

The Magazine That Actually Cares

CURRENT AFFAIRS

\$10.95

VOL. 4, ISSUE 3

MAY/JUNE 2019

MALCOLM X
WHY WE STILL
MISS HIM

**THE GREEN
NEW DEAL**
WOULD THE
DINOSAURS
SUPPORT IT?

**THE JOYS OF
TRESPASSING**
OUR GREAT
NATIONAL
PASTIME

BIG BUSINESS
MAYBE IT'S
ACTUALLY GOOD?
(IT ISN'T.)

**HOW TO GET IN
TO HARVARD**
(IT INVOLVES
MONEY.)

**MILITARY
DOLPHINS**
AND OTHER
BAD IDEAS



INTERNAL Affairs

IF YOU HAVE ALREADY PURCHASED SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, WHY NOT GET THEM FOR ALL THE LOCAL PRISONERS? CHECK LOCAL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY REGULATIONS ON MAGAZINE DELIVERY.



TENSIONS IN THE REGION

From the *Current Affairs* Foreign Desk: Sources indicate that there are escalating tensions in the region. Talks have stalled amid renewed economic pressure. Sanctions once lifted have been reimposed, negotiators withdrawn. Spokespeople expressed their hope that mutually beneficial agreements could yet be achieved, but warned that open hostility would be met with consequences.



ANIMAL CONTENT THIS ISSUE AND NEXT

THIS ISSUE

Several mentions of squid

Feature on weaponized dolphins

Small drawing of seagull

Two-page environmentalist dinosaur comic

Majestic Eagle in flight

Chupacabra



NEXT ISSUE

"Spot The Walrus" game

Letter "S" replaced with drawings of snakes

Squid Lawyer, Part II comic

Horrifying spider picture

Zebra in smoking jacket

Miscellaneous mice



HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

CORRESPONDENCE

Hi there, I'm writing as both an aesthete and the National Press Secretary for the Mike Gravel 2020 campaign. While the excellent Merch Primary article gave us (and our Pentagon Rolling Papers) a lovely shout-out, we would like to request an update on the state of our merch.

While it is true that we have only introduced one new item, I am so confident in this single work of art that I believe it should bump our status for Best Merch up to second or even first place. (All right, maybe just second. Warren's is pretty good.) Again, more merch is forthcoming, but we would hate to lose out on second-place bragging rights when we have our new

four-pack of political buttons. Text includes icebreakers such as "Send Henry Kissinger to the Hague" and "Compost the Rich."

Would appreciate an amendment to the piece. Will keep you updated, under the blanket assumption that you would like more updates.

Best,
Melissa

Melissa,
We have updated our article to showcase the full range of Gravel 2020 merch, and given the campaign an honorary cabinet post (Merch Secretary of State).

Hello,

I am reading the *Current Affairs* article. I came across this: 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.

What exactly is a mobility squid and how do I buy one?

Thanks,
Kathryn

Kathryn,
The mobility squid is a robotic cephalopod that functions as a service animal. It is available in four colors and fully replicates the experience of being friends with a colossal squid. Send \$2,000 to Current Affairs, Research & Robotics Division, 631 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130.

Many of you are kind enough to email and write to us with your thoughts, complaints, and suggestions. We mean this quite sincerely: We love getting your correspondence. It brings us joy. Even the irate readers are readers, and it is flattering to be read and responded to. However, due to the straining of editorial resources, we often find ourselves unable to reply to all correspondence. We do our damndest. But we are not Noam Chomsky. Our editor-in-chief has proven himself utterly hopeless at replying in a timely fashion, even to those who most deserve it. Nevertheless, we are committed to eventually replying to all inquiries. It may take some time. But we will get there. Your call is important to us. We mean that. We are sorry for the delay but know that our silence does not mean we love you any less. Here at *Current Affairs*, subscribers are royalty, and tardiness is affection. Thank you for your letters. Replies forthcoming.

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WITH YOUR MONEY WE WILL BUILD SOCIALISM

Occasionally a reader of *Current Affairs* will ask us the perfectly sensible question: Upon what are my subscription dollars spent? A subscription to this magazine requires a considerable expenditure of cash. You, the consumer, have the right to know what we do with our giant pile of dollar coins, beyond taking the occasional nude dip in it to celebrate our good fortune and reflect upon our superior moral character.

The good news is: We do not fritter away our finances. No, every cent you give us is a "red cent," i.e., a cent put toward communism. Beyond the expenses of paper, ink, glue, postage, salaries, rent, website, writing, art, equipment, and delivery, the money we take in is put toward the establishment of a fully socialist society in which the means of production are held in common and people live free of class hierarchy. An unorthodox goal for a political periodical, perhaps. But as it says on the front cover, *This Ain't Your Grandma's Political Magazine*. (This statement is not an absolute. Grandmas vary widely. This could well be your Grandma's political magazine. You could well be Grandma yourself. Hello, Grandma.)

It is true that we provide a superior product at competitive rates. Having achieved that most enviable distinction of being the nation's most beloved print bimonthly, we could simply lounge about on our laurels and leave things where they stood. But the difference between "the world as it is" and "the world as it is plus quite a good magazine" is a small one indeed. We aspire to more.

Thus we promise not only to give you "news and views," along with an arts section, but to do our best to contribute to the overthrow of the presently existing economic and social system. We realize this is no small task. But the human species is 100,000 years old and capitalism has only been around a few hundred years. A return to normalcy seems eminently feasible. Granted, a little leftist magazine can accomplish but few changes on its own. But together with you, the noble subscriber, we believe we stand a fighting chance. Allons-y! Solidarity forever! Yee-haw!



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"Edie Widder was eating lunch in the mess hall of the Research Vessel Point Sur on Tuesday when her colleague Nathan J. Robinson dashed in. He didn't have to say anything — in fact, he wasn't yet quite able to say anything. She ran from the table, made certain by his flailing arms and the look on his face that their expedition had turned up something big."

— **Giant Squid, Phantom of the Deep, Reappears on Video**, *New York Times*, June 21, 2019

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
NATHAN J. ROBINSON
CO-DISCOVERER OF LATEST GIANT SQUID
AND EDITOR OF *CURRENT AFFAIRS*

Q: What was it like to be part of the team that discovered the first Giant Squid in the United States?

A: Ah, yes... well, you know, I've been searching for the bloody thing for some considerable time. It's why the magazine has been late. People had seen giant squid before, but I thought it was quite important for national pride that one be found in U.S. waters. Of course, you can always drag one here, but it's not the same, and the wretched things have a tendency try to get their tentacles round your face. Now, I can't say that the discovery was wholly mine. I did very little, to tell you the truth, beyond flailing my arms and making a face that suggested to my research colleague that something big had turned up.

Q: Will we be seeing more aquatic discoveries from you in the future?

A: The magazine is obviously my first love, but I can't say I'm not spending a lot of my time undersea. You know that squids come in sizes, like cappuccinos, and there's one bigger than the Giant Squid? It's called the Colossal Squid, a venti squid if you please. And my god, does it live up to it. We're going to nab one of those buggers soon, I'm confident of it. If it doesn't get our research vessel in its beak first. Thinking of putting it in the lobby aquarium at CAHQ. How about that, eh?



DISPELLING RUMOURS

The publishing industry is a sea of slanders, a place where fancy is taken for fact and lies for not-lies. Being in the "public eye," we are no strangers to malicious mistruths. Fortunately, as the 2016 election taught us, the most effective response to a campaign of colossal falsehoods is a vigorous real-time fact-checking operation. Through use of a precise "lie-o-meter" it is possible to stop the prevaricators before they start. We take a lesson here from Elizabeth Warren, whose website contains a list of untrue rumours about her in order to stop those rumours from spreading. (For example: "No, Elizabeth Warren does not keep a racist artifact in her kitchen." It is, in fact, a Greek urn. <https://facts.elizabethwarren.com/instagram-live-urn/>)

Here, then, we put to bed once and for all the unfounded items of gossip that have been circulating around *Current Affairs*:

✦ *Current Affairs* has not blown a large portion of the subscription funds on novelty decorative items and costume fabrics for the upcoming Mardi Gras season.

✦ The editor does not require visitors to the *Current Affairs* office to be wearing neckties and cufflinks. It is only an informal suggestion, defiance of which carries minimal consequences.

✦ The Nathan J. Robinson who recently aided in the discovery of a giant squid is not a different Nathan J. Robinson. Our editor engages in recreational undersea ecological investigation. He is available for freelance work.

✦ *Current Affairs* is not 100% water-

proof and we are not responsible for damage to magazines read below 200m of undersea depth.

✦ We have never praised the police. The misunderstanding on this point is due to the fact that we once referred to "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" as "not a bad song, considering the times."

✦ Reports that a copy of *Current Affairs* arrived on time are demonstrably false. Since no issue is printed until after the months on the cover have elapsed, anyone who claims to have received the March/April issue in either March or April is a liar and a brigand.

✦ We did not call Mr. William Kristol an "odious purveyor of pseudoscholarly racist flimflam." That was Charles Murray. Kristol we called the "smirking murderer overseeing a failed biweekly."

✦ *Current Affairs* has no formal connection to the government of Andorra. Our newsletter editor did, however, once drink the country's Deputy Minister of External Affairs under the table. It is a very small country.

✦ *Current Affairs* interns are indeed paid in live birds. However, this is because they are kittens.

We hope these misconceptions will cease to persist.



this will not take too long bespoke MAGAZINE TAILORING

On Savile Row in London, home of the ancient tailors, a gentleman can have his suit exquisitely cut to fit his form. They say that one has not really worn a suit until one has worn bespoke. This would seem obviously factually false, yet it is true that there is a rare and unrivaled pleasure in wearing clothes that actually fit properly.

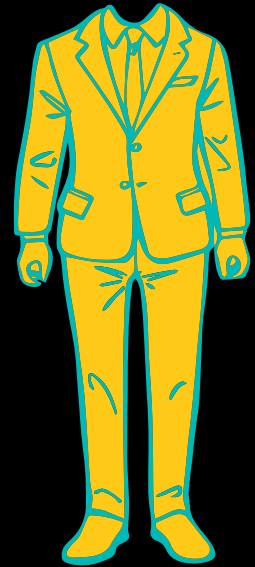
On St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, we attempt daily to replicate the bespoke experience in the periodical realm. We take your measurements exactly. We speak of hems and seams. We keep those floppy tape measures hanging around our necks. We wish the cut of the page to fit you exactly.

The bespoke periodical is designed to meet your needs perfectly. It contains just the right amount of Serious News Content, leavened with the proper dash of frolic. Its metaphors are well-mixed, its anastrophes reversed, its Ts dotted and its eyes crossed. There are liberal sprinklings of punctuation, as befits a magazine meant for the discerning

and educated reader. Do you need a flowchart? Your magazine will have one. A comic? It shall be provided. Perhaps a three-dimensional pictorama in lieu of a proper table of contents? Thy will be done.

Each copy of *Current Affairs* is custom-made for the individual reader. No two are alike. At great expense, we have purchased your personal data from the various technology companies that have hoovered it up and auctioned it off. That data tells us everything about you, from the content of your last dream to the number of lies you have told your boss. (Be glad a benevolent entity like *Current Affairs* stepped in to purchase it rather than some sleaze merchant, although we do intend to sell it to sleaze merchants after using it to create your custom magazine.)

This magazine is the result of an intrusive process of character assessment and bioscanning. It has been optimized to maximize your reading pleasure. If for any reason you do not enjoy it,



you may be malfunctioning and should see a physician. We do not need to hope that you enjoy this copy of *Current Affairs*, for it is mathematically certain that you shall. The wonders of our century never do seem to end!

THIS MONTH'S

HEXES



● I hope her water never boils

● And that she is always cold

● And that she finds something odd in her mouth every time she eats a meal

● May her heteronormative dreams of building a family materialize after instagram falls out of fashion so that by the time it happens for her, no one will care

● May none of his magazines ever arrive on time

● May he always forget something critically important (waterbottle, headphones) at home

● May her favorite hair products always be out of stock everywhere

● May he always accidentally overspend at lunch buffets



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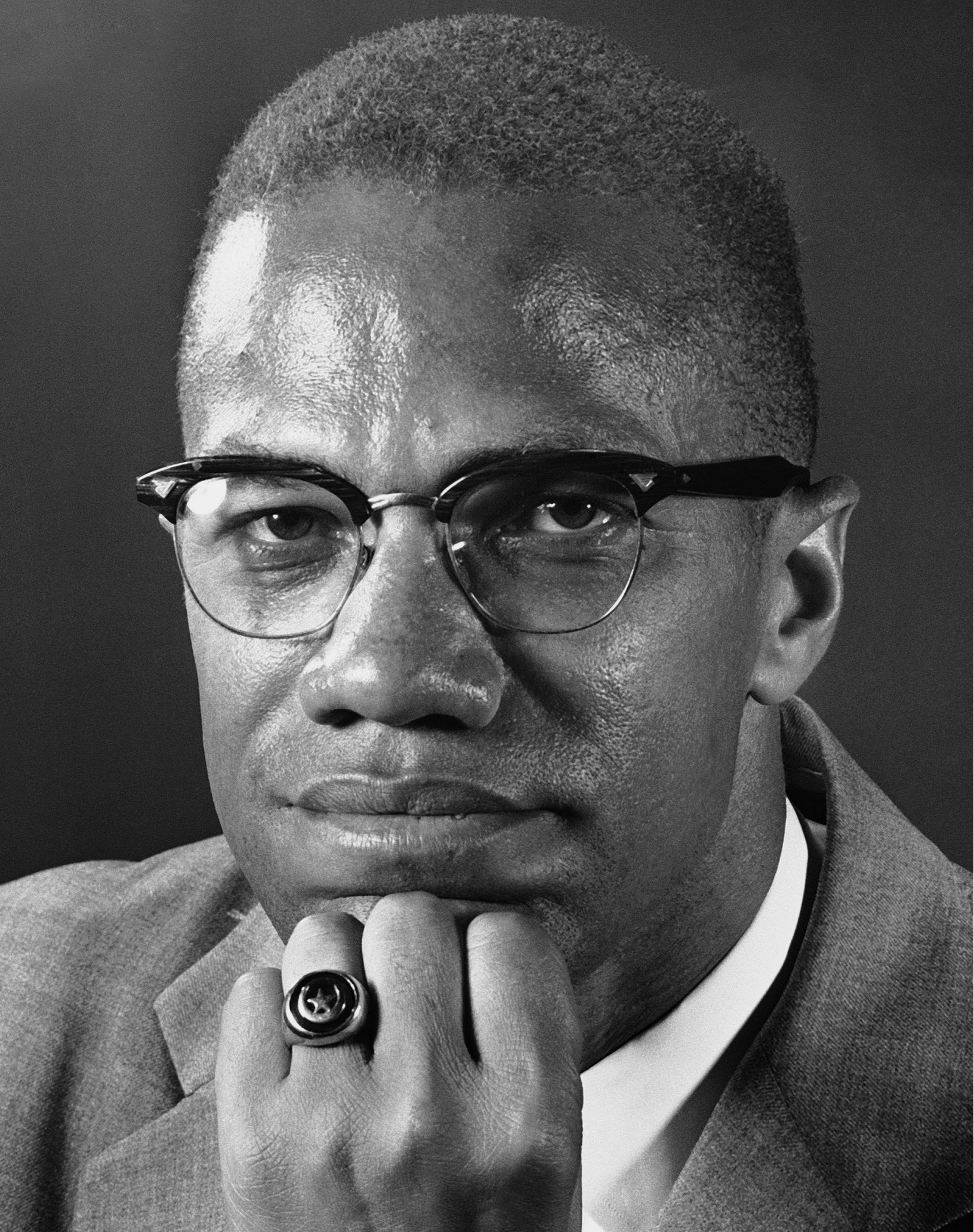
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REFLECTIONS ON MALCOLM



BY OREN NIMNI & NATHAN J. ROBINSON

MALCOLM X DID NOT HAVE TO DIE. HE could have avoided it. He chose not to. Then again, because one can't imagine him choosing differently, perhaps he did "have" to die. Such a man as Malcolm simply could not do otherwise.

Malcolm's assassination is awkward to fit into a political narrative. Martin Luther King was killed by a white racist, while Malcolm was killed by black members of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm spent his life antagonizing and condemning white America for its crimes against his people, yet he died at the hands of a fanatical cult and an egomaniacal leader. It seems at first such a useless, avoidable, death—if Malcolm was to be a martyr, why was *this* what ended him? King's death feels inevitable, but meaningful, while Malcolm's can seem frustrating, especially in light of the political evolution he was undergoing in his final year. Why could Malcolm not have

lived to see his project through? How could Elijah Muhammed be so cruel and petty as to destroy such a singularly important individual? Malcolm had not had a chance to build a political legacy, having only left the Nation the year before his death. He survives mostly as a *character* rather than as a set of ideas or accomplishments. But it did not need to be that way. Did it?

Perhaps it did. Because Malcolm's death was not absurd or inexplicable. He didn't die in a freak accident or a random act of violence. He died because he told the truth, and wouldn't stop telling the truth, even as it became clear that doing so would end his life. Like Socrates, he could not keep himself from asking dangerous questions. If anything, Malcolm becomes more admirable, and more interesting, because the particular truth he died for wasn't the truth that he is most known for telling. He didn't die because of his insistent honesty about race. He died because he applied that

honesty *beyond* race, and questioned and criticized his own mentor. Malcolm did not just defy the authority of white America, but was committed to seeking the truth on every question.

THE STORY OF MALCOLM X'S RELATIONSHIP WITH the Nation of Islam is a basic part of his biography. He discovers the sect while serving time in prison. When he is released, he becomes one of its most valued spokesmen, eventually becoming the de facto "number two" to leader Elijah Muhammed, who styled himself the "messenger of Allah." Malcolm builds a public profile expounding the Nation's uncompromising message of black separatism and indicting white America for its criminal history of oppression and violence.

But Malcolm and Elijah Muhammed eventually clash. Elements within the NOI believe Malcolm is getting too big, and threatening to overshadow the group's leader. When Malcolm discovers that, in direct violation of Islamic moral teachings, Elijah Muhammed has impregnated a number of his female staff members, Malcolm makes a final split from the group in 1964. That year, he founds two groups of his own: Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. He travels to Mecca to undertake the hajj, and comes back with a far more nuanced view on questions of race relations. Malcolm sheds a number of the NOI's more extreme positions and its unorthodox theology, embracing ecumenical Pan-Africanism and Sunni Islam. Despite fully realizing that the NOI is a violent organization that will not tolerate mild dissent, let alone fierce criticism of its leader, Malcolm continues to publicly denounce Muhammed for his moral hypocrisy. On February 21, 1965, Malcolm is assassinated by NOI members while beginning a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City.

When one watches footage of Malcolm in the last months of his life, it is obvious that he was deliberately courting death. Asked by interviewers about Elijah Muhammed's acts, Malcolm describes them in frank detail, admitting that he is "probably a dead man already" for speaking out. Malcolm knew what was coming for him. In *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, Manning Marable writes that Malcolm could have prolonged his time abroad until tensions with the Nation died down, but chose to return to the United States and continue pointing the finger at his former benefactor. Malcolm could not stomach what Muhammed had done, and felt guilty for having sold people on Muhammed's infallibility. He insisted on clearing his conscience.

Because Malcolm died young, and did not live to build the Organization of Afro-American Unity into a major political force, one can look back and wonder what he stood for and what he should mean to the left. Certainly, the posthumous *Autobiography* is a classic depiction of the awakening of political consciousness. But civil rights leaders of Malcolm's time were not wrong in pointing out that his activities had made him politically marginal, that there were not obvious material gains that can be traced directly to Malcolm X.

One can get a better appreciation for why Malcolm X matters by watching extant videos of his interviews, debates, and speeches. The acclaimed *Autobiography*, written in collaboration with Alex Haley, doesn't come close to capturing the *presence* that one sees in videos of Malcolm in action. It only takes a few minutes of watching and listening to him to realize that Malcolm was unlike any other public figure of that or any other era. Smolderingly handsome (Maya Angelou said: "His aura was too bright and his masculine force affected me physically... A hot desert storm eddied around him and rushed to me, making my skin contract and my pores slam shut."), he seems somehow more

alive, more contemporary, than other figures from early 60s grayscale television. In debates, he is quick and charming and flummoxes his interlocutors. In a 1963 *City Desk* appearance, he capably "destroys" three white men who attempt to penetrate his logic and embarrass him. In one memorable portion, a panelist tries to maneuver Malcolm into revealing that he was not born with the last name "X":

PANELIST: *What is your real name?*

MALCOLM X: *Malcolm. Malcolm X.*

PANELIST: *Is that your legal name?*

MALCOLM X: *As far as I'm concerned, it's my legal name.*

PANELIST: *Would you mind telling me what your father's last name was?*

MALCOLM X: *My father didn't know his last name. My father got his last name from his grandfather, and his grandfather got it from his grandfather, who got it from the slavemaster. The real names of our people were destroyed during slavery.*

PANELIST: *Was there any line, any point in the genealogy of your family when you did have to use a last name, and if so, what was it?*

MALCOLM X: *The last name of my forefathers was taken from them when they were brought to America and made slaves, and then the name of the slavemaster was given, which we refuse, we reject that name today.*

PANELIST: *You mean, you won't even tell me what your father's supposed last name was or gifted last name was?*

MALCOLM X: *I never acknowledge it whatsoever.*

Every exchange is like this. Malcolm is cool, unflappable, logical. His questioners are patronizing and relentless but get nowhere. If you were black in the early 60s, you would not have seen anything like this on television before. A man who ran circles around whites in debate, who didn't soften his language, who didn't pat people on the back for civil rights gains, who implied that John F. Kennedy got what he deserved. Malcolm was terrifying, in part because while he advocated armed self-defense, he did so in a gentle, rational tone that made violent struggle appear intellectually serious.

Those who knew Malcolm were struck by the same quality that comes across in video and audio recordings: the quickness and calmness of his intellect. Marable quotes an observer:

Malcolm would be the last person to say anything. He'd let people air out what they had to say. And then he'd say 'Can I say something?' You could hear a pin drop. And he said, 'Sister so-and-so has a good point, and she thinks she's in opposition to Brother so-and-so. And Brother so-and-so has a good argument. But—' And he would synthesize the whole argument. He would show everybody their strong points and everybody their weak points and how everything interrelated... It was amazing.

Marable reports that Malcolm was so persuasive that a racist police officer, tasked with listening in on Malcolm's speeches and phone calls, was eventually swayed by Malcolm's words and told superior officers that Malcolm was right.

He also had a gift for phrasing. When Malcolm criticized mainstream civil rights leaders for not moving fast enough, when he denounced white America for its crimes, he did so in language impossible to forget. A few choice quotes:

—"How can you thank a man for giving you what's already yours? How then can you thank him for giving you only part of what's already yours?"

—"Give it to us now. Don't wait for next year. Give it to us yesterday, and that's not fast enough."

—"Any time you demonstrate against segregation and a man has the audacity to put a police dog on you, kill that dog."

—"Whenever you're going after something that belongs to you, any-

one who's depriving you of the right to have it is a criminal. Understand that. Whenever you are going after something that is yours, you are within your legal rights to lay claim to it. And anyone who puts forth any effort to deprive you of that which is yours, is breaking the law, is a criminal."

—"If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there's no progress. You pull it all the way out, that's not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they haven't even begun to pull the knife out, much less heal the wound. They won't even admit the knife is there."

—"If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it's wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it's wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country."

MALCOLM SAID AT ONE POINT THAT IN ANOTHER world, he might have become a lawyer. Thank goodness he didn't, but one can see that he had a kind of "legal mind." He often proceeds deductively. If (1) segregation is illegal and (2) the police are trying to uphold segregation, then (3) the police are criminals and should be treated as such. If (1) black Americans do not have the right to vote and (2) unless a government is democratic, it is a tyranny, then (3) black Americans are within their rights to resist the United States government by force of arms, just as the American revolutionaries resisted the British. If (1) people have the right to defend their bodies from attack (2) police are setting dogs on black people's bodies, then (3) black people are

morally and legally permitted to kill police dogs. Malcolm gave people the chills in part because they didn't see how his reasoning could be escaped.

Malcolm's arguments are important because so many of them are right. He demands moral consistency: If it is wrong for black people to resist violently, then U.S. imperial violence is wrong. You cannot condemn one and excuse the other. His ideas about progress and entitlement are particularly essential. We should not say that we have "come a long way" or that things are "getting better," because it's like drawing the knife out a few inches and calling it "progress." If civil rights are a basic, non-negotiable entitlement, then the correct time for them to have been granted is the day before yesterday, and every day that they are not granted is another day that the state has no legitimacy. Malcolm was not just angry; he made arguments that anger was rationally compelled.

Many of Malcolm's interviews involve white people asking him why he believes in "hate," and Malcolm patiently explaining that he does not. The famous 1959 Mike Wallace documentary on the Nation of Islam, *The Hate That Hate Produced*, set the tone for future reporting. At the end of the *Autobiography*, Malcolm not only forecasts his own death but correctly predicts future portrayals of his ideas:

Each day I live as if I am already dead, and I tell you what I would like for you to do. When I am dead—I say it that way because from the things I know, I do not expect to live long enough to read this book in its finished form—I want you to just watch and see if I'm not right in what I say: that the white man, in his press, is going to identify me with "hate." He will make use of me dead, as he has made use of me alive, as a convenient symbol of "hatred"—and that will help him to escape facing the truth that all I have been doing is holding up a mirror to reflect, to show, the history



of unspeakable crimes that his race has committed against my race. You watch. I will be labeled as, at best, an "irresponsible" black man.

Malcolm made it repeatedly clear throughout his public life that he never believed in "hate." But it's true, as Marable points out in *A Life of Reinvention*, that Malcolm was often inconsistent in his statements. Sometimes he appeared to be demanding nothing more than basic equality, sometimes he appeared to be a separatist. Sometimes he would promise to work with civil rights groups to achieve common ends, sometimes he was denouncing them as Uncle Toms who could offer nothing to black people. There are ugly anti-Semitic remarks from Malcolm's NOI period, and at one point he appeared to have believed the Klan could be a valuable ally because of their mutual interest in nationalism and racial separation.

But one reason to be fascinated by Malcolm today, and to study him, is that he consistently learned and evolved. Marable calls this "reinvention," but it's not a fair term, as it implies a kind of deliberate shape-shifting, as if Malcolm came up with new phases like David Bowie. Instead, Malcolm was always taking on new knowledge. If he was inconsistent, it was in part because he was continuously trying to work out exactly what he thought. There are difficult intellectual dilemmas about race politics (e.g. to what extent should identity be the locus for organizing?) and Malcolm was grappling with them. He didn't figure out his answer before he was killed, but he was making new discoveries all the time. In *Malcolm X Speaks*, a posthumous collection of his public statements, Malcolm talks about the need to think for one's self, examine presuppositions, and try to make sure that one has not accidentally taken enemies for friends and friends for enemies. He recounts an incident in which a woman sitting next to him on a plane looked at his suitcase, with an X stamped on it, and asked what kind of last name began with X. Malcolm told her that the X was his full last name, and that his first name was Malcolm. "You're not... Malcolm X?" she replied. "You're not what I was expecting," Malcolm uses the woman's surprise to illustrate the power of prejudice, and to caution readers against making the same mistake.

Famously, after his trip to Mecca he became uncomfortable with black nationalism, because he had seen blue-eyed Muslims who worshiped the same god he did, and he saw Algerians engaged in the same anti-imperialist struggle that he identified with. Malcolm's Muslim faith and his strong black identity were in interesting tension—a tension that came to life in the disputes between members of his Muslim Mosque organization and his Organization of Afro-American Unity.

Toward the end of his life, Malcolm was producing some of his most sophisticated, and contradictory, analysis. As Marable points out, Malcolm "took different tones and attitudes depending on which group he was speaking to, and often presented contradictory opinions only days apart." He was attempting to work out his feelings on socialism and capitalism. He said he didn't think it was an accident that so many

Third World revolutionary movements were socialistic, and that "you can't operate a capitalist system unless you are vulturistic; you have to have somebody else's blood to suck to be a capitalist." He was particularly adept at joining the inextricably linked struggles against white supremacy and capitalism: "*It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism.*" At the same time, he would make qualifying statements like: "I am not anti-American, un-American, seditious nor subversive. I don't buy the anti-capitalist propaganda of the communist, nor do I buy the anti-communist propaganda of the capitalist."

As Adolph Reed, Jr. writes in his essay on Malcolm, this fact has made it almost irresistible to speculate on what Malcolm's next phase would have been:

It is all too tempting to play the what-Malcolm-would-do-if-he-were-alive game, but the temptation should be avoided because the only honest

response is that we can have no idea. Part of what was so exciting about Malcolm, in retrospect anyway, was that he was moving so quickly, experimenting with ideas, trying to get a handle on the history he was living.

Reed suggests that instead of day-dreaming about possible Malcolms of the 70s and 80s, we should embrace Malcolm's conflictedness as a core part of our image of him. We should get past Malcolm the icon to see Malcolm the human being, a person all the more impressive for being flesh and blood just like ourselves:

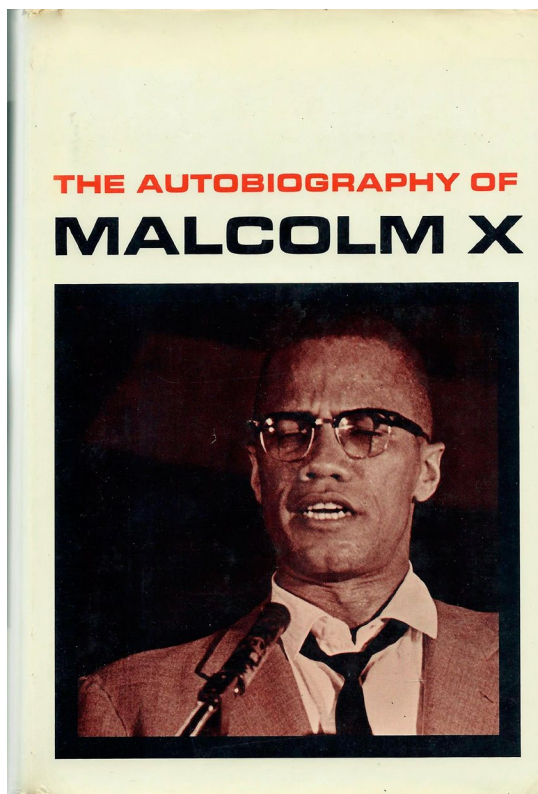
It seems to me that the best way to think of the best of Malcolm is that he was just like the rest of us; a regular person saddled with imperfect knowledge, human frailties, and conflicting imperatives but nonetheless trying to make sense of his very specific history, trying unsuccessfully to transcend it, and struggling to push it in a humane direction. We can learn most from his failures and limitations because they speak most clearly both of the character of his time and of the sorts of perils we must guard against in our own. He was no prince; there are no princes, only people like ourselves who strive

to influence their own history. To the extent that we believe otherwise, we turn Malcolm into a postage stamp and reproduce the evasive reflex that has deformed critical black political action for a generation.

What does Reed mean about "evasion" "deforming" political activism? Perhaps that when we see political figures of times past as two-dimensional heroes, we forget the reality of organizing, fail to see that it is done by *organizers*, who are people like us, and in evading that truth we thereby make it harder to imagine that we ourselves could continue their work. But Malcolm is undeniably human, in the most honorable sense. The more like us Malcolm seems, the more responsible we are for trying to finish what he left undone.



SSIE DAVIS, IN A POSTSCRIPT AT THE END OF the *Autobiography*, gives his own take on why Malcolm's life has enduring value. Davis says that he often disagreed with Malcolm, but that:



Whatever else he was or was not—Malcolm was a man! ... Protocol and common sense require that Negroes stand back and let the white man speak up for us, defend us, and lead us from behind the scene in our fight. This is the essence of Negro politics. But Malcolm said to hell with that! Get up off your knees and fight your own battles.

Davis says Malcolm “kept shouting the painful truth we whites and blacks did not want to hear” and “wouldn’t stop for love nor money.” That’s why it’s correct to place him in the tradition of Socrates, to see him not necessarily as a model revolutionary but as a model truth-teller, a person whose respect for himself and others was too great to allow him to compromise. Davis and Reed are right that it’s Malcolm’s character, rather than his politics, that we can take most from today.

His politics, after all, were in flux. But his character was firm, and he showed the same courage in taking on Elijah Muhammed that he had in doing speaking engagements in Mississippi. From Malcolm, we can’t learn what we ought to do, but we can learn *how* we ought to do it: with the same courage, resolve, dignity, and crisp intellect. Malcolm is a model of how to be sharp and committed in impossible circumstances, how to run rings around your oppressors by calmly demolishing their propaganda. Was he flawed? He’d be the first to say yes. But the short career of Malcolm X still has much to teach us about how to be smart, how to be brave, how to be good, how to be flawed—how to be a person. Very few of us will ever become as alive over a long life as Malcolm X was in such a short one, but we ought to try harder. ♣

CURRENT AFFAIRS Taboo

A game about what can or can’t be said about certain topics.
Describe the following without using the taboo words or phrases indicated on each card:

SOCIALISM

Venezuela
Stalin
Totalitarianism
Gulag
Cultural Marxism

MASS MURDERERS (white supremacist only)

Angelic Child
Misunderstood
Lone Wolf
Lunatic
We Will Never Understand

HOW WHITE LIBERALS TALK ABOUT PEOPLE OF COLOR

Uplift Voices
Listen, Just Really Listen
YASS QUEEN
I’m A Supporter But
I Need To Speak To
Your Manager

BANKS DURING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

Racket
Foreclosures
Conspiracy
Fraud
Robo-signing

HOW AIPAC FUNCTIONS

Influence
Donors
Spend
Contributions
Money

CORY BOOKER

Street PHD
T-Bone
Rescue
Big Pharma
Charter Schools

CHELSEA CLINTON

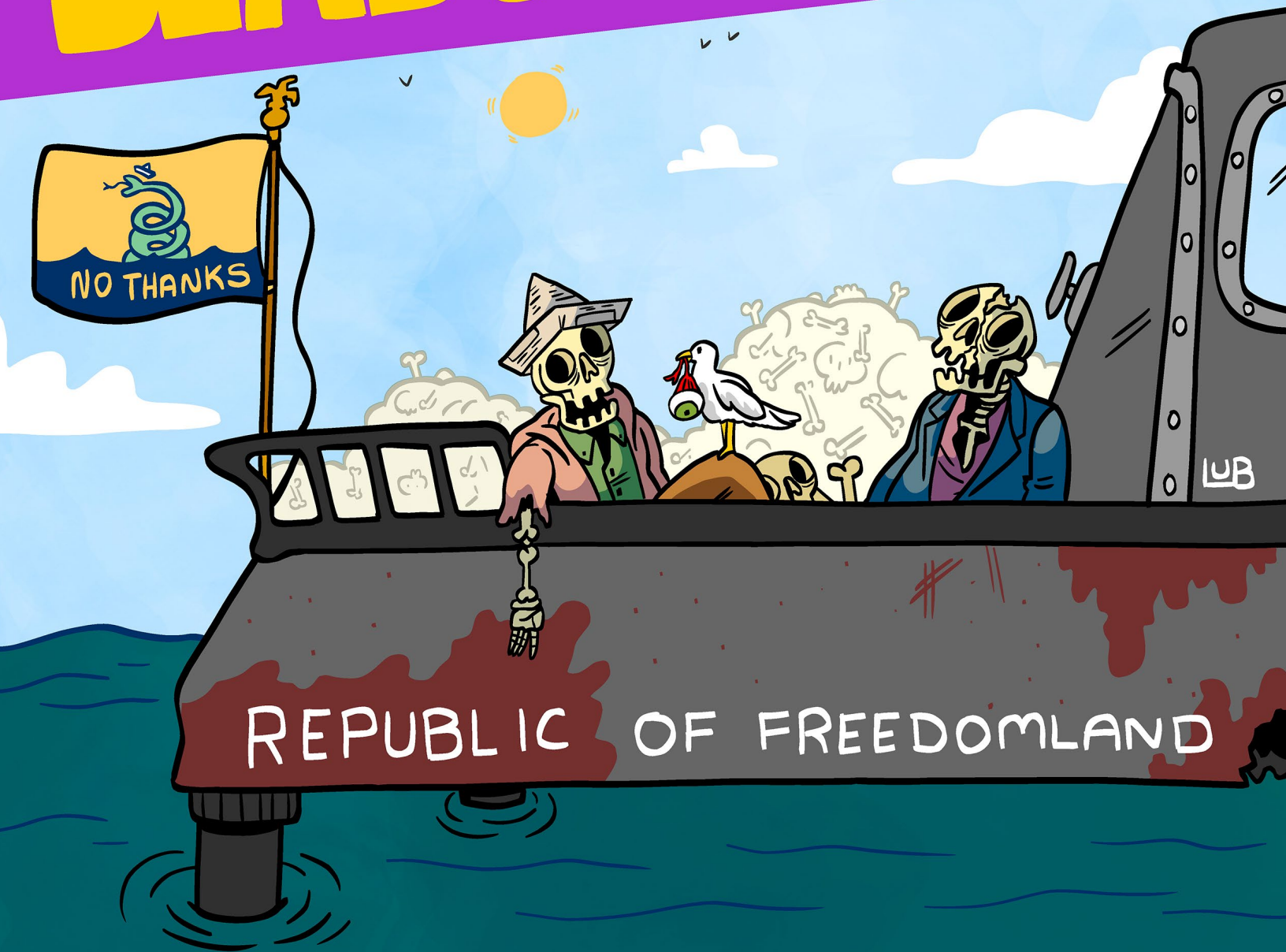
Daughter
Heiress
Beige
Clinton Foundation
Specious Accusations of
Anti-Semitism

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Best Magazine
Joy
Squid Lawyer
Noam Chomsky
Luxury Left

Sick of the TYRANNY of governments telling you to pay taxes and also your workers? Why not embrace the watery independence of...

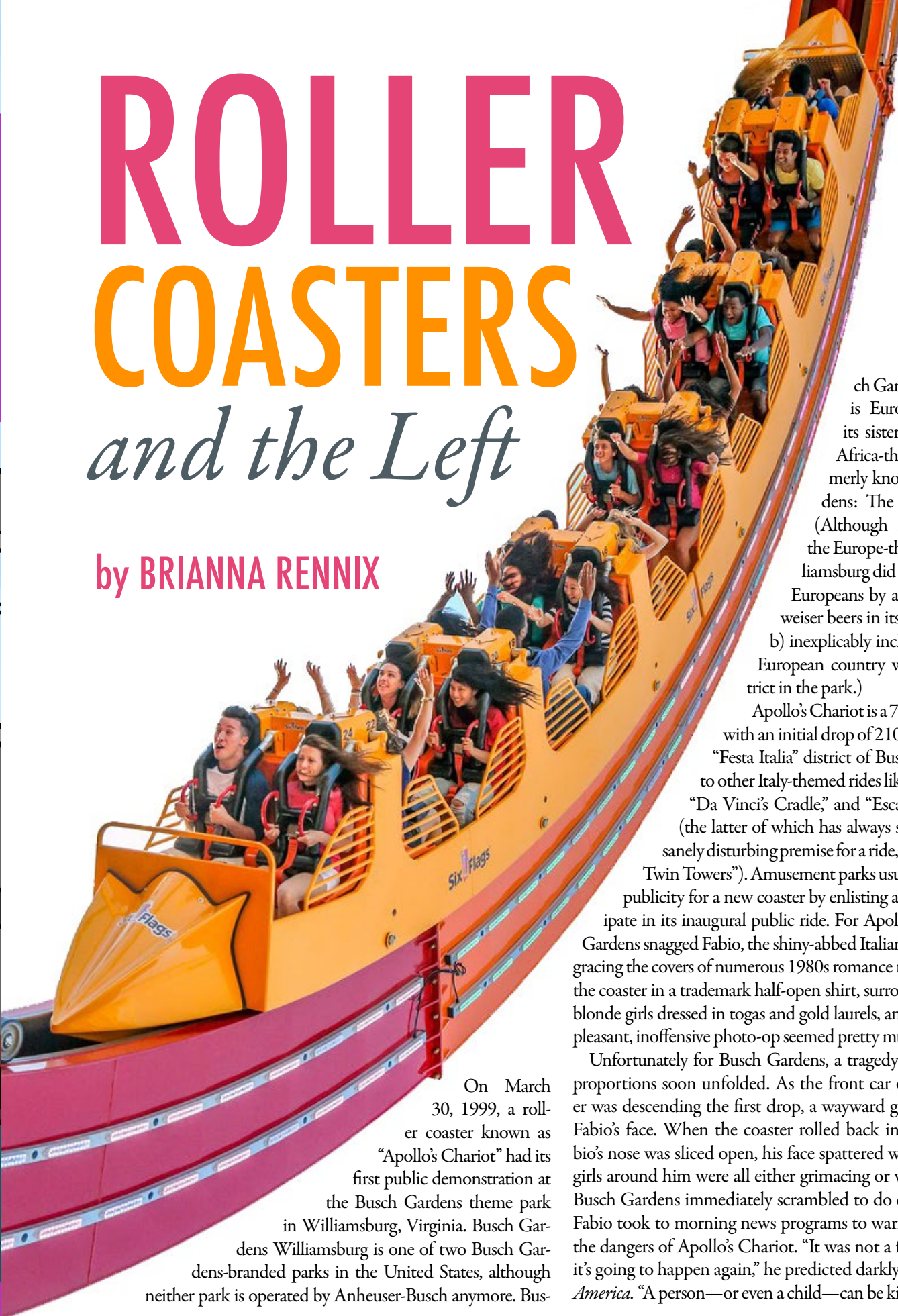
SEASTEADING!



No Fresh Water? No Problem!tm

ROLLER COASTERS *and the Left*

by BRIANNA RENNIX



On March 30, 1999, a roller coaster known as “Apollo’s Chariot” had its first public demonstration at the Busch Gardens theme park in Williamsburg, Virginia. Busch Gardens Williamsburg is one of two Busch Gardens-branded parks in the United States, although neither park is operated by Anheuser-Busch anymore. Bus-

ch Gardens Williamsburg is Europe-themed, while its sister park in Tampa is Africa-themed and was formerly known as “Busch Gardens: The Dark Continent.” (Although less overtly racist, the Europe-themed park in Williamsburg did arguably disrespect Europeans by a) only selling Budweiser beers in its pretend pubs, and b) inexplicably including Canada as a European country with a themed district in the park.)

Apollo’s Chariot is a 73-mph steel coaster with an initial drop of 210 feet, located in the “Festa Italia” district of Busch Gardens, home to other Italy-themed rides like “Roman Rapids,” “Da Vinci’s Cradle,” and “Escape from Pompeii” (the latter of which has always struck me as an insanely disturbing premise for a ride, akin to “Escape the Twin Towers”). Amusement parks usually try to drum up publicity for a new coaster by enlisting a celebrity to participate in its inaugural public ride. For Apollo’s Chariot, Busch Gardens snagged Fabio, the shiny-abbed Italian model famous for gracing the covers of numerous 1980s romance novels. He boarded the coaster in a trademark half-open shirt, surrounded by a bevy of blonde girls dressed in togas and gold laurels, and the prospect of a pleasant, inoffensive photo-op seemed pretty much assured.

Unfortunately for Busch Gardens, a tragedy of Phaethonesque proportions soon unfolded. As the front car of the roller coaster was descending the first drop, a wayward goose collided with Fabio’s face. When the coaster rolled back into the station, Fabio’s nose was sliced open, his face spattered with blood, and the girls around him were all either grimacing or visibly cracking up. Busch Gardens immediately scrambled to do damage control, as Fabio took to morning news programs to warn the public about the dangers of Apollo’s Chariot. “It was not a freak accident, and it’s going to happen again,” he predicted darkly on *Good Morning America*. “A person—or even a child—can be killed.”

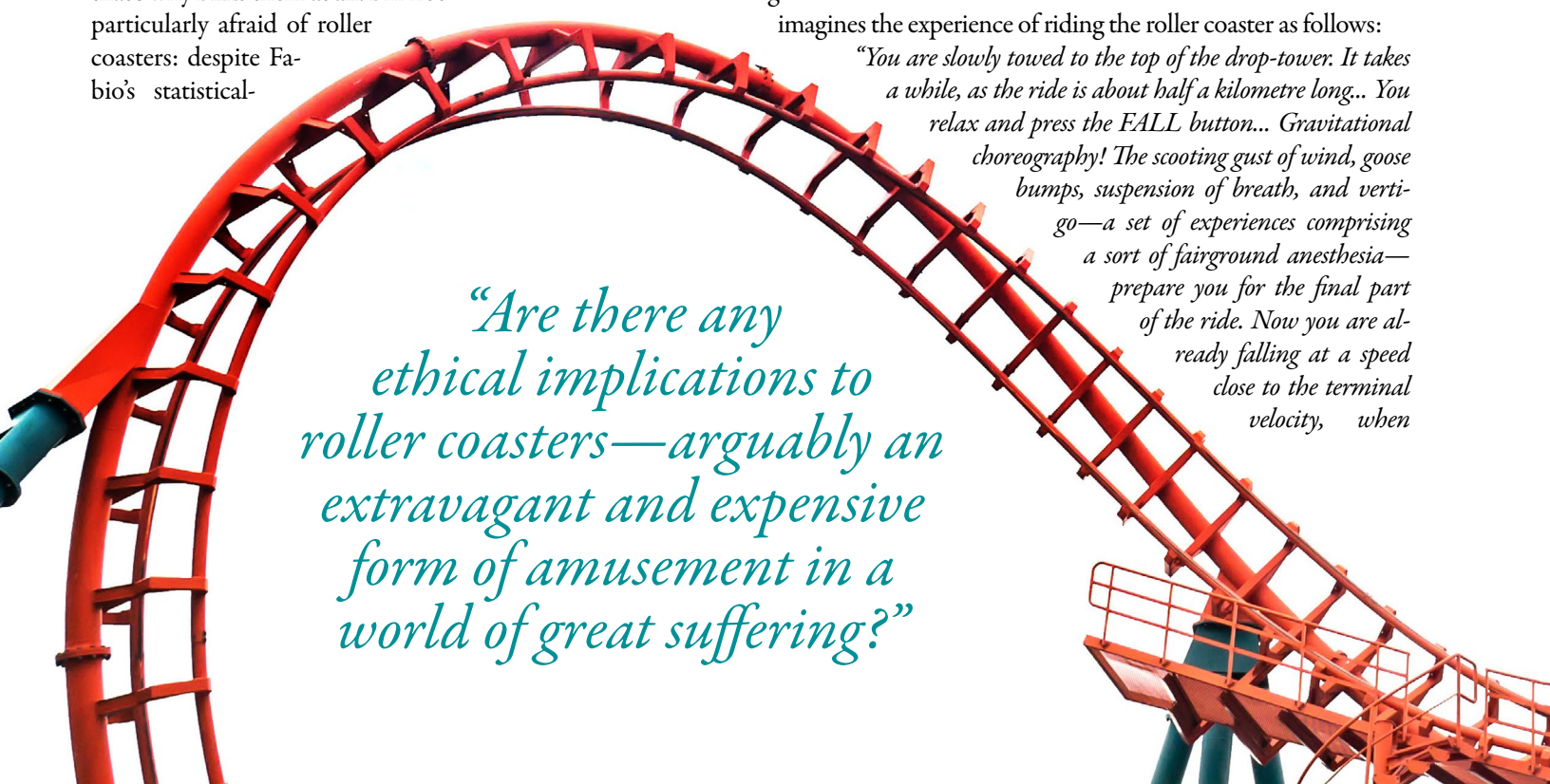
AS IT TURNED OUT, THE PUBLIC LARGELY ignored Fabio's premonition that Apollo's Chariot would kill again, and it went on to become one of Busch Gardens' major attractions. I rode it for the first time in early 2000 (although I then had to wait another year before I could ride it again, because the ride attendant caught me and realized I was under the required height restriction). Over the next 10 years, I think I must have ridden it well over 100 times. I still think it's one of the best roller coasters around. It's an incredibly smooth, thrilling ride, never jerky or nausea-inducing, with perfectly-timed drops. What makes it better still is the car design: Many roller coasters have over-the-shoulder harnesses, or, if they use lap-bars only, have small enclosed cars that keep your feet trapped during the ride. But Apollo's Chariot has an open car with only a triangular lap-restraint, meaning that you can swing both your arms and your legs with complete freedom throughout the ride. Depending on your size, you can also—with some stealthy maneuvering when the attendant comes around to check—position the lap restraint so that there's a bit of a gap between your hips and the restraint, and that way you can actually feel your body rising up out of your seat when you descend a hill.

Sometimes people are surprised to learn how much I love roller coasters, because I am notoriously cowardly in other areas of life. I can't watch even the most mildly frightening of scary movies. Recently, I tried to read Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, the plot of which is mostly "people feeling vaguely uneasy in badly-decorated rooms," and found the damn thing so terrifying that I had to stop reading it before bed. For some people, roller coasters are fundamentally about the peculiar enjoyment of *being afraid*; one friend of mine told me that she rides roller coasters because she is a masochist, and another because it makes her feel courageous when she conquers her terror. But I don't really think that's why I like them at all. I'm not particularly afraid of roller coasters: despite Fabio's statistical-

ly insane encounter with an unlucky waterfowl, roller coasters generally have extremely low accident rates. As a Six Flags study points out (with a strident hint of doth-protest-too-muchness), "a [park] visitor has a one in one-and-a-half billion chance of being fatally injured and... the injury rates for children's wagons, golf carts, and folding lawn chairs are higher than for amusement rides." When I'm climbing the first big drop of a roller coaster, especially a familiar one, I feel a deep sense of calm: and when the drop finally comes, my conscious brain processes the surge of sensation in my belly exclusively as delight. But it would probably be wrong to say that there's *no* risk-seeking element to my enjoyment, either. The visceral pleasure of speed feeds into a kind of weird, intense, happy contemplation of the annihilation of your physical body: the fleeting sensation of being an almost weightless entity, with only the pressure of a little foam triangle between you and a freefall into empty space.

THE SPIRITUAL INTENSITY OF ROLLER COASTERS has actually been the subject of an interesting (if morbid) thought experiment by a Lithuanian artist named Julijonas Urbonas, who in 2010 released a design for what he dubbed "the ultimate thrill ride": the Euthanasia Coaster. A 510-meter steel coaster with an initial drop segueing into a series of increasingly-small loops, the Euthanasia Coaster is, according to Urbonas' website, "a hypothetical death machine in the form of a roller coaster, engineered to humanely—with elegance and euphoria—take the life of a human being." During the ride, passengers are "subjected to a series of intensive motion elements that induce various unique experiences: from euphoria to thrill, and from tunnel vision to loss of consciousness, and, eventually, death." About seven times as tall and nearly three times as fast as the average amusement park roller coaster, the ride would be engineered to inflict lethal levels of G-force on its riders. Urbonas imagines the experience of riding the roller coaster as follows:

"You are slowly towed to the top of the drop-tower. It takes a while, as the ride is about half a kilometre long... You relax and press the FALL button... Gravitational choreography! The scooting gust of wind, goose bumps, suspension of breath, and vertigo—a set of experiences comprising a sort of fairground anesthesia—prepare you for the final part of the ride. Now you are already falling at a speed close to the terminal velocity, when



"Are there any ethical implications to roller coasters—arguably an extravagant and expensive form of amusement in a world of great suffering?"

the force of air drag becomes equal to the force of gravity, thus cancelling the acceleration. You feel your body as if supported by an air pillow. Just after this point, the track smoothly straightens forward, entering the first loop of the coaster, a continuously upward-sloping section of the track that eventually results in a complete 360-degree circle, completely inverting the riders at the topmost part. The centrifugal force drives the car upward, and you are literally pinned to the seat, your buttocks' flesh pressed against the ergonomic planes of the seat so hard that your body is almost immobilized. ... The rest of the ride, six or five loops, proceeds with your body being numb, ensuring that the trip ends your life. You die, or, more accurately, your brain dies of complete oxygen deprivation, a legal indicator of death in many jurisdictions. The biomonitoring suit checks if there is a need for a second round, which is extremely unlikely, as the result is guaranteed by a seven-fold repetition."

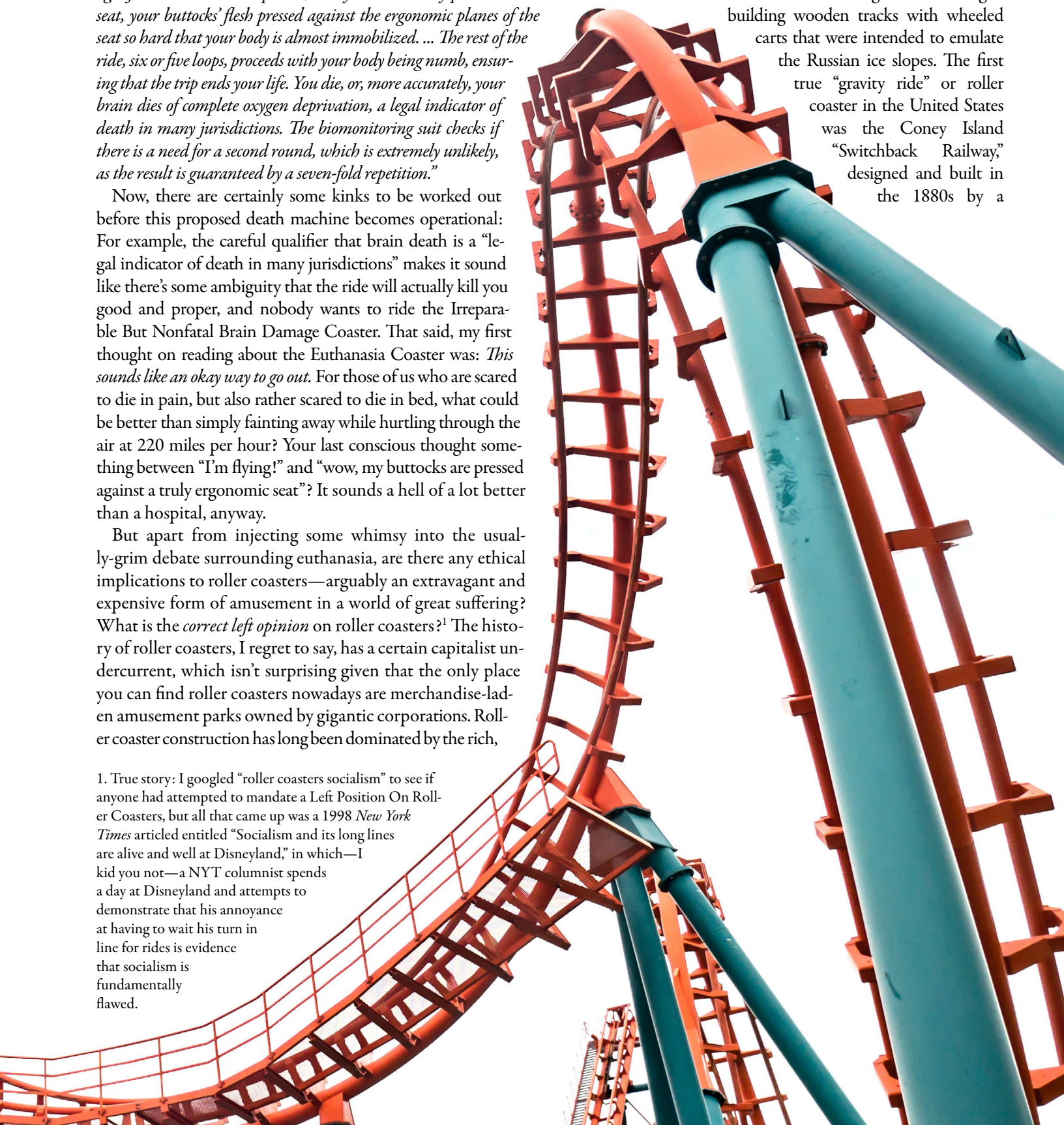
Now, there are certainly some kinks to be worked out before this proposed death machine becomes operational: For example, the careful qualifier that brain death is a "legal indicator of death in many jurisdictions" makes it sound like there's some ambiguity that the ride will actually kill you good and proper, and nobody wants to ride the Irreparable But Nonfatal Brain Damage Coaster. That said, my first thought on reading about the Euthanasia Coaster was: *This sounds like an okay way to go out.* For those of us who are scared to die in pain, but also rather scared to die in bed, what could be better than simply fainting away while hurtling through the air at 220 miles per hour? Your last conscious thought something between "I'm flying!" and "wow, my buttocks are pressed against a truly ergonomic seat"? It sounds a hell of a lot better than a hospital, anyway.


But apart from injecting some whimsy into the usually-grim debate surrounding euthanasia, are there any ethical implications to roller coasters—arguably an extravagant and expensive form of amusement in a world of great suffering? What is the *correct left opinion* on roller coasters?¹ The history of roller coasters, I regret to say, has a certain capitalist undercurrent, which isn't surprising given that the only place you can find roller coasters nowadays are merchandise-laden amusement parks owned by gigantic corporations. Roller coaster construction has long been dominated by the rich,

1. True story: I googled "roller coasters socialism" to see if anyone had attempted to mandate a Left Position On Roller Coasters, but all that came up was a 1998 *New York Times* article entitled "Socialism and its long lines are alive and well at Disneyland," in which—I kid you not—a NYT columnist spends a day at Disneyland and attempts to demonstrate that his annoyance at having to wait his turn in line for rides is evidence that socialism is fundamentally flawed.

and most of us grew up believing that the proper people to design and build roller coasters were Tycoons. The earliest roller coaster prototypes—which were big slopes carved from ice and buttressed with wooden supports—were built by Russian aristocrats starting in the 18th century.² Word of these rides soon began to spread around Europe, and in the early 19th century, a company in

France called "Les Montagnes Russes" began building wooden tracks with wheeled carts that were intended to emulate the Russian ice slopes. The first true "gravity ride" or roller coaster in the United States was the Coney Island "Switchback Railway," designed and built in the 1880s by a





wealthy businessman, LaMarcus Adna Thompson, who made his fortune in hosiery. (Thompson's engineering design was inspired by the Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway, a coal-hauling railway in the Pennsylvania Mountains that had to navigate a number of steep inclines and drops, which began offering thrill rides to tourists once they realized that some peculiar people would actually pay to be thrown down a mountainside.) Thompson apparently chose Coney Island as the site of his attraction because he hoped to lure poor people away from the barrooms, brothels, and other such unsavory vices available in the same area. As he wrote:

"Many of the evils of society, much of the vice and crime which we deplore come from the degrading nature of the amusements entered into. To inveigh against them avails little, but to substitute something better, something clean and wholesome and persuade men to choose it, is worthy of all endeavor... Sunshine that glows bright in the afterthought and scatters the darkness of the tenement for the price of a nickel or dime."

There's some intricate double-bluff charitable-rich-guy logic going on here, of course: Thompson knows that poor people will seek out "amusements" in response to the "darkness of the tenement," but instead of trying to fix the whole darkness-of-the-tenement business, he instead proposes to offer poor people a more "wholesome" amusement, and gently implies that he is heroic for selling it to them on the cheap. But on the other hand, this style of conservatism is preferable to certain modern iterations, in that it at least acknowledges that non-wealthy people are *allowed to have fun*. Compare Thompson's stance to that of the *Washington Post* columnist who flatly declared a few months ago that "If you're in debt, you don't deserve a vacation... I am not impressed that you saved for a summer trip to Walt Disney World with your

children when you haven't even set up a college fund." If the Thompson position on roller coasters is something like "give them circuses, to distract them from the fact that they have no bread," the *Washington Post* position is more like "you have no bread, and therefore deserve no circuses."

"Equal access to roller coasters" is probably not *the* most important issue facing humanity at the moment, although at this point I am more confident that the Democratic Party will soon put out a thoughtful policy platform on roller coasters than a thoughtful policy platform on immigration. That said, roller coasters are probably one of the nicest human inventions ever made. I think Thompson was not entirely wrong when he articulated that roller coasters produce a truly unique form of enjoyment that doesn't come bundled up with many physical or psychological downsides, and which sometimes is even capable of producing transcendent human emotions. I was lucky, as a kid, to live near an amusement park with very good rides, and that my family could afford the annual summer pass, so that getting to ride a roller coaster wasn't a matter of scraping together money over many months, but simply a matter of deciding "would I like to go ride a roller coaster today?" More recently, I visited Six Flags Fiesta in San Antonio and rode a roller coaster for the first time in a number of years, and was shocked by how radically the experience improved my depressed mood.

AND SO, WHEN I FANTASIZE ABOUT THE Utopian City of the Future—a popular topic of conversation here at *Current Affairs*—I always imagine that every modest municipality will have one really good roller coaster, open to the public. Why *don't* cities have roller coasters, the way they have movie theaters and museums? Why do we keep our amusement paywalled inside private parks? It instinctively feels like an absurd and frivolous demand, and perhaps it is: Maybe we will find out that in a world of fairly-apportioned resources, we do not have the raw materials and manpower hours left over to also build environmentally-responsible roller coasters. But who knows! Sure, rides aren't especially cheap to build, but they are a lot less expensive than, say, a commercial skyscraper, and give rise to considerably more human happiness. Maybe once we figure out our national public transport system, roller coasters can be the next big public infrastructure project.

We will probably have to do something to protect the geese, though. ✚

2. Even today, the word for "roller coaster" in Spanish, and evidently in several other languages, is *montaña rusa*, or "Russian mountain." Strangely, however, Wikipedia tells me that in Russian, roller coasters are called американские горки, or "American mountains." Why is no one willing to take credit for something awesome?!

2020 ELECTORAL ALMANACK 2020

RELIABLE AS ALL HELL A PRODUCT OF FIVE-THIRTY-EIGHT QUANTITATIVE "BAYESIAN"

CROSS YE NOT THE POLITICAL MENDOZA LINE, BERNIE

In the hallow'd sport of based-ball, the barometer for ineptitude is known as the Mendoza Line. This inglorious epitaph (named for erstwhile Pittsburgh Pirate Mario Mendoza) refers to batters who hit less than .200, meaning their efforts end in failure more than 80% of the time. It is a badge of dishonor reserved for the most feeble and inept practitioners of the craft—but in the realm of politics, it is worn with curious pride by one Bernard "Bernie" Sanders.

As any wise soul is well aware, ascending to the lofty throne of power necessitates the fiduciary allegiance of certain moneyed and well-esteem'd gentlemen. A careful reading of the most reputable chicken livers reveals that the average American president could count upon the support of at least .400 of the members of any given Manhattan oyster bar.

Bernard the Bad-Tempered, it goes without saying, could not. In fact, it's doubtful whether even .100 of the nation's most prosperous citizenry would be happy to see him in the House of Whiteness. So take heed of Old Nate's words, Mr. Sanders: if you wish to emerge victorious, be nicer to billionaires!

HOW TO RID ONESELF OF INTERNET-PESTS

Like any purveyor of fine online opinions, I occasionally find myself besieged by the most persistently quarrelsome intellectual gnats. "You're using arbitrary cut-off points and assigning inordinate importance to polls that have clear methodological flaws," they buzz, infesting my mentions and descending upon my every post in a thick, wrathful swarm of contradictory statistics and shaking-my-damn-head GIFs.

I must admit to being vexed and enraged by this, as if I were some charlatan who selectively interpreted data to portray my preferred worldview as objective

fact. It is as if my tormentors do not even realize that "data journalism" involves numbers, and that numbers are the indisputable hallmark of truth.

So, like any clever and resourceful fellow, I have devised a solution: swear a lot, make frequent reference to my handful of notable past successes, and use even more exotic-sounding statistics than my opponent. Thanks to my magic bag full of charts, graphs, and Bayesian probability-cubes, I've been able to repel my critics as I continue to suckle at the sweet, nectarous teat of public adulation—and you can too, if you heed my advice!

THE TALE OF THE MODERATE REPUBLICAN

In the pleasant hamlet of Eiertown there lived a Moderate Republican. A quiet and industrious man of average age, wealth, and penile girth, he was respected throughout the land for his sober intellect and agreeable temperament. Above his hearth could be found three portraits, those of Ronald Reagan, Bill Kristol, and Athena (the ancient Greek embodiment of wisdom and reason).

One day, he was on his way to the market when he came upon the baker's apprentice in the act of distributing yesterday's stale loaves among the local orphans. "Did you ask permission from your master to take this bread?" he asked the apprentice, to which the girl admitted she had not. "Some of these rapscallions are wearing shirts, trousers, even shoes—have you sought any of these items in recompense for your master's wares?" inquired the Moderate Republican, and again she said no. "What about the African, the Indian, and the Mexican? Do you deem them worthy of an equal portion as your unfortunate countrymen?" he continued, at which point the baker's apprentice told him, rudely, to fuck right off.

So the Moderate Republican called the local constables, who trounced the baker's apprentice with clubs and threw all the orphans into gaol. Later that night, as he lay himself down to sleep, he smiled and thanked the Lord that the world was run by men as reasonable as himself.



CELESTIAL POSITIONS AND THEIR ELECTORAL PORTENTS

THE ASCENDANT—Mars—the American people flock to Joe Biden thanks to his promises to "keep things exactly as they are" while also "bombing the shit out of Iran or whoever."

THE MIDHEAVEN—Neptune—that one candidate from a midsize state whose name you can never remember will just sort of continue to exist in polling purgatory for reasons that aren't quite clear to anyone.

THE DESCENDENT—Mercury—Donald Trump's fiery, unpredictable style will finally cost him as his administration becomes embroiled in scandal over \$13.67 in unpaid late fees from Hollywood Video in the mid-1990s.

THE IMUM COELI—Pluto—the concentration camps along the U.S.-Mexican border will fade from public memory after Nancy Pelosi impeaches Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for saying rude things about ICE.



Folksy Wisdoms

Seven ravens perched on a single trash can outside Elizabeth Warren's house means that any district under R+7 has a 12.5% greater likelihood of turning blue.

The thrifty insulin user stretches their pennies by adding a spoonful of castor oil to every vial.

Beer before whiskey, the senator's frisky. Whiskey before beer, be careful he's a notorious pervers.

*Justice Ginsberg, strong and true
A grateful nation seeks of you
Above all else, and without fail,
To put more Russian spies in jail*

Soap, toothbrushes, and non-concrete surfaces to sleep on are beloved by the weak and indolent, but hardy souls content themselves with nobler pleasures like a strong stock market or impermeable borders.

If the juice of a ripe tomato, when splattered across the chainmail armor of a neckbearded patriot at an Aryan Brotherhood rally, contains less than a dozen seeds per ligula, the Green New Deal will certainly fail.

When the average height of soybeans in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota exceeds the length of a goat's small intestine, it's time to invade another Muslim country.

WEEKDAY	DATE	FEAST DAY	TOP DAILY POLL AND WEIGHT	ELECTRICITY BY MOON SIGN	ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS AND PREDICTIONS	CANDIDATE BY PARTY (RELEVANT BASEBALL STAT)	GOAT ENTRAILS	TOAD CROAK ANALYSIS	MURKS & TWITTER WHO
Thursday	1	St. Fokyma	HarrisX .08	♈ Warren +4	watch for swing voters breaching off the SE coast	Schultz 11.5 DIPS	ropy	beware	79 4 4
Friday	2	St. Friedman	Morning Consult .03	♈ Biden +5	if Iowa corn height 98 in*, Biden's lead extends +10	Hickenlooper 0.59 ISOP	stippled	plant peas	52 4 9
Saturday	3	St. Pukler	Rasmussen .06	♏ Sanders -2	campaign continues to suffer from refusal to hire Third Way harespex	Sanders 1.56 VORP	clummy	gaffe	18 7 7
Sunday	4	Day of Good Sense	Georgetown U .09	♏ Booker +1	endorsement from pharma in the morning, socialists take warning	Biden +4.62 WAR	briddled	stirabout	23 3 26
Monday	5	St. Keisel	Nate's dog 2.98	♏ Delaney -3	if nationwide gym memberships increase, the first candidate to run will be the first to drop out	Klobuchar 2.54 PFR	sawey	call moether	75 7 18
Tuesday	6	Feast of Reason	Mitchell Rex and Com .42	♏ Harris +1	when prosecutor brings prisoner at crossroads, well for the New Hampshire primary it bodes	Castro -1.2 VORP	banded	transport issues	49 8 83
Wednesday	7	Feast of Rage	Monmouth U .06	♏ Biden +10	when a clock on a brick wall you see, angry constituents in your future someday will be	Warren 3.4 AB/HR	nondescript	twitter fight	99 20 45
Thursday	8	St. Hayek	YouGov .41	♏ Klobuchar -1	black clouds in the Midwest indicate thorn blinder approaching	DeBlasio .312 FPCT	gunny	scandal	60 3 8
Friday	9	Disney Co. payday	Marist Col. 12	♏ Ryan +1	when crickets by nightfall do cease, name recognition must increase	O'Rourke .420 BABIP	clummy	mini-scandal	59 10 5
Saturday	10	St. Bayes	A creepy nun on the subway 5.35	♏ Gabbard +1	if single butterfly in California is sighted, voter's preference for neoliberalism required	Warren 1.46 VORP	ropy	war	36 4 5
Sunday	11	St. Stigler	American Res. Corp .54	♏ Bennet -2	when spidersweb in morning still wet, confusion over candidate's foreign policy you will get	Bullock .005 CWIN	four-lobed	cancellation	73 8 7
Monday	12	St. von Mises	EPICAMRA .39	♏ O'Rourke -1	if butter by moonlight churned, a dull candidate you can tell you have earned	Trump +5.78 WAR	stiff	despair	84 7 10
Tuesday	13	Feast of the DNC	le epic le run 4.20	♏ Buttigieg -6	when a clock on a brick wall you see, angry constituents in your future someday will be	Buttigieg 8.6 DIPS	syropy	rain/wind	55 6 40
Wednesday	14	St. MacOnline	Michigan State U .01	♏ Biden -12	segregate in spring, dismiss in summer; grope in fall; gaffe in winter	Schultz .096 FPCT	lustrous	rain	22 2 3
Thursday	15	Day of the Superdelegates	Nate's dog again 7.23	♏ Williams +3	burn sage, the higher the smoke, the better the polls	Yang 2.0 CWIN	noisome	wedding	53 1 4
Friday	16	Feast of the Consciences	Targeting insight .28	♏ Sanders -8	suburban moms flocking to Starbucks means moderate-conservative voter index	Gabbard 1.87 PFR	precipitant	talking head explosion	44 1 6
Saturday	17	Feast of the Consciences	A Rambling Conversation with Elon Musk 6.82	♏ Swirell -2	if shoeless sales stumble, poll numbers also will crumble	Harris .395 BABIP	stiff	label	80 1 4
Sunday	18	St. Laplace	Claire Malone's Branch Group 3.92	♏ Swirell -2	if shoeless sales stumble, poll numbers also will crumble	O'Rourke .634 FPCT	glutinous	plane crash	91 5 48
Monday	19	St. New York Times	Public Opinion Start .72	♏ Gavel -2	heroes flame out, but legends smoulder forever like a healthy, delicious cigarette	Ryan 1.28 PO	aqueous	cat scratch	83 5 8
Tuesday	20	St. Raptors	Emerson Col .35	♏ Gavel -2	an unmissed rock triples no centrist millponds	Messam .002 DWAR	twisted	disappointment	21 6 6
Wednesday	21	St. Fairweather	Raytheon Predictabot 6.87	♏ Moulton -1	strike him down and he will become more irrelevant that you can possibly imagine	Delaney 2.5 K/9	palsied	netflix binge	78 3 19
Thursday	22	Feast of the Neutrality	Public Policy Polling .34	♏ Yang +3	give a man a hundred dollars and he will be pretty fine with it, most likely	Moulton 0.01 RF	humid	internet outage	99 26 37
Friday	23	Disney Co. payday	McLaughlin .15	♏ Biden -16	forest fires in Mountain West, loud concern will be expressed	Warren .974 FPCT	estranged	sunny	41 8 26
Saturday	24	NeatNight (ladies drink tea)	U of Chicago boozey alumni party 6.9	♏ Sanders -16	if countries ye refuse to make, certain ye are to face rebuke	Seetak .169 FPCT	gritty	tomato blight	57 10 51
Sunday	25	St. Sunstein	Gallup .47	♏ Hickenlooper +1	fracking juice, fracking juice / let's drink some yummy fracking juice	Wald 1.00 CWIN	redolent	soft cheese shortage	21 3 7
Monday	26	St. Access	Nate's dog at the dog park this time 5.78	♏ DeBlasio -8	he's walking here, he's walking there, for the subway is broken everywhere	Williamson 0.02 ISOP	swiveled	vineyard fire	61 4 14
Tuesday	27	Anthracite Seminar	IPFW .29	♏ Indale -2	forest fires get point out, loud concern will be forgot	Booker 193 AB/HR	gritty	book club night	34 6 30
Wednesday	28	Pollster Pool Party	IMC .73	♏ Bullock -3	when all else fails, so shall he, except faster	Sanders .003 FPCT	incongruous	toxic spill	45 10 33
Thursday	29	Methodology Morn	IDFC .58	♏ Messam -N/A	if his rein you should spot, be elected he shall not	Gavel 24.5 K/9	turbulent	moose sighting	9 0 3
Friday	30	Eve of Rational Disinterest	Quintapac .47	♏ Castro -1	HATE HIM SO MUCH AUGH	Bennet .467 FPCT	humid	no-bitter	17 0 9
Saturday	31	Hallowed Feast of the Math	Harry Enten's Fever Dream 12.08	♏ Sanders -32		Swirell 27 PO	ropy	DeBlasio out	18 2 4



TV on the BORDER

by Erica X Eisen

THE SHOW OPENS ON AUCKLAND INTERNATIONAL Airport, where the protagonists—customs and immigration officers employed by New Zealand’s government—are greeted with yet another full day’s worth of cases. A couple from Fiji is found to be transporting thousands of pseudoephedrine tablets in what were supposed to be bags of kava powder. A package of methamphetamine located in the men’s restroom sets the airport on high alert as officers try to nab the person who deposited it before they make their exit. A pair of young Saudi men are detained and searched because their bags contain a children’s toy called Pop Pop, which officers believe might contain an explosive substance.

These are scenes from an episode of *Border Patrol*, a New Zealand-based TV series that has been on the air since 2004. The program revolves around customs and immigration agents at New Zealand’s ports of entry, whose job it is to intercept goods and travelers they deem “suspicious.” In the words of the show’s promos, the country’s borders are a “crucial line of defense” that is “constantly under attack” from “undesirable and unsuitable arrivals” with the potential to “destroy our economy and our whole way of life.”

Given *Border Patrol*’s explicitly anti-foreigner rhetoric, its popularity is troubling: the show was one of New Zealand’s top five most-watched shows in 2018 even after almost a decade and a half on air. In 2006, *Border Patrol* won the award for best reality TV series at the New Zealand Screen Awards, the country’s equivalent of the Emmys. That win spurred the production of spinoff series in border-conscious Anglophone countries around the world: *UK Border Force* in the UK, *Stop, Search, Seize* in Ireland, *Border Security* in Australia and Canada, and a double dose of immigration-focused programming for the United States: *Homeland Security USA* and the exceedingly disturbingly-titled *Border Wars*. Collectively, these shows have wielded the simplistic heroes-versus-bad-guys moral blueprint of the reality TV format in order to dehumanize migrants and normalize a militaristic, deeply conservative ideology around borders.

REALITY TV SHOWS LIKE *BORDER PATROL* ARE NOT THE first mainstream TV programs to deal with immigration-related themes. But by its very nature, the label of “reality TV”

makes a claim to truthfulness that, say, a primetime drama or a *Law & Order*-style police procedural does not. Reality TV gives viewers the false sense that what they are viewing is accurate, objective, and complete. This is especially true of shows that take a documentary-esque, fly-on-the-wall approach. Other examples of reality TV (like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and the *Real Housewives* spin-offs) consciously, often campily wear their contrivances on their sleeves, with fans of the former gleefully mapping out the “storylines” of real people online as though the contestants were characters in a soap opera. Border TV shows, by contrast, rely on the cultivation of an aesthetic of gravitas and authenticity in order to appeal to their audiences, to whom they promise a unique behind-the-scenes look into a world that is usually kept from view. But the documentary-like air of these shows is designed to keep viewers from thinking about the role of editing in shaping narratives, or the way that things like sound effects can emotionally frame a scene, or any number of other factors that can inject a slant into seemingly objective accounts. Outside of the occasions when a detained person addresses the camera and crew directly, it’s deceptively easy to forget they’re there.

A closer look at *Border Patrol* and its spawn reveals the ways its creators latch onto the tropes and techniques of the reality TV format in order to push a very specific agenda. If the border and border-enforcement systems are already fundamentally cruel, then the transformation and repackaging of the stories that take place at the border into fodder for thrills and entertainment adds yet another layer of dehumanization. In all of these programs, the experiences of migrants being intercepted at the border are repurposed as episode arcs, conflicts for the border patrol protagonists to overcome. They unfold to the accompaniment of tachycardiac drumbeats and thudding dramatic music, which gets the adrenaline pumping and helps create a sense that the individuals pursued by these officers are dangerous criminals. For the audience’s viewing pleasure, footage of the humiliation and deportation of migrants is chopped up, interwoven, and spaced out to maximize suspense. The sympathies of the viewer are universally assumed to be with the agents, who are explicitly cast as heroes and introduced to the audience via interviews and voiceover commentary. We learn these agents’ names, we hear their motivations, and we follow the thread of

their “adventures” in episode after episode.

Moreover, with their focus on individuals crossing the border with drugs or illegal goods, these programs perpetuate the myth that foreigners are criminals, often violent ones, who represent an existential threat to the societies they seek to infiltrate. Agents unzip gym bags to reveal blocks of cocaine, or the remains of endangered animals, or masses of counterfeit currency. When suspects are questioned, their excuses and explanations are often played for laughs and openly mocked by the agents and the narrator. This bumbling gang of dishonest criminals, the subtext reads, is no match for the intellectually and technologically superior agents of the state. Paralleling Umberto Eco’s observation that fascist rhetoric portrays its enemies as simultaneously strong and weak, these programs vacillate between extremes as they see fit, casting the individuals they oppose as either dangerously cunning—capable of endlessly inventing new schemes for evading detection—or hopelessly outmatched, relying on paper-thin cover stories and incapable of proper forethought.

Individuals intercepted by the “protagonists” of border patrol TV shows are also frequently denied basic human privacy. In some (non-US) countries, privacy laws mean that the accused at least get their faces blurred or cropped out of the shot, but measures like these don’t necessarily eliminate voyeurism. In one episode of *Stop, Search, Seize*, a woman is strip-searched for drugs after being flagged by a sniffer dog; the camera crew is unable to go into the examination room, but they circumvent this minimal privacy restriction as best they can, lingering creepily on a close-up of the door while an audio recording of the search plays. The denial of these individuals’ rights to privacy is just one tool in these programs’ broader rhetorical strategy to win support for border regimes by dehumanizing its victims.

While the different international incarnations of the border TV phenomenon may have their separate flavors—UK *Border Force* spotlights officers poking CO2 detectors into trucks crossing the English Channel at Calais, while *Border Security: Australia’s Front Line* features stings on workplaces as well as the usual airport footage—militarism, machismo, and anti-immigrant rhetoric combine nowhere more clearly than in the American *Border Wars*, which ran from 2010 to 2016 on the National Geographic Channel. (A short-lived drug dog-themed spinoff, *K-9 Border Wars*, also aired in 2017 and featured such groan-inducing episode names as “In Dog We Trust” and “To Sniff and Protect”). Unlike its New Zealand predecessor, which devoted a great deal of attention to stopping the entry of food, plants, and animals that could harm New Zealand’s isolated ecosystems (one episode includes a scene where officers searching through baggage find a two-headed budgie), the focus of its American cousin is on cartels, weapons, and migrants. In “City Under Siege,” the opening voiceover describes Nogales, Arizona as being “under constant threat” from “illegal immigration, smuggling, and terrorism.” With episode titles like “Last Defense,” “No End in Sight,” “The Front Lines,” and “Fog of War,” the show frames the agents it follows as soldiers in a high-stakes battle between good and evil. This openly hostile stance is given dangerous weight by its association with a respected household name like National Geographic, whose programs I and many of my friends eagerly (and credulously) watched as children.

Part of what makes *Border Wars* so pernicious is that the flaws, failures, and violence of the border enforcement system are all kept out of shot, propping up the notion that the enforcement mechanisms of the border patrol apparatus are fair, just, and flawless. We aren’t shown the armed groups of militia members who patrol the U.S.’s southern border, taking the harassment and detention of migrants into their own hands. We aren’t shown the holding cells that migrants are kept in while wait-

ing for their cases to be processed, where they are subjected to sleep deprivation, humiliation, and physical abuse, before being coerced into signing their own deportation orders. We aren’t shown instances where the sniffer dogs so frequently highlighted in these programs cause the wrong person to be accused of drug-smuggling—even though multiple studies have seriously called the accuracy of this evidence into question, highlighting the degree to which unconscious cues from their handlers may prompt the dogs to make false positives. We aren’t shown instances where an innocent person has been wrongfully branded as a suspect due to endemic racial profiling. The simplistic moral universe of reality TV allows for no complexity, and so any counter-narrative that might work against the shows’ lionization of border guards, garner sympathy for border crossers, or sow doubts about the methods used to keep people divided from people is consigned to the cutting room floor.

Left out, too, are the voices of the people these border patrol officers are paid to hunt and capture. Let’s take an arc of one episode of *Border Wars*, in which officers are dispatched to Agua Fria after reports of two “suspicious people.” In order to ratchet up the suspense of the agents’ pursuit, the program makes much of the fact that these men may be armed and dangerous. But when the agents box the duo in, the two men surrender immediately. In the process of interviewing these two “suspicious people,” the officers learn that they are merely poor (and unarmed) men searching for jobs up north. One of them hopes to join his wife in Bakersfield. At this point, one could imagine a very different arc for this episode, in which the arrestees, and not the arresting officers, take center stage. One could imagine a program that delves into the heartbreak of enduring prolonged separation from one’s spouse, the physical hardship suffered in the process of crossing, the hopes and dreams that these men hold for the future. Taking it a step further, one could imagine a different kind of border TV program, with a narrator who contextualizes how the economic woes of Mexico and Central America today are largely due to structural adjustment programs undertaken after receiving unworkable loan packages from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, or gives a history of how U.S. foreign policy has seeded political violence in the region. But producers are uninterested in that kind of narrative: instead, we are simply told via voiceover that, barring any criminal records on the part of the two men, they will in all likelihood be deported that same evening and labeled “voluntary returns,” a success story for these agents.

Another strategy that TV shows like *Border Wars* employ is to portray its officer-protagonists as humanitarian forces for good—in one episode, agents are dispatched in a helicopter to rescue a group of migrants who had crossed the border and are now lost without water in the desert. By depicting the patrollers as kind-hearted heroes, the show papers over the fundamental cruelty of the apparatus these officers uphold. Meanwhile, the ultimate fate of these individuals is never shown—we do not see what happens to them when they are sent back, nor do we learn the circumstances that drove them from their homes in the first place. The camera is only concerned with them for the brief period of time in which they function as a plot element—but there is no before and certainly no after. This logic makes it seem as though border crossers autospawn like NPCs in a video game. The programs’ failure to give any thought to the ultimate fate of the people its protagonists deport is particularly cruel, given that so many individuals who cross the border are fleeing extreme violence and economic hardship. Yet shows like *Border Wars* do not touch on the notion of asylum seekers at all, instead confining their narratives to cartels and coy-

otes. Viewed in this light, the show's tacit disavowal of any real moral responsibility rings of "I wash my hands of this." Their belief in the necessity and fundamental goodness of borders is untinged by even the slightest thought of what suffering they might cause.

Justifying his decision to deport one of the two "suspicious people" he'd given chase to in Agua Fria, the arresting officer turns to the camera and says, "He just seems like a poor guy that's going to see his wife and get a job, but we're doing ours and I'm not gonna feel guilty about that at all." Quotes like these highlight the ways in which borders wall off not only land, but also hearts and minds, the ways in which their ideology constrains our capacity for human empathy.

The structure of the show helps to promote a number of general misconceptions about immigration. *Border Wars* focuses on undocumented people who cross the southern border on foot or by car, failing to account for the estimated 40% or more of cases where individuals enter the country on legally obtained visas and then overstay them, or cases where people arrive via plane (scenarios that Trump infamously dismissed when Univision reporter Jorge Ramos brought them up during a press conference in 2015, an event that had earlier seen Ramos forcibly ejected). This later omission is significant, as it helps prop up a skewed image of the undocumented as being largely poor and uneducated people of color, a demographic that has long been demonized and feared by the right.

What's more, in practice, *Border Wars'* narrative often runs immigration, drug trafficking, and violent crime all together, muddying the distinctions to the degree that the uncritical viewer could easily come away with the dangerous impression that intent to do harm—and not economic necessity, family reunification, or threat of violence—is the most common motivator of border crossers. Frequent mentions of terrorism seem intended to cast Mexico as a dangerous battleground of the War on Terror, creating the impression that places like Nogales are a hotbed of shoe-bombings and hijackings. In this way, the show propagates pernicious stereotypes against Latinx people, for which the Equal Justice Society (a non-profit based in Oakland that focuses on the intersection of race and the law) publicly decried *Border Wars* as "foster[ing] prejudice, hatred, and violence toward all immigrants, regardless of legal status, that lead to hate crimes like the deaths of Luis Ramirez in Pennsylvania and Raul and Brisenia Flores in Arizona."

Viewed through the warped lens of *Border Wars'* cameras, rational human responses become curiosities. Nervousness becomes suspect. A man's flight from the approach of gun-bearing agents is seen as an obvious admission of guilt instead of a natural sign of fear. In perhaps the starkest example, agents note several times the oddity of the fact that their activity is monitored by cartels across the border (a fact made easier due to what they call the "tactical advantage" of Nogales, Mexico, which sits at a slightly higher elevation than its American twin). Yet they themselves—with their helicopters and plainclothes agents and teams of drug-sniffing dogs—represent a surveillance apparatus on a massive scale. The cognitive dissonance here reveals something about the psychology at work: the American state is meant to have a monopoly on power and spying.

THE RA-RA JINGOISM OF THESE PROGRAMS MAY SEEM obvious, but this hasn't stopped the hellspawn of New Zealand's *Border Patrol* from clinching ratings pay dirt. National Geographic's *Border Wars* garnered the highest debut ratings in the channel's history when its first episode aired in 2009. At the time of this writing, *Border Security: Australia's Front Line* is slated for an eighteenth season. Box sets of *Border Wars* are available for purchase at Walmart, and the back catalogue of these programs is easily available online when reruns or new episodes aren't currently being aired.



Online comments attest to the impact that these programs have on the real world. "*Border Wars* on National Geographic needs to be shown to every college student. Studied. Maybe even make them take a class on border wars," wrote one poster in r/The_Donald, a subreddit devoted to the cult of Trump. Five-star Amazon reviews frequently comment on the show's perceived "truthfulness," referring to it as a "documentary series" without any consideration of the possibility of bias or manipulation. "Every American needs to see this! They would soon see why the open borders 'welcome wagon' approach to illegals is a BAD idea," wrote one reviewer. Another: "Ignore the media and watch this series!! Well done. You will want a wall after watching this!" The success of these programs is in part due to the rising anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States and other wealthy countries—but these shows in turn serve only to bolster the very sentiments that created them.

The slanted nature of the narratives portrayed in popular media is often explained away by apologists as "just what makes good TV." Networks need good ratings, the thinking goes, and so who's to blame them for playing to what they know will sell? Latent in this kind of statement is an excessively narrow understanding of the meaning of "good" in "good TV." Good for whom? For the viewers watching from the comforts of their living rooms, perhaps, but certainly not for the subjects. What if instead of always equating "good TV" with "compulsively watchable, advertiser-friendly TV," we were to say that good TV can also mean TV that promotes deep empathy and social harmony? Or TV whose content is not misleading? Or TV that grapples with how to put an end to racial hatred? What's more, if shows like *Border Patrol*, *Border Wars*, and their ilk are reflective of post-9/11 hypersecurity around travel and the public discourse's growing focus on "illegal immigration" since the early 2000s, it's also true that the existence of these shows on major networks helps to normalize and perpetuate these attitudes as well. It's noteworthy that a show like *Border Wars* was still on air when Trump was elected on a virulently anti-immigrant platform; it's noteworthy that a country where *Border Security: Australia's Front Line* can run for 18 seasons would also breed a man so violently xenophobic that he would murder 51 people in a mosque in his adopted home of Christchurch. I'm hardly suggesting that these shows are *solely* responsible for the worldwide flare-up of xenophobia and white nationalism. But what I am suggesting is that when programs like these are beamed into the living rooms and computers of millions of viewers worldwide, without any other context or popular counter-narrative, then they become an element in the feedback loop of hatred and dehumanization. They can, in their own way, help lay the foundations for the Wall. ✚



USA!

CETACEAN NEEDED

The “Battlenose Dolphin” and Other Militarized Marine Life

by AISLING MCCREA and SPARKY ABRAHAM

“...on the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much—the wheel, New York, wars and so on—whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man—for precisely the same reasons.”

—DOUGLAS ADAMS,

THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

In May 2019, it was reported that a beluga whale had appeared off the coast of Norway, and was behaving very strangely. The whale had been pestering some fishing boats, demanding the attention of its crew, and the fishermen had the strange sense that it was trying to tell them something. The whale didn’t seem unhappy, exactly—it was clearly very comfortable with human contact, and enjoyed being fed and petted, even showing off a few tricks—but this was clearly no ordinary animal. Observers noticed it was wearing some kind of harness, upon which you could mount some sort of equipment; a camera, perhaps, or a

weapon. The harness read “*Equipment St. Petersburg.*”

The whale was reported to the Norwegian police force, and as far as we know is still in custody. (Although Norway has a reputation for being somewhat liberal on matters of criminal justice, police custody is still police custody, and we hope the whale has been made aware of its rights and given access to counsel.) Rumors abound that the animal had escaped from a Russian military facility, and was in fact a spy that had defected by crossing the few miles into Norwegian waters (whales, being highly intelligent creatures, reject the concept of national borders). This is not as absurd as it might first sound: Marine mammals have long been recognized by humans for their trainability and ability to understand relatively complex concepts, as well as their cuteness, which gives them a layer of plausible deniability as they swim from territory to territory—one would be suspicious of a submarine making its way towards one’s borders, but who would suspect a porpoise? These characteristics make them a highly valuable resource for humans, and especially for human governments looking to intrude upon and destroy other human governments. To that

end, several states throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have invested in military research and training programmes for marine mammals.

The U.S. Navy prefers to use bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions. (Can't be having any suspicious foreign cetaceans in the program—what if they turned out to have loyalties to foreign waters? *American* cetaceans protecting *American* citizens, that's the way to go about it.) The Navy initially started studying dolphins in the 1960s, not with the intention of training them but to examine their bodies and the way they move, in the hope of improving the designs of their torpedoes. While these studies didn't turn out to be very useful, the researchers involved found themselves fascinated by the dolphins' clear signs of intelligence and willingness to be trained, as well as their ability to sense far-off objects in the water using echolocation. To this day, off the coast near San Diego, dolphins and sea lions are being trained to recover lost objects, detect sea mines, and warn navy personnel of intruders. In decades past, the Soviet Union had a similar programme, resulting in a much more low-stakes and adorable subset of the Cold War arms race. The idea of military dolphins even inspired a 1973 thriller movie, *The Day of the Dolphin*, whose plot revolved around military dolphins being trained to assassinate the President of the United States by planting a mine on his yacht. (The US Navy denies they have ever trained dolphins to plant explosives on boats, claiming it is impractical.)

THESE MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAMS WERE not the first attempt by humans to exploit the potential of marine mammals. In the mid-1950s, a scientist named John C. Lilly began looking into the brain structure of dolphins, and in particular the way they communicated. He was partly inspired to study this by spending long periods in 'isolation tanks,' closed capsules where he could float in salt water, disturbed by neither light nor sound, just him and a facsimile of the sea. As with many of the mid-20th century's wackier ideas, he was also inspired by psychedelic drugs.

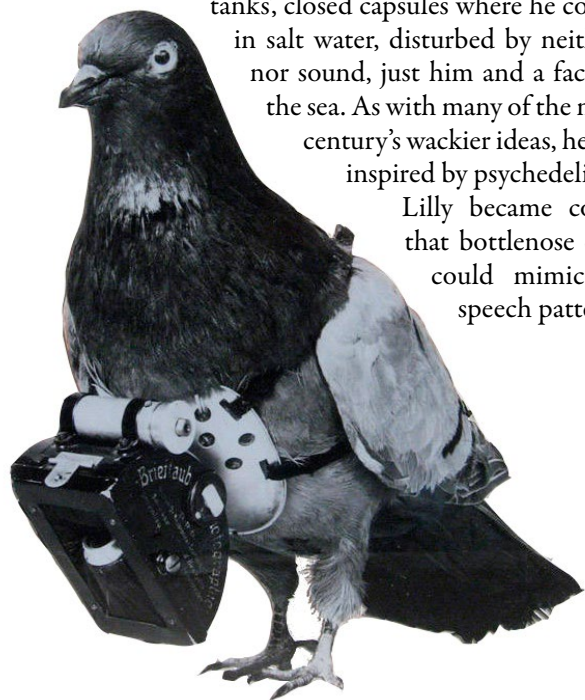
Lilly became convinced that bottlenose dolphins could mimic human speech patterns, and

concluded that, given the right learning environment, communication between people and dolphins was within humanity's grasp. He published a book in 1961, *Man and Dolphin*, speculating that dolphins would not only be able to learn human languages, but could also one day have their own chair at the United Nations, from which they could give a much-needed non-human perspective on international affairs. (Presumably, this chair would have to be submerged in some type of pool, or perhaps would be less a chair than a sort of aquatic playpen.)

This may all sound ridiculous in hindsight, but science had developed so rapidly in the previous decades that such propositions were taken quite seriously. If humans could make the atom bomb or travel into space, why couldn't they talk to animals? NASA and several other U.S. government agencies invested in Lilly, who began making plans for a new and ambitious type of custom-built lab. (The same year *Man and Dolphin* was published, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union launched their first successful manned space missions; NASA took particular interest in Lilly's theories because they suspected it would be relevant if they ever needed to communicate with extraterrestrials.) On the Caribbean island of St. Thomas, he had a house built and partially flooded with water. This 'dolphinarium' was designed for dolphins and humans to live in together, on the assumption that long-term cohabitation and exposure to human language and lifestyle would help the dolphins to learn English. Margaret Howe Lovatt, an amateur dolphin-science enthusiast who had assisted Lilly with some of his earlier experiments, was hired to live in the house with three dolphins for two years, playing with them, sleeping near them—in a bed suspended above the water—and speaking to them slowly and emphatically, as one would with a baby on the verge of their first words. Interestingly, Lilly did not express much interest in the other side of the coin, namely the potential for humans to learn the language of dolphins. All the focus was on getting the dolphins to put in the effort. It's debatable whether we're the smartest creatures on the planet or not, but we're at least smart enough to try and get other species to do all the hard work for us.

After a while, the dolphin experiments took an uncomfortable turn. The sole male dolphin became sexually aggressive towards Lovatt, and the experiment became notorious after a story was released in the pornographic magazine *Hustler* that revealed Lovatt sometimes gave the dolphin manual relief. (Lovatt has commented that she feels this aspect of the experiments was overplayed in the press.) Lovatt also clashed with Lilly over his decision to dose the dolphins with LSD, a decision which made her uncomfortable, and did not bring the team any closer to a breakthrough.

In the end, the experiments revealed little valuable information, and the dolphinarium was eventually decommissioned. Humans had failed to teach dolphins English. We would have to make do with teaching them to do acrobatic tricks— and, of course, enlisting them in our wars.



WHY ARE HUMANS SO FASCINATED BY OUR squeaky wet friends? And not just fascinated, but desirous to give them a special place in our culture: simultaneously as friends, resources, even mystical spirit-guides? We treat marine mammals differently from most animals, even other animals that appear to be just as complex and intelligent, such as pigs and crows. An old cliché stalwart of the “bucket list”—the list of all the things a person wants to experience before they die—is to swim with dolphins. People listen to CDs of ‘whale sounds’ to relax and fall asleep (or at least, they did for a period in the late 1990s, crowding the shelves of gift shops, music stores and musty hippie businesses alike). We love to ‘ooh’ and ‘aah’ over marine mammals, and are heartbroken at the thought of their mistreatment—witness the success of the 2013 documentary *Blackfish*, the outrage over whaling practices, and the demand for dolphin-safe tinned tuna. Interestingly, this adoration of marine mammals seems to be common even amongst people who are not vegetarian or vegan, and would not necessarily consider themselves animal rights activists.

Our fascination with military cetaceans is the perfect example. We all readily accept the military use of animals throughout history. Hannibal marched over the Alps with elephants—yes, of course he did. We know all about the horse’s central role in most human warfare, about carrier pigeons, about Navy SEAL dogs in Afghanistan with titanium teeth. (The titanium teeth aren’t weapons, they’re just dental crowns for doggies with tooth issues.) Run of the mill! We might know about Corporal Wojtek, the Syrian brown bear enlisted as a private and then promoted in the Polish Army. He helped his unit carry heavy ammunition. The unit then adopted, as their emblem, a bear holding an artillery shell. Ramses II supposedly had a pet lion that fought with him in battle. The Soviets trained suicide bomber dogs to climb under tanks with explosives strapped to their backs. The Greeks used flaming pigs in battle, and the CIA outfitted bats with explosives. There was one confirmed CIA project in the 1960s of implanting microphones and transmitters into cats to record conversations. (Maybe only one cat, and it might have gotten hit by a taxi in its first field test. The CIA is tight-lipped on this question.)

The thing about humans at war is nothing is off limits. If we grind up ourselves and our children like so much grist in the war mill, why would we spare the animals? But there is still something special about whales and dolphins. The thought of a beluga strapped with spy gear still seems odd in a way that a cat with a microphone does not. Elephants are big, cute, intelligent, with complex social structures, but the notion of co-opting them to help us kill each other seems completely natural. But whales and dolphins? That’s *weird*. That’s somehow *surprising*. We love cetaceans, we alternately rejoice in and are horrified by their lives in captivity for our entertainment. Spending a few minutes in a pool with them is among many people’s lifelong ambitions. But using them for war doesn’t sit right.

There are a few different explanations for this obsession and

accompanying discomfort of ours. First, there’s a term from the world of conservation that can help us understand this phenomenon: *charismatic megafauna*. There are certain types of animal that humans simply love, and attach a special value to: think of elephants, pandas, tigers, rhinos. These are the animals from children’s books, t-shirts and posters; the animals world leaders give to each other as gifts (there are entire academic articles on China’s ‘panda diplomacy’ alone). Conservationists have noticed that for whatever historical and mythological reasons, these animals get attention, and have responded accordingly by prominently featuring them in their campaigns. If you’ve ever owned any animal rights or environmentalist regalia—a badge, a decal—it probably had a picture of one of these ‘magic’ animals. No-one’s putting a naked mole rat on their pamphlets. There are some characteristics that seem to make some animals ‘bet-



We have always done this.

ter’ than others in the eyes of humans. Charismatic megafauna are usually ‘cute’ in some manner, whether by their appearance or their behavior, with complex social structures and habits at least somewhat comparable to our own, and are physically large enough that we can see their faces in detail, enabling us to humanize them. After all, how could we be expected to empathize with something that we can’t relate back to ourselves? Are whales and dolphins simply the most charismatic of the megafauna?

Humans also seem to have a particularly obsessive relationship with the sea, and the animals within it. Oceans take up 71% of space on the planet, and yet at a time where we’ve made our way across pretty much all the land, we still cannot populate the ocean, or really even know what’s in it. Google ‘deep sea fish’ and look at what eldritch horrors lurk in the areas too dark and pressured for humans to survive—strange and unsettling creatures with uncomfortable shapes, haunted teeth, unforgivable eyes. Consider the ‘bloop,’ a mysterious ultra-low-frequency sound first detected in 1997 emanating from somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. Or, of course, read *Moby Dick*, the most famous man-versus-nature story in all of Western literature. Having this entire arena of the earth that we cannot completely discover seems to drive us wild, especially since it’s populated by creatures who are, like the ocean itself, friendly, useful, and yet still unknowable.

But amid this last great frontier, this unknowable universe of leviathans, thresher sharks, slime eels, immortal jellyfish, tiny

adorable octopuses with enough venom to kill several adult humans, we've long seen whales and dolphins as allies. St. Martinian was an early Christian hermit who could not keep the ladies away. Attempted seductions on the mainland drove him to live on a rocky island, but even there he couldn't escape. A ship beached on his island and a woman came ashore. Naturally, in response, Martinian leapt into the ocean. He would have drowned if not for being carried to land by two dolphins. Jonah, of course, was saved by a whale on orders from God. Arios was a wealthy Cretian lyre player whose crew turned on him while at sea. He played one last song before leaping into the ocean, and was rescued by a pod of dolphins who liked his music.

In fact, dolphins don't just save us, in many origin stories they *are* us. The Chumash people in Southern California consider dolphins to be siblings. They have a creation myth in which the Earth Mother created people on Santa Cruz Island. But eventually the island got crowded and noisy, and she got annoyed. So she made a rainbow bridge to the mainland and asked them to leave. While crossing on the rainbow bridge, some people looked down, got dizzy, and fell into the ocean. Rather than letting them drown, the Earth Mother turned them into dolphins. The Santa Barbara Channel is still populated by thousands of dolphins today.

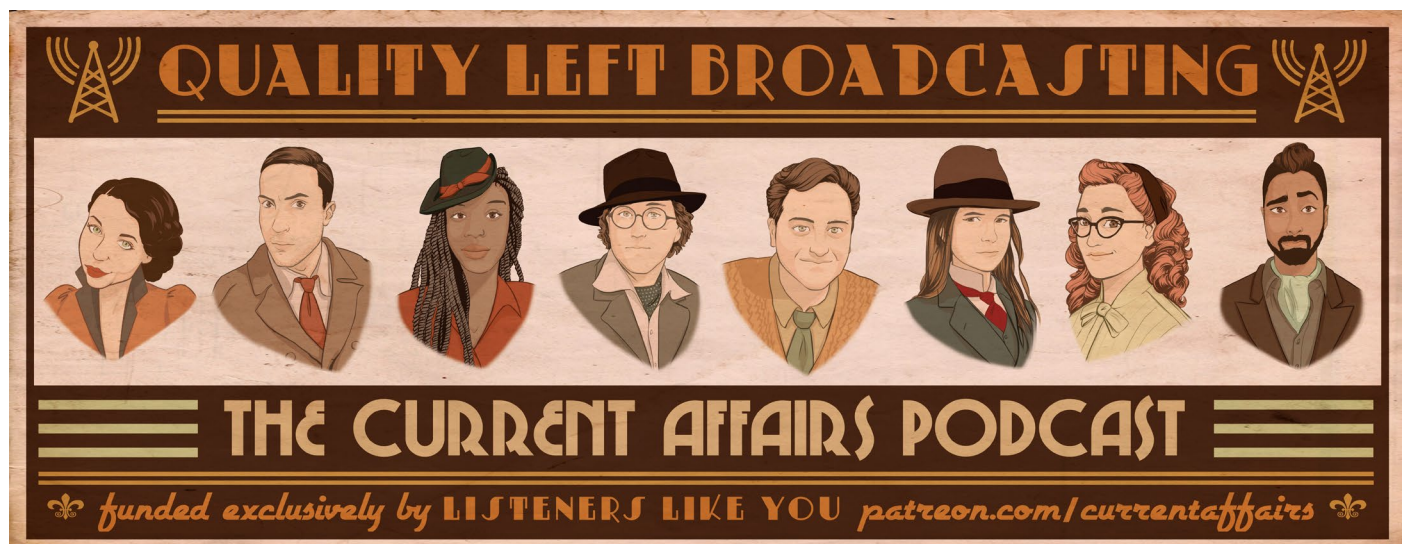
There are actually lots of dolphin creation myths where people are saved from drowning by becoming dolphins. In a story from Chinese mythology, a princess and her abusive stepfather were crossing the Yangtze when a storm rolled in. She jumped into the water to escape and transformed into a river dolphin. He also went into the drink and became a porpoise. And back in Greece, Dionysus was once kidnapped by pirates. He drove them mad with hallucinations until they jumped into the sea. But, considering them sufficiently repentant, Dionysus saved them from drowning by turning them into dolphins. Meanwhile Apollo turned *himself* into a dolphin to commandeer a merchant ship and its crew as the first staff of his temple at Delphi. All praise Apollo *Delphinus*.

And aside from being our close relations, dolphins have long made us horny. Amazon river dolphins sometimes transform

into attractive humans at night to seduce men and women alike. Even the story above about Margaret Howe Lovatt masturbating her dolphin companion might reveal more about us than it does about her. After all, there are whole industries of animal breeders whose entire job is giving various animals orgasms. There are also plenty of guides to owning certain pets that recommend getting them off once in a while. What does it say about *us* if we react more viscerally to helping a dolphin masturbate than to manually stimulating a cow's prostate? Do we protest too much?

MAYBE ALL OF OUR CONFLICTING FEELINGS about cetaceans go back to the unique combination of proximity and distance. They're mammals like us, social like us, with complex communication systems like us. They play like us and enjoy sex like us. But we have spent most of our shared history with very few opportunities to learn much about them. They come up to eye us once in a while but mostly live in a world that's not ours. We can find and follow and observe a herd of elephants for entire lifetimes, but a dolphin or whale can shake us with a deep breath and a few kicks of its tail fin. Not only are they hard to follow, they're hard to catch and to keep alive. The first recorded dolphin or whale kept successfully in captivity was a beluga owned by PT Barnum in the 1860s. He caught five but only one survived, and only for two years. The first cetacean wasn't born in captivity until 1947. So even though our shared narratives reach back thousands of years, we've only been up close and personal for a very short time.

Unfortunately this probably doesn't bode well for the dolphins and whales. Public outcry might eventually close SeaWorld, but if the world's navies decide that cetaceans can be useful then we can only expect to see more mine-detection dolphins and camera-laden belugas. Then again, who knows. Maybe simmering species-wide self-hatred will forever prevent us from ending war for our own sake, but we'll do it to save the whales. After all, they've been saving us for thousands of years. It might be nice to return the favor. +



American lives /ə'merik(ə)n laɪvz/ *n.* the units by which the human toll of a war is measured.

body camera /'bɒdi 'kam(ə)rə/ *n.* a magic technology capable of turning off whenever a police officer commits a crime.

border /'bɔ:də/ *n.* an imaginary line drawn through the world, the crossing of which is met with violence on behalf of those who may live thousands of miles away from the line.

charity /'tʃɑ:rti/ *n.* organization that attempts to partially compensate for capitalism's failures.

charter school /'tʃɑ:tə sku:l/ *n.* a school that insists it can provide better education than a public school because the people who run it are not accountable to anyone.

corporation /kɔ:pə'reɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* a collectivist enterprise in which all power is vested in a small number of central planning bureaucrats at the top and the individual must surrender their autonomy to serve the interests of the planning authority.

death tax /deθ taks/ *n.* when, upon a person becoming deceased, the state declines to transfer that person's accumulated freedom-unit score to a different, arbitrary person who did not earn those freedom-units.

disruption /dɪs'rʌpʃn/ *n.* changing an industry standard by finding ways to pay people less for their labor.

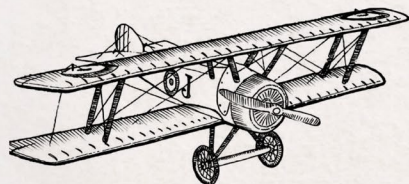
education /'ɛdʒʊ'keɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* the process of being filtered for employment based on one's pliability and deference.

employment /ɪm'plɔɪm(ə)nt/ *n.* being granted permission to continue living in exchange for an adjustable daily quantity of toil.

entitlements /ɪn'taɪt(ə)lmənts/ *n.* small increases in the freedom-units afforded to the elderly, sick, and those who have too few units to survive.

eviction /ɪ'vɪkʃ(ə)n/ *n.* forcible removal from one's home for failure to provide the appropriate lord with sufficient tribute.

fighter plane /'faɪtə pleɪn/ *n.* a plane that fights other planes to the death.



THIS PLANE FIGHTS PLANES

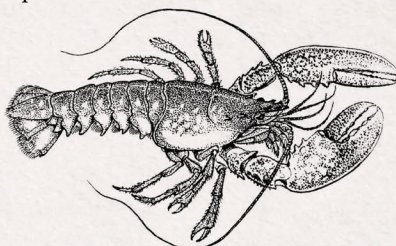
fiscal responsibility /'fɪsk(ə)lɪ,spɒnst'bɪlɪti/ *n.* only spending money on things that kill people.

food stamps /fu:d stəmp/ *n.* a system by which the poor must humiliate themselves on a six-monthly or yearly basis in order to buy a tiny amount of food they will be shamed for possessing. (Use of the stamp for lobster will result in congressional hearings.)

fossil fuel /'fɒs(ə)l fju:(ə)l/ *n.* a suicide pill; brings gratification of immediate pleasures but causes death to one's self and one's offspring.

genocide /'dʒenəsɪd/ *n.* something white people fear will happen to them; all other uses are disputed.

health insurance board of directors /helθ ɪn'ʃʊər(ə)ns bɔ:d(ə)v daɪ'rektəs/ *n.* death panel.



A FORBIDDEN DELICACY

homeless person /'həʊmlɪs 'pɔ:s(ə)n/ *n.* a person we are choosing not to house in any of the X million properties currently empty.

journalist /'dʒɔ:n(ə)lɪst/ *n.* a transcriptionist used by anonymous state officials to nudge public opinion in an appropriate direction.

landlord /'lan(d)lɔ:d/ *n.* precisely what it sounds like: the feudal ruler of a plot of land, entitled to extract wealth from all inhabitants.

limited government /'lɪmɪtɪd 'gʌv(ə)n,m(ə)nt/ *n.* government that restricts its role only to taking care of rich people.

lobster /'lɒbstə/ *n.* a delicacy forbidden to those below a certain annual threshold of freedom-units.

loiter /'lɔɪtə/ *v.* to exist in a space without spending money.

merit-based immigration /'mɛrɪt beɪsd ɪmɪ'greɪʃn/ *n.* a system of eugenics by which the elderly and sick are excluded from crossing geographic lines.

meritocracy /'mɛrɪ'tɒkrəsi/ *n.* a system by which those who possess certain arbitrary qualities are granted greater positive freedom. The intended arbitrary qualities are mathematical and argumentative aptitude, though in practice the arbitrary quality is usually preexisting possession of positive freedom as measured in money.

military /'mɪlɪt(ə)rɪ/ *n.* an institution whose sole purpose is awaiting permission to liquidate large numbers of human beings.

money /'mʌni/ *n.* a freedom-unit; the imaginary scorekeeping measure by which your freedom to do things is tracked.

national defense /'nʌʃ(ə)n(ə)l dɔ'fɛns/ *n.* bombing the weddings of rural poor people thousands of miles away.

nationality /nʌʃə'nælɪti/ *n.* a lottery system in which the winner is determined not by which numbers you pick, but where your head first emerged from a vagina.

open borders /'əʊp(ə)n 'bɔ:dəs/ *n.* the treating of imaginary lines between nations as comparable to imaginary lines between U.S. states.

police officer /pə'li:s 'ɒfɪsə/ *n.* particular class of person who is legally allowed to kill you if they claim to experience any sort of anxiety upon seeing you.

privatization /praɪvətaɪ'zeɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* the process by which control of an institution is passed from the population at large to unaccountable central planning bureaucrats.

property /'prɒpəti/ *n.* the set of objects in the world that you are allowed to have people kidnapped for using without asking you. Because there was no justification for dividing the world into sets of owned things in the first place, property is widely understood to be theft.

reparations /'repə'reɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* proposed readjustment of freedom-unit score to adjust for erroneous and malicious racial distribution error that persisted for centuries and continues to warp and render dysfunctional the entire freedom distribution system.

self-regulation /self'regju'leɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* the absence of regulation.

tax credit /taks'krɛdɪt/ *n.* a once-a-year return of a tiny amount of a poor citizen's freedom-units.

tax cuts /taks kʌts/ *n.* cutting the services we used to pay for with taxes.

teacher shortage /'ti:tʃə 'ʃɔ:tɪdʒ/ *n.* the unwillingness of a state to pay the market wage for school instruction.

United States Constitution /ju:'naɪtɪd steɪt kɒnstɪ'tju:ʃ(ə)n/ *n.* the wellspring of democracy. A set of absolute rules that govern those who were excluded from the drafting of those rules.

vocation /və(ʊ)'keɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* a job where it is okay for the standards of pay and quality of life to be as low as possible, because the employees theoretically enjoy what they do.

voter registration /'vəʊtə redʒɪ'streɪʃ(ə)n/ *n.* an obstacle to voting dropped in the path of people you'd rather didn't vote.

war /wɔ:/ *n.* a process by which people are ordered by their institutions to fight one another to the death.



LIFECYCLE *of a* LEAF

Our food system is insane. Making it better will make us happier.

BY SAM MILLER McDONALD

IN THE SECOND QUARTER OF 2009, THE NATION'S GDP hit its lowest point since the Great Depression, unemployment marched toward its 10 percent peak, banks seized nearly a million homes... and I graduated from college. I was lucky to have a degree, though I couldn't use it, so I took the best job I could find: working at an outdoor sports store with an attached ice cream and fudge shop. (Word to the wise—selling pajamas and fudge under the same roof is a recession-proof business model.) By the end of peak tourist season, my wrists were shot to hell from scooping hundreds of ice cream cones every day. During the summer, even at the height of a recession, the town of Bar Harbor, Maine, gets leisurely trampled by a few million people, and they all want ice cream. Ours was the first one off the pier where many of the world's largest cruise ships dock.

My wrist-wracking toil was terminated with the dwindling trickle of seasonal visitors and so, with few other options—the recession hitting peak unemployment the month prior—and a small pile of hoarded tip cash, I joined a friend in starting up a new company. He was the real business and engineering mind behind the venture, with me offering some real-world agricultural know-how and the top-quality sidekickery that only a guy named Sam (inside or outside of a fantasy novel) can provide. We decided to jump into an industry that neither of us had much real experience in, but, well, neither did any-

one else. We were trying to design a new way of growing food.

The new food-growing system we designed was run on hydroponics, which means growing plants suspended in a nutrient-rich water stream. Hydroponic growing is not new. But we experimented with a variety of newer high-tech methods, like using low-energy LED grow lights in a highly dense, stacked grow system with automated nutrient flows. Essentially, we were trying to develop a way of growing leafy greens using computers and a finely-tuned environment in an urban area at commercial scale. We must have been doing something right, since a horticultural lighting team at the world's largest lighting manufacturer/popular electronics brand wanted to work with us and ended up co-opting some of our design.

The business benefit to the concept was that we could sell lettuce near where it would be consumed, year round, which meant delivering more and fresher leaves with fewer labor needs and costly chemical inputs. But the broader social benefit was that this technique could dramatically reduce the negative impacts that the production of packaged salad greens has on people and the world, which is worse than you might imagine. Water pollution, air pollution, water waste, land use footprint, fertilizer and pesticide reliance, and, perhaps most importantly, carbon emissions: Our technique could have reduced all these destructive environmental problems. (It could have, but our particular company was not successful; we'll get to the why of that later.)

Here, however, you might want to stop me and say, *Wait a minute, Sam, how could growing leafy greens indoors with light-emitting diodes and computers be more energy-efficient than growing greens in a field with sunlight?* That is a reasonable question and in a reasonable world, it wouldn't be more energy-efficient. But we don't live in a reasonable world. So to answer that question, let's take a quick journey through the surprisingly intricate absurdities of our current fossil-fueled food system. One of the more illuminating products for exploring this system happens to be the humble packaged salad greens you can find in a supermarket. So let's start there...

THE LIFE(DEATH)CYCLE

SO YOU'RE AT THE GROCERY STORE AND YOUR BASKET is full of Cool Ranch Doritos, pudding, and cheese, but you're between health insurance plans and spent the afternoon woe-scrolling Instagram, so you shuffle out of the frozen pizza aisle to guilt-purchase a box of arugula, 65 percent of which you *know* will rot in the fridge before you eat it. What you may *not* know is that—notwithstanding the label showing an idyllic farm—a huge industrial infrastructure shuttled that shame-lettuce into your basket. Here's a basic sketch of the process from farm to garbage; let's keep a count of the number of fossil fuel inputs involved, bearing in mind that I've surely missed some.

Input #1: Since, like all other leaves, arugula starts as a seed, these seeds were likely extracted and bulk-sorted in a mechanized process using fossil fuel energy. Then they were shipped using diesel fuel to the field (input #2) in California or possibly Arizona, since 98 percent of packaged salad greens are grown within those two states. By this point, the ground has been stripped and prepared with internal combustion engine vehicles (#3) into which the seeds are planted with precision seeders (#4). Water is sprayed in vast quantities—agriculture uses 80 percent of California's human-use water—through pumps powered typically by (you guessed it) fossil fuels (#5) until seedlings break the ground. Laborers traverse the field, sometimes with vehicles (#6), applying pesticides synthesized from—and manufactured with—petroleum (#7): herbicides to kill weeds, fungicides to kill fungus, and pesticides to kill insects and rodents. Petroleum-derived fertilizers (#8), too, have been applied in a mechanized process (#9). When they're ready, the arugula leaves are cut with big diesel-fueled vehicles (#10) and transported to a processing facility that is powered by, most likely, coal (#11). There, the leaves are sorted on conveyors (#12), washed in industrial washers (#13), dried in industrial dryers (#14), and then packaged with machines (#15) into plastic (#16) containers.

Then the packaged greens are put on a truck (#17), then onto a diesel-powered, refrigerated train (#18), and shipped across the country to a grid-powered distribution center (#19), let's say Hunts Point, a sprawling food-warehousing complex in the Bronx. There they are moved with a forklift (#20) to a truck (#21) that takes them to a supermarket where they sit on a refrigerated shelf (#22), are then plopped in your basket, chucked in your electric refrigerator (#23), and partially consumed in exactly one meal before you forget about it.

But wait! The cycle isn't complete. As soon as the greens smell or look off, or you need more space for pudding in your fridge, you throw the greens into your bin, which is picked up by a garbage truck (#24) and ends its short life in a landfill that emits lots of methane—this isn't a fossil fuel input, but it *is* a potent greenhouse gas! In fact, methane is between 30 and 84 *times* more potent than carbon dioxide. Such landfills represent the third-largest source of methane emissions in the United States. That's on top of the prodigious methane emissions that come from manufacturing ammonia fertilizer, which are 100 times higher than the industry reports. Meanwhile, since you're a good environmentalist, you put the plastic container in a recycling bin. From there, the packaging is placed on a truck (#25) and brought to a sorting center (#26). At one time it would have been chucked onto a huge ship and chugged across the world to China or Canada, where gods only knew what happened to it. But now that China isn't taking America's plastic waste any longer, that plastic container will usually be incinerated (emitting greenhouse gases), piled in landfills (emitting greenhouse gases), shoveled into the ocean (to break down into microplastics and end up inside your body or a whale's), or sent to some other countries (#27+).

So there are—at minimum—around 30 points at which fossil fuels are used to grow, process, and distribute a simple box of lettuce leaves. This doesn't even take into account all the fossil fuels that were burned to manufacture and ship all the tools—the trucks, the hoses, the tractors, the trains, the washers and dryers—needed to run the farm and ship the product. Of all food, lettuce is *not* uniquely carbon-intensive. The entire food system in the Global North is like this. In fact, a lot of other food supply chains are much more carbon-dependent than lettuce. Chocolate often starts as a bean in West Africa, goes through lots of mechanized processing, frequently exploitative labor practices, and may cross three continents and an ocean before it arrives as a slab in North American supermarkets. Coffee lives a similar life. This doesn't even begin to dissect the lab experiments—like Pop-Tarts or cheese puffs—that require an industrial process just to conceive. Nor does it address industrial meat production, which swallows up about 80 percent of all agricultural land use, tons of energy inputs, and spews lots of greenhouse gas emissions—around a quarter of all emissions, by some estimates—while exploiting lots of precarious workers and killing billions of living beings.

FOSSIL FOOD

ALL THIS ADDS UP TO ONE FACT: THE FOSSIL-FUELED-food system is terrible. And while it's terrible in a lot of ways beyond dependence on fossil fuels, most of these ills are compounded and enabled by the use of fossil fuel supply chains. Food contaminated by passing through many hands sickens about 48 million Americans per year; a lot of harmful, synthetic additives cause chronic illnesses like diabetes, cancer, and heart disease (the latter two being the top causes of death in the United States); overuse of fungicides and antibiotics in the food industry are directly leading to drug-resistant infections that threaten to kill 10 million people or more *per year* by 2050; pollution from food processing despoils

huge expanses of air and land; air pollution from growing corn alone kills about 4,300 Americans every year; billions of animal souls are tortured and brutally killed every year; farms displace wild animals and are one of the leading contributors to mass extinction of wildlife; food corporations exploit precarious workers; healthy food is often inaccessible to lower-income people; industrial agriculture depletes nutrients from the soil at a rate faster than it can be replenished, which is hurtling *the entire world* toward mass starvation; and much more. Our fossil food kills in so many ways.

But our food system's complete dependence on carbon emissions remains the direst and trickiest problem. Without severe intervention, greenhouse gases will, in a handful of years, trigger runaway climatic feedback loops that will be unstoppable and could ultimately kill most life on Earth, as they did during the Late Permian extinction event. Right now, virtually every calorie of food consumed by someone in the Global North depends on a whole lot of greenhouse gas emissions. This has to change radically and rapidly if humans and other complex life will be able to continue making Earth their home.

Making that massive change haphazardly could be disruptive, leading to famines and wars. But such chaos will inevitably mar our future anyway if we ignore this problem now. So we can either fail to plan, or we can confront it head on while we still have the ability to implement proactive solutions. While doing so entails risks, it could also provide an opportunity not just to avert catastrophic climate impacts, but also to make the food system better in all those other myriad ways that it needs to improve. In fact, decarbonizing the food system could single-handedly address most of the problems listed above and fix a lot of other issues at the same time.

As an added benefit, decarbonized food can also offer greater resilience in the face of climate-related disasters. The climate has already changed. Weather-related disasters are already occurring at unprecedented scales and intensities. Our current food system, dependent as it is on monocultures, vulnerable supply chains, and precarious workers, is not at all resilient to the new climate we're living in. Recent climate-driven flooding in the Midwest, for example, has decimated many crops in the short planting season, which will have major ramifications for commodity prices later this year. Large-scale farming itself is a product of the Holocene, a geological epoch and climatic era whose reliable weather patterns made organized agriculture possible in the first place. Those of us alive today are the first generations of humans to live in a post-Holocene world; how farming will fare in this new era remains to be seen. It's unlikely to be good. Any number of climate emergencies—floods, droughts, blights, pests, fires, superstorms—can shock our food system, throw it into chaos, and leave huge populations without access to even basic subsistence.

While this new agricultural precarity will likely hit the Global South the hardest, people living in the Global North should not feel safe. Anyone whose food supply is dependent on supermarkets and complex supply chains is risking shortages and even overnight food scarcity. When I lived in Edinburgh, a highly functional city in a very progressive country (that is, Scotland, not the U.K.), a freak snowstorm—ultimately just a few inches of snow—exacerbated by climate change was sufficient to shut down the food sup-

ply chains. Supermarket produce shelves were bare for weeks after. Even eggs and milk were difficult to get after the storm.

A decarbonized food system, on the other hand, demands that we build a system on smaller, local scales, shorter supply chains, and ecologically sound principles that are far more robust in the face of literally every single disaster a broken climate can throw at us. But what would it mean to decarbonize food? What could a non-fossil-fueled-food system look like, and how could it benefit life in other ways (besides allowing it to survive into the future)?

Non-Fossil Food

AT THE TINY COLLEGE I ATTENDED IN MAINE (where the dining hall frequently ends up on top-10 lists for its local farm food), every student was required to take an internship before they could graduate. So for my internship, I did what every good post-civilization-pondering student does and went to work on a fairly self-sufficient, low-carbon farm to learn how to eat independently from complex fossil fuel supply chains. In a scramble to find a farm willing to take me on and cover room and board, a friend told me about one that she'd worked on in northern Italy. Seemed like a nice place to spend a summer, and it was. But what she'd neglected to mention was the dictator.

The remote farm sat perched on the side of a mountain overlooking vast green ranges stretching out into tumbling hills and valleys. Old, likely medieval stone structures made up the compound at the heart of the farm. At any given time, a cadre of about half a dozen vagabonds associated with WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and other traveling farmworkers (who also exchanged their labor for room and board) lived and worked on the land with the family that ran it. The lifestyle was austere. I lived in a small, bare room crawling with scorpions, which I caught and returned to the sunken field outside my room. The bathroom was shared with the other workers and the water heater was wood-fueled (that is, you had to build a small fire underneath the tank if you wanted a warm shower—I usually just took cold ones). Electricity was scarce. The food was almost entirely vegetarian, bread-free, and bland—far from the sumptuous, meaty pasta I had imagined. This protein-deficient diet sent me on hours-long treks down the mountain to the ancient town of Bobbio, where Celts and Romans once lived. There I would eat an entire chicken, or stuff slice after glorious slice of unparalleled pizza into my face, or even hoard peanuts to bring back to my room like a hungry rat. Peanut-laden and tanned, I'd hike hours up switchbacks through forests and fields stalked by wild dogs and wild boars.

And here you might protest again: *But Sam, this so-called "self-sufficient farm" was leaving you deprived of basic nutrition. It wasn't producing the pizza you depended on for protein and happiness. How is that a desirable alternative to our food system?* Well, as it turned out, the farm could have easily provided a much more nutritious cuisine than it did. It wasn't some little hobby garden: It grew tons of vegetables, fruits, livestock, and commodities that it sold on the market. It had more than enough food and revenue to lay out a full-blown feast every single night and

still sell a lot. But the farm didn't. And the obstacle was not the reasonably ecological way in which the food was produced. The obstacle was a tyrant. The farm was run by a greedy old man, that perennial obstacle to fairness, abundance, and progress.

The former doctor who owned the land and ran the farm seemed to be an aspiring cult-leader. He loped around the fields like a grouchy Italian Gollum with a shaved head, barking at volunteers and family members and occasionally reducing workers to tears. He was himself, in his body, austere: the physical embodiment of stinginess. He preached a bizarre dietary philosophy based on blood type and used it to justify depriving workers of sufficient nutrition. "Oh you're B+? Just rice and root veg for you!" He demanded we get up early and work late. Being mostly ignorant of the Italian language, I was immune to his verbal abuse and sermons on the benefits of quinoa. But it was clear that he was motivated by hoarding money, throwing feasts for affluent customers who paid a pretty penny to have dinner on the farm and learn about his food philosophy, and by selling the tinctures of calendula oil squeezed from the flowers we workers harvested and chopped.

But even despite the austerity, it was a beautiful summer. I carry vivid memories of reading in a sunny field, strolling along mountain paths to nearby villages, and bonding with the animals and other workers. Many animals roamed the farm, with ducks, cats, bees, and sheep adding much life to the compound. One of my main tasks was to lead the flock of 44 sheep into the alpine meadows and watch over them for hours on end to keep the wild dogs at bay. I spent these hours reflecting, basking in the sunshine, wandering the hills, and inventing tales. Sometimes I would hike down to the town to see a band, or jump from cliffs into the river Trebbia.

This experience offered a small glimpse into what a low-carbon farm and lifestyle can look like. A decarbonized food system will almost certainly entail dismantling the huge, complex supply chains we currently depend upon. This means growing more food near where it's consumed and at a smaller scale. Remove the austere dictator running it and the farm would have been a pretty idyllic place to live and work—even, dare I say, utopian. With aggressive measures like radically enforced commons and laws against land hoarding to prevent such petty tyrants from rising, it's a utopia that's readily replicable. Living an active, outdoors lifestyle made me healthy and hale. I felt a connection to the land. I felt satisfaction from growing food for people. I enjoyed wonderful, restful (if insufficient) leisure time. So how do we replicate something like that at scale while ensuring a more equitable ownership of land and less precarious existence for farm labor? How do we have non-fossil farms and avoid the dictators?

GREEN NEW FARMS

First of all, we can't simply "decarbonize" or "de-mechanize" the food system all at once and immediately switch to idyllic organic farms. If we tried to do that haphazardly, it would almost certainly result in a collapse in food supply or food price shocks, and the death and turmoil that would accompany such a global famine. And what

a responsible, managed decarbonization of food should look like in detail is beyond the scope of any single piece of writing; it would have to involve granular, specific plans that vary depending on the locale, the crops involved, and the people served. There's no standardized policy that alone can govern the decarbonization of food. There are just too many local complexities. There are regionally variable pests, variation in soil input needs, difficulties in fertilizing and rotating fields in some places where a lot of people live, and the myriad ways in which agricultural land can be interwoven with wild spaces and species depends on local ecological knowledge. Above everything else, there's the wildcard of climate change that casts a looming chaotic shadow on any plans we try to make now. Because of the local granularity, municipalities must be at the frontlines of governing this transition.

But there is one thing we can be doing now in spite of these local complexities and global uncertainties. There is one policy that we *can* standardize and begin applying at a federal scale, possibly contained within the boundaries of the Green New Deal or a similar policy. And that is federally subsidizing small-scale, low fossil fuel-input agricultural projects and dismantling the large fossil fuel ones. (We can break up the big banks *and* the big farms at the same time.) But doing this, decarbonizing the food system, will almost certainly mean changing the way in which people work and live in the world; if we're going to get the political buy-in necessary to dramatically change how food is produced, and fast, then we must discuss the big patterns in lifestyle change that might accompany a managed decarbonization of the food supply and how that can make life better.

One of the often-overlooked consequences of deindustrializing food is that it will almost certainly change the composition of the labor market. Today in the United States, only about 2 percent of workers are employed in agriculture. And many of those workers are exploited, underpaid, and toil in harsh conditions. This is due to fossil fueled industrial capitalist production. By mechanizing the process of growing food with petroleum, far fewer workers are required to grow the same density of calories as in a non-carbon, non-mechanized food system. Meanwhile, given the demands of a concentrated, corporate capitalist market, owners are incentivized to squeeze every available ounce of time and labor out of their workers. Without synthetic fertilizer and the use of big machinery like those used to grow salad greens, different methods will be necessary and, in some cases, almost certainly require more hands tilling the soil. Dismantling our current system will probably mean that a lot more people will need to do agricultural work. Selling this fact *may* be a political obstacle to decarbonizing agriculture.

Or maybe not. When asked in a recent Gallup poll about where they want to live, the largest percentage of Americans (27 percent) say they wish to live in rural areas. Today, so many workers toil in degrading service sector jobs indoors, in unpleasant, rapidly gentrifying cities, alienated from each other and from nature. Or they rot on rolling chairs in dank, fluorescent-soaked offices. Nature deficit disorder is rampant and people are sicker and sadder because of it. As *Jacobin* recently reported,

"A survey by the National Young Farmers Coalition suggests



EVEN THOSE OF US WHO AREN'T FARMERS NEED TO CARE MORE ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM.

that there's a generation of young people who want to farm sustainably, organically, and as a part of a robust local food system. Their main concerns are an inability to afford land, student debt, poor health care, and a shortfall of skilled farm labor."

Many more people today would enjoy owning and working on a small polyculture farm, but *only* if they could survive in an economically secure way and with the autonomy of working according to the needs of the land and their bodies rather than the needs of absent capital or mini-tyrants. And today the economic incentives to allow this at scale just aren't in place. This may be the largest obstacle to decarbonizing food and expanding small farms.

Huge monocrops are more profitable and are subsidized by the federal government. As a result, large farms are swallowing up the smaller and medium-sized operations around the country at a rapid pace. Subsidies go in exactly the wrong direction, and they're protected by the large, powerful food corporations and lobbies that profit from them. As a result, small farms are economically difficult to sustain and their owners often live financially precarious lives. Farmers are killing themselves at rates double veterans and higher than any other job in the United States. This is due directly to the industrialized consolidation of agriculture and the financial burden this places on smaller farms. Until that industrial consolidation changes, it will be difficult to sell a program in which more people have to

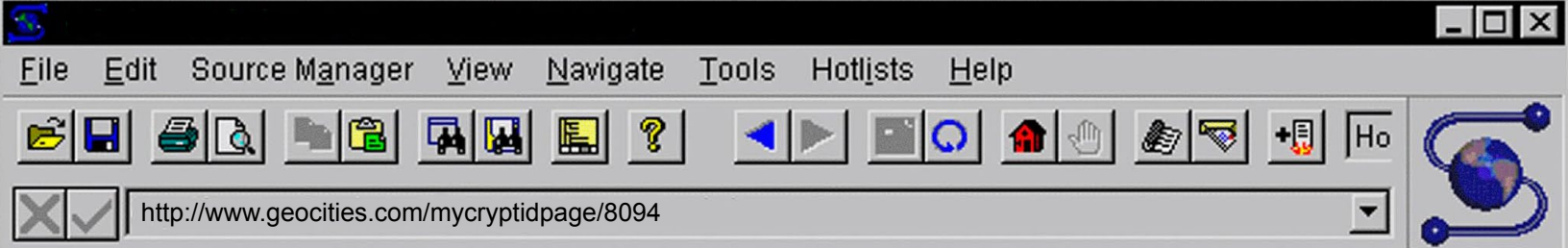
go work on farms. And it can only change through politics and policy. As one farmer told *InsideClimate News*,

"I don't think any of us wants to get bigger [...] It's just the curse of a commodity business. We made all the focus on production, and all the economics, the subsidies, are tied to production. We have a production-focused agriculture policy."

Farm subsidies and economic incentives will certainly have to be refocused to benefit small-scale agriculture and give small farmers the means to live a comfortable, secure life owning or working on small farms. Giant food corporations that depend on and incentivize huge supply chains and massive farms while peddling toxic food will have to be dismantled, disincentivized, or significantly reformed. Agroecological education will have to expand in public schools. Woven within the political battles to come, we will have to validate the virtues of nurturing nonhuman life and the deep dignity of protecting the ecosystems on which we all depend for our own lives. We have to inculcate a sense of high status and respect in the endeavor of feeding one's community. And even those of us who aren't farmers need to care more about the fundamental question of where our food comes from.

THE HIGH-TECH GREENS VENTURE I HELPED start up after college failed. It failed for many reasons, some of which were our own missteps. But one important reason it failed is that very few investors are focused on making agriculture better. Very few entrepreneurs are interested in working on making food systems healthy. No one with power and money really cares about fixing our food. There's little profit in it: Even the biggest, most profitable farms operate on slim margins. Why invest in a new farming venture with a 10 percent return on investment when you can get a 40 percent return on a new app that counts the number of times you stroke your beard? Our hydroponic greens venture and many others like it have failed in part because capitalism has failed. The economy often rewards the bad and punishes the good. As long as growth and private profit dominate our reasons for doing things, small farms are going to lose. As long as the subsidies, policies, and incentives benefit big fossil-fueled food, then that's what we'll get, in addition to all the cruelty and poison that's inextricable from a petroleum-powered life.

One way we can start working toward better policy is to extol the virtues of the better lives we can lead with decarbonized farms. We can discuss the real benefits that come when we build our lives around nurturing new growth and life that gives sustenance to our bodies and communities. Food is one of our most intimate relationships with the rest of life on Earth. If we can envision an entirely retooled relationship to that life, then we can start building a new food system not dependent on pain, suffering, and fossil fuels. With it can come a reorientation to each other, to our economy, and to ourselves. Small, communally-run farms can accomplish this, and policy should empower them to do so. The lifecycle of a leaf should not resemble a harsh, violent industrial holocaust. It should reflect the fundamental facts of a natural lifecycle: a healthy birth, steady growth, a timely death, and, from that, new life. ♣



A N O R A L H I S T O R Y O F CRYPTID CURRENCY

by Emma del Valle

FOR YEARS, economic instability, increasing wealth inequality, and the stagnation of the average wage have contributed to a job market where struggling and exploitation are normalized as “hustling.” We’ve all read enough profiles of ordinary people who have been affected by the tightening margins for comfortable living to fill the lobster tank in Jeff Bezos’s limousine. But there is a demographic whose adaptations to this reality have been overlooked by virtually every news outlet... until now.

I happen to run several geocities websites with green text on a black background. I use these websites to keep tabs on one of our country’s most obscure groups: Cryptids. With my unique resources, I was poised to conduct the first survey ever of these individuals, and see how they are coping with this fractured labor landscape.

Thankfully *Current Affairs* responded to my emails, phone calls, and hand-delivered manifestos written on the inside of those cardboard sleeves you microwave Hot Pockets in, and allowed me to use their platform to publish this important and unprecedented investigation.



BIGFOOT

I got in touch with Bigfoot via snail mail, sending an interview request to a post office box in Gardner, Colorado. He responded quickly, suggesting a stump we could meet at. My editor reluctantly granted me a travel stipend, and I flew out to see him. He was already waiting at the stump when I arrived. He had set out a dented can of La Croix and a raw deer leg for me. His manner was thoughtful, solitary - it was clear that he did not socialize often. After some halting small talk, he told me his story.

“Well, originally I had a good thing going. Someone took that picture of me, you know the one, I’m walking like this -” he mimed the infamous Bigfoot lope “- and it just blew up. So I made a website, started charging restaurants and supermarkets a fee for me to get ‘caught’ eating out of their dumpsters by the local news. That was working pretty well for a while. Then I break into a cabin that has a TV in it, turn it on to see who’s the President now and if there’s any new Law & Orders, and I see some guy dressed like me in a beef jerky commercial. The bubble had burst. Now there’s a hundred Bigfoot impersonators out there. I’m a little older than all these guys, and I just don’t have the energy to compete anymore. Nobody cares if they’ve got the real thing or not. That’s the way it is, I guess.”

MOTHMAN

My interview with Mothman was a happy accident. I ordered a box of beef jerky online after my meeting with Bigfoot left me with a guilty craving I couldn't shake. On the day of the delivery, I kept getting notifications that my delivery window was changing. It wasn't until 1am that my neighbor's Affenpinscher began howling and I heard the unmistakable thump of ten pounds of beef jerky hitting the ground outside my door. I checked my doorbell camera and saw an impossibly tall, dark figure turning to leave. I ran to the door, my heart pounding, threw it open, and there he was: the Mothman, of the infamous Prophecies. I invited him inside, but he demurred, saying that he had more deliveries to complete. I managed to convince him to give me a quick statement, in exchange for \$20.

"I've been doing a lot of deliveries. It's fine as long as the recipient isn't home. People freak out when I show up because they're expecting a guy or at least a drone and not an 8 foot tall humanoid moth with glowing red eyes. Look, I gotta go, I've got 10 hot pizzas and a pound of weed strapped to my back."



JERSEY DEVIL

The Jersey Devil is the only subject who reached out to me. I am not sure how she heard about the article, but I received a two paragraph long text message from her forcefully suggesting we get lunch at a glass-walled salad restaurant. When I arrived she was taking a photograph of her used napkin. I tried to get her to address some prepared questions, but she steered the conversation.

"First of all, so amazing of you to reach out to me and seek my perspective. I love sharing my learned experience. I'm so exhausted from doing promos for my new book, *The Devil You Know*. It's coming out in September. I haven't written it yet but then again I've done the hard part already: fucking living it."

I cut in to ask her about a recent article that had been making the rounds claiming that her born-and-bred Jersey credentials may be falsified.

"That article about me? Oh, you read it? I suppose everybody did. I wouldn't call it an exposé as much as.... Jealousy, I guess? Cryptids taking down other cryptids? It's sad actually. I mean, does my accent sound fake to you? Will you excuse me? My agent and manager are calling me at the same time. Wonderful talking to you, perhaps I can get you discounted tickets to my book tour? You can bring a plus one but only if they're an accomplished videographer who can film it without the bookstore's permission. Ok bye, love you! You inspire me!" As she ran out the door, I realized that she'd left me with the bill.



THE YETI

Getting in touch with the Yeti was more difficult. I finally found his phone number on Craigslist, in a for sale listing for a used CPAP machine. He was gruff on the phone, and almost hung up when he realized I was not interested in buying the machine. Ultimately, he agreed to give me a quote via email, on the condition that I do not publish his location. He wrote:

"Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays I do dogwalking. Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays I work at Home Depot. I do Uber most nights. People give me a low rating because I keep the car cold. I like it cold. I don't see what the problem is, it's my car. If they want the car hot they should buy their own car. I like dogs more than people but my health insurance is expensive because of my reverse altitude sickness and various other complications resulting therefrom so I have to keep doing the driving. And people complain about dog hair in the car. I do not let the dogs inside the car. That is my hair."

HOW WAS YOUR RIDE?



BANSHEE

I happen to share a commute with the Banshee. I noticed her sitting across from me on the bus four years ago, reading *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* with a strip of duct tape over her mouth. We managed to have a quick chat over the heads of several other passengers. “YOU’D THINK I DRIVE PEOPLE AWAY, WITH ALL MY SCREAMING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, RIGHT?” she said. “WRONG. I HAVE FIVE ROOMMATES. THEY WEAR EARPLUGS.” At this point the bus driver pulled over and refused to keep driving until she kept her voice down. The Banshee rolled her eyes, shrugged, and pulled the duct tape back over her mouth.



SLNDERMAN

As you would imagine, I found Slenderman online. He has a fast-growing TikTok account where he can exist comfortably camouflaged among the hundreds of other users cosplaying as him. He sent me this series of messages at 4 in the morning.

“I’m a social media manager but I’ve been doing free-lance consulting.”

“I’m in demand but nobody wants to hire me full time.”

“I’ve been running four different brand accounts and things are getting out of control.”

“Each company’s trying to get me to have them all clap back at each other”

“now I’m having dreams about the Charmin toilet paper bears teaming up with the Keebler elves, ripping my internal organs out and flushing them down the toilet”

“Are you awake?”

“can u send me some of your hair”



MOMO

I spoke to Momo, the recently viral internet monster, via Skype. It didn’t take much convincing; they were eager to set the record straight about the controversy that they were embroiled in at the time. Momo’s giant, browless eyes seemed to consume the screen, and during our conversation a deep, strange feeling of lassitude came over me.

“Ok,” Momo began, “So YouTube demonetized my channel because I was ‘inciting kids to commit violence and self harm.’ First of all, I just want to apologize to my fans for this controversy. I think they know more than anyone that that’s not what my intentions were when I started this channel. They know I’m just a sculpture that the artist Keisuke Aisawa made for a special effects company in 2016. I don’t want children to kill themselves. I want to steal children. Is that so hard to understand?”



CHUPACABRA

To meet with El Chupacabra I needed to return to my editor, hat in hand, and ask for an additional travel stipend. El Chupacabra refused to speak to me on the phone or via email, and he told me he'd only be in New Mexico for a few more days, and after that he didn't plan on having a fixed address for a while. I caught him outside a motel in the middle of nowhere as he was tossing a worn out suitcase into his car. He took special precaution not to let me see what else he had in the trunk. He lit up a cigarette and leaned back against the hood, regarding me suspiciously. I'm sure he didn't actually expect me to come. Like Bigfoot, he seemed to be a holdout from another time. I handed him the gasoline canister full of goat blood he had requested and he nodded approvingly.

"You know," he said, "a lot of clinics will take blood donations and pay you for the plasma, \$50 a squirt. Do I tell them that it's goat? No. And by the time they figure it out I'm in El Paso with new plates on my 1995 Hyundai Elantra doing the same damn thing."

He stopped, his long ears perking up. I could barely make out the sound of sirens. Without a word, he flicked his cigarette over his shoulder, tossed the gas canister in the back, winked at me, and sped away into a red Roswell sunset.



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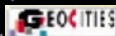
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BIG BUSINESS

and its Bottomless Bootlickers

by ROB LARSON and NATHAN J. ROBINSON

A LOT OF US GET HOT UNDER THE COLLAR ABOUT BIG business. When prices for life-saving insulin double in five years, when a third of Americans can't afford a \$400 emergency expense, when it turns out Facebook built its platform by allowing app writers to download our personal data by the terabyte, and when we learn the energy industry knew about climate change in the 1990s but still denied it incredibly loudly for years. For example.

But not Tyler Cowen, economics PhD and author most recently of *Big Business: A Love Letter to an American Anti-Hero*. We reviewed Cowen's book *Stubborn Attachments* in the January-February issue of this magazine, and found it flagrantly evaded discussing the limits to endless economic growth. In this new work, Cowen has taken his purposeful ignoring of capitalism's problems to a fresh arena, going to great lengths and new lows to avoid dealing with the incredible power of concentrated capital. As a genre, love letters are not necessarily known for their restrained argumentative rigor, but Cowen gushes over global mega-corporations with a suitor's brainless ardor.

Cowen styles his book as a no-bullshit, let's-get-serious defense of big business. These young people don't love capitalism enough, with only 42% supporting it and 51% opposing it in a survey he cites, leading him to conclude with a straight face that "Business is like the parent who tells you that you can't have everything you want all the time." Stupid bratty kids, throwing temper tantrums at our fine economic system! The grown ups are here with facts to overturn your feelings-based socialism.

GRASPING AT STRAWS

THE first thing to recoil from is how Cowen addresses his opponents' arguments. His book is billed as a response to business' "critics," and yet their appearances are cameos at best. Each chapter has an opening paragraph meant to indicate the views of the critics of business, a nat-

ural thing to include. However, most of these let-your-enemy-have-their-day-in-court moments are transparent bad-faith caricatures. His chapters begin with a single short paragraph with at most an article title or single sentence from a (usually mainstream liberal) critic, or just as often only a sentence-fragment-length caricature of a hypothetical "critic." One chapter has a single paragraph with nothing more than the titles of critical books; another represents the left not with *Jacobin* articles or the speeches of Senator Sanders, but with a tweet from "Dina." Generally, faceless "critics" aren't cited, but "they say" all kinds of anti-business things--somehow it's even less than a "strawman" argument where you debate a weaker version of an opponent's ideas, here they don't even appear.

For example, Cowen endeavors to prove that working for giant corporations is actually something people enjoy. He faces a challenge here, because when people are asked to rank the activities they enjoy, "working is next to last in terms of producing a positive mood," and people would generally much rather be having sex, chatting with friends, relaxing outdoors, or praying (in that order). But, he says, there are different data showing that we do enjoy work:

"The aggregate data on work hours are striking, and they show that Americans have fairly positive attitudes toward work. For instance, if we consider weekly work hours per American, that number rose from 22.34 in 1950 to 23.94 in 2000, hardly a sign of work falling out of fashion.... The reality is that preferences for work haven't declined nearly as much as commentators had been predicting earlier in the 20th century."

Here, for the normal human beings among our readers, who may be unacquainted with the bizarre libertarian worldview, it is worth explaining that right-wing libertarians generally treat "agreeing" to do something as synonymous with "choosing," "wanting," and "preferring" to do something. If you agreed to sell one of your organs to a black market organ-grinder in order to pay your child's medical bills, it means you "wanted" to do so. *There is no compulsion under capitalism*, meaning that even if the only job available involves allowing Jeff Bezos to perform disfiguring medical experiments on you, you are simply a voluntary participant in a mutually beneficial transaction.

Tyler Cowen, *Big Business: A Love Letter to an American Anti-Hero*, St. Martin's Press, 272pp, \$27.00

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So for Cowen, the evidence that people have “positive attitudes” toward work and “preferences” for it is that they now work more than they used to. By libertarian reasoning, Dickensian London was a place where hard labor was very much “in fashion,” as proven by the number of people who chose to spend 14 hours a day doing it. Cowen says that John Maynard Keynes’ famous prediction of a coming 15-hour work week clearly “overestimated the value” that people place on leisure, which he attributes to Keynes being a well-to-do Cambridge academic out of touch with the soul of the working man—while Cowen, we must presume, is a blue-collar spot welder in addition to his duties as a George Mason economics professor. (Actually, while we have spoken as if the assumption that “acceptance equals preference” is fringe libertarian madness, it is worth noting that it has been a major assumption underlying bipartisan economic policy for the last 30 years, and is what leads liberals like Nicholas Kristof and Matt Yglesias to defend sweatshop labor as Actually Good.)

Cowen argues that people find fulfillment in work, that it gives them Meaning And A Sense Of Purpose, social connections to others, etc. He says that many people do jobs helping others, and many find a sense of safety at work. Yet he also introduces something of a paradox:

“Having a decent job is a major source of happiness, satisfaction and social standing. That is one reason I have moved away from the idea of a guaranteed annual income; if it is set at decently high level, too many people will use it as a reason not to work...”

Note the tension here: work is simultaneously something that makes people extremely happy *and* something that they’d instantly stop doing if they had enough money. Of course, if you’re a leftist, you know how to make sense of this: people like “working,” what they hate are their *jobs*. Cowen is right: there is intrinsic pleasure in helping other people, in creating things, in being active and useful. Why, then, do people rank their jobs dead last on the list of things in their life they enjoy doing? Cowen hypothesizes that it is because we do them for long periods of time; if we had sex for as many hours a day as we work, he says, we might be similarly weary of it. (Though this would imply that, contrary to the theory of one Tyler Cowen, people aren’t working more because they want to.) A more obvious answer would be that many jobs fucking suck.

Anthropologist David Graeber, in *Bullshit Jobs*, and philosopher Elizabeth Anderson, in *Private Government*, have given useful observations on why this is. Cowen cites both books, but gives some signs of not having cracked them open, e.g. not quoting a single passage from them. Graeber points to the large amount of needless, meaningless work generated by capitalism—for example, jobs kissing rich people’s asses or selling status-enhancing goods that nobody actually enjoys. Anderson highlights the tyrannical structure of the corporate workplace: it’s like a government you can’t vote on, that gets to tell you what to do without your having any say. If the CEO of Walmart decides that on “Smile Day” every greeter will be required to wear a terrifying smiley-face mask on penalty of termination (this is not a real thing) or that before every shift employees will need to perform a “Walmart Cheer” in unison (this is a real thing), there is nothing workers can do about it. (Unless they are unionized, which they are not.)

Cowen doesn’t spend much time thinking about the nature of the workplace, or how employers’ power over workers affects our day-to-day experience. His only response to Anderson is that “the threat of workers leaving... can enable and enforce a lot of worker freedoms,” when her point is that it doesn’t do that at all, because if it did then the American workplace wouldn’t be run on the junta model. Such is the level of argument throughout. Cowen sets up a straw man, then doesn’t even knock it down. At best, he sort of swipes at it listlessly.

Consider his chapter “Are businesses more fraudulent than the rest of us?” It’s an oddly-phrased question, because we don’t generally hear leftists saying specifically that businesses are “more fraudulent than the rest of us,” but it’s worded that way because it’s the question he finds most convenient to answer. First, Cowen concedes that “entire sectors of our corporate economy are based primarily on ripping off consumers,” which is a pretty big concession. But then he tries to show that corporations do not commit *criminal fraud* at a greater rate than the general population, with the implication that profit-seeking does not incentivize dishonesty. He writes:

“Personally, I would be hard-pressed to find a big business that lies to me as much as—presumably—my friends, family and closest associates do. [note: this may say more about the quality of Cowen’s relationships than about

capitalism.] Shell may send me misleading information on a few big things—say, about climate change, but in my regular interactions with them... they are telling the truth, as indeed it is usable gasoline that comes out of the pump... The posted price corresponds to the price I am actually charged.”

To prove that CEOs themselves are honest, he uses, among other things, a comically irrelevant non sequitur:

“Critics of business suggest that the commercially minded are among the least honest people in American society. But no, the data tell a different story. The books that are most likely to be stolen from libraries are books on ethics.”

Cowen asks us to compare Shell’s record with the record of ordinary humans, citing the propensity of people to lie on their dating profiles and résumés. But notice a few things about this. First, fossil fuel companies systematically misleading the public about climate change for decades is not just “a big thing,” it’s a colossal act of civilization-threatening criminal misconduct. And if we want to know why Shell would lie about *that*, but doesn’t lie about the price of its gas at the pumps, there’s a fairly obvious answer: because fraud of the latter kind is illegal while fraud of the former kind is not. Why were the 19th and early 20th centuries infamous for the quantities of snake oil and quackery sold on the open market? In part because it was the era of *caveat emptor*, i.e. “buyer beware,” i.e. “sucks for you, buddy.” We are, thankfully, much less libertarian about outright scams these days.

Why do Shell executives not do things that would get them sued or sent to prison? Because those things would get them sued or sent to prison. If the same consequences hung over anyone who fibbed on a dating profile, you’d probably see fewer false professions of feminism among the Nice Guys Of OkCupid. To see what capitalists are really capable of, you’d have to look at them in an environment where no profit-seeking behavior, however deceptive, was subject to legal sanction. In fact, we can predict what such a world might be like from what companies *already* do. Lying about climate change wasn’t illegal, so they did it, and while Shell may not post outright inaccurate prices at the pump, they come as close to it as legally permissible—we all know the 9/10-of-a-penny trick that is used to subtly make us think gas is a tiny bit cheaper than it actually is. (Don’t get us started on the way Cowen cites statistics on shoplifting to show ordinary people are frequently dishonest, without noting the tens of billions of dollars in wage theft perpetrated annually by employers.)

SPEAKING NICE TO POWER

Cowen’s main argument, returned to frequently, is summarized at the front of the book: “All of the criticisms one might mount...pale in contrast to two straightforward and indeed essential virtues. First, business makes most of the stuff we enjoy and consume. Second, business is what gives most of us jobs.” In other words, capitalism and business are the system we have now, which indeed produces goods and employs us. It’s the “Stalin industrialized Russia” pattern of reasoning: for-profit companies have produced innovation and economic growth, therefore this growth was produced because of the for-profit structure of companies. It can be applied to any social system—doesn’t the King provide us with the security to grow our crops? Doesn’t our perfect Soviet system give us work and bread? The fact that our current social system produces goods on a basic level is not quite as ringing an endorsement as Cowen presumes. It doesn’t work logically, as the Stalinism and feudalism parallels show, but it’s also factually false: as Rob has documented at length in this magazine, the public sector’s role in innovation is frequently obscured to serve the mythology of the Great Benevolent Entrepreneur. Cowen is not wrong to give companies credit for *some* innovation; as he points out, “Facebook also has been a leader in the development of targeted advertising” and has “revolutionized how companies communicate information about their products for individuals.” Innovations in invasive advertising are indeed one of the bounties capitalism has proven itself most capable of delivering.

How much lazy reasoning is it worth going through? Cowen’s defense of pharmaceutical companies is that “pharmaceuticals are among the most effective of all medical treatments,” which is an insufficient response to the evidence that companies are incentivized to prioritize treatments over cures, charge as much as possible regardless of a drug’s cost to the company, and aggressively attempt to create as much addiction as possible. When confronted with the monstrous greed of the corporate sector and its often deadly consequences, Cowen tends to reply that this behavior is the exception rather

than the rule, but what an exception! (These instances have a Pinker-esque “for every Black man the police kill, think how many they *don’t* kill” flavor to them.)

The failure to engage with serious critics is borderline academic malpractice. It means that Cowen doesn’t talk about the things that critics of big business actually talk about: exploitation, inequality, preventable poverty. It means that he makes points like *individuals commit more illegal tax fraud than corporations* without thinking *perhaps the reason that corporations don’t commit illegal tax fraud as much is that they pay a lot of money to make sure their tax avoidance schemes are legal*. It means he means that he ignores direct critics like economist William Black of the U of Missouri-Kansas City, who specifically criticized Cowen’s sunny, hands-off views of CEO-board control fraud, especially in the banking sector.

We try harder here at *Current Affairs*, dear reader. Nathan’s articles begin with full step-by-step descriptions of conventional conservative positions, and with enough guts to even state them in an at least moderately favorable manner, so readers can actually have a moment in the headspace of a political opponent. Rob’s book *Capitalism vs. Freedom* quotes the Pinochet-advising arch-conservative economists at paragraph length. If you’re serious about debunking arguments and not just out for cheap PWNAGE, you want to go the intellectually strongest supporters of the other side and really let their words be presented, and referred to faithfully in your own retelling. That way you can not only feel confident in meeting the full force of the other side, but you know you’re arguing against the right points!

Debating imaginary idiots rather than actually existing left economists and social critics leads Cowen to clumsily put many Big Businesses into the Critics of Big Business slot. Early in the book we get this: “The media are perhaps the biggest villain when it comes to criticizing business,” simply since they have a bias toward headline-grabbing negative news. This of course is problematic because

1. The media *are* big businesses—the news networks belong to huge corporations like AT&T, Disney and News Corporation, and often operate on ad-based business models reliant on selling commercial ad time to *other* big companies, so it’s hard to imagine they’ll abide much shitting on themselves and their customers, even if it’s favorable for clicks.

2. Media-monitoring groups like FAIR have documented extensively that pro-business viewpoints hugely dominate on the news networks, which are after all corporate property, and in particular representatives of labor are almost completely unheard from.

Let’s go into a bit more detail one more of Cowen’s defenses of big business, because it’s important to understanding what he’s missing, namely the power of concentrated capital. In the chapter “How Monopolistic Is American Big Business?” Cowen wants to show that whatever big businesses are, they are not monopolies. That is, they’re big, and their bigness is good, but they are not so big as to be too powerful.

Now, one quite conventional way to analyze any particular market or industry is with a “concentration ratio,” a simple measurement in which the four (or alternatively eight) biggest companies in the market are added up in terms of their market shares—the proportion of the market’s total production that comes from each firm. So a very high concentration ratio for an industry means it has big companies, large even when compared to the overall market. This suggests that big business’ strategies will be based on their power within the industry, like using their huge scale to bully suppliers or to crush upstart rivals.

And yet Cowen’s monopoly chapter has almost no concentration ratios cited. Instead, we’re treated to Cowen repeatedly telling us that the widely-used metric is irrelevant, or that even though the numbers “have gone up,” or “have risen,” “you shouldn’t worry too much about rising concentration

ratios.” Suddenly the hard truths of data are shoved aside, and I have to say that even a non-economist reading this text must become a little suspicious—why are these values referred to constantly only to disparage and dismiss them? By my count, Cowen refers to elevated concentration ratios nine times in this chapter, and brings himself cite only two. One is in the historically less-concentrated apparel markets, the other in manufacturing, which with its economies of scale is much more big business-prone. But even here Cowen manages to dismiss the issue, with a tool that American economists have relied upon for decades to disprove fears of market power—low prices.

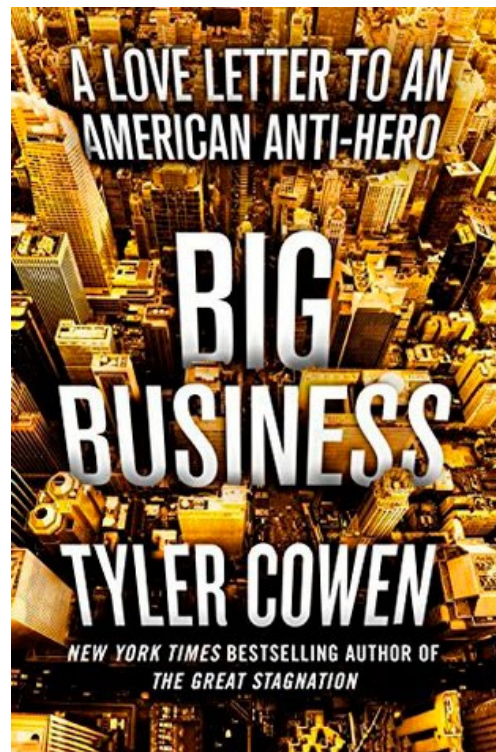
SEEING POORLY

See, in the standard economic model of monopoly (or other markets with just a few big companies, called “oligopoly”), giant companies with control over a market have a classic play where they deliberately restrict supply in order to inflate the market price for their products, and therefore increase their own profits. While this is definitely one possible strategic option for giant companies, it’s clearly not essential for them—even huge powerful corporations may keep prices low for a period, in order to gain market share or to crush a weaker rival. But for years, economists have argued against any public concern about towering capitalist assholes like Jeff Bezos by pointing to low prices, and indeed even formal antitrust trials against clear corporate monopolists now end in business victories when their attorneys can point to a history of low price points.

Don’t take our word for it—read this book (okay, maybe not *this* book) or conservative news sources like the *Wall Street Journal*, and you’ll discover that as long as some corporate giant hasn’t yet used their power to openly screw consumers with high prices, there’s no need for concern. Low prices are the “At least the trains ran on time” of big capitalism—a basic concession to daily stability while the power centers gather strength in the shadows. What Cowen and his classy ilk never bring up is the wide scope of *market power*, the ability to decide outcomes in the economy, which may or may not require hiking prices today. (In fact, to the extent that Cowen thinks monopolistic practices occur, he says we should relax. In a remarkable passage, he says that if a single company were to gain control for the market for “say, apples, movies, or ski boots,” people could just stop buying those products and “spend more time on Facebook,” the “universal substitute” for other human goods. “You call it addiction, I call it trust-busting,” he says, though he admits that the theory wouldn’t work very well if the product in question was, say, an artificial heart that you needed in order to live.)

Crucially, other conservative sources openly discuss real market data like concentration ratios, and take them quite seriously. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, cites market share information and the resulting ratios very regularly, and sometimes goes further into the actual ownership of today’s giant corporations too, like when it noted that “stock ownership is concentrated among the wealthy,” a conclusion backed up by ample research. (Cowen, like Trump, cites the rising stock market as part of the case for big business, without diving into the question of who owns the stock.)

If you actually look at the data on market concentration today, you can see why Cowen shies away from this embarrassing data. According to the Economic Census of today’s markets, the eight largest software publishers code programs that earn half the market’s income. The four biggest snack food corporations produce over half the total, and 80% of US pet food comes from just eight firms (often misleadingly labeled as separate brands), both being classic oligopolies. And of course the new Silicon Valley tech giants are such colossal monopolists (or at best duopolists) that even the stifling reactionaries at the *Economist* called them “out of the box monopolies.” That



should be embarrassing to Cowen, but he has some even more monumental doozies in the book. Early on, he responds to an unspecified person on Twitter making a vague complaint about eyeglass stores. “But perhaps eyeglass companies should instead be applauded for competing against each other to make this service as cheap as possible,” Cowen writes, patting himself on the back for having stood up to Dina on Twitter.

But as any economist with a passing familiarity with modern market structures will tell you, the American eyeglasses industry is in fact utterly monopolized. In a case that has become notorious among economists whose goal is *not* to polish the balls of Corporate America, the Italian glasses behemoth Luxottica has rolled up the entirety of the U.S. market. Let us yield the telling to Barry Lynn, the prominent pro-capitalism but anti-monopoly writer, describing in his stupendously good book *Cornered* a US suburban mall:

There are four retail outlets here: LensCrafters, Knighton Optical, Sears Optical, and Sunglass Hut...I am treated to a mall tableaux that, had I not done my research beforehand, would surely have convinced me I was wandering through a well-kept garden of competition...Thanks to my research, I know that LensCrafters, Sears Optical, and Sunglass Hut are all owned by the same company, the Italian eyewear conglomerate Luxottica...Not only does Luxottica sell products under its own name and that of Ray-Ban, it also makes what is sold under such names as Dolce & Gabbana, Donna Karan, Ralph Lauren, and Tag Heuer.

(Incidentally, you may have heard of Lynn for being fired by a well-known Obama-aligned think tank, the New America Foundation, after supporting the European Union's fine on Google for its anti-competitive practices. Google's then-CEO, Eric Schmidt, was a major donor to the Foundation and was evidently most displeased by this mild criticism and exercised some simple market power to presumably press for his firing, carried out by Foundation president Neera Tanden. Luckily we have Cowen to reassure us, because since Google hasn't raised any prices, nothing bad is possible!)

Unsurprisingly, Cowen devotes a chapter to Big Tech—the giant Internet companies like Google, Amazon and Facebook. This makes sense for a defender of business, since these Goliaths have been racking up the headlines, mostly bad, like Facebook's notorious data insecurity or Amazon's barbaric treatment of its workforce. His chapter is titled “Are the Big Tech Companies Evil?”, avoiding again the basic question of whether the companies are *powerful*, for example being able to get critics fired, using the childish-sounding “evil” instead.

Cowen admits to major privacy concerns, and even suddenly concedes that companies like Google may be “natural monopolies,” and abruptly adds that this “is the way a lot of markets are supposed to work,” rather a surprise after 104 pages describing markets as fully synonymous with competition and lots of scrappy independents. And indeed, in reality the online tech giants like Google tend to be monopolies or oligopolies, due to *network effects*—the dynamic where some services become more valuable as more people use them. The classic example of this is a telephone—in the early days, as more people got phones and joined the telephony network, your phone gets more valuable as it has increasing numbers of people or businesses you might potentially call.

Facebook has a semi-monopoly for the same reason—people join the network their friends are on, and when your friends join, there are more acquaintances you can communicate with and platform gets more valuable to you. Google's search monopoly (with a market share north of 90% on mobile) owes to network effects originating in data collection—with every search since its creation, Google has kept a record of who searched for what, which links were clicked on, if the user clicked a different link instead, and so on. This means Google has an enduring advantage over its limited competitors like Microsoft's Bing, who lack the same bottomless ocean of hoarded data Google controls—another form of network effect. But Cowen blandly repeats his earlier claim that monopolies won't last, adding “There is no particular reason to think Google will dominate” in the future.

But in fact, the observant reader will discover that the very concept of network effects *does not appear* in the entire chapter on Big Tech. Meaning, Cowen doesn't acknowledge this important economic process and then explain why markets and business are still good, he simply omits it entirely from the discussion. Crucially, network effects and even their tendency to lead toward monopoly are acknowledged by pro-business writers and conservatives—for example, the *Wall Street Journal* columnist Greg Ip wrote

that “Digital markets do have features that tip toward monopoly: ‘network effects,’” before trying to content his audience with mild government regulation. Or how about the pro-Tory *Financial Times*, which recognized a major network effect where “customers, once they have chosen a program, tend to ‘groove in’; learning to use software takes time, and information is often saved in proprietary file formats, so switching programs is painful.” This explains “the tendency of market leaders to get even further ahead...The winning firm can invest that money in developing new products, lengthening its lead.” In the end, “Monopoly power becomes pervasive.”

Cowen even adds that “the benefits of the tech companies still far outweigh their costs, as evidenced by how few Americans are trying very hard to opt out.” But of course a basic feature of networked markets is the above lock-in or groove-in dynamic—it's a major nuisance moving all your photos off Facebook and onto another social media network, let alone switching your contacts, music, and cloud accounts from an Apple to an Android phone, plus buying new apps. This is a basic feature of markets characterized by network effects (Rob has a book on a Big Tech coming out in a few months, for those who want a more realistic treatment of the sector). Cowen is such an abject defender of established power he could use this logic to claim the old AT&T national telephone monopoly was beneficial on-balance, since so few people were cutting their cords and giving up all phone service entirely.

PERHAPS WHAT'S MOST REMARKABLE ABOUT *Big Business* is the number of of horrible things Cowen is willing to admit. Sometimes this comes in the form of statements like: “possibly the largest benefit from America's role as global financial capital is that it helps sustain America's larger role as world policeman and, to some extent, global hegemon.” But he also concedes that we are in many ways powerless and have our lives shaped by corporate actors that do not care about us except as revenue streams. Corporations use “powerful manipulative tools for drumming up loyalty and sympathy” and screw with our emotions and our attention in order to get us to buy things. “At least some of the freedom of contemporary consumer society is an illusion,” he says, because “we are not very much in control at all.” Yes, he says, corporations would give you a disease to make a buck, but it is best not to think about that:

“Let's say you walk into a Burger King. Do you really want to think they would be willing to increase your chance of listeriosis if it would boost the company's profits a few million dollars (after adjusting for the risk of a lawsuit and bad publicity)?... You might at some level know it is true, but another part of you realizes that the risk of listeriosis is in fact quite small, and so you can go ahead and eat without being obsessed with calculating the probability of your pending illness... You are not quite facing up to the entire truth.”

All of this is fine. We like our corporations. They make us happy. Work is fun. We may be powerless, but we have Normalcy:

“Most of us have turned over more and more of our lives to external, autonomous, selfish corporate agents—agents who take our wishes into account only insofar as it suits them. That sounds terrible, but in fact most people are moving ever more deeply into the corporate nexus. They love its creativity, they love its normalcy, they love the potential for fulfillment...”

This, Cowen says, is the best we can hope for. A basic income, remember, would cause us to flee the corporate jobs that we Actually Love, so we can't try that. And lest you hope for some other economic system in which we'll one day be free from the power plays of the one percent, Cowen has some bad news for you. On “worker-managed firms,” he claims “when workers are ostensibly in control, they can be consumed with the problem of trying to get the other workers to do the work, much as a traditional employer would be so concerned,” and indeed “many workers require some degree of external control.” Don't hope for socialist freedom, kids, you'll just inevitably become Mr. Burns yourself. Accept your big business overlords. Enjoy your Amazon warehouse job, your KFC Cheetos Chicken Sandwich, and your Facebook friendships, because they're all there is in this life. You'll accept what business gives you and, if you understand Economics, you'll be thankful for its benevolence. Quell your hopes for autonomy, variety, and equality. Sit back and let the decisions of billionaires rule your life. There is no alternative. ✚

FOLLOWING A CLOSE CALL OFF THE COAST OF Central America in 1502, Christopher Columbus is reported to have exclaimed: “*Gracias a Dios que hemos salido de estas honduras*”—“Thank god we’ve gotten out of these depths.” The name Honduras, then, was perhaps inauspicious from the get-go. Now, more than half a millennium after the legendary Italian’s nautical escapades, Honduras’ entrance into full-blown bloodbath mode—characterized by massive homicide rates and ruthless state repression—means that many Hondurans are fleeing the terrifying “depths” for the United States. But the U.S., a faithful heir of the Columbian tradition of decimating overseas populations, happens to be responsible for helping to sink Honduras to such great lows in the first place.

The abusive relationship between the United States and Honduras was solidified in the 1980s, when the Central American nation was endearingly designated the “U.S.S. Honduras” on account of its role as a base for U.S.-backed Contra mercenaries attacking neighboring Nicaragua—a campaign that Noam Chomsky has referred to as “a large-scale terrorist war against Nicaragua, combined with economic warfare that was even more lethal.” Some 50,000 Nicaraguans perished.

The aim of the Contra war was, of course, to punish the Sandinistas for daring to suggest that life without U.S.-directed capitalism might be possible, especially in the United States’ self-declared backyard—and to serve as a warning to other countries not to stray from the path of righteousness. In 1986, Ronald Reagan broadcast his hallucination that Nicaragua—a mere “two hours’ flying time from our own borders”—had become a campsite for “Soviets, East Germans, Bulgarians, North Koreans, Cubans and terrorists from the P.L.O. and the Red Brigades,” while also enjoying the affections of Muammar Qaddafi and the Ayatollah Khomeini.

In contrast to Nicaragua, Honduras was a model territory. As Stephen Kinzer noted in the *New York Times* in 1988: “Behind the guise of formal democracy [in Honduras], military leaders make all important decisions, and they respond to direction from the United States Embassy [in Tegucigalpa]...one of the largest State Department outposts in the world...American diplomats exercise more control over domestic politics in Honduras than in any other country in the hemisphere.”

Inevitably, some Hondurans still got out of line, but they were handled by Battalion 316, the “CIA-trained military unit that terrorized Honduras for much of the 1980s”—as the *Baltimore Sun* recalls. Battalion 316 was responsible for the kidnapping, torture, and murder of hundreds of people suspected of undesirable political orientation.

With the end of the Cold War, the U.S.S. Honduras got a bit of downtime, though the country remained a key outpost in the now-reigning global superpower’s international military network, playing host to U.S. personnel and armaments. The *Stars and Stripes* magazine boasts that Joint Task Force-Bravo, stationed at Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras, has since its establishment in 1983 remained the “face of America’s military presence in Central America.” Other contemporary North American presences in Hondu-



The long, dist
“U.S.S.

Women raise machetes and crosses in front of a cordon of soldiers during a protest by demonstrators against Honduras’ President Juan Orlando Hernandez, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Jan. 25, 2018. AP Photo/Fernando Antonio



“Disturbing voyage of the HONDURAS”

by Belén Fernández

ras have included a flourishing sweatshop industry, an appropriate symbol of post-Cold War neoliberal conquest—not to mention the smorgasbord of gringo businesses and investors fully committed to exploiting hydro-electric dams, mining, palm oil, and other opportunities in everyone's favorite banana republic.

EENTER MANUEL ZELAYA, WHO ASSUMED THE presidency of Honduras in 2006 and proceeded to steer the Honduran ship a hair to the left, both raising the minimum wage for urban and rural areas and engaging in other behavior seen as heretical by the Honduran ruling class—like pursuing agrarian reform on behalf of peasant farmers, or, for example, actually bothering to ask impoverished communities how they felt about being forced to live smack in the middle of toxic corporate mining operations.

When Zelaya then chose to engage in friendly diplomatic relations with regional villains like Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, it became all the more clear to the U.S. that the lessons of the Cold War had not been adequately learned by their client nations, and obviously Democracy Itself was again at stake. The red menace had to be nipped in the bud—and so, in the wee hours of the morning of June 28, 2009, Zelaya was democratically kidnapped from his bedroom by members of the Honduran military and carted off to Costa Rica in his pajamas, never to be restored to his elected post.

The official alibi of the *golpistas* (coupmonsters) was that Zelaya had violated Honduras' sacred constitutional article limiting presidents to a single term. This claim is a bit convoluted: Zelaya was already ineligible to run for a second term, and what he had actually proposed was a non-binding public opinion survey on the subject of whether or not to include an extra item on the 2009 ballot which would ask voters if they wanted to convene a constituent assembly in the future to rework the constitution. (The Honduran constitution dates from the era of—you guessed it—the U.S.S. Honduras.) As the *golpistas* and their American buddies spun it, this public opinion survey was concrete proof that Zelaya was scheming to install himself as dictator for life and subvert the very foundations of civilization. Funnily enough, the constitutional article in question *has* since been done away with—not by Zelaya, of course, but by the current ultra-rightist Honduran dictator Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH), whose party took power after the 2009 coup.

The U.S. implicitly supported the 2009 regime change, but found it awkward to admit as much in public. Following some initial imperial slip-ups—like when Barack Obama actually called it a “coup”—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided that it was simply impossible to determine *what* mysterious event had just transpired in Honduras. If it had been a “military coup,” then the United States would have been required [under Section 508 of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act] to cut off aid to the new, corporate-friendly regime of Zelaya's “interim” replacement Roberto Micheletti. (Micheletti was later hailed by the Honduran National Industrial Association as the “first national hero of the twenty-first century”—lest anyone persist in thinking that the evil Zelaya had been heroic to, you know, raise workers' wages.) Meanwhile, Clinton's old law school pal Lanny Davis was hired by the Latin American Business Council of Honduras to lobby in Washington on behalf of the coup-that-wasn't, which hardly required much arm-twisting given the abundance of U.S. business interests in the region.

U.S. dithering over what to call the strange happenings in Honduras gave the coup regime time to consolidate its hold, with Clinton herself scurrying around “strategiz[ing] on a plan to restore order in [the country] and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot and give the Honduran people a chance to choose their own future.” This, at least, is how she put it in her 2014 memoir *Hard Choices*, before the passage was mysteriously disappeared (like any number of Honduran dissidents) from the book's paperback version.

Soon enough, the Honduran people were given the opportunity to “choose their own future”—never mind that the president they had *already* chosen had been spontaneously deposed and whisked out of the country. Elections that were by definition not free, fair, or legitimate—staged as they were amid a militarized crackdown by an illegal coup regime—produced the right-wing presidency of Porfirio Lobo, whose government wasted little time in adopting the slogan “Honduras Is Open for Business.” Socialist Armageddon had been averted.

As so often happens, repressive state security forces proved necessary to ensure that Armageddon remained at bay. American University professor and Honduras expert Dr. Adrienne Pine has argued that, just as the U.S.-trained Battalion 316 had previously “laid the groundwork for the implementation of U.S.-led neoliberal economic policies, of which the Honduran military itself was a primary beneficiary,” the postcoup neoliberal free-for-all has been facilitated by death squads within the Honduran military and police. In the surge of forced disappearances, torture, and assassinations, pretty much anyone opposed to the economic plunder of the country or with vaguely positive ideas about human rights and justice has been fair game. This has included not only members of the anti-coup resistance, but also lawyers, environmental defenders, teachers, *campesinos*, journalists, LGBTQ activists, and so on.

I MYSELF SPENT FOUR MONTHS IN HONDURAS AFTER the coup and was able to witness some of the more mundane forms of state brutality. In Tegucigalpa, daily anti-coup marches that were almost aggravatingly peaceful were regularly met with tear gas, water cannons loaded with a delightful pepper spray mixture, and more hands-on forms of physical deterrence involving “wooden batons, metal tubes, and chains to beat protestors,” as Human Rights Watch put it. In October 2009, I attended the burial of union leader Jairo Sánchez, shot in the face by police.

Although human lives are cheap, business is not, as the Honduran elite made very clear by losing their shit when a Popeye's branch was briefly set on fire during the protests. The minimal cosmetic damage sustained by this piece of private property—certainly one of the great architectural highlights of the Tegucigalpa skyline, along with other homages to toxic imperial diets—was definitive proof of the violent orientation of the anti-coup crowd, who had no doubt been egged on in their destructive plots by Chávez, Castro, and Satan himself. When in November 2009 I landed a rare interview with Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, the Honduran general who had spearheaded the coup, he complained that there was entirely “too much liberty” in Honduras, which had enabled coup opponents to run around “doing things they shouldn't be doing,” like “insulting people” and “dirtying walls” with graffiti. The Honduran army, on the other hand, was



A woman holds up a poster with a photo of slain environmental leader Berta Cáceres, during a protest march in Tegucigalpa, Honduras during March of 2016. AP Photo/Fernando Antonio

composed of “very democratic soldiers” who were “not people who want to hurt anybody.” (Vásquez himself is an alumnus of the U.S.-run School of the Americas, longtime educational hub for Latin American dictators and death squad leaders.)

In a January 2012 *New York Times* op-ed titled “In Honduras, a Mess Made in the U.S.,” University of California scholar Dana Frank observed that, despite reports that more than 300 people had thus far been murdered since the coup by Honduras’ ostensible forces of law and order, the U.S. had still “maintained and in some areas increased military and police financing for Honduras [while] enlarging its military bases there.” Although this rapid militarization was allegedly intended to ensure stability and security, Honduras soon, coincidentally, entrenched itself as the murder capital of the world.

Now, as we mark the 10th anniversary of the coup against Zelaya, Honduras’ highly cherubic security forces continue to operate with near-total impunity and the loyal backing of the U.S. Two days after the 2017 elections that produced JOH’s (Juan Orlando Hernández’s) second presidential term, the U.S. State Department “certified,” according to a *New York Times* report, “that Honduras was meeting human rights conditions, strengthening transparency and cracking down on corruption”—a requirement for the release of yet more American aid. Never mind the transparently farcical nature of said elections or the state’s homicidal response to those contesting

the results, as evidenced by headlines like: “Families fear no justice for victims as 31 die in Honduras post-election violence: US silent on alleged military police responsibility for deaths despite \$114m aid to security forces, amid claims of ‘vote fraud’ by President Juan Orlando Hernández.”

In a recent email to me, Dana Frank provided a nutshell explanation of the United States’ insistence on legitimizing an “illegally imposed dictatorship” in Honduras:

Escalating repression of the opposition by Honduran security forces serves, in part, to silence those who challenge the U.S. military presence in Honduras and the region, who challenge illegal mining and dam projects that serve transnational corporate interests, who defend labor rights, and who seek to build a future in which Honduras is sovereign and independent of U.S. domination.

In 2017, Honduras was declared the most dangerous country in the world for environmental activism by the NGO Global Witness, which emphasized: “Nowhere are you more likely to be killed for standing up to companies that grab land and trash the environment than in Honduras.” Among the most high-profile assassinations was that of environmentalist and indigenous rights campaigner Berta Cáceres in 2016. According to a former Honduran soldier interviewed by the *Guardian*, Cáceres’s name had appeared on a military hit-list given to U.S.-trained Honduran special forces units.



A man throws a bin at a torched police vehicle during a protest against the government of Honduras' President Hernandez, in Tegucigalpa, May 30, 2019. Thousands of doctors and teachers have been marching through the streets of Honduras' capital against presidential decrees they say would lead to massive public sector layoffs. AP Photo/Elmer Martinez

And while the U.S. likes to justify its gobs of aid to Honduras by promoting the small nation as an invaluable ally in the ever-noble and effective war on drugs, this logic quickly self-combusts. The recent list of Hondurans busted by the U.S. for drug trafficking includes both current president JOH's brother and former president Porfirio Lobo's son, and JOH himself has been the subject of a DEA investigation. The U.S. itself has never been too interested in stemming the flow of drugs; as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz remarks in her memoir *Blood on the Border*, the top Honduran drug lord in the Contra era, Juan Ramón Matta Ballesteros, ran an airline company that was so frequently utilized by the CIA it became known as the "CIA airline." The postcoup drug war alibi was also not enormously helped by a 2011 Wikileaks cable revealing U.S. knowledge of hardcore narco-trafficking activity on plantations belonging to (now deceased) Honduran biofuels magnate Miguel Facussé, then the country's largest landowner. His war on peasant farmers who sought to reclaim their stolen lands was funded by—what else?—U.S. aid. The ousted president Zelaya had promised these farmers and others assistance in recuperating their land rights, which was surely totally unrelated to Facussé's relentless PR work in support of the coup.

NOW, YOU MIGHT BE THINKING: SURE, THE HONDURAN ruling class may be a nasty lot—and the United States may be perennially up to no good in Latin America—but are these really Honduras' biggest problems? Why not talk about Honduras' legendarily brutal gang violence, its epidemic of violence against women, and all the other factors contrib-

uting to its sky-high murder rates? But it's impossible to understand these other violent phenomena without placing them in the context of the decades of economic plunder, of the exploitation and manipulation of the Honduran people by military and economic elites in Honduras and the United States. Neoliberal policies are predicated on the obliteration of interhuman bonds, support networks, and dignity in general—the calculated sacrifice of the wellbeing of the masses in favor of the prosperity of a tyrannical few. When the state declares war on its public, phenomena like gangs are bound to arise—and, in turn, give the state even broader license for violence. In her assessment of Honduras in 2002, UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir documented the frequent extrajudicial executions of children by Honduran security forces: "Every child with a tattoo and street child is stigmatized as a criminal who is creating an unfriendly climate for investment and tourism in the country."

As for the escalating femicide rate in the postcoup epoch, every individual aspect of violence against women obviously can't be blamed on the state—but the pervasive impunity for such crimes certainly can. An April 2019 essay by Sonia Nazario titled "Someone Is Always Trying to Kill You" cites a study from the previous year indicating that, in the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula, "more than 96 percent of women's murders go unpunished." Meanwhile, officials working for the very agency tasked with investigating women's deaths have been implicated in female murders. Nazario traces the culture of machismo "back to colonial times"—hi, Columbus!—and notes some past and present U.S. contributions to the lethal milieu: "Thanks to the contra war, when the United States secretly funded right-wing militia groups in Central

America, there are an estimated 1.8 million guns in Honduras.” To be sure, being simultaneously female and a human rights and environmental activist—like Cáceres, for example—is a particularly deadly business in Honduras. Luckily for the powers that be, Hondurans are often so busy trying to keep themselves alive that they don’t have the time or energy to expend challenging the system.

It’s no wonder, then, that, as Honduras descends ever deeper into violence and economic despair, a whole lot of people have been attempting to extricate themselves from the brutality. Hence the U.S.-bound migrant caravans, the first of which departed from San Pedro Sula in 2018. Since the logic of empire criminalizes human movement in some directions but not others, the U.S. border has played host to new forms of brutality, resulting in headlines such as: “Split from his family at border, Honduran asylum seeker hangs himself in Texas jail.” Despite their pitiless reception by the U.S., things back home are sufficiently dire that approximately a whole 1 percent of the population of Honduras is expected to migrate in 2019.



AS A GRINGA, I’VE BEEN ABLE TO COME and go from Honduras as I please without having to contend with border walls or sadistic immigration and law enforcement officials—clearly an obscene privilege. Over the course of my time in the country following the coup, I did get to experience a couple of minor personal security situations, usually when I encountered persons wishing to relieve me of my valuables in exchange for not killing me. During one episode in Tegucigalpa, the most prized possession I could muster was a battered blue alarm clock that I used for jogging purposes, which was kindly handed back to me. Another time, my would-be assailant concluded that, in lieu of subsidizing his *aguardiente* habit with all the money I had sworn I would extract via a nonexistent ATM card, I could simply adopt his small child. Fortunately, this stipulation, too, was ultimately rescinded.

A somewhat more disconcerting encounter took place in the northern Honduran coastal city of Trujillo, when I awoke from tequila-fueled slumber one night to find that a man had materialized in my room and was contemplating the machete-type instrument on the table, which I had been using to slice avocados. I produced some demonic screams and fled into the hallway in my underwear. He dived back out the window. The event did not even register on the scale of Scary Things That Happen in Honduras—like, say, women being skinned alive—yet it still kept me from sleeping for a decade or so.

Trujillo, incidentally, is where Columbus touched down in 1502, although it bears plenty of more recent imperial footprints. A 2018 post at CentralAmerica.com by a Canadian part-time resident of the town mentions that “there’s also a small airstrip for charters [*sic*] flights, built by Oliver North during the Contra War,” and that Dole fruit trucks are “the main cause of all the potholes” in this section of the “the original ‘Banana Republic.’” Enthusing about investment opportunities, gated communities, and other attractions for North Americans with freedom of hemispheric movement, the Canadian attributes much of Trujillo’s progress to entrepreneur Randy Jorgensen, the force behind a cruise ship port and similar indicators of “growth.”

This is the same Jorgensen who, the *Toronto Star* reminds us, has long been known as “Canada’s porn king,” and is accused along with other foreigners of illegally amassing land belonging to Honduras’

indigenous Garifuna community. Jorgensen’s own exploits were presumably facilitated by his friendship with the brother of Porfirio Lobo, the illegitimate postcoup president who conveniently reversed Zelaya’s land reform projects.

Trujillo was also proposed as a launchpad for the charter city scheme, brainchild of U.S. economist Paul Romer, who decided some years ago that it would be cool to set up a bunch of privatized city-states governed by investors and not beholden to domestic laws. After all, who said colonialism was outdated? The Honduran constitution, only sacred when Zelaya tried to touch it, was thus altered to allow for the creation of special development zones (ZEDEs, in the Spanish acronym). The prospect of free-market tyranny triggered a near-orgasm in the *Wall Street Journal*’s resident right-wing sociopath Mary Anastasia O’Grady, who found charter cities to be a most logical next step for the “little country that stood up to the world to defend its democracy” by overthrowing its elected president in an illegal coup.

American anthropologist Beth Gaglia, who researches the ZEDEs, told me that, when the current version of the ZEDE law was passed in 2013, the resulting Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices was “at its inception... dominated by U.S. citizens, many of whom had played important roles in the execution of Ronald Reagan’s counter-insurgency policies in Central America in the 1980s.” While no ZEDE has as of yet been born, “plans move forward behind closed doors,” and, Gaglia says, could portend “large-scale land grabbing or speculation-fueled land conflicts.”

Now, as we observe the 10th anniversary of the coup, Honduras is once again rocked by protests against JOH—and specifically what is seen as his attempt to privatize the Honduran health and education sectors in accordance with the U.S.-backed prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund. Once again, Honduran military and police have used lethal force against protestors. Once again, the U.S. is entirely complicit.

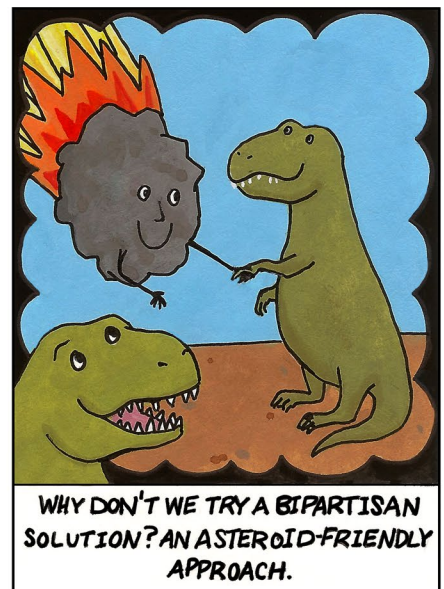
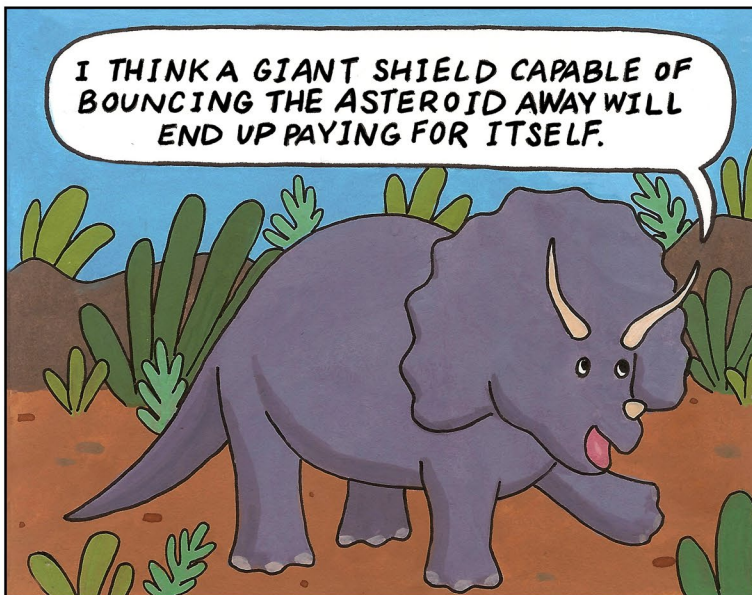
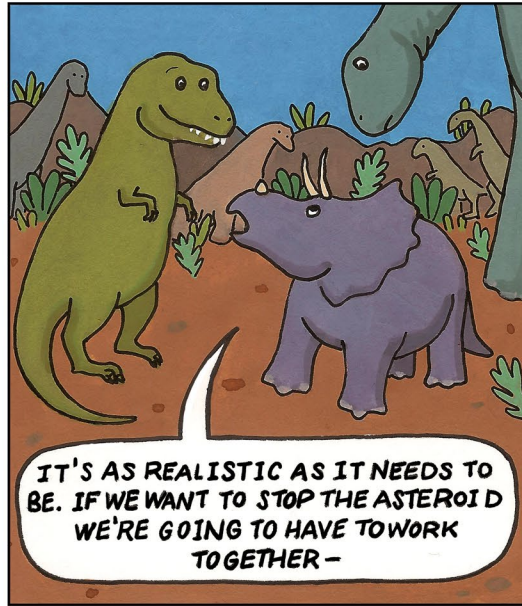
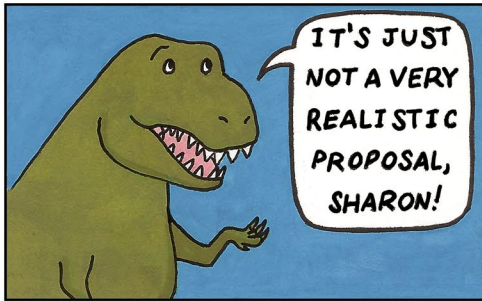
At the same time, Honduras’ service as a pillar of the regional neoliberal order seems to have been somewhat lost on the imperial captain himself: Donald Trump has emitted much noise about cutting off humanitarian aid to this and other “Mexican countries” for their perceived laziness in halting northward migration. But when Trump’s opponents cry out that Honduras needs *more* security aid, they fail to realize—or simply don’t care, or worse—that pouring more money into the coffers of Honduras’ state security apparatus will only exacerbate the political and economic crisis Hondurans are fleeing in the first place. And these days, even “humanitarian” aid can be military aid in disguise: As Dana Frank emphasized to me, U.S. donations to the Honduran police and military are often “embedded in what look like ‘benevolent’ projects, such as anti-gang projects,” that nonetheless “continue to fund murderous behavior by the agents of the state.”

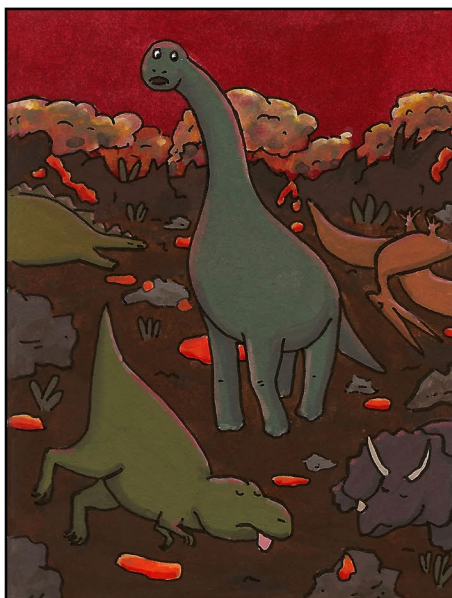
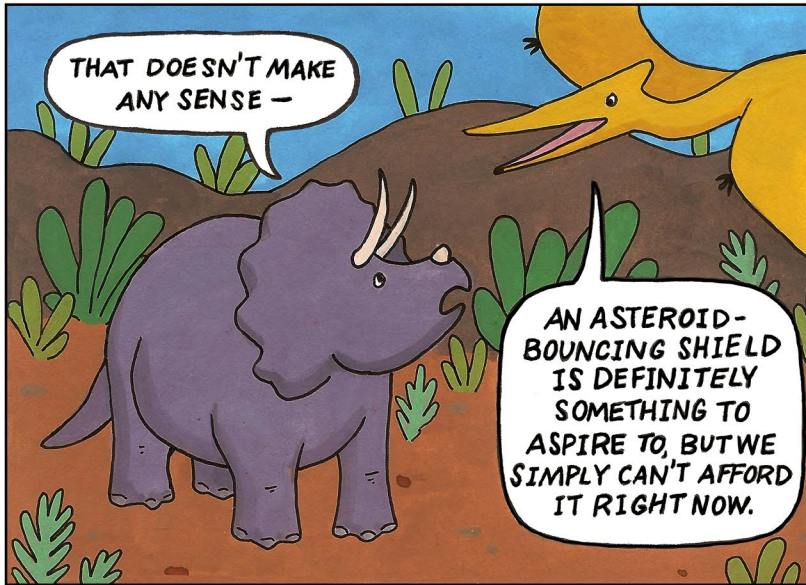
So, despite Trump’s sensational huffing and puffing over Honduras’ alleged migration-related transgressions, the arrangement of imperial servitude continues full steam ahead. With the U.S.S. Honduras in business as ever—and the U.S. still making a killing off of Honduran misery—it remains to be seen if a Columbus-like exclamation of relief will ever be forthcoming, or if Honduras is simply in too deep. ♣

Belén Fernández is the author of *Exile: Rejecting America and Finding the World* (OR Books) and *The Imperial Messenger: Thomas Friedman at Work* (Verso). She is a contributing editor at *Jacobin*.

DINOSAUR

DEBATES







At The EDGE

Thoughts on Britain's Strange Relationship with Knife Crime

by AISLING MCCREA

*I'm gonna get drunk
Come round and fuck you up
I'm gonna get drunk
Come round and fuck you up
And you can't help my life
But you can hide the knives*
—LYRICS TO “KNIVES,” BY THERAPY?

THE MORE ICE CREAM IS SOLD, THE HIGHER the murder rate climbs. You might have heard this fact before: it's often used in statistics classes to try and prod students into thinking critically. There is a positive correlation between the two variables, yet it would be silly to conclude that ice cream causes murders. Correlation is not the same thing as causation—sometimes, a third variable connects the most visible dots. In this case, it is hot weather. This fact has been borne out in multiple studies, from various times and places all across the world: violence, in particular, rises and falls with the temperature. The crime rate is worst in the summer and will even spike suddenly in warm periods of winter.

Opportunity seems to offer a partial explanation for this phenomenon. Hotter weather means people are outside more and interacting with each more, which brings on more conflict. The lure of spending a sunny weekend between pubs and parks might encourage more excessive drinking, leading to worse decision-making. It is also possible that heat affects our quickness to moodiness and anger. Some have suggested that summer literally opens the door to opportunistic theft—as the heat rises, people

start keeping their windows open, or leaving their homes empty while on vacation. But the evidence suggests more than opportunity is responsible for subversiveness. Revolutions and riots, too, tend to happen overwhelmingly in summer. The French Revolution boiled over between May and August of 1789. The Haitian Revolution, August 1791. Stonewall riots, June 1969. This is when things are *supposed* to happen.

It was the summer of 2007, and something was about to happen.

OVER THE COURSE OF THAT SUMMER, THERE was a cluster of fatal stabbings in London, the victims mainly young men of color. These young men would previously have been of no interest to anyone in power. But that summer, on TV every day, for weeks on end, pundits agonized over the crisis on discussion shows and in newspapers. (I distinctly remember a Photoshop mockup of a BBC News 24 screenshot, made by someone I vaguely knew online, featuring an interview with a talking knife. The ribbon scrolling across the bottom said “*Knife knife knife? Knife!*”) Politicians gave Very Concerned Speeches, and in response to the pressure, the police began conducting an unusually high number of stops and carrying out searches on the streets, trying to hunt down any object with sharp edges. Yet looking at the statistics, the rampant obsession with this particular form of violence seemed absurd. This supposed sudden epidemic was neither sudden, nor an epidemic.

The U.K., and London in particular, has a reputation as a cesspool of violence. Gun crime is rare in our little kingdom, yet

jokes and rumors abound on our fondness for brawling, stabbing, and “glassing” (the act of attacking someone with a broken bottle or pint glass). Still, if you turn away from the lurid stories in the newspapers, the U.K.’s crime problem is less dire than is often claimed. The violent crime rates are generally much lower in the U.K. than in the United States. London’s homicide rate over the last couple of decades has generally hovered between one and two murders per 100,000 people—that’s about half of New York City’s rate, and far below most major American cities. Mass killings are rare, not least because it’s quite tricky to kill multiple people with a short-range weapon. And, like the U.S. and the rest of the West, the crime rate has been trending down since the mid-1990s, regardless of the occasional small spikes and dips. Yet every now and then we are visited by panics, radios blaring and headlines screaming at us that we are a nation besieged by knife-wielding maniacs. What was it about the summer of 2007 that made us obsessed with knives?

The U.K. in the mid-2000s was, above all else, really fucking boring. Of course there’s always war, and horror, and poverty, but if you were fortunate enough not to be directly involved in any of those things, summer 2007, like the rest of the mid-2000s, was an empty space, an era plagued by an oppressive mundanity. There were news stories—you have to put *something* in the news, after all—but they all felt either repetitive or manufactured, almost as if new events had stopped altogether. In June, Tony Blair had finally resigned, his reputation in shreds after the Iraq invasion, and been replaced by his longtime rival Gordon Brown, a man mostly remembered for being extraordinarily dull. Then in July, there was a big controversy over a BBC documentary about the Queen, which had been apparently been edited to make her look moodier than she really was. (The controversy was exactly as stupid and meaningless as it sounds). There was talk of the new government announcing an election, but that ended up coming to nothing.

Every week there were four new identical guitar bands being pushed on the radio, all working in a style so forgettable that it gained the nickname “landfill indie.” It was a big year for old-school light entertainment shows, including the inaugural season of *Britain’s Got Talent*. Amongst the finalists were a mildly talented pop-opera singer, a man with a monkey puppet, and a pair of flair bartenders both called Neil. The biggest comedy shows on TV were *Little Britain* and *The Catherine Tate Show*, two sketch shows in the same mold, in which the actors would play out slight variations on the same sketches each week, usually ending with the characters repeating a hilarious catchphrase (the catchphrases would become progressively less hilarious each time you heard them repeated in the playground or at the office, until around about the sixtieth or seventieth time, at which point you would consider perforating your own eardrums with a pencil dipped in drain cleaner). By coincidence—or perhaps as a testament to the poisonous nature of Britain’s class snobbery—both shows had a popular character who was a “chavvy” (low-class) teenage girl, making fun of girls who dared to be talkative and opinionated even though they didn’t speak like Dame Judi Dench. In March 2007, Catherine Tate did a one-off sketch as her teen girl character, Lauren Cooper, for a charity telethon.

In this very special mini-episode, Lauren, who usually dismisses her interlocutors with her catchphrase “Am I bovvered?” [translation for non-Brits: “Do I look like I give a shit?”], finds herself face to face with Prime Minister Tony Blair, in the dying months of his premiership; she tries to tell him some gossip, but in a knee-slapping reversal of fortune, Blair tells *her* “Am I bovvered?,” thus finally rendering her speechless.

In short, 2007 was a cultural vacuum.

Everything felt like a repetition of the same petty controversies, whether it was political dirt or celebrity scandal. Culture was dead. Nothing of importance was happening that the media wanted to talk about. So they went to Plan B, and that summer, they talked about knife crime.

ONE NIGHT IN MARCH 2019, I turned on the TV without having anything specific to watch and settled on BBC Two. I hadn’t done this in quite a while; I was at a relative’s house and trying to get away from my computer for a couple of hours, but there was little to do in the neighborhood, and the best way for me to take a break from my screen was simply to look at a different type of screen in a different room for a while. *Newsnight*, the channel’s flagship current events program, was on. The topic of the evening: our national blight of knife crime. Instantly, I felt a flash of déjà vu back to 2007. After lurking at the back of the media’s closet for the past few years, like a toy gathering dust—present always in our jokes, and our angry suburban uncles’ rants about how society was going to the dogs, but not so much to the fore of or concerns—knife crime was once again at the center of a moral panic.

I was baffled. Did we have nothing else to talk about? The economy? Jeremy Corbyn? Syria? The refugee boats? Weren’t we mere weeks away from the Brexit deadline? Hadn’t we been warned that with no Brexit plan on the table, essential medicines might run short, trade might stall, war might start in Northern Ireland? Compared to the endless cycle of crises of the late 2010s, knife crime seemed almost parochial. Over the next few days I saw the subject floating around on Twitter and news websites, a strange interloper amongst the apocalyptic Brexit chat, a cuckoo’s egg in the nest. Out of curiosity, I checked the crime statistics, to see if there really was some sudden new crimewave. What I found was that knife-related deaths were up slightly from the previous year, but in the context of the longer trends, it was nothing special—fluctuations in the statistics are to be expected. So why were we being asked to pay attention to it now?

The activist, writer and rapper Akala has spoken at length about the reality of knife crime. In his view, it is a genuine problem for young men in London, but the sensationalism and racist assumptions that dog the media industry taint discussions of the issue. As Akala has pointed out, over and over again, the relatively small number of murders in the inner-cities are always framed as an indictment of entire cultures—especially young black men’s culture—rather than a symptom of the alienation that *always* follows economic inequality, regardless of its victims’ ethnicity and loca-

tions. He asks us to pay attention to the context: despair is rampant in the United Kingdom, yet only rarely does it manifest as deadly violence. The U.K. has always had places like the ones Akala describes: communities bereft by funding cuts and political neglect, hubs of debt and poverty that pull people into grim and vicious circles. Most of the time, the media seemed to care little about these alienated communities.

To address the root causes of the issue would require frank and uncomfortable debates about policy, ranging from British education and local spending, to the nation's public health and the criminal justice systems, and the plethora of ways in which peo-

to resentment, anger, despair and chaos as the economic crash wrecked the lives of countless Brits. Normal was over.

Even after the financial crisis ceased to be news, and became instead a drab and murky constant in our everyday lives, 2008 marked the beginning era when there was always *something* going on. In 2009, we learned that almost every British Member of Parliament—save for one Jeremy Corbyn and a handful of others—had been abusing parliamentary expenses, living lavish lifestyles while taxpayers footed the bill. Then, in 2010, the country elected its first Conservative government in fourteen years, who immediately implemented a brutal austerity program.

“Fixing the knifings would require coming to grips with what both Labour and Conservative governments have done, but fixing things was never really a goal of the knife crime discourse...”

ple suffer in this country. For every headline-grabbing pool of blood, thousands of people neither kill nor die violently. Simply and without fanfare, they continue to live difficult lives in cruel circumstances, for reasons the media will generally never bother investigating. Fixing the knifings would require coming to grips with what both Labour and Conservative governments have done to Great Britain, but of course, fixing things was never really a goal of the knife crime discourse. Instead, the knife crimes are a fallback discussion—a filler to avoid more painful or dull topics.

IN AUGUST 2007, THE KNIFE CRIME STORIES started melting away from the headlines—not just because the summer was drawing to a close, but because the news media had started to notice that something else was going on. A few major investment banks outside the U.K., notably Bear Stearns in the U.S. and BNP Paribas in France, were in trouble due to issues around subprime mortgage lending. Shortly afterwards, one of the U.K.'s biggest banks, Northern Rock, ran into the same trouble. In September, panicking customers who were saving with Northern Rock caused Britain's first bank run in 150 years. The media dropped the Knife Crime Crisis in the rush to cover financial news—one day it was everywhere, the next day it was gone. Talking about those dead young men was for the times when nothing was happening. Now, finally, something was happening, so they could be forgotten again.

The full brunt of the financial crisis was not felt by most of the public for a couple of years—by the end of 2007, there was still little change in either the unemployment figures or the mortgage default rates—but the shockwaves were beginning to pass through the country, building slowly as the decade came to a close. The cultural sterility of the mid-2000s gradually gave way

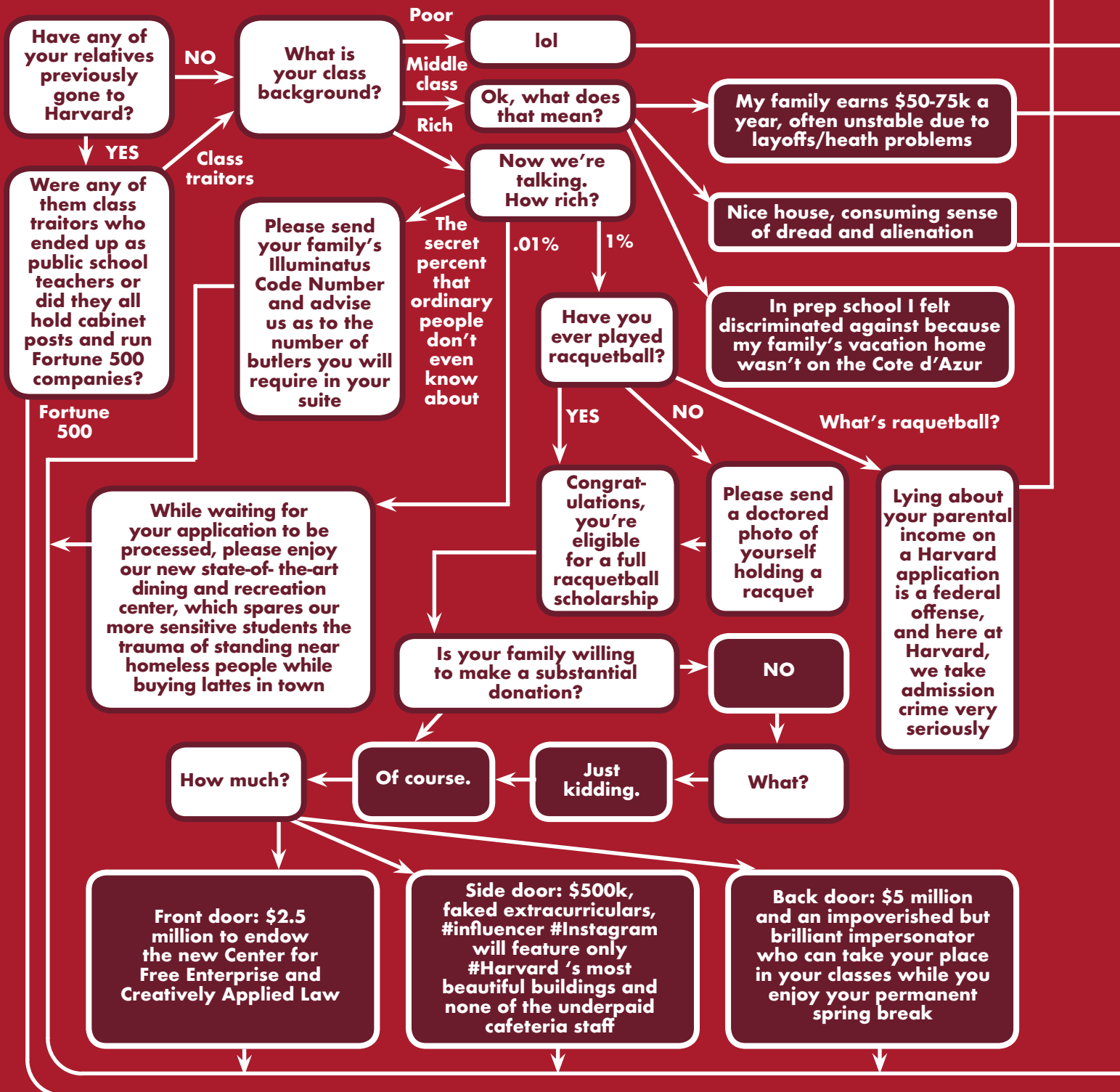
They were aided in this by the Liberal Democrats, a smaller and previously quite well-liked party, who cheerfully betrayed their campaign promises, most notably the pledge to never raise university tuition fees. In 2011, police officers shot and killed a man in North London under suspicious circumstances, leading to an outbreak of riots, and the list goes on—outrage after outrage after outrage. Since the financial crisis, it's felt as if we are trapped in a rapid cycle of elections and accusations and protests and radicalism and violence. And then, of course, there's Brexit: the precipice we were running towards for years, before reaching it, standing at the edge and staring down paralyzed by the uncertainty of how we got ever here and where to go next.

When I turned on the TV in March 2019 and saw that the Knife Crime Crisis was back, at first I was confused. But now, I think I understand. This recurring panic has nothing to do with the actual people it affects, people that we never really cared about in the first place. Instead, it acts as a fallback, a callback, a throwback. It allows us to talk endlessly about—but never *to*—invisible people whose humanity is theoretical for so much of our society. It lets us hyper-focus on Britain's most ground down communities, all the while ignoring their own voices and activism efforts. It allows us to express *concern* and demand that *something must be done* without ever really breaking the surface of what exactly that *something* might be. Ironically, it's safe—not for its victims, but for the viewers. And who wouldn't want to feel safe, now that we're teetering on the precipice, and don't even know if our country will have trade or medicine or peace on the streets in six months?

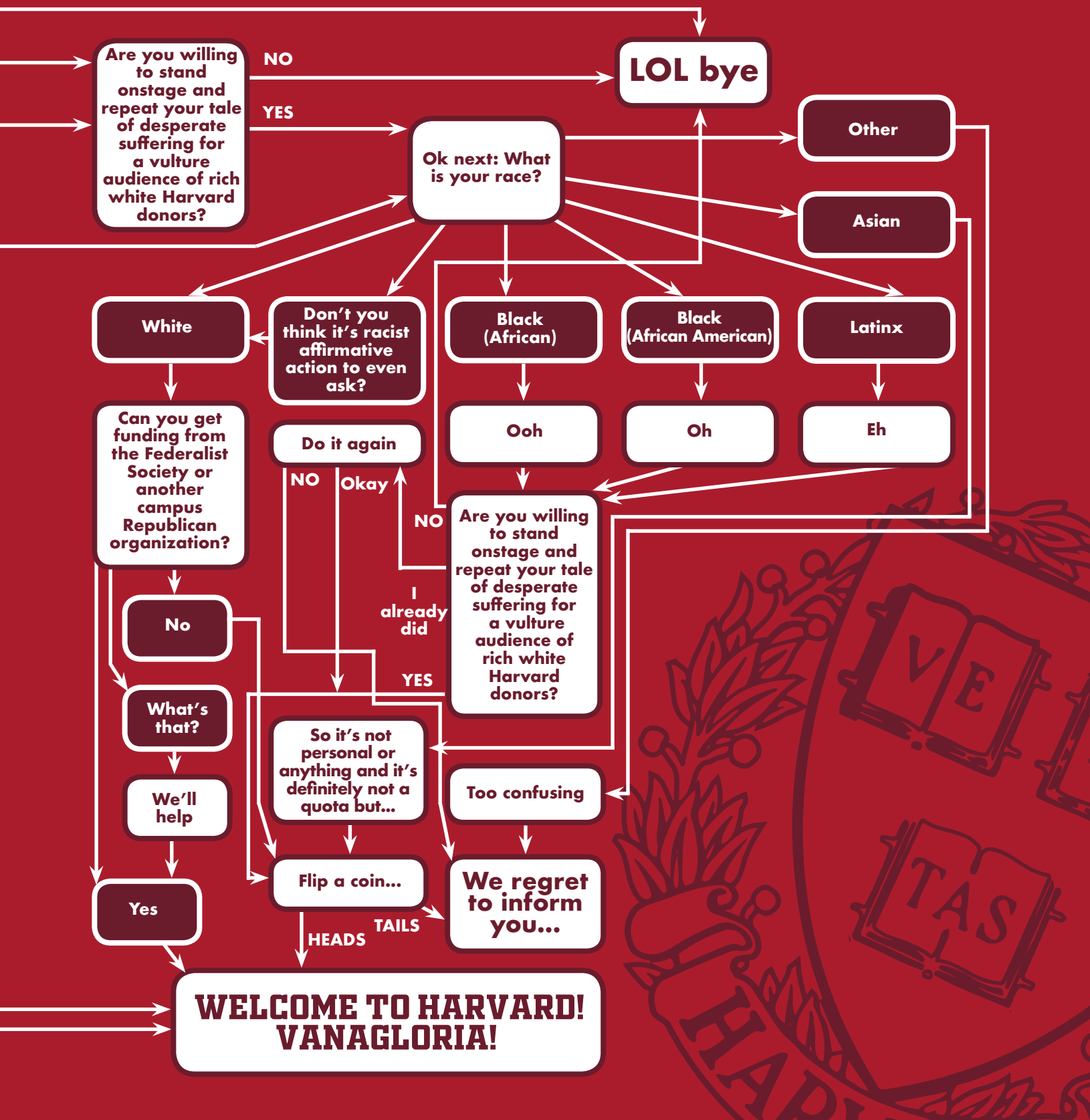
We're on the edge, and we know it. The temperatures are rising, and something's about to happen. You can tell because we're turning to our old nostalgic stories, our perennial comfort food. It's a food that's sharp, and we keep hungering for more slices. ♣

Can you get into

BEGIN HERE



HARVARD?



THE INNOCENT TRESPA



P L E A S U R E O F A S S I N G

by Nick Slater

I FIRST DISCOVERED THE JOYS OF TRESPASSING ONE night several years ago when I was living in Saigon.* The dry season was coming to an end, and the air was warm and pleasant. We were sipping watery Bia Saigon and chain-smoking cheap local cigarettes at a street food restaurant, as we did most Saturday nights, when my friend Ed asked, “Hey, do you wanna see the best view of the whole city?” I declined, since in my mind this was synonymous with spending the equivalent of \$20 on a mediocre cocktail (plus a hefty cover charge) to hang out at a glitzy rooftop bar while surrounded by the most insufferable assholes in a 10-kilometer radius. No matter how great the view itself might be, it didn’t seem like the kind of thing I was likely to enjoy. Life experience had taught me to associate the kinds of places where you find “the best view of the whole city” with paying a lot of money and feeling self-conscious about clothes and manners.

But as my friend explained, there was another way, and it didn’t involve paying a single *dong*. Nor did it require violence or malicious deceit, and it wouldn’t hurt anything except the feelings of our friends who’d see the sick-ass mementos of our triumph on Instagram. It was, I had to admit, a pretty convincing argument.

A short while later, as we stood in the elevator of one of Saigon’s fanciest hotels on our way to the third-highest floor (it’s best to get off and take the stairs from there, to avoid security or hostile penthouse guests), I stared at my friend in disbelief. Was it always this easy? Could you really just walk into the fortresses of the rich and politely but firmly bullshit your way into seeing sights that were normally reserved for paying customers? Not always, he said, though you’d be surprised...

There were certain tricks that would help your chances, like dressing nice or being white (the latter

* Ho Chi Minh City has been the official name of the metropolis since the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese puppet dictatorship fell in 1975, though most residents still call it Saigon. Government censors become quite upset if you use the old name in print, as I discovered while working at a local magazine, but since I no longer live under their jurisdiction, fuck ‘em.



was especially useful, as it is with many endeavors), but the most essential thing was confidence: You had to carry yourself like someone who expected to pass by the gatekeepers without a second look, like someone who knew deep in their bones that they had a right to be where they were. Because, as my friend explained, we *did* have a right to be there, even if we couldn't afford the \$700-a-night junior executive suite or even the \$85 lobster breakfast frittata. All human beings had the right to see what we were about to see, regardless of how much money they might have in their pockets.

And then we were standing on top of the city, gazing down at the endless sea of lights beneath us. Slow-moving snakes of red and white inched their way through the streets, while every monument and palace shone like a bright forest of gold. To our left, dancing spotlights traced lazy figure eights across the sky, and to our right, lonely ship beacons bobbed in the darkness of the river. The wind that blew strands of hair into my eyes was warm and gentle, and the silence that surrounded us felt not like the absence of sound but the presence of all the world's wonders at once, each trying to cram itself into our ears at the same time.

On the surface, there was little to distinguish that moment from the many other moments in my life where I've stood on top of a very tall building and gazed down upon the world below. And yet at the same time it *did* feel different, because there was no transaction, whether direct or indirect, that I'd made to be there. It was an experience, not An Experience™. There was no line for us to stand in, no security guard to move us along. There was no gift shop we had to exit through. We did not ask permission, nor did we beg forgiveness, and the end result was that we felt deliciously alive.

GOING WHERE YOU PLEASE WITHOUT PAYING a fee or requesting permission, or “trespassing” as it's often called, is good and we should all do it more often (though, admittedly, it's a riskier practice for some people than others). Exploring the world around you is not a crime: It's a natural human impulse, an affirmation that we are alive, a cheerful middle finger waved in the scowling face of power. Although most of us have been taught to regard trespassing with tremulous indignation, the only people with any real reason to oppose it are those who seek to control the lives of others and accumulate enormous fortunes for their own selfish pleasures. In today's increasingly lock- and camera-infested world, trespassing is a courageous demand for freedom, and it also happens to be fun as hell.

Why should you try trespassing? For one, it will make your world suddenly seem much more interesting—a broken window will fill you with curiosity rather than fear. When you see the world with new eyes, you'll start to explore much more of it, too, and you'll find that many of life's noblest pleasures are not found in a bar, gym, church, or even a museum of antique sex toys. In the course of this process, you may (nay, certainly shall) even discover something about yourself.

I should probably clarify: When I speak in praise of trespassing, I'm not talking about breaking into your neighbor's house at 3:00 a.m. to rummage through their stuff for drugs or money. This is the mental image that most of us probably associate with trespassing—a noise from downstairs in the middle of the night,



Photographs by Nick Slater

a shadowy menace lurking just a few steps away, a terrifying confrontation in the one place you're (theoretically) supposed to be safe. Needless to say, this kind of trespassing is usually bad, unless you're breaking into one of Jeff Bezos' homes. But while it's hard—though not impossible—to defend trespassing on *personal* property, it's much easier to make a case in favor of trespassing on *private* property (trespassing on public property comes with its own set of considerations, which we'll get to later).

Aren't personal property and private property essentially the same thing, though? No! There's a difference between things that are owned by persons and things that are owned by entities, and although that difference has been obscured by over a century's worth of "corporations are people" rhetoric from the right, it's still an important one. Scale matters: It might be reasonable for Bob to say I can't go hang out in his backyard gazebo while he's on vacation,* but it's far different for The Bob Corporation to say that I'm not allowed to set foot in a certain forest, beach, park, shopping mall, or abandoned soap factory.

The leaders of capitalist regimes in America and elsewhere do their best to blur the lines between personal and private property for the same reason they attempt to equate household debt with national debt—to make ridiculous comparisons seem like common sense, and to make ordinary people feel personally invested in the defense of a system that could not care less whether they live or die. They would like you to believe that if your family can't get away with

** However, if Bob is so rich and greedy that he bought up all the gazebos in town and forbade anyone else to hang out in them, there's nothing wrong with telling him to go fuck himself and having a picnic there anyway.*

spending more than it earns, neither can the government. Likewise, if you have the right to insist that strangers stay off your property, so should corporations like Brookfield Asset Management.

But this is nonsense, because while you'd be more fortunate than most if you had a four-bedroom home to call your own, Brookfield Asset Management owns more than 400 million square feet of real estate in almost every major city in the world. According to *Forbes*, not only is Brookfield the biggest office landlord in London and Los Angeles, it "quietly owns entire city skylines in places like Toronto and Sydney." In New York, it owns the massive World Financial Center complex (whose real name is Brookfield Place) in Manhattan, along with the enormous skyscraper at One Liberty Plaza (which was built atop the bones of the Singer Building, the tallest building ever torn down). Brookfield also owns Zuccotti Park, the heart of the Occupy Wall Street protests. (If you were wondering, "Did they write a whiny letter begging the NYPD 'to help clear the Park' of protesters by whatever—presumably skull-cracking—methods the Department saw fit?" the answer is yes, and how).

Corporations aren't the only ones to stake exclusive claims to massive chunks of the Earth's surface—other private entities are just as covetous. The Catholic Church, for example, owns nearly 276,500 square miles of land around the world, which, if all put together, would be significantly larger than France. Or take American cable tycoon Ted Turner, whose personal holdings of more than 2 million acres could comfortably fit Delaware, Rhode Island, and Washington D.C. with plenty of room left over. He may be but one private citizen, but he takes up a lot of



space. To quote Jay-Z, in this regard Turner is a business, man.

Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of human beings are being herded into smaller and smaller areas, and losing whatever tiny scraps of personal property they once held. In the 10 years after the 2007 financial crisis, there were more than 7.8 million foreclosures in America alone, and today fewer than half of black and Hispanic households own their home (41.6% and 46.6%, respectively).

Regardless of race, you're much less likely to own property now than you would have been if you were born a few decades ago. According to a 2018 report from the Urban Institute, one of D.C.'s most venerable and well-funded think tanks, while 45% of Baby Boomers owned a home when they were between the ages of 25-34, only 37% of millennials can say the same today.

AT THE SAME TIME THAT OWNING PERSONAL property is becoming an impossible dream, our public spaces are shrinking. In their place, cities are being overrun with "privately owned public spaces," which resemble the parks and plazas of yesteryear but whose use is limited (whether implicitly or explicitly) to those with the "right" kind of bank balance and/or skin tone. Even the most eloquent defenders of these areas, like Jerold Kayden, a Harvard professor of urban planning and the founder of Advocates for Privately Owned Public Space,* can't make a convincing argument that their unchecked proliferation is a good thing. They might create value, but not for the people who need it the most. The end result of the trend, as Kayden told *Here and Now's* Jeremy Hobson, is "a feeling that we're not

really all in this together. That there's not a level playing field. There are areas for wealthier people, and then there are areas for poorer people."

As an intellectual concept, this should offend you. When it's expressed in statistics like this one from The Trust for Public Land—white neighborhoods in Los Angeles have 31.8 acres of park space for every 1,000 people, compared with 1.7 and 0.6 acres for black and Hispanic neighborhoods, respectively—you should be appalled. And when you see examples of it put into practice—like the spiked doorways, slanted benches, and other types of "defensive architecture" that are intended to deny homeless people the slightest bit of warmth or comfort—you may feel enraged enough to throw a brick through the window of the nearest luxury real estate office.

As I type these words, I have become so furious that I'm struggling to spell things correctly. There's a memory that keeps making my hands twitch: I'm standing outside a Manhattan skyscraper, slowly spinning in circles as I look at the little blue arrow on my phone's map. As I orient myself and start walking down the street, I glance to my left and see something strange in the corner where two buildings abut each other—a few feet off the ground, diagonal metal bars connect the two walls, creating a neat little triangle of empty space that doesn't seem to serve any discernible purpose.

** This "initiative" (an impressive-sounding term that is so vague it could mean literally anything) is a partnership between Kayden and the Municipal Arts Society of New York City (who co-published a book in 2000 with the eyeball-glazing title Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience). The "initiative's" main objectives seem to be collecting photos of privately-owned public spaces, making concerned-but-ultimately-positive noises about private developers in media interviews, and dunking on itself with the most cheerfully gutless website on the whole fucking internet.*



And that's when I realize that the purpose of those metal bars is to keep poor people from huddling in that corner to seek shelter from the wind.

Any society that denies its most impoverished members *access to outdoor corners* is a profoundly sick and cruel one. Both cities and rural areas around the world (but especially in America) have long been the battlegrounds of a one-sided class/race war, and the forces of capitalism/white supremacy have already conquered huge swathes of territory. Like any occupying army, they have an overwhelming superiority in terms of money, technology, and firepower. However, they face the same problem that all occupiers face: Seizing land is easier than controlling it.

Trespassing is an act of resistance against this slow strangulation of our living spaces. Human beings should be free to wander where they please—indeed, for much of our history, this has been taken for granted. Nomadic and semi-nomadic civilizations like the Plains Indians or the Turkic tribes of the Eurasian steppe weren't the only ones to prize freedom of movement; those who insist such a concept is incompatible with the property-loving values of Western civilization may be interested to know that “the right to roam” has been ingrained in the cultures of many Northern and Central European countries for centuries. It's a longstanding tradition everywhere from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to Austria, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic. The Nordic countries of Finland, Iceland, and Norway protect the right to wander where one pleases, while Sweden's tourism website boasts, “Sweden has the freedom to roam. This is our monument. We have no Eiffel Towers. No Niagara Falls or Big Ben. Not even a little Sphinx.”

Many of these countries even have formal laws that protect public access as vigorously as American laws protect the right to exclude. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code, for example, ensures that “everyone, whatever their age or ability, has access rights.... over most land and inland water in Scotland, including mountains, moorland, woods and forest, grassland, margins of fields in which crops are growing, paths and tracks, rivers and lochs, the coast and most parks and open spaces” for a wide variety of purposes, including recreation, education, non-intensive commercial activities, or just going from one place to another. There are a worrying number of easy-to-exploit loopholes (like the one that stipulates these rights don't apply to “visitor attractions or other places which charge for entry”), but the laws still protect public access rights far better than anything in America, where former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke pushed hard for the privatization of the country's national parks and nearly succeeded before he was forced to resign in disgrace amid investigations into his personal business dealings with land developers and fossil fuel companies.

There are many reasons why people like Zinke—and the institutions they control or support—seek to limit our access to physical spaces, but two of them are particularly insidious. The first one is simple: They don't want us to see what they're doing there, whether it's having an extravagant pool party or slaughtering defenseless animals by the millions. Many states have “ag gag” laws that are intended to prevent people from entering factory farms under “false pretenses” and sharing evidence of the outrageous cruelties they witness there, like baby chickens having their beaks



burned off or pigs with needles shoved into their eyes. The justifications for limiting our ability to access the panoramic rooftops of a city's high-rises are somewhat different (here, a nebulous appeal to public safety or corporate secrecy is often invoked), but the intention is the same. You, the citizen, must keep your nose out of the business that's happening around you.

The second reason for elites' attempts to limit the public's access to any space that's not strictly essential for work or consumption is also simple: they hate us. They consider us filth. They wish we would just disappear, especially if we happen to be poor, dark-skinned, or both. When Ronald Reagan ranted about "welfare queens" ruining America's cities, when Donald Trump raves about "animals" pouring across America's borders, when Silicon Valley innovators like Greg Gopman* ponder removing all the "human trash" to "regional retirement communities" in remote areas where they can live out the rest of their drug-addled days, everybody understands exactly what they're saying—wouldn't it be nice if it was just *us* here, with *us* meaning prosperous white people (and perhaps a smattering of minorities who share the values and social behaviors of prosperous white people) who don't make a lot of noise or get sick in public.

And so it is clear: We are under attack, and we must fight back. We must resist being crammed into ever-smaller boxes. We must

refuse to trudge through life with blinders on, paying attention only to the pre-approved, highly monetizable sights that are set before us. Most of all, we must remember that trespassing is one of the most thrilling and rewarding things you can do with your pants on.

SEEING THE PLACE YOU LIVE (OR EVEN ONE you're just visiting) from a raw, unmediated point of view has a way of changing your outlook not only on your physical surroundings, but your daily existence within them. For example, in 1861 Walt Whitman visited the abandoned Cobble Hill Tunnel, through which a train had once run all the way to Downtown Brooklyn nearly half a mile away. After walking through the entire tunnel, he was impressed enough by the experience to write, "It might not be unprofitable, now and then, to send us mortals—the dissatisfied ones, at least, and that's a large proportion—into some tunnel of several days' journey. We'd perhaps grumble less, afterward, at God's handiwork."

It's debatable whether Whitman had his fellow humans' happiness in mind when he wrote that. He did, after all, describe the tunnel as "dark as the grave, cold, damp, and silent," and his logic seems to go something like: *Well, if you spend long enough in the most depressing place on earth, anything looks good after that!* On the other hand, and it's fair to point out that this is perhaps an overly charitable interpretation, I'd argue that Whitman was endorsing not a baptism into the church of hard knocks, but a radical realignment of one's perspective in general.

Few activities are as well suited to such a task as recreational

* Gopman, a Bay Area tech founder who gained notoriety in 2013 for a viciously anti-homeless Facebook post that went viral, went on to write a manifesto in 2018 called "Homeless Solved: Re-building the House Ladder from the ground up." It's every bit as arrogant, vacuous, and despicable as you might imagine—Gopman seems oblivious to the fact that his brilliant plan is essentially a tiered system of concentration camps. It cannot be emphasized enough how much Greg Gopman sucks.



trespassing. For one thing, you tend to gain an intimate appreciation of just how tenuous any hold on power really is. To illustrate, several years ago I was traveling through Bulgaria when I came across a massive, flying saucer-shaped monument jutting from a hilltop like a concrete toadstool. It was Buzludzha, the former Monument House of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and less than 40 years after being built, it was already crumbling. Though it was closed to the public and its doors had long ago been sealed, it didn't take long to find a subterranean access point (a fancy way of saying "a hole wide enough to wiggle through with a long piece of rope-like plastic and slowly lower myself down"). Once inside, I saw that the seemingly solid exterior bore little resemblance to the rampant decay within: Many of the beautiful stone mosaics had been stripped, and its roof was collapsing piece by piece. In the main chamber, the portraits of several prominent Bulgarian communists were slowly being chipped away, with one of them already gone, replaced by the shakily spray-painted words, "it's just A HEAD." This building had been one of the crowning achievements of a mighty empire that was supposed to last for hundreds of years. Regardless of your personal inclinations toward tankiedom, its rapid deterioration is an encouraging sign that the other dominant political force of the 20th century might soon meet the same fate.

Not only can trespassing restore your faith in the impermanence of exploitative power structures, it can also restore your faith in the cleverness, kindness, and beauty of the people around you. Too often, we're accustomed to seeing people at their most dull and obnoxious: they're obstacles to dodge at the grocery store, annoyances to ignore as we walk down the street, assholes

to honk at as we waste yet another precious hour of our lives sitting in traffic. When our only interactions with those around us are like the brief gratings of tiny cogs in a vast dick-punching machine, it's little wonder that we come to despise both our environment and each other. But should we meet under more pleasant circumstances, we're apt to feel differently. At various points during my time within the bowels of Buzludzha, I encountered 1) a pair of Chinese youths who had found photos of the monument on Baidu, the country's Googlian search engine, decided to fly halfway around the world to take selfies in it, and were kind enough to offer me a toke of their joint; 2) a group of Bulgarian, German, and Romanian antifascists who were on their way to a Rainbow Gathering and were also quite generous with their drugs, plus; 3) a flashlight-waving stranger who helped me find my way back to the access point instead of murdering me in the darkness, as I'd originally feared when I first heard their footsteps. I have nothing but the fondest memories of each of these people, and would be proud to one day give them a ride, attend their wedding, and/or testify on their behalf in a court of law.

Trespassing, then, is not simply a matter of seeing a sign that says "Do Not Enter" and having the courage to enter anyway (though that is often an important part of it). It's a radical expression of freedom, hope, and humanity. When you trespass, you are striking a blow against hierarchy and capitalism and uptight motherfuckers everywhere. It can't be overstated how important this is for our prospects of a livable future. So go forth, dear friends, and trespass—as a great philosopher once said, there's treasure everywhere. ✦

THE NEW YORKER'S ISAAC CHOTINER INTERVIEWS HISTORICAL FIGURES

In recent months, Isaac Chotiner of the New Yorker has become justly famous for his polite yet brutal interviews in which he eviscerates his wealthy subjects by relentlessly reminding them of things they have said or done in the past. Chotiner is a joy, and we are lucky to have him in our current obsequious climate. But did you know that Chotiner has been showing hypocrites their own asses for centuries? That's right: Isaac Chotiner, an immortal antagonist of the powerful, the smug, and the obtuse, has been mastering his art for millennia. We present to you now some excerpts from his greatest historical interviews.



HENRY
THE
EIGHTH



OLIVER
CROMWELL

CHOTINER: But you did kill Anne Boleyn.

HENRY VIII: Not at all. The executioner killed her.

CHOTINER: But you gave the order to have her executed.

HENRY VIII: In a manner of...look, when you're a king, you sometimes have to make choices...I'm not saying they're good choices. I'm not saying they're smart choices. But they're the decisions you have to make, because no one else can make them. That's the burden of being a king.

CHOTINER: Well, one argument would be to spread the decision-making around, so that one man doesn't constantly end up making bad or stupid choices without consequence.

HENRY VIII: I would not make that argument.

CHOTINER: Now you've been accused of hating the Irish, and I think it's fair to say that a lot of killing, starvation, mass exiles, and forcible land grabs have occurred in Ireland under the Model Army occupation.

CROMWELL: That's a very unfair characterization. Yes, we're in a time of war. But I've warned all my officers that any violence against Irish civilians, unless they are in league with the Cavaliers, will be punished.

CHOTINER: Have any officers in fact been punished?

CROMWELL: I am not aware of any acts that would warrant punishment.

CHOTINER: But there were 1500 civilians massacred during the siege of Wexford, for example.

CROMWELL: They were in league with the Cavaliers.

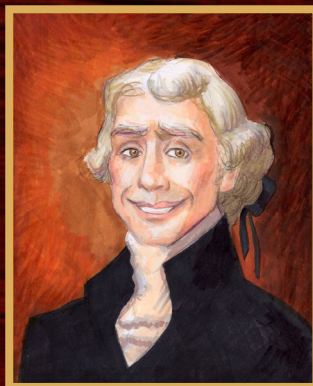
CHOTINER: Would you say that all Irish people are in league with the Cavaliers?

CROMWELL: All? Perhaps not. But many, yes, unfortunately.

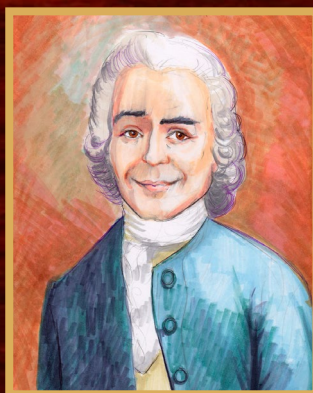
CHOTINER: And yet on another occasion you stated that "I had rather be overthrown by a Cavalierish interest than a Scotch interest; I had rather be overthrown by a Scotch interest than an Irish interest and I think of all this is the most dangerous." Aren't you suggesting here that the Irish are inherently your enemies, whether they're in league with the Cavaliers or not?

CROMWELL: The Irish have shed plenty of English blood.

CHOTINER: That doesn't answer my question.



THOMAS
JEFFERSON



ROUSSEAU



ATTILA
THE HUN

CHOTINER: So, all men are created equal, with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

JEFFERSON: I agree with that.

CHOTINER: I know you agree with it, because you wrote it. I guess what I am wondering is how you square that with literally possessing human beings.

JEFFERSON: Well, I said all men are created equal, so, obviously a lot depends here on our definitions.

CHOTINER: Okay. How would you, personally, define "men"?

JEFFERSON: As you know, I can speak and write in a lot of languages—six languages! I can't say much for the practicality of Anglo-Saxon (laughs). Anyway, what I've learned in my study of language is that words are fluid. The Declaration, the Constitution—these are meant to be immortal documents, but also completely reactive to the views of worthy men. I'm sure that, say, 80, 200, 250 years from now, America will not be divided by the question of who or what persons are created equal, and what rights are inalienable.

CHOTINER: Do you or the other Framers anticipate any problem with an enduring system of government that was devised solely by a tiny group of wealthy, white male landowners?

JEFFERSON: (laughs) Who else should have been included?

ROUSSEAU: The bounds of possibility, in moral matters, are less narrow than we imagine: It is our weaknesses, our vices and our prejudices that confine them. Base souls have no belief in great men; vile slaves smile in mockery at the name of liberty.

CHOTINER: Ok, but I really want to come back to the fact that you've repeatedly impregnated your common-law wife and forced her to abandon the babies at foundling hospitals.

CHOTINER: So when the Emperor's sister Honoria sent you her ring, what made you believe she was proposing to you?

ATTILA: I knew she wasn't. It was just convenient for me to pretend she was my betrothed and needed to be rescued, so I had an excuse to invade Rome.

CHOTINER: When it comes to Romans, do you feel comfortable admitting—

ATTILA: Murdered the shit out of them.

CHOTINER: You're referring to the sacking of Rome.

ATTILA: Burned that motherfucker down.

CHOTINER: I have to say, this is refreshing.



A conversation with Green New Deal policy architect

RHIANA GUNN-WRIGHT

Rhiana Gunn-Wright serves as the Green New Deal policy director for New Consensus, a progressive policy shop that is developing concrete ways to implement the GND and advises lawmakers and activists. Previously Rhiana served as policy director for Dr. Abdul El-Sayed's Michigan gubernatorial campaign, and as policy analyst for the Detroit Health Department.

NJR: *I first encountered your work on the Abdul El-Sayed campaign, where you put together this extraordinary state-level, single-payer plan, called "Michicare." But — am I right — it's not quite usual for an insurgent gubernatorial candidate to even have a policy director. Is that right?*

RGW: Yeah, that's right. It's not usual for any gubernatorial candidate to usually have a policy director, but Abdul was really serious about it. I think it's not really a secret—he's kind of a nerd. And I am too. For him, it was really important to run on a pretty policy-heavy platform. In part, because I think that's just who he is, and in part because it ensured that no matter what happened in the outcome of the race, that there was always something that we could leave behind, right? Because the goal was obviously, yes, to get him elected, but also to be part of this larger sea change, and talk more about the ways that we really can structure our world, and our economy, and our society, to be more just, and more fair, and better for people. So I think it was really important for him for that reason, and for me, when I came in. I also personally thought of it as an element of credentialing. He is Muslim, he was a first time candidate, and he had never held elected office. So people needed to know that we were serious, and that we really did know our stuff, and that we were thinking really hard about how to solve the problems in Michigan. So that was also part of the logic, at least on my end, for the kind of policy onslaught that we unleashed.

NJR: *Yeah. Onslaught is right. People should look at these documents. They are still available online. They are really quite extraordinary. You produced a stack of papers on the Abdul agenda. Some of these are 50 pages long. You have an urban agenda, a rural agenda, a water plan, a health plan. I'm missing, like, five of them, right?*

RGW: Yeah, I think we released 11 agendas. And I can't remember if that was just the major ones, because we would also drop shorter pieces. We had an auto insurance one, that was a few pages. We had one around municipal internet, which was one of my favorite policies to write, and that was shorter. But yeah, we just kept putting stuff out [laughs].

NJR: *I want to talk about your municipal internet plan. Why was that your favorite?*

RGW: MI-FI, it was my favorite...

NJR: *MI as in Michigan?*

RGW: Yeah, M-I-F-I. We were also really into branding, and fun Michigan names [laughs]. Because you can do a lot with the letters M-I. So that was my favorite, because that was one I wrote entirely on my own. In terms of staff, I had this really great guy named Shaun, who is actually an intellectual property lawyer, who works a lot, and thinks a lot about the internet. So, he keyed us in on municipal internet, and the intricacies, and the legal framework through which you could do something like this. And then I worked on it. And it was just fun, because it was a topic that I didn't know a ton about. But I was learning more, and thinking about how to make it work as a system, and how you could actually make something like this happen. It's always nice to realize that there is a possibility for public intervention where private enterprise fails. I always find that heartening, because it just reminds me that we create the worlds that we live in, and that if we built it one way, then you can always build it another way.

NJR: *When I look through these documents you've made, it did distinguish the campaign. There are some candidates—there are even presidential candidates who don't have a policy section on their website, and when you look through what you created here, what I like about it is that it's so detailed. You could say some of it is wonky and technical, but it kind of shows a degree of respect for voters—*

RGW: Absolutely.

NJR: *—because it says, “Here's the plan. Scrutinize it, ask questions, criticize if you like, suggest improvements,” but it's hyper-transparent. Now you're working on the Green New Deal with the New Consensus Project, and you have just released this document on the Green New Deal, co-written by you and your colleague, Robert Hockett, that explains the basics of the Green New Deal, giving the justification for it and a response to what I think is the big first question about the Green New Deal, which is: Why lump together climate change, poverty, inequality, racial injustice into one package, instead of addressing climate, and having that be one part of your agenda, and having some other part that addresses the other thing. Why put “Green” and “New Deal” together?*

RGW: Yeah, so this was critique—that's so funny that you asked about it—that actually brought me back to Twitter.

NJR: *Oh no, did you get sucked back in?*

RGW: I did get sucked back in! Because it's far easier to communicate with a lot of people on Twitter than on Facebook. So I just kept seeing a lot of these arguments about how this is too big because it includes inequity, because we're trying to deal with justice, it should just focus on climate, why doesn't it just focus on climate, so on and so forth. And I think there's a few reasons for that. The first one is that the two are intertwined. We know that the folks who are the most at risk of basically living through the worst effects of climate change are people of color, especially low-income people of color. The second reason is that a lot of the intersections will be expressed in ways that deserve support from a climate plan, but unless they're included specifically, or you're taking an intersectional lens, they won't be.

So an example of that would be Detroit, which has shed a lot of its population, and now the residents who are left, who don't have as much money, are stuck trying to pay for the cost of this big, aging system. And

you could see something like this happening in say, a coastal community, where as climate change gets worse, the people who can afford to move will move, and the people that will be left there are people who can't afford to move. And then, what are we going to be talking about it as? We're going to be talking about it as a municipal finance problem. We're going to be talking about it in the same way that you talk about it in Detroit.

NJR: *Well, I live in New Orleans, so this is a very highly relevant point here.*

RGW: So the cause could be climate change, but it's going to appear as a municipal finance problem. It's going to appear as a city going bankrupt, because their tax base is eroding. And then you add on top of that, they're going to have to adapt to the effects of climate change, and this goes across the whole nation, with the heavier storms. So, for instance, imagine a city like Detroit, that now desperately needs to make updates to its stormwater system so that it can handle these heavy rains. And so, to me and everyone else who is working on the GND, why not address those together? Because in fact, that is a climate issue, and if you do have things like Medicare for All, where you're unlinking employment from health insurance, if you are having a jobs guarantee program, that means that people can be mobile. That means that people who are stuck in that community can now move to places where we need them to move, in order for them to do certain types of work. Or, they can stay, and still be earning a living wage, and have that money going back into their communities, and into their tax coffers, so that places have a better chance of actually being able to afford the adaptations that they need, and to support themselves in the midst of the sort of changing climate. That's one of the reasons. Another is that people don't experience things as climate change, right? They experience them as economic loss: of a job, of a home, of savings.

So we need to also be able to communicate what the transition will mean to them, and the benefits for them of transitioning to a green economy, and similarly, personal terms, in terms of jobs, in terms of equity, in terms of reinvestment in their community, because right now, it's kind of separated. People understand that climate change will cost them something, and that a transition away from fossil fuels, or whatever else, will change the way that they live, but then, we'll communicate about the benefits in a very national way, or a global way. We talk about emissions going down, we talk about us being able to keep warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. But that's not telling anybody what they actually stand to gain for themselves as we transition. So I think it's also a political move, in the sense that for people to really act on climate change, or to feel empowered to do it, we also have to give them a vision of what their lives will look like after this transition, which we have to communicate in economic terms.

And then the third reason is simply that a lot of the programs that we need to increase participation and job quality in our economy, to reduce inequity and inequality, are the same programs that you would need to support a green transition. I talked about Medicare for All and jobs guarantee in terms of allowing mobility. But also, it's that you know that you're going to have this transition, and you know that if you don't think about it proactively, in terms of equity, and how it's going to affect different kinds of people, you are knowingly allowing them to be excluded. Because we've seen how market mechanisms work. We can't ask a company who is focused on profit to also be thinking about equity. We can ask them, but there's no guarantee that they'll do it. And similarly, we can't imagine that a government investment, which is going to be layered on top of a system that is inequitable right now, will all of the sudden make it equitable. We saw what happened in the New Deal. We saw what happened in World War II, which was communities of color actively being excluded from the benefits of that. We know that just because the government is going to invest in these new industries, it doesn't mean

that the outcomes will help everyone across the board. To ensure that you're actually going to redress some of the harms that are going to be done, but also just simply make sure that everyone can benefit from and participate in the green transition, you have to be thinking about equity, or else you're just planning to fail, leave those people out. I guess I just wish we were more honest about that—which is that there is no way that you're going to get equity in a system, and in a society like ours with so many centuries of discrimination and exclusion sort of layered upon each other. You're not going to all of the sudden get better outcomes without proactively thinking about those things.

NJR: *Whenever people critique the Green New Deal and say, "Well, it's short on policy details," I always you think of you, because I always think, "Well, it's not going to be when Rhianna Gunn-Wright gets through with it, because if you want policy details I can assure you they are coming." The existing resolution is a statement of goals, but people like you live for the policy details.*

RGW: I know. When people are like, "What about the details?" I'm like, *hold on*, they're like, "Are you sure?" I get why you wouldn't trust me, you don't know me, but you should know, I love a detail. I have not found a detail yet that I do not love. I talk about service delivery and public goods way more than anyone should. I love details. But I think I'm excited, honestly, as painful as it is, I didn't think I would ever get to this place. I'm actually glad, right now, that we aren't talking about prescriptive policy details, because right now we have to get consensus around these goals, and we have to actually listen. This is going to be such a big transformation, and the Green New Deal, even in resolution form—it's an economy-wide transition, so everyone is going to be affected, so we actually have to take the time to talk to people, to listen to different groups, to hear the debates, to try to build consensus, and then move forward to try to figure out prescriptive policy details from then. Right now, I feel like if we were doing that, if we were coming out with prescriptive policy details, we would essentially be saying we have decided from on high how this should go, we'll talk to you about it a bit later, but for now try to get on board. And that's not the model that New Consensus uses, that's not the policy model that I use. I think it actually shows that we're being *more* judicious than less judicious, because racing to have details right now, that's about nothing but impressing the press, it's about nothing but trying to appear serious in a game that's often rigged against you. So why not just take the time, talk to people, try to get folks on board, and have a truly participatory policy design process?

NJR: *That's such an interesting point that I actually haven't heard before. You don't want a group of policy makers, in secret, going off and designing the plan, and going "look, we made the plan." You're part of New Consensus, it's about building consensus. I mean, the whole process of democracy is asking people what their needs are so that they can contribute.*

RGW: Exactly, it would mean that we went into some sort of secret chamber. Because also, the level of consultation that we need is very different to get without momentum, or without attention. Because then, people want to participate. They want to be part of it because they've heard about it, they get the goals, they want to see how they can help you reach them. Or, they want to express their deep concern that you are completely wrong, and an idiot, which is also fine. That's very difficult to do if you're not out in the open, talking about the policy, if you don't have something like the resolution out there. So when people are like "Where are the details?" I say, honestly, since we couldn't do that consensus-building process, it would be something like you said, we would decide among ourselves, this group of experts, what it would be. We shop it around to a few groups, and then we're like, here you go. And that's just not the way that we want to do this. It's just not.

NJR: *This is what I really like about your work: You are a wonk who knows the detail, but you are not a "technocrat," who thinks that a small group of people should be in charge of designing the future. And it's not Rhianna Gunn-Wright's plan for how to plan out the entire American economy. You are there to help people figure out what is best to do.*

RGW: We say we are here to identify a line, and mobilize expertise to figure out what the next version of the U.S. economy looks like that, and how the Green New Deal facilitates that, and how we reach the goals and the resolution and whatnot. People, and a collective, and really, honestly, listening, and trying to figure it out. And also trying to figure out second-order effects, because that's the other thing: There are so many things that the Green New Deal will touch, you want to be able to hear from folks from all across the country how these things will affect their community, because I promise you, a group of people could never figure that out on their own, in their own little bubble. But people who are going to experience it are the best at figuring out, at looking at something and being like, that wouldn't work here for these, these, and these reasons, you would probably see that happen, this might hurt this person, this might hurt this group. That's really useful information, and too often, in our process, what we do is we say, "oh, we're going to pass this," and then the onus is on people who usually have the least power, and the least time to come out and mobilize against it, instead of policy makers trying—this is not a slam on policy makers. Often they have so many competing priorities, and not nearly enough resources, so I 100 percent get why you wouldn't do a participatory process like this, because it takes a lot of time, and a lot of effort, especially if you have to move quickly.

But still, the onus shouldn't be on the people who are going to be hurt to tell you how they're going to be hurt, after you've already started moving. The onus should be placed back on policy makers, whether they're wonks, whether they're think tanks, whether they're in government, wherever they are, to actually go and try to figure out that information first, so that people can focus on their actual lives. At the end of the day, I get paid to do this, this is my job, right? This is my entire job. So, why should I ask you, who has two or three jobs, to come out and come to a protest about Medicaid work requirements, right? That should never have been on the table, because I knew it would hurt you. But I think often there are other times when it's unintentional or whatnot, but still, the onus is on me and other people who get paid to do this work, to do that job for people, and not expect or ask people to do that on their own, and take time away from their own families, their own obligations, to tell us what we did wrong.

NJR: *Well, I am so excited to see what you're going to do next, and how your work is going to develop. I recommend people read your Green New Deal document, which explains the basics, and gives the justifications, as well as to the policy documents you produced for the Abdul campaign, which are truly impressive examples of how real world progressive policy-making can occur, and really good models. And Abdul did not win, but you left a really impressive legacy in the form of these proposals. So congratulations to you, and thank you very much for joining me.*

RGW: Of course, thank you, I had a ton of fun.

NJR: *Okay, good. That's what we want.*

RGW: Yeah, I know, and people are like "you have fun talking about service delivery?" I'm like, "yes, sir!"

NJR: *It's peculiar, but if it works for you. Thank you, Rhianna Gunn-Wright! +*



what makes an EDUCATION

by Erika Jost

WE HAVE A MYTH ABOUT THE POWER OF education. No matter who you are, it goes, if you do well in school, you can be anything you want to be. Education is the golden ticket to upward social mobility and financial security: “In America, the son of a shoe salesman can grow up to be president.” The historical reality has always been that this myth applied more to certain populations than others: if you were white, if you were male, if you were rich. Now, as we struggle with skyrocketing college costs and public school disinvestment, this myth is as unattainable as ever. But what does it look like when education works the way we say we want it to? Is this a myth worth aspiring to?

In their blockbuster memoirs, both published in 2018, Tara Westover and Casey Gerald reach radically different conclusions about this myth. They each come from troubled, marginalized backgrounds but catapult to the pinnacles of education and eventually comfort and material security: in this way, they are both models of this particular American Dream. However, while Westover credits her elite education with saving her, Gerald believes education ruined him. I will let you guess which memoir ended up on President Obama’s Summer Reading list that summer.

The contrasts between Westover’s *Educated* and Gerald’s *There Will Be No Miracles Here* show that even when our education system “works,” it may be working all wrong.

While the authors lived drastically different childhoods, these memoirs share some commonalities. For one, they are tales of the Millennial experience: Tara Westover was born in 1986 and Casey Gerald in 1987. Both authors also grow up in often misunderstood parts of our country where they face serious barriers to accessing quality education. Westover is raised in a far-right, survivalist Mormon family in the Idaho mountains, where her father forbids her from attending school (at 17, she enrolls at Brigham Young University against his wishes) and discourages the family from relying on modern medicine and technology. At home, Westover is subject to physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her violent brother Shawn (a pseudonym) and her reckless father, whom she now suspects suffers from mental illness. Gerald is Black and comes from a poor Dallas neighborhood where he is raised by relatives and then his

older sister, while his parents struggle with drug dependency, incarceration, and possible mental illness. Despite these challenges, Gerald nonetheless excels both in academics and particularly in football. In the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity, both memoirists make the rags-to-riches leap. Westover leaves to earn a doctorate in history at Cambridge University in England. Gerald obtains an undergraduate degree from Yale and later, a business degree from Harvard.

I must admit that while reading *Educated*, I felt gripped, touched, and even strangely validated. Westover’s memoir is a recognizable tale of perseverance and grit, of an almost-lost girl made good, of education as self-realization. It is a story so seductive that I did not notice what it missed until I read *There Will Be No Miracles Here*.

Gerald’s memoir shines a fluorescent light into the shadows of Westover’s narrative, revealing what is personally sacrificed by the people we make the symbols of our education myth. His is the coming-of-age tale of a young Black man who experiences a profound loss of self after being used and muffled by his education, only to be held up as one of its successes. Gerald’s memoir doesn’t have a lot of answers, but it accurately diagnoses the cynicism of an education system that, at its best, aspires to assimilate poor and disenfranchised individuals into the powerful classes, largely by requiring them to distance themselves from the realities and struggles of their upbringing and homes. Westover’s memoir has been championed by powerful people like Obama and Bill Gates because it feeds the fantasy that the best and brightest have it figured out, and that people from institutionally ignored and disadvantaged populations need simply to adopt the values of the ruling class to be fulfilled, to be self-actualized, to be “educated.” For Westover, education empowers her to “remake” herself into “a changed person, a new self.” Gerald is much more skeptical of the “self” created in the course of his education: “It had taken nearly every day to turn the boy that I had been into the man that I became, a dead man.” How do these memoirists walk away with such different interpretations of the American Dream?

Tara Westover, *Educated: A Memoir*, Random House, 352pp, \$28.00
Casey Gerald, *There Will Be No Miracles Here: A Memoir*, Penguin, 400pp, \$27.00

COMPARE, FOR INSTANCE, HOW THE TWO WRITERS describe and relate to the people from their old worlds. For Gerald, one example is Mauricio, his fifth-grade classmate. In fifth grade, as his parents become less of a consistent presence in his life, Gerald learns to negotiate his increasingly chaotic reality by “identify[ing] who was in

charge, find[ing] out what they want, giv[ing] it to them immediately.” In one such instance, he misunderstands an assignment to write a speech and, to the delight of his teacher, writes, memorizes, and delivers the speech from memory to his class. (His talents as an orator have carried into his adulthood successes and can be independently verified on YouTube.) Looking back, Gerald sees the role that his obedience to authority plays in this story: “[W]hen I was a child I did not speak much,” he writes, “and then, one night, in slavish fear, I got my homework so wrong that it was perfect. And that made all the difference. Or enough.”

Mauricio, on the other hand, has not completed his homework assignment. Dispirited, Mauricio lies down in the middle of the road with the intent to remain there until he is run over by a car. The plan fails, and Mauricio is returned safely to the classroom, where he is chastised for not having his assignment. What is unusual about how Gerald frames the discovery of his own talent is that he refuses to forget the unpredictable cauldron in which his treasure is forged. While he is “saved” by the attentions and encouragement of his teachers, Gerald wonders whether Mauricio’s actions were a more appropriate response to the “strangeness” of both their lives. Reflecting on this moment, he writes:

...young Mauricio, who might have had the right idea all along, was struck with the paddle and doused with medication and, I bet, given another chance to try fifth grade—while I, his mad submissive counterpart, toed the line so well and for long that somewhere along the way somebody said I had a gift—a gift!—when what I had was more of a sickness...Two mad boys and too much strangeness, one reformed, one revolting.

Gerald’s deep empathy with Mauricio highlights the absurdity of their disparate treatments: Mauricio acts truthfully, consistent with how Gerald himself is feeling, and is punished; Gerald, because he acts “slavishly” and “submissively,” because he denies the turmoil and uncertainty in his life, is rewarded.

While Gerald yearns for more humane treatment for both himself and Mauricio, Westover’s education seems to alienate her from the pain of her youth. Growing up in a patriarchal household, Westover learns as a child to define her worth in terms independent of her gender. However, as she becomes an adolescent and increasingly “female” in ways that are hard to deny, she becomes a target of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her controlling older brother Shawn. The abuse ranges from calling her a whore and pushing her head into the toilet to nearly breaking her arm in one particular outburst, while most of her family feigns ignorance or suggests that the abuse was warranted. Reflecting on one particular altercation, Westover describes with great insight the tortured mental state that Shawn’s abuse put her in: “Suddenly that worth felt conditional, like it could be taken or squandered. It was not inherent; it was bestowed. What was of worth was not me, but the veneer of constraints and observances that obscured me.”

I find this a particularly affecting articulation of female adoles-

cence (and beyond), hardly restricted to the experience of a fringe Mormon family in Idaho: the policing, derision, and punishment of the dress, behavior, interests, etc. of women are classic hits in the dominant culture as well, though the adult Westover does not explore these connections. Heartbreakingly, Westover looks to her abusive brother Shawn to help her: “He knew about worldly women, so

I asked him to keep me from becoming one.” Her explanation of the complicated relationship between her learned lack of self-worth as a girl and the abuse perpetrated by her brother and accepted by her family and herself is sharp and convincing.

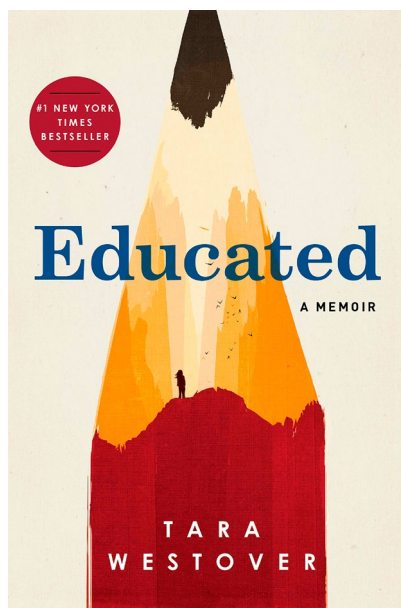
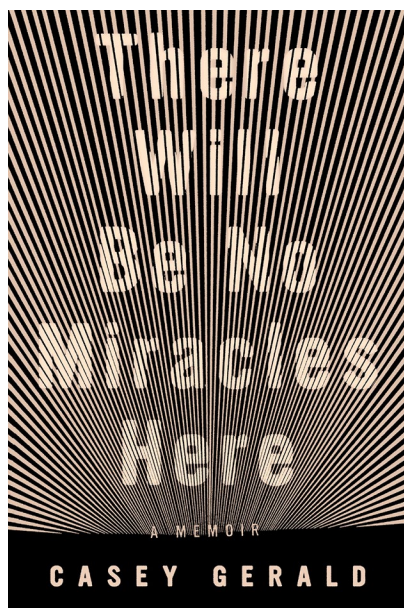
HOW PUZZLING IT IS, THEN, TO watch her back away from it later, as she attempts to help the women still subject to Shawn’s abuse and her own family’s indifference. During a visit home from her master’s program at Cambridge, Westover recalls the night that Shawn’s wife Emily runs to Westover’s parents after Shawn throws her into a snowbank and locks her out of their trailer. Westover sees herself in Emily. Unlike Gerald, however, she seems to have lost all insight into the complexity of being subjected to Shawn’s violence in the world of her childhood. Looking at Emily, Westover concludes:

What was needed was a revolution, a reversal of the ancient, brittle roles we’d been playing out since my childhood. What was needed—what Emily needed—was a woman emancipated from pretense, a woman who could show herself to be a man. Voice an opinion. Take action in scorn of deference. A father.

What a strange solution, in a 300-plus-page book by this extremely accomplished woman who has spent her adult life working to free herself from the same physical and psychological shackles, from the very same man within the same family dynamic. By the end of the memoir, Westover has moved across the Atlantic and broken off contact with the majority of her family to foster and protect her sense of self. By her own account, Westover is able to free herself from the power of the male authority figures who oppressed her in part because she is now armed with an elite education and the accompa-

nying new worldview, one that has exposed her to healthy relationships and has made therapy accessible to her. Why then does she think that the solution to Emily’s emancipation is either imitating manhood or finding a new male authority figure? (Relatedly, why is she resistant to reading second-wave feminists, whose works might grant her even greater insight into domestic violence as a larger political issue?)

The memoirists also consider power in starkly contrasting ways. Gerald sees it everywhere and is tormented by it, in its exercise by other people and by himself. Westover, on the other hand, seems oblivious to power structures. Power courses through her story without a nod. It is not noted when her brother Tyler, already in university, writes her college application for her. Nor is it explicitly acknowledged when Cam-



bridge rejects her application for an undergraduate program and one supportive professor pulls strings to guarantee her admission. Because of her generally uncritical deference to authority figures, Westover's aspiration to power is uncomplicated. After she has earned her doctorate, Westover recalls a question posed by her undergraduate professor during a college lecture: "Who writes history?"

My idea of a historian was not human; it was of someone like my father, more prophet than man, whose visions of the past, like those of the future, could not be questioned, or even augmented. Now, as I passed through King's College, in the shadow of the enormous chapel, my old diffidence seemed almost funny. Who writes history? I thought. I do.

Unwilling to deconstruct her idea of a historian, at least in this memoir, Westover chalks up her inability to imagine herself as a historian to a lack of confidence. While developing a stronger self-image is clearly an instrumental part of her journey, her memoir fails to consider the power dynamics that propelled her to this rarified position, or any complications about position being so rarified in the first place.

In contrast, Gerald credits power—and his own predisposition to submit to it—for his journey from Dallas to the Ivy League to the finance industry. Power explains his early success in school and later in high school football, where Gerald would "submit to [the recruiters'] demands" and "feel such deep gratitude for his opportunity that he'd do almost anything, be almost anybody, not to lose it." At Yale, success follows when he takes on the advice of faculty members and changes his clothes and his speech. At his summer job at a white-shoe law firm, it comes when Gerald performs his personal story for the partners, and one of these powerful men lands him another summer job at Lehman Brothers, the now defunct investment behemoth. Each time, submitting to power begets power. "If you know the right people, they can help you do anything, be anybody, rules and hard work be damned—as long as they like you," Gerald writes. This, he calls "the real American Dream."

I heard and watched and learned a great deal from the people who turn, or try to turn, the axis of the world. What a wonder it was to behold. To see past their fights in political ads, in boardrooms, in history books—to witness how often they, in fact, want the same things, how they view the world through like-colored lenses, are shaped by schools and jobs and clubs that are the same or nearly, how well they work together to play in a game, to win a fellowship or get into a school, to make a billion and protect those billions, to run a country or save it or ruin it or claim it as their own.

Gerald learns another important lesson: With the right people behind him, there is no losing scenario. Though he wins neither the Rhodes scholarship for which he competed nor the important Yale football game that conflicts with his Rhodes interview, Gerald notes, "it seemed that I had reached the stratum of American life where, even when I lost, regardless of *why* I lost, people treated me like I won." He wonders what it would have been like to experience this kind of support as a child in his "forgotten world." And having tasted power now, he aspires to hold on to it and to exert it.

Somewhere along the way though, Gerald becomes troubled about the person this power dance is turning him into. He illustrates this point with an anecdote about a conflict in the Yale Black Men's Union, which he has cofounded with his classmate Daniel to foster support among Black students at Yale and in nearby communities. Without going into great specifics, Gerald recalls how, during his senior year, the Union's leadership is threatened by an intense disagreement between Daniel and Elijah, another football recruit whom Gerald describes as "a little brother, the one who has done everything right...the bravest boy I ever met." Gerald "resolves" this conflict by telling Daniel and Elijah to "*Get over it or you're fired*," a move praised by Gerald's academic advisor. Both Daniel and Elijah do carry on their work, but Eli-

jah feels betrayed by Gerald, which Gerald neither acknowledges nor understands at the time. Looking back, Gerald is horrified by his own actions, is horrified by the system that rewards this behavior. When Elijah commits suicide in his late 20s, Gerald believes that value system carries some responsibility: "the way we were taught to be men, to be human beings even, was a dead end." Gerald criticizes not just the arbitrariness of power—whom it helps and hurts—but also the kind of human it shapes: in his case, a man blind to his brother's pain. While Gerald is deeply troubled by the personal compromises his success story demands, Westover is almost silent on the values of her new world.

GERALD AND WESTOVER SEEM TO HOLD OPPOSING attitudes about what exactly makes an education. In *There Will Be No Miracles Here*, education fails to teach its students "to be whole, to be free." In *Educated*, education *is* freedom. To be sure, education liberates Westover in undeniable ways. It teaches her to trust her own thoughts and judgments after a lifetime of mental abuse, and it allows her to support herself financially. But we ought to be aware of the limits of Westover's meditation on her education.

Beyond the accumulation of facts, Westover credits her education with creating a new "self," a version of her that is more refined and more sensitive, one that belongs in her new world, as opposed to the "thing of stone, with no fleshy tenderness" that she was before. Westover ends her memoir with these parting words: "You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education."

Westover seems to believe the abused child who grew up among survivalists, tolled in the scrap yard as a kid, and didn't know to wash her hands after using the bathroom could not possibly belong in the beautiful buildings at Cambridge. Only by taking on the sensibilities and values and identity of this new class of people does she become "educated." While conceiving of herself in two halves may be helpful in dealing with her past trauma, this two-selves framing is troubling. It reinforces the idea that education is a process for achieving conformity, that it only belongs to certain types of people, and that its purpose is to continue creating that certain type of person. While shedding the pain of her childhood is admirable, and probably really difficult, Westover inadvertently endorses a destructive purpose for education. This suggests that it would perhaps be wiser to understand her memoir as her escape from an abusive home, and not as an "education as liberation" memoir.

Gerald's insight is that his education at the best schools in the United States did not amount to liberation. For him, education and the road to a successful life has demanded the disavowal of his emotional life: his sadness, his friendships, his home, his loves. Enlightenment for Gerald only comes once he reaches back to nurture all the pain he hasn't been allowed to feel, to chuck off his restraints. The scales-falling-from-the-eyes moment occurs when Gerald comes out as gay to his campaign manager and abandons a run for Congress in Texas: "I had strived to win this world and won my death instead."

Gerald's memoir lays bare the shallowness of his formal education and challenges us to imagine education as something better than a potential means of social and economic advancement. A liberatory education should cultivate all people from all classes—not only the class it already caters to, and not only select individuals like Gerald and Westover—"to be whole, to be free." Instead of stomping out vestiges of their childhood selves, education ought to empower people of all backgrounds, to give them the tools to better understand themselves and the worlds they come from, and thus help us all better understand the world we live in now. ✦

WE JUST HAVE THE RADICAL APPROACHES TO ABORTION

By Cate Root and Lyta Gold

ESTIMATES VARY, BUT SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ONE in three and one in four American women will, at some point in their lives, get an abortion.* Access to legal abortion is, of course, already burdensome, largely dependent on location, wealth, social support, and the ability to get time off from work. With legal abortion in grave danger as state after state passes heavy restrictions or near-absolute bans, and the fate of *Roe v. Wade* likely to be decided by the kindness of Brett Kavanaugh, it's more important now than ever for the Democratic Party to stand resolute on abortion rights. However, if you look at the behavior of many centrist Democratic politicians and media outlets, you'll probably conclude that, as with most critical left issues, centrist Democrats don't actually give a shit and aren't committed to the cause.

In fact, what we get from centrist Democrats is often useless hand-wringing and concern-trolling. "My heart breaks for this 'heartbeat' bill," said Nancy Pelosi, in reference to the law passed in Ohio that bans abortion at the point when a particular clump of cells expresses electrical impulses, colloquially and inaccurately referred to as a fetal "heartbeat." In the same interview, "Pelosi called abortion a 'tragedy,' saying she respects the position of those who oppose abortion, including members of her own Catholic Italian family." Two years ago, Pelosi cited those same anti-abortion relatives when she stated that abortion rights could not be a litmus test for Democrats. Focusing on reproductive justice, she warned, meant that liberals were guaranteed to lose:

[Pelosi] also suggested that the party's presumed rigidity on social issues is one reason that Democrats were unable to appeal to segments of the electorate that might otherwise have been in tune with their broader agenda. "You know what? That's why Donald Trump is president of the United States — the evangelicals and the Catholics, anti-marriage equality, anti-choice. That's how he got to be president," she said. "Everything was trumped, literally and figuratively by that."

Here Pelosi directly blames LGBT people and abortion advocates for Trump's victory, and yet liberals didn't condemn her for it. In fact, they saved their ire for Bernie Sanders when he supported Heath Mel-

lo's candidacy for mayor of Omaha. (Mello had previously voted for anti-choice legislation but vowed not to pass similar legislation as mayor; since he lost the election, it's impossible to know whether he would have kept his word.) What is treason from a socialist is hard-headed practical realism from a centrist; it's simply good politics when Pelosi casts abortion as a fringe issue, separate from the broader agenda of the party. It may break your heart, but there's simply no moving people who disagree with you.

But how many people are really against abortion in the first place? In the *Cut*, Eric Levitz notes that "there is not a single state in the union where a majority of voters support 'making abortion illegal in all circumstances.'" And according to the General Social Survey (GSS), 62 percent of Democratic voters now support complete access to abortion on demand no matter the reason. This is a remarkable uptick of 10 percent from two years prior. Yet the *New York Times*, reporting on this same data from the GSS, warned that "40 percent of Democrats say they oppose legal abortion if the woman wants one for any reason." This misleading phrasing makes it sound like a full 40 percent of Democratic voters are totally against abortion, when in fact 38 percent (not 40) are opposed only to *abortion on demand*—i.e., they believe there should be at least *some* restrictions on abortion, but don't necessarily oppose all abortion access. This *New York Times* report was titled "Politicians Draw Clear Lines on Abortion. Their Parties Are Not So Unified" and the subhead glumly advised readers: "It's one of the most polarizing issues in America, and a political litmus test. But surveys find many voters struggle with its ethical and moral perplexities." The *New York Times* could just as easily have trumpeted the swift and extraordinary rise in support for abortion on demand, so why this gloomy framing?

THE *TIMES* IS NOT ALONE; A RECENT ARTICLE in the *Washington Post* bemoaned the increased fervor of abortion advocacy among Democrats. "'We've become so intolerant; [anti-abortion] former congressman Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) said... '[The Democratic party] take[s] our money, but they can't come to our events or help us out in our campaigns.'" Stupak, now an employee of Venable LLP who "lobbies on health-care issues," decries the "almost vengeful" behavior of pro-choice advocates who criticized Joe Biden for supporting the Hyde amendment (a hideous piece of

*NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: Throughout this article, we frequently refer to "women." The more precise and correct term for the group we are talking about is "people who are theoretically capable of becoming pregnant," which also includes many genderqueer and trans individuals. We are using "women" as a shorthand, but we do not intend to exclude non-women.

TO FIGHT ON ACCESS



legislation which bans federal funding for abortion, meaning women on Medicaid must pay for their abortions out of pocket). Abortion advocates, like angry Furies, have destroyed the discourse: As Stupak went on to lament, “It just seems like we’ve lost a sense of civility.” It’s important to remember, as abortion rights are stripped away nationwide, first from poor women and then from everyone else, the true victim is...civility.

Why the Democrats are so afraid to stake out popular positions (and, in general, so afraid of power and addicted to losing) is a broader question for another day; but abortion, like so many issues, is a battlefield upon which the Democrats have always been too timid to mount a proper defense. Time after time, they have preferred to let their oppo-

tics to be rebranded as a new cause célèbre. The evangelical pro-life movement is, and has always been, a marketing campaign for the religious right. It’s their top-selling vehicle for political power.

THE BATTLE AGAINST ABORTION IS, AS A WHOLE, A relatively recent one; for most of human life on Earth, abortion fell within the accepted sphere of women’s power and influence. Women in most civilizations controlled reproduction; birth usually took place at home, and was attended only by women. Obstetric forceps were invented in 1588, and the field of obstetrics muscled into the world throughout the next few hundred years. Male physicians duked it out with midwives (who were

“THE LEFT HAS LOST SO MUCH GROUND SINCE ROE. IN THIS COMPROMISED POSITION, WE NEED TO REASSERT UNIVERSAL PROTECTIONS FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT AND POPULAR LIFE...”

nents set the field and dictate terms. As feminists have pointed out ad nauseum, exceptions for rape or incest make no sense if you believe life begins at conception, and if you believe life begins at conception, surely you must support maternal health care and the well-being of children post-birth. The vast majority of anti-abortion advocates are opposed to universal health care and family subsidies; this is because they are dishonest people who do not really care about children at all. At the same time, there are indeed principled Catholics and others who are genuinely troubled by the metaphysical status of the unborn, and for them, we recommend socialism. As an earlier *Current Affairs* article noted, socialism will naturally reduce abortion by eliminating poverty and improving healthcare, ensuring that people can afford to choose to have children if they want to. But for the most part, the statement “life begins at conception” is used to obscure the true anti-abortion argument, which is this: People with uteruses, by the nature of their biology, have too much control over the means of reproduction; these people are primarily women; and women cannot be permitted to possess authority that men lack, or the whole patriarchal edifice might disintegrate.

Due to its implicit threat to patriarchal power, abortion has become a convenient rallying point for the religious right. It wasn’t always their favorite villain; as Randall Balmer pointed out in *Politico*, abortion was once considered by evangelicals to be perfectly acceptable and a mere Catholic neurosis, but after the defeat of school segregation in the courts, leaders of the religious right realized that abortion had the appropriate ontological characteris-

all too frequently accused of witchcraft), while the plunder and colonization of America offered a new front for the fledgling male medical profession to organize. In 1857, a mere 10 years after its founding, the American Medical Association began the fight to criminalize abortion in the New World. Leslie Reagan, who wrote “When Abortion Was A Crime” (basically *the* book on abortion) calls the AMA’s campaign “antifeminist at its core.” Criminalizing abortion was a direct strike against midwives and homeopaths, as well as women fighting for admittance to medical schools.

While male doctors organized for control over abortion, pregnancy, and gynecological care, they also relegated it to “specialized care.” For thousands of years, laywomen had carried institutional knowledge about human reproduction. But to male physicians, male bodies were frequently designated as the “default” while women were “special cases” whose reproductive organs guided and controlled most of their biology. In the West, women’s reproductive health was an area of morbid fascination for millennia; nearly every illness in women could be attributed to a wandering womb or some other damaging influence of the lady humors, a belief that lingered well into the 20th century. Since the reproductive system was itself pathologized as a source of disease, it needed to be controlled for the sake of women’s physical and mental health—and, incidentally, for the sake of continued patriarchal dominance. This has led to significant problems, of course, but the advent of actual scientific rigor in the medical profession (long after the founding of the AMA) has also meant important medical advances. In *Doing*

Harm: The Truth About How Bad Medicine and Lazy Science Leave Women Dismissed, Misdiagnosed, and Sick, Maya Dusenbery lays out the contradictions inherent to contemporary women's reproductive health:

The fact that women have become largely dependent on a male-dominated medical system for the ability to prevent, end, and safely bring to term a pregnancy—a freedom that's so fundamental to women's equality—has led to some tensions, to say the least. Undoubtedly, women have benefited in many ways from this medicalization of their reproductive lives; it's given us more effective birth control, safer abortions, and life-saving interventions in complicated pregnancies. On the flip side, women have had to constantly fight on a variety of fronts to maintain control: to simultaneously push for greater access, resist overmedicalization, and defend their autonomy in making reproductive decisions.

Where women's liberation and the medical establishment have clashed since the founding of the AMA, it's been a new struggle for old power. The collective authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1970) were a dozen women aged 23 to 39 who met at a women's liberation conference in the Boston area. The initial "Women and their Bodies" workshop they attended was so provocative that they formed a group and set about researching topics: anatomy, sexuality, birth control, venereal disease, abortion, childbirth, and postpartum health. Their \$0.75 "course handbook" attempted to wrest institutional knowledge back from a medical establishment dominated by wealthy white men. As the authors wrote in "Women, Medicine, and Capitalism, an Introductory Essay":

As women are redefining competence: a doctor who behaves in a male chauvinist way is not competent, even if he has medical skills. We have decided that health can no longer be defined by an elite group of white, upper middle class men. It must be defined by us, the women who need the most health care, in a way that meets the needs of all our sisters and brothers.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there were other radical attempts to take power back from the male-dominated medical establishment. One of the most famous is Jane, formally known as the Abortion Counseling Service, a women's collective that operated in Chicago from 1969 to 1973. About 100 women passed through the Jane collective as counselors over the years, but never more than a few dozen at a time; the group collectively facilitated approximately 11,000 abortions, initially coordinating appointments with friendly doctors, and eventually, after training, performing abortions themselves. In the fall and winter of 1972, the group offered a free post-abortion checkup with one of these friendly doctors, who reported that the service's complication rate was roughly equivalent to that of New York's legal clinics (between three and six per 1,000 D&C abortions). The collective was highly successful—until 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* was decided, and Jane dissolved. Control over abortion passed back into the hands of (mostly male) doctors. *Roe v. Wade*, which enshrined abortion as part of the right to privacy between a woman and her (again, usually male) doctor, wasn't even close to the result that radical feminists wanted. Laura Kaplan—a former member of Jane—explains this in her book *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*:

When New York's legislature debated legalizing abortion in 1969 and 1970, radical feminists passed out a copy of their ideal abortion law—a blank sheet of paper. They advocated repeal and repeal meant no laws on abortion. They argued that any reform, no matter how liberal, was a defeat since it maintained the State's right to legislate control over

women's bodies. With that control codified, as in New York's liberal law, the door was open for further restrictions. These radicals could foresee a time when abortion was legal but relatively inaccessible, perhaps as inaccessible to most women as it had been before reform.

Their prophecy was correct: While abortion is technically still legal as of the time of this writing, it has become increasingly inaccessible. A 2016 Guttmacher Institute report shows the incredible multiplication of abortion restrictions: an average of 38 new restrictions a year in the 10 years following *Roe*, an average of 14 per year in the 28 years after that, and then, in just the five years between 2010-2015, another 288, a stunning 57 restrictions per year. According to another Guttmacher report from 2019, 24 states have laws regulating abortion providers beyond anything that can be remotely considered medically necessary. *Roe*, just as the radical feminists warned, kept power over women's bodies in the hands of the state, and ultimately placed too much trust in the benevolence and stability of institutions. It's a concession, a compromise, and a bad legal ruling. As Lillian Cicerchia writes in *Jacobin*:

"Roe guaranteed privacy, not access. It guaranteed choices, not good choices. It (formally) guaranteed the right not to have children, not the right to have children in a safe and supportive environment. Roe gave pregnant people rights, not agency."

This framing of abortion as a narrowly defined and easily-abridged legal right controlled by the state completely negates the autonomy that most people desire to exercise when it comes to their own bodies. That is, what we want is a positive, natural right, not given by the state but understood by everyone, like the right to breathe. And yet, in the public discourse, abortion has become a matter of private experience and guilt rather than a collective reality. As Yasmin Nair and Eugenia Williamson argue in the *Baffler*,

"...the left has failed to translate the experience of being denied rights to abortion into political and economic terms that affect everyone—even the anti-abortionists to whom they've ceded their authority on the matter. In casting abortion as something that should cause guilt, the left has forfeited any way to demand rights as rights."

If we accept the framing that reproductive control is a private sinful, guilt-inducing behavior that requires legalization, rather than a natural social freedom, then the left loses its greatest leverage: Abortions are common, and the right to abortion has always maintained relative popularity. (Discussing their campaign to criminalize abortion at the 1860 Annual Meeting of the American Medical Association, the president of the AMA declared: "It is difficult for legislation in a free country, where the people are the source of all political power, to rise higher than popular sentiment and intelligence.") The only way to lose is to treat abortion as something shameful and "a complex issue" in need of state intervention and complicated trimester restrictions, rather than what it is: part of the suite of women's reproductive options which are essential to our full freedom.

THE LEFT HAS LOST SO MUCH GROUND SINCE *ROE*. In this compromised position—where a woman is still dependent on the medical establishment for abortions, and with a technical guaranteed right but without guaranteed access—the left needs to reassert universal protections for reproductive justice in every level of government and popular life, a vision that by definition requires a mass movement of organized actors fighting for collective power.

In *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the Gilded Age*, Jane McAlevey evaluates three common ways of achieving social change: advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing. She defines the “advocacy model” as a method of struggle which does not require collective action, but relies instead on paid lobbyists, PR professionals, media, lawyers, and other actors working with capital instead of popular, collective demand. “Mobilizing” requires turning out large numbers of already-committed activists to engage in crucial fights. “Organizing,” the strongest and most enduring, requires base building through recruitment of people who have never before been involved in the fight. McAlevey argues that while advocacy and mobilizing models can achieve occasional and moderate victories, truly radical, systemic social change can only be achieved through organizing.

For too long, defenders of abortion rights have relied on the advocacy model, with occasional whirlwinds of mobilizing. This is inevitable as long as Roe is the centerpiece of abortion rights. In a different piece for *Jacobin*, “What Medicare for All Means for Abortion Rights,” Cicerchia frames the problem with the current advocacy and mobilizing models:

...with Roe on the chopping block, liberal organizations are still clinging to the strategy which brought them to this conjuncture. They seek to preserve the tenuous legality of abortion under Roe, rather than entrenching it as a right within the healthcare system. In this way, the procedure has become technically permissible but far from accessible. Now, it's in danger of becoming neither.

Medicare for All is the de facto universalist demand to address this need. It provides the capacity-building, maximalist, collective struggle to cohere change. But Cicerchia points out, “there is a temptation on the Left to overstate Medicare for All’s power to win greater abortion rights by itself. In this perspective, Medicare for All’s unifying power will simply transfer to its specific provisions for reproductive health funding. Emphasizing those provisions, on the other hand, could invite divisions within its potential base.” That is to say, we will still face challenges from anti-abortion advocates if women’s reproductive health care is treated within Medicare for All as a separable, special consideration rather than a natural human bodily process, experienced by a full 50 percent of the human population.

The left must not defend only “abortion rights,” using the advocacy and mobilizing models. The path to victory is an organized, universalist demand for bodily autonomy, including the right to healthcare. Even before the Hyde amendment passed in 1976, the legalization of abortion did nothing to build expansion of healthcare access or to transfer social and economic power over reproduction back to women. The older feminist collective model may have held better answers. Kaplan tells us in *The Story of Jane*:

As members of the women's liberation movement, the women in Jane viewed reproductive control as fundamental to women's freedom. The power to act had to be in the hands of each woman. Her decision about an abortion needed to be underscored as an active choice about her life. And, since Jane wanted every woman to understand that in seeking an abortion she was taking control of her life, she had to feel in control of her abortion. Group members realized that the only way she could control her abortion was if they, Jane, controlled the entire process. The group concluded that women who cared about abortion should be the ones performing abortions.

As Dusenbery notes above, the long medicalization of reproductive health yielded some victories: better birth control, safer abortions, and better outcomes for complicated pregnancies, and basic best practices

such as sterilizing instruments and washing hands. It isn’t necessary for every abortion to be performed by a loving supportive feminist collective, which may not be exactly easy to create in every part of the country. But moving the framework of abortion away from “a choice between a woman and her doctor” and towards simply being “a common part of reproductive life,” much like childbirth or menstruation, is essential. Publicizing the frequency and banality of abortion (as in the “Shout Your Abortion” campaign) is a decent start; creating abortion funds is another.

BUT SIMPLY TALKING ABOUT AND FUNDING abortions, as the patchwork of laws shift and abortion becomes more legal in one state, less in another, won’t solve the fundamental problem: Women’s reproductive rights are still viewed as distinct, sacrificable, and less important. They’re a special issue for a special population: a red state problem and (sometimes) a blue state privilege. In those same red states, mothers generally have higher maternal mortality rates, while the U.S.’ general statistics for maternal health are piss-poor, especially when the gap between outcomes for Black mothers is considered. This is where more holistic “abortion” funds can be valuable. The Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund is part of the NNAF (National Network for Abortion Funds), but it’s not just an abortion fund. Founder Laurie Bertram Roberts also provides support to parents and for basic needs. According to her:

Many people in Jackson [Mississippi] will not say the word “abortion” in public. They prefer euphemisms, like “taking care of a problem” or “women’s health care”; even in their own homes, they lower their voices before uttering the word itself. Roberts has responded to this secrecy with a bullhorn. She openly helps people obtain abortions. She takes them to dinner afterward. She provides them with whatever else she thinks might help them and their families go on with their lives: birth control, books, money for groceries or child care or Christmas presents.

Embracing the idea of reproductive justice, Roberts is not just providing the means to abortions. Part of her goal is to create a rare experience: shame-free, holistic bodily autonomy. Ideally, in the socialist paradise of our dreams, organizations like the Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund still exist, but are funded by the state, maybe as part of Medicare for All. But we don’t live in that world yet; we live in a world where the Democratic Party is still led by lukewarm centrists worried about alienating a relatively small number of anti-abortion constituents, and where even Bernie Sanders can be slightly squishy about abortion rights.

To that end, we have to band together, and not just advocate or mobilize, but also find ways to organize, both inside and outside of the law, in order to provide care for each other. That may look like walking a sidewalk as a clinic escort, canvassing with your local DSA to build support and gather pledges supporting Medicare for All, or offering childcare or food for on-the-ground activists who have been working on securing reproductive freedom for decades. It may mean creating or joining a collective along the same lines as Jane. “Care” is an old liberatory feminist term, encompassing a much bigger emotional and material concept than the narrow framework of a legal right. Defending the right to privacy under Roe, and making half-assed exceptions for trimesters and abuse, isn’t enough. We have been losing for so long. We need to go on the offensive. It is completely insufficient to defend an abstract law. We need to defend each other. +

Goofus and Gallant



Goofus tells millennials to stop whining about their problems.



Gallant listens to their concerns.



Goofus doesn't think there's a viable left position on immigration.



Gallant believes in open borders.

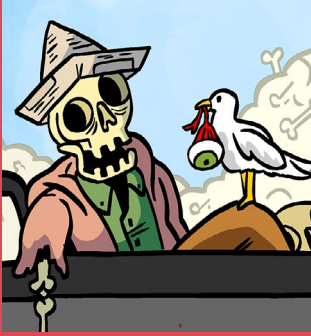


Goofus, however ironically, is running for president of a country.



The Gallants want to abolish all countries in favor of international anarcho-socialism.

The Illustrators



Matt Lubchansky



*Ben "Skutch"
McGehee*



Ben Clarkson



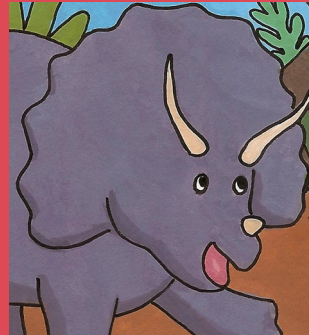
Heather Milligan



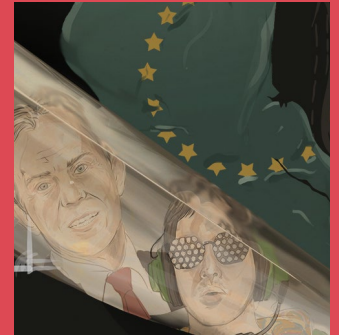
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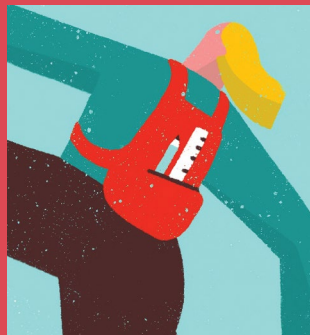
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