

The "Good" Magazine

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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JAN./FEB. 2019



GROWTH
CAN IT JUST CONTINUE
FOREVER?

**THE CITY
OF TOMORROW**
IT'S GONNA BE
INCREDIBLE!

**WHO WOULD
GO NAZI**
IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

**ANIMAL
MAGIC**
A CHAT WITH
GLENN GREENWALD

PSYCHEDELICS
TIME TO START
USING THEM



Bryan Brown
2016

IMPORTANT AFFAIRS

OF THE KIND YOUR TEACHER NEVER WANTED YOU TO LEARN

ANOTHER SUBSCRIPTION COULD NEVER REALLY HURT, EH?

THE CURRENT AFFAIRS GUIDE TO SOCIALIST *Cocktails*

OLD FASHIONED: A fine socialist cocktail. Warms the innards, has lots of ingredients that complement each other perfectly without overwhelming the others. Has a retro feel but is currently coming back into fashion.

MOSCOW MULE: Truly communist, the Moscow Mule is a delightful invention that kicks harder than you probably intended. The ginger beer gives you the warm, fizzy feeling of quality time with your comrades while the lime represents the bitter fleeting reality of the gulag. The copper mug is underappreciated aesthetically, being much more practical and stable than the delicate, decadent capitalist martini glass.

DRY MARTINI, SHAKEN NOT STIRRED: The drink of the deep state. You may think you sound cool and classy when you order it in a bar, but the acrid reality of both the dry martini and the deep state is that it isn't good for anyone, at any time, and while everyone who loves the dry martini and the deep state constantly fantasizes about being a dangerous cool guy with a flashy car and a license to kill, everyone else just thinks you're the fucking worst.



RUM AND COKE: Any cocktail mixed with Coke or Pepsi carries the sickly sweetness of liberalism. Oh, did Coke launch their #WokeCoke campaign, where multi-ethnic celebs pose with bottles of Coke in exotic locations? Is Pepsi trying desperately to become "the drink" protestors use to counteract the effects of pepper spray? Great #marketing. If you mix either Coke and Pepsi with a perfectly good hard liquor, it almost lets you forget their extraordinarily brazen civil rights abuses abroad.

MANHATTAN: The libertarian socialist cocktail. The name might be misleading to the uninitiated, but people in the know recognize its many merits. Once the name is reclaimed from the sneering rich white people who have commandeered it, both the Manhattan and libertarian socialism will be popular everywhere.

FRENCH 75: An aggressively antiwar cocktail, the French 75 was (possibly apocryphally) created during WWI and said to have a kick like the French 75mm artillery gun. Regardless of its origins, when you drink it you'll be so cheered by the bubbly and the gin shooting straight to your head that you'll feel a golden glow of peace on Earth and goodwill toward all men.

LONG ISLAND ICED TEA: The only truly apolitical cocktail, in that if you drink it you will probably wind up making out with somebody embarrassing whose politics you detest.



Gentlemen of the Voicemail Line

Current Affairs is unique among magazines in that we do not instantly throw away the letters-to-the-editor we receive. We believe in "reader engagement," having been founded on that powerful slogan: *Subscribers Are Royalty*. And as such, we maintain an open voicemail line for listeners and readers to let us know how they feel. Selected voicemails are played "live" on the *Current Affairs* Podcast. We are grateful to all of those who have called in so far.

We must note, however, that there is a pronounced tendency among voicemailers: nearly every single one (to the extent these things can be gleaned) is of what we might call "the gentlemanly persuasion." Women do not call. Now, we know for a fact that there is more than one woman who reads this magazine and has listened to its accompanying audio program. (Or at least, has very persuasively lied about doing so.) And yet they show a marked reluctance to leave prolonged voicemail messages containing their opinions on things.

We are beginning to suspect that there is a gender divide among those who believe their thoughts worthy of long recorded monologues. This is only a theory, a faint hunch, but we think on the whole women may be reluctant to deluge strangers with their opinions in a way that men are not. This is a pity. The *Current Affairs* voicemail line is explicitly set up to collect such a deluge. Shower your beliefs upon us! We would strongly encourage, nay positively implore, members of all gender groups to telephone *Current Affairs* and tell us what you think. Give us your questions, your queries, your quarrels! This is precisely what we are here for. And you are worthy of being heard.

504-867-8851

NEXT ISSUE



THE POLITICS OF
CRYPTIDS

BIDEN 2020

"The younger generation now tells me how tough things are—give me a break. No, no, I have no empathy for it, give me a break."

— Joe Biden

I Am Literally Incapable Of Basic Human Empathy



ON SMALL FONTS

The *Current Affairs* office has, on several occasions, received some complaints about the size of the font. Several of our readers have raised concerns that the font is too small—concerns which we have listened to, and considered at length. However, by total coincidence an equal number of our readers have raised concerns that the font is too big, and in fact that the magazine in general is too big. This was only to be expected, as an estimated 22% of our readers are mice living in the walls of cellars and subways, who leave their habitats only to scavenge for discarded fruit and to pick up a copy of *Current Affairs* several times their own body mass. In the interests of compromise, we have decided for now to keep the font exactly the same.

MARDI GRAS

The editorial staff would like to thank those who attended the First Annual Subscribers' Mardi Gras Ball at the *Current Affairs* Headquarters. Copious quantities of king cake and Perrier were ingested in an afternoon of "controlled debauchery." The subscriber who left behind a pair of sequined pasties shaped like a "C" and "A" is invited to return to the office during business hours to retrieve them.



CONTEST LOSERS

In the last issue, we announced a contest: Whoever could successfully predict the subjects of every one of the articles in the present issue would receive a free yearlong subscription, a value of \$60. We regret to report that not a single reader successfully predicted the contents. This makes each one of you a loser. On the positive side, it means that no reader is better than any other, and that you now share the common bond of loserdom. In a way, when we all lose we all win. Right? (The subscription has been donated to an orphan.)

10 MEN NAMED

DON

RANKED FROM BEST TO WORST

GOOD
DONS

Don Ho

Don Cheadle

Don Quixote

Don Knotts

Don Cornelius

Don Pardo

Don Rickles

Don King

Don Imus

BAD
DONS

Don Trump

SCRATCH 'N' SNIFF



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THE 8TH ANNUAL CURRENT AFFAIRS CRUISE

w/ guests Thomas L. Friedman and Kathia vanden Heuvel



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UPCOMING SHOWINGS ON THE Quillette MOVIE NETWORK



- I Was Bullied For Bullying: The Story of a Man Misunderstood
- "Move Over, Cis"
- Taunted By the Left
- Snowed In By The Snowflakes
- Phrenology: My Crusade, My Crime
- It Happened To Me And It Could Happen To You: I Was Criticized For My Opinions
- The Truth: Why The Left Fears It, And Why Germany And France Criminalized Saying It
- Lies My Liberal Professor Told Me
- The Man, The Mis-timed Joke, And The Mob
- Just Asking Questions
- Tale of the Truly Oppressed: A White Man's Story
- The Already Perfect Society
- Persecuted For My IQ
- When The Internet Came For Me
- I Vanquished The Virtue-Signalers
- PewDiePie: Hero, Monster, God
- A Snowstorm on Christmas: So Much For Global Warming

New York Times OBITUARIES

of the Past, Present, and Future

The *New York Times* obituary page is famous for focusing on the most important characteristics of the dearly departed: which terrible people happened to find them inspirational (leftists only), which traditionally feminine tasks they excelled at (women scientists only), and which of their war crimes will be quietly omitted (American war criminals only). We present to you now some *New York Times* obituaries of the past and future (and, in the case of Kissinger, hopefully present by the time you read this.)

- Noam Chomsky, Mumbling Linguist and Media Conspiracy Theorist, Dead at 128
- Bernie Sanders, Quixotic Senator Known for Yelling About Inequality or Whatever, Dies at 99
- Henry Kissinger, Nobel Peace-Prize Winning Statesman, Finds Rest After Lifetime of Passionate Public Service
- George W. Bush, Beloved Former President and Landscape Painter, Tragically Devoured By Climate-Maddened Elk at Luxury Resort in Montana
- Harvey Weinstein, Irascible and Iconoclastic Film Producer, First Felled By A Hashtag and Then by a Stroke
- Hillary Clinton, Trailblazing Presidential Candidate Who Had Trouble With Emails, Died Surrounded by Loving Family and Suspected Russian Spies
- Jeremy Corbyn, Unreconstructed Radical Dubbed "Obvious Anti-Semite", Attractor of Intense Cult Following That Swept Him Into Downing Street Over Expert Objections, Finally Dead After Forcing Britain Into Socialism
- Rodrigo Duterte, Fiery Populist with Blunt Approach to Drug Policy, Slain by Mob in Palace Battle
- Nelson Mandela, Former Inmate: Divided a Country Even as He Unified It
- Adolf Hitler, Formidable Statesman, Dies at Home in His Bunker Surrounded By Friends And Family (Who Were Also Dead)
- Farewell to Eugene Debs: Brocialist, Convict, and Perennial Election-Loser
- Martin Luther King, Controversial Civil Rights Crusader Who Demanded a "Color Blind" World, Ceases to Dream
- Rosa Parks, Obstinate Transit Passenger, Dies
- Marie Curie: She Tinkered With Recipes And Toyed With Radium
- University President, Decorated Veteran, and Fiery Virginian: Robert E. Lee Fought To Defend State's Rights But Not Because of Slavery, It Was Just a Coincidence
- Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary, Reformer, And Redistributor of Irish Land and Resources is Mourned by Grateful Citizens on Both Sides of the Irish Sea
- Joan of Arc, Female Firebrand and Angsty Teenage Icon, Was Offered Confession But Chose Immolation
- Wife, Widow, Adoptive Mother: Ching Shih Also Managed Her Husband's Red Flag Fleet, Was Lovingly Nicknamed "The Most Successful Pirate In History"
- Ivan, Affectionately Known as "The Terrible", Leaves Grieving Nation in the Hands of Unmurdered Son
- While Under House Arrest, Aztec Emperor Accidentally Loses His Life, Saddened Conquistadores Report
- Hannibal Dead After Brutally Resisting Rome
- Krednas the Blood-Loosener, Who Increased GDP of the Craglands by 124%, is Interred Atop a Mound of Devoted Bondspeople

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MATCH THE REPUBLICAN POLITICIAN WITH THEIR CHARMING LITTLE QUIRK

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Steve King

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Misogyny
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- low-key racism

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- returning society to the 17th century, but with more robot surveillance
- rounding up all the immigrants and, well, you know...
- murder, just plain old murder

Last but not least, who will write your fawning profile in a major American media outlet?

- Thomas Friedman
- David Brooks
- George Will

THE 3 RULES OF ELVIS



- Every good song of his was stolen...
- ...usually from a black artist...
- ...who did it better.

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STUBBORN DETACHMENT

Economists' myopic growth cult can't cope with environmental realities...

by **ROB LARSON** and **NATHAN J. ROBINSON**

The whole experience had been so bewildering to him that he put it out of mind as soon as possible, but he had dreams about it for months afterwards, nightmares. Sae-mtenevia Prospect was two miles long, and it was a solid mass of people, traffic, and things: things to buy, things for sale. Coats, dresses, gowns, robes, trousers, breeches, shirts, blouses, hats, shoes, stockings, scarves, shawls, vests, capes, umbrellas, clothes to wear while sleeping, while swimming, while playing games, while at an afternoon party, while at an evening party, while at a party in the country, while traveling, while at the theater, while riding horses, gardening, receiving guests, boating, dining, hunting — all different, all in hundreds of different cuts, styles, colors, textures, materials. Perfumes, clocks, lamps, statues, cosmetics, candles, pictures, cameras, games, vases, sofas, kettles, puzzles, pillows, dolls, colanders, hassocks, jewels, carpets, toothpicks, calendars, a baby's teething rattle of platinum with a handle of rock crystal, an electrical machine to sharpen pencils, a wrist-watch with diamond numerals; figurines and souvenirs and kickshaws and mementos and gewgaws and bric-a-brac, everything either useless to begin with or ornamented so as to disguise its use; acres of luxuries, acres of excrement. In the first block Shevek had stopped to look at a shaggy, spotted coat, the central display in a glittering window of clothes and jewelry, "The coat costs 8,400 units?" he asked in disbelief, for he had recently read in a newspaper that a "living wage" was about 2,000 units a year. "Oh, yes, that's real fur, quite rare now that the animals are protected," Pae had said. "Pretty thing, isn't it? Women love furs." And they went on. After one more block Shevek had felt utterly exhausted. He could not look any more. He wanted to hide his eyes.

And the strangest thing about the nightmare street was that none of the millions of things for sale were made there. They were only sold there. Where were the workshops, the factories, where were the farmers, the craftsmen, the miners, the weavers, the chemists, the carvers, the dyers, the designers, the machinists, where were the hands, the people who made? Out of sight, somewhere else. Behind walls. All the people in all the shops were either buyers or sellers. They had no relation to the things but that of possession.

He found that once they had his measure he could order anything else he might need by telephone, and he determined never to go back to the nightmare street.

— Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A VILLAGE, AND in that village there was a tinkerer. And the tinkerer built machines, usually not very useful ones (an automatic bread-butterer, a cuckoo clock that screamed). One day, however, he invented a machine more marvelous than any other. You could take any object around you, put it in the funnel, press a button, and it would be turned into another, more useful object. Pop in a log, get a table. Dump in some precious metals and get a microchip. Put in an adorable piglet, get a tasty sausage. Anything could be improved. The machine transformed the town. Soon, things were being transformed into other things left and right. The clay was turned into porcelain, the piles of stray rags into fashionable suits. More machines were built, so that more transformations could happen faster. When people got something out of the machine, they put it back in, along with anything else they could find, to make something even better. One day, an economist showed up in the town. The people gathered round the economist, to hear what they ought to do:

"Everything that comes out of the machine is better, therefore if you care about improving the world you are morally obligated to build as many machines as possible, and put every single object into the machines, and then put the products of the machines back into the machines, and so on indefinitely. In this way you will maximize the welfare of future generations."

The people could see no flaw in the economist's reasoning, so they devoted themselves to the machines. Some spent their lives working at

all costs to increase the speed and capacity of the machines, and they suffered greatly in the process. The machines produced some extraordinary things, which made many people happy (though paradoxically the people who obtained most of the things were not the people who had worked the hardest on the machines). All values went out the window except filling the machines. People were cruel and selfish. Fixable social problems were ignored, because fixing them would divert resources away from filling the machines. This did not matter, the economist reassured them: Everyone was better off with the machines than they would otherwise have been.

Eventually, something disquieting began to happen. After a few dozen cycles through the machine, the objects they made did not seem much better. They kept building machines, and putting things through them, and putting things through them again. The suits became slightly better suits, the food slightly better food.

Then the villagers looked around, and realized they had literally killed every animal on earth, made millions of people live lives of needless toil and misery, and destroyed every last piece of plant and animal life in order to fill the fucking stupid machines. And so they thrust the economist into the funnel, and began slowly to rebuild their world. The end.

LIBERTARIAN ECONOMIST TYLER COWEN'S NEW BOOK *Stubborn Attachments* argues that "growth is good." In fact, growth is so good that we should subordinate virtually all other moral values to the maximization of the GDP. He appears to be serious about this.

Here is the structure of Cowen's argument: We know that countries with higher GDPs have, on average, more health, education, happiness, life expectancy, etc. than countries with lower GDPs. Happiness is a good thing. He says:

Even if you don't regard material wealth as central to human well-being, economic growth brings many other values including, for instance, much greater access to the arts and sciences. The virtues of the modern world depend on higher and indeed growing levels of wealth. Growth alleviates misery, improves happiness and opportunity, and lengthens lives.

Cowen adds that when we think about what we ought to do morally, we shouldn't just think about how to help people today. There is no moral difference between someone today and someone in the far distant future, say a million years from now. A person is a person whether they live in 2019 or 4046 or the year 9 million. That means, however, that we should spend most of our effort trying to maximize economic growth now, because (as with compounding interest) the benefits in the far future will be astronomical. As he writes:

Our strongest obligations are to contribute to sustainable economic growth and to support the general spread of civilization, rather than to engage in massive charitable redistribution in the narrower sense. In the longer run, greater economic growth and a more stable civilization will help the poor most of all.

Cowen argues that a resulting moral imperative should be the recognition of any processes that create growing wealth for the future, giving "free lunches" to future generations who do not themselves have to do anything to benefit from them. Borrowing from the great University of Chicago economist Frank Knight, he refers to "Crusonia plants," imaginary easy-to-cultivate plants that produce fruit plus seeds of more plants every generation. The conclusion is that Crusonia plants should be a priority for us to create, since they will benefit future generations so greatly. Cowen then surveys the world for "analogues" to Crusonia plants, being "ongoing, self-sustaining, and which create rising value over time." His conclusion is a perfect picture of the parody of intelligence economists reverse: "The natural candidate for such a process is economic growth," with market investments in production building higher production levels over time. Notably, he does not consider that an analogue to the Crusonia plant could be *actual plants*, which themselves do produce inherently growing streams of benefits over time. (It's amusing that he refers to economic growth as the "natural" candidate, rather than actual nature.)

Cowen quotes favorably an economist who said that "The consequences for human welfare involved in questions like these are staggering: once one starts to think about [exponential growth], it is hard to think about anything else." Cowen takes this quite seriously: He looks at every human social problem in terms of what it means for economic growth. Martin

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PRODUCTION

"If we suddenly find ourselves up to the ears in a sea of plastic gnomes, then it is reasonable to assume that something has gone wrong with the whole philosophy of production." — James Stevens Curl, *MAKING DYSTOPIA: THE STRANGE RISE AND SURVIVAL OF ARCHITECTURAL BARBARISM*

Curl has a point. But while it is indeed a world of many plastic gnomes, if you truly want to understand the philosophy of capitalist production, you would do well to look up "poop emoji pool float" on Amazon. Here is the staggering fact: Not only are poop emoji pool floats a commodity that exists, but there are 10 different kinds of poop emoji pool float, from many different companies. There is competitive marketplaces of poop emoji pool floats. Capitalism may not give everyone adequate healthcare, but it is capable of giving us endless variations on the same shit.



Luther King, he says, had a net positive impact, because he “brought much good to the world with respect to both justice and economic growth.” If King had had a *negative* impact on economic growth, Cowen’s verdict on the Civil Rights Movement might have been different. When it comes to policies that help the worst-off, Cowen’s main question is: *But do they grow the economy?* He says that “we should redistribute wealth only up to the point that it maximizes the rate of sustainable growth,” and growth defines the “appropriate nature and scope” of redistribution. “Some degree” of redistribution may be justified, but only because individuals that are less poor and better educated are “more likely to be productive and pay taxes, and less likely to overturn public order,” and “cementing the social order” through “social welfare programs [that] buy the loyalties of special interest groups” can clear the way for more economic growth.

The implications of this philosophy are radical, though Cowen does not actually discuss them much. First, it means that gross social inequality is perfectly justified if it enhances growth. In fact, Cowen even considers it reasonable to ponder whether we should redistribute wealth from the poor to the rich, since the rich are likely to make investments that better improve economic growth and thereby serve the well-being of those “Many people mock the term ‘trickle-down economics’ but most social benefits do take a trickle-down form,” he says. This means that there is no fundamental problem with being absurdly rich—in fact, we should probably be grateful to the billionaire overlords for their benevolent innovation and job-creation. We’re morally a-okay as long as we “work hard, take care of our families, and live virtuous but self-centered lives while giving to charity as we are able and helping out others on a periodic basis.” The latter part about giving to others Cowen leaves vague, and he makes clear that it’s okay to be *very* self-interested as long as you do a bit of minor mitigation here and there, and he repeatedly praises Ayn Rand. The main moral imperative is growth, which means you’re probably a better person if you escalate production at the smartphone factory than if you found an orphanage (except to the extent that the orphans will someday be producers and taxpayers).

Notably, Cowen is truly worthless on the subject of inequality too, again and again describing “growth for us,” and “our living standards,” and even claiming “recent world history has been an extraordinarily egalitarian time” even though wealth and income inequality are exploding. Specifically, Cowen argues for “strict limits” on redistribution of wealth, claiming “we should redistribute wealth only up to the point that it maximizes the rate of sustainable economic growth,” since ongoing growth creates wealth for everyone, avoiding the messy government bureaucracy needed for redistribut-

ing wealth, along with the chance of redistribution creating “urban cultures of dependency and crime.” But as current research by UC Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez indicates, the majority of income increases from new economic growth are concentrated in the richest one percent of U.S. families, specifically debunking Cowen’s whole dumb point. The wonderful new wealth being created by Crusonia plants creating a global extinction is in large part going to the one percent, creating more heinously spoiled ruling-class douchebags like Bezos and Trump, and their even-worse born-rich kids.

BUT WHAT GROWTH ACTUALLY IS, and how it could be decomposed into “better” and “worse” constituent parts, Cowen does not discuss much. Measures of economic growth, of course, are just the sum total of production in a society, but that doesn’t tell you whether you’re producing fruity cocktails or atomic weapons. This is why many serious economic thinkers have rejected using production growth as the core metric for whether a society is well-off. It’s highly imprecise, and you are better off measuring happiness or people’s capacity to fulfill their desires. After all, GDP can increase even as people are made worse off. Jeremy Lent quotes the words of Raimundo Brago Gomes, an indigenous Brazilian who was forced off his land to make room for a new hydroelectric complex. Brago Gomes has actually gotten “richer” by measures of growth, but that’s not how he feels about it:

I didn’t need money to live happy. My whole house was nature... I had my patch of land where I planted a bit of everything, all sorts of fruit trees. I’d catch my fish, make manioc flour... I raised my three daughters, proud of what I was. I was rich.

Lent says that now Brago Gomes and his family “live among drug dealers behind barred windows in Brazil’s most violent city, receiving a state pension which, after covering rent and electricity, leaves him about 50 cents a day to feed himself, his wife, daughter, and grandson. Meanwhile, as a result of his family’s forced entry into the monetary economy, Brazil’s GDP has risen.”

Importantly, Gross Domestic Product itself, the main conventional metric for measuring the economic growth Cowen celebrates, arose in the US during the Great Depression to help keep track of industrial production. At that time, it was recognized to be a highly incomplete indicator, with its creator, economist Simon Kuznets, cautioning that its mathematical precision masked great complexity in the actual subject.

Issues like these are why economists like Amartya Sen have tried to develop far more sophisticated measurements of economic success, such as whether people have “positive liberties.” Cowen bizarrely rejects these approaches, saying that “the concept of positive liberties is important, but it is



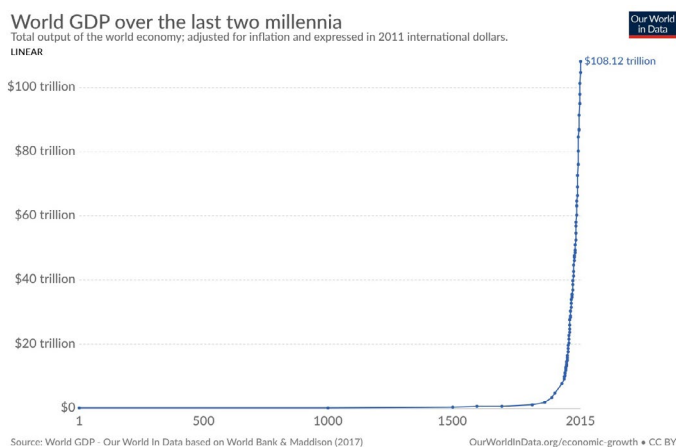
These are all different variations that you can buy.

already covered in the imperative to maximize sustainable growth. There is no need to double-count positive liberties, in fact doing so would be a mistake.” For Cowen, growth tells you pretty much all you need to know. He does believe there should be some restrictions on whether you can violate basic human rights, so that the relentless pursuit of growth doesn’t turn you into Stalin (who, after all, achieved phenomenal economic growth). But he says that “the only non-growth-related values that will bind practical decisions are the absolute side constraints” like not murdering people, and “most rules are not as important as the growth maximization rule.” “The Principle of Growth... will be limited only by absolute or near-absolute human rights.” Growth will take care of everything: “The overwhelming benefits of economic growth help us resolve clashing preferences” and “more important plural values will come along for the ride.”

This is a marvelously helpful philosophy, because it means we no longer have to wrestle with difficult questions about how social resources should be allocated. There is but one imperative: Feed the growth machine. No matter what happens to people, no matter how much exploitation or despair arises in the process, *on balance* it will all work out in the end. It’s remarkable, actually, the degree to which this resembles both Stalinism and religious faith. It’s the type of reasoning that says “the lives sacrificed for the workers’ paradise will all be worth it once the paradise gets here.” In fact, Cowen explicitly praises religious faith, saying that even if we don’t have any evidence about the benefits of growth that will accrue in the far-distant future, we have to have faith that our actions today will pay off. Even if the world around us *looks* terrible, if we are producing endless needless commodities for the sake of it, tearing communities apart, making people stressed and selfish and suicidal, we must have an unshakeable, unquestioning faith that the Growth Principle will see us through. The present may not look good, but just wait until you see the future.

EXCEPT THAT THERE ISN’T GOING TO BE A FUTURE, IF THIS kind of thinking is followed. We will destroy the earth long before we reach Cowen’s promised land.

Economists like Cowen look at the following chart and see something wonderful and miraculous:



Just look at the bounties that our economic system has brought us! It’s easy to see why Cowen concludes that since economic growth compounds over time, its value trumps other concerns which are simply swamped by the huge future value of exponentially increasing wealth production.

But all of this production occurs on Earth, a planet that has to be kept alive in order to sustain its inhabitants. And infinite compounding production growth can have calamitous consequences in a delicately-balanced

ecosystem. Cowen seems to understand this—sort of. He throws in that growth should be “sustainable,” and proposes that our full priority should be “Wealth Plus,” i.e. GDP plus “environmental amenities.” But he never actually examines the implications of what sustainability would mean for economic growth, how taking seriously the need to be sustainable would utterly wreck the “let’s keep ramping up production toward infinity with only the barest regard for any other value” approach Cowen favors.

It’s not that difficult to understand—the American and global scientific community have been issuing increasingly dire warnings and increasingly horrifying papers. Take “Looming Global-Scale Failures and Missing Institutions,” which ran in the most prominent American research journal, *Science*. It observes:

Energy, food, and water crises; climate disruption; declining fisheries; increasing ocean acidification; emerging diseases; and increasing antibiotic resistance are examples of serious, intertwined global-scale challenges spawned by the accelerating scale of human activity. They are outpacing the development of institutions to deal with them and their many interactive effects.

For dispassionate scientists, these are fighting words.

And sustainability, despite becoming a vague lip-service catchword used by corporations to paper over their crimes against ecology, is in fact an area of active science research. Marine biologists recently reported “Current ocean trends, coupled with terrestrial defaunation lessons, suggest that marine defaunation rates will rapidly intensify as human use of the oceans industrializes.” Indeed, scientists globally are discussing whether human activity has finally reached a level to constitute a “mass extinction,” events which destroy many millions of species around the world as in the end-Cretaceous meteor impact that destroyed the dinosaurs. Journalist Elizabeth Kolbert’s book *The Sixth Extinction* describes scientists’ struggles with this issue, with many lamenting that the beautiful organisms and their complex ecological relationships won’t be around for their kids to view. But there will be Crusonia plants, so that’s consoling!

The ecology-economy cautionary tale classic *Limits to Growth* makes the definitive point here. Subject to endless ridicule when first published in the 1970s and then much less ridicule when updates in 2004, the authors observe the exponential growth of capitalism and ask

Can this physical growth realistically continue forever? Our answer is no! Growth in population and capital increases the ecological footprint of humanity, the burden humanity places on the world ecosystem, unless there is a successful effort to avoid such an increase... Once the footprint has grown beyond the sustainable level, as it already has, it must eventually come down—either through a managed process (for example, through rapid increases in eco-efficiency) or through the work of nature (say, through declining use of wood as forests disappear). There is no question about whether growth in the ecological footprint will stop; the only questions are when and by what means.

“Hooray for higher exponential growth” is the slogan of bacteria growing in a petri dish. However long it takes, the limits will be reached, and then deaths will grow exponentially as the agar is exhausted. All this means Cowen’s thesis is particularly disgraceful, since future generations are actually in giant danger to ecological collapse and climate change *caused* by constant growth in GDP, as argued in very well-reviewed recent socialist books.

This blind spot, created by economists’ monumentally casual approach to ecology, leads to some truly humiliating remarks. For example, Cowen has a very brief discussion of climate change, being a Harvard-educated liberal-ish libertarian. But his gigantic lack of familiarity with the scientific literature is immediately betrayed by his comment “many scientists believe that global warming will increase the number of virulent and persistent storms on our planet.” In fact, a *strong* scientific consensus supports these results of climate change. Cowen displays only the most casual regard for climate science, probably because taking it seriously would make his entire program look like an insanely wrongheaded set of priorities.

Cowen even comments that while economic growth gives us a stream of steady and growing benefits, some feared environmental “investments” are less important since they’re “one-time adjustments.” His example? “Relocating coastal settlements,” which although “large,” would be earned back over time through compounding economic growth. This is arguably the most pitifully, gigantically ignorant comment an “economist” can possibly make. The costs assessed to date of moving even small towns in low-lying areas of Louisiana and Alaska are in the neighborhood of \$100 million each. The cost of moving a real major city, a Tampa or Barcelona or Osaka, will be in the many billions. The prospect of “relocating” modern megacities, like London or Shanghai or New York or Hong Kong or Rio de Janeiro, will be in the tens of trillions and involve immeasurable trauma and certain permanent losses of priceless historical places. Likely these enormous urban agglomerations would have to be protected by expensive walls, dykes, and storm gates, costing billions and making every recreational beach and seaside resort into a venue for looking at a wall.

How could anyone conceivably argue for accepting such apocalyptic costs in order to avoid rich people having to pay AOC’s high marginal tax rates? And yet they do. FOX News’ John Stossel, who simply says we can “move back from the coasts,” and the present author are named by experts surveyed by the *Economist* as among the most influential figures in the field. These people are going to be burned in effigy by future generations, and for good reason.

The picture of these thinkers that emerges is one of professionals with no good-faith understanding of what’s commonly discussed in scientific literature—it’s not clear what kinds of economic growth are compatible with sustainability. So taking 40 years to add the word “sustainability” to “growth” suggests a field with a Stubborn Detachment from the sciences.

COWEN’S FEIGNED REGARD FOR THE FUTURE, LEADING him to more of the growth-obsessed neoliberal status quo, is reminiscent of Paul Collier, the Oxford economist and author. Whereas Cowen claims more exponential growth will benefit future generations, Collier makes the more common argument that it will help the current global poor, especially the *Bottom Billion*, his most prominent book.

Collier’s work correctly sees the condition of the world’s poorest people as an emergency, but like Cowen refuses to consider any option for development other than more capitalist economic growth. The possibility of a large-scale program of capital grants to the developing world from the rich, former imperialist powers as a reparations campaign in recognition of its blood-soaked, resource-stripping past, is specifically condemned as a “guilt-ridden colonialist hangover” and mere “victimhood.” Only countries exploited by non-Western powers, like Korea’s suffering under the Japanese empire, are entitled to a victim status, not India or Brazil or the Congo.

But like Cowen, Collier has an utterly instrumental view of nature that is completely detached from modern scientific understanding. He says “natural substances only acquire value as a result of technological discoveries” and “Biodiversity is a good thing, but within the context of our survival, not as an end in itself. We are not here to serve nature; na-

ture is here to serve us.” Of course, biologists have spent years describing “ecosystem services,” basic natural processes that benefit our civilization through their own logic, like pest control from amphibians and crop pollination from bees.

But Collier is far too sophisticated to go anywhere near this literature. Collier’s view is that we are custodians of nature, but only “ethically obliged to pass on to future generations the equivalent value of the natural assets that we were bequeathed by the past.” So we may blow through habitat and species in our exponential growth, but as long as that money is invested (much as with Cowen’s Crusonia plants), rather than wasted on consumption (whether through corruption of fuel and food subsidies for the poor), we’re doing the right thing.

Of course, a basic part of being a scientist is responding responsibly and respectfully to your critics, but in the social sciences we’re above that. Collier hurls any disparaging stereotype he can think of at those opposing limitless growth in consumption, calling them “an alliance of the anti-industrial values of the aristocracy, exemplified by Prince Charles, and the anti-capitalist values of Marxists.” Obviously this is just name-calling and complete willful ignorance of the actual arguments of the other side. But rather than being laughed out of the academy, Collier has been knighted and had his garbage dump book celebrated by the *New York Times*, *Financial Times* and the *Economist*.

These are very respected, not hyper-partisan economists, yet their complete failure to engage with the scientific consensus makes their work an utter fraud and a pitiful waste. Their success shows economics’ stubborn detachment from the real-world context around

us. Here on planet Earth, both future generations and the current desperate global poor are better served by environmental policy that creates jobs cleaning up our mess, along with a desperate crash course to restore the declining ecosystems all around us.

RECENT weeks have seen the reaction of conservative political figures to the headline-grabbing Green New Deal promoted by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other left national politicians. House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi famously mocked it as “the green dream or whatever they call it,” while President Trump said it would “permanently eliminate all Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas & the Military.” Meanwhile actual scientists have continued their grim, thankless march toward greater understanding of climate change, recently releasing a helpful app that allows you to see what location your own hometown will feel like in 2080—on average, one 500 miles south.

These hideously glib dismissals of one of the existential issues of our times didn’t come from nowhere. Besides the massive corporate funding that made the subject a partisan political issue, and the reliable anti-scientific posturing barfed out by conservative editorials, economists themselves have formed the core vanguard normalizing brisk dismissal of climate and sustainability in general.

When people say, “The free market has lead to the greatest increase in standards of living in human history,” the hidden pile of bullshit is that we’re boiling the future alive to make more Donald Trump Juniors. Supporting the surprising socialist moment and the Green New Deal, for all its flaws, should be the path for anyone interested in having a future. ♣



RIGHT-WING GRIFTERLAND

If you land on a character's square, advance ten paces.
Except for Lord Ivory-Tower — if you land on his square
you must return to the beginning.



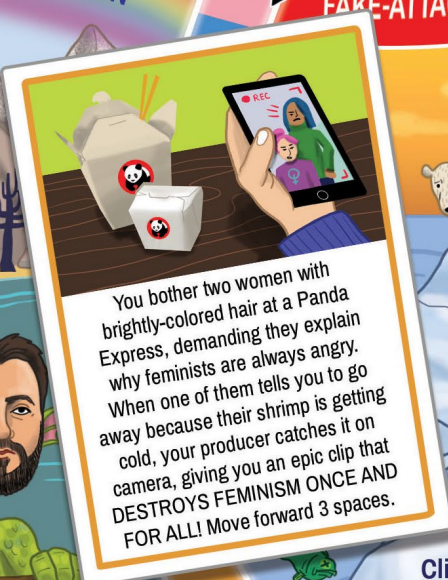
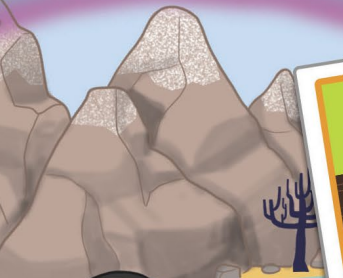
START



Gramma
Coulter



SOFTBALL INTERVIEW MOUNTAIN



AGGRIEVEMENT
ACRES

Jolly Jordan
Peterson

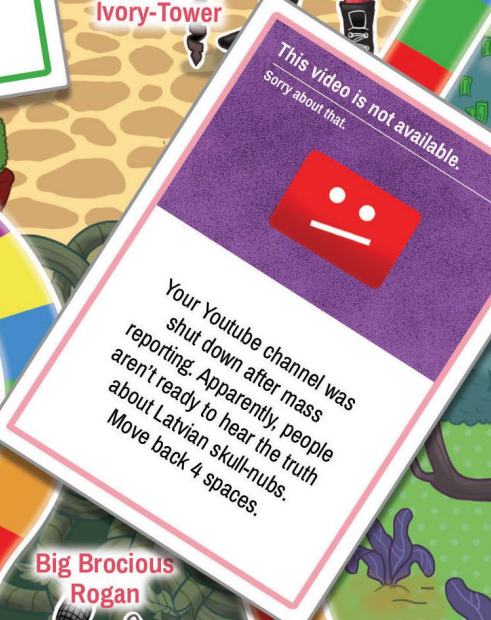


FAKE-ATTACKED BY ANTIFA ALLEY



NO-PLATFORMED
PALACE

Lord
Ivory-Tower



Big Brocious
Rogan



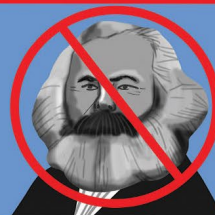
DESTROYING
FEMINISTS
FIELDS





SPECIAL
SNOWFLAKE
LAKE

You film yourself at the southern border trying to help Build The Wall. Unfortunately, manual labor is new to you, and you accidentally cement your eye shut. Thank goodness you have healthcare through your corporate sponsor. Move back 2 spaces.



A senior grifter invites you to chat on their Youtube channel! You have an impassioned, in-depth conversation about why Marxism is wrong, which is not at all inhibited by the fact that neither of you have ever read Marx. Move forward 2 spaces.



FOSSIL FUELS
FOUNTAIN

DARK
MONEY
MINE

HACKY HOAX EXPOSED
Stay here until New Billionaire
Donor card is drawn.

Mr. Adelson

BILLIONAIRE
BOG



THE VIRTUES OF PACIFISM

by Nathan J. Robinson

PEOPLE WHO DISLIKE PACIFISTS *REALLY* DISLIKE pacifists. In fact, I sense that the term has become somewhat embarrassing. George Orwell said pacifism was “objectively pro-fascist,” and many believe he was exactly right. Sam Harris wrote that pacifism is “deeply immoral.” A *Huffington Post* writer says she feels no need to respect the opinions of any self-described pacifist, because they are illogical and indefensible and abet the rise of terror and fascism.

You can see how someone can come to despise pacifism. If we think pacifism means “an absolute commitment to nonviolence,” such that the pacifist has vowed never to take up arms under any circumstances against anybody, then it’s easy to come up with hypotheticals where pacifism seems perverse. You wouldn’t shoot Hitler? You wouldn’t save your family from an intruder? You would simply stand there and watch as atrocities unfolded, even if you could do something about it? The pacifist is confronted with examples of “just wars” where fighting would seem a moral necessity, and pacifists seem like “moral free loaders” who require other people to do the dirty work of fighting to keep them safe, while the pacifists maintain their purity. A pacifist is a coward who wants the luxury of denouncing as murderers those upon whom his free speech depends.

I don’t find this picture of pacifism remotely fair, though I understand the logic that produces it. But I’d recommend that anyone tempted to hiss at pacifism pick up a single book, Vera Brittain’s memoir *Testament of Youth*. I don’t think it’s easy to come away from Brittain’s book without sincere respect for the pacifist stance.

Testament of Youth chronicles Brittain’s life before, during, and after World War One. She served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse during the war, leaving a comfortable life at Oxford University to tend to the gassed and mutilated men of the trenches. Brittain lost some of her closest loved ones during the war: Both her fiancé and her brother were killed on the battlefield along with two of her dear friends. She begins the book studious but naive, living mostly for her schoolwork, but her war experiences turn her into a fierce pacifist activist, and when she returns she is frustrated by the obliviousness of those who have not experienced the war firsthand.

The portrait of Brittain’s fiancé, Roland, and his commonplace, meaningless death, is devastating. Age 20, Roland writes her a letter from the trenches explaining how the actual facts of war make patriotic descriptions of it seem farcical:

The dug-outs have been nearly all blown in, the wire entanglements are a wreck, and in among the chaos of twisted iron and splintered timber and shapeless earth are the fleshless, blackened bones of simple men who poured out their red, sweet wine of youth unknowing, for nothing more tangible than Honour or their Country’s Glory or another’s Lust of Power. Let him who thinks War is a glorious, golden thing, who loves to roll forth stirring words of exhortation, invoking Honour and Praise and Valour and Love of Country with as thoughtless and fervid a faith as inspired the priests of Baal to call on their own slumbering deity, let him but look at a little pile of sodden grey grags that cover half a skull and a shin-bone and what might have been Its ribs, or at this skeleton lying on its side, resting half

crouching as it fell, perfect but that it is headless, and with the tattered clothing still draped round it; and let him realize how grand and glorious a thing it is to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a fetid heap of hideous putrescence! Who is there who has known and seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these?

Roland himself soon joins the “fetid heap,” shot in the head while on a routine patrol. Brittain, whose love for him had become all-consuming, is utterly shattered. She writes of the experience of what it was like to see his clothes after his death:

These were his clothes—the clothes in which he came home from the front last time. Everything was damp and worn and simply caked with mud. And I was glad that neither you, nor Victor, nor anyone else who may some day go to the front was there to see. If you had been you would have been overwhelmed by the horror of war without its glory. For though he had only worn the things when living, the smell of those clothes was the smell of graveyards and the dead. The mud of France which covered them was not ordinary mud; it had not the usual clean pure smell of earth, but it was as though it were saturated with dead bodies—dead that had been dead a long, long time. All the sepulchres and catacombs of Rome could not make me realise mortality and decay and corruption as vividly as did the smell of those clothes. I know now what he meant when he used to write of “this refuse-heap of a country” or “a trench that is nothing but a charnel-house.”

You will not find *Testament of Youth* to be an uplifting read, but Brittain attempts to convey what World War One actually meant in the lives of those who endured it. She forces us to look at the flesh of her dead fiancé, demands that if we are to justify war we give her an explanation for why it was right and good that this much pain came into so many lives.

This, to me, is where pacifism begins: with a full awareness of what violence actually is and what it does to human bodies. Pacifists like Brittain are horrified by war, but more than that, they’re horrified by the fact that anyone can *fail* to be horrified. They don’t understand how war can be talked about casually, as a thought experiment or adventure film, when what it actually means is seeing a pile of your friends’ bodies on the ground. The pacifist feels as if the whole world around them has gone mad, is treating as normal but “regrettable” something that is actually so absurd that it should never even be conceivable. This is how Albert Einstein described the root of pacifism: “My pacifism,” he said, “is an instinctive feeling, a feeling that possesses me because the murder of men is disgusting.”

Note that this does not actually entail a particular position on whether violence can be justified under X or Y circumstance. Einstein has not said here that he does not think you are morally permitted to raise a hand in anger even to spare the lives of a million children, or any other such extreme position that is often treated as synonymous with pacifism. *Murder is disgusting*. Pacifism here is a feeling that violence is an evil that needs to be stopped, that we cannot treat it as natural or inevitable. It can’t be shrugged off, it has to be deplored.

Here I want to be careful, though, because I think it’s easy to reply “Well, nobody *likes* violence, if pacifism just means ‘thinking war is bad’ then everyone this side of Henry Kissinger is a pacifist. Only a psychopath likes war for its own sake. If pacifism is just a feeling, but you can still be a pacifist and engage in justified violence, then it means little.” I want to avoid saying that pacifism means an absolute opposition to violence under any circumstances, but I also want to avoid a kind of “wishy washy” pacifism that just means “peace is preferable to war.” I think that what distinguishes the pacifist from the non-pacifist is the *strength* of their hatred of war. Some people just say “Oh yes, of course war is bad.” The pacifist feels it to their core. I have written before about the way people talk about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—many who say the bombings were necessary say that they were terrible, but they don’t seem to really spend much time thinking about *just* how terrible they were. Anyone can say war is terrible, but not everyone is going to mean it in the same way that Vera Brittain means it when she says war is terrible.

THIS STRENGTH OF OPPOSITION TO WAR means that pacifists want violence to become “unthinkable.” It’s not just that we should strive to avoid war. It’s that “war” shouldn’t seem like something sensible at all. Just as I cannot conceive of raping another person, I should be unable to conceive of killing another person, and coming up with hypothetical examples in which killing is justified should be like coming up with hypotheticals for when rape is justified. Pacifists are trying to “de-normalize” war, to make it seem as strange and barbaric as slavery or medieval torture. The reason a pacifist will be reluctant to answer the question “Would you be violent in X situation?” is not because they would necessarily take the most extreme stance in favor of absolute nonviolence, but because they do not want to legitimize these kinds of questions as reasonable. Discussing it “puts it on the table” when it should be out of the realm of possibility. We can ask all kinds of revolting hypotheticals, after all (e.g., “Would you eat one of your children if it saved the other two?”), but we may debase ourselves through the very act of contemplating it.

It’s also silly to taunt the pacifist by asking whether they would fight Hitler. The pacifist, more than anyone else, will be trying to stop the rise of Hitler from the very beginning. The hypothetical only usually works because it is set in 1941, where war is unavoidable. If, however, the pacifist is dumped in 1919, when there are plenty of peaceful means one might use in order to ensure that the world does not descend into another bloodbath, the challenge becomes less compelling. Yes, you can engineer a situation in which the poor pacifist has very few non-martial options for advancing ultimate peace. But when we are not in those situations, the pacifist spends her time doing everything possible to make sure those situations do not come to pass. In that respect, the pacifist is distinctly

different from those who talk about war casually, who (like Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*) daydream about telling other countries to “suck on this.”

IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE CLEAR, TOO, THAT THERE is no relationship between pacifism and cowardice. Even those who have the most unyielding commitment to nonviolence are not fearful. Quite the opposite. I've been struck, reading first-person accounts of those who avoided the Vietnam draft, by how many felt that they had to muster more bravery to refuse to fight than they would have to fight. This is because by refusing they endured the total disdain of their peers, families, and communities, seen as fugitives and traitors, which seemed a far more difficult fate than the risk of being hit by a bullet. And when nonviolent resisters face external force, the refusal to fight back becomes impressively courageous. Nobody, after all, can call the 1960s civil rights demonstrators who risked being beaten and killed anything but fearless. Gandhi himself said that bravery was critical to his nonviolence:

My nonviolence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice. I can no more preach nonviolence to a coward than I can tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes. Nonviolence is the summit of bravery. And in my own experience, I have had no difficulty in demonstrating to men trained in the school of violence the superiority of nonviolence. As a coward, which I was for years, I harboured violence. I began to prize nonviolence only when I began to shed cowardice.

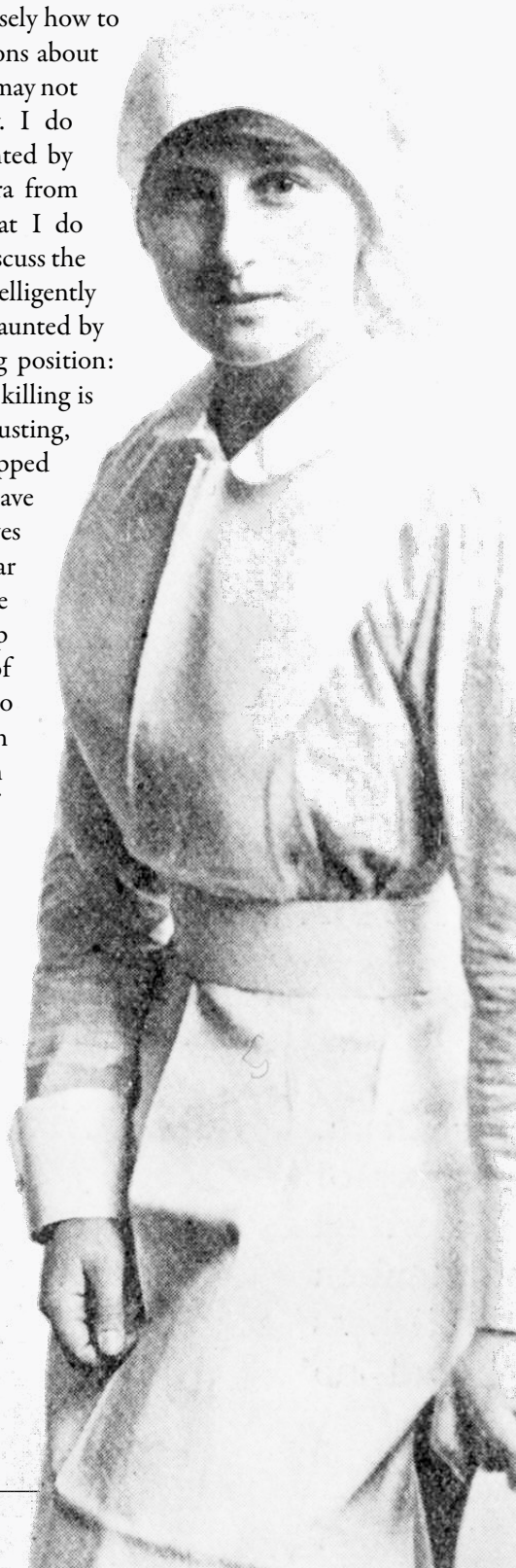
And yet we still have those who share the sentiments of John Stuart Mill, who described the hater of war as the ugliest of creatures:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

Mill is technically condemning cowardice here, and neither Gandhi nor King prized his “personal safety.” But in this passage we see a conflation that happens all too often: Being willing to fight for things, and caring about your values more than saving your skin, is lumped together with believing that war can be acceptable. That's not necessarily the case, though—we know there are many ways to “fight” that do not involve arms. It is dangerous to suggest that the only people who pass a moral test are those who are willing to kill and maim others in the name of their morality. (Sorry, Desmond Doss, you're among those ugly creatures who is immoral because you cannot endorse war.) Brittain herself volunteered to do one of the hardest jobs in the war, though she could have remained in her cushy life at Oxford. If we are to say that only those who

are willing to fight have moral credibility, then what of Vera Brittain, who lost so much, endured so much trauma, and yet still came out declaring: “All that a pacifist can undertake—but it is a very great deal—is to refuse to kill, injure or otherwise cause suffering to another human creature, and untiringly to order his life by the rule of love though others may be captured by hate.” Even those who don't think everyone should think this way must admit that there is value to having some people around who think this way. Without people who hate war, it will never go away...

I do not know precisely how to resolve the old questions about when fighting may or may not be morally necessary. I do know that I am haunted by Roland's letter to Vera from the trenches, and that I do not trust anyone to discuss the moral questions intelligently unless they, too, are haunted by it. This is the starting position: not just a feeling that killing is “bad,” but that it is disgusting, that it must be stopped forever and we have to dedicate ourselves fully to ensuring war becomes a thing of the past. If you cannot stop hearing the scream of Hiroshima victims who watched their children burn to death, then you are a pacifist. If you do not think much about them, then you are not. Pacifism does not describe a particular set of solutions to the thorniest moral problems. Instead it is an attitude about war: a feeling that it is deeply wrong, that even when it is “justified” it still isn't justified, that nobody should treat such bloody insanity as romantic or noble or respectable. ✚



WHO GOES NAZI?

OFFICE EDITION

IT'S BEEN 78 YEARS SINCE DOROTHY THOMPSON published her iconic "Who Goes Nazi?" in *Harper's*. "Interesting and somewhat macabre," *Who Goes Nazi?* is a game you can play with your friends and acquaintances (although, for your safety, play it in your own head, not out loud). The rules are simple: Look around a group and ferret out who would go Nazi under the right conditions, and who never, ever would, no matter what. In her piece, Thompson described playing her game at an imaginary dinner party. We present to you, updated for the 21st century: the Office Edition. After you've finished reading, try it out at your own workplace (again, in your head, or with very trusty coworkers).

As with Thompson's dinner party, the imaginary office described below is not meant to be an average or universal environment, representative of all experiences (as if there could be such a thing). It's a very specific place: a white-col-

lar corporation in a gentrifying liberal city. By no means are the characters described below the only kind of people who would go Nazi. Nor is it impossible, as Thompson stipulates, for Jewish or non-white people to go Nazi. "Nazism has nothing to do with race and nationality," Thompson says. "It appeals to a certain type of mind."

Let us look around the conference room, and see if we can locate this certain type of mind.

The woman who will soon triple-clap to begin this lunch meeting is the office manager. We'll call her the **Cheerleader**. She was, in fact, never actually a cheerleader, but she has that same kind of team-spiritedness, shaded with irony now for coolness's sake. Alpha girl, committee queen, she peaked in college roles



that rewarded organization and bullying. In her ponytail and her sweats she could, as a gorgeous, authoritative 22 year old, control a crowd of fellow students, and she loved the power of it. She hates her powerlessness now.

In her childhood, the Cheerleader was told so often that she was stupid, and only her weight and beauty mattered, that she believes it now absolutely, and downplays her own formidable intelligence (though not without consciousness, she's recognized that acting stupid when she isn't is a species of cleverness, the cleverest weapon she has). With her coworkers she's openly, passionately anti-intellectual, an avid non-reader—this makes men more comfortable, or so she's found. The cheerleader is always attuned to what men, who are power, find valuable and useful. She doesn't have much use for or place much value on women, including herself.

Everyone knows the Cheerleader is fucking the boss. Not for attraction, but for lack of anything better to do, and because it's power, or as close as she can get to it any-

way. As his mistress and his right hand, she's the bubbly blonde enforcer of the boss' will. You'd better give obeisance to her or you'll be slowly starved of advancement opportunities, blamed for random errors, and never invited out after work. If you're a man, she's automatically got your back; if you're a woman you'll have to work very hard to prove you're not a threat. Loudly, proudly, not a feminist, the Cheerleader never votes because "voting doesn't change anything."

She has lots of gay friends and is progressive on the surface, but these gay friends (you've met them) are the type that absolutely despise women. With them—they're all white—she engages in a laughing low-key racism, slipping into AAVE for "comic effect." She would not only go full Nazi but would make an excellent prison comandante.



NEXT IS A FELLOW ASSOCIATE-LEVEL COWORKER, THE **Failed Academic**. He's only here as a day job, and makes sure everybody knows it. A self-described Marxist, he would have been an academic if academia were still a field with careers. But the academy is broken, which despite his professed Marxism he takes more personally than politically, because it's forced him to scrounge for meaningless salaried work like the rest of you slobs. He writes "pieces" for his blog and sometimes for tiny journals run by failed academics like himself. These are lengthy essays, deeply researched, dense with allusions, all displaying a reflexive contempt for the masses who can't understand his talents and aren't reading his work anyway. The existence of Gmail's automated features means everyone is becoming robots. Facebook's algorithms dominate the human information multiplex; there is no escaping it. (You can catch him on Facebook at least four hours of every workday, getting into labyrinthine quarrels with important left figures you've never heard of).

In the Failed Academic's former Marxist politics, now flattened into despair, nothing can be fought, only monitored, and mourned, though with contempt for you and your petty bourgeois nostalgia for a past that was never real. Any liking his coworkers ever express for pop culture, however hedged and passing, feeds the flames of his contempt for everyone around him. (He's perfectly interested in pop culture himself, but he's always careful to pass off his tastes as thoughtful; the '80s action movies he loves are symbolic of a great hollowness, which he's certain is society and not himself).

The Failed Academic will never go Nazi, because he still has his principles, and also because going Nazi would require change, and he finished developing years ago. But he'll chronicle the descent into fascism lyrically, fatalistically, for an audience of no one. (Should it be socialism instead, he won't help or organize, but he'll chronicle it too, with a confused and disbelieving joy).

ACROSS THE TABLE FROM THE FAILED ACADEMIC, chatting amiably to anyone and everyone, we find the receptionist, who we'll call the **Maddow Madhound**. Ugh. She's nice. It's really hard to dislike her. She's a decent, thoughtful person. The day you got sick after eating that tuna wrap you stole from the VP's meeting, the receptionist was the one who called your roommate to come get you. But as kind as she is, the Maddow Madhound is, in Seinfeldian terms, a long talker. And for the past few years, her favorite subject has been the #Resistance. She knows every detail of the Russia investigation, and having decided that your political sympathies are firmly Team Blue, she can't wait to tell you all about it. Every morning, she breaks down the thrilling news that Rachel Maddow broke to her last night. Mueller is inching closer to the target, he'll get there any day now; the Republicans are turning on Trump, it'll take just a few more senators, a few more shocking revelations, and then, just like that, pop! the Orange Abomination will be impeached, and the nightmare will be over.

Behind the Maddow Madhound's back, the other people in your office (especially the Failed Academic) make fun of her. They mock her for her social awkwardness, for long-talking, for being hopeful, for being unselfishly kind. Despite her commitment to the #Resistance, her actual politics—when you can draw her off Russia—are relatively left. The word "socialism" makes her nervous—she's worried the government is going to come for her pension, as (she thinks happened) in Venezuela. But at the same time she does believe the rich should be aggressively taxed and healthcare should be free for everyone. Her daughter's getting married to an immigrant and she just couldn't be happier, she tells you loudly but also sincerely; she means it or she wants to mean it; she is actively trying to be a good person. She will never go Nazi. In fact, unlike the Failed Academic,

she's politically engaged. She'll phonebank for the first socialist presidential candidate, and cry at the inauguration.

Slipping moodily at her coffee and nervously biting her nails is the project manager. You don't want to cross her, lest you be at the sudden receiving end of an avalanche of anxiety which triggers your own barely managed disorder. Unlike the Maddow Madhound, you do, actively, despise the **Anxiety Attacker**. It's hard not to. The Anxiety Attacker guards her territory fiercely; she gets in at 7:00 am and stays until 9:00 pm, working, always working, performing how hard she's working, which is also how hard she doesn't need to work, because if she just delegated and explained you'd be happy to help. But in her anxiety and self-protectiveness and terror of the boss she simply can't. Everyone is out to get her; if you say hello to her she wants to know what you're after. She's sure that everybody wants something. This is just the latest in a long line of cruel jobs; decades of workplace mindgames and sudden shocking layoffs have made her distrust everyone, and for good reason. She makes huge mistakes in her distrust and her exhaustion, and her errors have rippling effects throughout the office. But, if you ever suggest she might have screwed up she'll go to HR, accusing you of trying to undermine her.

The Anxiety Attacker has no stated politics. She's opposed to the redistribution of wealth because she's worked hard, so very fucking hard, and she just wants to retire in peace (she will never retire, she's addicted to the abuse-cycle of overwork and pride in overwork and in hating herself for overwork and for making errors, the inexcusable imperfections of an exhausted mind). She's been through too much to turn back now. She's terminally tired. Will she go Nazi? Hard to say. She's already a Nazi in her own heart, a Nazi of herself, proud and hateful and obedient and death-driven. She'll do anything to be safe from the fear of loss and failure. She might not help the Nazis, but she won't stop them. She won't even notice when they've arrived.

CHATTING FEARLESSLY NEXT TO THE ANXIETY Attacker is an additional associate, yet another woman in the office who drives the Failed Academic crazy. This one is the **Cheerful Centrist**. She's a liberal, so she says, and she knows things are bad. It's just that right now most things are so *nice*, for her. The conveniences of modern life can't be beat. She loves Netflix and Spotify and her Amazon Prime account. She takes Uber everywhere, even when she technically doesn't have to. Yes, it's bad, but what can you do? Her boyfriend works for Google and drives a Tesla, he's actually a lovely guy, they're buying a house, you hate them just a little or maybe a lot for being able to afford a house, for speaking in a capitalized soup of brands and only shrugging wryly at it. What *can* you do?

The Cheerful Centrist is a feminist, sincerely, and cares about every intersection except class. She has a finely balanced sense of the absurd, and is funny, and is your workfriend. You commiserate about microaggressions over drinks. She remembers, months later, the name of the writer you said you liked. She wants the world to be better but she doesn't want to lose anything in the process. Her parents are very conservative and she loves them. When they first immigrated they struggled for a while and, while they're quite comfortable now, they've impressed upon her that she must avoid struggle. She must never lose.

This Cheerful Centrist will not become a Nazi, but it's going to be tough to make her a socialist. She'll hold on to what she has. She feels her parents earned it at great cost, and she puts up with a lot of bullshit to keep it. Her life is too smooth, fun, unwrinkled, lively. Her clothes are beautiful; her vacations are Instagrammable. She isn't willing to take the difficult journey into where and when and how she's wrong.

WHO'S SITTING WITH HIS BACK TO THE CHEERFUL Centrist, listening furiously, fuming at every word? Why, it's the IT Guy, who you call, succinctly, the **Internet Guy**. He thinks Joe Rogan is hilarious, but when you ask him to tell you a funny Joe Rogan joke he says you just have to watch it. Whenever you venture into his ratty windowless office for computer help, you catch him mainlining Rogan and the rest of IDW YouTube. The Internet Guy has never studied the humanities, and he hasn't read a book in years. He may have bought and skimmed *12 Rules For Life*, and also Richard Dawkins' books, which he privately thought were too dense, which in his mind is synonymous with brilliant. When GamerGate happened, he told you it was about ethics in videogame journalism, but when you asked for more information he couldn't clarify what that meant. He claims he isn't part of the alt-right (and is offended you would insinuate that!) Oddly enough, he always ends up hating the "woke," "diverse" corporate pop culture artifacts starring women and people of color, but never for the right reasons. He'll focus on the CGI, or the frame rate, or a single awkward line, or a generalized failure-to-be-exactly-the-same-narrative-he-loved-as-a-child. The Internet Guy has the kind of raw, lashing, intellectual insecurity of a man who doesn't really know how to analyze narrative and is ashamed of it, but rather than doing the work of self-education he flings his private inferiority and ignorance outward on a carrier wave of distrust and resentment. It's infectious; the Internet Guy is so confident that you, like him, know nothing and understand nothing that you begin to believe it yourself.

Desperately crushing on the Cheerful Centrist, the Internet Guy covers for it by aggressively teasing her, which she receives laconically, almost unbothered. He's just another piece of shit she has to put up with to stay where she is. When he tries to discuss politics with you, he always references his Cuban grandfather, as if this both shields him from being a bigot and justifies his fear of socialism (it doesn't). He lives in a luxury condo in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, and thinks his Black neighbors hate him (they do). He thinks this is racism (it isn't). He considers identity politics a personal attack (what he wants is automatic forgiveness for the sins of history, without realizing that no one is asking for his private guilt, just his help).

The Internet Guy will absolutely go Nazi. He probably has already. See if you can find his secret posts on a popular alt-right message board. Don't know his avi? Try the name of his favorite video game character. He was bullied as a child a few times for being a nerd. He has never forgotten. You can't possibly appreciate how oppressed he is, at least as much as people of color, for having been bullied, once, twice, maybe even three whole times.

ENOUGH TALK OF POLITICS! CRIES THE PINK-CHEEKED CIO, The **Apolitical Adjudicator**. He hates politics. He doesn't believe in politics. He has extremely strict politics. Everyone just needs to sit down and have a good conversation, really hammer it out. Everyone can overcome anything, with a little hard work. Even bigotry can be overcome by doing your best and proving your worth. Why, the Apolitical Adjudicator knows a guy who... his stories ramble, but everyone endures it, as they won't for the Maddow Madhound, because she's a woman and lower-ranking, and he's a founding member of the company. Born in the South, the Apolitical Adjudicator is all sweetness and down-home charm unless you cross him, in which case he turns brightly vicious, and the accent disappears. In any case his Southernness is mostly affectation. He may have been born in Tennessee but he attended Exeter (yes, he keeps the banner above his desk, along with his diplomas from Yale and Carnegie Mellon).

The Apolitical Adjudicator believes in hard work but he does not,

himself, work very hard. He spends most of his days on the phone with his children, or with the schools he's trying to get his grandchildren into (he praises the high achievers and complains about the artistic losers, but in either case he pushes his contacts to get his grandchildren accepted. They are *his* grandchildren, after all). But enough about his family, his non-politics which are the inflexible unquestioned politics of American conservatism—will he go Nazi? In theory he is opposed. He's a patriotic American. He owns multiple unread Churchill biographies. But in practice, should some other, undeserving, possibly browner person's child squeeze his legacy admissions out of what they so rightly deserve, he'll be forced to declare himself fascist, far-right, whatever, if that's what the leftists, those uncivilized partisans and the true bigots, have driven him towards. What happened to this country, during the long years where he didn't have to care about politics? Whatever happened to freedom, values, and an unfettered, American chance at happiness? (He will remain opposed, in any case, to free college.)

FINALLY, THE LUNCH MEETING BEGINS. THE SPEAKER—the only speaker—is the man himself, the man in charge, the CEO, the **Boss**. He started this company from scratch with nothing, except the Apolitical Adjudicator, a \$100,000 dollar loan, and a third partner who has long been cut out of the picture, literally at times, like Stalin's disfavored officials. That is the only comparison to Stalin the Boss will admit. He's a capitalist down to his bones and out again through his Botoxed skin. The Boss, and the private power of Bosses like himself, is the only authority he recognizes.

Mercurial and arbitrary, the Boss' winds blow in any direction, and can suddenly froth into a hurricane. Are his sudden storms an act to keep his employees cowed? Or just cocaine? It's hard to tell. He is a blur of movement. He's always changing his mind. You've always done it wrong, unless you're The Cheerleader, his mistress, in which case someone else is to blame.

The Boss votes Republican, though he pretended reluctance when it came to Trump. Really, he just doesn't like getting gouged by Uncle Sam, not while he's trying to renovate his lakehouse. It isn't fair; he's worked so hard, he's built this company, he's survived so many storms (including the ones he created). From fragments of conversation screamed into his office phone, you've deduced that he's being audited by the IRS. He didn't do anything wrong. It isn't fair. He keeps shouting about a Mr. Epstein from that agency, who's been calling to arrange an appointment. Mr. Epstein, Mr. Epstein—he's very fixated on that name. He can't seem to stop saying it. Coincidentally, it just so happens that he regularly confuses the names of the few people of color in the office. You may have considered complaining about his behavior to HR, but those who do so tend to leave the company rather quickly. They didn't do anything wrong. It isn't fair.

In his office, the Boss is yelling on the phone to his betrayed and long-suffering wife not to answer any more calls from Mr. Epstein. The lakehouse and the money he failed to mention on his tax return is his, as dear to him as his own body or his wife or his mistress, all of his prized possessions. It's all his; he's worked so hard, harder than anyone else at this company, which is also his own, his private property. He *deserves* what he's earned. He deserves everything. No one, he believes, has ever deserved it more than himself. If the Boss wasn't going to go Nazi before—though he likely would have—he'll certainly go full Nazi now, and happily so, finally able to give his grievances a Jewish name. When you finally quit the company, make sure you shake his hand, and look him in the eye, and tell him you can't wait for the day when all his wealth will be expropriated. ✚



WAITING FOR THE HOLY INFANT OF ATOCHA

by Brianna Rennix

IN DILLEY, TEXAS, THERE IS ONLY ONE GROCERY store, and that grocery store is Lowes. (It is not *a* Lowes, like the home improvement center. It is a totally different and legally distinct store that also happens to be called Lowes.) Lowes is a place of many mysteries. I once went there to buy vegetable broth for a sick co-worker, and combed the soup aisle for nearly 20 minutes before being forced to admit that no, Lowes does not carry vegetable broth. The closest thing they had was a can of something called “vegetable beef.” Lowes does, however, carry bacon-flavored pancake syrup, quite a lot of animal pheromones in spray cans (including such choice selections as “raccoon urine” and “sow in heat,” which I assume are for agricultural rather than cosmetic purposes), and a large selection of devotional candles in glass cylinders.

I had never paid much attention to the candles, but a friend of mine was in town, volunteering at the child internment camp where I work as an immigration lawyer, and he wanted to bring back a candle for some eclectic *ofrenda*-type situation he had set up in his D.C. apartment. He is a meticulous and thoughtful sort of person, and took a long time debating between various candidates. I had come to Lowes primarily to buy Cheez-Its, and was getting impatient. I picked up a candle

at random. “How about this one?” I said.

The candle had a picture of a Little Lord Fauntleroy-type in a plumed hat and a white ruff, with a pink seashell pinned to his cloak. I glanced at the label on the back. *Glorioso Santo Niño de Atocha*, it said, *patrón de las que están injustamente en prisión, protector de viajeros y que das la mano al que se encuentra en peligro...*

I didn’t know anything about this saint at all, despite having grown up Catholic, so I looked him up on my phone. I soon discovered that he was not really a *saint*, per se, but a special Limited Edition version of baby Jesus. Wikipedia offered up the following backstory:

In the 13th century, Spain was under Muslim rule. The town of Atocha, now part of Madrid’s Arganzuela district, was lost to the Muslims, and many Christians there were taken prisoners as spoils of war. The Christian prisoners were not fed by the jailers, but by family members who brought them food. According to pious legend, the caliph ordered that only children under the age of 12 were permitted to bring food. Conditions became increasingly difficult for those men without small children. ... Reports soon began among the people of Atocha that an unknown child under the age of twelve and dressed in pilgrim’s clothing, had begun to bring food to childless prisoners at night. The women of the town

returned to Our Lady of Atocha to thank the Virgin for her intercession, and noticed that the shoes worn by the Infant Jesus were tattered and dusty. They replaced the shoes of the Infant Jesus, but these became worn again. The people of Atocha took this as a sign that it was the Infant Jesus who went out every night to help those in need.

This all got me rather excited, because I am very fond of medieval history, and regularly drive around rural Texas blasting 13th-century Spanish pilgrimage music. Who would've thought that a little vestige of the medieval world would turn up in my local grocery store? Secondly, what better patron for someone who works at a jail for child refugees than a child-saint who defends both travelers in peril *and* the unjustly imprisoned?

And that was how I first ended up buying a Holy Infant of Atocha candle for my kitchen table.

Later, when I researched the matter further, I found out that the Wikipedian history of the Holy Infant was—shockingly—likely incorrect. The medieval origin story was a post hoc invention, an attempt to give an older European pedigree to a wholly Mexican tradition. The Holy Infant's mother, as it turns out, *was* an authentically medieval character: Holy Mary of Atocha appears in several of the 13th-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (a.k.a. the sick beats currently blaring from my Kia Forte), mostly as a patroness of field workers. When her shrine at Atocha was selected for special favor by the Spanish monarchy in the 17th century, she was transformed from a saint of the

people into an emblem of Spanish governance. It was in this capacity—as a defender of Spanish colonial might—that Mary of Atocha found her way to Mexico. Sanctuaries in her name were built in the state of Zacatecas, in Fresnillo and Plateros.

But through some obscure evolution of local devotion, it was the image of her child, the Holy Infant, that became the primary locus of worship. The Holy Infant of Atocha eventually came to be revered as a protector of ordinary people, especially of miners, travelers, and prisoners. An 1848 novena written by one Calixto Aguirre was instrumental in popularizing the cult of the Holy Infant, and the cover illustration of the printed pamphlet version was the first to show him as a pilgrim rather than a prince. Instead of a crown, a globe, and a scepter—the traditional iconog-

raphy of power—he had a big hat, a food basket, and a traveler's staff with a gourd hanging from it. The first episode of the novena tells of a legal miracle. It begins with the tale of a poor woman by the name of Maximiana Esparza, who wanders to four different cities, seeking succor. In each city, she is imprisoned for her *malas costumbres*—some unspecified bad manners—and, having no family or other advocate to speak on her behalf, she languishes for years in prison in each place. At last, after being in prison a year in Durango, she prays to the Holy Infant of Atocha:

...who listened to her kindly and took her out of her captivity; for in all the time that she had lived there, there was nobody who would defend her, until the Holy Child of Atocha, dressed as a handsome youth, visited her in that prison and gave her some bread in the name of his mother, saying to her that same afternoon she would see the judge and he would take up her case, which caused no little amazement among the rector and the other inmates; and when the time arrived that the Child had named, she was set free.

Mary of Atocha, the former people's saint, may regrettably have become more conservative in her waning years, but she nonetheless succeeded in giving the world an even more radical son. We should all be so lucky!

IT'S ACTUALLY PRETTY ABSURD THAT I KNEW nothing about the Holy Infant of Atocha until a few months ago. Once he was on my radar, I soon realized that he's a pretty standard figure in Mexican and Chicane Catholicism. But I stumbled into immigration advocacy three years ago knowing next to nothing about Latin American cultures, and even now there are huge gaps in my understanding. My Spanish, too, is still pretty atrocious. I have been working at it for three years, but it's like speaking through a mouthful of broken glass. I muster my words with pain, and my meaning comes out all mangled. I now feel a strong affinity for all those immigrant grandparents who understand English perfectly and never learn to speak it; I am sure I would be just the same if I were ever to immigrate to a non-English-speaking country. I often feel that any bilingual person, with or without a law degree, could do most of my work a lot better than me. But I am here, so I do my best.

Sometimes I wake up in the mornings very anxious, usually when I have to draft a big court filing or an important request to the asylum office, to try and stop a detained family's deportation. I come up with soothing little rituals to ease my transition from fretful sleep to focused work. I put on some music. I make a big pot of coffee. I light my Holy Infant of Atocha candle. It's really because I like the way the candlelight makes me feel, not for superstitious reasons. I'm really not one for good luck charms, astrology, or premonitions. I remember that shortly after Trump first announced the family separation policy this summer—this was when I was still in Massachusetts, getting ready for my move to Texas—I was walking down a



familiar street near my home, feeling very disturbed and heart-sick. All of a sudden I saw a rabbit on the sidewalk a few feet ahead. It was standing quite still, and it let me walk up close. For a moment the encounter felt almost magical. Then the rabbit loped off, and where it had been, I saw two small baby bunnies lying dead on the pavement. When I bent to look, a little cloud of flies dispersed, then settled again. As omens go, that was some Roman-level bullshit. But I don't think it was anything but coincidence.

The area of south Texas where I live now is teeming with strange sights, and sometimes everything I see feels pregnant with meaning. The drive from my apartment to the internment camp is only four minutes, but the road is always strewn with strange corpses. A dead dog or housecat is an everyday

unusual in the United States. Most immigration jails have few to no lawyers continuously on the ground, and they must—of necessity—heavily triage cases. It's amazing how little has changed in 170 years. For Maximiana Esparza, trapped in prison in Durango, nothing short of a divine intervention could save her from the machinations of an indifferent legal bureaucracy. Even today, some immigrants address letters to the Holy Infant of Atocha, often asking him for that greatest of miracles, the mercy of a judge. Juan Javier Pescador has compiled a number of them in a book called *Crossing Borders with the Santo Niño de Atocha*:

Dear Santo Niño: I write to You hoping You are fine. We are doing OK so far, but I am a little sad because my husband is in jail. I ask You to move the judge's heart because right now the

Sometimes, the ones we lose vanish into the void, and we never hear of them again. I think about the living person that was in front of me—where is she?

casualty; but I have also seen bodies of armadillos, bobcats, and javelinas, all mowed down by a speeding truck, or a passenger-bus of incoming detainees, or one of the heavy tankers that barrel continually to and from the nearby oilfields. No waste collection service ever disposes of the animals, so I watch their corpses bloat and distend and then disintegrate over a period of weeks. I have heard a rumor too that there are zebra on one of the ranches around here, flown in and kept in captivity so that deer-weary hunters can have something exotic to shoot. I've yet to see an escaped zebra lying dead by the side of the road, but give it time.

Also on the same road as the child internment camp, if you can believe it, there is a Texas state prison. It lies alongside a large ranch, and in front of the jail there's a field of watermelons. Sometimes in the early morning, on my way into work, I see a group of prisoners in white jumpsuits and white caps, working the watermelon field. Ringed around them are three or four heavily-armed officers on horseback, in case anyone tries anything. The thing is so ludicrous it's hard to know whether to laugh or cry. It's as if this tiny town has been selected as a kind of roadside showcase of human cruelty.

Other times, I arrive at work to find a helicopter blocking my entry to the parking lot. We are so far from a hospital that can treat children, serious medical emergencies have to be airlifted out.

Inside the internment camp, hundreds of new women and children are bussed in every week. We provide legal services to every single one of them. This level of legal representation is

immigration laws in California are very strict. My husband did not do anything wrong. It is just that he was caught by the Migra and he was deported to Mexico at once. Then he came back to the U.S. and was caught again. They are giving him five years. Santo Niño, grant me the miracle that his sentence be reduced. I have three children, and one of them cries all the time because she wants her daddy back.

Santo Niño de Atocha, You know better than anybody about my needs. ... My son is in prison without a chance to be free for several years. That breaks my heart with sadness, for I am economically poor. I don't have the enormous amount a lawyer would charge for defending my son in court before the judge who will sentence him. That is why Niño de Atocha, I beg You to attend that trial as my son's defense lawyer. Don't allow a long sentence for him as is expected. At least let the court show compassion for him and reduce the jail time to a minimum.

My clients, at the very least, have a lawyer—and because they have brought their children with them, they have the prospect of being released within a matter of weeks rather than a matter of months or years, provided they can pass a threshold interview with an asylum officer here and demonstrate that they have a potential asylum claim. But the government is still as capricious as any ancient god. When it suits the government's logistical purposes, they can simply issue everyone at the border a court order and let them all go, without making them pass a threshold screening. They know that mothers with babies are no threat to anyone, and probably would have passed their threshold screening anyway, so they can do this when-

ever they feel like it, with no real political repercussions. Or the government can choose to schedule a hundred interviews a day, and my colleagues and I will work 12- or 15-hour days just to prepare the families for the questions they'll be asked. It's all arbitrary, all performance theater, and everyone in the system knows it, and pretends not to know it. At their interviews, the women detained here are forced to disgorge their deepest, most intimate agonies to a bureaucrat before the government will give them any chance to remain in the country to seek protection for their families. If I locked up some bureaucrat in a camp and made him relive all his worst traumas before I allowed his child a chance at safety, we would call that torture.

The government knows most of the families have cases—almost everyone at this center ultimately passes their interview—and that it's legally bound to let them in as asylum-seekers. But every so often, someone comes along who doesn't fully understand the nature of the interview, or is holding back something that she fears to tell. Those people are the sacrifices, caught in the government's nets. They are chosen to be deported with their children as a show of might, to prove that we don't just let *everyone* in. The women deported from Dilley have a genuine fear for their life if they return, a fear that is usually totally undisputed by the asylum office. But maybe the wording of the threat they received doesn't easily conform to one of the few protected categories under existing asylum law. People who have been raped, tortured, or threatened with violent death are often found not to have viable asylum claims. If they happen to cross the border one week, they might be let into the country without even doing an interview. If they happen to come on another week, they will be interviewed, tripped up on an idiotic technicality, and deported right back into the hands of their abusers.

I work primarily with people who have failed their interviews and are on the verge of deportation, trying to appeal their cases. I had a run of several months where it feels like nearly all my clients were *very* young women with *very* small children. By bad luck, they all happened to have the kind of case that is especially hard to save—out of confusion, or fear, or both, they didn't say *quite* enough in their credible fear interview to pass the threshold screening. The details these women withheld, had they emerged in the original interview, would likely have gotten them through, but the new information isn't quite horrific and dramatic *enough* for the asylum office to think it's worth giving them a second chance. One night, I played peekaboo with a fussy one-year-old and, in between "boos," asked his 20-year-old mother if the sexual abuse she suffered as a child had ever made her feel suicidal. She raked the settled muck at the bottom of her memory, painfully extracted every buried trauma, let me look at them under fluorescent lights. She gave me everything I asked her for. She told me things she said she had never told another living soul. It was not enough. They deported her.

Sometimes, the ones we lose vanish into the void, and we

never hear of them again. I think about the living person that was in front of me—where is she? Maybe she is alive. Maybe she is alive, but maybe she is crying and afraid. Maybe someone is holding her down and hurting her right now. Maybe she is dead, maybe she is rotting in a black bag somewhere under a few inches of dirt, maybe no one knows where her killer hid her. Where is her little boy? Where is his little body? Who is taking care of him?

Other times, I get text messages and voicemails from the outer darkness. *Abogada, they deported me but I never agreed to it, I never signed my papers. That's not right, is it? Can you appeal my case? I can't work because the gangs are threatening me again. I have so many debts from my journey. My child is hungry. Is there someone who can help me?*

I USED TO NOT THINK OF MYSELF AS AN ANGRY person—and stupidly, I used to believe this was a virtue of some kind, that I was sanguine enough to give other people the benefit of the doubt. Well, that was fine, back when all I had to be annoyed about was some workplace drama, or an unrequited crush, or someone not doing the dishes. I had no fucking clue. In our immigration system, you sometimes run across people who are so petty, who are so ready to put their egos above the real lives of other human beings, that they feel like some kind of comic-book parody of a villain. At Dilley, too, you often get to hear the stories of how the detainees were treated just before getting here, while they were still at the border, far from observant legal eyes—made to sit in their wet clothes for three days in ice-cold temperatures, given frozen masses of rotted food to eat, forced to use an open toilet in a room packed with people while their children's bottoms blistered in unchanged diapers, kicked and screamed at all night to keep them awake. These are things monsters do. This is what our country does to the poor and helpless, in a time of prosperity and peace. I think of how the little children I see every day are going to grow up, those who end up allowed to stay in the United States, with this their first welcome as refugees.

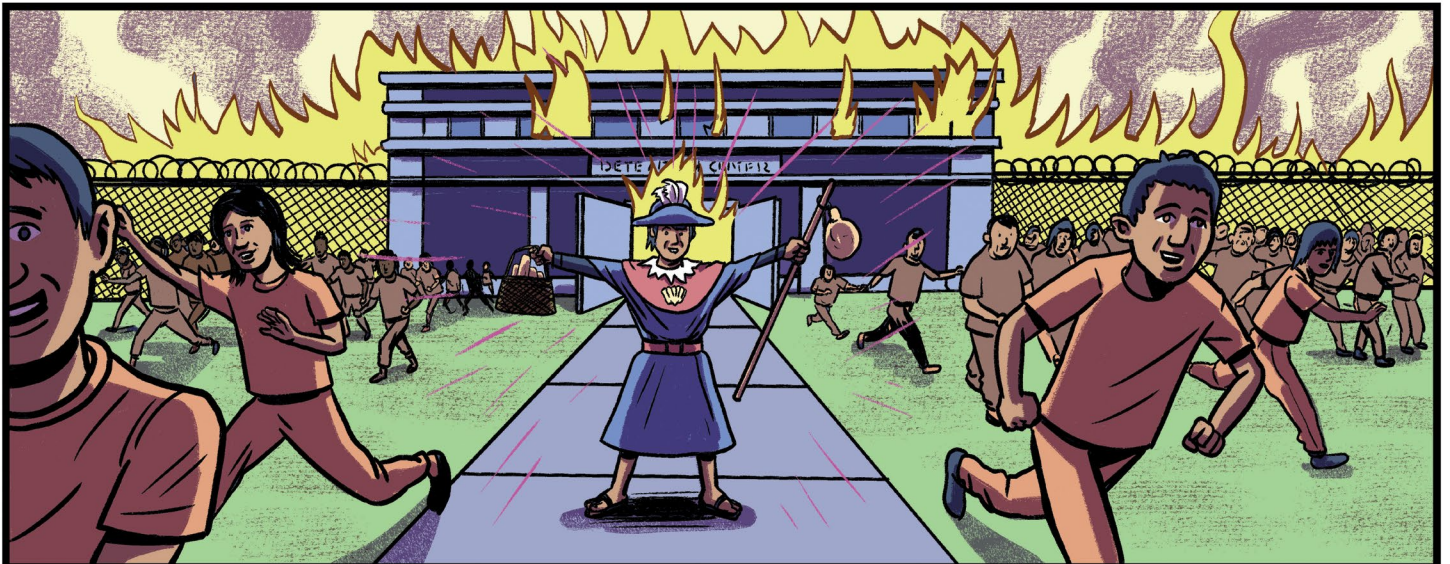
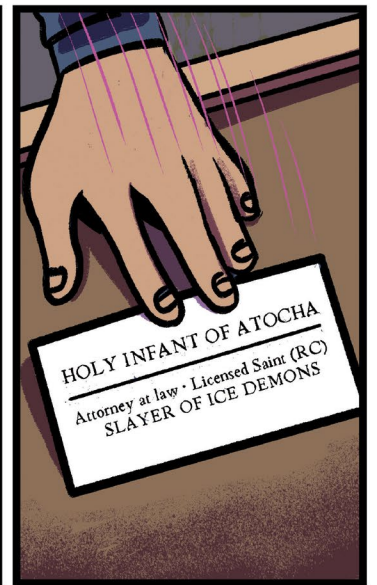
I am so angry that I am rapidly losing the ability to communicate with people and their facile opinions: "Well but what's the solution?" and "Well, but we can't just let *everyone* in." In the past I would have thought these people were moderates, probably. Now I think they are the accomplices of extreme evil. I don't know what to do with all the rage in my body. And this is how I feel merely as an advocate and onlooker. If my family and friends were being tortured in this way, how would I live? Would my heart simply explode? How are there so many people in our country carrying this feeling in their body every day?

My roommate sees me lighting my Holy Infant candle sometimes and thinks it's funny. "You remind me of my grandma," she says. "I keep thinking it's some religious thing."

"Nah," I say, "I just like the way it looks."

That said, I could probably use the help. +

HOLY INFANT OF ATOCHA COMICS





are voters just LEMMINGS?

by RYAN COOPER

IN 2008, THE POLITICAL SCIENTISTS MARTY COHEN, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller released a book called *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. The basic argument is that, despite the ostensible democratic machinery of state primaries, party elites were the ones who *really* made the decisions. The authors showed that even after the presidential primary reforms in the late 60s and early 70s made the nomination process more reliant on voters, the candidate who collected the most endorsements from party grandees still ultimately locked up the nomination.

A semi-bastardized version of this argument quickly became conventional wisdom among the pundit class. Although *The Party Decides* itself contained extensive caveats and qualifications (especially concerning its minuscule sample size), the book came to be treated as all but ironclad proof that the voters had no say whatsoever in the selection of their party's nominee. When it comes to presidential primaries at least, The Voters Are Stupid. They might *think* they have some say in choosing their party's nominee—said the wonks, nodding sagely to one another—but in reality, they were merely validating the pre-existing choices of the elite class.

But by 2015, this consensus was melting like snow before a stream of hot urine, as Donald Trump contemptuously bulldozed the Republican establishment and locked up that party's nomination. Indeed, not only did he casually brush aside unified opposition of nearly the entire Republican elite, but he did it despite having no formal political experience of any kind. It seemed the voters had some kind of a voice after all.

But this changed political context did not spell the end of the Stupid Voter narrative: It merely changed form. Whereas voters were previously deemed stupid because they had *no* influence on political outcomes, they were now deemed stupid because they had *too much* influence, influence that thwarted the wise and sensible aims

of political elites who otherwise would have governed in the public interest. In 2016, political scientist Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels published a much more ambitious book called *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. It is, basically, The General Theory of Stupid Voters. It has become the latest conventional wisdom about democracy, garnering near-universal praise in the elite press, from the London School of Economics to *Foreign Affairs* to the *New York Review of Books*. The *Economist* deems it “the most influential recent book on voting.”

At wonk central HQ *Vox*, it has been cited as definitively proving that “everything you know about democracy is wrong,” namely that “the problem with democracy is voters.” It was cited as “the best book to help you understand the wild 2016 campaign,” because “people in general have cast their votes for no particularly good reason at all, so there's no reason to expect Trump supporters to be any different.”

There is much to recommend about the book, and many of its assertions are certainly at least partly right. But its general conclusion that voters are basically incapable of reason, and *never* vote based on ideological considerations — one which has been similarly stripped of caveats in popular discussion — is far too strong, and even dangerous. Voters are often ignorant, but they are not completely insensible to reality. Blinding oneself to that fact could easily knock the legs out from any attempt to confront Trump, and even undermine our very democratic institutions.

FIRST, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF *Democracy for Realists*. Achen and Bartels assemble a huge body of evidence to demonstrate that the voting public is vastly ignorant about policy, tends to rationalize pre-existing biases, and blames the incumbent party for things they could not possibly control, like shark attacks. Even when voters can be shown

to be making a sort of judgment about political success on the merits—namely, voting the bums out during times of economic crisis—their decision tends to be severely myopic. Voters generally judge economic performance only on the last few months before election day, not based on how the whole last electoral term has gone.

The authors take aim at something they call the “folk theory” of democracy, which they define as the idea that democracy is about simply representing the will of the voters. The “folk theory” of democracy is the animating force behind initiatives to increase popular participation in decision-making by adding ballot initiative and referendum procedures to various constitutions, so that “the people” can have a direct voice on policy matters. The authors demonstrate many severe problems with this sort of direct democracy — most notably, that it is at least as vulnerable to elite influence as any other sort of de-

is based on the same neoclassical bullshit. They define it in exclusive-ly *individual* terms—a fundamental premise of this style of economics. By their lights, political reasoning happens when someone has pre-existing, fully worked-out ideology, and perfect knowledge of how the political system has affected their *personal* well-being, who then calculates the most rational political decision in terms of their own pocketbook and principles.

It is true that virtually nobody behaves in this way. Many people don’t have a clue what each party stands for, while others are egregiously mistaken about who believes what. But more importantly, Achen and Bartels argue that even very well-informed people tend to rationalize their group identities by adopting whatever the consensus view is—and then argue that, by definition, adopting a consensus view *cannot* be a “reasoned” decision: “[T]he political preferences

Legitimizing the belief that voters have **no actual beliefs** or preferences is not only intellectually sloppy—it’s **politically dangerous**.

mocracy, if not more so. Ordinary citizens really are not equipped to make decisions on complicated policy questions, and have often shot themselves in the foot by voting down water fluoridation measures and so forth (often egged on by well-funded right-wing extremists).

The trouble starts with their formal model of the folk theory, which they represent with an elaborate mathematical system descended from neoclassical economics called the “median voter theorem.” By this view, voters select candidates closest to their own ideology, and assuming voter preferences are represented by a single left-right spectrum with two equal-sized peaks, parties will rationally appeal to the median voter directly in the political middle. This predicts that each party will have the exact same centrist platform. The “rationally ignorant” median voter doesn’t have to do anything to see his preferences validated by the political system.

This model was directly based on similar economic models, which take a lot of *assumed* background conditions, run them through some intimidating math, and produce a result demonstrating that free market institutions automatically produce the best of all possible worlds. Voting, it’s just like buying peanut butter! It’s sort of an appealing notion, so long as it doesn’t make any close contact with reality.

Achen and Bartels blow this theory out of the water, thus defeating their conception of the folk theory of democracy. Most obviously, the parties do *not* have the same platform and never have, not even during the mid-20th-century period of relative political consensus when this kind of model was somewhat plausible. But since 1980 especially, the idea that the parties don’t have strong and increasingly stark disagreements is *prima facie* ridiculous.

THE AUTHORS HAVE A LOT OF SMART THINGS TO SAY about the negative influence economics-style reasoning has had on political science. But they don’t consider the idea that using the median voter theorem to represent the folk theory may itself be misleading.

This can best be seen in their implicit theory of reasoning, which

and judgments that look and feel like the bases of partisanship and voting behavior are, in reality, often the *consequences* of party and group loyalties ... the more information a voter has, often the better able she is to bolster her identities with rational-sounding reasons.”

There are a lot of problems with the premise of this argument.

First of all, if the most informed people simply adopt the views of their most important identity groups, then *where do those groups come by their notions?* Presumably, they aren’t just distilled from the celestial ether. It could be a leader simply lays down a party line, which is adopted by rank-and-file partisans regardless of content or hypocrisy. That is perhaps a plausible picture for Republicans, who now apparently hate the FBI and love Vladimir Putin, but is it universally true of *all* voting blocs?

Take African Americans, for instance. Such people vote almost in lockstep for Democrats (routinely at over 90 percent), a fact which is repeatedly mentioned by Achen and Bartels. Blacks have tended to support Democrats since the 1930s, but not by such huge margins. In 1960, for instance, John Kennedy racked up only 68 percent of the black vote.

But in 1964, Lyndon Johnson racked up *94 percent*. The reason, *obviously*, is that Johnson used his spectacular legislative legerdemain to pass the Civil Rights Act in July 1964, which his opponent Barry Goldwater opposed. Black voters made a collective decision that Johnson was genuinely committed to their interests while Goldwater was pushing disingenuous Dixiecrat politics, and shifted their votes accordingly.

It is frankly ridiculous to argue that there wasn’t at least *some* genuine reasoning about policy going on here, no matter where the change in opinion is coming from. Even if rank-and-file blacks were simply blithely taking marching orders from civil rights leaders (and if you read some histories of the civil rights movement, they *clearly* were not), it was still rational to follow that instruction. The parties really had made a profound ideological shift, and it was correctly identified by virtually every black voter.

That may be why the only time Achen and Bartels discuss black re-alignment into the Democratic column is during the New Deal, when Democrats were still the party of Southern white supremacists:

Was that sudden political mobilization inspired by support for New Deal policies, or by the Roosevelt administration's cautious outreach to African-Americans, signaling that they, too, would be a welcome part of the Democratic coalition?

The authors are so committed to their stupid voter shtick that they generally assume that all political group loyalties must be the dumbest caricature of identity politics—policy-free group signaling, affective demonstrations, and so on. As if outreach to black people *can't be a policy*. In reality, in 1941 President Roosevelt issued an executive order prohibiting racial discrimination in defense industries as part of the war effort—the start of a pro-black Democratic policy trend that culminated in the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

What's *most* ridiculous about this idea that group behavior can't be rational is that *all* thinking is collective in some way—and this reality affects elites as much as it affects voters! Every person learns a group language as a child, develops views heavily influenced by their parents and community, and generally attends some sort of church or government school. *Of course* all political thinking is mediated and influenced by various groups. That is what human reasoning *is*.

That's as true for academics as it is for anyone else. Scholars build on findings and models developed by those coming before them, building on their successes, filling in the gaps, or overturning mistaken theories. Achen and Bartels themselves, naturally, cite a vast quantity of previous research. Voters may not fit the homo economicus model of rationality, but neither does literally anyone else who has ever lived. The authors rule out voter reasoning by foreclosing the only process by which political reasoning has ever actually happened. If all humans were held to the same intellectual standards that the authors hold “voters” to, we would all be gibbering idiots.

ACHEN AND BARTELS' revisionist history of the New Deal period exemplifies how much the “stupid voter” framework can distort the lessons we draw from the elections and policy initiatives of the past. The traditional history of the New Deal era sees it as an unusually ideological period, in which voters were convinced to adopt radically more left-wing views. With Herbert Hoover-style conservatism profoundly discredited by the Great Depression, New Deal liberalism eventually swept in to take its place. (Incidentally, this is one period where an election unquestionably *did* produce responsive government, but I digress.) But Achen and Bartels argue that *actually*, these sweeping Democratic majorities were largely due to fortuitous election timing.

To be fair to the authors, they do present fairly compelling evidence that voters don't make fair judgments of a whole presidential term, but instead short-sightedly consider only the quite recent past. FDR's sweeping election victories were heavily—though not entirely—correlated with local income growth during just that period.

Republicans got swept out due to the Depression in 1932, while things were turning up fairly well right before election day in 1934 and 1936, leading to sustained huge Democratic majorities. Then, in 1938, the election took place during another bad recession. Democrats lost badly, and returned to their spending policies. Eventually,

after many years of big Democratic victories, the voting public then adopted the ideology of its new masters: “retrospective judgments were ... incorporated into durable partisan attachments[.]”

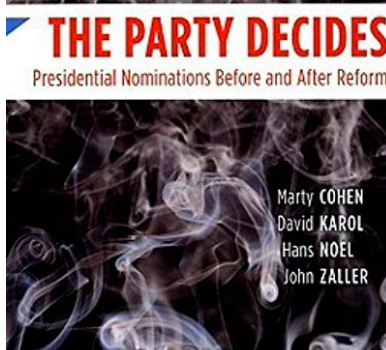
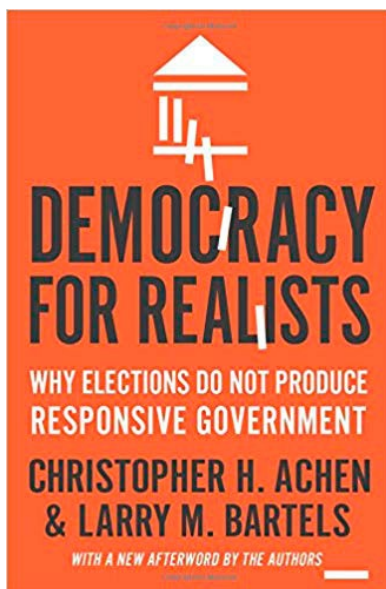
But stripped of the quasi-neoclassical presumption that reason only occurs individually, this mass shift in party loyalty looks less like the rube public being jerked around by circumstance, and more like a reasonably successful example of social political reasoning. Voters made a judgment in November 1932 that the economy was in severe crisis—a bleary, instinctive one, but a real and correct one nonetheless—and handed control of the government to the Democrats. A vast galaxy of interest groups, intellectuals, and politicians within the party then conducted a sharp debate about what should be done. Perhaps most importantly, FDR agreed that whatever it was, it needed to be big and aggressive.

The government conducted various policy experiments to fix the economic crisis, which managed to restore reasonable prosperity in time for the next election. Some efforts like the National Industrial Recovery Act were abandoned as quasi-failures, while others like the Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration were celebrated as performing as advertised. Voters then ratified the leftward policy turn by returning the Democrats to power. Many reasoned correctly—a sort of thought shortcut, but a correct one nonetheless—that these New Deal Democrats must be on to something, and adopted the new ideology.

A particularly howling absence from Achen and Bartels' account is that of unions, which were one of the key props of the New Deal coalition. Democrats passed a big expansion of labor organizing rights in the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933, and a comprehensive orga-

nizing framework with the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. Union membership then exploded, and those new union votes went (with perfect *collective* rationality, just like that of African-Americans in 1964) overwhelmingly to Democrats.

On the other hand, the recession in 1937 was directly caused by a return to conservative austerity policy, namely trying to balance the budget long before full employment was reached. Voters lost trust



in the Democrats, and their votes swung accordingly. The big 1938 loss harmed Democrats in Congress, but it also reinforced New Deal factions within the Democratic coalition by directly demonstrating that conservative policy causes economic disaster, and hence political losses.

Voters punishing parties at the ballot box for the adverse results of their policies is a critical part of the democratic reasoning process, because elites can be every bit as stupid as the most pig-ignorant voter. Achen and Bartels do note on a couple occasions that their analysis applies to everyone up into the elite, including “the authors of this book.” But nearly the entire book is dedicated to the irrationality of voters, and they repeatedly suggest that elites can be trusted to reason more effectively: “We need to learn to let political parties and political leaders do their jobs, too.” In their chapter on the downsides of voters’ economic myopia, they construct a neoclassical-style model of a competent legislator, showing that the greater the random economic fluctuations, the greater the chance that a better-than-average legislator will be turned out by accident.

Similarly, they reference some tentative evidence demonstrating the possibility of a “political business cycle,” or the possibility that the party in power will cynically—but rationally—juice the economy just before election day, instead of a more consistent approach. They note that since the 1936 publication of John Maynard Keynes’ book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, politicians have had a workable framework for carrying that out.

But they do not discuss the many instances in which rube politicians have legislated themselves out of office by making gigantic, obvious policy mistakes. The most common and devastating is pushing austerity in a depression, or failing to juice the economy before election day. As discussed, Democrats did this in 1937. Perhaps that is understandable the year after Keynes. But a large swath of the party did the exact same thing in 2010, stymieing additional Keynesian stimulus after March 2009 over fears about the budget deficit. Those conservative Democrats were mainly situated in more vulnerable districts, and most of them were turfed out in the wave election that year.

The election of Republicans did not, of course, lead to a more sensible Keynesian approach. One of the many, many anti-democratic characteristics of America’s political system is that it doesn’t provide a broader menu of political options. Absent the two-party duopoly, we could theoretically, after a crisis, choose between a number of possible policies to ameliorate the disaster; but since there are only two choices, the rebellious instinct during times of economic duress redounds to the benefit of the out-of-power party, almost regardless of what they advocate.

But still, all that doesn’t change the fact that voters made a correct collective judgment that Democrats had screwed the pooch on the economy.

This question of elite stupidity gets almost no attention from Achen and Bartels. It’s a glaring absence, as it is at least as important as voter stupidity, if not more so. Ordinary citizens, it’s true, don’t have time or training to develop super-detailed or consistent policy views. But the whole supposed point of having a party system is that people will vote for the party most in line with their political instincts, and that this party will then train up an intellectual elite who can translate those instincts into workable policy. And yet very often, parties colossally fail to do anything of the kind. For example, Democratic politicians pushing for austerity when unemployment is

10 percent and their party has the majority — as most centrist Blue Dogs did in 2010, not to mention President Obama himself — is like a fire department mistakenly filling its tankers with gasoline. How to get party elites to actually follow through on the mandates they were elected on is at least as important to democratic functioning—and maybe even *more* important—as figuring out how to get voters to choose the right mandate.

LEGITIMIZING THE BELIEF THAT VOTERS HAVE NO actual beliefs or preferences is not only intellectually sloppy—it’s politically dangerous. One clear implication of the book’s argument is that neither ideology nor policy matters politically, because no voter actually understands anything. During the 2016 primary, Achen and Bartels argued exactly this about Bernie Sanders supporters. They cited (far from comprehensive) polling data showing his supporters somewhat to the right of Hillary Clinton supporters, concluding that his surprisingly strong challenge was merely the “reflections of social identities, symbolic commitments and partisan loyalties.”

As we have seen, this extreme view is clearly wrong. But worse, it leads directly to an enervating political helplessness. For instance, there is a strong case that Donald Trump got considerable political mileage out of railing against free trade deals in parts of the Rust Belt that were devastated by de-industrialization—suggesting that a more class-based campaign could peel off *some* of his voters and win the 2020 election, following the victorious Obama campaign strategy of 2012. But if we adhere to the view that policy appeals are *always* useless, then there is no point in even trying to win over any marginal Trump voter—or the vastly larger population of nonvoters—through any sort of rational appeal. The result of this belief is strategic inertia: It means fatalistically surrendering whole swathes of voters to the Republicans, without even attempting to appeal to their legitimate interests and anxieties.

Of course, virtually no one is going to be won over by brandishing a fully worked-out 2,000-page trade policy reform. But to foreclose *all* policy-based appeals—even those properly situated and framed with group- and identity-based signals, as would be indicated by an intelligent consideration of the research cited by Achen and Bartels—is to foreclose a potentially decisive political weapon, and possibly cede another term to Trump.

To their credit, the authors come back from the edge by the end of their book. They do not stoop to the odious libertarian arrogance of Jason Brennan in *Against Democracy* or Bryan Caplan in *The Myth of the Rational Voter* to say that democracy is basically bad in itself. They say that opportunities for voter choice and education should be expanded, not abandoned. Their call for reducing social and economic inequality is particularly welcome.

But their hyperbolic, elitist thesis—which wouldn’t have gotten half so much attention if it was more *realistic* and less contrarian—is still wrong. If the Democratic Party wants to get rid of Trump, it should remember that voters are not gormless sheep. Just because voters are not policy wonks or cool-headed logicians does not mean that they are categorically incapable of perceiving which party is (or isn’t) looking out for their interests. Party elites who blame voters for our country’s political ills would do better to look to some of their own egregious failings, and figure out what it would actually take to build a party worth voting for. ✚



THE CITY OF IS THE CITY

By Sam Miller-McDonald

HAVING GROWN UP IN THE U.S., I USED TO THINK AMERICAN cities were universal. The glass rectangles piled on top of each other, the glossy towers jutting up like angry glistening phalli, the barrage of bleating car horns, the unstoppable society of emboldened rats, the concrete chaos, the grime—that was it; that was just what cities looked like.

But since visiting cities older than the United States itself—and living in cities well over a thousand years old—I began to notice two characteristics common (though not exclusive) to American cities. First and obvious: They're abominable. Between the buildings, the roads, the billboards, the cars, the facades, and the decay, they're just objectively ugly spaces. Some older American cities are exceptions:



DUGALD STEWART

BORN 11 NOVEMBER 1773

DIED JANUARY 1828

TOMORROW CITY OF YESTERDAY

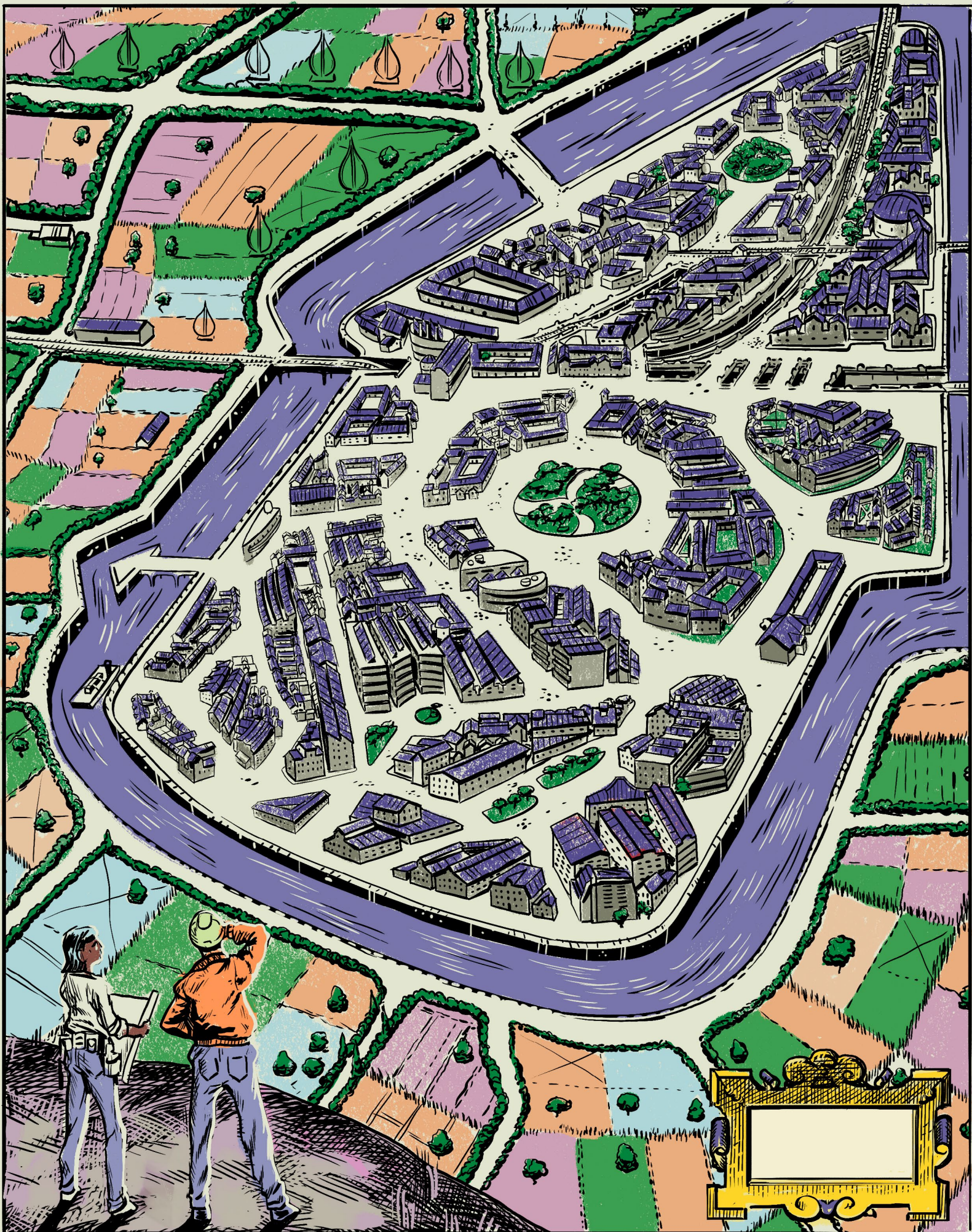
iconic gems like Detroit, New Orleans, and New York (except for Midtown). But most American cities weren't built to look nice or provide enjoyment for the people living in them; they were built to minimize construction costs and maximize developers' returns on investment. In short, these cities were built to serve the bank accounts of a few rich men.

The second characteristic is less immediately apparent than ugliness, but it's more intrusive in the long run. American cities can be difficult for living bodies to inhabit. The air is poor, the scale is off, the smells unpleasant, green spaces scarce, parking lots abundant, housing isolating and unaffordable, bars too loud, cafes too small, shopping centers too big, offices too cold, streets too hot, transportation inefficient or inaccessible, and plus, everything is violently unequal along both race and class lines. But looking globally, this is more a matter of youth than Americanness. Most cities under a few centuries old, from China to Brazil, tend

to be ugly and brutal places to live. Even older cities are not immune from the encroachment of the hideous and the uncomfortable; at the edges of the Old Town in Edinburgh, Scotland, the grand stone cathedrals, symmetrical townhouses, and intricately-decorated facades intermingle with jarring, unhealthy-looking glass-and-concrete blobs. (This isn't to suggest there's no beautiful or humanely designed modern architecture; there most certainly is, it's just vastly outnumbered by the ugly. Egocentric "starchitects" aside, only a small proportion of new construction even consults architects these days.)

This isn't just the subjective ravings of a disgruntled expat. Tourists flock in droves to old, beautiful, livable cities like Edinburgh or Venice just to take pictures of stunning ancient buildings, or to stroll down lanes carved out for people instead of cars. Edinburgh has been voted the U.K.'s happiest city and also named the best city in the world to live. In the meantime, nobody's booking a vacation to Houston, Texas to admire the gorgeous sprawl.





What drives the harshness of the modern city? A number of factors, including racist politicians, nihilistic architects and planners who put ideology over livability (Robert Moses, cough cough), and ruthless real estate moguls with a mad devotion to commerce and consumption above all else. Cities are the physical embodiment of the values, biases, and power structures of a society and its economy. Ugly, brutal, capitalist America has built ugly, brutal capitalist cities.

BUT ONE SINGLE COMMODITY IS RESPONSIBLE, ABOVE all, for the waste and hideousness of our cities: fossil fuels. The modern city is the carbon city. While capitalism and finance, exploitation and working-class grit may have all conspired to physically assemble these cities, it was carbon energy that provided the raw material abundance—the mountains of bricks, the rivers of asphalt—necessary to sprout steel towers and sprawling corridors of commerce.

One recent summer day, on the scorching pavement of New York City, I accidentally strolled through the largest private development project in the world: Hudson Yards in Chelsea. That day, multiple generic-looking glass towers were bursting out of the broken ground. An articulating boom—basically an enclosed platform on a hydraulic arm, sitting atop four huge tires—sat idling next to one of the erupting new towers. As I scowled at the exhaust pouring from the machine—adding more heat to the concrete oven—it suddenly hit me how utterly dependent this and all other such developments are on diesel fuel, coal, and gas. I imagined the oceans of oil, the caves filthy with coal, all needed to light the innards of a skyscraper, to keep its temperature steady, circulate its air, pump water through its copper veins, manufacture and then move its steel bones and glass skin across oceans, hoisting with tall cranes its Frankenstein pieces into the air, elevating people and material up and down its long frame. The World Bank estimates that cities gobble up “as much as 80 percent of energy production worldwide” while the International Energy Agency calculates they spew around 70 percent of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are the factories of climate change, the engines of our demise.

That’s because today, the only fuels capable of pouring such immense quantities of energy into our cities—both to construct and to sustain them—are the very dense, abundant fuels made from fossilized plants and animals. Hundreds of new cities have been built since the turn of the millennium. The explosion in new metropolises we’re seeing around the world today may be encouraged by the perverse financial incentives of neoliberalization, but it’s been made possible by the fossil fuels flowing through all arteries of the global economy. It’s probably obvious to state that the world’s building boom is fueled by carbon energy. What’s less obvious is what happens when nations decide to shut off the flow of fossil fuels, which they’ll have to do, and soon, or the planet will die.

As we all know, we cannot keep burning fossil fuels. If we do, we will rapidly make Earth uninhabitable for complex life, including humans. Volcanoes burning buried fossilized carbon caused the greatest extinction event in earth’s history, the Permian-Triassic extinction, also known as “the Great Dying.” Much deadlier than the asteroid that decimated the dinosaurs, the Great Dying killed most life on earth and in the oceans. Today, we’re burning fossilized carbon 10 times faster than those ancient volcanoes did. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report recently stated that we must completely stop emitting carbon by 2050 at the latest. To limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, we have about a single decade to steeply cut emissions (that means whomever is elected president in 2020 will basically get to decide the fate of humanity). And the IPCC report was relatively conservative, meaning we may have even less time. When the entire economy, billions of lives and livelihoods, depend on a resource we have to immediately cease using, fundamental change is no small order. “Decarbonization” is a single word that means monumental disruption.

So what happens when we can no longer use fossil fuels to maintain

skyscrapers and sustain sprawling, energy-slurping urban spaces? Well, it means we must build new cities and redesign existing ones from the ground up. Whether the *non*-carbon sources of energy that we have right now—nuclear, wind, and solar electricity, and some biofuels—could provide the sheer volume of energy that fossil fuels provide and that modern cities crave is debatable. But whether they can do this in the short timeframe we have is not up for debate at all. We can’t just swap in some uranium and solar panels and ethanol and expect our metropolises to chug along exactly as they are while avoiding collapse. And no matter how quickly we decarbonize, the seas are still rising.

The choice before us is not between the status quo and apocalypse, between a thriving Manhattan and watery doom, as much as some Manhattanites might believe otherwise. Sure, as sea levels rise we may have to abandon some of our most treasured cities and build new ones, or refashion existing ones that already sit in safer parts of the country. That doesn’t have to be all bad. In fact it may be a blessing. It offers us a chance to build or rebuild cities that are not only carbon-free and climate resilient, but also more beautiful, humane, and equitable places to live. As we discuss what should be included in a Green New Deal-style policy—the central policy vision of the left at the moment—we should be incorporating plans, values, and funding to build better cities and coordinate the migration of millions. If fascists and feudal capitalists dominate politics this century, then these new and redeveloped cities will reflect their values: authoritarianism, rule by the rich, and violent elimination of the vulnerable. If libertarian ecosocialist values dominate politics, then our cities will reflect *those* values instead: the sanctity of life, liberty, and equality. The stakes couldn’t be much higher.

Better Cities

It’s important to consider now what the general contours of the decarbonized city could look like. What might constitute the best outcomes for the people living in them (and outside of them)? For a little inspiration, we can look at pre-industrial cities, which were built before fossil-fueled machines existed. While many old cities are beautiful, they could also be spaces of inequality, squalor, and disease. It’s important to note here that while a decarbonized city can borrow from some of the best qualities of ancient urban spaces, it doesn’t need to include open cesspits for historical accuracy. We can easily incorporate modern comforts like hygienic plumbing, electricity, and trains. Decarbonization doesn’t mean deprivation or giving up the most important technologies that make modern city life safe and hospitable. To the contrary, it can make cities far more abundant in the things—fun, equality, beauty, space—that matter most.

Aside from the design and basic quality-of-life issues that can be improved by decarbonizing cities, perhaps the most important question is whether they could be more equitable than carbon cities. Looking to pre-industrial examples doesn’t give much indication. Many cities of antiquity were built on slave economies and could be brutally stratified, while others were quite egalitarian. Archaeologist David Wengrow goes further to suggest that “cities organised ‘from the bottom up’ and on relatively egalitarian principles can be found at the very basis of urban civilisation in Eurasia itself.” Stephanie Webb, co-founder of the project Decipher City, suggested that building equality into non-carbon cities isn’t a linear relationship. That is, we don’t just decarbonize and then decide to build equality into that. “As long as legitimate, intersectional coalitions are built that work to dismantle segregation, which has been the unspoken impetus for urban sprawl, then a carbon neutral-society can be built.” Not only will decarbonization provide an opening to build more equitable societies, but mobilizing those seeking greater equality can contribute to carbon neutrality goals. Webb brought up the example of the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative in Detroit where communities of color are organizing to control their own food supply by bringing climate-resilient and low-carbon agriculture into their neighborhoods. “There are plenty of neighborhoods looking to be completely sustainable, i.e. making sure that people can remain in the neighborhood to meet all of their needs. Creating com-

munities where that is the goal of multiracial residents will be the first step in going carbon neutral.”

Infrastructural inequities and socio-economic inequality are fundamentally intertwined. As Jamie DeAngelo, Decipher City’s other co-founder, told me, “we have to be aware of latent social hierarchies, whether legally enforced or not, and how they persist ghost-like in our spaces.” Communities of color have borne the brunt of environmental injustice—pollution from industrial space, for example—and have been marginalized and policed by a built-in history of racism. Building new decarbonized cities will have to be informed by this history. Removing some traditional fossil fuel-enabled forms of racial control—like huge highways, waste streams, and coal plants—can help do this, but it likely won’t be enough. We have to build both spaces and policies that break down these old racist ghosts that still haunt our cities.

It’s not just about which residents these new or refurbished cities could benefit, or how to make sure we build in equality, but also the more basic question of who gets to move to these cities in the first place. The broader politics that guide climate migrations will ultimately answer that question. The municipal politics within these cities have to be fair, but that’s not enough. Getting national policy right will be absolutely necessary to ensure movement across borders is equitable and humane. Authoritarian capitalist governments will reserve desirable space for the already privileged, leaving the vulnerable to die. A libertarian ecosocialist paradigm, on the other hand, will ensure all get to move and, therefore, live. Any decarbonization plan must incorporate these political values, and construct goals that ensure these political outcomes.

To get a sense of some of the more important areas in which we can build something better, let’s zoom in and imagine what decarbonized, climate-resilient, and equitable cities might look like in more detail. There are three areas in particular that could benefit from reimagining: housing, transport, and entertainment. How can these areas be made better—more equitable, more beautiful—than the cities we know now?

Better Living

PERHAPS THE ONE THING EVERY SINGLE NEW YORKER CAN agree on is that “the rent is too damn high!” Worldwide, city dwellers (except for the “people of means” among us) are united in their discontent at their city’s housing stock. Landlords are universally reviled, for good reason. Housing, maybe more than any other element of a city, illuminates the extreme inequality baked into our society. The rich enjoy sprawling, opulent spaces while everyone else is packed into cramped, unhygienic, ugly ones. But, besides inequality, perhaps the most universal problem with modern housing is its tendency to isolate. Everyone seems pretty lonely. One major reason for this is simply the shape and design of the physical spaces city dwellers inhabit. We live in desolate rooms, inhabited only by ourselves and our stuff.

This doesn’t mean “pack up your stuff, we’re all moving into crowded communes!” Anyone who’s ever shared close quarters with lots of other people knows that it’s usually unbearable and inequitable. There’s always one conscientious person who ends up doing most of the housework (or nobody does, and everything deteriorates). Building mutually supportive social bonds requires that every individual has their own space, a sense of autonomy, and control over their homes. Housing need not be a choice between a commune full of itchy hippies and an isolation box for lonely singles or atomized nuclear families. By disrupting standard models of housing—partly by incorporating food and energy production, such as gardens and solar panels—it’s possible to increase social bonds, give people more control over their space, and build carbon-free, equitable, climate-resilient housing.

Why is it necessary to include gardens and solar panels? Elisa Iturbe, visiting professor at the Cooper Union School of Architecture, explains: “As we move towards a decarbonized future, the integration of energy generation and food production will be essential. From an architectural perspective, these activities could have a spatial presence in the city, which, when paired with alternative land ownership models or coop-

erative ownership structures, can begin to challenge the norms we have around what constitutes the basic unit of society.” The basic unit here is, of course, the home. When we bring climate-resilient, decarbonized energy capture and agriculture into urban spaces, we can marry these technologies with more pro-social housing that positively impacts how we relate to each other. If we’re working together in the community garden, it may help to cut the epidemic of loneliness we all suffer from in the capitalist city.

Furthermore, renewable energy and onsite food production are also some of the best ways of making housing resilient through a range of climate disasters as solar-powered buildings and agro-ecological farming in Puerto Rico have demonstrated. If these amenities and spaces are owned cooperatively by the people who live there—as is also seen in the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative—suddenly residents are vastly more empowered by the places they inhabit.

While we’re talking about housing, we have to remember its long history as a tool of racial segregation and economic oppression. In our interview, Professor Iturbe brought up community land trusts and cooperative ownership as means of undermining a real estate market that consolidates property in the hands of a few rich, absent landlords. But other legal and financial aspects of housing—like zoning and mortgage lending—are also riddled with racism. New housing models will have to be governed at a national scale by egalitarian principles if they are to avoid reproducing the inequalities we live with now. The need to build new cities in new places and drastically reform existing cities offers an opportunity to build more racial and economic justice—as well as social bonds—directly into the physical structure of our homes.

Better Moving

CARBON CITIES ARE GENERALLY TERRIBLE AT transportation. They were, of course, designed or redesigned for dependency on cars. From a climate standpoint, cars are murderers. Transportation just passed electric power as the primary source of carbon emissions in the US, and this is significantly due to cars.

Car-dependent cities produce bad air quality, incessant noise pollution, and deadly accidents. They turn over abundant space to dangerous, hurtling machines. Even cities with pretty good public transportation still tend to devote tons of space to the needs of large vehicles. As city planner Jeff Speck points out in his book *Walkable City Rules*, car parking accounts for more acres of space than any other urban use. That means roads bloat, and sidewalks shrink. It also means there are very few spaces to just roam around safely. Freedom of movement gets relegated to parks, which people must crowd into uncomfortably. Anyone who has visited Central Park on a beautiful summer Saturday will understand the feeling of those huge colonies of Adélie penguins packed together against stormy winds in Antarctica. In short, cities designed for cars are good for cars, and bad for people.

In a decarbonized city, there will have to be virtually no fuel vehicles. One could imagine some electric vehicles, but the materials needed to build electric engines and batteries—like cobalt and lithium—are nonrenewable and limited. According to the *Guardian*, “demand for other key battery ingredients, such as graphite and lithium carbonate, is also outstripping supply. The current shortage of lithium has seen prices double since 2015.” And this is at a time when electric vehicles account for less than one percent of market share in the U.S. (Additionally, the rare earth metal extraction process is notoriously dangerous and unethical.) Barring some unforeseen technological breakthrough, we can’t simply exchange every working fossil fuel car for an electric one. What this means for our cities is that we no longer need to build them around big lanes designed for giant metal boxes that routinely kill people. Instead, we can design them around human beings.

Venice has the largest network of pedestrian streets in the world, and it’s, coincidentally, one of the most desirable cities to live in and visit. If you remove cars, you suddenly have a lot more space for people, and can begin filling that space with the objects and activities that people enjoy. Christmas markets with glowing lights and wreaths, the smells of wood smoke and sausages cooking, the taste of hot chocolate or mulled wine while strolling under a dark sky. A big square with a fountain, lined with

trees, and dozens of people sitting around under the moon chatting with beers and burgers while a band plays in a pavilion. A narrow cobbled alley with beautiful storefronts and bakeries heavy with the scent of fresh bread. These all can become much more ubiquitous in cities without cars. We know this because, well, they have been in the past.

The Oxford transportation studies professor and top expert in the field, Tim Schwanen, Director of the Transport Studies Unit and an associate professor in human geography at the University of Oxford, agrees that density, walking, and cycling will have to be important factors in new urban transport. But he also suggests that there are limits to walkability. “Thinking about California and walking and cycling in a 3 degree Celsius increase?” Too hot. And even if we keep the temperature to an unpleasant-but-survivable 1.5 degree increase, people have different needs; some can’t walk far, or at all, and the decarbonized city needs to give them options. Those options will likely need to be a combination of pedal-powered taxi carts and (potentially underground) electric rail or small electric vehicles. But Schwanen cautions against putting too much faith in high-tech solutions. “We have to be careful with technologically utopian visions, we still have to think about the people who will live in the city.”

While cars have been tools of inequality, being prohibitively expensive for precariously employed or poor residents, public transport, too, can suffer from justice issues. It also has been used to segregate and marginalize already disadvantaged populations. Ultimately, when we’re thinking about building better transportation systems, we have to think holistically. Doing so will “require new forms of governance and an overhaul of how transport planning is traditionally done, which is usually very technocratic, top-down, exclusionary, and prioritizes economic growth,” says Schwanen. “We can’t just intervene in transport. It needs to be a full-blown urban policy where justice is prioritized.” With building new cities, this might be less of a problem, but if we’re reforming existing cities, there will be far more obstacles.

Concerted political movements that can, block by block, transform existing cities and build new urban spaces with these principles of justice and equity in mind will be absolutely necessary in designing the next era of urban transit. Transportation planning will also have a huge impact on the rest of the city, as transport is usually the negative space, the weft between buildings, that helps weave together the urban fabric.

Better Fun

SIENA, ITALY IS HOME TO A FAMOUS TOWN SQUARE, THE Piazza del Campo. It’s a big open space in the middle of town resembling a cobblestone piecrust inverted into the ground. Twice per year, a major horserace, the *Palio di Siena*, takes place in the large, shallow bowl. Year round, the square is ringed with cafes and restaurants, with many outdoor chairs and tables. I visited the *Campo* one night (pre-smartphone) to find dozens and dozens of people sitting in the square, some with candles and wine, just enjoying the night and each other under a dark Tuscan sky. There are no gates around the square. No velvet ropes, no bouncers, no queues, no ticket to get in. Just open, public space.

In carbon cities, people have fun alone or in privately-owned spaces. Fun is increasingly expensive. Cocktails are \$15 minimum in many parts of Brooklyn, and even more across the East River. Brunch, with drinks, can easily exceed \$35 per person. A Broadway show or a pop concert can range from \$60 a ticket to thousands. Although some cities including New York offer free summer entertainment—like Shakespeare in the Park, or weekly movies projected onto a big screen, or publicly-available barbecue grills—most fun, especially in the winter, takes place in expensive private spaces or in our own cramped apartments, the bare walls splashed with the cool blue light of our laptops.

We can assume in a decarbonized city that we’ll have fewer electrified forms of entertainment, screens or otherwise. But more importantly, building decarbonized cities with ecosocialist principles offers an opportunity to create public spaces that provide free, inclusive, communal sources of fun, particularly if we’re assuming they’re mostly car-free. Preindustrial cities enjoyed vast, beautiful frescoes in elaborate public baths, forums for public debates and theater, lush public gardens (and also, uh, gladiator fights, bear-baiting, and towers of human skulls). In an urban economy that

doesn’t put the maximization of profit above all else, we can begin to envision many spaces that are designed for its citizens’ joy (non-sadistic only).

Building Anew

FOR TWO YEARS, I’VE HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE TO LIVE IN the medieval city of Oxford, England. Once burned to the ground by Vikings, the city is now full of beautiful old buildings. It’s basically *just* beautiful buildings. In the summer, the streets are so clogged with sightseers one has to dodge cars in the streets to get anywhere on time. The city is full of lovely surprises. A winding alley leads mysteriously to a medieval pub. A café with vaulted ceilings attached to a 13th-century church serves the best cheese sandwiches in Britain. There are *dozens* of old, warmly lit libraries. You may be familiar with the most famous of them: the 18th century Radcliffe Camera and its iconic dome. This library has appeared in countless television shows and movies. It’s not the only one; on the same square, a *different* library provided spaces used in some of the *Harry Potter* movies, just as the city itself has served as a backdrop to countless stories and novels.

But while Oxford is a beautiful spectacle, the mythology of which is owned by the public, the spaces themselves are very exclusive. The Radcliffe Camera is strictly shut to the public at large and even to curious visitors (except for the odd tours and of course, film crews). My delightful college, nestled right next to the Camera, more often than not displays the sign “closed to tourists.” Even as a member of the university, you always feel excluded from *something*. There’s always some corner that’s off-limits. And Oxford, the City of Dreaming Spires, holds dark secrets, not least of which is the fact that some of these old monuments were built with money from New World slave markets, or that many colleges still invest their funds in arms and fossil fuels. There’s no reason the new cities we build should be any less beautiful than Oxford, any less given to evoking wonder. But there’s also no reason they should be as exclusive, or as dependent on blood.

RECENTLY, THE *INTERCEPT* RELEASED AN INTERNAL VIDEO put together by the Pentagon. This video attempts to depict what the world’s megacities—10 million people or larger—will look like in the coming decades and predict how the US military might control them. The image it portrays is, in a word, dystopian. Over melancholy violins, a grim voiceover says cities “will be the locus where drivers of instability will converge.” Those “drivers of instability,” says the gritty voiceover guy, include economic inequality, resource constraints, ethnic tensions, and environmental disasters driven by “climate changes.” Networks of violent gangs and terrorists will grow, slums will expand while the rich get richer, and “social structures will be equally challenged if not dysfunctional.” Over images of urban squalor, walled off high-rises, uniformed combat soldiers, and violent police clashes, the voiceover confidently proclaims: “this is the world of our future. [...] And it is unavoidable.” If we continue on our current course, governed by homicidal capital, that may be true.

But we don’t have to continue on our current course. If the massive transition before us is governed by a more egalitarian ethic, by ecosocialist principles that put the freedom, health, and well-being of people and the planet above all else, we might finally be able to build a better city, and, with it, a more just civilization. Any Green New Deal—or other all-encompassing policies like it—must incorporate funding and a planning priority to rebuild cities and build new ones with these principles at their core. An ascendant left today is a good sign that these values have a chance at guiding us through this looming transition. But it’s far from guaranteed. Climate emergencies are already fueling the rise of dictators and far-right parties around the world, parties that seek to slaughter the vulnerable and shield the powerful. The left will need to respond by offering a better vision, and prove they have a greater capacity to organize new modes of living in which people can not only survive the impacts to come, but thrive in spite of them. The city is one of the main fronts on which this battle between equitable happiness and brutal misery will continue to rage. For the sake of all those who wish to enjoy lives worth living, it’s a battle we had better win. ♣

SELF-CONGRATULATORY HOLLYWOOD MIX 'N' MATCH

OMG!!! You just won an award! That being said, the enormous bloated corporation you've contracted with in order to create a product-placement friendly, hundred-million-dollar-grossing feature film is the real winner, but still! You get a trophy and an acceptance speech! What will you say? How will you condemn the bigotry and abuse endemic to Hollywood without arguing for any kind of meaningful material change? How will you continue the narrative that *narrative itself* is the only possible social progress? Remember: It's risky to argue that the ultimate problem is power, so make sure you stay focused on increasing diversity (a bit, not too much) while never talking about money! If you're involved in any kind of larger political project, such as universal social programs or a broad coalition of workers across industries, ick, don't bring it up on stage. You'll make everyone uncomfortable, which is not what being #woke is all about!

For column A, take the first letter of your first name (stage name). For column B, take the last letter of your last name (real name that you changed because your agent thought it was too ethnic, or not ethnic enough). For column C, take the first letter of the brand you promote the most on Instagram. For column D, take the first letter of the last name of the PA who brings you coffee (if you don't know their name, make it up, that's what you normally do anyway). For column E, take the first letter of the last name of your favorite artist who died poor and unrecognized.

"Thank you all so much. We all need to recognize how important it is to fight (Column A, social issue), and commit ourselves to (Column B, vague platitude) while acknowledging (Column C, hideous problem in Hollywood). I'd like to thank (Column D, corporate brand) for sponsoring this project, and of course, our friends at (Column E, military/intelligence apparatus) for their guidance and logistical support.

A

SOCIAL ISSUE

- A. Bullying
- B. Internet bullying
- C. Guns
- D. Vaccines
- E. Anti-vaxxers
- F. Digital piracy
- G. Sea piracy
- H. BernieBros
- I. Billionaire-bashing
- J. Rude nannies
- K. Non-keto diets
- L. Russia
- M. Human trafficking (sexy kind only)
- N. Drones (celebrity nail polish-inspecting kind only)
- O. Food deserts
- P. Food comas
- Q. Lack of oat milk
- R. Cancel culture
- S. Not enough awards shows
- T. Sick children
- U. Ugly children
- V. Subscription boxes
- W. Bitcoin volatility
- X. Insufficient afterparty swag bags
- Y. Boring Met Gala themes
- Z. Lack of diversity in T.V. shows starring the CIA

B

VAGUE PLATITUDE

- A. Awareness
- B. Taking steps
- C. Rolling up our sleeves
- D. Doing something about it
- E. Getting in there
- F. Leaning in
- G. Saying the word "intersectionality"
- H. Diversity
- I. Inclusion
- J. Changing the narrative
- K. Changing the world
- L. Reparations (non-monetary only)
- M. Learning to code
- N. Sensitivity training
- O. Sleep-training
- P. Respecting Our Norms
- Q. Civility
- R. Trust falls
- S. Free webinars
- T. Mindfulness
- U. Heartfulness
- V. Vote-shaming
- W. Recycling
- X. Freeganism
- Y. Free Goop subscriptions for all
- Z. Installing solar panels on my private jet

C

HIDEOUS PROBLEM IN HOLLYWOOD

- A. Misogyny
- B. Racism
- C. Misogynoir
- D. Homophobia
- E. Transphobia
- F. Islamophobia
- G. Ableism
- H. Ageism
- I. Sexual abuse
- J. Verbal abuse
- K. #MeToo is still a necessary thing
- L. LA's homeless population
- M. Gentrification
- N. Constant forest fires
- O. Firefighters are prison labor
- P. Not enough immigration (housekeeper shortage)
- Q. Not enough immigration (fruit-picker shortage)
- R. Rampant inequality
- S. Overworked, underpaid crew-people
- T. Overworked, not-at-all-paid crewpeople
- U. Alienation
- V. Corporate synergy
- W. Exploding Teslas on every block
- X. Everybody takes HGH
- Y. Poison air
- Z. Capitalist realism

D

CORPORATE BRAND

- A. Monsanto ChemiFruit
- B. Raytheon Baby Mines
- C. INNOCU.OS Crowd Control Services
- D. FunkoCoin
- E. Fyre Festival 2.0
- F. Amazon City Planning
- G. SpaceX Explodable Rockets
- H. Scientology Humor Division
- I. Hugo Boss Non-Nazi Suits
- J. Lululemon Misogyny Pants
- K. Instagram Influencer Factory
- L. Citgo (now a division of Exxon)
- M. Chiquita Profiteering Corp
- N. Sunny D's Sad Juice
- O. Little Debbie's Depression Sweets
- P. Nestlé Appropo-Water
- Q. Nike Slave Labor Sandals
- R. Givenchy Gilded Age Luxury Bags
- S. McKinsey & Company
- T. HRC: Militarism Diversity Branch
- U. Sackler Family Defense Organization
- V. UberEats/UberShitWipes
- W. Condé Nast Consulting & Layoff Department
- X. Wells Fargo Home Cancellation Services
- Y. Forever 21 Employee Endurance Challenge
- Z. Ford Motor Company Masculinity Sales Co.

E

MILITARY/INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS

- A. U.S. Marines
- B. U.S. Air Force
- C. U.S. Army
- D. U.S. Navy
- E. U.S. Coast Guard (seriously)
- F. Navy SEALs
- G. Death ray-equipped seals
- H. CIA
- I. FBI
- J. NSA
- K. The SS
- L. ICE
- M. CBP
- N. Space Force
- O. Section 31
- P. The French Foreign Legion
- Q. IDF
- R. IIPCF (Israeli Imprisoning Palestinian Children Forces)
- S. Saudi Arabia's Country-Starvation Services
- T. UAE Runaway Women Recovery Institute
- U. Blackwater Academi Mercenary Corps
- V. DynCorp Global Private Security Repression Forces
- W. Caterpillar Home Bulldozing Services
- X. NYPD Heavy Tank Division
- Y. Chicago PD Black Sites Inc.
- Z. Mar-a-Lago Resort Security



MAKE AMERICA



AGAIN

by Garrison Lovely

NEARLY EVERY HUMAN SOCIETY HAS FIGURED OUT HOW TO get high. This behavior isn't limited to Homo Sapiens—a number of animals also do recreational drugs. So why do we and some of our finned and hoofed brethren seek to escape normal consciousness? Well, as an active participant in normal consciousness, I don't find the mystery too great: Normal consciousness often sucks. Our brains are powerful problem-solving machines that evolved to protect and pass along our genes. In many situations, achieving that goal is unrelated to being happy.

"The mental healthcare system is so badly broken, it doesn't even qualify as a system." This indictment, coming from Tom Insel, the former director of the National Institute of Mental Health, is not due to lack of effort. The U.S. spends over \$200 billion on mental healthcare treatment each year, double what we spent in 2005. American suicides are at a 50-year high and continuing to rise at an increasing rate. Over 70,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2017, twice as many as did in 2007.

Our best responses to depression, addiction, and PTSD haven't changed much. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), in-

troduced in the 1980s, work only with some forms of depression, have not improved, and carry side-effects that their users hate. Only eight to twelve percent of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) members get sober after the first year, and the organization has resisted the introduction of drug-based treatments, despite research showing that these treatments work better than the faith-based 12-step program. Talk-based therapy is expensive, time-consuming, and often ineffective. Rather than throw up their hands in the face of maladies that are affecting tens of millions of Americans and hundreds of millions more worldwide, researchers are turning back to a class of compounds that were exiled from the medical establishment over forty years ago.

Classical psychedelics were administered to over 10,000 people in research settings in the 1950s and 60s. Acting primarily on the 5HT_{2A} subtype of serotonin receptors and sharing a similar chemical structure, classical psychedelics are generally thought of as psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms), LSD, mescaline, and DMT. MDMA (i.e. molly or ecstasy) shares some features, but is neurotoxic at high doses and can lead to dependencies not seen in the classical psychedelics.

These psychedelics share more than just structure and method of action, they are anti-addictive (they help users break addictions and don't create dependencies themselves), non-toxic, and generally affect the mind far more than they affect the body (someone tripping on a high dose of LSD will exhibit normal vital signs, and the only external evidence of the experience is pupil dilation).

At low to medium doses, psychedelics can induce a dreamlike state: Imagination is heightened, time may feel as if it is passing slower than usual, and visuals distort, creating the appearance of movement where there is none ("the walls are breathing"). Psychedelics can intensify positive emotional states, particularly feelings of awe, wonder, and bliss, and increase feelings of trust and empathy. They can also intensify negative emotions, especially paranoia and feelings of losing control. But a summary of the research on the psychedelic experience has found that, "the majority of emotional psychedelic effects in supportive contexts are experienced as positive." At higher doses (sometimes called "entheogenic" doses for their ability to create spiritual experiences), psychedelics can break down the barrier between self and the external world. Some users experience "ego death," the "complete loss of subjective self-identity." Insights gained during periods of ego death can take on the quality of objective truth, which helps explain the power of psychedelics to inspire sustained behavioral changes (as well as some of the more peculiar beliefs about the universe some psychedelic users take away from the experience). Reports of mystical experiences brought on by high doses of psychedelics appear similar to reports of non-drug related mystical experiences: an overwhelming sense of unity with the cosmos, transcendence of space and time, ineffability, and what William James called "the Noetic Quality": the deep feeling that what is learned during the experience is capital-T True.

Recent psychedelic research has demonstrated the ability of psychedelics to beat our current best treatments for depression, addiction, PTSD, smoking, alcoholism, and existential anxiety. A lot of these studies are conducted by highly-motivated researchers on small samples and may not generalize. But the promise of psychedelics across such a wide range of ailments may indicate that mental illnesses aren't as varied as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* would have us believe. The ability of psychedelics to help people with treatment-resistant mental illness (those that persist after two or more forms of treatment have been attempted) may foreshadow even better results in populations with less severe conditions. David Nutt, Britain's former director of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, told me over email that these results are "almost certain" to generalize.

WHILE PSYCHEDELICS HAVE BEEN USED BY HUMAN societies for thousands of years, they weren't widely introduced to the U.S. until 1957, when R. Gordon Wasson detailed his magic mushroom experience with a Shaman in Mexico in *Life* magazine. Albert Hoffman stumbled upon the psychoactive properties of his creation lysergic acid diethylamide-25 (LSD) 14 years earlier. Hoffman's firm, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, had already been sending LSD to therapists for nearly a decade.

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, psychedelics were seen as a wonder drug, embraced by respected and mainstream celebrities like Cary Grant, Jack Nicholson, Stanley Kubrick, and Aldous Huxley (whose 1954 book *The Doors of Perception* describing his experience with mescaline did its share to pique interest in psychedelics among the Western upper crust). Researchers couldn't believe how effective these drugs were. A 1967 article reviewing 42 papers studying psychedelics therapy conducted between 1953 and 1965 found therapy to be successful in 70 percent of anxiety cases, 62 percent of

depression cases, and 42 percent of OCD cases. However it should be noted that these studies were largely uncontrolled (publication standards have increased since the 1950s and 1960s).

Despite showing so much promise as a therapeutic tool and revealing deep truths about the mind (the discovery of LSD's similarity to serotonin arguably kicked off modern neuroscience), LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline are fully criminalized Schedule I drugs: according to the government they have high potential for abuse and no accepted medical uses. Research significantly dropped off in 1966 and froze in 1976.

What happened?

Psychedelic History

NIXON DECLARED THE START OF THE "WAR ON DRUGS" IN 1971, but the first shots were fired far earlier. The United States has a long history of criminalizing drugs associated with social undesirables, detailed in Johann Hari's book *Chasing the Scream*. Premonitions of the war to come can be found in the late 19th century. Fears of Chinese immigrants using opium to seduce white women contributed to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. A 1914 *New York Times* headline informed their readers that "Negro Cocaine 'Fiends' Are a New Southern Menace." This climate led to the passage of the Harrison Act the same year, which effectively criminalized cocaine and heroin.

Harry Anslinger, the fanatical and viciously racist founder of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, is the founding father of the drug war. In the 1920s, Anslinger prosecuted 35,000 doctors for prescribing controlled drugs to addicts, overriding a Supreme Court decision (this would not be the first time drug enforcers ignored judicial opinion) and ceding control of addictive drugs to the black market. After successfully pushing for marijuana criminalization in 1937, Anslinger took his show on the road. Invoking fears of Chinese "Communist heroin," he threatened to cut other countries off from American foreign aid and markets if they didn't adopt drug laws similar to America's. In the words of a retired DEA agent, "He was truly the founder of international drug enforcement."

There is a tendency to see the backlash to psychedelics as an avoidable tragedy brought on by the "antics" of Timothy Leary and other evangelizers. While psychedelics may have seemed poised to become a part of the mainstream, the infrastructure to criminalize substances in the face of all evidence was built long before Leary emerged on the scene.

The history of the psychedelic 1960s is well-documented in Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams: the Complete Social History of LSD*. The media narrative went something like this: An extremely promising drug (LSD) was being used responsibly and to great effect by pioneering therapists and intellectuals. Along come reckless scientists like Timothy Leary and counter-culture populists like Ken Kesey, who heave psychedelics over the wall separating the educated classes from the great unwashed. In response to the social and public health crisis that resulted from millions of people turning on, the government steps in, first when the FDA regulated acid as an experimental drug in 1962, then when California banned it in 1966, with the final nail coming with the 1970 Controlled Substances Act, which inaugurated the modern war on drugs.

A different story played out beneath the surface. Inspired by the use of mescaline on prisoners in Dachau, the CIA became keenly interested in drugs, as truth serums, biological weapons, and methods of mind-control. This highly secret program was known by the codename MK-ULTRA. After extensive experimentation, the Agency settled on LSD. Effective in micrograms (one millionth of a gram), odorless, colorless, and tasteless, acid was well-suited for covert operations. However, the effect of the drug was so unpredictable that the CIA struggled

to determine its best use. LSD could be used to subvert psychological defenses during interrogations, but it could just as easily provoke nonsensical answers. For this reason, they believed it could be used defensively like a suicide pill, allowing a captured agent a temporary escape hatch from reality. But what if we weren't the only ones who were pharmacologically curious? What if the Russians dosed an American city's water supply?

These questions needed answers, and the CIA was willing to pay for them. Before the Agency took an interest, few American scientists were researching LSD, as Lee and Shlain write, "Almost overnight a whole new market for grants in LSD research sprang into existence as money started pouring through CIA-linked conduits or 'cutouts' such as the Geschickter Fund for Medical Research, the Society for the Study of Human Ecology, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation." R. Gordon Wasson's expedition to find the magic mushroom—the event that truly kicked off American psychedelia—was funded by MK-ULTRA.

This research was conducted from the perspective that LSD could induce a temporary or "model" psychosis in the laboratory. This thesis claimed that acid was a "psychotomimetic" or "madness-mimicking" substance. By creating an experience like schizophrenia in a controlled setting, scientists hoped to understand and ultimately cure the illness. Dosed unwittingly, or while strapped to a chair in a windowless lab, people often responded as if they were losing their minds, confirming the psychotomimetic thesis in the eyes of their observers.

The CIA engaged in research of their own, surreptitiously drugging each other along with hundreds of civilians, lured into brothels-cum-laboratories run by agent George White. Numerous participants in these non-consensual experiments became ill, and "some required hospitalization for days or weeks at a time." Experiments on non-consenting civilians violate the Nuremberg Code, but none of the people responsible were held accountable. In a letter to Sidney Gottlieb, MK-ULTRA's director, White wrote of his experience, "...it was fun, fun, fun. Where else could a red-blooded American boy lie, kill, cheat, steal, rape, and pillage with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest?"

By the time the FDA took an interest in LSD in 1962, the CIA had supported enough basic research and shifted their focus to applied:

They had given up on the notion that LSD was "the secret that was going to unlock the universe." While acid was still an important part of the cloak-and-dagger arsenal, by this time the CIA and the army had developed a series of superhallucinogens such as the highly touted BZ, which was thought to hold greater promise as a mind control weapon.

The FDA regulations, however, had an exemption for any studies the military or CIA wanted to conduct, "Apparently, in the eyes of the FDA, those seeking to develop hallucinogens as weapons were somehow more 'sensitive to their scientific integrity and moral and ethical responsibilities' than independent researchers dedicated to exploring the therapeutic potential of LSD."

Further restrictions on research followed, and bad publicity forced Sandoz to stop marketing LSD entirely in April 1966. Two years later,

acid possession was criminalized and the FDA relinquished its authority over the drug to the newly formed Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, an amalgamation of Anslinger's agency and the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control. These restrictions, of course, did not apply to the military or CIA. An official in the FDA's parent department admitted that "we are abdicating our statutory responsibilities in this area out of a desire to be courteous to the Department of Defense. . . rather than out of legal inability to handle classified materials."

Historically, the US criminalized drugs when they became associated with poor people and people of color. Psychedelics, however, were favored by well-educated, white, middle-class youth. Octavio Paz, a writer in an alternative publication, (correctly) identified the real motivation at the time:

The authorities do not behave as though they were trying to stamp out a harmful vice, but as though they were attempting to stamp out dissidence. Since this is a form of dissidence that is becoming more widespread, the prohibition takes on the proportion of a campaign against a spiritual contagion, against an opinion. What the authorities are displaying is ideological zeal: they are punishing a heresy, not a crime.

Years later, we got confirmation of the cynical roots of the 1960s incarnation of the war on drugs, as Richard Nixon's Domestic Policy Advisor, John Ehrlichman explained in 1994:

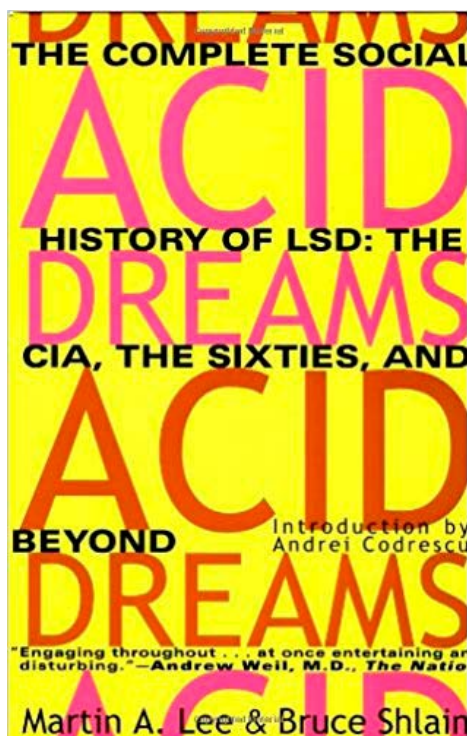
The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people...We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

In 1975, The Rockefeller Commission investigated the CIA and summarized the Agency's objective with MK-ULTRA: "Can we get control of an individual to the point where he will do our bidding against his will and even against fundamental laws of nature, such as self-preservation?" Two years later psychologist Bill Richards administered the last legal psilocybin session in the United States, until the recent resurgence of research.

But the psychoactive baton was passed to a new wonder drug: MDMA. Also known as ecstasy or molly, MDMA was ignored after it was first synthesized in 1912 by Merck, at least until psychedelic chemist Sasha Shulgin popularized the drug in the 1970s.

MDMA followed a similar path to its cousin, LSD. Initially hailed as a therapeutic wonder drug, it became associated with the rave scene in the 1980s and was subsequently criminalized, despite the protestation of scientists who were aware of its potential to help people and the ruling of an administrative judge to place MDMA in Schedule III.

OUT OF THE EYES OF THE MAINSTREAM PRESS AND PUBLIC, psychedelics continued to be employed by underground guides in therapeutic and spiritual contexts. They also played a role in shaping the rise of modern festival culture. Burning Man, the Dionysian weeklong experimental society that emerges in the Nevada desert each year, is built by and for people on psychedelics.



Inheriting the Merry Prankster ethos of participatory anarchy, Burning Man is the closest example to what a psychedelic American society could be: insanely creative, open-minded, community-oriented, and just a tad detached from reality.

A group of true believers never gave up on the promise of psychedelics and can largely be credited with the renaissance underway. Rick Doblin founded the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) in 1986, the year after MDMA was criminalized. MAPS is the most prominent organization pushing for political change on psychedelics and has funded the research on MDMA for PTSD.

Purdue University pharmacologist David Nichols founded the Heffter Research Institute in 1993. Named after the German chemist who first isolated mescaline from the peyote cactus, Heffter funded research on treating anxiety in cancer patients and alcohol and smoking addiction. Nichols also synthesized the MDMA and psilocybin used in recent research.

The same year Heffter was founded, Bob Jesse founded the Council on Spiritual Practices (CSP). "Dedicated to making direct experience of the sacred more available to more people," CSP organized and funded the first psychedelic experiments at Johns Hopkins and supported the suit that led to the Supreme Court's decision in 2006 to recognize ayahuasca as a sacrament in the União do Vegetal (UDV) Church.

These groups and the scientists they support have tirelessly worked to rehabilitate the scientific and social reputation of psychedelics. In the face of onerous and anti-scientific restrictions from the government, they are beginning to succeed- but the fight is far from over. It is just now that we are beginning to step out of Harry Anslinger's long shadow.

Psychedelic Capitalism

PSYCHEDELICS DON'T QUITE FIT WITHIN THE CAPITALIST framework. People enjoy doing them enough to pay for the pleasure, but the black market for psychedelics is small (classical psychedelics aren't even discussed in the DEA's 2018 National Drug Threat Assessment). Mushrooms sell for around \$10 per gram on the black market, coming out to roughly \$35 per trip. Drug

dealers are subject to the same market pressures as "legitimate" capitalists. Are they going to choose to carry anti-addictive drugs that people typically buy in small quantities, or cocaine?

LSD's patent in the US was granted in 1948 and expired in 1965. Not sure what to do with their accidental discovery, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals sent acid out for free and in return scientists and therapists shared their research. By the time other pharmaceutical companies were allowed to manufacture their own LSD, the government and media had turned on the compound. Sandoz recalled the drug from researchers in 1966, the same year it became illegal in California. The black market stepped in to meet the demand that had been stoked by evangelizers like author Ken Kesey. But these were no ordinary drug

dealers. Legendary underground chemists like Owsley Stanley and Tim Scully manufactured millions of hits of acid. Scully was motivated by more than just the bottom line:

Every time we'd make another batch and release it on the street something beautiful would flower, and of course we believed it was all because of what we were doing. We believed that we were the architects of social change, that our mission was to change the world substantially, and what was going on in the Haight was a sort of laboratory experiment, a microscopic sample of what would happen worldwide.

As psychedelic elder James Fadiman reminded me "mushrooms don't know they're illegal." Mushrooms of the magic variety grow all over the world in over 100 species. Mescaline occurs naturally in the peyote cactus, and DMT can be found in many plants and animals (possibly including ourselves). Since they're naturally occurring, these drugs can't be patented (related technologies, however, can). Drugs that can't be patented don't make for good business: Pharmaceutical companies can manufacture known drugs with ease. This low barrier to entry increases competition, driving down prices, leaving the companies with low-margin commodities. Psychedelics can also be effective in single sessions (whereas 60 percent of Americans on antidepressants have been on them for two years or longer) and may obviate the need for other pharmacological interventions. After all, is curing patients a sustainable business model? Combine these economics with the controversy attached to psychedelics, and it becomes easier to see why they were allowed to be criminalized.

Despite the apathy of big pharma, psychedelics are poised to re-enter the good graces of medicine. Psilocybin is in Phase II of FDA trials and recently received breakthrough treatment status for its promise in alleviating depression. MDMA therapy for PTSD is now in Phase III of FDA trials and as early as 2021 could be approved and moved to Schedule III, the equivalent of going from being treated like heroin to being treated like low-dose Codeine.

Psychedelic Politics

IN THE 1960S, THE POWERS THAT BE GREW TO FEAR THE POWER of psychedelics. The drugs' ability to shake people out of their normal modes of thinking and to inspire people to question authority led to their targeting by the authorities and media. Nixon declared Timothy Leary the most dangerous man in America. The Controlled Substances Act of 1970 classified LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline Schedule I drugs: those with a high potential for abuse and no medical uses. These drugs, and LSD in particular, became closely associated with the counter-culture, which nipped at the culture until the culture bit back.

But were these drugs the necessary and sufficient tools of revolution their most inspired advocates imagined? Does tripping acid turn you into a revolutionary? Was Nixon right to fear the High Priest of LSD?

LSD escaped the labs and therapist offices while the United States waged a monstrous war on the Vietnamese abroad and blacks at home. The same people who dropped acid were being compelled to invade a distant peasant society and conform to the stifling mainstream culture of obedience their parents embodied. Acid was closely tied with radical anti-authority figures like Timothy Leary, who boldly proclaimed "The kids who take LSD aren't going to fight your wars...They're not going to join your corporations...They won't buy it." The drugs took on the personalities of their loudest proponents. The collective experience of their users was in many ways a reaction



to the challenges and anxieties of their times.

Psychedelics are like funhouse mirrors: They can cause you to see things differently, but what they reveal ultimately depends on who's looking.

Martin Lee, one of the authors of *Acid Dreams*, told me, “these compounds don't have a political point of view.” As his book demonstrates, the psychedelic 1960s were really a CIA experiment that got out of control. Both the hippies and the Agency saw enormous potential in psychedelics: as a tool for liberation and control respectively. Lee asked me “why is it that these substances have that responsibility attached to them? Why is it not good enough that these substances help people live a better life?”

Much has been written about the impact psychedelics could have on the way we treat mental health. If the early research generalizes to the overall population, we could live in a world where addiction, depression, PTSD, and existential anxiety are greatly diminished, if not eliminated outright. Given how much individual suffering these afflictions cause, this would be stunning progress in a stagnant field. When considering how these conditions relate to other social problems like crime and suicide, the possibilities seem nothing short of revolutionary.

But less has been written about what properly integrating these substances could do to our politics. Most of us do not suffer from severe mental illnesses, and some have argued that the transformative potential of psychedelics should be shared with everyone, not just the ill. This notion—what Bob Jesse calls the “betterment of well people”—is intoxicating. We may be looking for a panacea in the face of the seemingly insurmountable problems our species will face in the years to come. In the past we have been eager to find it in events (the fall of the Berlin Wall and the End of History), people (Obama, Trump, Bernie), and ideas (escaping to Mars, artificial intelligence). Are psychedelics the answer?

I am not the first to imagine an American politics where these drugs are embraced—in 1967, Timothy Leary boldly predicted: “Within 15 years, we'll see an LSD orthodoxy. We'll see an LSD president and a pot-smoking Supreme Court.” And in 1982, LSD had been a Schedule I drug for twelve years and Nancy Reagan first told America to “Just Say No.”

The psychedelic pioneers I spoke to strongly related to the development of my own thought on psychedelics: initially a scary unknown that became the key to solving the problems of our world, before settling on the more measured conclusion that, while these substances are important, they are a part of a much larger, more complicated project.

The beginnings of a story of psychedelics as a panacea can be found in the famous Concord Prison Experiment, supervised by Timothy Leary while he was still a Harvard professor. The original study claimed that a single session with psilocybin reduced recidivism by over half and that personality tests recorded measurable positive changes. Rick Doblin conducted a follow-up study and found methodological problems, which, when controlled for, eliminated the claimed reduction in recidivism. In his conclusion, Doblin writes, “the failure of the Concord Prison Experiment should finally put to rest the myth of psychedelic drugs as magic bullets, the ingestion of which will automatically confer wisdom and create lasting change after just one or even a few experiences.”

Knowing that they are not a panacea, how might psychedelics actually change our politics? Three ways come to mind: individual personality and value changes occasioned by the drugs themselves, the societal impact of drastically decreased mental illness and addiction and corresponding crime, and the awakening to the politicized history of these drugs.

Psychedelic Minds

BEYOND AGE 30, “BIG 5” PERSONALITY TRAITS ARE FAIRLY stable, any changes occur gradually and subtly. In a remarkable study of the effect of psychedelics on personality from Johns Hopkins, researchers found that a single high-dose session with psilocybin led to substantial and lasting increases to the trait Openness. Openness “encompasses aesthetic appreciation and sensitivity, imagination and fantasy, and broad-minded tolerance of others' viewpoints and values” and is negatively correlated with traditionalism and positively correlated with universalism. Unsurprisingly, Openness is negatively correlated with a conservative political orientation. While the study involved a small sample, these results have no real precedent:

During normal aging, Openness typically decreases linearly at a rate of approximately 1 T-score point per decade. In comparison, participants in the present study who had a complete mystical experience during their psilocybin session [outpatient counseling for substance abuse] increased more than 4 T-score points from screening to follow-up. Notably, this increase is larger than increases in Openness seen in individuals treated successfully with antidepressant medication...

A massive meta-analysis of the relationship between personality and political orientation found that the degree to which Openness negatively predicts political conservatism in a given country is substantially affected by the amount of systemic risk, in this case measured by the country's murder rate. The lower the murder rate, the more openness predicts liberalism. As the study authors note:

These results suggest that a liberal political orientation may be thought of as (for lack of a better term) a relative luxury. People who are interested in novelty and, creativity (i.e., those who are high on Openness) tend to adopt a liberal political orientation. This tendency only emerges, however, when cues from the environment signal that the world is relatively safe, stable, and/or predictable.

The range of possible applications for psychedelics in mental health treatment is so broad that predicting society-wide results is difficult, but some population-level research is promising. One survey found that:

Lifetime classic psychedelic use was associated with a significantly reduced odds of past month psychological distress, past year suicidal thinking, past year suicidal planning, and past year suicide attempt, whereas lifetime illicit use of other drugs was largely associated with an increased likelihood of these outcomes.

While, we cannot determine causality from surveys alone, the Hopkins study supports the idea that the psychedelic experience actually causes people to open their minds. The study occurred in a therapeutic setting, which likely contributed to the experience. But the survey and population data of users in a naturalistic environment suggest that, even taken “recreationally,” psychedelics can blow people's minds into a more open shape.

While it is possible that the people who choose to take psychedelics are open enough to allow their minds to be expanded further, it could also be that those who shy away from illegal drugs would stand to gain even more from a psychedelic experience.

PSYCHEDELICS INDUCE A SIMILAR EFFECT TO ANOTHER kind of trip.

In 1966, Stewart Brand was tripping acid on his rooftop in San Francisco when a question came to him: “Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole Earth?” This question, printed on thousands of buttons, along with a grassroots campaign



successfully pressured NASA into turning the cameras around. Brand explained that the image “gave the sense that Earth’s an island, surrounded by a lot of inhospitable space. And it’s so graphic, this little blue, white, green and brown jewel-like icon amongst a quite featureless black vacuum.” This image and the resulting *Whole Earth Catalog* helped launch the modern environmental movement.

Brand intuited the power of something only experienced by a rare few. Astronauts who see Earth for the first time from space report being deeply changed by the experience. The source of everything we’ve ever known and loved rests on a pale blue dot, suspended in darkness, clothed by a thin layer of atmosphere. National boundaries disappear and the fragility of our home becomes viscerally understood. This feeling is appropriately known as the overview effect. As we face down an unprecedented ecological crisis of our own making, the universalizing tendencies of psychedelics may help us remember that we are all mammals who have no other home.

Contrary to the beliefs of the petitioners trying to “Force Trump to eat shrooms until he realizes we are all one,” getting powerful people to experience psychedelics is not enough. Unfortunately, it is totally possible for elites to consume and greatly benefit from psychedelics and still believe that the masses aren’t ready or deserving of the same experience. Al Hubbard, the smuggler and spy who became the “Johnny Appleseed of LSD,” resented the mass embrace of acid psychedelic populists advocated. As detailed in *Acid Dreams*, Henry Luce, Time-Life’s president, was “an avid fan of psychedelics,” but also, “encouraged his correspondents to collaborate with the CIA, and his publishing empire served as a longtime propaganda asset for the Agency.” His wife, the great matriarch of post-war American politics Clare Boothe Luce, was fine with LSD use by the ruling class, but had a less than egalitarian view about the rest of the population, saying “we wouldn’t want everyone doing too much of a good thing.”

Psychedelic Society

ACCORDING TO THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, 66 percent of people in state prisons were dependent on or abused alcohol or drugs. Up to three quarters of people who begin addiction treatment report having engaged in violent behavior. Addiction has been criminalized since the days of Harry Anslinger. Following Portugal’s lead by decriminalizing all drugs would do a lot to reduce the crime associated with sustaining addiction. Going further and legalizing the most addictive drugs, as Switzerland did with heroin with great success, would do even more. In the absence of these changes, psychedelic therapy could dramatically reduce the number of people with addictions.

Crime or the perception of it can play a corrosive role in our politics. The actual rise in crime rates in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to a turn towards draconian “law and order” policies and rhetoric. In 1993, nine percent of Americans reported crime and violence as the most important national problem, in 1994 that number jumped to 37 percent. This massive increase in public concern coincided with the 1994 crime bill, which subsidized state prison expansions, promoted mandatory minimum sentences and three strike laws, allowed 13-year-olds to be tried as adults, and further militarized the police. Low crime rates over the past 20 years likely contributed to the fact that only one to three percent of Americans have told pollsters that crime is the most important national issue in the years since 2002. Voters seem willing to roll back the worst excesses of the prison system based on their support for criminal justice reforms in recent state ballot initiatives.

Low crime is obviously not a sufficient condition for sane politics. The American murder rate was hovering around 50-year lows when Trump was elected. Low crime does, however, make things a lot easier. Americans appear to be open to alternatives to incarceration and harsh punishments when dealing with crime. Psychedelic therapies could offer a course of treatment to at-risk and incarcerated populations that actually help rehabilitate people, addressing a source of crime and showing the public that there are effective alternatives to punishment.



Burning Man: What happens when a large number of people take psychedelics in the same place. Photographs from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under Creative Commons.

Psychedelic Awakening

IRUG USE AND POLITICAL RADICALISM GO HAND IN HAND. This is not due to some law of nature, but rather to the politicized criminalization of drugs. As the authors of *Acid Dreams* observe:

The act of consuming the forbidden fruit was politicized by the mere fact that it was illegal. When you smoked marijuana, you immediately became aware of the glaring contradiction between the way you experienced reality in your own body and the official descriptions by the government and the media. That pot was not the big bugaboo that it had been cracked up to be was irrefutable evidence that the authorities either did not tell the truth or did not know what they were talking about. Its continued illegality was proof that lying and/or stupidity was a cornerstone of government policy. When young people got high, they knew this existentially, from the inside out. They saw through the great hoax, the cover story concerning not only the narcotics laws but the entire system. Smoking dope was thus an important political catalyst, for it enabled many a budding radical to begin questioning the official mythology of the governing class.

In other words, if the government, media, and teachers lied about this, what else have they lied about?

The mainstream writing on psychedelic research often includes at least a passing sentence about the politically-motivated crackdown on these substances. The reality is that the people who played a role in the criminalization of psychedelics, the officials and journalists and doctors, have blood on their hands. Not just of the people who were imprisoned for violating drug laws, but of the millions of people who succumbed to their addiction or depression who could have been helped by a psychedelic session. Or the millions more who died anxious and terrified, withdrawn from the world and the ones who loved them. The architects and custodians of the war on drugs are the real criminals. To think otherwise, that they were well-intentioned but misguided actors, is to be ignorant of the racist, anti-intellectual history of drug prohibition. And those who inherited the drug war and sustained it had access to voluminous evidence that their war was based on none.

Psychedelic Future

AMERICA SEEMS TO BE ON THE VERGE OF EMBRACING psychedelics.

The Left focuses (correctly) on the real interests motivating the actions of those who wield power. Capitalists who control the mineral rights to a trillion dollars worth of fossil fuels oppose action on climate change for obvious reasons. We don't need a complicated theory of political economy to understand why so many billionaires oppose higher taxes on their income. People respond to incentives, and we need to change the incentives. But different people respond to the same incentives in different ways. A turned-on world won't automatically become a just one—there are no shortcuts to justice. But power is ultimately rooted in the minds of people. Changing minds changes power.

But psychedelics will not usher in the revolution. They are no substitute for political education and organizing. The insights brought on by the experience are not guaranteed to be true or useful. But psychedelics have unprecedented potential to make people's lives better. And if the Left should be for anything, it should be for making people's lives better.

We are facing down the greatest challenges to the continued existence of our species in the short history of civilization. The provincial politics of the 20th century won't allow us to survive into the 22nd. Runaway climate change, nuclear proliferation, synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, and risks we're unaware of could put an end to the human experiment. These are problems that will require global coordination, concern for future generations, and a universal outlook to solve—problems that require us to step out of our normal frames of reference. And there is no better tool for changing your frame of reference than a psychedelic.

Will psychedelics save us? Not by themselves, no. There is no replacement for a robust social safety net, a humane criminal justice system, and economic justice. But the problems that face us are enormous, and we'll need all the help we can get. +



IT'S HARD TO BE A HUMAN IN 2019. WE STARTED THE millennium with mildly hopeful, if slightly naive expectations: *this Internet thing is getting real big! We're becoming a global community! Maybe we can put an end to war, if everyone in the world's conflict zones learns how to send each other emails.* Then 9/11 and the financial crash and Brexit happened, and now the techno-optimists are left scratching their heads, trying to figure out where it all went wrong. We're living in a different age now, and what was once unthinkable has become normal. Yes, in many ways, this is not a good thing. For example, while watching the historic inauguration of Barack Obama—a charming, clean-cut symbol of everything America was supposed to be—one could hardly imagine the monstrous sleazeball who would be next to take the oath. But maybe, in some perverse way, we can find some positive in the dramatic reversal of our expectations. Obama, after all, turned out to be little more than an attractive gloss painted over worm-infested walls; the Nobel Peace Prize he won just nine months into his first term, for the promotion of denuclearization and a “new climate” in international relations, was followed up by seven years of frustration and disappointments. 2008 was the year we convinced ourselves we could cure society's ills with TED Talks and sophistication. 2019, by contrast, is visceral. Everyone is screaming, all the time. The planet is hot. The president is messy. Strangers on the internet are constantly trying to tell you how lonely, angry, and sexually aroused they are. But if there's a silver lining to be gleaned from this neverending horror, it's that we seem to be finally accepting that we are both human beings and animals. This is a fact we've been deluding ourselves about for quite some time, tamping down our raw, disgusting instincts in favour of water-cooler chat about the latest Aaron Sorkin show.

Now, it just feels too damn difficult to keep up the pretense, and people are getting ready to be honest. There's still dishonesty, of course: people pretend to be civil on TV news as they discuss whether it would be better to bomb Iran or starve it. People on Instagram pretend to be happy on Caribbean beaches. Nieces smile and nod as their uncles explain that Nancy Pelosi is in the pocket

of MS-13. But a lot of people are very slowly coming to admit their shameful humanity, and how ill-served it is by the systems they live under. Even when it's negotiated through layers of irony and media savvy, people online—and increasingly offline—seem to be in some phase of confession. We all want to *tell* each other things, suddenly; we are more ready to admit that something's wrong, and our apps aren't fixing it. So what's missing in our lives, as we trudge through the 21st century? What did we lose between seasons of *Mad Men*?

You don't have to be a hemp-wearing hippie to feel like people are suffering from their inability to be in touch with the sensual—not sensual as in sexual, necessarily, but as in *pleasing to the senses*. Most people no longer live surrounded by nature, or have the time or inclination to crunch a leaf between their fingers, breathe in every note of their coffee, or lie out and look up for an hour at the stars, not when there are so many other things competing for our attention. (And depending on where you live, maybe it's too polluted to even see the stars anymore. The difference between the night sky at the more rural end of my hometown, and the night sky in the city in which I live, is frightening to me.) Between notifications and deadlines and emails, everything can come to feel a little flattened, deadened; everything is received through a screen. Sensuality has gone missing somewhere in our rush to embrace technology, and people are starting to feel the emptiness it's left behind. Outside of sex, it is considered vaguely abnormal to think or comment too much on how things physically feel; indeed, it can feel as though sexuality is the *only* lens through which we can see physical pleasure. (Talk to a group of people about how much you like the sensation of kneading dough, and see how long it takes before someone makes a joke implying you're some sort of bread pervert). But aren't we physical beings? Is it wrong to have a body and a mind that are connected, to want to seek some sort of stimulus?

WHICH BRINGS ME TO ASMR.

ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, a term popularised somewhere around the late 2000s and early 2010s. The term refers to a phenomenon whereby some people feel a pleasurable tingling sensation - particularly around their head, neck and down their spine - in response to certain stimuli. Not everyone gets it, but if you've ever felt a wave of inexplicable tingles when someone cuts your hair, or when you hear the rustling of a newspaper, you might be someone who experiences ASMR. Those who feel it report that they find it relaxing, that it helps them sleep, or even describe it as euphoric - myself, I find it's somewhat comparable to the feeling you get by using one of those cheap head massagers that look like big metal spiders. In the last decade, a whole genre has sprung up on YouTube of videos dedicated to triggering people's ASMR, in a huge variety of weird and delightful ways. (If you're not familiar with this genre, you might want to look it up, so you feel very slightly less confused by my descriptions.) At their most basic, these videos are simple sound collages, featuring the tapping of glasses, quiet whisperings of book readings, the turning of pages—sounds which might not seem so strange to call relaxing, even if you're not familiar with ASMR. Many involve the creators—or “ASMRtists,” as they're known - whispering directly to the viewer, as whispering is a big ASMR trigger for most fans, or interacting with the viewer while playing the part of a doctor, hairdresser, or any other position that involves getting close to people and making sound near their ears. And some videos are more...adventurous. Can't sleep? Why not pop on some headphones and watch a video where someone

pretends to be your intergalactic travel agent, rambling quietly to you about their popular tours around the rings of Saturn? How about a roleplay where someone pretends you are a houseplant? Or an hour-long medical examination of a melon, performed by a medieval plague doctor? There's almost a tacit competition among ASMRtists to create the strangest, most imaginative videos that trigger people's ASMR, and it's wonderful.

When first encountering ASMR, a lot of people's reaction is to assume it's a sexual fetish. They will point to the fact that a lot of popular ASMRtists are attractive young women, which is a bit like saying music must be a fetish because a lot of popular singers are attractive young women. The terminology used for different types of video can sound odd and vaguely pornographic: *personal attention*, *roleplay*, *mouth sounds*. And the whole thing just feels like it's somehow breaking a taboo. You're not *supposed* to have someone speaking softly in your ear, unless you earned that right in real life by making someone like you enough to become your sexual partner. It's not *allowed*! ASMRtists often play on screen with children's toys like slime, or even objects found in the back of their closets that they think might give people tingles, regressing to a form of kin-aesthetic play which adults generally aren't supposed to participate in. (When adults have non-sexual toys, they have to keep them on their desks and label them "stress balls," nothing more than a tool for displacing misery.) In ASMR roleplays, one can find the renewed pleasure of imaginary games—the ASMRtist might take the role of an old-timey apothecary mixing up a mysterious tincture for you, or an engineer fitting you with a robotic arm. One of the most common types of roleplay is of ASMRtists pretending to do your makeup, echoing the rituals enjoyed by countless preteen girls, who have been brushing horrendous pink eyeshadow over their friends' eyelids for decades. People are rediscovering what we so often forget after the ravages of adolescence—that play, and intimacy, and physical elation, have a place in human life beyond the box marked 'sex'. Seven or eight years ago, when I discovered ASMR, most people didn't talk about it. Now it's getting a place in the mainstream. It's getting less and less embarrassing to say "yes, I too experience bodily pleasure in response to the cornucopia of objects and textures around us." It's getting less shameful to be a human.

Another reaction people sometimes have to ASMR—once they've got over the initial weirdness of it all, and have accepted it might not be a sex thing—is to ask the question: Is it not at all, well... a bit *sad*? Why do you need a stranger to whisper to you? Isn't it a replacement for real-life intimacy? And I admit, I understand that concern. I have written before in this magazine about the dangers of using "self-care" practices to soothe ourselves in the face of deep-seated societal problems, rather than taking it upon ourselves to actually solve those problems. I've no doubt that somewhere out there, there's at least one lovelorn recluse who has convinced themselves an ASMRtist is their soulmate, much as lovelorn recluses have convinced themselves that actors and anime characters and duchesses are their soulmates since time immemorial. ASMR videos are not a replacement for real life interpersonal relationships. What they are doing, however, is opening a door. They are starting a conversation. ASMR has radically altered the conventional wisdom on how sensible adults experience joy.

Joy is not a word you come across much in politics or culture anymore. It has a vague air of naivety, of old-fashionedness; *joy* is what a schoolboy feels when he gets an extra helping of custard in a children's novel from the 1920s. For an adult in 2019, a good life is supposed

to be that which makes you *fulfilled*, where your goals are achieved and your retirement is secure. In between meeting those targets you might have fun at a party, or be entertained by a TV show, but heaven forbid you *play*, unless by 'play' you mean either a game with defined rules, or some euphemism for theoretically-naughty-but-basically-socially-acceptable adult activities. To express too much joy, outside of the proper contexts, is often labelled eccentric at best and deviant at worst. But ASMR is changing that. Whether the naysayers like it or not, it is becoming okay for an adult human to unwind by watching forty-five minutes of a pretend eye exam. It's okay for an adult human to love sound and sight and imagination, and not just in the work of movie directors but in the frivolous, small-scale experiments of YouTube creators with a passion for exploiting the weird glitches of the nervous system. In these pioneers, I see an echo of a child's spirit; the spirit that, upon seeing a really big, solid stick on a countryside walk, urges you to pick it up and carry it around, and hit it against bushes and trees and the ground to see what sound it makes. We're starting to experiment with what it means to live in our own bodies - first in the privacy of our own browser history, then slowly but surely telling other people. We're getting over the curse of our needless inhibitions. It's not a secret any more.

I'm human. I like to feel tingles. And I am not ashamed. ♣

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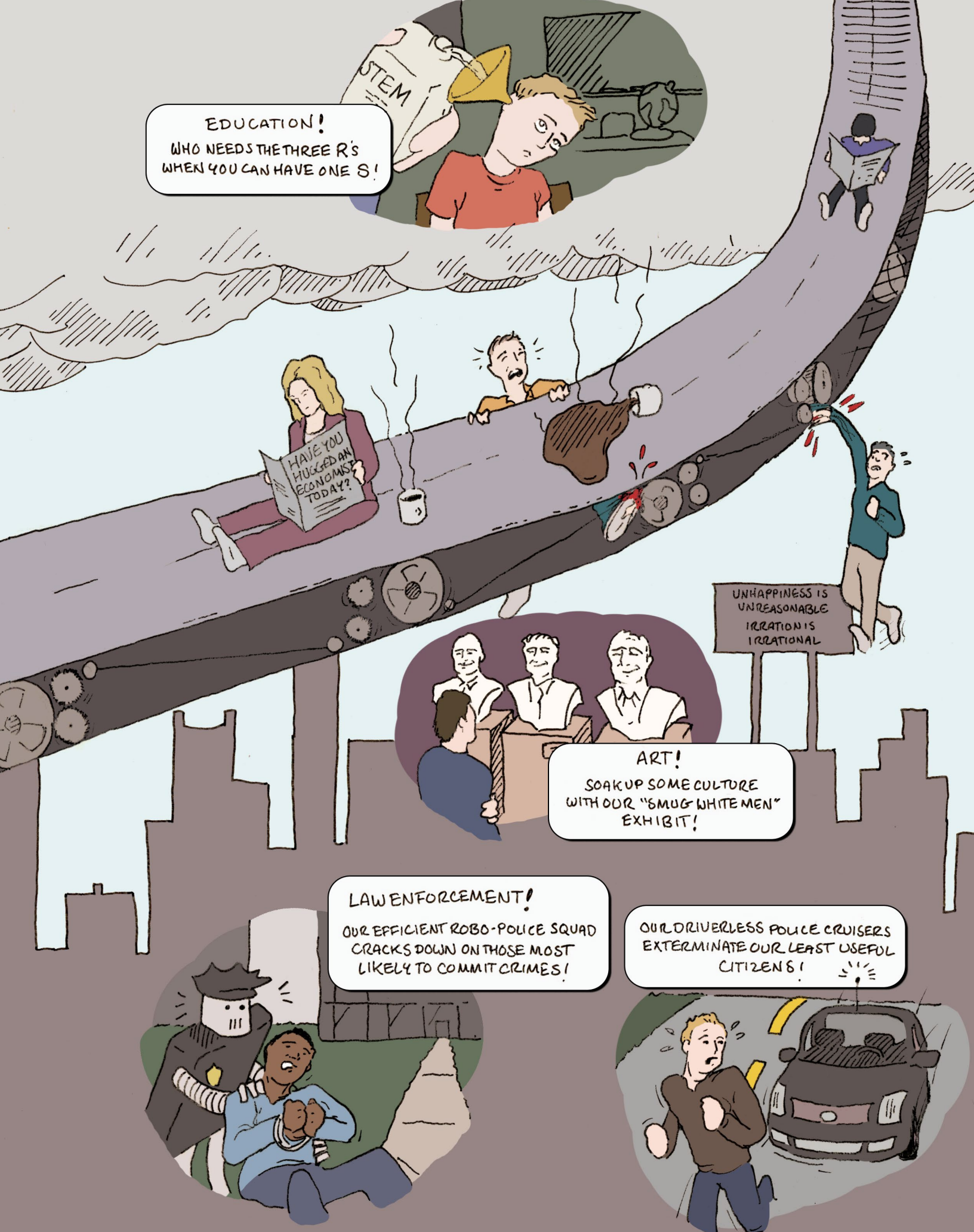
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HONEY- MOON IN PALESTINE

by Nick Slater

My wife and I have paid eight shekels each to ride in this old, dust-colored minibus from Ramallah to Ras Karkar, a small Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank. There's going to be a protest today when the men return from the 5 p.m. prayers. Crammed into my camera bag is a napkin with the name "Hamza" scribbled on it, right above a phone number that starts with +972. This is the man who our friend Yousef told us to call when we arrive in the village. An old Fairuz ballad crackles from the radio as our minibus honks and lurches onto the road, winding past the gleaming settlements that loom atop the hills.

Close your eyes, and forget what you know about recent political history, and it would be easy to imagine a world in which Palestine was among the world's most popular honeymoon destinations. A gorgeous Mediterranean coastline, stunning desert sandscapes, ancient bazaars with bright colors and spicy aromas floating through the narrow stone passageways — Palestine has all these things and more, at least in theory. The problem is that,

in practice, Palestine also has a foreign military force occupying the vast majority of its land, making it much less attractive as a romantic getaway for your average newlyweds.

There are exceptions to every rule, however, and I am a travel masochist, while my former fiancée is not overly fond of beaches. Thus, a few weeks after our wedding we found ourselves standing outside a candy shop in the center of Ramallah, trying to catch a few wisps of wifi to call our friend Abdullah. He'd promised to come pick us up, though he was running late as usual.

Abdullah had been our host eight months earlier, when we'd made our first trip to the West Bank. When I'd told him of our plan to return for our honeymoon, he'd written back, *lol bro are you crazy?* Eventually, after he failed to dissuade us from coming, he insisted that we stay with him. He'd just moved into a new place, he said, and he had a couple of spare rooms. I told him it sounded like he was moving up in the world.

When Abdullah arrived in a taxi, though, the first thing I



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noticed was how exhausted he looked. On the ride back to his house, he told us about the long hours he'd been working for his new software startup, and the endless piles of paperwork he had to slog through every day when he went home. "Man, I'm tired," he said, lighting a cigarette as we turned down a street lined with armed soldiers in red berets. "Damn fucking tired."

All the windows were rolled up tight, and smoke soon filled the car.

His new place was modern and spacious, made of sand-colored stone with a roofed terrace. The neighbors on the left had two European sedans. The neighbors on the right were a herd of goats, grazing in a rocky field under the gaze of an elderly shepherd. Across the highway stood an Israeli military outpost that had been expanded into a civilian settlement, still surrounded by high gray walls and jagged strips of barbed wire.

Abdullah paid the cab fare and carried our bags inside, ignoring the volume and vulgarity of my protests. He gave us cold beers from his fridge and told us about his pending business deal. With one hand he chopped the vegetables for dinner, with the other he tapped out a non-stop stream of text messages. Our friends Ameer and Momen were on their way. Soon we'd have the whole crew together again, just like old times.

LET ME TELL YOU, DEAR READER, THAT IT WAS a joyous moment when they arrived. Abdullah set the table with hummus, labneh, fresh-baked pita, and his own specialty of grilled chicken and peppers. We drank too much Jameson and smoked too many joints. We even watched a *Rick and Morty* episode on Abdullah's new smart T.V. For a moment we recaptured the magic of our first night together, and I remembered something Ameer had said back then: "We are the smallest gods."

But there was a new weariness in my friends' faces. They seemed older, sadder, more preoccupied. They checked their phones more often, and more urgently. They fell asleep in their chairs. A lot had happened in the last eight months. Living in Palestine is much harder than visiting it for your honeymoon.

A single narrow path connects the village of Ras Karkar with the road that leads to the rest of the world. An Israeli military jeep is parked at the turnoff point, its long radio antennae flicking like whips under the blazing mid-afternoon sun. Olive trees glimmer on a nearby hill — these are the groves that are doomed to be destroyed. Unless today's protests are successful (and, in all likelihood, even if they are) these family fields will be buried under the concrete of an illegal Israeli settlement, one that will likely be filled with Americans lured by cheap healthcare and heavily subsidized costs of living.

The village itself is composed of thin strips of buildings that cling to the hillside, and the minibus belches black smoke as we make our ascent. Suddenly the driver slams on the brakes. "Ras Karkar?" My wife and I look at the couple next to us, who smile and point out the window. The man tries to explain, in what is clearly

very basic Arabic, something that I am completely unable to understand. His wife sees my confusion and just says, "Ras Karkar, OK." We tell her "shukran", and wave goodbye as the minibus putters back down the hill, leaving us to seek shade in the shadows of the empty-looking houses.

My friends in Ramallah and the villagers of Ras Karkar are both trapped in open-air prisons. But they suffer in different ways, and at the hands of different captors. To understand why, it helps to know a little about the local geography.

The occupied West Bank is divided into three zones: Areas A, B, and C. In theory, Area A is under the full control of the Palestinians, Area C is under the full control of the Israelis, and Area B is under "joint control." In practice, Israel has such an overwhelming edge in terms of money, firepower, and surveillance technology that it controls the entirety of the West Bank. Even if its heavily armed soldiers aren't physically present in a given area, their presence is always felt, like a nest of wasps buzzing above a picnic. However, they're not the only threat that intrudes on the lives of ordinary Palestinians.

In Ramallah, which is in Area A, people like my friends are mistreated not only by the Israelis themselves, but also by their proxies in the Palestinian Authority (PA). Here, people are perhaps a bit less likely to have their homes demolished by an armored military bulldozer sent under the orders of a vengeful colonel than a regular civilian bulldozer dispatched by a bored zoning official.

Of course, there are notable exceptions to this rule, like when the Israeli military invaded Ramallah to punish the PA's administrators for keeping too loose a hand on their subjects. For the most part, though, these administrators are allowed to create petty fiefdoms to enrich themselves, so long as they keep their fellow Palestinians under control.

One of their favorite techniques is bureaucratic obfuscation. To give you one example, my friend Abdullah had originally intended for his new home to be an office until a PA official changed his mind about its zoning classification (forcing Abdullah to take a second lease on a different building, which was owned by the official's cousin).

Another common method of the PA's social control is flat-out theft. Mr. Zarhan Jaghad, the owner of the Dar Zahran heritage museum in Ramallah, has been trying to keep Palestinian officials from seizing his family's farm for years. "All this evil is possible because of the occupation," he says. "But we can't ignore the corruption in the PA. They want us to trade our history for some small economic benefits. They want us to forget our villages and olive trees. They want us to be software programmers who eat fast food. Look at this city: All they build is bars, five-star hotels. Fine, I don't mind. But that's not the Palestine I love."

Palestinian officials have long dodged accusations that Ramallah is a glorified Potemkin village meant to make people dream more about starting their own prosperous startup and less about an independent Palestine. Viewed from the perspective of Pales-



All photographs by Nick Slater

tinians like Mr. Zarhan, much of the “progress” represented by Ramallah’s burgeoning tech scene and Western-style nightlife signifies a betrayal of higher goals — a campaign to make Palestinians relinquish their dreams of an independent capital in East Jerusalem that includes the holy mosque of Al-Aqsa, and instead content themselves with more coding jobs and dance clubs under de facto Israeli rule.

These scraps of neoliberal prosperity are the most that the Israeli military government and their puppet administrators in the Palestinian Authority are willing to grant the 57,000 inhabitants of Ramallah. Under exceptional circumstances (and at exceptional costs) it may be possible to build a mildly prosperous future for oneself, but loftier aspirations are strongly discouraged.

Here’s a good place to remind you that Ramallah is located in Area A, the part that’s ostensibly under full Palestinian control.

In Area C, which comprises more than 60 percent of the West Bank, the Israelis feel no need to respect even the pretense of Palestinian rights. For years, the Israeli government has carried out a methodical plan to empty Area C of all its Palestinian inhabitants. Here the Palestinians can’t build at all: no homes, no schools, no hospitals, no businesses. Between 2009 and 2013, more than 2,000 applications were submitted to the Israeli authorities. 34 were approved. Since then, things have gotten even worse. In 2014, only one Palestinian building permit was granted.

The next year, there was zero.

ALMOST ONE-FIFTH OF RAS KARKAR’S LAND HAS been deemed to fall within the boundaries of Area C. This land, which contains some of the area’s most fertile olive groves, is keeping the village alive. If it’s destroyed, the farmers who lose their trees can’t start driving for Uber or freelancing at a graphic design firm. They will have to leave their family homes, or starve.

A boy’s head pokes out of the second-story window of a small stone house. His eyes widen under a mop of dark curly hair — he looks to be about 10 years old. Seconds later he’s scampered out the door, and is shaking my hand with grave civility, though it’s clear he’s trying very hard not to laugh at my wife and I, who are both literally dripping with sweat. The boy’s skinny little arms and legs poke out of an oversized FC Barcelona jersey. He asks me something in Arabic that I can’t understand, so I give him a thumbs-up and say, “Messi ... Barcelona!” He grins (he’s missing at least three teeth, which is not uncommon for a 10-year-old) and lets loose another rapid-fire burst of Arabic. This time I catch the word “España,” and again I make friendly noises back at him.

The boy in the Barça shirt leads us up a path lined with small houses, all of which seem empty. Soon we’ve attracted some of his friends. They snicker when they see the tattoos poking out of my sleeve. When one of them notices that I’m also sweaty as hell, he calls for his little brother, who comes running with an icy liter of water in an old Coke bottle. The gang of boys are giddy and mischievous, but they keep a respectful distance from my wife and politely decline all my attempts to give them candy.

We've almost reached the top of the hill before the boy suddenly darts over to a house and bangs on its door with his tiny fist, shouting a word I assume is the owner's name. When a man emerges, groggy and confused by the boy's rapid chatter, I show him the napkin with Hamza's phone number. He nods and punches the numbers into his old Nokia, handing it to me with princely delicacy. When Hamza answers, his voice is crackly and garbled. "Hello, I'm so sorry," he says, "I can't meet you today. Don't worry — my friend will help you. Wait there, I will send a car."

My wife and I didn't visit any villages the first time we went to Palestine. We did see the refugee camps of Bethlehem and the tourist traps of Jericho and the Mexican restaurants of Ramallah. But we didn't go anywhere like Ras Karkar, and that left a glaring blind spot in our understanding of Palestinian life.

After that trip, I wrote a story about the inspiring and infuriating experiences we'd shared with the Palestinians who opened their hearts and homes to us. It was full of scenes where we smoked hash, argued about Bitcoin, and drove fast while listening to Bon Iver. Looking back, there's a lot I'd change about it.

I told that story the way I did because I wanted to show people in the West who were vaguely aware of Palestine — but had never thought much about the place, beyond what they heard on the news — that Palestinians were complex, fully-formed human beings just like them (and yes, in a perfect world there would be no need to plea for such a bare-minimum amount of empathy). At the time, I thought that rhetorical strategy seemed best because human beings generally have more sympathy for people who they consider to be similar to themselves. While there were obvious problems with my approach, I thought it would be the most effective way to help readers imagine Palestinians as "people just like us."

But now I think I spent too many words suggesting that we should have empathy for Palestinians because they're surprisingly westernized, and not enough words suggesting that we should have empathy for Palestinians regardless of whether they speak English or wear Yankees hats or roll excellent spliffs.

My error was pointed out by Ty Joplin, an Arabic-speaking

American journalist based in Jordan, who criticized the piece for "falling into the same general lines of humanist thinking that over-emphasize aesthetic similarities to prove someone's humanity," which "implicitly excludes those who do not share those similarities." He also thought that my dependence on local translators, who had certain ideas of what a foreign visitor would find interesting, might have limited my exposure to more conservative parts of Palestinian culture, though he conceded "it's basically impossible to get around that if you don't live there and speak Arabic."

He was right on all accounts. I don't know if it's impossible for a westerner to fully understand what it's like to be Palestinian, but I do know that it's far beyond my ability. The life experience of the average Palestinian is just far too different for me to fully comprehend.

FOR SEVENTY YEARS, PALESTINIANS HAVE LIVED under the military occupation of a foreign power that considers them subhuman and speaks openly about its plans for mass expulsion and/or murder. David Ben-Gurion, the George Washington of the Israeli state, thought all Arabs were animals, saying, "We view them like donkeys." Former prime minister Levi Eshkol, who oversaw Israel's annexations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Six-Day War of 1967, hoped that "precisely because of the suffocation and imprisonment there, maybe the Arabs will move," and mused that "perhaps if we don't give them enough water they won't have a choice." The current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, gleefully taunts his captive Palestinian subjects with promises of genocide: "There is no place for the weak. The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive."

Only the most craven, milk-blooded *New York Times* columnist could listen to seven decades of such naked threats and continue to give the benefit of the doubt to the people who make them. Think of how quickly (and with such little evidence) the American public was convinced that Saddam Hussein threatened our entire way of life. We went on to slaughter more than half a million



human beings because of that spurious gossip. What acts of vengeance might we have unleashed if there had been nearly a century's worth of proof?

Israel's state-run propaganda efforts, known as *hasbara*, have spent years trying to portray the country as a gay-friendly tech paradise full of foodies, feminists, and plucky pop stars (if you'd like to lend a hand, there are generous benefits for "cultural ambassadors" through entities like Hasbara Fellowships, the REALITY Initiative, and the ever-popular Birthright). However, as the late Israeli ambassador Yohanan Meroz once warned, some things are not "hasbarable." No matter how empowering the new Gal Gadot blockbuster might be, it's hard to believe that the nation that cloaks itself in her accomplishments is really a safe haven for women when it also snatches female Palestinian medics and journalists from their beds in the middle of the night.

The occupation's breathtakingly cynical attempts to brand itself as a hip, enlightened defender of Western values—see: the IDF's sassy tweets about *Mean Girls*—should make it evident why some Palestinians might prefer to reject those "values" altogether. If the army that demolished your house and imprisoned your relatives also claimed to be "the most moral army in the world" because it prevented an "ecological catastrophe" caused by some burning tires, it would be understandable if you were unimpressed by the papier-mâché progressivism whose main purpose seems to be hiding the ugliness of the Israeli war machine.

THIS IS A LONG-WINDED WAY OF SAYING THAT, when my wife and I arrived in Ras Karkar, I would not have been surprised if some villager had seen us, decided that our expensive electronics and colorful tattoos were the embodiment of all the West's injustice and depravity, and told us to go fuck ourselves. I certainly wouldn't have blamed them.

As George Orwell once said, "You cannot feel dispassionately

about a man who is about to cut your throat."

In the shady courtyard of the village's mosque, as we sit and wait for the protest to begin, I do something stupid. A boy asks me where I'm from and I say, "España," because it's easier than explaining I'm an American (a country he has good reason to hate) who lives in Andorra (a country he has probably never heard of). I've used this line a hundred times in Palestine, and I've never met anyone who had A) any problems with España or B) the ability to determine that I'm not actually Spanish. So when the boy shouts "España!" and whips out his phone to make a call, I have no idea what's coming next.

Moments later, a handsome young man shows up and hands us two bottles of orange juice. "Hola chicos, ¡bienvenidos a Ras Karkar! ¿Cómo están?" It turns out that he's a doctor who recently returned from studying medicine in Cuba. For the next half hour we chat in Spanish about his travels abroad and his reasons for coming back. "No sé como explicartelo," says the doctor. He tells me that Palestinians have a connection to their land that westerners struggle to understand. A pickup truck, its bed loaded with dozens of olive tree saplings, rumbles to a stop in front of the mosque, and he goes to help the boys unload the plants. "Eso es mi Palestina," says the doctor before he walks away.

The villagers plan to plant these saplings as an act of symbolic defiance on the ground that Israel is threatening to seize. The message is simple: The villagers of Ras Karkar have roots in these hills, ones that won't be destroyed by bullets or bulldozers. But there's a problem. Only around 20 men have showed up for the protest, not nearly enough to challenge the Israeli soldiers on their own. After a quick discussion, they decide to go join the protest of a neighboring village. The men pile into a couple of cars, their heads and arms sticking out the windows, fierce dabke music blasting out a call for revolution. Someone asks us if we want a ride, and we squeeze into the back seat.

If you're a westerner who's sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, as I am, it's easy to hold a romantic view of "Palestine" or "the Palestinian people." Part of the reason is because the Israeli occupa-





tion is so nakedly cruel and sadistic that empathy can soon turn into pity, and attributing saint-like qualities to all Palestinians seems like the least you can do.

However, as Saul Alinsky once said, “The fact that people are poor or discriminated against doesn’t necessarily endow them with any special qualities of justice, nobility, charity, or compassion.” Palestine is not a nation of saints. It’s undeniable that significant parts of society hold regressive views on women’s rights, or that popular opinion about LGBTQ communities can be just as bad. Common views on sex, gender roles, and marriage can be downright regressive*, as Israel’s *hasbara* machine is happy to remind us.

**It would be uncouth, of course, to mention that if you trained a similarly critical eye on Israeli society, there would be no shortage of stories you could write about its rampant misogyny, its legally-enshrined racism against the country’s minorities, or its police brutality against Jews of color.*

THE POINT IS NOT THAT PALESTINIANS ARE angels and Israelis are demons —there are fine people on both sides, as a famous anti-Semitic Islamophobe once said— but only that a person’s worthiness of basic human rights should not be dependent on the dominant views of the society in which they live. Despite the hideous crimes of the Israeli government, no Israeli schoolchildren deserve to be blown up on their way to school. Despite the conservative nature of much of Palestinian society, no Palestinian deserves to be tortured, raped, exiled, humiliated, robbed, beaten, or murdered by Israeli forces.

All Palestinians, whether they are cosmopolitan young go-getters like my friends in Ramallah or tradition-loving homebodies like the doctor in Ras Karkar, deserve to live their lives with basic dignity and respect. Both of these are denied to them at the present moment. They are human beings —yes, like you and me—who are suffering, and there is no way to justify the cold, meticulous atrocities that are being committed against them.

From the top of the hill, teargas billows into a cloudless blue sky. Pop-pop-pop — this is the sound of the grenade launchers, their canisters soaring in parabolic arches, hissing as they release poisonous serpentine fumes that chase them to the ground. Men flee from beneath them, scampering down the rocky slope. We get out of the car and the air already tastes foul.

We begin to climb the hill, which is steep and covered in small, slippery stones. Smoke from the grenades makes the world seem fuzzy. The higher we go, the harder it gets to breathe. Cries of Allahu Akbar! ring out from the summit, and as always it’s a surprise how much less frightening the phrase sounds without frantic TV music playing in the background. Even a non-Arabic speaker can understand what the men shouting it mean: “I hope things will be OK somehow.”

But things are not OK when we reach the top. The Israeli soldiers have split into two squads, and they’re both advancing. A hail of bullets, which have been covered by a bit of rubber to indemnify Israeli leaders against future war crimes charges, spit from their rifles. The

man just to my left clutches his shoulder and falls to the ground. I hold my camera behind my back and snap photos blindly as I dash behind an olive tree.

A small group of journalists, standing off to the side, is in the path of the advancing Israeli troops. They are quickly dispersed by a flurry of tear gas grenades, fleeing back down the hill. As they run past us, one of them vomits. A concussion grenade explodes nearby us, and my organs rattle inside my rib cage. The journalist vomits again. My wife pulls out an onion, smashes it against a rock, and hands it to him.

He shakes his head, wiping his mouth with a sleeve. “Onions only worked in the first intifada,” he says, with an accent that sounds oddly Midwestern. “Then they got smart, made new stuff.”

“The new stuff” is working. Men and boys are running back down the hill, trapped between the slow-moving pincers of the Israeli troops. Covered in body armor and armed with weapons usually seen on the battlefield, they overwhelm the Palestinian villagers with sheer firepower. A few scrawny boys, scarves wrapped tight around their mouths to keep out the worst of the tear gas, half-heartedly launch a few small stones in the direction of the troops. None of the stones lands within 20 feet of a soldier.

And then I start laughing, because for fuck’s sake, what if one actually hit a guy? Just imagine that a four-ounce stone, traveling at roughly the speed of a slo-pitch softball toss, managed to hit an Israeli soldier square in the forehead? Well, if he weren’t wearing a helmet, then perhaps that could leave a small bump!

But of course, all the Israeli soldiers are wearing helmets, and none of their personal safeties are remotely threatened at any point during the protest. They have guns, unlike their counterparts, and chemical weapons and armored cars. They have been trained to kill people with their bare hands, and to view Palestinians as subhumans. One phone call, and they could have the entire village blown up by missiles.

*The only real reason they don’t make that call is because it would not be *hasbarable* if someone found out about it. Someone like us, anyway—someone who isn’t Palestinian, someone whose credibility isn’t impaired due to Arabness. There’s always a chance that some English-speaking westerner might be around to create a PR nightmare. That’s why we’re here, running around like idiots with a camera and a bag full of useless onions, hoping that just by being present we might somehow keep a Palestinian family from losing their loved one.*

*In all likelihood, it wouldn’t matter. Being a white foreigner didn’t save Kristin Foss, who was shot in the stomach while attending a protest, and it certainly didn’t save Rachel Corrie, who was literally run over by a bulldozer in broad daylight in front of multiple eyewitnesses. It does make a twisted kind of sense. If the Israeli *hasbara* machine can erase the existence of millions of Palestinians, then covering up the demise of a few nosy westerners is little more than something to keep the intern busy.*

The soldiers don’t care who their bullets hit. They’re simply doing their jobs, laying down suppressing fire from multiple angles, forcing the Palestinian villagers into their desired zones like dolphins chasing fish into a ball. I imagine they will all get excellent marks on their performance reviews, especially the son of a bitch who fires the tear gas canister that ricochets off a rock and goes whistling past my wife’s head



at 100 miles per hour.

Now we too start running down the hill. Unlike the boys who kick up clouds of dust ahead of us, stopping now and then to make rude gestures at the soldiers, we make no pretense of bravery. Tumbling down the rocks, we race toward ... well, we're not quite sure what, since we have no ride back to Ramallah, but the soldiers are firing more and more tear gas.

When we reach the bottom of the hill, a small convoy of cars is pulling out of a clearing. Each one is loaded down with at least eight men. Some roll past us in silence, while others burst with a chorus of "hello!" as they head back to their villages.

Suddenly, we're surrounded by a pack of teenagers. Instinctually, we start walking behind the cars, trying to keep up — nobody likes being surrounded by teenagers. Some of them are wearing masks, some of them have hard eyes. They are village boys, and none of them speak much English.

But they try. They ask us, "Where from?" They tussle for the right to take the first selfies with us. They whistle at my tattoos (whether in admiration or astonishment that anyone could be so stupid, I'm not sure), and they ask us, "You Islam?" When we pretend not to understand, they clasp their hands together and point to the sky, saying, "Allah?"

When we smile the most nervous smiles of our entire lives, they laugh and drop the subject.

Night has fallen by the time we reach the road. Millions of stars sparkle above the desert, illuminating the thin ribbon of asphalt that leads back to Ramallah. We stand there for five minutes before the first car goes by. "Wen taxi?" I ask one of the boys. He is absolutely correct to look at me like I'm the world's dumbest idiot — of course there are no taxis out here.

There is the occasional handyman's van, however, and when one of them wheezes around the corner, the boys begin to leap up and down, shouting and waving their arms. The driver rolls down his windows and five boys begin shouting at once (I catch the word "Ramallah" again and again). Whatever they say appears to work, and the driver opens the door for us. One of the boys asks us for a selfie before we drive away.

We set off down the road, past the settlements that loom atop the hills. I want to tell the handyman how grateful we are, but sadly he speaks "only" Arabic and Hebrew and I can speak neither, so all I can say is shukran over and over until he pulls into a gas station, points at a parked taxi, and says, "Ramallah." We exit the old vehicle and enter the new one, borne along by the goodwill of Palestinian strangers.

The taxi driver, as it turns out, does speak English. He's from a village just outside Ramallah, and this is his last run of the night. When he gets home, he's looking forward to a big meal. "If I late, wife very angry," he says, chuckling as he looks into the rear-view mirror. "And you, marry?" We say yes, and I can't resist pointing at my former fiancée and saying, "My wife!"

A smile comes over the taxi driver's face, and he pulls out his phone. "My wife," he says, showing us a picture of a woman in a dark hijab. We tell him that she's very beautiful. He flips to another picture. This one is of a different woman. "And my two wife," says the taxi driver.

For a moment, we don't know how to respond. It's awkward and uncomfortable. I mumble something about hoping they are happy, which I'm fairly certain the taxi driver doesn't understand. But before long we're back at Abdullah's house, safe and free and soon-to-be drunk. As we get out of the taxi, the driver says, "Welcome to Palestine." ✦

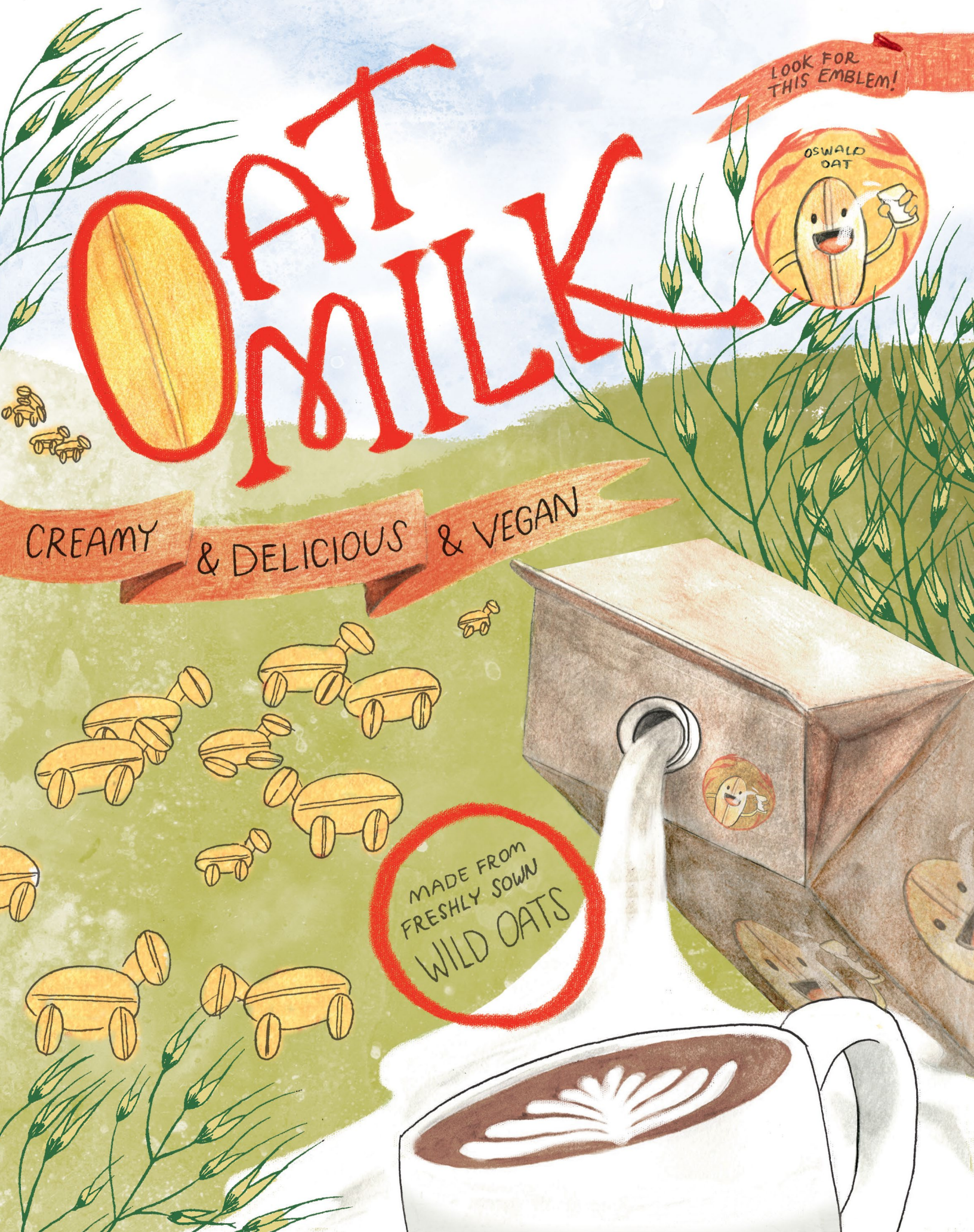
OAT MILK

LOOK FOR
THIS EMBLEM!

OSWALD
OAT

CREAMY & DELICIOUS & VEGAN

MADE FROM
FRESHLY SOWN
WILD OATS





IF YE BREAK FAITH

The Rise of Poppymania

by ERICA X EISEN

IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO NOVEMBER 11TH, mid-autumn England is blanketed each year with a second springtime of faux poppies. Scarlet pins—some petit, with enamel outlined in gold, some outsized and sporting floppy crocheted petals—adorn the lapels of millions of damp-smelling woollen coats across Great Britain and its former colonies. On street corners, in tube stations, booths selling red paper poppies from blue boxes crowd the footpath. If you were to descend and take the train, you would see carriages affixed with scarlet vinyl decals; alighting and ascending to street level, you'd see fallen poppy pins mingling with leaves in the gutters and slicking the road with their trampled blossoms.

Since the end of World War One, the “remembrance poppy” has emerged in Britain and its former colonies as a way of commemorating the armed forces, a symbol on par with the American yellow ribbon. And while some hard-core poppy wearers sport pins all year round, the flowers come out in force as Remembrance Day—the Commonwealth equivalent of Veterans Day—approaches. While it owes its origins to the John McCrae poem “In Flanders Fields,” written to memorialize the dead of the Second Battle of Ypres, the re-

membrance poppy has come to stand not merely for those who died in WWI—a figure that in the United Kingdom alone numbered over 700,000, with an additional 1.675 million wounded—but for all British Commonwealth soldiers killed in any conflict. And with each passing Remembrance Day (so strongly tethered to its floral symbol that it is sometimes colloquially called Poppy Day), the poppy has become—ironically—increasingly weaponized.

When Georgia native Moina Michael returned to her professorial work after a leave of absence spent volunteering for the WWI war effort, she found her classroom full of disabled veterans in need of social and financial support. Recalling the first lines of McCrae's poem, which had moved her deeply when she first read it, Michael decided to manufacture silk flowers in order to raise money for servicemen like her students, as well as to memorialize the dead. Though Michael was American, her idea found its greatest success not in her own country but in the United Kingdom, where the poppies rapidly caught on. In 1921, the newly founded Royal British Legion (a charity that aids British veterans) adopted Michael's symbol, buying and selling 9 million artificial poppies to help former soldiers seeking work and housing. This was the first so-called “Poppy Appeal.”

A

CENTURY AFTER THE END OF WWI, THE RBL's Poppy Appeals have become annual fixtures in Britain and many Commonwealth countries. In recent years, Poppy Appeal launch events have included major spectacles, like a concert by a pop band and a performance by paratroopers (whose special parachute design more closely resembled a Red Baron tribute than any recognizable species of terrestrial flower). RBL's 2018 target was to raise £50 million through sales staffed by some 40,000 volunteers. In addition to the paper badges sold in person, the RBL's online "Poppy Shop" features not merely the typical pins, but a massive array of scarlet products, including cufflinks, headscarves, camo-print duffel bags (though the efficacy of the camouflage is somewhat compromised by the presence of a bright red flower in the center), oven mitts, dog beds, a "spiced fig and cassis poppy reed diffuser" (unfortunately out of stock!), and, inevitably, football club cross-promotions. For a mere £2.99, Scunthorpe United fans can show their patriotism and their team allegiance all at once by sporting a pin that resembles the unhappy conjoined-twin lovechild of a flower and a football insignia. A special Valentine's Day section of the website features such romantic gift ideas as a pin commemorating the Royal Army Dental Corps.

This deluge of poppy apparel, poppy kitchenware, poppy home décor, and poppy etceteras—combined with the social pressure to conspicuously consume and display these products—has turned a solitary act of reflection upon war and its casualties into a massive public spectacle centered less on the act of remembering than on the performance of it. Come each November, News Corp tabloids boil over with poppy-related content. These papers offer endless dissections about the shades of meaning behind different poppies and play host to never-ending debates about the proper way to wear the pins (on the left side or the right? With the leaves angled this way or that way? And what's with the Queen wearing five at once?). In these accounts, poppy-wearing is explicitly coded as Good, while those who neglect to wear the pins are breathlessly named and shamed. In this way, the poppy has become a wearable form of virtue-signalling, an accessory meant to telegraph its wearer's patriotism and respect for the dead—and by extension, the conscientious poppy objector's ingratitude and disloyalty to the nation.

If there's social pressure on us plebes to wear these pins, for public figures, having a remembrance poppy is virtually compulsory. Simon Cowell's mummy costume for *The X Factor's* Halloween special last year came complete with the signature pin, thereby suggesting some kind of bizarre alternative timeline wherein Ramesses the Great was a signatory of the Treaty of Versailles. In a move that was widely derided as "poppy fascism," the Cookie Monster burrowed a Remembrance Day pin into his blue-furred flesh before an appearance on *The One Show* in 2016 (The *Huffington Post* noted in an uncharacteristically arch aside, "There was no word as to whether Cookie Monster opted to wear the flower himself, or if he was asked to do so by the BBC"). British celebrities who choose not to wear a poppy court controversy: In 2006, in response to numerous expressions of "disgust" from the public, Channel 4 News presenter Jon Snow was obliged to publish an op-ed apologia explaining why he chose not to wear a pin while working. Snow justified his choice by saying that he never wore insignias of any kind on air, regardless of whether he supported the cause or not, making his stance on the issue an essentially apolitical one. For others, the decision to refrain from wearing a poppy is more charged—and

the backlash, accordingly, more extreme. Perhaps the most high-profile conscientious poppy objector is James McClean, a footballer from Derry who has played for both English Premier League teams and the national team of the Republic of Ireland. McClean is from Creggan in Derry, as were six of the 14 unarmed civilians killed by British soldiers during Bloody Sunday. To wear the poppy, he explained to media outlets, would therefore be to honor the very soldiers who had devastated his community. Yet McClean's choice to forego the poppy jerseys donned by the rest of his teammates has garnered him boos from the stands and death threats online.

In another incident involving a prominent athlete, conservative Twitter was thrown into uproar when an official photo published by the English cricket team showed player Moeen Ali without a poppy. Ali later clarified that his pin had simply fallen off—pictures from later that day show him poppy-clad—but such statements did little to stem the tide of online abuse questioning his right to play for England. Ali, who is of Pakistani descent, has complained elsewhere of the racism he has faced in the professional cricket world; as this pseudo-event highlighted, outrage over nationalism-tinged symbols like the poppy can easily serve as a racial dog-whistle. What's more, even forgetting the



fact that the team photo incident with Ali was due to nothing more than a faulty pin, the way that Ali's critics construe the refusal to wear a poppy as a statement against purely English soldiers ignores the vast number of WWI soldiers from then-British colonies who also journeyed to the front lines.

As the fixation on the red poppy badge has mounted, simply wearing a remembrance pin is not enough—it has to be a pin of the *right kind*. In the 1930s, a number of women involved in the Peace Pledge Union were fired for wearing white poppies to promote pacifism and protest against the increasingly militaristic overtones of Remembrance Day events. In more recent times, TV presenter and Murdoch tabloid alum Piers Morgan—who spent his Remembrance Day retweeting an inane gossip article by and about himself—accused a wearer of a white poppy badge of supporting ISIS and the Nazis. Given the intense scrutiny paid to poppy etiquette, it's perhaps unsurprising that some public figures' refusal to remove their pins for fear of giving offense *has itself* engendered controversy. David Cameron declined to take off his poppy pin when requested to do so during a 2010 diplomatic visit to China that coincided with Remembrance Day—which Chinese officials interpreted gloating over the results of the Opium Wars. In another incident involving Cameron, 10 Downing Street garnered widespread public ridicule when, in an attempt to avoid poppy-rabid criticisms

about his Facebook profile picture lacking a pin, Cameron's office tried to cut the issue off at the pass by adding in crudely photoshopped version, an absurd incident that came to be known as "Poppygate."

Of course, the frenzy surrounding the presence or absence of a poppy on a Prime Minister's blazer is not the only example of a political controversy whipped up over a symbolic ornament. Similar strains can be seen in the "outcry" that surrounded Obama's decision not to wear a flag pin in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. As in the case of Ali's poppy, the flag pin was touted as a symbol of unity, but in reality became a tool to divide a supposedly virtuous moral in-group from a supposedly unvirtuous moral outgroup (a division that conveniently happened to follow lines of racial exclusion as well). Both poppy and flag pin enthusiasts seem to subscribe to a civic remix of solifidianism, in which good citizenship is achieved through not actions or words, but through beliefs and their symbols—symbols that can be easily bought and sold at that.

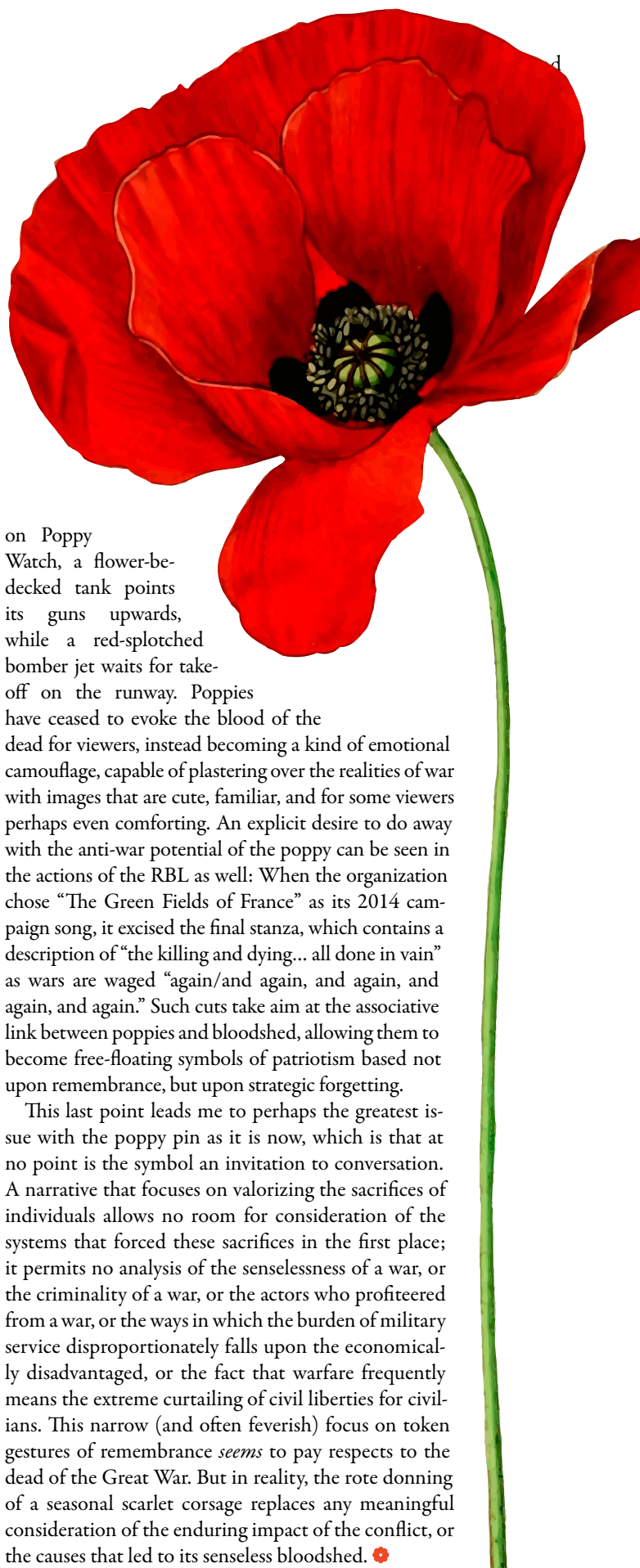
PATRIOTISM IS NOT THE ONLY SUPPOSED VIRTUE available on the market, of course: Beyond the political sphere, the corporate world is full of other instances of product-mediated virtue-signalling. In the private sector, pink-washing products with breast cancer ribbons has come under fire as a mercenary practice that burnishes the image of the corporation involved and give a consumer's self-regard a boost, while ultimately making a dubious difference in the actual funding of cancer research. Yoplait's partnership with the Susan G. Komen Foundation pledges that for every pink yogurt lid consumers mail in, the company will donate \$0.10 to research. Under such a plan, someone who fastidiously ate a container of yogurt with every meal for an entire year, licked clean every single aluminum lid, and mailed them all in would raise just over \$100, at which point it would seem a lot quicker and more effective to just ditch the yogurt and cut a check. But of course, the appeal of the yogurt is that it allows one to feel as though with every meal one is contributing to the world, which is what Yoplait and other pink-washing companies count on.

Likewise, in recent years, poppy-mania has metastasized beyond the RBL's street corner sales to encompass farflung commercial arenas eager to cash in on the Poppy-Industrial Complex. A satirical Twitter account established to document instances of this, Poppy Watch, has recorded frozen pizzas with pepperoni "poppies," poppy underwear, a poppy tag affixed to the leg of a hawk employed to catch subway pigeons (presumably remembering the fallen all the while), and a disturbing number of human-sized poppy costumes that make their wearers resemble engorged red blood cells. But beyond ludicrous examples like these, the scenes captured on Poppy Watch often accidentally disclose something about the deeper nature of Britain's poppy fetish. One image in the feed shows a supermarket meat counter with the label "All Our Meat Is British—Lest We Forget," inadvertently implying that the cutlets on display below are fresh from the battlefield. Lapses like these are indicative of how Britain's obsession with symbolic acts of commemoration has come largely at the expense of a true national reckoning with the legacy of WWI, or any of the subsequent armed conflicts in which the United Kingdom has involved itself.

In an overt manifestation of poppy critics' fears that a symbol meant to provoke contemplation about the human consequences of war has now become a way of increasing its attraction, the armed forces sometimes use poppies to decorate military equipment. In one set of images

on Poppy Watch, a flower-bedecked tank points its guns upwards, while a red-splotched bomber jet waits for take-off on the runway. Poppies have ceased to evoke the blood of the dead for viewers, instead becoming a kind of emotional camouflage, capable of plastering over the realities of war with images that are cute, familiar, and for some viewers perhaps even comforting. An explicit desire to do away with the anti-war potential of the poppy can be seen in the actions of the RBL as well: When the organization chose "The Green Fields of France" as its 2014 campaign song, it excised the final stanza, which contains a description of "the killing and dying... all done in vain" as wars are waged "again/and again, and again, and again, and again." Such cuts take aim at the associative link between poppies and bloodshed, allowing them to become free-floating symbols of patriotism based not upon remembrance, but upon strategic forgetting.

This last point leads me to perhaps the greatest issue with the poppy pin as it is now, which is that at no point is the symbol an invitation to conversation. A narrative that focuses on valorizing the sacrifices of individuals allows no room for consideration of the systems that forced these sacrifices in the first place; it permits no analysis of the senselessness of a war, or the criminality of a war, or the actors who profiteered from a war, or the ways in which the burden of military service disproportionately falls upon the economically disadvantaged, or the fact that warfare frequently means the extreme curtailing of civil liberties for civilians. This narrow (and often feverish) focus on token gestures of remembrance *seems* to pay respects to the dead of the Great War. But in reality, the rote donning of a seasonal scarlet corsage replaces any meaningful consideration of the enduring impact of the conflict, or the causes that led to its senseless bloodshed. ❁





THOSE WHO RISE AND THOSE WHO DISAPPEAR

by Erika Jost

IMAGINE A PLACE WHERE WORK AND INCOME ARE insecure; where wealthy businessmen/criminals collude with police and politicians to exploit and abuse workers; where family relationships deteriorate into violence and anger under the pressure of economic hardship; where education is a commodity few can afford; and where, in the face of this hopelessness and powerlessness, the most vulnerable communities and individuals are eaten away by drug epidemics. Imagine, if you can, such a place.

This place—at least for our immediate purposes—is a poor neighborhood in post-World War II Naples, the setting of Elena Ferrante’s blisteringly brilliant and critically acclaimed *Neapolitan Novels*. The four books follow the lives of two women from childhood into their sixties, from the 1950s to the 2010s.

One is Elena Greco, who gets educated and gets out, and writes the story of her life, the books we are reading. Hers is the traditional bildungsroman, a Dickensian tale of miraculously surviving a senselessly cruel childhood to find success, order, comfort, benevolence, and recognition in the great wide world.

The other is Lila Cerullo, Elena’s best friend, obsession, and photo-negative. As children, they bond over their shared intelligence and curiosity, but their lives diverge. As Elena gets to leave the neighborhood, Lila stays. Where Elena seeks to please, Lila fights to assert herself. Where Elena advances into the educated classes, Lila rails against the power systems that hem in her life and is knocked back at every turn. Where Elena publishes books and makes a mark on her world, the more gifted Lila figuratively and literally disappears.

Our imaginations are awash in stories like Elena’s: a hundred-billion-dollar company that started in a garage; an unemployed single mother who wrote on a manual typewriter a

book-turned-film-franchise-turned- theme park at Universal Orlando; a poverty-stricken, abused child who became a media mogul. We *need* these stories; we use them to justify a lot of misery.

But we’re not very good at the Other Stories: the ideas that never left the garage, the single mothers whose books never sold, the survivors of abuse who don’t go on to rule daytime T.V. The artistic and political genius of the *Neapolitan Novels* is the recognition, in Lila specifically, of these many, many Other Stories. Or, more accurately, the genius of these novels is the demonstration that the Other Stories are not—and maybe, under present circumstances, cannot be—told.

The Ferrante series is a searing criticism of power, inequality, and the class system. It has sold over 10 million copies, according to Wikipedia, and the first book has been developed into a series on HBO (and they’re working on season two!). The books speak to the anxieties and inane cruelties of living under a system in which *some people* enjoy security, education, safety, beauty, leisure, self-realization, and dignity, and the rest do not, and the line between these groups is drawn in a way no person of reason and good conscience can justify. The *Neapolitan Novels* are a cautionary tale, a catharsis, a call to arms, especially in the historically lopsided U.S. where wealth inequality has sharply worsened in recent decades, and where the ruling class has shown itself uninterested in addressing this situation as a problem.

Certainly our culture-makers—the thinkers and creatives at the helm of our collective imagination in this desperate political moment—jumped at the chance to praise these books’ ability to speak directly to the deepest fissures among us.

Of course I joke.

The reviews of this series—and there were many—talked

about female friendship, about feminism, about working and succeeding as a writer. None of these descriptions is wrong, exactly, but they miss the full force of the story and sap it of its strongest claims and critiques. The reviews did not discuss the class designations that rule and constrain the characters, and determine every outcome of their lives. They did not examine the systematic erasure of Lila or dissect Elena as an unreliable (really, failed) narrator of her own story. They seemed to miss the central tension in the relationship between these characters. Puzzlingly, reviewers discussed the books as a classic rags-to-riches tale but with ladies: Elena was the protagonist and Lila was seen as inconsequential, or a burden, or an obstacle, or a villain.

This interpretation is wrong, but it's wrong in an instructive way, in a way that shines light on how sharp this story really is about the limitations of art in a world carved up by inequality.

(I thought often of Elena's shortcomings as a storyteller—and the tone-deaf reviews of these books—in the wake of the 2016 election, when these same newspapers and magazines looked to J.D. Vance, the Elena Greco of Appalachia, to explain “what happened” with rural voters in the United States. A better reading of these novels could have saved everyone some time, and it could have saved anyone from feeling compelled to read J.D. Vance.)

That these reviewers empathized with Elena's plight to the exclusion of Lila's is not a surprising move: By now we are used to mainstream publications being written for, by, and about Elenas and generally reacting to the world's Lilas with perplexity, disinterest, disgust, pity, or outright hostility. (The novels themselves tell us this: The rich and powerful are a group of people who,

Elena observes as a teen visiting the posh part of town, “look only at each other.”)

But this reading of the novels—the praise of Elena and the vilification of Lila—is lazy and wrong, and I think we should take issue when the class provided the time and platform to read and interpret can't even do that properly. (The novels, masterpieces that they are, warn us about that, too.)

The narrative force of the story is Elena's stated resolution to understand Lila, to prevent her friend from disappearing by writing about her, and Lila's supposed insistence on remaining elusive (Lila has, in fact, forbidden Elena from writing about her, for reasons that are not explained but can be guessed at). This is the drama that kicks off the narrative in Book I: Lila has disappeared and Elena will write her down. Here is Elena after learning in a phone call about Lila's disappearance:

She wanted not only to disappear herself, now, at the age of sixty-six, but also to eliminate the entire life that she had left behind.

I was really angry.

We'll see who wins this time, I said to myself. I turned on the computer and began to write—all the details of our story, everything that still remained in my memory.

And here is the near-end of Book IV, the end of the novel the character Elena is writing:

It's only and always the two of us who are involved: she who wants me to give what her nature and circumstances keep her from giving, I who can't give what she demands; she who gets angry at my inadequacy and out of spite wants to reduce me to nothing, as she has done with herself, I who have written for months and months and months to give her a form whose boundaries won't dissolve, and defeat her, and calm her, and so in turn calm myself.

(There are five more pages, the end of the *Neapolitan Novels*, that contain a stomach-churning twist which should definitively cast doubt on Elena's ability and intentions as a writer; I wonder if maybe these pages were left out of the reviewers' copies completely.)

MANY REVIEWERS TOOK THE FICTIONAL ELENA at her word, that she was simply trying to understand her friend and that, in the end, the writing of her novel and Elena's own professional successes redeem the tragedy of Lila's fate. Sure, Lila's genius is trampled to inconsequentiality by a harsh life. Sure, Lila's efforts to grow her family's shoe business are co-opted by the local Camorra crime syndicate, whom Lila hates. Sure, her daughter is killed or kidnapped as a young child, her brother dies of a drug overdose, and her son becomes an addict. Sure, Lila is cast aside or ignored by their grade-school teacher (she is a “pleb” whom Elena should avoid), by her bosses, by her doctors, by Elena herself. Sure, Lila literally disappears without a trace.

But don't worry, these reviewers comfort us, Elena won't let Lila be forgotten. Because Elena has written *a book about her*.

Here is the *New York Times*' take on Elena in its review of the final novel:

Elena lives on to make her plodding progress from vulnerability to education to self-realization. She becomes, in short, normal



— and this, Ferrante suggests, is where the female drive toward autonomy, with all its racking, successive waves, will ultimately deliver us: into a reality that is, if not transformed, at least better adjusted. Elena and Lila may both suspect that Lila possesses the greater, more radical brilliance. But the achievement of these novels belongs solely to Elena.

Why would we want “radical brilliance” when we can simply be “better adjusted” to the injustices of the world, to the decimation of our friends and communities?

The *New York Review of Books* echoed this contrast: Elena is the subject, the actor, and doer, and Lila serves as little more than her “inspiration”:

*Elena has the discipline to channel her gifts, as she shows in the writing of her story. But she could not have done so without the inspiration of Lila, who is the more brilliant but too mercurial to fulfill her promise, whether as an author (the story she wrote as a child, *The Blue Fairy*, mesmerizes Elena), shoe designer, or entrepreneur.*

This reviewer’s explanation of Lila’s creative and business failures is...interesting. Lila is “mercurial.” Forget that Lila was a 10-year-old child reliant on her father to pay for schooling he couldn’t afford and didn’t value for her, a father who responded to her relentless requests to attend middle school by throwing her through their apartment window; forget that Lila returned from her honeymoon so bruised from beatings (related to her arguments with her husband about his handling of her family’s shoe business) that she was too ashamed to be seen by Elena; forget that Lila is later brutalized as a worker in a sausage factory, forget that her romantic and business partner is wrongfully imprisoned, forget about the drugs, forget about the kidnapping of her child. Forget about Lila’s lack of access, her lack of options, her material vulnerability even as she fights for dignity and autonomy. Forget that every expression of her dazzling brilliance has been met at best by indifference and at worst by outright violence. Lila’s just got a bad case of the “mercurials”!

The *New Yorker* followed suit, casting Elena’s artistic effort as an admirable expression of the suffering, disenfranchisement, and collapse of Lila and the rest of their community:

To Lila’s oppressive disorder...[Elena] will oppose her own, once-despised instinct for order. Dispersal will meet containment; dialect, Italian. This is an old literary trick, or at least as old as Proust: to tell a story of pain and defeat and then, at the end, say that it will all be redeemed by art, by a book—indeed, the book you are reading. Lena will write for months and months, for as long as it takes, she says, to give Lila “a form whose boundaries won’t dissolve.” She will thus calm her friend, and herself—and, to reach beneath the metaphor, rescue life from grief, clarity from chaos, without denying the existence of grief and chaos. She pulls her chair up to her desk. “We’ll see who wins this time,” she says. Art wins. We win.

Who is the “we” here? The *New Yorker* can admit—and does not seem bothered by—the fact that the winning “we” does not include Lila. (In fact, I would argue that no one “wins,” least of all we as readers and Elena as a writer.) It is troubling

that this reviewer sees Elena as a success, and it is troubling that she shares Elena’s resentment against Lila, who has done little more than suffer and fail the entire length of four novels.

Lila’s disposability is again articulated in an *Atlantic* review in which the reviewer describes Lila cutting herself out of her family pictures, one of her attempts to make herself disappear. “But Lila’s ambition backfires—she’s more present in those butchered snapshots with their glaring voids than she was in photographic form.” Again, the reviewer does not seem bothered by the fact that the most accurate and poetic representation of Lila is absence. Nor does the reviewer consider that Lila herself may be exercising some artistic agency in this act.

In these reviews, Lila’s unrelenting suffering is not taken seriously in part because Lila is not seen as a real person. The *Slate* reviewer states this unequivocally:

In truth, Lila is a character so extreme, so unadulterated in all her qualities—fierceness, courage, defiance, honesty, resourcefulness, determination, self-reliance, and, eventually, pessimism—that she never seems persuasively real. Actual human beings relent every now and then. They doubt. Instead, Lila is a personification, the distillation of everything admirable, if also often harsh, in the neighborhood that Elena has tried to leave.

IN THIS REVIEWER’S WORLD, BRIGHT, CREATIVE people like Lila who survive in poverty and aspire to a better world simply cannot be real. There are no people who suffer and fight as Lila suffers and fights. I will grant that the version of Lila we get through Elena’s eyes is purposefully incomplete. We don’t know how Lila relents, we don’t know Lila’s doubts, because we never intimately know Lila’s point of view. This is key.

But how do you read about this captivating woman battling for her existence around the edges of Elena’s life and not want to know more about her, to hear her story from her directly? To say Lila does not seem real betrays a lack of empathy that feels insurmountable. Lila embodies the forgotten, the misunderstood, the lost, the losers of what feels like a social and economic lottery. Under global capitalism in the 20th and 21st centuries, that is a lot of people. The blindness of these reviewers to Lila matches the political blindnesses of the class of people who benefit from these structures.

But this is not just about bad politics; it’s bad reading interpretation, too. There is ample evidence in the novels, even barring the ending, that Elena is not to be trusted as a narrator. She herself tells us; she tells us what she doesn’t understand about her friend, about her neighborhood, about the very subjects of her books.

For instance, she tells us she is uninterested in politics and the material conflicts of the neighborhood. As an adult, Elena returns to live in Naples for creative inspiration, and she resents Lila’s efforts to interest her in their provincial concerns: “[Lila] didn’t care in the least about freedom of expression and the battle between backwardness and modernization. She was interested only in the sad local disputes. She wanted me, here, now, to contribute to the clash with real people, people we had

known since childhood..." Elena cannot muster up the interest. "[B]ecause of [Elena's] *respectable* identity," she has "lost... the capacity to understand." Elena addresses herself:

...you're too well-meaning, you want to play the democratic lady who mixes with the working class, you like to say to the newspapers: I live where I was born, I don't want to lose touch with my reality; but you're ridiculous, you lost touch long ago, you faint at the stink of filth, of vomit, of blood.

THE TURMOIL IN ELENA ABOUT HER limitations in understanding her origins is important but unaddressed in these reviews: Why can't Elena as an adult understand the place where she grew up and where she currently lives? Why does she remain stubbornly ignorant about the political realities of this world and, by extension, about her oldest and closest friend? This is not the good-faith effort of a writer or a person trying to capture Lila and their shared community.

Even when Elena's willful blindness was acknowledged by the reviewers, it was to unsatisfying ends. The *Guardian* grapples with Elena's decision to throw her friend's childhood journals into the river at the beginning of Book II. Lila, worried her new husband will read them, entrusts the journals to Elena; Elena pores over them and, feeling "exasperated," disliking "feeling Lila on me and in me," drops the journals into the river. The *Guardian* review rationalizes this callous act: While Elena "minds her language, Lila says what she likes, but nothing that can be published. That's why Elena throws Lila's notes away: though hope remains in the box, what Lila had to say must have been unbearable." The underlying premise that we should not be writing or reading things that are "unbearable" goes unexamined, along with the contradiction between Elena's stated purpose—keeping her friend from disappearing—and her actions—tossing her friend's journals into a river. This level of cognitive dissonance takes a lot of practice.

The logic of these reviews is trapped in a worldview in which Elena the self-realized class-climber deserves to exist, while Lila—because she is too radically brilliant, because she describes a reality that is unbearable and disordered, because she is too "mercurial"—does not. Materially, the great difference in Elena's and Lila's lives is that, when they are 10 and their teacher recommends they both continue their schooling, only Elena's family pays for her to attend middle school and beyond. Lila's does not. Everything else flows from this: Elena plods steadily up the economic and social ladder, taking on the language, behavior, and values of the elite to join their class; Lila drifts in ways bewildering to Elena, carried by waves of poverty, abuse, and what Elena perceives as self-destruction.

In the end, based on this accident of access to formal education, Elena matters and Lila does not. In the end we have "their" story, in Elena's words, from Elena's perspective, in Elena's novel. We are meant to be disturbed by this outcome; we are meant to be unsatisfied by Elena's pat explanation of her rags-to-riches life.

Elena's story is captivating, but the great question of Lila remains unanswered.

But still—*still*—this chorus of reviews is unable to see beyond Elena.

To understand how truly bad and wrong this interpretation is—that Elena has imposed order on disorder, has rescued "clarity from chaos"—we will analyze the ending. (Ferrante's talents as a novelist cannot be overstated. She cares about being entertaining, she cares about plot and twists and dramatic reveals, she cares about keeping her readers flipping pages. The *Neapolitan Novels* have good politics, but before that they are just really, really, really good books.) While Elena Greco's novel may end with a tidy button, Elena Ferrante's novel ends in turmoil.

To explain the gut-punch of the ending, I have to explain the significance of Elena's and Lila's dolls.

Some of Elena and Lila's first bonding experiences came from playing with their dolls, Tina and Nu, respectively. One day, they exchange dolls, and Lila purposely drops Tina through the grating over a basement window. (Elena describes this as a time period during which Lila "began to subject [her] to proofs of courage that had nothing to do with school." To Lila, this time period was...well, we don't know.) Elena drops Lila's doll in response ("What you do I do") and they go together to the basement to retrieve the dolls. The dolls are not there, and Lila convinces Elena that she has seen Don Achille, the loan shark, the neighborhood villain of their childhood, steal their dolls.

This memory is temporally tangled with the revelation that Elena would be attending middle school and Lila would not. As Lila continues to bargain with her family to continue her education, she decides that she and Elena will confront Don Achille and demand the return of their dolls. After some confusion and disbelief at the accusation, Don Achille gives them money to buy new dolls and to remember that the new dolls are a gift from him. Elena thanks him; Lila does not. (Ferrante truly does not miss a beat; Elena the social climber is characteristically eager to please people in positions of authority. Lila, for good reason, is suspicious of and combative with these people, even at a young age.)

Elena and Lila instead use the money to buy a copy of *Little Women*, a book that stirs their imaginations and inspires their dreams about writing books and getting rich. (Incidentally, this is what Elena ends up doing.)

THE SUBJECT OF THE DOLLS RESURFACES PERIODICALLY in their relationship. Lila marries Stefano, the son of Don Achille, full of conviction that her new husband will use his money and power to improve the neighborhood, abandoning the violent and cruel ways of his father and their childhood. After that dream is shattered and Lila shares with Elena their violent fighting, Lila reflects on their childhood confrontation of Don Achille and expresses regret for taking the money, feeling tricked by both Stefano and his father: "...ever since that moment I've been wrong about everything." There is no further explanation.

Elena brings up the dolls again when they are pregnant with

their youngest children at the same time:

Do you remember, I asked. She seemed bewildered, she had the faint smile of someone struggling to recapture a memory. Then, when I whispered to her, with a laugh, how fearful we were, how bold, climbing up to the door of the terrible Don Achille Carracci, the father of her future husband, and accusing him of the theft of our dolls, she began to find it funny, we laughed like idiots...

Again, we have no further explanation of Lila's reaction.

The next reference comes at the very end of the series, those final five pages that occur after Elena Greco has completed her novel. Elena spends the morning playing with her dog and reading the newspaper, and then she returns to find in her mailbox a package wrapped in newspaper. It contains the lost dolls from her childhood.

But no Lila.

Elena, as usual, tries to divine Lila's meaning. She accuses Lila of deception, of dragging Elena through a story over which Lila had the ultimate power all along. Or maybe the dolls are a sign of love, that Lila is traveling the world and enjoying life. The point, again, is that Elena will never know, and neither will we. She looks at the dolls: "Seeing how cheap and ugly they were I felt confused.

Unlike stories, real life, when it has passed, inclines toward obscurity, not clarity. I thought: now that Lila has let herself be seen so plainly, I must resign myself to not seeing her anymore."

So: Lila has had these dolls for 50 years. Elena and Lila bond over the dolls as children, the dolls' disappearance plays a critical role in Elena's path to becoming a professional writer, and Elena and Lila discuss the dolls' disappearance at significant moments in their lives. And Lila has had these dolls this whole fucking time. Why? Why does she take them to begin with? Why does she hide them from Elena? Why doesn't she tell Elena about them? Why does she compel Elena to confront Don Achille about them? Why does she finally leave them with Elena in the end? What does Lila mean when she says she's been wrong about everything since the dolls? Is she wrong then or is she wrong now, and about what? What is Lila's purpose?

Elena doesn't know. *This* is how the series ends: not with the triumph of Elena's art but with its failure. Not with order and clarity but with Elena and the reader scrambling after Lila for answers. The loss is tragic, and we feel it acutely at this unresolved ending. The triumph here is absolutely not Elena's, who cannot understand her friend, who cannot understand the story of her own life. If anything, the triumph of these novels belongs to Lila, who was able to poke through this medium that was not constructed for her, this book she was not able to write and publish herself, to communicate the harrowing story of her disappearance.

The triumph also belongs to Ferrante. Art in general and novels in particular are as co-opted as anything by global capital-

ism and its class system: Books generally are written for, by, and about Elenas. And yet the *Neapolitan Novels*, at their critical moment, turn the attention entirely to the Other Story, the story that was not told.

I closed the back cover of the last installment and my first thought was: I wonder if Ferrante will write this story from Lila's perspective.

Followed immediately by: Oh, no, she won't.

And then: Oh, no. She *can't*.

That's the whole point. Although Elena (and maybe Ferrante herself) shares a background with Lila, to find stability and success Elena takes on the language, behavior, and values of the elite; from this position of power, Elena tries to understand her friend, their relationship, and by extension her own story. She fails. For arbitrary and ordinary reasons, Lila (like nearly every other person from their neighborhood, like most people everywhere) does not become a part of this elite. She struggles on the margins of Elena's life, and then she disappears entirely. (The

Ferrante's real message is that class and power are the 'sickness' of the world.

other people from Elena's childhood disappear in their own ways: prison, drugs, death.) This is the tragedy of these novels, of class division: the loss of the vast majority of people, the loss of unknown and untold talents like Lila's, and the resulting ignorance of the powerful few whose construction of reality we are all beholden to.

I think this book should be taught in schools, though not as it was reviewed by these media outlets. I think it should be passed around leftist book clubs. I'm glad that it's risen to such popularity as a story about "female friendship" (almost like actual friendship!) but don't let this billing obscure its real message: that class and power are the "sickness" of the world.

Get away for good, far from the life we've lived since birth. Settle in well-organized lands where everything really is possible. I had fled, in fact. Only to discover, in the decades to come, that I had been wrong, that it was a chain with larger and larger links: the neighborhood was connected to the city, the city to Italy, Italy to Europe, Europe to the whole planet. And this is how I see it today: it's not the neighborhood that's sick, it's not Naples, it's the entire earth, it's the universe, or universes. And shrewdness means hiding and hiding from oneself the true state of things.

The world is made up of a few Elenas who look only at each other to hide from themselves the "true state of things" and many, many more Lilas at various stages of disappearance. In this reality, in the reality of class division and inequality, the world continues to be "sick," the powerless continue to disappear, and the powerful can do nothing more than scratch their heads and, like Elena, fail to understand why. ✚



A chat with **GLENN GREENWALD** *about animals*

In addition to his reporting and commentary on national security and civil liberties, Intercept journalist Glenn Greenwald is a passionate supporter of animal rights. Current Affairs editor Nathan J. Robinson recently spoke to Greenwald about his dogs, the morality of meat consumption, and the way atrocities are concealed.

CA: You are known as a man of many dogs. If people know one thing about you beyond your journalism they probably know that you have a lot of dogs. How many is it now — I hesitate to ask?

GG: Well, the number varies because we're self-delusional. So a lot of times we'll pick up and bring to our house a dog, and give it this, like, "temporary guest status," which is just our psychological tactic for not accepting that we've done something incredibly stupid and picked up another dog. So right now we've got 24 dogs, plus what I would call "two guest dogs." So the total is 26 but only 24 are officially residents.

CA: Are you able to keep track of all the dogs' names?

GG: It's funny that you say that, because I used to wonder that about people who had 12 or 14 children. Do they know the names of all their kids? And do they even recognize them? Once you get to so many, is it even possible to keep track? And I used to genuinely wonder that about people with like 12 kids, and now when people ask me, "Do you know the names of all 24 of your dogs, I get so offended. "How dare you! Of course. I have extremely personal relationships with each of them."

CA: So 24 dogs is not too many dogs, then.

GG: It's funny, because I talk to my husband, David, all the time

about how we should be more timid when people ask us how many dogs we have. Just saying 24 as though it's a normal thing, because we forget that 99.9 percent of the people on the planet think that you ought to be institutionalized. They think that you're a hoarder, or one of those crazy cat ladies caught with like 186 cats in her one-and-a-half room apartment, and the health department comes and arrests her. They're all rescue dogs. We foster them. We place many dozens, probably hundreds, in homes. We purposely live in places in Rio where there's a lot of property for the dogs. So it's not like we're living in a studio apartment with 24 dogs. I mean we live in a place that on purpose has a lot of outdoor space, so that it can accommodate dogs.

CA: I think that answer is not going to convince anyone that it's not insane to have 24 dogs, but I still don't understand — are there fights? I don't get how 24 dogs can inhabit a space together. I mean, I've just watched that video that you did about your shelter where you say that dogs actually get along. They all did seem to be getting along, and it seems very strange, because when you think of a lot of animals together, you think, "that can't go well."

GG: I mean, dogs are complicated, social creatures. And it is really fascinating. I grew up with one dog, and two dogs, and kind of the typical dog experiences. So I didn't realize the complexity of their social behavior. One of the fascinating things is that cliques form within the dog packs, and they're extremely difficult to predict. Cer-

tain dogs hang out with other dogs, as their friends, in certain places in the house, or outside. The most seemingly disparate dogs end up as kind of sub-parts of the pack. And then there are two or three dogs that can't actually be near one another. They are dominant females, and they will fight. So they kind of have to be let out of places in shifts. So there's some complexity to it. But by and large, they all know each other, and with very rare exception, they won't fight. Occasionally, a fight will break out, like with children, if they just are in a bad mood or whatever, and we just pick them up and throw them in the pool, because that's the only way you can separate dogs determined to kill each other. Other than that, it usually works out pretty smoothly.

CA: Is there anything else that you learned about dogs over the course of owning 24-plus two guest dogs?

GG: I know this is going to sound a little bit trite and syrupy, and Hallmark-ish, but a lot of times, when people hear that I rescue dogs, or people talk about adopting a dog, they almost talk about it like it's an act of charity. Like you're doing something for a living being in need. And you are. But the reality is that each and every dog has an individual personality. They all have a kind of wisdom that human beings really don't naturally have. I know it sounds odd to people who don't really have dogs, because they think that dogs are just of inferior intelligence, and of course, there are a lot of types of intelligence where humans are superior to dogs. But just like dogs have superior hearing, and superior sense of smell, by many magnitudes, as compared to humans, there's also just things that they intuit, and ways that they interpret the world, that you can actually learn from them about how to just be in the present, about how to let past traumas go, about how to connect with people empathetically. You cannot trick a dog with your emotions, so if you fake cry, but you're really happy, they won't think you're sad. But if you're really sad and you try and hide it from them, they'll know that you're sad. They're extremely empathetic. They connect on a very emotional level, because they've evolved to really receive and understand human emotions, which is why we call them "man's best friend." So each and every dog does have an individualized wisdom that comes from whatever their experience is, or breed it, or just, individuality is. So every dog that we've picked up has given something to us as well.

CA: Animal rights and animal welfare issues more broadly have been interesting to you. You wrote a long piece fairly recently about pigs, and made the case that these traits of emotional depth are not actually unique to man's best friend—they are widely present in the animal kingdom. And you wrote that pigs are "among the most intelligent, social, and emotionally complicated species, capable of great joy, play, love, connection, suffering, and pain." That raises disturbing implications about a number of human practices, since a lot of people recognize that dogs are wonderful, and they keep dogs as pets. But they slaughter pigs by the billion.

GG: Well, that's right. I consider myself a fairly new arrival to the movement of animal rights. And I've spent a long time thinking about why it took me so long to get there, because I've loved dogs my entire life. And yet I would support industries and consume the products of industries that would torture and slaughter, as you say, by the billions, pigs and cows, and chicken, and turkeys, and the like, and goats. And so the question that ultimately I ended up having to confront was: "Why is that if we see a dog being abused we feel so morally outraged, to the point that we want that person to go to prison?" And in fact, in the United States, in all 50 states, they *will* go to prison if they inflict suffering and torture and gratuitous pain on an animal the same way they would a human, whereas we are completely indifferent to similar types of suffering and torture and pain being gratuitously inflicted on the animals that serve as our food, like pigs, and cows, and goats and the like.

And so for a while, you can tell yourself that there are moral distinctions between the animals that you value and the animals that you don't. But none of them are sustainable upon any kind of minimal scrutiny. As you just said, if intellect is your moral metric, there are animals more intelligent, by most metrics, than dogs, including pigs, including fish, including large mammals. Why does the internet go crazy when it sees a lion, or an orangutan, or a leopard killed in Africa? While your outrage is boiling over, you're shoving into your mouth a carcass of an animal at least as intelligent, if not more so, than the one you're so angry had just been killed. So none of it really makes moral sense, and ultimately what I realized is that the reason why we're able and willing to sustain this industrial, systemic, global and systemic torture of animals is because we just turn away from it. We don't look at it. We don't watch it. Laws are erected to make sure we don't have to see it. It's exactly the same model for how we allow our government, for 20 years now, to go around bombing multiple Muslim countries because we just don't need to know the victims' names, we don't need to learn about the aspirations that have been extinguished, we don't see their charred bodies. We just pretend that it's not happening. We only know in the abstract at most that it is happening. And the more, as kind of a journalist, that I started looking into the realities of factory farming, the more I got forced to accept that these are moral atrocities on a massive scale, which cannot be tolerated, if you're a person who likes certain kinds of animals, there's no way any longer to distinguish it, morally, ethically, politically, or in any other way, and allow it to happen.

CA: If you confront the animal welfare issue head on, the implications really are very, very disturbing. And it seems to me to be very simple logic. Animals are sentient. We all know that they can suffer. All of the distinctions between animal species kind of break down, as you say, and once you accept that, then it really does seem as though we're complicit in something that is just, given the scale of factory farming, absolutely atrocious. And that's really hard to accept, in part because you don't want to think of people you love as being bad people. You don't want to think of yourself as being a bad person who is causing horrible pain and suffering. And in some ways, it doesn't seem like you're causing pain and suffering. It seems so normal to eat meat. There's a kind of cognitive dissonance that causes us to turn away. Would you agree with that?

GG: Oh, absolutely. Even now that I'm doing a lot of activism, and a lot of journalism in this field, every time I talk to the incredibly brave animal rights activists, the people who go in the middle of the night into factory farms to film it, so that we don't turn away any longer, or even rescue symbolic animals from the billions that are about to go to the slaughterhouse, who are on the verge of death, and then they take them to a veterinarian to save them, and then get prosecuted under felony laws for doing so.

I brace myself for every time I'm interviewing one of them where I get to the point where they're about to describe to me what it is that they saw when they entered into the slaughterhouses, or the places where these animals are kept, for example, pigs in pens that are so tiny that they can never, in their entire lives, turn around. Literally, they just stay indoors, they can never see the sun, they just keep forcing them to reproduce, they step on their own babies, they never turn around in their entire lives.

So when you hear that, when you hear about the injury, and the disease in which they're all wallowing, the emotional suffering of these pigs from isolation, because they're social animals. Just like humans—if you keep them in prolonged solitary confinement, they'll go insane. Most of them go insane. They start gnawing on their metal bars, desperately gnawing on the metal bars until their teeth fall out, while their gums are bleeding. Just things that are so horrific that even, as I said, now that I know about it, now that it's one of my primary causes, I still

don't actually want to hear much about it. I often scroll fast past videos of it. So I do think it is all dependent on just making sure that we don't become aware of the consequences of our actions. And that's why I say so many draconian laws have been put into place that actually characterize animal rights activists as terrorists, or prosecutes them under felony laws. They've gone to prison for years, simply for exposing the realities of this industry we support, because this industry knows that human beings of good conscience won't continue to permit it to continue if we're actually aware of what it is that's being done.

And let me just add one last point, which is this fascinating thing that I've noticed: My husband and I adopted two children last year, 10 and eight, and they came out of a orphanage in northeastern Brazil, which is one of the poorest regions in the country, and they were malnourished. And the only thing they ate, ever, was meat with rice and beans. And because they were malnourished, we couldn't really change their diet quickly, and there was so much change with adoption anyway. So we didn't want to change the diet. But I wanted them to know what it was they were consuming. I just wanted them to know what they were eating, even though I was going to leave it up to them to make the decision. We would go to a farm, and we would play with chickens, or goats, or we would see cows, then we'd talk about how beautiful the cows were. And then when they would get meat on their plate, or chicken on their plate, I would say "Hey, do you remember those chickens that we played with? That's what was killed to give you that food." And they were so angry at me, like I had done something, and they never want to hear it. I always find that fascinating, because if it really is so natural for us to just slaughter animals, with whom even children develop an emotional bond and connection, why are they so angry when I make them aware of what has been done to feed them? Why aren't they just indifferent to it the way you would if you said, "Hey, a plant was *used* and the fruits of what it grows was used to feed you?" They would say, "oh, that's beautiful, that's awesome." But if I say, "Hey, a cow is slaughtered in order to give you that slab of meat that used to be part of the cow," they get really angry. Why is that, if it's so natural?

CA: I've been a vegetarian for 10 years, and sometimes people get defensive about eating meat even if you just tell them you're vegetarian. You don't say it with any particular judgement, but just telling them you don't eat meat makes them uncomfortable about the fact that they do.

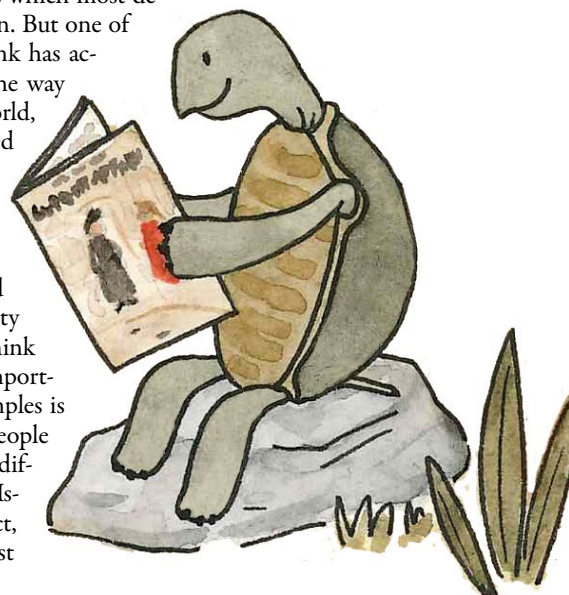
To bring up a parallel, you also wrote recently about the controversy with Texas' law requiring public officials to swear that they won't boycott Israel. I feel as if there are many examples of things where people in power know that if people were allowed to confront the truth of the factual situation, they will be morally repelled. And so those with interests to protect are willing to violate basic standards of free speech, because if we allowed speech there would be such a risk that people would turn against something very obviously indefensible.

GG: I think it's a crucial point. One of the reasons why I've devoted myself with such vehemence to defending free speech, first as a lawyer, and now as a journalist, is because I do think so much human evil depends upon manipulating other people's perceptions, and concealing critical information about how the world really works. And censorship is one of the primary means to do that. There are others, like stigmatizing people who dissent from orthodoxies, and the like. And before I started writing about animals, I spent most of my time as a journalist writing about the War on Terror. And I remember I had this epiphany once, I was in Canada when the parliament was attacked. It ended up being attacked by somebody who was from a Muslim family, but had a long history of mental health struggles, and certainly the mental health struggles played a far greater role in the decision to attack the Parliament than any religious or political convictions. But when it

happened, of course it was immediately because he had an Arab name, and was from a Muslim family, so it was depicted as a terror attack. And he killed one person, a young security guard who worked in Ottawa in front of the Parliament. And for a week, when I was in Canada, there was nothing but profiles of his life, interviews with his grieving relatives, examination of his childhood, of what he wanted to do. The prime minister went to his funeral. His name was just flooding everybody's brain, because he was one of *our* victims. And everybody was just so angry at the idea of terrorism. And yet, Canada was a country that had been at war for 16 years by that point in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Libya, in other places. And not only could no Canadians name a single victim of any of those wars, literally not one of them who have been killed by their own government—they barely even knew their own government was at war. I kept hearing: "Why would anyone want to come inflict any kind of violence on Canada? We're such a loving peaceful nation." When in reality, they're flying fighter jets over multiple countries all over the world, and dropping bombs that are killing people. It's so concealed from them, that reality, that they weren't lying. That is really the perception that they've been fed, because how else would they allow their government to continue to keep killing people around the world in a way that was compatible with how they want to think about themselves? And I think you're absolutely right that that's the same scheme that over and over and over is what enables and empowers evil acts to take place: just preventing people from knowing their reality.

CA: I wrote an article a while back examining the way people defend the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, because I was very interested in the arguments that are made. They never, ever, ever discuss what it actually means to vaporize a city with an atomic weapon. So they would say, "well of course it was horrific," and the word "horrific" would be all you needed to capture the reality. But if you say, "yes, we incinerated thousands of children in front of their mothers' eyes," then it becomes nearly impossible to make the same utilitarian argument. So you kind of have to downplay and avoid confronting the human reality if you're going to sustain certain arguments, where the arguments on the surface look like they work, but they only work because you've blotted out so much of the real world.

GG: I think you actually see promising changes in a lot of different realms as a result of internet technology. Because if you look at how people started talking about the internet when it first proliferated and became widely used, there were a lot of utopian promises made about what its effects would be, some of which have been fulfilled, some others which most decidedly have not been. But one of the things that I think has actually transformed the way that we live, as a world, is that it has changed the way information gets disseminated. Because of the ease with which people can now film and disseminate the reality that takes place. I think one of the most important and blatant examples is how, worldwide, people now think so much differently about the Israel-Palestine conflict, because instead of just



allowing two or three pro-Israel reporters into Gaza or the West Bank, everybody who lives there now has a cell phone, and internet access, and a Twitter and Facebook account, and can upload the families who are dead as a result of Israeli bombs. Or there's lots of people who have access to cameras who can film kids on beaches, kids being shot by Israeli fighter jets recklessly, or indiscriminately, or snipers and the like. And it has really radically changed how people perceive Israel, going from the plucky little democracy that occasionally and accidentally kills innocent people, to this reckless occupier that has no regard for Palestinian life, that treats them essentially like rats are treated, easily extinguishable. So it has really shifted how the world thinks about this issue for no reason other than the fact that we've changed the information that is now available about it. And I really do believe that the cause of the next generation, or one of the causes of the next generation, is going to be confronting the ethical horrors of the agricultural industry, and the way in which our food supply depends on the infliction of extreme levels of gruesome torture on living beings that are, as you said, sentient, and capable of suffering, and do suffer, and feel love, and feel loss, and feel hurt. It's just morally unsustainable, if we end up having to confront the reality of it, and all of this technology is now making us confront it, and I think you're going to see that in more and more areas.

CA: Because I wanted to confront you with the strongest possible criticisms of your position, I was trying to look up arguments against animal rights. But honestly, they're really hard to come by. They're really quite flimsy. They say "if morality is a concept that applies only to human rights, it's a concept that should apply only to humans," but it's argument by assertion.

GG: It's classic question begging, right? It's not called question begging in the colloquial sense, where everything that's called question begging, but actual question begging. So the question is, why is the life of humans worth preserving, but the lives of animals are so worthless that we can just freely extinguish them, and on the way, inflict pain on them. And the answer becomes "humans are meant to live and thrive where it's permissible to kill animals. So, the question is answered only by begging the question. That's the classic example of it.

I think for a long time, one of the arguments has been intellect, and I think it's very morally troublesome to start determining how much you believe life ought to be valued based on intellect. That has led to eugenic theories in the past where people of a certain IQ were deemed dispensable. Hitler notoriously wanted to kill off people who he regarded as idiots by using IQ tests that Nazi scientists were developing. We don't generally think that people who are more intelligent have more moral worth, or inherent worth than people who are less intelligent. And again, you look at how we treat dogs versus how we treat more intelligent species, or at least species as intelligent, such as pigs, and the distinction breaks down even further. And then there's the really interesting question of when we do get to the point, which is rapidly approaching, where we do have some form of artificial intelligence, which on some level is autonomous, which definitely will be more intelligent by every metric than the standard human brain, even the best human brain, the best functioning human brain. What arguments would we have as to why whatever we want to call that, that superior intelligence shouldn't essentially use us for whatever it decides benefits it? What moral strictures do we have to justify why our lives ought to be preserved if intelligence is the metric?

CA: I always think, "What argument will I make when the aliens ask why they shouldn't eat me?" I want to have a good response.

GG: I'm sorry to say, Nathan, I don't think there is one. It's interesting because the only morally legitimate answer you could give is "because all life is valuable, even lifeforms that are less intelligent, and I have lived my life in accordance with that principle, by ensuring that I never

contribute to the extinguishing of life that I regard as inferior, by not consuming them unnecessarily as food.

CA: And they'll say, "Well I don't share that belief."

GG: Or they may say and I've also read Noam Chomsky, and I agree with your moral proposition that we ought to treat others the way we want to be treated, and use that as our moral guide, as the Bible taught, and I therefore find your argument compelling.

CA: I want to end by talking about one thing that you are, in fact, doing on animal welfare. You have recently founded a shelter for dogs, and you shelter homeless people and animals together. What are you doing, how is it working?

GG: We were working with the homeless population that lived on the street with their animals, and started realizing that the bond between them was more deep, more profound, it's way deeper and more profound than the standard human-animal bond, as deep and profound as it is, where humans have other sources of fulfillment and happiness, because they don't depend quite as much on the dog. And same for the dog. If the dog has lots of people around, and kids, and toys, and other dogs, they don't need the human as much. But the human that lives on the street with his or her homeless animal, they basically are the only thing they have in the world, and so the bond becomes even stronger and more inspirational, and more steeped in love and mutual dependence and connection.

And so I thought about "how can we tap into that?" and we first did a couple of films that were produced by Laura Poitras profiling a couple of those cases, and then decided to build a shelter based on that model that was designed not only to rescue, and then place for adoption as many abandoned animals as we can, but to employ homeless people who have already demonstrated an affinity for animals, so that we can teach them how we work with social workers who specialize in homelessness, they teach them how to manage income, how to open a bank account, and eventually how to find a apartment and then get permanent employment. Basically to re-integrate them into society. And we know if we're helping 200 dogs and 15 homeless people every six months, in the scope of the world, where millions of dogs are euthanized every day, and millions and millions of human beings are living on the street, that as individual cases, it's still a moral good. Every time you decrease suffering, you increase fulfillment of living beings. But in the scope of the problem, we know that it doesn't do very much, quantitatively, so the idea is to use my platform, to use my husband's platform, encourage other people to use theirs as you're doing, to shine a light on the capacity of this model to tap into this unique synergy, and inspire other models around the world, to encourage people who have a lot of money to fund models like this, because I do think that one of the interesting things is that when you work with animals, it's true that you're not just helping the animals, you're increasing human beings' capacity for empathy, for compassion, for connection. A lot of human beings, a lot of us have trouble psychologically opening ourselves up emotionally to other human beings, whereas we're willing to with animals. That's why dogs are incredibly useful therapy tools for autistic children, for people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Animals can really open up this whole vista of emotional awakening, and spirituality, and compassion. And I see that obviously, each dog that we help is really fulfilling, it's important unto itself. But I do see the model, and the attempt to inspire other people to do some more things, or even things based on the same principles that are different in other fields as the ultimate goal. ✚

Support Glenn's animal shelter here:

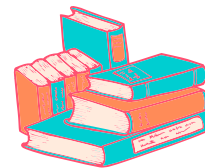
<https://www.gofundme.com/homeless-people-animals-together>

A CITY'S SHOPPING LIST

(IF IT HAD JEFF BEZOS' MONEY)

Estimates of Jeff Bezos' wealth vary, but according to a January report from Bloomberg, the zero-tax-paying, warehouse-worker-abusing, dick-pic-sending Amazon founder has a net worth of \$137 billion. As per the terms of his contentious divorce settlement, his entire fortune (yes, estimated net worth and all, not even liquid assets!) has been bestowed upon a random medium-sized US city of 150,000 people. What will this lucky city be able to buy with \$137,000,000,000? Much, much, much more than you'd think.

- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner (\$20 per meal) for every city resident, every single day, for 10 years: **\$32.85 billion**
- 10% down payment on a home for every family (based on median U.S. housing price of \$200,000, and assuming 1 house for every 2 people): **\$1.5 billion**
- Monthly mortgage payment for every home for 10 years, excluding taxes and insurance: **\$8.08 billion**
- Retrofit every home for the Green New Deal (using Bloomberg's conservative estimate of \$100,000 per house, again assuming 1 house for every 2 people): **\$7.5 billion**
- Install a lovely rooftop garden on every home: **\$112.5 million**
- Build ten public libraries (10 million apiece): **\$100 million**
- Operate a state-of-the-art library system for 10 years: **\$200 million**
- Every resident gets a Shetland pony (\$1,000 per pony): **\$150 million**
- Shetland pony upkeep for 10 years (presuming an annual per pony cost of \$5,000 a year): **\$7.5 billion**
- Every household gets a top-of-the-line hot tub with massage jets (\$10,000 each): **\$750 million**
- High-speed, carbon-neutral, accessible light rail system with 10 stations (rounding up to account for typical American grift, corruption, and outrageous consultancy fees): **\$3 billion**
- 1000 high-quality massage chairs on each one of the 10 light rail station platforms (\$5,000 per chair): **\$50 million**
- Public education for every child for 10 years (children are, on average, 22.4% of population, so 33,600 children x annual above-average public education cost of \$15,000 per child x 10 years): **\$5.04 billion**
- College education for all current residents (assuming the average cost of tuition at a 4 year private college of \$35,000 per year): **\$21 billion**
- Expert daycare for ten years (33,600 children at \$20,000 per child): **\$6.72 billion**
- Mechanical mobility-squids (an average of 10% of the population has mobility issues and the mecha-squids cost \$2,000 each, plus R&D expenditures of 2 billion with room in the budget for cost overruns): **\$2.75 billion**
- Annual voucher for a pair of cool \$100 sneakers for all residents for 10 years: **\$150 million**
- Working with a nature conservancy group to plant 1 million trees in and around the city: **\$3 million**
- Universal basic income of \$2,000 a month per citizen for 10 years: **\$36 billion**
- Extraordinary pyrotechnic concerts every weekend for 10 years, booking the best acts, compensating them and the stage crew handsomely (each concert has a \$3 million budget): **\$1.56 billion**
- Ecstatic Mardi Gras parades every day of February for 10 years (based on the budget of the most expensive krewe in New Orleans and rounded up for non-toxic beads): **\$1.9845 billion**



Grand Total: \$137,000,000,000

The Illustrators



Mort Todd



Chelsea Saunders



C.M. Duffy



Mike Freiheit



Matt Lubchansky



*Ben "Skutch"
McGehee*



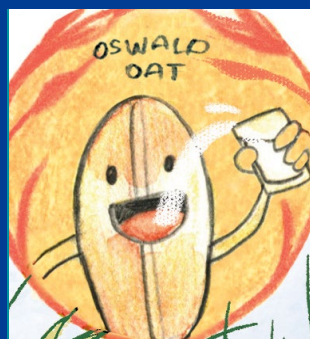
Ben Clarkson



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Tyler Rubenfeld



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