

Spreading Sweetness and Light

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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JULY/AUGUST 2019

**ETERNAL
DAMNATION**
ACTUALLY GOOD?

**WHY TEENS
LOVE
SOCIALISM**
BECAUSE IT'S
AWESOME

MOTOWN
WHY IS IT SO
MAGICAL?



**MONUMENTS
TO ANIMALS**
LET'S BUILD MORE

HUEY LONG
POSSIBLY
UNDERRATED



notice + comment

SUBSCRIBERS ARE ROYALTY

OWN THE LIBS BY EATING RAW SQUIRREL CARCASS

"Pro-meat protesters fined for eating raw squirrels at vegan stall: Pair ate fur-covered dead animals in front of children in London despite pleas to stop," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2019.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that vegans can be kind of annoying. But you know how you can teach them a lesson? By eating raw, fur-covered squirrel carcass in front of them. This is precisely what a pair of carnivorous young Londoners did last month at a vegan food stall. That really stuck it to those vegans.

In fact, did you know that eating raw, fur-covered squirrel carcass is an excellent way to "own the libs" more generally? It's true. Every time you see someone in a dumb #Resistance t-shirt or complaining about

child detention facilities, don't get mad or go out and vote to re-elect the president. Just pick up a live squirrel and start gnawing it in front of them. Could anything be more unpleasant and upsetting? Hardly! In between bites, you can say "Are you triggered?" They'll probably beg you to stop. This is because they are SJWs who don't understand that human beings did this for tens of thousands of years and were fine. Laugh while you chew, as you contemplate how dumb people are.

Remember: always eat a raw squirrel if you want to teach the left a lesson. Then put the remnants down your pants. This drives leftists crazy. They won't know what's happening! And sure, uncooked rodent meat

might taste a little icky. But when you go "rolling coal" in the faces of tree-huggers, you often end up choking and spluttering a bit. It's totally worth it though.

If you want to make the left look silly, here are some more things to do:

- ✦ Retreat to your safe space
- ✦ Eat your own shit in public (it's a free speech protest)
- ✦ Set all your belongings on fire
- ✦ Do labor organizing at a Nike factory
- ✦ Join the DSA (and be sincere about it)
- ✦ Eat more raw squirrels. (We just want to emphasize how much you should do this.)

Good luck owning those libs!



We love you, dear reader.
We tell you all the time.
But how do you really know?
"All you do is show up at my house once every two months, sometimes not even then, and all you do is talk about your opinions," you may say to us. Fair enough. All true. But remember too: We once read 12 Rules for Life for you. Has a greater feat of devotion ever been known?

THIS MAGAZINE IS FOR YOU

WHY WE FIRED THE ADVICE COLUMNIST

We know that you look to this publication for wisdom. Family, friends—they may be good for recipes and sporting tips, but they're hardly going to give you good life advice. For that you need a magazine. Alas, we have failed you. It has come to our attention that our advice columnist has been offering suggestions of dubious efficacy. In response to "Soiled in Sacramento," the columnist should not have pre-

scribed pointing the smell out to the woman's employer, and to "Left Behind in Louisville" it was not advisable to propose "taking the matter into your own hands and doing what you think is necessary." The correspondents in question have informed us that the consequences of following advice printed in this periodical have been unfortunate, and we regret the resulting carnage. We would first politely draw atten-

tion to the liability waiver that binds all subscribers and indemnifies *Current Affairs* for death or disfigurement resulting from use or misuse of this magazine. We would also note that the advice columnist will no longer be appearing in our pages. Future columnists will be asked to refrain from suggesting that readers "blow it all at the craps table" as well as from countenancing minor arson.

SHRIMP????



THE TOUR IS CANCELED

You had looked forward to it all year. "The first thing I shall do when I get off the boat in New Orleans," you had said to your grandfather, "is visit the *Current Affairs* Building and shake hands with the editor of *Current Affairs*." Your grandfather, being wise, doubted that you could pull it off. But he was wrong. Or at least, he would have been. Alas, there has been an incident.

We warned the children. Do not drink from the chocolate river. If you fall in, the portliest among you will end up stuck in the tubes. Did the children listen? They did not. This, we emphasize once again, is a magazine and not a daycare center. If your children cannot follow basic instructions, then perhaps they should end up in the taffy-pulling machine. God is cruel to those who do not listen to their tour guides.

Unfortunately, the mounting number of deaths on the tour has led us to place it on an indefinite hiatus. We are sorry that the irresponsible actions of the few should spoil the fun of the many. Alas, as it is in society, so it is here at *Current Affairs* World Headquarters. Perhaps if we extract the child, you can come next year.

RETRACTION

We wish to retract the recent column, "How Identity Politics Drove Me From The Left And Also Made Me Kill My Wife" by Joe Stronghands, supposedly a Hoxhaist spot welder in Dubuque and card-carrying member of the Democratic Socialists of America. Mr. Stronghands was not, in fact, a welder. Nor was he a Hoxhaist. Nor was he a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. Nor did he live in Dubuque. In fact, he did not exist at all. At *Current Affairs*, we fact-check articles by asking ourselves whether they "reek of verisimilitude." The article in question confirmed too many of our preexisting beliefs not to print. It felt too true not to be true. Alas, it turned out to be false. *Current Affairs* regrets the error.

IS CURRENT AFFAIRS WATER PROOF? TRY IT AND SEE

HOW TO BE PRAGMATIC

1. Say "but how will you get it through the Senate?"
2. Promise a thing almost identical to the status quo. Say it is "just as good" as any big bold thing.
3. Cite a bunch of polls. You can definitely find some to support you. Insist Public Opinion is on your side.
4. Draw a graph. Hold it up.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Hey there,

I just finished reading Nathan & Oren's article on Malcolm X in the latest issue. What a beautiful article! I really thoroughly enjoyed it and appreciated some new Malcolm X quotes I hadn't encountered before. As always, I was so excited to get the newest copy of Current Affairs!

I also wanted to offer another perspective on Malcolm X and his legacy. Malcolm is so often characterized as the symbol of black rage, and I think it's really important to remember how misogynistic and sexist he was. I get a bit frustrated when folks, especially black men in my communities, praise Malcolm without talking at all about how exclusionary his politics were to black women. Black women don't exist in Malcolm X's speeches, except sometimes as mothers or wives to black men. Because of this, I don't feel like Malcolm X is fully able to speak to my anger or my identity because his analysis cannot accommodate how racism and sexism intersect. His politics is pretty explicitly about liberation for black men, not all black people.

In my reading, Malcolm X's sexism is central to his claims about racial justice—it permeates his speeches. He's always talking about how black men need to stand up and fight like men for what is theirs and openly scoffs at any form of resistance that could be read as feminine. I wrote an essay on this a couple of months ago when I was

still in school and here's the conclusion I came to (and sorry to quote myself, which is kind of obnoxious): *What Malcolm X so often demonstrates in his speeches is that he has accepted that the only real power lies in the domination of others. His notion of Black liberation takes up the virulent masculine impulses of the racist society it opposes by accepting power as power over, power as domination. He, and other political leaders of this tradition, leave no space for a collaborative power with. Instead, they essentially understand power as the pursuit of whiteness, or as an attempt to become the dominant class that has oppressed them. I do not think this path can lead us to liberation; it is destined to recreate the very conditions that it seeks to overturn. I am not interested in a power that simply reorganizes existing hierarchies to place new groups of people at the top. I want to change the very structure of a society that allows for such a hierarchy at all.*

All of this to say that I find Malcolm X's aggressive masculinity to be central to his claims about race, struggle, and liberation, and I try to keep this in mind when thinking about him and his legacy. I wanted to add this to the team's reflections on his legacy in your wonderful article.

Hope all is well with everyone at Current Affairs.

Take care,
Logan

Cut out
and give
to your
friends:

YOU DESERVE
THIS COUPON

YOU DESERVE
THIS COUPON

AN EXPLANATION

You may have noticed a somewhat mystifying exhibit on the preceding page, in which sea life and punctuation mingle freely under conditions of equality. "Egad!" you may have said to yourself, "this magazine has finally cracked. Editorial control has ceased to be exerted. There is nobody steering the ship." This, we would like to reassure you, is not the case. No, what you have before you is the sweet fruit of democracy.

The Editor did not intend to litter the pages of this magazine with heaps of unnecessary crustaceans. The Editor is an individual of sound judgment and impeccable taste. Other members of the Staff, however, have notions of their own.

"A three-page spread of shrimps and question marks, or I resign," declared the Contributing Editor at a recent Quality Control meeting.

"Are you serious? You can't be serious. My God, what would the reading public say?" replied the Editor, with the sober restraint that has earned him such respect among the Staff.

"Six pages," insisted the Contributing Editor. "Six pages or I tender my notice and take half the staff with me to Concurrent Affairs." The Editor reeled. He had forgotten about our sister publication. The threat was not an empty one.

"Here is what you will get: a tiny square, with a few shrimp here and there. Possibly a question mark if I am feeling generous." The Editor was proud of his resolution. It showed leadership.

"How about a compromise?" volunteered the Contributing Editor. "A pullout mini-magazine within Current Affairs called SHRIMP??, consisting only of pictures of shrimp and question marks."

For a moment, the Editor considered it. It would be a way to distance himself from the whole baffling enterprise. If readers complained, he could insist that he had no idea how the pullout found its way in, that it had nothing whatsoever to do with Current Affairs, that it must have been included by marauders. Pullout costs, however, revealed themselves to be prohibitive. Into the magazine the shrimps must go.

What you see before you now, then, is the end product of many hours of editorial deliberation and debate. At one point, the entire Design department threatened to strike if a minimum of six shrimps were not included. In the interests of labor peace, the Editor finally accepted the modestly-sized square of shrimps that now sully these pages.

If these make you happy, so be it. You may thank the Contributing Editor. If they infuriate and confuse you, the same individual deserves your ire. The Editor did what was possible within the presently-existing political system. For good or for ill, this is what democracy yields.

AFTER THE COLLAPSE

It is said that the only things that will outlast the Apocalypse are cockroaches and Current Affairs. And we have no doubt that the saying is true. Proud we are of our indestructibility. But reader, we ask you, what good is it *really*? What's the use of being the #1 magazine in town, when every subscriber is a skeleton? The potential for reading groups and discussion circles is limited.

We say this to make clear our position on the Apocalypse: We are against it. Some have speculated that because the collapse of civilization would be in this enterprise's financial interests, we are somehow trying to hasten it, or are surreptitiously encouraging others to do so. This could not be less true or more false. Wishing to see the Economist incinerated does not mean wishing to see the same fate inflicted on the rest of humanity. That would be cruel. Abominable. There is a reason people call us "The Nice Magazine For Nice People," and it is that we are nice. We promise you it will be ever thus.

WE HOPE THAT YOU ENJOY YOUR BEVERAGE

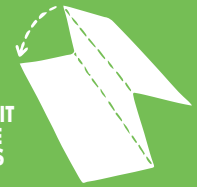
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a product of current affairs



WHAT FRESH HELL
HAS CORPORATE
GREED BROUGHT US
THIS TIME?

HERE WE GO WITH ANOTHER RIDICULOUS
CURRENT AFFAIRS FOLD-IN
ILLUSTRATED BY AIDAN Y-M

DO IT
LIKE
THIS



A

FOLD PAGE OVER LEFT

B

FOLD BACK SO THAT "A" MEETS "B"



AYM

A WHEN BELOVED MEDIA INSTITUTIONS ARE
CONSUMED BY THE CAPITALIST IMPERATIVES
OF EVIL CORPORATE HELL-LORD CHICKENSHITS
THE TYPE WHO BLAME THEIR OWN ASTOUNDING
ASININE INCOMPETENCE ON SOME DOWNTREND
OF DEMONIC MARKET FORCES, WHAT HAPPENS
TO THE VENERABLE MAGAZINE THAT ONCE
JOYFULLY STUCK A DIRTY FINGER INTO THE
MADDENED FACE OF POWER?

B

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In Praise of HELL FIRE

by BRIANNA RENNIX

THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES FOR WRITERS AND orators who wish to specialize in the language of Moral Harangue. We live in an era where persuasive speech is largely comprised of lukewarm appeals to self-interest. One seeks to prove to one's audience that they have something to gain—or, at the very least, nothing to lose—by supporting the desired moral proposition. When we denounce our political foes, we usually do so by vaguely suggesting that their ideas are “backwards” and that “history” will “judge” them. This is pretty toothless stuff: our politicians are almost all nihilists who cheerfully consign their fellow-humans to endless miseries on a daily basis, so why would they give the faintest fart what human beings not-yet-born will think of them? (To say nothing of the fact that ascendant evil-doers always—and often correctly—assume *they* will be the ones writing the history books.)

For those who like their rhetoric neat, of course, there is the language of revolution. But this is tricky to deploy. The invocation of revolution nearly always carries an implicit threat of violence: “if you don’t do the right thing, we will come kill you.” If you’re a pacifist, you may think that this is rarely, if ever, a morally justifiable threat. And even if you aren’t a pacifist, you must at least think carefully about when to use revolutionary language: It’s probably strategically unwise to invoke violence that you have no stomach or ability to carry out. Leftists are, by a significant margin, less well-armed and well-trained than their political opponents. Calls for uprisings and guillotines sound like lazy, empty irony rather than anything that could actually happen. The bluff is ludicrously easy to call.

But Back In The Day, there was another option available when you wanted to denounce your foes: the language of hellfire.

The idea of hell is, perhaps, the part of traditional Christianity that seems the most absurd and weirdly Off-Message to non-Christians. After all, isn’t it rather at odds with the whole notion of Love Thy Neighbor that the creator of the universe would have a subterranean

torture chamber where those who displease him are roasted in perpetuity? New Atheist types are always eager to point out that hell is an absurd contradiction: how can a god that inflicts horrific pain on his creations for eternity be the arbiter of any kind of morality?

There are two ways to approach this apparent contradiction. Option #1: *super* lean into the idea that Hell Is A Good Thing in a way that makes everyone around you extremely uncomfortable. During the first 1,000 years or so of Christianity, there was recurring theological speculation that the blessed in heaven could actually *see* the damned in hell—and, what’s more, that they *enjoyed* seeing the damned in hell. Tertullian, a 2nd century Christian writer, looked forward with giddy anticipation to his front-row seat to the torment of the wicked: “What a panorama of spectacle on that day! Which sight shall excite my wonder? Which, my laughter?” He imagined “so many and so mighty kings, whose ascent to heaven used to be made known by public announcement... groaning in the depths of darkness,” and the provincial governors who tortured and executed his coreligionists “melting in flames fiercer than those they themselves kindled in their rage against the Christians braving them with contempt.” A couple beats later, Tertullian begins to sound less like an anti-establishment revolutionary and more like an incel posting a screed on 4chan, as he pictures the fiery torment of “the tragic actors... more vocal in their own catastrophe,” “the comic actors... more lither of limb in the fire,” and “the athletes... not in their gymnasiums, but thrown about by fire.”

Tertullian clearly got some kind of creepy, maybe-erotic kick out of imagining various Chads being burned alive: but other, soberer theologians also concurred that those in heaven would witness the spectacle of hell, and that it, like all God’s works, would be a cause of rejoicing. Many hundreds of years after Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas wrote: “That the saints may enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, and give more abundant thanks for it to God, a perfect sight of the punishment of the damned is granted them.” Aquinas hastened to clarify that it



wasn't the torments *themselves* that caused the enjoyment, but the knowledge of God's perfect justice, of which the torments were merely an insignificant side-effect. (Thomas Aquinas would definitely have been one of those guys in high school who claimed to like the *Saw* series "for the plot.")

There are fire-and-brimstone varieties of evangelical Christianity that still preach basically along these lines. But I was raised Catholic, and in modern Catholicism, we go in for option

#2: *Don't bring up hell that much and when you do maybe don't talk about the fire stuff okay.* Hell is literally real in Catholic theology: that is to say, hell is not a "metaphor," but an actual place, with actual flames, and any conscientious theologian will be forced to admit this when pressed. But when I went to church as a child, most priests—if they mentioned hell at all, which was rare—would talk about hell primarily as the condition of being cut off from the love of God. This, the priests hastened to assure us, was the *worst* agony of all, worse than any merely physical torture. I think this is a pretty clever maneuver! The fire-and-bodily-agony thing just makes God sound like a garden-variety serial killer, so pivoting to the psychological dimensions of eternal torment is a way to take the murderous edge off God's sadism, while simultaneously assuring everyone that hell is still *definitely very bad*. It reminds me of the way one of my family members used to justify being against the death penalty on the grounds that a) killing is wrong, but also b) keeping people locked up forever is actually much crueler than just killing them, and people who have committed terrible crimes deserve to suffer.

THERE'S SIMPLY NO GETTING AWAY FROM that odd tension between doing the right thing because it brings you closer to a loving God versus doing the right thing because the same loving God will light you on fire if you don't—but it's really hard to argue that being lit on fire isn't *more* terrifying. I had a three-year stint at a Catholic school where we all publicly prayed the Act of Contrition at the end of every day, and I've always loved it as a model apology. It's written in the voice of an overly honest man frantically trying to cover his bases in real time:

"Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins *because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell*, but MOST OF ALL (!!!) because they offend YOU, oh God, Who art* all good and deserving of all my love."

**I'm pretty sure the version of our prayer replaced all the "thee"s with "you"s but still kept the old-timey "art" in place of "are." Or was 11 year old me the only one saying "art" like a fucking asshole?*

That hastily-disclaimed "because I dread the pains of hell" really says it all. No living human with a flesh-and-blood body *truly* believes that forfeiture of the love of God could possibly be *worse* than the physical torments of hell. Given the choice between being gored with hot pokers over and over and over, and being afflicted with a particularly fierce case of FOMO, who would choose the pokers? No one, and anyone who says otherwise is a *liar*.

Given the visceral grittiness of the torments of hell, the language of hellfire—in times and places where people actually believe in hell, or at least have to publicly pretend that they do—is a powerful rhetorical register. Unlike revolutionary language, it isn't an outright threat to slaughter your enemies, but neither is it a bloodless civil censure. It is, in effect, telling your political opponents: "What you have done is so evil that when the omniscient, omnipotent author of the universe finally holds you to account, he will probably light you on fire, rip your entrails out of your body, and feed them back to you in an endless cycle for the rest of time." It's a way to express moral outrage so furious, so implacable, that not even an eternity of torture could expiate it. Forget "cancel culture": If you really intend to anathematize a member of your community, tell everyone why that person deserves to go to hell. Or, if you think your entire community is destined for the flames, then hellfire language is a way of expressing smoldering, vengeful despair, of declaring that we all deserve to be obliterated for what we have condoned, that the sins committed are so bad that no one who has been touched by them should escape punishment. Take, as an illustrative example, this speech by the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, in which he invites the wrath of God on a nation that has enriched itself on the agony of slaves:

Yet I know that God reigns, and that the slave system contains within itself the elements of destruction. But how long it is to curse the earth, and desecrate his image, He alone foresees. It is frightful to think of the capacity of a nation like this to commit sin, before the measure of its iniquities be filled, and the exterminating judgment of God overtake it. For what is left us but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation? Or is God but a phantom, and the Eternal Law but a figment of the imagination? Has an everlasting divorce been effected between cause and effect, and is it an absurd doctrine that, as a nation sows, so shall it also reap? "Wherefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men that rule this people: Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we are at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place: And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through it, then ye shall be trodden down by it."

It's very hard to imagine Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez getting up in front of the nation and declaring that our country, left unreformed, merits "the exterminating judgment of God." William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionists of his ilk have been vaguely reimaged in American history as milquetoast Anti-Slavery Good Guys, but in their time, they were viewed as dangerous radicals and seditionists. Today, a person who speechified in this manner about an analogous issue, like the prison-industrial complex, or the labor abuses of multinational companies, or the immigrant po-

lice state, would probably be accused of inciting domestic terrorism.

I myself don't quite know how to feel about hell. I was raised in a religious tradition where you never can be sure who is going to hell and who isn't. The weight of particular sins depends on the inherent nature of the action itself, but also on the knowledge and intent with which you committed the sin. In theory, any number of sins that seem trivial when viewed from the outside could, in the fullness of their secret psychological context, turn out to be hellfire-worthy. And, by the same token, someone who does ostensibly terrible things all the time may perhaps not really understand, in their heart of hearts, that what they do is sinful; or they might sincerely repent of their sins at a critical moment, and in the end, they might escape hell altogether and join the ranks of the blessed. In my charitable moods, I hope that everyone's private moral ledgers balance out somehow, that people who seem evil are really not so evil, and that my own moments of goodness will ultimately prove heavier and more numerous than my evil actions. Intellectually, I think we are supposed to try to love everyone, along the lines Jesus outlines in the gospels: that we should turn the other cheek, and not cast stones at our fellow sinners.

BUT THEN AGAIN, JESUS IS A contradictory model in this respect, because when he's not exhorting people to love their neighbors, he's roaming around the countryside irritably smiting fig-trees and flipping over money-changing tables. And these days, my own internal compass is all in a muddle. I've now spent one year working in an immigration internment camp—serving as one very small, increasingly mutilated wrench in the gears of the United States' deportation machine—and those charitable moods are harder and harder for me to muster. I spend a lot of time thinking about the peculiar evil of judges, bureaucrats, lawyers, and political operatives. Sure, my clients from Central

America suffer at the hands of gang members and domestic abusers, and very possibly these perpetrators are evil too—but with them, I don't feel qualified to perform any precise moral calculus. There is some unknowable quantity of suffering, fear, and material deprivation that plays into the decisions those kinds of people make, and I don't know how to factor this against the magnitude of their apparent sins. Their lives feel too distant from my own for comparison.

But the sort of person who becomes an ICE attorney, or an immigration judge, or an advisor to a president is someone much closer to me. They are people I would have encountered in college or in law school. They, like me, live lives of relative comfort and certainty. The stakes of the decisions they make are, for themselves, largely professional, social, and reputational,

not life-or-death. People like Kris Kobach, Jeff Sessions, William Barr, Ken Cuccinelli, and Stephen Miller grew up with every conceivable advantage and still choose to devote their lives to grinding the faces of the poor into the dirt.

I read an article recently about Agnelis Reese, an immigration judge in Louisiana, who has denied 100 percent of the asylum-seekers who have appeared before her, making her the harshest immigration judge in a country with some pretty stiff competition. The article's author, Gabriel Thompson, highlights one hearing transcript where the judge lectures a man facing deportation to Eritrea about his faith:

"Reese asked if he had ever told anyone about [his sexual abuse while imprisoned in Eritrea] before revealing it to the doctor at Pine Prairie. 'I did not,' he said. 'This is very shameful for me to tell.'"

Later, S. said that, despite daily beatings, he refused to convert to Orthodox Christianity. 'And every time you said no?' asked Reese.

"Yes, based on Matthew 10:22," he replied.

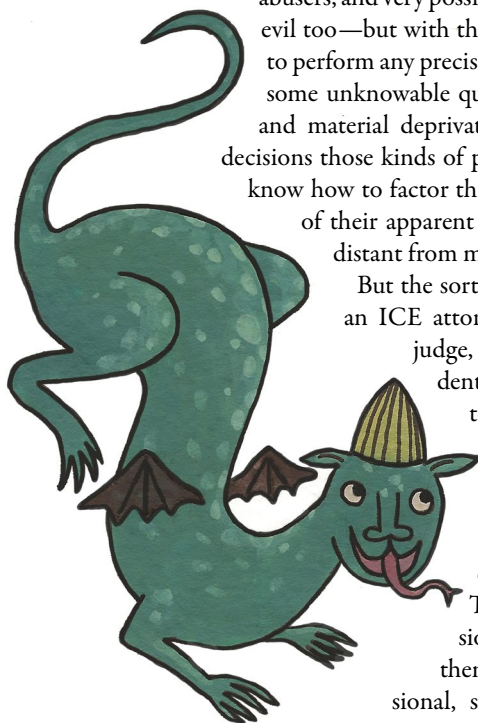
"I didn't—sir, I'm not asking you to quote scripture," said Reese.

"Jesus is asking me to talk for him."

Reese snapped. 'And when you lied to the asylum officers or failed to disclose your sexual abuse, what do you think Jesus thought about that?' The judge followed that up with a lengthy diatribe, chastising S. for not revealing the abuse earlier.

Knowing that courtroom scenes like this are happening all across the country, it's difficult to avoid feeling at least a tad Tertullian. How do we *talk* about these things? What language of moral disapprobation could possibly be vivid enough? How do we allow people like this judge to live respectable lives in human society—to eat in restaurants, go to the movies, attend PTA meetings—when the things they do in the ordinary, plodding course of their workdays are so repugnant and inexcusable that they should be permanently cut off from all love and communion with their fellows?

We might, like William Lloyd Garrison, take a leaf out of the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Woe to unjust judges and to those who issue unfair laws, so that there is no justice for the poor, the widows, and orphans. ... Oh what will you do when I visit you in that day when I send desolation upon you from a distant land? To whom will you turn then for your help? Where will your treasures be safe? I will not help you; you will stumble along as prisoners or lie among the slain. And even then my anger will not be satisfied, but my fist will still be poised to strike you." When you feel powerless, there is at least some satisfaction in telling the powerful exactly what they deserve. You hope that maybe—if you express your hatred of evil, and the complacency that enables it, with enough conviction and passion—others will be stirred out of their slumbers and roused to righteous anger too. What else can we do, if we hope to avoid the exterminating judgment of God? 🔥





HUEY LONG

and the Power of Populism

BY JAY SWANSON

"HOW MANY MEN EVER WENT TO A BARBECUE and would let one man take off the table what's intended for nine-tenths of the people to eat?" roared Huey Long. "[H]ow are you going to feed the balance of the people?" The crowd was silent. The speech was given at the height of the Great Depression; many in the audience had experienced hunger and malnutrition. For them, the idea of dividing up too little food among too many mouths was painfully real.

Without waiting for a response, the senator from Louisiana answered his own question, swinging his arms and throwing his weight around with a fervor that was almost cartoonish. "The only way you will be able to feed the balance of the people is to make that man come back and bring back some of 'at grub he ain't got no bidness wit.'" The crowd burst into laughter as Long's senatorial cadence descended into Louisiana backwater dialect.

America, Long explained, was the barbeque. God had set the table, but Rockefeller, Mellon, and the rest of the robber barons had carried off nine-tenths of the food, leaving the scraps for everyone else. It was about time, he said, to call them back to the table with their heaping plates and make them share it out. He concluded the speech with a promise that, under his program, "none shall be too big, none shall be too poor; none shall work too much, none shall be idle. No luxurious mansions empty, none walking the streets, none impoverished, none in pestilence, none in want."

Long gave many versions of this speech over his life. This one, from 1935, was utterly characteristic of his politics: folksy metaphors, sim-

ple solutions, a focus on helping the poor, and a profound anger at the rich. For these reasons, we know him today as a "populist": someone whose political style is, according to political scientist Cas Mudde in his seminal paper "The Popular Zeitgeist," a "highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the 'gut feelings' of the people." Like all populists, Long claimed to know "the heart of the People," and promised to stick up for "the poor man," or "the little man." Like all populists, Long identified the enemies of "the People" as the elites: the rich and well-connected. And, like all populists, Long was willing to break rules and shatter norms to get his way.

This "populist" label puts Long in some very bad company. After all, the execrable President Trump is often justifiably described as a "populist." There are some definite similarities. Trump claims to speak for the popular anger directed against cultural elites, while Long claimed to speak for popular anger directed against economic elites. Trump wants to Make America Great Again, while Long wanted to make Every Man a King. Both men relied on clownish antics to shock the establishment and amuse their base. And neither man had much respect for the concept of legality.

But there are important differences too. Trump's populist appeals have a heavy racial component, while Long's did not. Trump's populist rhetoric is a smoke screen designed to hide his policies' upward redistribution of wealth, but Long was the exact opposite—relying on populist appeals, he was able to distribute wealth to his state's neediest citizens, overcoming vicious opposition. His life and successes demonstrate that populism can serve as a powerful vehicle

for accomplishing left-wing goals, though his failures demonstrate that populist appeals must be supplemented by other political strategies. Long accomplished too much to be ignored by historically minded leftists: his legacy must be reckoned with.

HUEY LONG SINGLE-HANDEDLY UPENDED Louisiana's status quo on the basis of one simple idea: poor people were being cheated by the rich. This was his idea at 16 years old, when he helped defeat a scheme to use local taxes to subsidize a private railroad corporation. This was his idea at 25, when he got elected to the Public Service Commission and immediately took on Standard Oil, calling its executives "criminals." And this was his idea at 35 when he was elected Governor of Louisiana. This single, simple idea defined the seven years he controlled the state's politics until his murder at the age of 42.

As unsophisticated as this idea was, Long wasn't wrong. The Louisiana of his time was plagued by desperate poverty. Thousands suffered with no electricity, no indoor plumbing, and no access to healthcare. Thousands more could not read or had no education past the fourth grade. What little income these people had was profoundly precarious, as it was often dependent on the next harvest, and there was no easily accessible scheme of crop insurance to protect small farmers from disaster. Many sank deeper and deeper into debt as harvests failed and rivers flooded.

The reason that poor Louisianans had almost no public services is that the state's elite simply refused to provide them. The state's political and economic landscape was, in rural areas, dominated by land-owning planters who, for over a century, had used judicious intermarriage to maintain control over the bulk of the state's cotton and sugar production. These families deliberately tried to recreate an aristocratic, antebellum atmosphere, sporting frock coats, wide brimmed hats, and even ridiculous facial hair like their ancestors. Also, like their ancestors, they practiced brutal racial discrimination and ruthlessly exploited their tenant farmers of all races. This rural elite was known as the "Southern Bourbons," after the opulent and decadent French aristocrats who were overthrown in the French Revolution.

The Southern Bourbons controlled rural politics through the local sheriff, a uniquely powerful figure. On paper, he was the chief law enforcement officer of a given parish. In practice, he was a great deal more. Accountable only to his voters, in an era without meaningful federal oversight of elections and with a force of armed deputies at his back, the sheriff had almost unlimited coercive power over his domain. He used this power to organize the local "courthouse ring"—a clique of lawyers, business owners, and elected officials who chose which candidates to run and reliably turned out votes. The tactics used by the rings were not limited to advertising and door-knocking, but included patronage, bribery, and violence: in one congressional race, anti-Long forces rode the streets carrying rifles to dissuade supporters of Long's candidate.

In New Orleans, the largest city in the South, wealthy corporate interests ruled. The city was home to powerful financial institutions, utility monopolies, and shipping companies. Chief among the urban corporate interests was the Standard Oil Company of Louisiana, which was owned by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, the largest fraction of John D. Rockefeller's empire to sur-

vive the turn of the century's trust-busting. In Long's time it was the largest oil producer in the world, with enormous global resources at its disposal. It could afford to shell out over a quarter million dollars on a single vote from a single legislator, and used its power to avoid serious taxation or regulation.

These corporate interests controlled politics through the "Old Regulars," New Orleans' version of a Tammany Hall-style political machine. Many political machines of the era, despite all their corruption, were able to deliver to their poor constituents some material benefits; not so for the Old Regulars. It was one of the most business-friendly machines in the country, consistently ordering its representatives in the state capitol to vote against all regulation of manufacturing—including the abolition of child labor—and allowing utility monopolies to milk the city's residents by charging them inflated prices. It maintained its control of the city's politics through its police force, headed by such sinister figures as Guy "Machine Gun" Moloney—who, when he wasn't rigging elections as New Orleans Chief of Police, worked as a mercenary in Central America.

By the time Long arrived on the scene, this union of landed aristocracy and urban capital had, unchallenged, kept the state's population mired in poverty and ignorance for nearly 100 years. Long was determined to change all that.

LOUISIANA WAS READY FOR LONG'S BRAND OF populism. The people knew they were being cheated, but for decades there was no one with any political power who would speak for them. Sure, politicians on the campaign trail might make gestures at holding the powerful to account, but these promises evaporated once they took office. These politicians, even those who claimed to be on the side of the people, tended to treat the state's elite as an interest group to be accommodated and negotiated with. Long was unique in that he had both the political skills to articulate a populist message and the courage to actually follow through: for him the rich were not stakeholders to be conciliated, but enemies to be defeated.

Long's willingness to take on his "enemies" was central to his political appeal, and he knew it. T. Harry Williams, in *Huey Long: A Biography*, the definitive work on Long's life, relates that Long carefully selected his political enemies for maximum drama and, on occasion, stage-managed events to ensure that all the characters played their proper roles. After he broke the power of the Old Regulars, he allowed their leader T. Semmes Walmsley to stay on as mayor of New Orleans. "You always leave a figurehead for your boys to fight against," Long said. "If you don't they start fighting against themselves. Walmsley is a perfect target for us to fight. He's impotent and can't do us any harm."

This pugilistic style wasn't limited to the campaign trail—it was how he governed, too. One of the first big fights of his governorship was his effort to lower utility prices in New Orleans. Past governors had promised to fix this problem but had wilted as soon as they ran into opposition from the Old Regulars. Long took a different approach. He summoned the utility monopoly executives to a meeting, where he told them to lower their prices or he would have the state take over their company and do it for them. "A deck has 52 cards," he explained. "And in Baton Rouge I hold all 52 of them and

can shuffle and deal as I please.” The executives caved.

Like many populists, Long ignored the traditional rules of civility and decorum in politics. For instance, in his battles with Walmsley, the leader of the Old Regulars, he almost never used Walmsley’s real name—inspired by his bald pate and long neck, he preferred to call him “Turkey Head.” He also ordered the *American Progress*, his own personal newspaper, to caricature Walmsley as a turkey buzzard. The name stuck.

Long’s antics were not all insulting. He knew when to be funny too. Whenever he arrived in New Orleans, he made sure that he was greeted by a jazz band, which he would then personally lead, parade-style, to his hotel. He was famous for giving press conferences while sitting up in bed, wearing brightly-colored silk pajamas. He even caused an international incident, by receiving the captain of a German warship that had docked in New Orleans the same way—in bed, wearing pajamas—and had to issue a rare apology to the German government.

In spite of these antics—or, more likely, because of them—Long was unbeatable politically. He went from electoral triumph to electoral triumph, from public service commissioner to governor to senator. His margin in the 1928 gubernatorial race was the largest ever in state history at the time, only to be bested by the margin

LONG’S LOUISIANA PROGRAM WAS SIMPLE AND flowed directly from his populist principles: tax the wealthy, spend on the poor. In this, he was unbelievably successful. His popularity, the power that it earned him, and his ability to use that power shrewdly and ruthlessly won him a long list of accomplishments that would be impossible to comprehensively summarize here. (The Long Legacy Project has engaged in a more complete accounting at www.hueylong.com.)

Infrastructure was always the centerpiece of Long’s Louisiana program. When Long was first elected, Louisiana had just 300 miles of paved roads. The rest were a series of winding, dirt paths that flooded in the rainy season. Even worse for a state crisscrossed by waterways, Louisiana only had three modern bridges; for other water crossings, travelers were forced to rely on a patchwork of ferries, fords, and toll bridges. The reason Louisiana’s roads and bridges had been allowed to reach such a state of decay was that the state’s elites were simply not willing to pay the taxes necessary to extend a modern transportation system to the poor, rural parts of the state. In 1921, state elites had written into the Louisiana constitution that the state could not issue any bonds or go into

“Long’s Louisiana program was simple and flowed directly from his populist principle: tax the wealthy, spend on the poor.”

of his handpicked successor four years later. He could also swing elections even when he wasn’t on the ballot: his recruitment, endorsement, and frenetic, non-stop campaigning on behalf of “Longite” candidates enabled him to pack the legislature and the judiciary with supporters of his populist program. This electoral success earned him political capital, which he spent wisely, if not exactly ethically. Once in control of Louisiana’s executive branch, he doled out patronage jobs to reward supporters and win over anyone who might be wavering. He made sure that all the heretofore “independent” elements of state government—the school board, the Highway Commission, the Board of Health—answered to him personally. Louisiana’s police force was even tasked with handing out Longite propaganda.

All in all, Long dominated state politics for a period of seven years. From 1928 to 1932 he ran Louisiana politics directly as governor. From 1932 to 1935, when he was in the U.S. senate, Long ran the state through his cat’s paw, governor O.K. Allen, who would literally vacate the governor’s office whenever Long was in Baton Rouge so he could resume his rightful place behind the executive desk.

During that time, Long acted with ferocious energy, enacting a program of astonishing breadth. To do this, he had to beat back an impeachment attempt, countless electoral challenges, and even a politically motivated IRS investigation ordered by FDR’s administration. But each of these attempts to contain Long failed, and, in the end, his program could only be stopped by an assassin’s bullet.

any debt to pay for the construction of highways and bridges. This constitutional barrier—the strongest protection available under state law—meant that Long would need a two-thirds majority in the legislature to fulfill most of his campaign promises.

But Long wasn’t about to let the state constitution stand in his way. He simply got the votes to amend it. Thanks to his personal popularity, a number of legislators were already committed to his direction; the rest he won over with some combination of bribes, bluster, and bullying. The resulting program was truly massive, employing 10 percent of the entire nation’s road builders, and giving work to 22,200 men at the height of the Great Depression. Long more than doubled the size of the state’s highway system, creating 16,000 miles of new roads and 111 new bridges, not to mention all his other infrastructure projects. These public works employed thousands of people and shielded Louisiana from the worst of the Great Depression.

Education was the second most important plank in Long’s platform. When Long was elected governor, Louisiana was second to last in the nation in terms of literacy. 40 percent of its rural population had not completed the fourth grade. And what little education was offered was simply another chance for the wealthy to fleece the poor: state law required that parents purchase school books for their children, and the only supplier was F.F. Hansell Book Company, a privately-held but state-sanctioned monopoly that charged inflated prices.



Long's main educational promise on the campaign trail was "free school books." He fulfilled this promise early in his term, leveling a relatively small tax on oil extraction to pay for it. But Louisiana's ruling class couldn't let even this hugely popular and relatively cheap program pass without resistance. Because the program paid for free schoolbooks for children attending private schools, which many of Louisiana's large Catholic population relied on, the state's elite argued the program was unconstitutional. And of course, Louisiana's bankers—out of concern for the constitution and the rule of law, naturally—could not extend the state any loans that would pay for an unconstitutional program.

The bankers confronted governor Long in a meeting in New Orleans. All the state's major financial institutions were represented. Taking courage from one another, they drew a hard line: the program was illegal, the tax was illegal, and therefore the loans were illegal. They would not be extending the state the funds it needed to buy the schoolbooks. Long was unfazed. He paused in thought. Well, he eventually responded, if making any new loans to the state was unconstitutional, it stands to reason that paying back old loans would also be unconstitutional. The bankers might as well forget about getting back any of the over \$1 million they had already lent Louisiana. With this, Long got up, left the meeting, went to a restaurant across the street, and ordered a sandwich.

As he was waiting, one of the bankers from the meeting sheepishly approached him. "Governor," he said, "let's stop all this talk where it is. We voted to make you the loan." As he said this, the waiter brought over the sandwich. In an exultant mood, the governor sent it back. "Fry me a steak!" he commanded.

Free schoolbooks were the simplest and most politically winning aspect of Long's education program, but he wasn't content to stop there. He made common cause with T.H. Harris, the superintendent of public instruction, a sober, policy-minded education reformer who was initially wary of Long's antics and big promises, but was soon won over by the governor's obvious and apparently sincere interest in bringing education to the poorest parts of the state. Together, they doubled state support for education, with the bulk of the new money going to an equalization fund that fed the coffers of schools in Louisiana's poorest parishes. They raised teacher salaries, as well as educational requirements for teachers, and they lengthened the school year. Harris and Long also targeted adult education, setting up night schools for illiterate white and black adults, taught by white and black teachers, albeit in segregated classrooms. In a very short time the illiteracy rate fell significantly—from 10 percent to 7 percent for whites, and from 38 percent to 23 percent for African Americans. Now that regular folks could read, Long reasoned, "our plantation owners can't figure the poor devils out of everything

at the close of each year.” Plus, “[t]hey can find the name Huey P. Long on the ballot.”

Long was concerned with higher education as well. Ever since he was 21 years old, Long had been preoccupied with giving “poor boys and girls” a chance at obtaining a college degree, as evidenced by his youthful letters to the editors of various Louisiana newspapers. Years later, when he came into office, public higher education was still anemic: Louisiana State University was tiny, and considered “third rate” by the Association of State Universities. Long increased the school’s annual operating budget from \$800,000 to \$2.6 million, enabling student enrollment to increase to 6,000, and he engaged in a massive program of academic construction that was frankly over the top: the new music building probably did not need all 80 of the grand pianos that he insisted it contain.

LSU became “his” university, to a degree that was somewhat unusual for a politician. Governor Long took it upon himself to personally supervise the marching band’s practices, taking over the conductor role when he felt that the real conductor needed some pointers. (He also had a habit of telling the football coach which plays to use during games. But eventually he was convinced that if he wanted LSU to win, which he desperately did, he should confine his involvement to giving rousing locker room speeches.)

Long also founded a medical school at LSU, opening up a career in medicine to “any poor boy” by offering a medical degree at very low cost. This medical school was a perfect example of Long’s almost supernatural effectiveness as a politician: in late 1930, he got it into his head that there should be a public medical school in the state. In less than two hours he convinced the LSU board, and less than a year later, the school was open and teaching students. This type of speed from government is almost unheard of today, and is a testament to Long’s power, energy, and force of personality.

The creation of the medical school was just part of Long’s healthcare program. The centerpiece was Charity Hospital, an institution in New Orleans for indigent patients which was maintained by the state. While the hospital was created before Long became governor, Huey dramatically improved its services. He more than doubled the number of patients it could take, from 1,600 to 3,800. Additionally, he modernized its practices, reducing the death rate by 30 percent. In total, he tripled public funding for healthcare and increased the number of free clinics in rural areas by 200 percent. He also reformed the state’s mental health facilities, ending the practice of straitjacketing inmates, and providing dental care for the first time.

Long funded this new spending primarily by taxing the wealthy. The Long program included a bewildering new array of taxes: on tobacco, on malt, and on “carbon black,” a natural gas byproduct. But by and large, according to Williams, Long’s levies fell on “corporations or the well-to-do classes.” He also cut taxes on the poor. Before Long, the state’s main source of revenue had been a property tax that fell hardest on the already indebted poor, hitting their homes, livestock, and even their furniture. Long introduced the “homestead” exemption that eliminated taxes on every household’s first \$2,000 of property. At the time, this meant that 80 percent of homeowners paid no property taxes at all.

JUST AS LONG’S SUCCESSES DEMONSTRATE WHAT can be accomplished by embracing left-wing populism, his failures demonstrate where left-wing populism can go wrong, or where it must be supplemented by other strategies.

The most glaring of Long’s faults is on the issue of race. The best that can be said about Long and race is that he was not as racist as he could have been. The typical Southern demagogue of the post-Civil War era married populist economics and vicious white supremacy, but that was not Long’s style, a fact which the black press at the time made note of. Rather, he tended to downplay racial issues. Many of his programs which were aimed at helping poor whites also helped poor African Americans, and he was fine with that—he even bragged about it to the right audiences. But he never took any steps to improve the racial status quo: he remained a segregationist, he never tried to improve black access to the ballot box, and as a senator he opposed an anti-lynching law.

It is possible that, had he not been assassinated, his racial legacy might have been quite different. It seems as if, as governor, he made the calculation that addressing racial inequalities would lose him more votes than it would gain him. That calculation started to shift once he became a senator with his eye on the presidency. He made common cause with Northern black anti-poverty campaigners (some of whom testified to his apparent lack of personal bigotry) and he encouraged African Americans to organize politically as part of his federal program, the Share Our Wealth movement. Despite his relative timidity on the subject, even these small steps toward racial openness were enough to earn him the enmity of the Ku Klux Klan. At a “klonvocation,” the group formally denounced Long, and Hiram Evans, the Klan’s “Imperial Wizard,” promised to go to Louisiana to campaign against him. Senator Long gave the press a formal statement on the matter: “Quote me as saying that imperial bastard will never set foot in Louisiana [and if he does he will leave] with his toes turned up.” The “imperial bastard,” cowed by this apparent threat of violence from a sitting U.S. senator, never made it to Louisiana while Long was alive.

But at the end of the day, Long’s political style was not one that could tackle racial issues effectively. The key to Long’s success was honing in on a strongly-held but unexpressed sentiment: the poor are being cheated by the rich. Once he ignited this latent feeling, he established a powerful connection with the voters, and could use this power on their behalf. But on racial matters, concern for injustice just did not exist among Louisiana’s segregated white voting population.

Another flaw in Long’s political program was its lack of sophistication. While he was governor he was able to translate his simple philosophy directly into action, which masked this weakness somewhat—all he had to do was build and spend. There was nothing in Long’s plans as complicated as a social insurance scheme, land reform, or a social safety net, ideas that were starting to percolate in New Deal circles.

Once Long became a senator, the limitations of his political thought became even clearer. The program he advanced on the national stage, memorably called Share Our Wealth, mostly consisted of a vague and ever-shifting bundle of new taxes, the proceeds of which would be redistributed either by old age pensions, basic

income payments, or even a barter system, depending on what Long felt like on the day he was describing it. Given the lack of detail or a coherent plan, it can hardly come as a surprise that *Share Our Wealth* fell apart after Long's assassination. Long's unsophisticated political instincts may have been sufficient guide for his term as governor, but they were inadequate to the task of laying the foundation for the social welfare state we have today.

The final problem with Long's career is its very success: he obtained a titanic degree of personal power, so much that he was able to ignore the legal and constitutional devices designed to check executive authority. His sway in the legislature was such that he could defeat any impeachment attempt. His iron control over the state's police and National Guard shielded him from law enforcement. There is no question that all this power went to his head and that he flirted with authoritarianism. It is likely, for instance, that he ordered state police to coerce into silence Sam Irby, his former associate and a potential whistleblower on corruption within the Long organization. As governor he also dominated the legislative process, roaming the aisles, shouting instructions to the elected representatives, and even assuming the role of *de facto* chairman of various legislative committees, all in violation of the state constitution.

All this power enabled him to tolerate a great deal of corruption. People around him used their power to steal from the state, and Long covered for them. In one instance, it came to Long's attention that one of his lieutenants had pilfered so much from a state agency that the agency was going to be noticeably short of funds. Long made sure that his personal campaign funds were transferred to the agency to cover the shortfall and hide the malfeasance.

Surprisingly, it is less clear that Long was personally corrupt. Of course, he wasn't above transactional politics—the only way he got the votes to abolish the poll tax was by promising to pardon a state senator's brother, for example—but there has never been proof that Long used his power to put money in his own pocket illegally. FDR's administration even ordered an IRS investigation into Long after his uncompromising left-wing stance as a senator had made him a political threat to the president's re-election. 50 federal agents, working for months, were unable to build a case that Long ever used his power to feather his own nest.

Long's failures offer lessons for those who would adopt populism to advance left-wing goals today. The first is that, as an inherently majoritarian rhetorical style, populism is ill-suited to combating prejudice. Populists divide society into two groups, "the people" and "the elites." This does not leave a lot of room to talk about prejudice, which exists at all levels of society and cannot entirely be blamed on elites. What is more, the importance of the rhetorical conception of "the People" to populist discourse opens the door to an oppressive concept of who counts as part of "the People" and who doesn't.

This failing must be corrected by would-be left-wing populists today. Addressing subjective and structural prejudice is a cornerstone goal of the left, one which absolutely cannot be sacrificed. Populism, therefore, must be supplemented with a prolonged and sustained effort to change popular attitudes and enact policies directed specifically at alleviating the social inequalities occasioned by prejudice.

The second lesson is that populism alone is insufficient. Long's lengthy and consistent history of sticking up for the "little guy" suggest that his personal sympathies really were with Louisiana's poor, and his idiosyncratic and scattershot measures aimed at bettering their lot, reflected that. But to be truly effective in a way that outlives any particular charismatic leader, populism must be married to some broader theory of politics and policy. Populist rhetorical appeals can build mass support for redistributive policies. But the content of those policies has to come from somewhere else, and has to be the product of deep and serious thought.

The third lesson is that checks on power exist for a reason. Constitutional checks on power are creatures of elite discourse, the province of lawyers and political philosophers. Populists who, like Long, claim a "commission from the People," can therefore easily dismiss the norms and laws designed to constrain them as a nefarious conspiracy by the elites to frustrate the will of the majority. And sometimes they will be right—but not all the time. People with the best intentions can become corrupted by power, or lose perspective in their zeal. Left-wing populists must, despite the power they obtain, maintain proper respect for the constitutional mechanisms we rely on to prevent a slide into authoritarianism.

THE FINAL THING LEFT-WING POPULISTS NEED to worry about is violent reaction. Louisiana's ruling class, unable to beat Long at the ballot box, eventually had him killed. We will probably never know whether Carl Weiss, the man who actually pulled the trigger, acted alone or in conspiracy with others—there's credible evidence both ways. But what is clear is that, towards the end of his life, a consensus had formed in elite circles that Long had to be murdered. Anti-Longite figures, drawing on the state's tradition of extra-judicial lynching, were not shy about calling for Long's death in public and on the record. They would speak darkly of "ancient methods." Mayor "Turkey Head" Walmsley promised Long, "you shall pay the penalty as other carpetbaggers have done before you" (a reference to the Colfax Massacre, in which 150 black men were murdered by a self-styled white "militia"). A group of wealthy New Orleans gentlemen even started an armed group called the "Minute Men", who planned to march on the capitol to assassinate Long. On September 8, 1935, as these murderous mutterings were reaching fever pitch, Long was ambushed and gunned down by Weiss in the hallway of Baton Rouge's state capitol. (The capitol building where Long died was brand new, built on his own orders, and to this day remains the tallest and grandest capitol in the United States. Long is buried in the center of its elaborate public gardens, his grave marked by a statue that watches over the building, either protectively or menacingly, depending on your point of view.)

What can we learn from the case of Huey Long? He shows us that populism is an imperfect weapon. Those that would embrace it must be aware of its drawbacks, and work to contain them. But there are times that cry out for left-wing populism: times of yawning economic inequality enforced by an entrenched elite, unwilling to make even the slightest concessions. In these times, when more sedate forms of discourse have been choked off, left-wing populism can electrify the people, rally them against their enemies, and produce political change that borders on the miraculous. ✦

DIRTY SECRETS OF THE

PR industry

*"a Current Affairs,"
special expose*

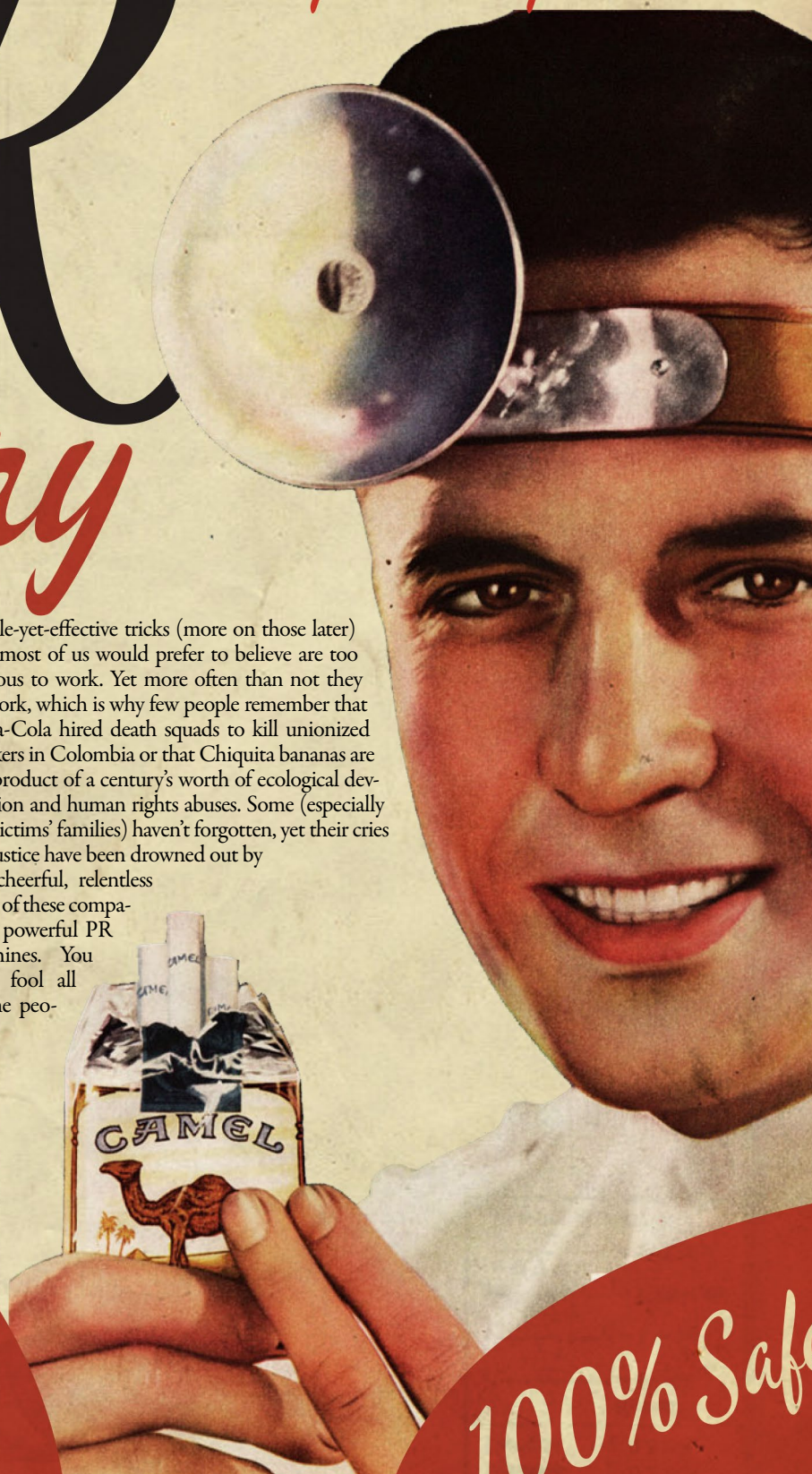
THE BIRTH OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS industry was one of the most quietly calamitous events in American history. While much derided and downplayed—try finding a movie or TV show where PR professionals *aren't* repugnant slimeballs—the industry has been a massively influential presence in our lives since the turn of the 20th century, shaping our thoughts and feelings in ways that have caused immense damage to our environment, our fellow humans, and ourselves. The world would be better off if it simply didn't exist. But like many unscrupulous activities, PR is both extremely profitable and useful to the interests of the wealthy, and for that reason it has grown and prospered.

The metastasis of the PR industry came thanks to a number of

simple-yet-effective tricks (more on those later) that most of us would prefer to believe are too obvious to work. Yet more often than not they *do* work, which is why few people remember that Coca-Cola hired death squads to kill unionized workers in Colombia or that Chiquita bananas are the product of a century's worth of ecological devastation and human rights abuses. Some (especially the victims' families) haven't forgotten, yet their cries for justice have been drowned out by the cheerful, relentless hum of these companies' powerful PR machines. You can't fool all of the peo-

by

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ple all of the time—but it turns out you don't have to.

All you need to do is persuade—or bore—a critical mass of people into swallowing your message. Few have ever been adept at this as Edward Bernays, widely regarded as the father of public relations (and modern propaganda). The nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays made his bones by helping to stir up public support for U.S. intervention in World War I, then parlayed that success into a long and lucrative career which included such accomplishments as convincing American women that cigarettes (which he dubbed “Torches of Freedom”) were empowering and good for their health, and convincing the CIA to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Guatemala on behalf of the United Fruit Company (which has since changed its name to Chiquita).

In his influential book *Propaganda* (1928), Bernays made a case for the “conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses.” According to Bernays, while some bad actors might seek to manipulate the public for the wrong reasons, “such organization and focusing are necessary to orderly life.” He laid out a vision of the world that is chillingly familiar today: “We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.” In his view this wasn't necessarily a bad thing, since it was people like him doing most of the governing, molding, forming, and suggesting.

Modern PR specialists are both strongly influenced by Bernays' work and, in some cases, alarmed by its implications. Take Andrew McKenzie, who penned an article for the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) that urged PR pros to be “the conscience of an organization,” and to insist that harmful actions “cannot be reframed or spun,” since this “is bad business, destroys shareholder wealth, and ruins brands.” It's a noble sentiment, but one that is fundamentally at odds with reality. Doing harm is often profitable, and the number of brands (personal or corporate) that have been irrevocably tarnished by their

misdeeds is far smaller than those who have gotten off largely scot-free. Johnson & Johnson might have had to pay \$4.7 billion in damages to women who developed ovarian cancer from using its baby powder, but that's a tiny fraction of the company's revenue (\$81.5 billion in 2018 alone), and people are still buying Listerine, Neutrogena, and Band-Aids.

It's clear that the idea of PR as a force for good is little more than wishful thinking. In the words of British journalist and author Heather Brooke: “Public Relations is at best promotion or manipulation, and at worst, evasion and outright deception. However, what it is never about is a free flow of information.” However, today's PR industry is exceptionally skilled at pretending otherwise.

Whether its practitioners are working within an organization or as part of an outside agency, whether they're representing individuals, businesses, or governments, the methods used are largely similar. None of these tricks are particularly complex at first glance, but that's why they're so effective—the best gifts are often the simplest ones.

We'll now examine the three most important tricks in the PR professional's repertoire. It's worth noting that none of these tricks are *intrinsically* evil. In theory (and sometimes in practice) the same methods can be used to advance the goals of saving coral reefs or ensuring health care for all, just as easily as they can be used to advocate nuking Iran or using killer drones to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border. However, the rules of the PR game are much the same as those of college admissions: Those who start off with a big pile of money and know the right kinds of people have an all-but-insurmountable advantage.

“Media Placements”

THE MOST VALUABLE PR PEOPLE IN THE WORLD ARE THOSE WHO can reliably secure their clients a platform in “A1” media outlets like the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and CNN. For customers who prefer to keep a lower profile, top PR pros can also seed favorable coverage of their preferred policies and positions in those same outlets while being careful to omit any mention of their involvement.

The firms who do this work are the *crème de la crème* of the PR profession, pulling in multi-million dollar retainers from ultra-wealthy clients. Take, for example, APCO Worldwide. One of the largest PR firms in the United States (it also claims to have 35 offices worldwide in cities from Paris to Tel Aviv to Shanghai), its website proudly proclaims: “We work for bold clients.” Many of those clients, like the Saudi Arabian royal family, are bold indeed—at least when it comes to beheading journalists, causing famines that kill millions of people, or torturing and murdering political opponents. APCO was not hired to spread the word about these accomplishments, of course. Instead, they were paid by the government of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to secure positive U.S. media coverage of his anti-corruption efforts against rival princes, government ministers, and minor officials. The campaign, which began in 2017 and concluded in early 2019, led to the detainment of hundreds of people in the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton, many of whom were tortured (with at least one person dying as a result of their injuries).

However, instead of acting as “the conscience” of the Crown Prince, as some PR ethicists might have hoped, APCO helped bin Salman land (among other media coups) a one-on-one interview with Norah O'Donnell on CBS' *60 Minutes*. In the March 2018 interview, O'Donnell touted the Crown Prince's women-friendly reforms, praised him for “[curbing] the powers of the country's so-called ‘religious police,’” and concluded by asking, “Does Saudi Arabia need nuclear weapons to counter Iran?”

Shortly before that interview, APCO was the subject of an unflattering report from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism which exposed their role in the Crown Prince's PR offensive. When asked why the firm's briefings on the anti-corruption campaign just so happened to omit any mention of the rampant human rights abuses committed by bin Salman's administration, an APCO spokesperson told the Bureau, “It is only now [March 2018] that such allegations are coming to light. Therefore, there were no concerns for us to raise with the

“Don't Think
Of Death
Squads!”



client, and no reason for us to question the information we were given.”

This seems... dubious at best. In November 2017, Clay R. Fuller of the American Enterprise Institute (no great foe of the rich and powerful) explained that “anti-corruption” sweeps” like the Crown Prince’s “are a common authoritarian tactic for consolidating power” that “can cost people their freedom, health, money—and sometimes their lives.” If APCO was really that oblivious to what their client was doing (and why he was doing it) they wouldn’t be in business.

And if bin Salman hadn’t committed one of the worst PR blunders of all time just a few months after his *60 Minutes* interview—the kidnapping, mutilation, and murder of the dissident journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018—it’s likely that the carefully-crafted image APCO helped bin Salman sell to the American public on CBS would be what stuck in people’s minds. Mass media is perhaps the most essential tool for mass manipulation, and PR firms like APCO are essential for getting the right message in front of the right people, no matter what that message might be.

“Network Building”

BUT HOW DO PR FIRMS LIKE APCO BUILD THEIR PIPELINES into America’s top media outlets? It seems obvious that some kind of chicanery is at play, though few would be so unimaginative as to think it involves a team of jowly, besuited men marching into the newsroom with a handwritten list of talking points and a big sack of money labeled “BRIBES.”

Indeed, this is not the case—the people making the “request” tend to be extremely attractive and articulate, there’s not usually a paper trail (at least in the more sensitive cases), and the meeting place is most often a tropical paradise, a picturesque ski resort, or at least a feloniously expensive restaurant.

For honest journalists—insert your own snide, world-weary comment here—this can be an uncomfortable situation, as you might imagine. That’s why the PR people who approach them are often former journalists themselves. According to Muck Rack, a service that provides jour-

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WITH A NEW YORK TIMES COLUMN ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND

Current Affairs is pleased to present this guest op-ed by New York Times columnist Milton Wallace.

If you’re anything like me—and, let’s face it, you are—you sense that something’s up with this country. Things you used to be able to say and do with impunity are now being criticized. Your rights, as a 45-year-old white man in America, are under attack. People are reading your column and saying things like, “This opinion piece disregards all of history and power dynamics, not to mention it’s badly written.” Everyone carries a tiny supercomputer in their pockets, and yet no one can Google the fact that, hello, I went to *Harvard*.

On the one hand, conservatives in America advocate putting children in concentration camps. On the other, a twitter account with 234 followers named “Judith Butt-Lord” committed a vicious *ad hominem* upon me for my essay entitled “The Whites-Only Club: Joyous and Not Necessarily Racist.” Judith Butt-Lord, in claiming that my *article* was racist, also slandered *you*, dear reader, (that is to say, me) as a racist. When I countered: “Why don’t you engage in a constructive debate about whose rights and comforts should be protected and whose should be ignored?” Ms. Butt-Lord responded with an altered photograph of my face on a piece of corn. The artistic extremism in this country is deeply disturbing. At this time, I fear the only reasonable position to occupy in this country is exactly in between the two equally depraved poles of right and left.

So why do you—that is to say, I—feel so lonely here?

Millions of Americans have been left behind by our polarized discourse. Where’s the representation for the con-

stituency of op-ed writers who just want to make a down payment on their third summer home without reporting any income tax? The more our politicians refuse to acknowledge this constituency, the more we shall bravely speak out in our weekly op-ed columns. The right to free speech is a heavy burden, but we mustn’t fear to exercise it.

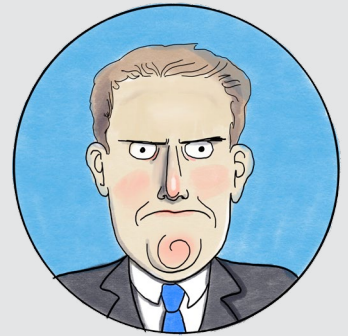
While at this point you are likely thinking, ah, Milton, you have made an utterly ironclad argument, what more proof could be needed!—nonetheless, I will gift you with an anecdote from a friend of mine. This friend, whose name I will not disclose for fear of mob retaliation against him, is a 53-year-old white male with a PhD who writes for a respected conservative publication. It may not be “woke” to say so, but I deeply value our friendship, and the fiery congeniality of our arguments. He and I fall very far apart on the spectrum of intellectual diversity: his publication is funded by dark money, while mine is funded by respectable corporate sponsorship at our biannual Capital One Heroes Gala. Anyway, this man—my friend and ideological opposite—has also had a negative interaction with the self-same *Judith Butt-Lord*! It’s been four years since my own encounter with her—an interaction I’m certain she remembers daily, as I do—and yet Ms. Butt-Lord (obviously a millennial) has not grown up in the interim, but continues to employ the same obscene photo-manipulative tactics and withering scorn against all members of the political spectrum. If Ms. Butt-Lord hadn’t been so sensitive about the dangerous free-thinking represented by myself and my friend, we could have had a robust, spirited debate. It could have been *civil*, *dammit*. Robust debates are the only

way that intellectual improvement, ideological continence, budget-balancing, and civil rights have ever been achieved in America. Everybody knows that.

Reader, you may feel alone out there. You may feel that even with the difficult mental task of painstakingly crafting one op-ed column every two weeks, something unpleasant has found time to grow inside your mind. A nasty voice is telling you that you’re not doing enough to further the cause of civilization; that you don’t know enough, you should be reading more, exploring other schools of thought (even the silly fake majors at safe-space universities, the ones that study the works of men who are not white and canonized, and in some cases not even men!) This same ugly voice says that it may have been wrong to attend Henry Kissinger’s birthday party, and that he liked the drone you bought him a little too much. This voice says—I hesitate to even write this—“you are a mediocrity, you are a morally vacuous grifter writing polysyllabic thinly-veiled white supremacist tracts for boomers to e-mail to their niece with the subject line, ‘See?’ And this is why you’ll never get Judith Butt-Lord’s respect, because she knows you better than you know yourself, and even though her profile picture remains quite tantalizingly attractive she’ll never have sex with you, and although you are happily married to your fourth wife this, for some reason, breaks your heart.”

Maybe, you’ve begun to worry, there’s good reason not to respect your work. Maybe all your honorary degrees and birthday Lexuses and invitations to Davos’ special Mindfulness Over Mass Murder Seminars are, somehow, *unearned*.

No, dear, reader. You have done



nothing wrong. The problem is, in fact, Ms. Butt-Lord and everyone like her. The trouble is that young people these days are *sensitive*, too much so for the stern strength of your intellect. Your ideas are marvelous, and dangerous, and the Ms. Butt-Lords of the world find that frightening, and perhaps a bit titillating. That’s the true reason they’re mocking you and your friends: fear. They’re the ones who are afraid that you might be right all along. That’s why they try to drown you out with pictures of your face on a corn cob and screenshots of that unfortunate column your sadly damaged second wife wrote in *Harper’s*. You’re not afraid of them—no, no. They’re afraid of *you*. And you can tell yourself this, every night, until you’re able to sleep.

Reader, I’m a little bit like you, truth be told. I hope this column makes you feel like your voice has finally been heard. I hear it, and it’s telling me your ideas are smart, strong, dangerous, valuable, moral, and highly potent. Dear reader: you, like me, are capable of withstanding any criticism, no matter how cruel the memes.

Illustration and text by Jason Adam Katzenstein

nalists' contact information and areas of expertise to PR professionals, in 2018 there were almost six PR specialists for every journalist in the United States., up from a ratio of 4.6 to 1 in 2014. While there's no data available on how many of these newly-minted PR pros come from the journalism world, the sheer number of articles with titles like "From Press Badges to Press Releases: Why Journalists Make the Move to PR" suggests the number is larger than you'd think—the writer of the aforementioned article, a PR pro herself, said that, "about 30 percent of our staff are ex-journalists or hold degrees in journalism."

The reason so many journalists make the jump is simple: There are more jobs in PR, and the money is better. In 2017, the average salary for a PR pro was almost \$68,000, compared to \$51,500 for journalists. And since PR is one of the few fields where a journalist's skillset (i.e. "storytelling") is easily transferable, this salary bump doesn't require learning to code or acquiring other boring, tedious qualifications.

What it *does* require is 1) a shitload of emails and coffee dates and 2) attending events like the *Wall Street Journal's* Tech Live, an extravagant event series held each year in Laguna Beach and Hong Kong. Tickets to the invite-only event run upwards of \$5,000 apiece, though that's a small price to pay for "premium networking opportunities." Not only are many of the *WSJ's* top journalists present, but also "executives, investors, and founders from around the world." PR pros with especially good connections can get free tickets, plus speaking opportunities for their clients, either on the main stage or in more intimate settings like "fireside chats"—a euphemism for "a bunch of extremely drunk people sitting in comfy chairs listening to a mildly drunk person in an even comfier chair talk about the transformative power of blockchain for poor farmers in rural India." Some of 2019's most notable speakers include Ajit Pai, the chairman of the FCC; Ben Horowitz, the co-founder of venture capital giant Andreessen Horowitz; and Michael Brown, the director of the Defense Innovation Unit at the U.S. Department of Defense; and also supermodel Naomi Campbell, because fuck it, why not?

Aside from the swag bags (i.e. a potpourri of sometimes-expensive presents provided by the event's corporate partners) and the ego boost for the client, attending events like these provide an opportunity for PR pros to increase their clients' visibility in the eyes of both potential partners and journalists (whose future flattering profiles can be used to attract even more partners, by which we mean "people who can provide the client with money and/or access to power"). In lieu of having a brilliant invention or a world-changing vision for the future, a prestigious Contacts list is perhaps the most valuable asset a brand or government can possess. This allows their ideas and/or products to proliferate with the speed and vigor of a batch of e. coli.

"Optics"

THE AGE OF DEEPPAKES (PHOTOS AND VIDEOS THAT HAVE been doctored so convincingly that they're indistinguishable from real ones) may be fast approaching, but until that day comes, a picture's still worth a thousand words—and video is worth even more, especially when it evokes moral outrage.

In the hands of the right PR firm, this can be an almost unimaginably powerful (and destructive) tool. During World War I, Bernays stirred up public hatred against the Germans by running thousands of short films in cinemas that claimed to expose the Huns' (one-sided) barbarities. Decades later, similar techniques would be used by a PR firm called Hill+Knowlton to drag the United States into the Gulf War.

First, some background. Hill+Knowlton is one of the most blatantly malicious PR firms of the last century. In the 1930s, it helped steel manufacturers suppress worker dissent. In the 1950s, it helped tobacco companies cover up evidence their products caused cancer. In the 1970s, it co-founded the "Asbestos Information Association" to convince the public that asbestos had no health risks. Today, Hill+Knowlton helps the energy consortium America's Natural Gas Alliance in

their quest to pretend that fracking is environmentally friendly. Hill+Knowlton: the poster child for why the PR industry is reviled, and how damaging its work can be.

But the firm's most infamous accomplishment came in 1990, shortly before the United States invaded Iraq for the first time. Known as "the Nariyah testimony," the video can still be viewed in its entirety on YouTube. In it, a tearful 15-year-Kuwaiti girl is shown testifying before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus about the horrific atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein's soldiers during their invasion of her home country. "While I was [working as a volunteer nurse], I saw the Iraqi soldiers come into the hospital with guns," she says in flawless English as she fights back sobs. "They took the babies out of the incubators. They took the incubators and left the children to die on the cold floor. It was horrifying. I could not help but think of my nephew."

Her testimony was circulated by most of the country's major media outlets, and President George H.W. Bush repeatedly referenced it as a justification for "humanitarian intervention" in Kuwait and Iraq. What was left unsaid was that the girl, who testified only under her first name Nariyah, was in fact the daughter of Saud al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States, and the events she described never happened. Nor was it mentioned that Hill+Knowlton—which had close ties to Human Rights Caucus chairmen Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Edward Porter (R-IL)—had helped organize the hearing in the first place.

By the time the truth was revealed, Iraq had already been bombed back to the "pre-industrial age," as described in a United Nations report which estimated the total Iraqi death toll from the war to be between 142,500-206,000 people.

To be fair, the majority of PR photo and video "ops" are much more banal—a picture of a CEO shaking hands with workers, a short clip of a politician riding his tractor, and so on. Yet they serve much the same purpose: to give you, the humble citizen, visual proof that the client's cause is a righteous one, and that they truly have society's best interests at heart.

IN SOME CASES, THIS MIGHT EVEN BE TRUE. AS mentioned before, PR isn't inherently evil, and mobilizing public sentiment isn't always a bad thing. (It's the only way to combat climate change or police brutality, for example).

All of the techniques described above can be used for noble purposes, and with the right amount of money and connections, they can be highly effective. But the realities of a capitalist system dictate that "noble PR" is the exception to the rule, since those who have the requisite money and connections to afford expensive PR usually acquired their wealth by nefarious means.

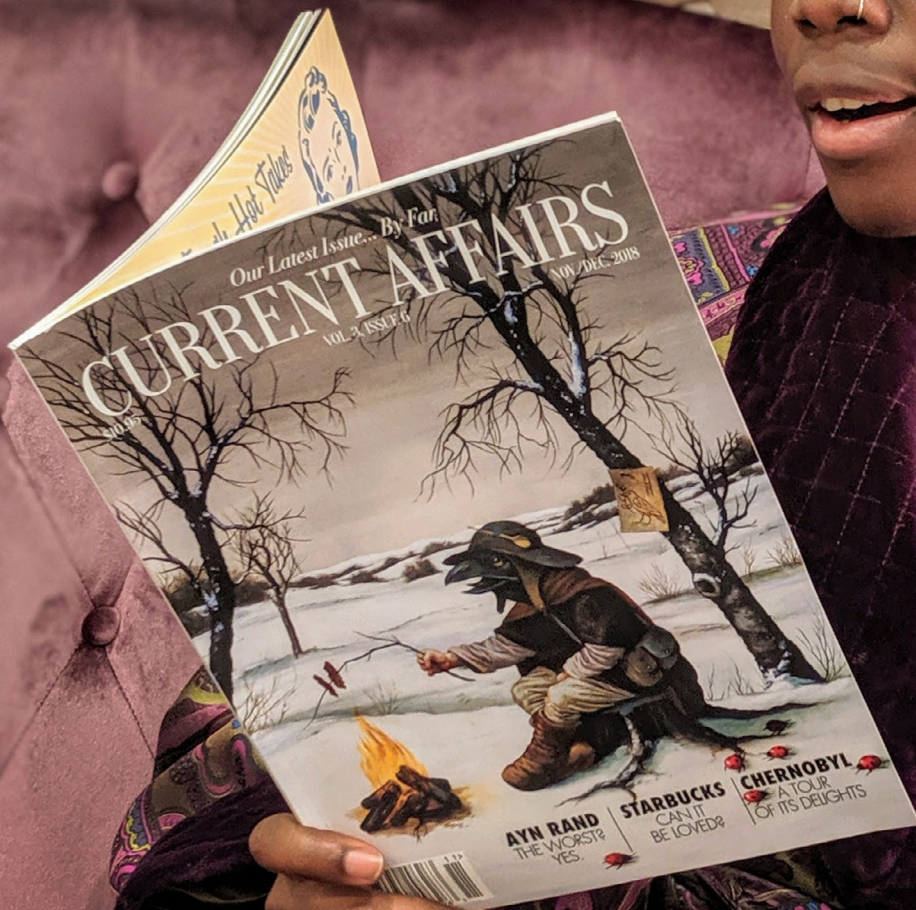
As citizens, there's little we can do to stop the PR onslaught that now pervades every aspect of our lives. Sure, we can "question everything," but most of us already do that, at least when a particular news story originates from a source outside our preferred bubble. Nor will it do much good to write a heartfelt letter to your congressperson or the CEO of your city's most prominent PR firm—they have too much money to make from prolonging the problem to be interested in finding a solution. Direct collective action, like picketing outside the headquarters of a PR firm, might be effective in some cases, but it's more effective for winning specific battles than the war at large.

The truth is that modern capitalism is inextricably entwined with the PR industry, depending on subtle misinformation to soften the many physical, financial, and spiritual blows that capital's subjects must endure each day. Eradicating PR from a capitalist society is a fool's errand. Until we achieve socialism, the best defenses against this bombardment of messages are 1) consuming as little corporate-owned media as possible, 2) remaining curious and thoughtful when we have strong feelings about distant events, and 3) learning about the great PR snafus of the past so we can begin to recognize the patterns.

And whenever we feel our heartstrings being tugged upon, we should ask ourselves:

"Who does this message serve, and why am I just seeing it now?" ✚

LIVE WELL.



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WHAT ARE REFUGEE CAMPS FOR?

by Laura Robson

IT'S BECOME A STANDARD HEADLINE THAT FORCED displacement is at a record high: 70.8 million people at the end of 2018, according to the United Nations. Of these about 26 million are formally recognized as refugees—people who have been forced to leave their homes and cross into another country due to a “well-founded fear of persecution.” Refugee camps—temporary accommodations offering immediate shelter to people fleeing violence—have become a central strategy of delivering refugee aid. There are hundreds of refugee camps globally, especially in Africa and the Middle East. And although they are constructed as temporary settlements, many of them actually become long-term fixtures, developing into shantytowns and even cities with their own economies, rudimentary infrastructures, and schools for inhabitants who might be there for years or even decades.

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR)—the international organization that runs most of the world's refugee camps—doesn't think they are a good idea. In its view, voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in a third country are all preferable “durable solutions.” In 2014 it made this stance official, publishing a formal statement that accused camps of creating refugee dependency, distorting local economies, and harboring security threats. Henceforth, it declared, “UNHCR's policy is to pursue alternatives to camps, whenever possible ... Compliance with this policy is mandatory.”

In other words, even the people who run them think that camps are a terrible way to deal with refugees. It is peculiar, then, that refugee camps remain one of the most common, visible, and widely ac-

cepted institutions of human migration, acknowledged as a kind of necessary evil by politicians, diplomats, humanitarian workers, and pundits from across the political spectrum. Why do 40 percent of the world's refugees (according to UNHCR's own figures) still live in camps? Why do the UN, the EU, the United States, and hundreds of NGOs and private humanitarian organizations all continue to support them, not just politically but practically and financially?

Refugee camps have three main purposes, none of which have much to do with providing assistance to refugees themselves. First of all, camps are an anti-immigration strategy; they are intended to keep refugees in place, and, crucially, prevent them from being able to physically move into western Europe or North America. Second, refugee camps provide a venue for the transfer of funds between patron and client states: they allow cash and goods to be channeled from the United States and Europe to weaker client states, where refugee camps are nearly always located, through a frame of legitimate international aid. (There are vanishingly few refugee camps in the wealthy countries of western Europe and North America; most are in Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia.) Third, refugee camps operate as a reminder of the reach of international authority—and now, sometimes, as test sites for techniques of global surveillance and marketing. Refugee camps, and the international institutions running them, constitute a venue for negotiation and exchange between the wealthy nations of the Global North who mostly finance refugee operations and their poorer clients in the Global South who mostly host them. It's not surprising, really, that the bargains they strike so often disregard the interests of refugee camps' actual inhabitants.

THE EARLIEST MODERN REFUGEE REGIMES arose in the aftermath of World War I. (There had been displaced people before this, of course, but no international bureaucracies specifically for dealing with mass numbers of refugees.) The most prominent refugees were anti-Bolshevik “White Russians,” expelled from the new Soviet Union following the 1917 revolution, and Armenians targeted for elimination by the late Ottoman state and driven through the Syrian desert in an act of genocidal deportation in 1915-1916. Survivors of the Armenian genocide ended up in some of the world’s first refugee camps, run by American and French missionaries (and, a bit later, colonial officials) in places like Aleppo and Beirut. In the camps, refugees were carefully monitored, physically constrained, and prevented from making contact with relatives and friends outside Syria. In 1936, the French High Commissioner for Syria articulated the French approach to the camps: “With the Armenians, what one fears is that as soon as they have a little savings, they will wish to go elsewhere. This must be avoided.” So, a basic historical truth about the modern refugee regime: refugee camps were invented, mostly, to keep people displaced.

But there was nothing inevitable about the emergence of long-term camps as a solution for what was always referred to as the “refugee problem.” The League of Nations also spearheaded a project called the Nansen Passport, an identity document issued to some refugees that allowed them to (temporarily) move to and work in countries that would accept it. But the anti-Semitism and xenophobia sweeping western Europe and the United States ushered in an era of new and draconian immigration restrictions. In the U.S., the 1924 “National Origins” Act (which would not be undone until 1965) sought to return the United States to an earlier (whiter) ethnic composition by imposing immigration quotas and banning immigration from Asia entirely. Similar immigration restrictions aimed at Eastern European Jews were introduced in Britain and France. In such an atmosphere, camps proved to be an easier way to keep tabs on refugees and ensure a lockdown of the borders. And in the Middle East, refugees confined to camps could also serve as a useful source of labor. Without other economic options, without political and social connections on the ground, Armenian refugees in Syria and Assyrian refugees in Iraq were co-opted not only as workers, but as shock troops for European colonial occupation. So the camps model prevailed—not because it was good for refugees, but because camps were valuable for preventing immigration into Britain and France and useful for the imperial project abroad.

In addition to providing a means of warehousing refugees who might attempt to enter Europe or the United States from elsewhere, the camp model proved convenient for controlling immigration between European countries. As the Nazi regime intensified its persecutions of Jews and others, a refugee emergency of unprecedented scope began to emerge across central Europe, but the Allied powers remained mostly concerned with keeping the Nazis’ victims away from their own borders. In 1938, representatives from more than 30 countries met at Evian, in southern France, where they proved totally unable to agree on relief measures for the burgeoning population of European Jewish refugees—mainly because no one wanted to allow immigration into their own countries to alleviate the crisis. In the conference’s aftermath, Franklin Roosevelt tried desperately to find somewhere to ship Jews *en masse*, to prevent their entrance into the U.S.: “What I am looking for is the possibility of uninhabited or

sparsely inhabited good agricultural lands to which Jewish colonies might be sent.”

At the end of the war, prisoners liberated from the concentration camps were re-interred in a series of refugee camps scattered across Germany, Austria, and Italy. (As Hannah Arendt put it with her usual acerbity: “Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put into concentration camps by their foes and internment camps by their friends.”) These “Displaced Persons” or “DP” camps weren’t just relief hubs; they were detention centers, explicitly intended to prevent European Jews from amassing in western Europe or the United States; the famous Harrison report on the camps, released in 1945, charged the Allies with keeping Jewish DPs in dire conditions behind barbed wire and under armed surveillance, sometimes actually in former Nazi concentration camps. When war broke out between Zionists and Arabs in Palestine, resulting in the declaration of the new state of Israel in 1948, many in the Anglo-American sphere seized on the war’s outcome as an answer to the problems of resettling DPs whom nobody else wanted. In fact, many Jewish DPs were actually reluctant to settle in Israel—most of them expressed an active preference for the United States—but this meant nothing in the face of European and American determination not to open their own borders to the survivors of the Holocaust.

The dismantling of Europe’s DP camps and the shipping of many of their inhabitants to the new state of Israel signaled the end of one refugee crisis and the beginning of another. By the end of 1948, approximately 750,000 Palestinian Arabs had been expelled from their homes to temporary shelters in Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, as the new Israeli government closed its borders and appropriated Palestinian land, houses, farms, and businesses for redistribution to new Jewish arrivals. In 1949, the UN tacitly acknowledged that mass Palestinian return was unlikely in the face of Israeli intransigence, and established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to run new refugee camps. These camps would come to serve as a more or less permanent “solution” to the problem of Palestinian dispossession.

UNRWA and the camps it ran were mostly funded by the United States, which paid as much as 70 percent of their costs in some years. This was not an altruistic move. American support for UNRWA was conceived as a kind of protection—not just for Israel, which obviously wanted to keep Palestinians enclosed and monitored, but also for American oil interests, which relied on political stability and could be threatened by the unchecked movement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians around the Middle East. By 1961, the State Department was defending its support for UNRWA by pointing out that at a cost of \$.09 a day, it had been “remarkably successful in keeping the potentially explosive refugee problem under control,” while also maintaining good relations with states through which oil pipelines passed. The American head of UNRWA, John Davis, summed up what the organization was doing even more succinctly: “UNRWA was one of the prices—and perhaps the cheapest—that the international community was paying for not having been able to solve with equity the political problems of the refugees.” He added, chillingly, “It was surely well worth the cost.”

And so, just like the DP camps in Europe, refugee camps for Palestinians were built, financed, and maintained specifically to contain the political problem that the refugees represented, by physically and forcibly preventing their migration elsewhere. It’s a role the camps continue to play today; and this is why, when UNRWA funding is threatened (most recently by the Trump administration) conserva-

tive authoritarian governments in the Arab world—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar—have been willing to step in to save the institution. UNRWA may be a lot of trouble and expense to maintain; but it keeps Palestinians, who have historically been heavily involved in labor and pro-democracy movements across the region, confined and out of the way.

The European Union is now carrying on the long tradition of using refugee camps to prevent immigration. In 2015, the European Council opened negotiations with the Erdogan government in Turkey to incentivize the country to act as a gatekeeper, making sure Syrian refugees stayed in camps in Turkey rather than entering the E.U. through Greece. The following year, the two parties reached an agreement aimed at “stopping the flow of irregular migration via Turkey to Europe,” by ensuring that all migrants who reached Greece from Turkey or were intercepted in international waters would be returned to Turkey, and that the Turkish government would undertake new policing to prevent migrants from crossing to Europe. The price of this scheme: €3 billion paid directly to Turkey to build camps and provide services (with the possibility of another €3 billion if things went well), and the speeding up of the “visa liberalization roadmap” that would lift visa requirements for Turkish citizens traveling in Europe.

In the media, this was mostly presented as a victory: both for Europeans, who wouldn’t have to worry about huge numbers of Syrians landing in their countries, and for Turkey, whose souring relationship with Europe could be salvaged through this kind of cooperation. In some particularly disgraceful coverage, it was even presented as a victory for the refugees themselves. The *New York Times* has long been enamored with this “solution” to the Syrian refugee question, running articles with titles like “How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp” (about the Kilis camp on the Turkish-Syrian border) and “How to Treat Refugees with Dignity: A Lesson from Turkey” (about Syrian refugees in Gaziantep). “It was inspiring,” the author of this last article raves, “to see hope alive for an otherwise humiliated people.” Apparently, paying off authoritarian governments to use their militaries to keep destitute refugees ensconced in camps far from Europe—and away from the possibility of claiming asylum and citizenship rights—can be represented in the neoliberal press as a humanitarian triumph.

THIS BRINGS US TO AN IMPORTANT POINT: WEALTHY, developed countries are not the only beneficiaries of refugee camps. Weak, impoverished, and politically beleaguered governments see them as opportunities too.

Refugee aid, especially for camps, is usually channeled through the “host state” government, with that administration having a lot of leeway in terms of what they can do with it. This is a useful source of relatively unrestricted cash for host administrations, who will typically use some of the money for direct aid but reserve some of it for services that can benefit both refugees and local populations, or sometimes just the government itself. When Turkey is taking €3 billion for the “Facility for Refugees in Turkey,” some of that money is being used to build schools and clinics for refugees—but it’s also being used, just to cite a few publicly available examples, to fund improvements in the “operational capacities” of the Turkish Coast Guard, to provide job training and placement programs to Turkish citizens as well as Syrian refugees in refugee-heavy areas, and to improve municipal infrastructures. Turkish control over this money is an important part of the deal.

Allowing host countries to control the use of funds is, of course, arguably preferable to the usual scenario of an army of international

bureaucrats and professional humanitarians descending on an area struck by disaster, with the goal of ordering the lives of the unfortunates they find there. And distributing some relief benefits across the general population in the host country can serve an important social function: it’s not unusual, globally, for refugees to face serious hostility from local communities, who may be just as impoverished but are not eligible for this kind of international assistance. But it’s also impossible to ignore the fact that the money being sent to Turkey under the refugee deal is being used to prop up an increasingly authoritarian government. The cash can be spent to buy public quiescence not only over the issue of the refugee flow, but also over crucial questions of domestic governance, popular representation, and democratic process. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan sees an opportunity here, not just to improve relations with Europe—which he may or may not care much about, at this point—but to access a kind of slush fund that can be doled out, to some extent, for his own purposes, even propping up an arm of the military (the Coast Guard), which of course can always be deployed elsewhere.

The same thing is happening next door in Jordan, which has taken in an estimated 1.4 million Syrian refugees since the war began—a number that constitutes some 10 percent of the country’s total population. Most refugees in Jordan don’t live in camps, but camps remain the focus of most international attention and funding. Jordan has become famous for its Zaatari camp, constructed in 2012 just east of Mafraq, about 10 miles from the Syrian border, and currently housing nearly 80,000 people—which is actually down from the 150,000 it held in 2013. (If it were a city, at its height it would have counted as Jordan’s fourth largest urban area.) UNHCR, which built it and continues to run it in cooperation with the Jordanian government, describes it like this: “Occupants of Zaatari are served by nine schools, two hospitals, and some 3,000 refugee-owned shops lining the camp’s thoroughfares. The camp also offers several recreational outlets, including a soccer league and a circus academy.”

Let’s take a closer look at this cooperative effort between the Jordanian government and its refugee aid providers. Jordan is an authoritarian monarchy whose political legitimacy and governmental funding has always, since its inception, come from outside: specifically, from Britain and the United States. The monarchy has little in the way of military capacity and has routinely appealed to its foreign backers to protect it against perceived threats, including ongoing internal challengers like pro-democracy activists and Palestinian militias. Mostly, the United States and Britain have been willing to

CAMPS
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PROFITABLE.
JUST NOT
FOR THE
PEOPLE
WHO LIVE
IN THEM.



The Zaatarî camp in Jordan, as seen on July 18, 2013, from a helicopter carrying U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh. State Department Photo

supply Jordanian autocrats with the money (and, occasionally, the military support) they need to maintain themselves as a way of preserving the political status quo.

The Syrian refugee crisis has opened up a new channel, and some new sources, for this kind of financial help. The European Commission has now routed €584 million into Jordan to support refugee efforts there—but not only for direct refugee aid. The commission's own breakdown goes like this: “more than €198 million from the humanitarian budget, €180 million from the Macro Financial Assistance Instrument, over €170 million from the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument and more than €30 million from Instrument for Stability... This support comes on top of the over €500 million in regular programmed bilateral cooperation for Jordan under the European Neighbourhood policy, which brings the overall number to €108 billion.” Once other donors are included, the numbers rise further; Jordan has received something like \$6 billion in refugee-related money since 2015, a higher level than any other country.

Jordan has made the case that it needs to spend this money on development projects that will make it possible to sustain refugee populations over the long term. So the camps, like Zaatarî, serve as the public face of a larger and more comprehensive economic development plan: building infrastructure in cities, improving electrical grids, modernizing water distribution plants, constructing and running schools. All of these things help to bolster the case that Jordan's monarchy perpetually has to make to a restive public: that it is better off under authoritarianism. UNHCR has made its cooperation with Jordan and the modernity and functionality of its camps a center-

piece of its own PR; and it's certainly true that a lot of desperate people have found succor of sorts there. But this money is also serving to mask the many economic, political, and social failures of a longstanding authoritarian regime and helping it to remain viable. The UN, the United States, and the E.U. alike, with the aid of fawning media coverage of Zaatarî's solar panels and circus academy, are managing to present direct international financing of an authoritarian government as a humanitarian success story.

Finally, let's think just a little about the camps themselves and what's actually going on in them. Zaatarî is a good example here. It does, indeed, offer food, water, shelter, health care, and schooling to refugees. It also directs their labor, makes them into a captive market, limits their physical mobility and political expression, and subjects them to a regime of surveillance, tracking, and data collection for the benefit not only of the Jordanian government but also of private corporate interests abroad.

There have been a lot of efforts, focused especially on the Zaatarî and Azraq camps, to make Syrian refugees in Jordan productive members of a capitalist economy and reimagine them as a useful source of cheap labor. The “Jordan Compact,” a 2016 agreement between the E.U., the U.N., and the Jordanian government, allocated \$700 million to the regime in grants and \$1.9 billion in “concessional loans” in return for Jordan's issuing 200,000 work permits to Syrians and providing schooling for all Syrian refugee children. Goods made in

18 “Special Economic Zones” by Jordanian companies employing at least 15 percent Syrians would be eligible for a number of trade concessions: the relaxation of the E.U.’s “rule of origin” restrictions, tax exemptions, subsidized transport and electricity, less restrictive licensing and permitting procedures, and substantial administrative assistance. The World Bank’s Middle East director was effusive in his praise for this scheme: “Jordan is shifting from a purely humanitarian approach to a forward looking development drive. The Jordanian government is to be commended for its foresight and vision and for leading the way for the international community on what still today are uncharted territories.” In other words: here’s to Jordan for advancing the view that refugees can represent not a burden, but a commodity.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) exist elsewhere: in China, in India, in the Caymans, in Nigeria, and in Mexico, to name just a few. The World Bank defines them as “geographically delimited areas administered by a single body, offering certain incentives (generally duty-free importing and streamlined customs procedures, for instance) to businesses which physically locate within the zone,” adding that “[p]erhaps the most notable trend over the past 15 years has been the growing number of privately owned, developed, and operated zones worldwide.” In other words, SEZs are places where cheap, often migrant labor can be deployed at minimal cost to mass-produce goods that are not subject to territorially-based legal requirements or tariffs. The Jordanian version is no different. Jordan’s SEZs focus on low-skill, low-wage work like garment production; they are located far from most of the country’s urban areas; and labor conditions are poor, marked especially by long working hours.

As a consequence, the Jordan Compact has been largely unsuccessful at attracting Syrian refugees to work in the SEZs. They can quite often earn higher wages and work fewer hours, closer to their families, in the informal economy. (And notably, high-skill Syrians with postsecondary educational qualifications can’t access work permits for professional positions through this program; it limits holders to low-skill, low-paid jobs.) Two years after the implementation of the compact, the U.N. estimated that only about 13 percent of working-age Syrian refugees have work permits. Still, this refugee reluctance hasn’t stopped the Jordanian government, or the U.N., or the E.U., from trying to force the issue, particularly in the camps. In early 2018 the UNHCR partnered with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Jordanian monarchy to open a new employment center in the Azraq refugee camp, trying to get more Syrians to apply for work permits. “Once issued,” the ILO reported, “UNHCR will record the work permit in a database linked to the Jordanian authorities, facilitating movement in and out of the camp. Refugees who obtain these work permits will be able to leave the camp for up to one month at a time.”

And here we come to a final reason that camps remain so central to refugee policy: they offer unparalleled opportunities for surveillance, tracking, and data collection of populations who might otherwise slip under the radar of both governmental authorities and global corporations. In 2017, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) piloted a new program at the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps called Building Blocks, in which all camp residents must access their food supplies through a biometric tracking system using privately developed blockchain technology. “Now,” the WFP declares, “over 100,000 people living in the camps can purchase groceries by scanning an iris at checkout. Built on a private, permissioned blockchain, and integrated with UNHCR’s existing biometric authentication technology—WFP has a record of every transaction.” There are plans to expand

this system to cover more than half a million Syrians in Jordan, and to use it for purposes beyond food distribution: to track refugees’ citizenship, education, movements, work authorization, and credit histories, among other things. Refugee camps thus simultaneously offer a venue for experimenting with such tracking technologies and actively incorporating more and more people—who can’t opt out, if they want to eat—into a globally sourced public-private data web.

SO, CAMPS ARE INDEED USEFUL, VALUABLE, beneficial, and profitable—just not for the people who live in them. Refugee camps are an industry: one that focuses on keeping refugees *contained*, partly for the purposes of defending Western borders from onslaught, but also for the purposes of creating new cheap labor pools, commercial markets, and forms of territorial control.

But, you might ask, what could we do instead? Don’t refugees need the food and water and shelter that humanitarian organizations provide through camps? What would happen to them otherwise? Aren’t camps better than nothing? Isn’t that why I donated money to the UNHCR that one time and now I constantly get all these glossy brochures and pleading emails about tents and water and microloans?

Here’s the thing. As it stands, international refugee aid regimes are a cornerstone of a deeply-rooted system of rights restrictions for migrants. Refugee regimes broadly, and camps in particular, channel money to authoritarian regimes, force refugee populations to serve as sources of cheap labor and experimental data collection, and—above all—reduce political pressure on wealthy countries to liberalize their asylum practices. In other words, they are built specifically to dilute support for the one thing that would help refugees most: the unrestricted right to move where they want to go.

Refugees themselves understand this exceptionally well. That’s why they generally don’t want to live in camps, why they prefer to work in the black market rather than sign on as cheap labor in “Special Economic Zones,” why so many of them refuse to register as refugees with the UNHCR or UNRWA. This isn’t obstinacy; it’s self-protection. UNHCR and UNRWA can’t offer political alternatives to refugee camps, however much their officials might like to, because they were built as institutional manifestations of a world of radically unequal states. And if we want to really advocate for refugees, we need to stop enabling the kinds of international agreements that repeatedly, consistently, and deliberately deploy them as tools—and sometimes weapons—of imperialism, authoritarianism, and the most brutal forms of global capitalism.

So instead of donating money for more tents, more water, and more barbed wire fences, we need to be advocating within our own states: for immigration policies that allow refugees into wealthy countries without restriction, and for revisions to asylum law that will allow asylum-seeking from war, violence, and natural disaster, as well as the current standard of “fear of persecution.” We also need to press for serious labor regulation at a supranational level to prevent the mass global exploitation of workers on the move—removing camps from the equation won’t mean much if all these people become more fodder for the global trade in unprotected migrant labor. The so-called refugee problem isn’t a stand-alone question of effective humanitarian assistance. It’s an aspect, and a reflection, of the much broader issue of global inequality; and camps have become a go-to “solution” partly because they render invisible the deep links between refugee crises and the other profound inequities and injustices of our age. ✦

THEY'RE SUPERCILIOUS!
CENSORIOUS!
UTTERLY VAINGLORIOUS!

step right up to the
**INTELLECTUAL
DARK WEB**

FREAKSHOW

Suffrage has gone far enough! If we get any more freedom, men will stop taking care of us!

ANTI-SUFFRAGE
SUFFRAGETTE

MISTER KIRK
WORLD'S
SMALLEST FACE

MEDITATION
SECRETS OF THE
EXOTIC EAST

PROFESSOR
SAMUEL T. HARRIS:
MASTER OF CONCERN

By refusing to measure skulls, are we not denying potential theoretical scientific advancements? I'm Just Asking Questions!

You are getting very sleepy... you are responsible for everything wrong in your life... communist suffragettes have caused everything wrong in your life... you will be incapable of noticing this contradiction...

Did you just assume my gender? I identify as...

Do a Winchester rifle!

...A Winchester rifle!

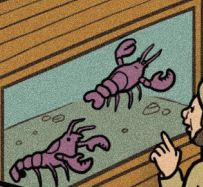
THE MAN
WITH ONLY
ONE JOKE

FOR VICARIOUS
VIRILITY, VIVISECT
A LOBSTER TODAY

LIBERATE YOUR
LIVER & COLON
WITH KENTUCKY
SAM'S PURE MASHED
BARREL O' BEEF

RECLAIM YOUR
MANHOOD! DEFEAT THE
SUFFRAGETTE
MENACE!

DR. PETERSONIO
THE MENTACULAR
MAGICIAN, HYPERBOREAN
HYPNOTIST OF TORONTO



SERIOUSLY,
SUPPORT OUR
PATREON



RICKY GERVAIS:
FREE SPEECH ACROBAT

To say I can't mock the
marginalized is CENSORSHIP!
But if you mock me, that's
censorship too! I'm marginalized
for my mockery, therefore it's
morally wrong to mock me!!

THE SPECTACULAR SHAPIRO

SMASHES HIS OPPONENT IN A
DUEL OF WIT AND WIZARDRY!

As you see, this
rampacious rodent's
ridiculous arguments—
have disappeared!

LEPORA THE LOONY
LEFT LAGOMORPH

FRESHLY POPPED!
BOOST MASCULINITY!

THE LOST SECRET OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION
SECRETS OF LOGIC 10-STEP GUIDE
5¢
WIN ANY ARGUMENT
DESTROY YOUR OPPONENT

BOXER'S BEST
BULK UP WITH THIS
PATENTED PROTEIN!*

SWAMP	POSSUM
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*MADE FROM 100% SWAMP POSSUM

ROUGH & ROWDY
RED ROGAN'S
RIPROARING ROADSHOW

YOU SHOULDN'T
PUNCH NAZIS.
CHANGE MY MIND.

Anti-elitist elixirs:
don't try that fancy
mainstream medicine!

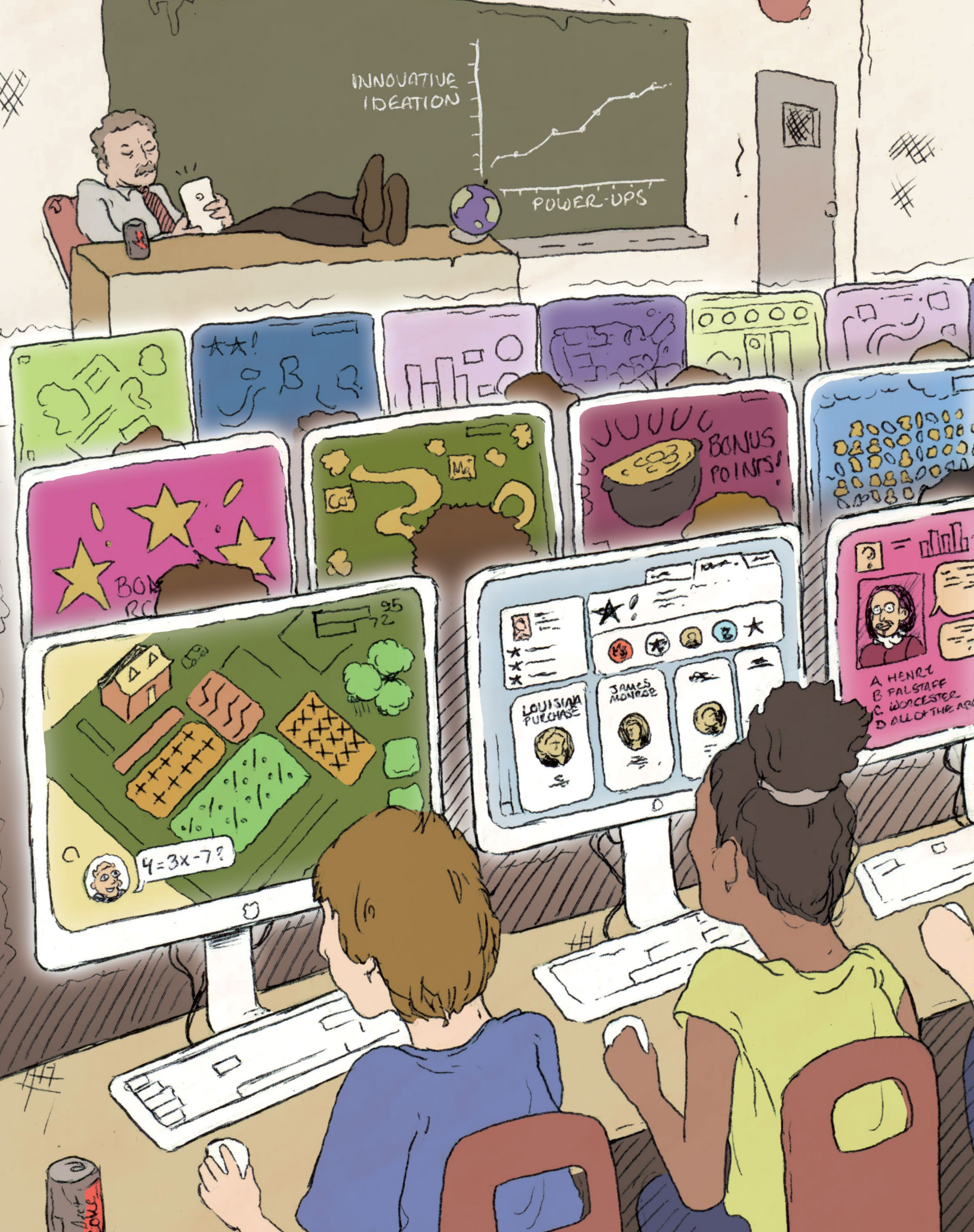
No one will let me
say racial slurs!

HIGH
LOW
FREESPEECHOMETER

Extract
of Edge +
Oil of
Offensiveness

ASTUTE ATTIRE FOR THE
GENIUS GENTLEMAN

AQUEOUS ACCEPTANCE
LIBATIONS TO ENSURE
LAID-BACK
CONFABULATIONS



EDUCATION GAMIFICATION

by Vincent Gabrielle

LIKE MANY PEOPLE MY AGE, I WILL PROBABLY remember the names of hundreds of Pokémon until I die. In the spring of 2019, Stanford neuroscientists released a study that might explain the reason behind this phenomenon. When exposed to images of Pokémon, people who had avidly played Pokémon games as children demonstrated heightened activity in a region of the brain called the occipitotemporal sulcus. Not coincidentally, it's the same part of the brain that recognizes different species of animals. Playing hundreds of hours of Pokémon trains you to recognize fictional monsters in the same way that you might recognize wild game or edible plants.

This finding probably isn't surprising to anyone who played a lot of Pokémon (or their parents). On its own, the Great Stanford Pokémon Experiment isn't a cause for alarm in any respect: it was just taking a look at how the brain learns to recognize and categorize patterns.

The study did, however, demonstrate something that has long been suspected: games can have a lasting impact on the developing brain. Over the past 30 years, a growing community of video game designers, teachers, researchers, and educational reformers has emerged to harness the power of games for education. Learning can be difficult, frustrating, and boring. Proponents of games argue that fun, attention-sustaining systems can make learning simple, joyous, and effective. It's also commonly argued that Gen-Zers are addicted to screens and must be counter-addicted to learning in order to succeed. This push is part of a broader movement towards gamification: the introduction of games and game-like interfaces into more serious contexts.

"I think we're going to see a mainstreaming of using games and playful interactions for all kinds of purposes," Sebastian Deterding, a senior research fellow at Digital Creativity Labs, said in an interview. "Particularly in education."

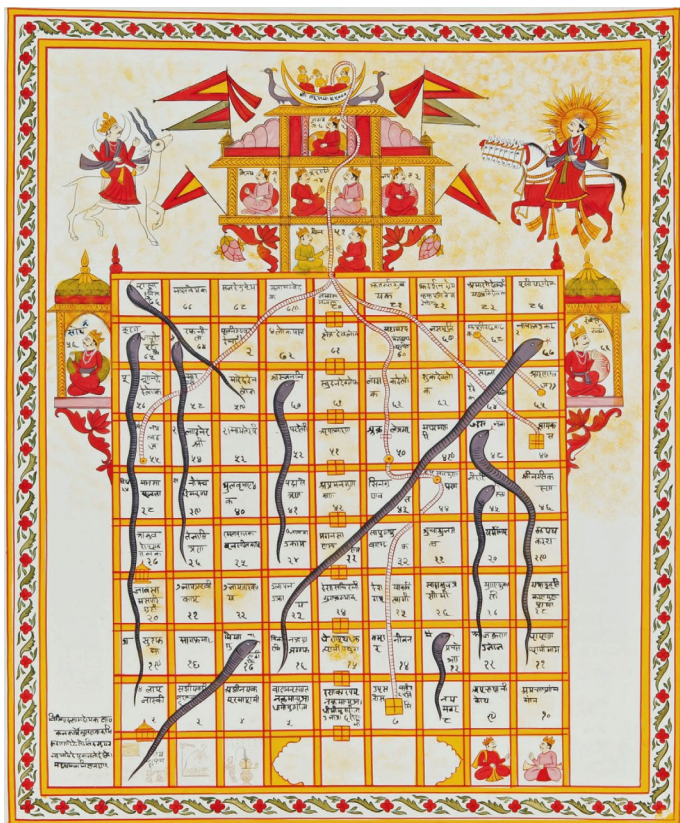
The wave is already building. Games and gamified platforms or

apps are exploding onto the market. Metaari, a business analytics firm, projected that by 2023 the global market for educational games will surpass \$17 billion. *EdSurge*, an ed tech-focused news outlet, reported that investments in ed tech startups exploded through 2018, surpassing \$1.9 billion dollars in venture capital or philanthropic funding. Articles with titles like "Are Games the FUTURE of Education?!!?" pop up in outlets like *Wired* and *Techcrunch*. *EdSurge* has an entire suite of articles dedicated to the topic, complete with a lesson planner for teachers.

Games and gamified "playful" interfaces are ubiquitous features of other digital technology. Most of these aren't "games" in a true sense. Gamified apps layer the trappings of games such as points systems, badges, and fun interfaces over a more purposeful core. Duolingo gamifies learning foreign languages. Fitbits and other activity trackers gamify health and fitness data. (The West Virginia teacher's strike was partially precipitated by the introduction of mandatory Fitbits as part of a wellness scheme. The teachers resented the intrusive gathering of sensitive medical information that came with the program.) Credit card reward programs and credit scores gamify personal finance. Uber and Lyft send drivers on "quests" to push them to drive more hours. Amazon uses video game-like interfaces to drive competition between warehouse workers, all to meet higher quotas while also tracking worker behavior.

But while we may agree that much of gamification is creepy, the question remains: in an educational context, is it useful? Do games and gamified platforms actually help students learn? If so, how and when are these techniques appropriate? And who actually benefits from the introduction of these technologies to the classroom: students and teachers, or administrators and technology firms?

This last question is especially significant. After all, the elite of Silicon Valley are increasingly sending their kids to screen-free (and therefore gamification-app-free) private schools. One parent was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying: "the devil lives in our



A 19th-century Indian “Snakes and Ladders”

phones.” The children of the tech elite are being kept away from the very “innovations” their parents are pushing. The disconnect is troubling, and the reasons behind it are worth examining.

THERE’S CERTAINLY NOTHING WRONG WITH PLAY. The impulse to play predates humans. Dogs play. Dolphins play. Ravens play. Monkeys play. There are weird examples of potential play behavior in fish and eusocial wasps. Play is a hard concept to define. French philosopher Roger Caillois argues that play is “an occasion of pure waste,” a voluntary activity undertaken solely for amusement bounded by its own rules where the outcome is uncertain. But play, as the late sociologist Brian Sutton-Smith notes, is ambiguous. No single definition can contain it.

Humans have likely always played games: both the type with rules and more imaginative freeform varieties. Evidence for games dates back at least 5,000 years. Archaeologists have unearthed boards and dice-like knucklebones from ancient sites worldwide. The late historian Johan Huizinga framed the development of games as a necessary precursor for complex human behaviors like war, law, philosophy, and art. For Huizinga, there was no formal difference between rituals or cultural institutions and play. “The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the tennis court, the screen, the court of justice, etc. are all in form and function playgrounds.” Our sacred spaces are bounded, temporary worlds within the ordinary, featuring their own separate rules and conventions. Huizinga, in opposition to the dominant theories of his time, centers play and games as what makes us human. We are not *Homo sapiens*. We are *Homo ludens*. We are the players, not the wise.

For as long as games have existed, they have likely been applied to

purposes beyond simple entertainment. Games like India’s ancient *Gyan Chauper* were designed to impart religious and moral lessons. The game board depicts the climb to enlightenment, moving from lower levels of consciousness to higher levels by overcoming vice and attachment (both represented by snakes). Players move upward based on die rolls, ascending or falling back if they land on a virtue or a vice square respectively. The gameplay models predestination, karma, and the cycle of rebirth. It’s still played at religious festivals in India. In a strange twist of irony and colonialism, you’ve probably played this game too. In the United States it’s known as Chutes and Ladders, and is decidedly less religious.

The use of games as educational tools is probably just as old. In Rome, budding young aristocrats played *Ludus latruncularum*—the game of brigands—to teach military tactics. Early forms of chess like *shatranj* and *chauranga* were battle simulation games; they became part of courtly education in medieval Persia. Go, the 2,500 year old abstract Chinese strategy board game, was adopted as one of the “four cultivated arts.” Mastery of Go was considered a necessary part of becoming an accomplished scholar.

More modern applications of games and play in education can be partially attributed to the diaspora of kindergarten teachers from the Prussian empire. This occurred in the aftermath of the March Revolution of 1848, when Frederick William IV was reinstated as Emperor of Prussia by a coalition of aristocrats and generals. Irritated at having been offered a crown “disgraced by the stink of revolution,” William IV set about reversing all the achievements of the revolutionaries and anyone vaguely associated with them. This included a movement of educational reformers, disciples of the early childhood pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel, who had been trained by him in a new educational philosophy of play. According to Fröbel, the “work” of children was found in games, and broader learning through exploration, dance, and song. Instead of rote memorization and recitation, Fröbel’s students observed butterflies and bees, cared for pets, and planted gardens. But most importantly, a fair amount of time and space had to be given over to unstructured play in dedicated play spaces. For Fröbel, it was especially critical that very young children be given time to be creative and playful. Fröbel called his school *kindergarten*. William IV called it socialism and banned it nationwide.

Kindergarten teachers fled to the United States where they established some of the first early childhood education centers with purpose-built playgrounds. They arrived just as Massachusetts and Connecticut were setting up “common schools” based on, ironically, Prussia’s age-graded, compulsory school system (which is very similar to the current school system in the United States). Kindergarten and play-as-pedagogy integrated with common schools and spread across the country.

In the 21st century, it’s commonly accepted that play and structured games are crucial elements of childhood learning, development, and psychological well-being. But does this translate to the current trend of educational video games, gamified curricula, and gamified apps or platforms?

That’s much more complicated.

The way that video games impart their lessons is a matter of some debate. In “Gamification as Behavioral Psychology,” the psychologist Conor Linehan and his co-authors argue that games function along behaviorist lines through conditioning and reinforcement. Games, and the somewhat controversial ABA (Applied Behavior Analy-

sis) interventions for autism are structurally similar. Games, much like ABA, include specific, measurable goals, intensive repetition, rewards, and feedback. Patients, like players, are required to pass a stringent test. If they fail, they repeat the program. “This process will be familiar to any player familiar with use of ‘boss fight’ mechanics as a way of testing learned in-game skills,” Linehan and his co-authors write. Carefully-designed games and gamified platforms can train students in a variety of areas, linking fields of knowledge in a reinforcing process called *scaffolding*. Each lesson builds and chains to the lessons before, allowing for complex learning.

OTHER SCHOLARS ARGUE THAT THIS DOESN’T go far enough. Literary and educational theorist James Paul Gee describes video games as “worlds in which variables interact through time.” Players learn to succeed by mastering hidden rules and meeting unspoken criteria. Through exploring the contours of these systems—by trying, failing, and succeeding—players learn how to win within the parameters of the game. Game designer and new media professor Ian Bogost calls this “procedural rhetoric”: persuasion through rules-based interactions rather than text, imagery, or spoken word. The boundaries of the system create a space that one explores by playing. For example, Monopoly can only be won by crushing your opponents into bankruptcy, but presents many options for doing so. The system itself teaches you how the system works. Characters within the game—including player avatars—encourage emotional investment and identification (in a rhetorical sense) with the game. In structuring the experience of the player around certain logics, a game make claims about how the world works.

Professor Dargan Frierson of the University of Washington is a climate scientist and one of the founders of EarthGames, a student-driven ecology game studio. Students in his studio carefully craft games in which the mechanics reinforce the central message. In one notable example, players pilot a ray of light out of the atmosphere. As CO₂ builds up, the task becomes more and more difficult. The players directly experience the greenhouse effect. Frierson explained that his project is a way to reach people who aren’t persuaded by conventional environmental messages. “You can experience really difficult problems through games. You can fail many times before you succeed,” he told me. Frierson claims this technique instills a kind of optimism in players; it helps them believe that environmental issues have solutions.

Game designer John Krajewski agreed. “Games,” he said in an interview with me, “are so good at giving you a reason to care.” Krajewski is the lead designer behind Eco, an ecology simulation game currently in early access release. (Players can play it, but it isn’t finished.) He describes Eco as “tragedy of the commons: the game.” In Eco, players build a society and literally craft their own laws against the backdrop of a simulated ecosystem with finite resources. You can drive animals and plants to extinction through pollution, habitat loss, and overhunting. There are no monsters, only other players. Krajewski says he hopes the game will be used in schools to teach students about the environment.

But without careful design, this can easily backfire. “You have to take in mind who is designing it,” explained Brian Cross, a game designer and sociologist at Webster University. Designers have biases like everyone else, and these biases will be encoded into games, educational or otherwise.

Take SimCity for example, a longstanding game series about urban planning. Players build cities by placing infrastructure, and control land use through zoning. Buildings might or might not grow in zoned areas. The virtual residents might thrive or languish in poverty. The play of SimCity emerges from observing how your virtual citizens behave and responding to their needs. By meeting the demands of the city’s residents, the player is able to “build the city of their dreams.”

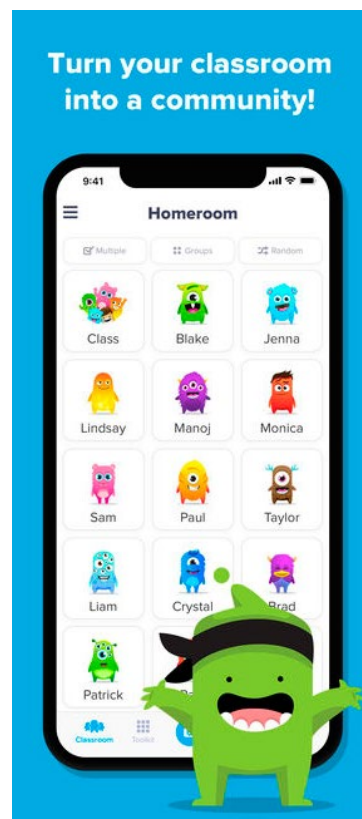
SimCity is often deployed in an educational context, integrated in some higher-ed and K-12 curricula. And it’s by far the most visible “face” of urban planning. Copies of SimCity were preloaded on computers bound for India during the One Laptop Per Child program, a techno-optimistic initiative to solve rural education deficits by giving every child a computer. An educational version of SimCity called SimCityEDU leads children through a series of challenges like planning school bus routes, “increasing jobs,” or reducing air pollution.

But only certain kinds of cities are possible in SimCity and its successors. The city of your dreams must be car-centric, modernist, and usually grid-based. Vehicles in SimCity conveniently don’t emit pollution, or even need parking: when cars reach their destinations they simply disappear.

The disappearing cars of the simulated city are a way to make the game more accessible by preventing eternal gridlock. But they also elide many of the most heated debates in real-life urban planning. Parking spaces are battlegrounds, and drivers fight for them against more bike or pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Students playing the base game or the educational version of SimCity are presented with an environment where cars are neutral, unproblematic, and essential, rather than a deliberate policy choice.

Other elements of SimCity are more troubling. Worker sims have no permanent homes. They cycle endlessly between whatever businesses or dwellings have available slots. Homeless sims are created when a house becomes “abandoned” due to falling property values. These sims lose their identity, gender, and “citizenship” within the game. They wander aimlessly between public spaces and abandoned buildings, eating garbage on their way. They cannot be helped, only removed through stringent trash collection and bus depots out of town. Race, social mobility, real estate speculation, and community aren’t simulated at all. Omissions like this aren’t just matters of design. Their absence from the game is a statement of its own.

You might assume SimCity isn’t a deliberate political project, just



An ad for ClassDojo



WE CANNOT OUTSOURCE THE WORK OF TEACHING TO SIMCITY

one that happens to be built on the particular presumptions and expectations held by the sort of white-collar designers employed by Maxis and later Electronic Arts. However, in the case of SimCity, the ideological roots go much deeper to the spotty sociology of the anti-Great Society polemic *Urban Dynamics*, written by MIT computer scientist Jay Forrester. *Urban Dynamics* outlines an argument against taxation and social services, claiming that governments could better address poverty by catering to the needs of business. Forrester made these arguments in 1969, supporting them with then-state-of-the-art computer models. Will Wright, the original designer of *SimCity*, was inspired by *Urban Dynamics* and used parts of it to build his game. This isn't something the game tells players. Players cannot adjust these inbuilt assumptions; they cannot interact with the model itself. They can only play in the margins of the inputs and outputs while the black box remains inaccessible.

"The interactivity of a game," writes games scholar Paolo Pedercini, "should not be mistaken with the freedom to try things out and see what works." No matter how unbiased or apolitical games may claim to be, every game has a rhetorical scope.

Professor Rebecca Reynolds of Rutgers University, who studies the application of games in computer science and digital literacy, told me that this shouldn't necessarily be interpreted as a limitation of the medium, but of our creativity. "The game is only as good as the teacher's creative and imaginative curriculum development," Reynolds explained, citing a need for teachers to design lesson plans with educational games as a component, not the focus, of learning. She stressed the need for careful research in this area. "We have to know what's beyond the hype."

Reynold's own work has shown that using gamified learning sys-

tems can overcome race, sex, and economic gaps in computer science and math learning. These gamified systems aren't actually games at all. They are digital learning management platforms that guide students through a curriculum while providing positive reinforcement through points, badges, and upgrades for in-system avatars. Systems like this aren't games as such, but use the trappings of games to keep students "engaged."

"On a classroom level it can work and it works great," said Caleb Stokes, a high school teacher and game designer. Stokes is the designer of *Red Markets*, a role-playing game about the horrors of capitalism. He uses games in his classroom in rural Missouri, and has seen positive results in his students' information recall, teamwork, and participation. By demonstrating basic principles of game design and game mechanics, he says his students have come to understand systemic thinking and probability.

BUT GAME DESIGN THINKING GOES BEYOND individual lesson plans. "The gamified semester shows a lot of value," he continued, comparing it to traditional grading where you start at 100 percent and grades go down over the semester. In a gamified semester, grades function like achievements or experience points. Students start from zero and slowly "level up." "It's a lot better in terms of incentive," Stokes said, "but it's hard to do." Functionally, you have to design the whole semester before the kids show up.

That's actually the model of the New York public middle-high school *Quest to Learn* (Q2L). The entire school is modeled on game design thinking. Every piece of the curriculum is framed as a "mission." Teachers work closely with game designers to build a curriculum that meets New York State standards. The school has shown some success in terms of standardized testing results, but it's still early days for the school. It's only been operating since 2009.

In many ways both *Quest to Learn* and self-motivated game pedagogues like Caleb Stokes are anomalies. Stokes, like most teachers using game design in their classrooms, are doing it on their own time to help their own kids. That's not something every teacher has the time, expertise, resources, or passion to pursue. And unlike many public schools, *Quest to Learn* is an experiment supported in part by the MacArthur Foundation and staffed with dedicated believers. There isn't any data showing how many teachers use game design in their lesson plans, but there's only one *Quest to Learn*-style school. Both situations are the exception, not the rule.

Gamification in the classroom typically takes the form of "learning management systems." These are technology platforms like Google Classroom, Apple's Schoolwork, ClassDojo, Classcraft, or Kahoot!, all built to be easily applied to any school. These platforms wrap educational activities in a friendly, entertaining, video game-like skin, or feature game plugins. Some are more game-like than others. Schoolwork and Google Classroom are essentially mini social networks for individual classes with real-time grades and feedback. Kahoot! is a mobile quiz-game app that "brings the urgency of a quiz game show to the classroom." ClassDojo is a giant leaderboard where teachers can





issue points or demerits for disciplinary reasons. Classcraft is a fantasy-themed “behavior and learning management role playing game” that’s structured like a free-to-play mobile game. Students earn “powers” (like eating in class) for good behavior. Bad behavior is represented as “damage” to the character. Teachers function like game masters in Dungeons and Dragons. Many of these apps can connect with students’ phones or tablets; some, like ClassDojo, publicly shame kids with parent-accessible leaderboards. Good and bad behavior are displayed for every student and parent to see.

“They are a fun facade that legitimize methods of surveillance,” argues Rowan Tulloch, a games studies professor from Macquarie University. He claims that apps like these serve the interests of institutions and capital more than those of students. By monitoring students, the apps try to quantify the qualitative experience of education and serve as proxies for administrators to discipline the unruly. Administrators aren’t evil (necessarily), they’re responding to the demands of an increasingly austere, test-heavy educational ecosystem. As a result, gamified apps are not systems that allow genuine self-empowerment or exploration; their purpose is to discipline workers or students into their roles within the institution. Students must play by someone else’s rules, or be punished.

THIS ISN’T THE FIRST TIME ADULTS HAVE TRIED TO control children by dominating games and play. In the first decades of the 20th century, progressive reformers and the child-saving movement adopted playgrounds as part of a suite of social reforms that also included labor laws and a separate juvenile justice system. At the same time, American cities grew rapidly, taking in immigrants from Europe and Latin America, African-Americans moving northward in the Great Migration, and rural Americans seeking jobs as agriculture mechanized. Consequently, the population of urban children swelled. Working-class children playing in the streets were a nuisance to traffic, and an object of racist and classist fretting.

The Child Savers demanded that philanthropists and city government set aside land for play.

They argued that playgrounds would bolster education, cognitive development, and produce good citizens. Reformers in Cleveland railed against “spare time” for children as a source of delinquency. Children could not be trusted to their own devices. Playgrounds should not just be built, but also staffed and supervised. Adults should lead the children in play and, in so doing, assimilate them into white American culture. More than that, play had to be engineered, optimized, and useful. According to technology historian Carroll Pursell, these reformers had a vision of shaping savage immigrant children into docile workers using the principles of “scientific management.” In the words of one reformer: “We want a play factory; we want it to run at top speed on [scheduled] time with the best machinery and skilled operatives.”

“Scientific management” was, essentially, just micromanagement and work speed-up practices elevated to a science. Managers would follow their employees around with stopwatches, haranguing them for inefficient movements or resting. This practice, based on the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor, is also known as Taylorism. From the turn of the century until the 1920s, Taylorists were in charge of the playground, directing working-class children in sex-segregated, systematized play. As

one might imagine, the children didn’t take to this, and either avoided playgrounds or ignored the shouts of supervisors. One 1915 survey from Hartford, Connecticut showed that only 4 percent of children tolerated the Taylorist playgrounds. The practice persisted until wartime austerity killed the public appetite for employing adults whose job it was to force children to exercise and also to maintain park equipment.

The digital gamification of school can be understood as a similar movement, capturing and domesticating the play instinct in schools. But unlike the Taylorist playgrounds of the turn of the century, gamification in schools is driven by austerity, not halted by it. Also, it doesn’t only target kids. Teachers are in the crosshairs as well. Gamified apps and ed tech more broadly are parts of the race to privatize schools, control curricula, and deprofessionalize teachers.

“When your school is under-resourced, the fast solution is to put a computer in front of kids,” said Merrie Najimy, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. She explained that cash-strapped schools are driven to maximize class sizes, and in some cases, this leads to computer-based instruction, complete with game-like skill challenges for the kids. Such a system, Najimy explains, turns teachers into proctors and troubleshooters, task-workers and mechanical turks, rather than the guides and facilitators of childhood education. This is the pipedream of educational “reformers” like Bill Gates or former U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan: a few teachers reaching thousands of classrooms over the internet, while schoolchildren are supervised locally by apps and proctors. “It’s the dissolution of the brick and mortar classroom,” she says.

This isn’t a lost battle. In an ironic twist for ed tech companies, austerity also makes it difficult for struggling districts to buy computers and stable Wi-Fi. The decentralized structure of the U.S. public school system coupled with bureaucratic and difficult procurement policies make mass adoption of any single tech platform difficult. The nonprofit Institute of Play and its spinoff game studio GlassLab—both funded by the Gates Foundation—closed their doors recently due to financial issues. The most successful players in the market, like Google, Kahoot!, and ClassDojo, have offered free software directly to teachers. It’s a distribution model not unlike that of social media: free services with hidden costs and unclear monetization schemes. Teachers’ unions are now all the more necessary; through organizing, unions can expose the hidden costs of these technologies.

“It’s our responsibility to stand up. To reclaim technology for use in ways that keep public schools public,” Najimy said.

Games, which have been with us since the dawn of time, can easily be used in ways that aren’t dystopian, no matter what kind of technology they employ. Teachers like Caleb Stokes or Professor Frierson demonstrate that using games as a point of discussion or as an exercise in design can work well in some educational contexts. Using games as team-building exercises—or as projects to provoke thinking about the nature of systems—can be very beneficial. Carefully-structured play exercises, such as those done at Quest to Learn, can also be useful tools for teaching. What doesn’t work is expecting a game or app to perform the act of teaching on our behalf. We cannot outsource the work of teaching to SimCity. We cannot expect an app to fix our educational ills. Games are limited. They are maps, not places; tools, not teachers. If we’re going to use them we need to make sure we aren’t being played. 🐙



public sector services

as private sector startups

In today's busy world, even the conveniences afforded by Silicon Valley's hottest startups seem to fall a little short. Your phone is loaded with apps, but you lack the peace and quiet of a good book or a patch of grass. There's bottled smart water on every street corner, but nowhere to fill a bottle you already have. You use Lyft so much that your transportation bills are insane. Your house is on fire, but you have a conference call in five minutes. What's a modern millennial to do? Thankfully, the tech industry is stepping in to provide the essential services that, until now, human civilization has been unable to provide.

shakespeare



Bookstores are disappearing, but millennials are increasingly seeking an escape from shortform, snackable, instantaneous media, craving the meditative peace that comes from reading a paper book. However, who wants to spend \$20 or more on a book they might only read once, if at all? This is where shakespeare comes in. The app allows you to borrow a book, for free, after a low membership fee of \$12.99 (charged monthly). Want to read in a quiet, peaceful setting? shakespeare has brick and mortar locations in LA, SF, and NYC, with comfortable chairs, desk space available for rent, and shelves of gorgeous print media for you to browse at your leisure. No homeless allowed.

Hoppr



Most cities have high traffic routes that are constantly hailing rides from Uber and Lyft. Wouldn't it be easier to just hop in a car that travels that route in a circuit all day long? The answer is Hoppr, the rideshare that's always on its way. Luxuriously elongated Hoppr cars run their routes 24/7, picking up and dropping off riders at designated stops for a low fee of \$7.99 a ride. Don't worry about tipping your driver: all of Hoppr's Rocks lease the cars directly from Hoppr itself, and need to work off their debt first before they're legally allowed to be tipped.

Tubular



Elon Musk's Hyperloop may be the current frontrunner in the tunnel-based transportation game, but Tubular is closing in fast. For a low monthly membership fee, Tubular's fleet of high-speed underground trains can take you anywhere inside a city, with service to all three affluent neighborhoods in NYC, LA, SF, and maybe even Chicago. Just swipe your TubeCard, travel down clean and brightly lit stairwells (no elevators—it's important to get exercise!), and board the Tubular train, which is patrolled by private security for your safety and comfort. Even better, your tracked rides add up in the form of TubePoints, which you can spend in our TubeStore on TubeSwag, like the limited edition SupremexTubular TubeCard, or a novelty wall print of each city's Tubular system. Tubular: it's the cool way to ride.

Sip



Ever been thirsty in a public place, but don't want to buy a whole new water bottle? You probably already have a reusable one in your fjalraven! For those environmentally conscious folks who care about climate change and don't want to add more plastic to the oceans, there's Sip. These trendy water kiosks are readily accessible in

parks, movie theaters, and public buildings. For a low unlock fee of \$1.99, you can fill up your environmentally-sustainable container with fresh, cool water. For added ease, Sip's facial recognition technology allows you to scan your face and access water in seconds—just download the app and pay your balance online. Your facial data will be sold to the security firms dedicated to keeping our southern border safe. So drink up—it's for a good cause!

Burnvictor



Is your house on fire? What a pain! You probably don't have time to put it out yourself, what with your busy schedule. Burnvictor (the opposite of a burn victim—you are NOT a victim!) will contact people in your neighborhood to come put the fire out for you. Sync the app to your smart door to give Burnvictors easy access to your home, without having to worry about the hassle of leaving a key or, even worse, having them smash your windows in order to save your screaming pets. Burnvictor guarantees that your fire will be put out with minimal loss of life, and if you aren't satisfied with your service, you are entitled to a \$49.99 mail-in rebate.

Enforcer



The whole institution of policing and the prison-industrial complex isn't "in" right now, but sometimes you still need an armed authority figure to get rid of a guy who's sleeping in front of your house. Luckily, Enforcer has a dedicated team of people who weren't accepted by the police academy ready to bust in and unleash hell. Our paramilitary staff of

probable psychopaths is passionate about law enforcement and isn't afraid to get their hands dirty. Note: Enforcer is not legally responsible for screening applicants.

Guarden



If you live in a city, you probably miss the great outdoors from time to time. Spending time in nature is shown to increase happiness, relieve stress, and possibly add years to your life. So, how can you access those benefits when you live in a concrete jungle? Introducing Guarden, your new members-only urban oasis. Guarden has bought a number of public nature areas and rehabilitated them, transforming shabby eyesores into sleek, sexy, sanctuaries. Just check in at the gate (15 feet high and electrified, for your privacy), scan your Guarden GreenCard, and return to the life-giving simplicity of Mother Earth.

Albert



Who has time to take trash to the dump? Not you, with your WeWork membership and the startup founder-boss who expects you to be at your desk 14 hours a day! Thankfully, Albert is there for you. Albert is the app that beckons Albert, a man with a car that already stinks, to your house where he fills his car with your trash and drives it to the landfill. Recycling costs \$40 extra. Note from the team at Albert: We would like to formally disavow the actions taken by Nate, the serviceman for our previous trash pickup app, "Nate." We did not know he was just throwing garbage into the river. Albert has promised us he won't do the same.

Gigg



Unemployed? Who isn't! With Gigg, the digital temp agency, you can jump into any of the jobs mentioned above. Were you rejected from the National Guard for being too violent? Join the team at Enforcer! Do you have a big jug of water? Become a Sip kiosk replenisher! Do you have a car, or are at least open to taking out a predatory loan to get one? Join the gang of Rockrs at Hoppri! Are you anywhere, and have some idea of how to put out a fire? Sign up to be a volunteer Burnvictor! The team at Gigg is dedicated to finding a place for you, because a person without work isn't a person at all.

PayShare



If you're having a hard time managing all your memberships, the good people at PayShare feel your pain. Sometimes, it's hard to deal with all those accounts, apps, and separate bills. It's especially inefficient given that many of your neighbors also take advantage of these same services, and struggle to keep track of all their payments too! With PayShare, this problem is a thing of the past. PayShare is working with local governments to implement a PayShare system in which everyone in a neighborhood chips in a low fee—far lower than individual memberships—to make access to services universal to all subscribers. It's a radical idea, but one that experts think may just become the hottest new trend.

by Emma Del Valle



GET IN, LOSERS, WE'RE DOING SOCIALISM

By Lyta Gold

IF I WERE TO TELL YOU “A GREAT DEAL OF AMERICAN television is dedicated to portraying the glories of capitalism and tearing down anything that looks like an alternative system” you would probably say “thank you, that’s the most obvious thing I’ve ever heard.” All the same, the third season of Netflix’s *Stranger Things* merits special mention, since it takes the love of all things corporate to a supersized extreme. Product placement crawls across the screen, more frightening and insidious than this season’s body-snatching monsters. A legion of “Evil Russians” (they are literally referred to as “Evil Russians”) builds a gigantic evil laboratory under a good, law-abiding, honest American mall. A 10 year old Black girl gives the following unlikely speech: “Know what I love most about this country? Capitalism. Do you know what capitalism is?...It means this is a free market system. Which means people get paid for their services depending on how valuable their contributions are.” *Stranger Things* has always been a Reagan-era nostalgia-fest, but usually referential to its popcorn-movie source material rather than a hammy reimagining of the time period itself. There’s no hint whatsoever of acid irony or critique: watching the third season of *Stranger Things* is the equivalent of bathing in the undesired sugariness of New Coke.

So you may be surprised to learn that the very same Netflix that brought us *The Plucky Mallrats* vs. *The Red Menace* has also created a show called *The Society*, in which a group of stranded teenagers—with hope, fear, clumsy wonder, and a lot

of mistakes—explicitly, directly, textually, try to do socialism. I mean it: they actually say the word “socialism” and it’s presented as something quite positive.

How can these two shows exist on the same streaming service? I suppose *The Society* is simply being paid for the value of its contributions to art. That being said, *The Society* is only a *good* show, not a great one; for starters, the title is too vague, and guaranteed to get buried in Netflix’s black-box algorithmic rankings, even though *Get In Losers, We’re Doing Socialism* was a perfectly available choice.

So how do the teens come to embrace socialism? It’s not, alas, through a student revolution planned in the cafeteria, but through a series of mysterious occurrences. First, a weird smell pervades a small upscale Connecticut town. Then the local teens are all bussed away for an overnight school trip. The trip is suddenly canceled; the teens are turned back and dropped off in the town square, only to find that everyone else is gone. No parents, no teachers, no younger siblings, no grandparents. The town is deserted except for the teens. All roads and train tracks heading out of town now end in a massive, eerie wood crawling with snakes. There’s still electricity and water—for now—and cell service, but the characters can only reach each other, not the internet or the outside world. Where are they? Is it a parallel universe? Why is all this happening? Who has done this to them? These questions are not fully answered in the first season, and they’re ultimately unimportant. In the tradition of what’s commonly called “soft” science

fiction, *The Society* is a thought experiment about power, gender, and civilization, with the mysterious premise serving mostly as a backdrop and a framing device.

HERE'S OUR THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: WHAT would happen if a bunch of mostly affluent Connecticut teenagers were suddenly forced to form their own society? On the opening night in their strange new town, the teens—not yet realizing that everyone else is gone forever—throw a dance party in the empty church. But once the full reality of their situation sinks in, there's lots of moping about and missing their parents. As boring as this is, it's appropriately realistic. These aren't just *any* kids, but the children of the upper middle class in a New York City commuter town (as one character says: "everyone's parents are lawyers. It's like a zoning requirement or something.") With a few exceptions, these high schoolers are bound for Ivy League universities and private liberal arts colleges. They don't really know how to let loose and have *real* fun, because they haven't been raised to have a good time. They've been bred as room-meat for the professional-managerial class order, which has suddenly vanished along with their parents. The sudden lack of social expectations throws them completely off-balance.

Cassandra, the student body president, initially attempts to instill a sense of social responsibility and communal effort. "There's no civilization here, not until we start one," she says. "So what are we going to do? First, I think we have no choice but to share. Share food. Share resources." She's joined in this effort by the only working-class character, the biracial orphan Will; and virulently opposed by the rich kids, led by the outrageously wealthy Harry and Cassandra's own sociopathic cousin Campbell. Harry and Campbell's position boils down to "keep what's ours"—that is, hold on to their private property (even in the absence of their parents or any other governing authority) at all costs. Harry, in an effort to impress his estranged girlfriend Kelly and convince her of the rightness of his ideology, shows her a stack of gold bars that his father put in a safe "in case things go to shit...You can't trust anybody. All you can do is have an advantage, and this is mine." Kelly, skeptically eyeing a gold bar, replies, "It's just a chunk of metal, Harry. I don't think that's gonna matter now."

At first, most of the teens follow Harry and Campbell's example, and anarcho-capitalism reigns supreme, with everyone just hoarding and hiding while the trash accumulates behind their houses. But 10 days of chaos culminate in a violent, drunken riot, with smashed windows and burned-out cars. Almost all the perpetrators are boys. The next day, Cassandra gathers the girls and organizes them into a socialist feminist liberation front. "Right now it's just pillage, but how long until someone's raped walking home one night and no one gives a shit because that's just how it is?" Cassandra argues. "Women aren't safe in a world that's run by brute force and stupidity. If we want peace, we need order. And to get order, we need to exert our power." From this

moment follows a delightful series of scenes, cutting from conversation to conversation across town, in which different groups of girls organize, recognizing their power ("We're like, half the town. Women. More than half, I think. I mean, if we all just said 'stuff needs to change,' would they be able to say no?") and discussing how to convince their boyfriends.

Interestingly, however, these grassroots feminist organizers are not the first characters on the show to directly say the forbidden word "socialism": that comes out of the innocent mouths of the jocks.

The jocks are easily the funniest characters in the show: I've transcribed their conversation in full, because it's great.

Jason: I've been thinking. What if we like, didn't... take stuff? Like food or whatever? Wouldn't be the worst thing in the world, right? Sharing? It could be like... *socialism*. There's no 'I' in team, right?

Clark: Erika give you that talk?

Jason: ... no.

Clark: Oh really? 'Cause Gwen said that exact shit to me last night. Lukey?

Luke: Well, it's not like it worked in China. Socialism...

Jason: It kind of worked. Everything's made in China.

Grizz (the smart one): China's a poor example. The party took complete priority over the workers. In reality, we've never seen a true socialist state.

Clark: Maybe all the Chinese women said they wouldn't put out unless the men got on board.

Jason (with horror): Gwen said that TOO?

(Jason, Clark, and Luke all take a moment to realize they are being Lysistrated).

Luke (after a pause): Well, socialism it is.

LETTING THE SILLY JOCKS INTRODUCE SOCIALISM by name, and agree to it reluctantly in exchange for sex—rather than having the earnest, organized girls declare themselves openly and seriously in

favor of socialism—feels like a deliberate narrative choice, and if it is, it's a clever one. Introducing socialism in an offhanded, funny way makes the concept more palatable to an audience that's been wired by decades of propaganda to see socialism as inherently dangerous and doomed. The script even brings up the classic "what about China/Venezuela/the Soviet Union" canard, but then allows it to be shot down by the well-read Grizz. This is simply not *done* on mainstream American television, or at least quite rarely.

Few reviewers grasped the significance of this socialist theme. One critic writes that the anger later directed at Cassandra by some of the boys "who blame her for their girlfriends' sudden unified assertion of power—[is] no doubt a pointed and intentional storyline in the aftermath of the 2016 election." This is a fascinating misapplication of the politics in play—Cassandra is doing *socialism*, deliberately and explicitly: organizing the other girls, instituting communal housing, communal dining, conserving the town's lim-

ited resources, and creating fair work schedules. There is nothing Hillary-like about her approach, her policies, or her ideology. Another review compares Cassandra to Elizabeth Warren. That's arguably a hair closer, but still entirely missing the point: the feminist empowerment of Cassandra and the other girls is inextricable from the socialist society they are forming; their socialism *is* feminism. Could you give an American audience, accustomed to a media diet of rah-rah capitalism and praise for patriarchal control, a show in which a united front of girls say directly "hey, we're going to do socialism?" Of course not; it would be interpreted as propaganda, whereas the third season of *Stranger Things* is 'just a show'—one in which capitalism, at every turn, just happens to be portrayed as an unadulterated good. So the boys of *The Society* say the forbidden word, jokingly; and the girls institute socialist policies, and the show challenges our conventional propaganda model subtly instead of too directly for comfort.

The burst of organization, activity, and creativity under Cassandra's reign doesn't last long. The rich kids grumble at the work schedules, but everyone contributes. The jocks are formed into the Guard, and are stationed outside the grocery stores (unarmed, but wearing intimidating letter jackets) to discourage looting. Since there must be roses as well as bread, Cassandra and Kelly organize prom. Everyone seems fairly happy—everyone, of course, except Harry and his group of malcontented rich boys, who have been forced to open their five-bedroom mini-mansions to their fellow students. In an ironic mirroring of the way Cassandra deliberately gathered all the girls together for socialist organizing, Harry casually summons a select group of rich guys to complain about the new feminist order. Kelly has officially dumped him because, as Harry claims, "she's just copying Cassandra...she wants to turn the whole world upside down." The conversation escalates into misogynist mudslinging at Cassandra's expense. A scrawny, background nobody named Dewey takes what he hears seriously and decides that something must be done. He shoots and kills Cassandra.

The death of the charismatic Cassandra throws the fledgling socialist order into disarray, and highlights one of the most thoughtful conceits of *The Society*: it portrays socialism as difficult, but not inherently impossible. There's a common right wing argument that socialism can't succeed because "human nature" (that clear, obviously-defined concept) naturally forbids it. As John O'Sullivan writes in the *National Review*, "Human nature is the set of hopes, ambitions, and ideals that explains why socialism succeeds politically, but also the hopes, ambitions, and ideals that explain why socialism eventually fails economically, socially, morally, and thus politically too." Accustomed to this right-wing framing, I fully expected that, at some point during *The Society*, a character would turn to

the screen and say, with wisdom and gentle regret, that socialism just can't work because of The Way People Are. But this never happens. The teens struggle with socialism, but their problems all descend from the inequalities, hierarchies, and technologies of violence they've inherited. Cassandra's unready younger sister, Allie, who is pushed into the leadership vacuum left by Cassandra's death, optimistically claims, "This [town] is a new place with no history." But she's wrong. Even these young, inexperienced people have brought their history with them.

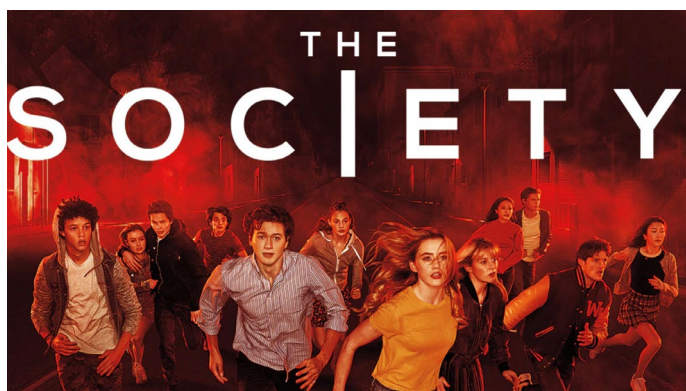
In the aftermath of Cassandra's murder, the immediate problem is gun violence: belying the myth that guns are a red state problem, this rich Connecticut town is filthy with guns. Even the pro-"socialism" characters can't extricate themselves from the history and imagery of institutional violence. When Allie and the rest of her council figure out who murdered Cassandra, the Guard tries to initiate a pre-dawn raid to arrest Dewey. But they have absolutely no idea what to do besides imitate SWAT/cop TV tropes, like kicking

down the door (and failing), and arguing over whether to read the suspect his Miranda rights. Jason says, "*Law and Order*, man. You don't read the bad guy his rights, he gets away like every time." Grizz retorts, "There's no more legal system, Jason! We're living in some sort of fucking black hole anti-universe!" Less humorously, Clark—the most sadistic and impulsive of the jocks—later

beats the shit out of the imprisoned Dewey, trying to get him to confess. But can you really blame Clark? He saw it on TV, in shows like *24* and movies like *Zero Dark Thirty*, in photos from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. The teens may have arrived in a black hole anti-universe, but all the evil came with them.

In addition to misogyny, the teens have also inherited racism. After Dewey is sentenced in the best imitation of a legitimate trial the teens can muster, he spews hatred: "Cassandra was a fucking bitch. So is her sister and her black boyfriend that makes all the rules." This is a reference to Will, who is just Allie's friend and like totally not even her boyfriend at this point, but the mere hint of miscegenation is enough to send Dewey over the edge. He didn't invent his racism or his misogyny, but learned it all from the old world. At the conclusion of his speech, he sounds exactly like a 4chan-inspired incel killer: "...the women here. Fucking bitches who won't give us the time of day, who think we owe *them* everything? I killed Cassandra for everyone, because she had it coming."

After Dewey's confession, Allie and the rest of the leadership council face a dilemma: what are they to do with him? They can't imprison him in a wine cellar forever. They have no knowledge of restorative justice. Rehabilitation never occurs to them; they simply don't have the education, the institutions, or the training. (Grizz, despite his broad humanities education, apparently hasn't



yet read Angela Davis or Mariame Kaba). All the teens know is coercion, authority, and the threat of violence. They execute Dewey in the woods.

From here, the teens devolve into semi-authoritarianism—often encouraged by Will, who obviously fears what will happen if the rich white boys get their power back. Allie is a weak, vacillating executive at first, and she's invested with too much power, reigning as a sort of uncertain quasi-queen. She lacks her sister's charisma, and also Cassandra's understanding of the collective nature of socialist power. Eventually realizing her mistakes, Allie does attempt to rectify the damage she's caused by opening up free elections, but by then it's too late; there's too much distrust of the violence she and her Guard have caused. But again, this is never framed, implicitly or explicitly, as "human beings must naturally devolve into authoritarianism." Time and again, the teens are portrayed as kids who are just trying to do what's right, despite the evils they've inherited, and the general lack of creative solutions available to them from the old world. A review in *Variety* insists that "despite—or maybe thanks to—their best efforts, [the teens'] attempts to make a revolutionary new order end up looking an awful lot like the more rigid, heteronormative one in which they all grew up." This is of course, *exactly the point*—it is very difficult for the teens to shed the awful attitudes they've been raised with. Grizz, who finally comes out as gay, says to Sam, his semi-closeted sort-of boyfriend, "We might be in a new fucking universe and we also might starve in here. How do you want to *live*, Sam?" He's referring to their sexuality, but also of course to the entire situation; the teens have arrived in a new world, and they can make choices. Those choices are constrained by the history of the old world they brought with them, but at the same time, they can still choose how they want to live.

THE REPEAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE show's depth by its critics are not surprising: its political orientation is atypical, and its admitted aesthetic flaws (too many characters, frequently portentous dialogue, a slow second half) obscure a lot of its real thoughtfulness and originality. What *The Society* is trying to do is fundamentally *hard*. It's asking a question many people are asking themselves right now, in a time of frightening upheaval: how *do* we want to live? And it's asking it in the context of emergency. The teens have arrived in a strange, unknowable world that could hurt them suddenly and inexplicably. In the longer term, their resources are also running out. The feeling of living in a familiar place suddenly turned dangerous and mysterious is a clear echo of climate change anxiety; by the end of the season, the teens have realized they will probably have to transform from comfortable house-dwelling suburbanites into grubby farmers. Their lives are going to be difficult, physically taxing, and utterly different from the ones their parents led. Judging by the current dire climate predictions and the difficulty of halting global capitalism's runaway carbon emissions, this is probably going to be the case for our real-world teens also.

This imagery seems worthy of serious critical engagement, but most reviews missed its impact entirely. In a *New Yorker* piece titled

"A teen dystopia but with, like, socialism," Doreen St. Felix displays a snotty disregard for both socialism and teens:

...there's an irrepressible optimism to this guilty-pleasure watch; the town-hall meetings, in which the kids earnestly debate the benefits of participatory democracy, gun restriction, and reproductive rights, would thrill Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Keyser [the showrunner] has described "The Society" as a "kind of post-Parkland conversation about what this generation of kids is thinking, and how they're interested in remaking the world in some ways." The writers have clearly read the polls and trend pieces that declare that "Young Americans are embracing socialism."

No worries, parents: socialism is just a phase, a market trend, a fashion. The kids will grow out of it, as they always do, as the hippies did. Like the father of the punk protagonist says in the movie *SLC Punk*, referring to his wild hippie past and currently respectable present: "I didn't sell out, son. I bought in." The kids will abandon leftism as they always do, once they've bought in. But grow out of it... into what? Buy into... where? What future, exactly, do you plan to sell to teenagers when scientists believe the planet could be reduced to a boiling stew in 30-40 years? Do you expect your kids will become respectable liberals or conservatives once they just settle down and own property? How and where on earth are you even expecting them to do that? As the YouTuber Hbombguy said in his hilarious rejoinder to Ben Shapiro's assertion that under climate change, people will just sell their houses and move: "Sell their houses to who, Ben? Fucking Aquaman?"

It isn't the Kids These Days who are foolish dreamers, soon to be disabused of their childish beliefs: it's their parents. Looking at climate projections, the rates of mass shootings, spiking economic inequality, and the rise of fascism worldwide, it's simply a fantasy to believe that the world will go on as it once did, that children today will grow up to live more or less the same lives as their parents. Teen-age activists are well aware of this. From Greta Thunberg to the Sunrise Movement to the Parkland teens to young BLM activists to the Gravel campaigners, there is a heartening rise in leftist organizing among the teens. Socialism is alive and well, and it's not going anywhere. At the same time, a terrifying number of other teens are attracted to fascism instead; the Deweys and the Harrys of the world are also probably not going anywhere. We're at a tipping point, and young people realize it, while too many older people think we can return to business as usual, the quiet, civilized brutality at the end of history. But the world has changed, and will not change back. The future may be harsh and mysterious and full of risk, but it's also rich with possibility.

At the end of the first season of *The Society*, we catch a glimpse of the parallel reality that the teens' vanished parents are still living in. To them, it's the children who have disappeared. Trapped in another dimension, the parents have no knowledge of the new world that the teens are inhabiting, the new civilization they're trying to build, the dangers and difficulties and losses they've encountered. But the teens, on Netflix and in real life, understand much better than the adults. We can't rely on the old hierarchies and established structures of the previous world: we have to choose, now, how we want to live. ✚



THE MAGIC OF MOTOWN

ELI MASSEY & NATHAN J. ROBINSON

It was an unfathomable number of great songs in a brief span of time. The “golden age” of Motown, from the Miracles’ “Shop Around” in 1960 to Marvin Gaye’s *What’s Going On* in 1971 was only 4,000 or so days. In those prime years, the label had over 100 Top 10 hits. In fact, the Funk Brothers, Motown’s in-house studio band, reportedly played on more No. 1 records than Elvis, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones combined. Even after the label left Detroit for Los Angeles in the early 1970s, never again reaching the same heights as it did during the “Hitsville” years, it was producing artists like Rick James, The Commodores, and DeBarge, and continuing to put out classic albums from Gaye and Stevie Wonder.

How great was Motown Records’ accomplishment during its golden era? It was stunning. In 1959, Berry Gordy, Jr., a 30-year old black songwriter and ex-boxer who had dropped out of high school, started a small record label with \$800 he had borrowed from family. Within a few years, Motown was regularly topping the Billboard charts, and introducing the world to Gaye, Wonder, The Temptations, The Supremes, Gladys Knight, The Four Tops, Smokey Robinson, and later the Jackson 5. By 1966, the company had over 450 employees.

Motown’s music has now seeped so deeply into our culture that it’s difficult to be appropriately amazed by it. But what a colossal achievement it was. First, it was a black-owned label, competing with—and beating—the New York and L.A. music industry. Motown changed American music forever, and its songs spread across the entire planet. When you visit “Hitsville USA” in Detroit, the site of the original recording studio, you realize that they were essentially operating out of a pair of single-family houses. It’s as if someone started producing dozens of No. 1 blockbuster films out of a warehouse in Cleveland.

What was happening in Detroit? All of those brilliant artists recording with the same musicians in the same place, putting out classic after classic. The band was tops, the songwriting magical, the voices the best in the world. How did it all happen? How could a sound, unlike anything else ever heard, spring up in a place for a few thousand days, then disappear? Could anything like this ever happen again?

Before thinking about what made Motown successful, it’s worth remembering what made the music so special. Go back and listen to the hits. There are so many to choose from, from the early girl-group sounds of “Please Mr. Postman” to the “psychedelic soul” of The Temptations’ “Cloud Nine.” They have in common a deceptive simplicity. They’re catchy and poppy, but when you break down what’s actually going on in a Motown song, you can hear how many elements had to fall into place. YouTube makes this easy: You can listen to Michael Jackson’s isolated vocal track, or one of James Jamerson’s intricate basslines. (One user has made remarkable extended versions of classic Motown tracks that allow for better appreciation of the components of a Motown song—you realize what an odd choice it was to put a bassoon on “The Tears of a Clown,” and yet it works. And you are bowled over by just how powerful Levi Stubbs’ screams for “Bernadette” were.)

The bass intro on “My Girl.” The drums that kick off “Nowhere to Run.” The way the Vandellas sing “Burning, burning, burning” in “Heat Wave” like they can feel the flames. The tambourine like a rattlesnake on “Heard It Through The Grapevine.” There’s a great deal of variety within certain fixed parameters: Nearly every Motown song is about love, and they’re almost all three minutes long and follow conventional pop-song structure, but you’ve got everything from sweet Diana Ross to The Contours’ wild and crazy “Do You Love Me.”

WITHOUT BERRY GORDY, JR. THERE could have been no Motown. The label's roster of artists included some of the most creative players and singers of the time, but Motown's success was not just due to its talent, but also its production process and organization. Gordy could be dictatorial in his governance of the label, and records did not get released without his personal approval. His standards were exacting, and songs would be reworked over and over again until he deemed them satisfactory. Gordy was also ruthlessly capitalistic, and numerous artists complained of the small proceeds they received for their labor. The Funk Brothers were decently-salaried during their hit-making era, but struggled financially later in life, without the cushion that could have been expected from Motown's vast continuing royalties.

Gordy's dominance in the company decision-making process was also arguably responsible for both Motown's ascent and its decline. Discriminating as he was, Motown released a *lot* of saccharine and forgettable music (see, e.g., "After The Showers Came Flowers" by Joanne and the Triangles). Browse the "Complete Motown Singles" collection and you'll find some truly embarrassing dreck, especially when the label tried to branch into country and rock music. Gordy was single-mindedly focused on maximizing sales, which meant that he frequently privileged commercial success above originality. For instance, when Motown had a big hit, songwriters would attempt to replicate the success by penning a follow-up in the same style, with a similar feel, e.g., Edwin Starr's only major hit "War" was followed up by the blatant rip-off "Stop the War." On top of that, Motown's roster would record different versions of the same song in order to maximize its chances of success—which is why there are so many Motown versions of, for example, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." (The Motown vault does have plenty of "should-have-been-hits" in it, like "Just A Little Misunderstanding" by The Contours and "I'm On The Outside Looking In" by Eddie Holland.) It's therefore fitting that the label was named after a portmanteau of "Motor Town," given that it often seemed to be structured more like a car manufacturing plant—churning out Motown-brand songs—than a creative artistic endeavor. Gordy frequently boiled music-making down into a formula. And he seemed to have internalized the ethos of the automobile industry that Detroit was built on.

Gordy's idiosyncracies and preferences also directly affected the music. Sometimes he would become infatuated with a woman and give her preferential treat-

ment. One reason The Supremes had so many No. 1 hits (12 of them!), and got the best songs written for them, is that Gordy was obsessed with Diana Ross, though she was never the most talented singer at Motown. Similarly, an unexceptional white singer named Chris Clark received unusual amounts of recording time because Gordy took an interest in her. But perhaps the most consequential move came with Gordy's wrongheaded decision to relocate the label to Los Angeles, and to send the Funk Brothers—the band that created the Motown sound—scattering to the wind.

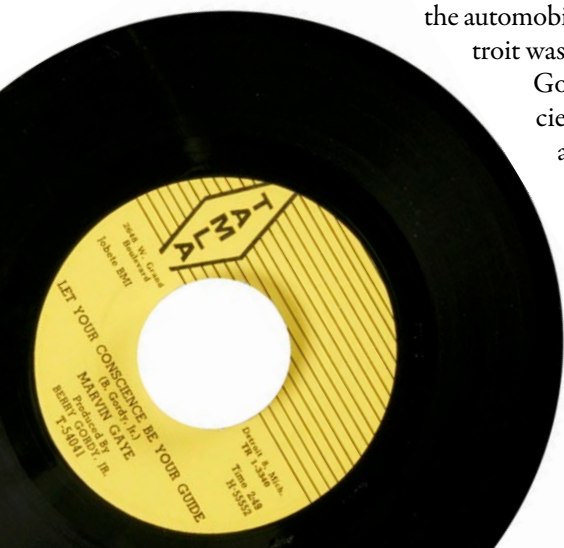
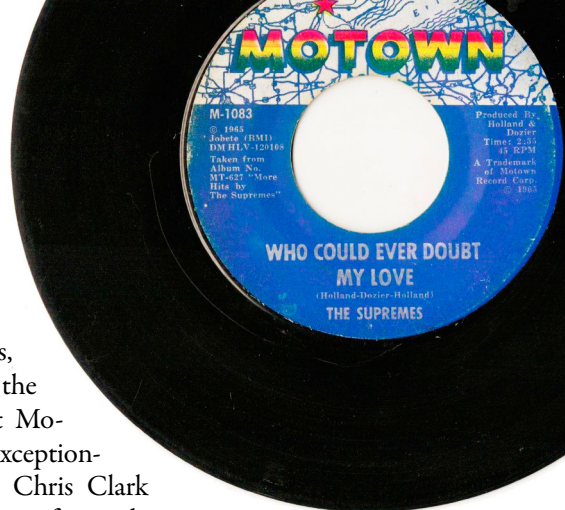
Gordy was also extremely cautious on matters of race. Early record sleeves did not show the artists' faces to avoid being categorized "race music" in Southern markets. Gordy was strongly concerned with the image the label presented to white music-buyers, even requiring etiquette coaching for the artists. The Funk Brothers had to bill themselves as The Soul Brothers because "funk" was too black. The assiduously apolitical Gordy was even reluctant to release Marvin Gaye's seminal record "What's Going On."

To what extent can Motown's success be attributed to Gordy? To be surrounded, as Gordy was, by some of the greatest musical artists of all time—like Wonder and Gaye—was this because Gordy himself turned these artists into what they were? Was he merely in the right place at the right time?

The question of how the "Motown magic" happened, and who caused it, is worth thinking about, because Motown raises some dilemmas about capitalism and workplaces. Does the ruthless pursuit of profit damage artistic innovation? In Motown's case, the answer was both yes and no. Yes, because it meant Motown songs were often formulaic. No, because they were also often incredibly good.

It's true that there happened to be a large number of gifted performers in the Detroit of the early 1960s. It was a musically vibrant place, and in some ways Motown captured on wax the existing culture. But it's also true that Motown was *built*, and its songs came through a *process*. A black-owned, largely black-run label like Motown—with in-house recording, musicians, producers, marketing, promotion, management, and more—was to a significant extent without historical precedent. There had been black record labels before. But Motown's achievement was pretty much unparalleled.

Of course, at a certain point, success bred further success. Some artists traveled to Detroit with the express intent of getting signed by Motown, or at least landing a songwriting position. Ashford and Simpson, for instance, who penned the Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell mega-hit duet "Ain't No Mountain





Hello I am a sentient bag of spiders formerly known as Beto O'Rourke

It's 6:00pm and the sky is already turning the color of push pops—a beautiful pastel orange floating above a sunflower horizon. I was Beto O'Rourke just five hours ago but then my buddy Greg came over with some 'shrooms and we took them. Now I am a sentient bag of spiders, but I still want to be your president.

Let me tell you something. Let me tell you this while I stand on a coffee table flapping my wings like the majestic condor I saw eating the sun a few minutes ago. I'm going to be president for the same reason that I started a punk band: because I will it to be true, and because it would be cool. No one from a punk band has ever been president and neither has a sentient bag of spiders. This is our time.

When I think of El Paso I think of time and how it sweeps through all cities, and bodies, and the very molecules that make up this great country of ours. Think about it: a molecule that was once part of Hitler's mustache might have just found its way into the burrito lovingly

crafted by a hardworking immigrant. That's what's going to bring us together. That, and health savings accounts.

In El Paso we have an army base called "Fort Bliss" named after Lieutenant Commander William Bliss, the son-in-law of President Zachary Taylor. When we—all the spiders in this flesh bag you still call Beto—become president, all the military bases will be called Fort Bliss. This will help our warriors stay mindful of joy and think consciously before engaging our enemies at home and abroad. I want every American soldier to know that the heaving mass of arachnids in the Oval Office cares deeply about their mental health.

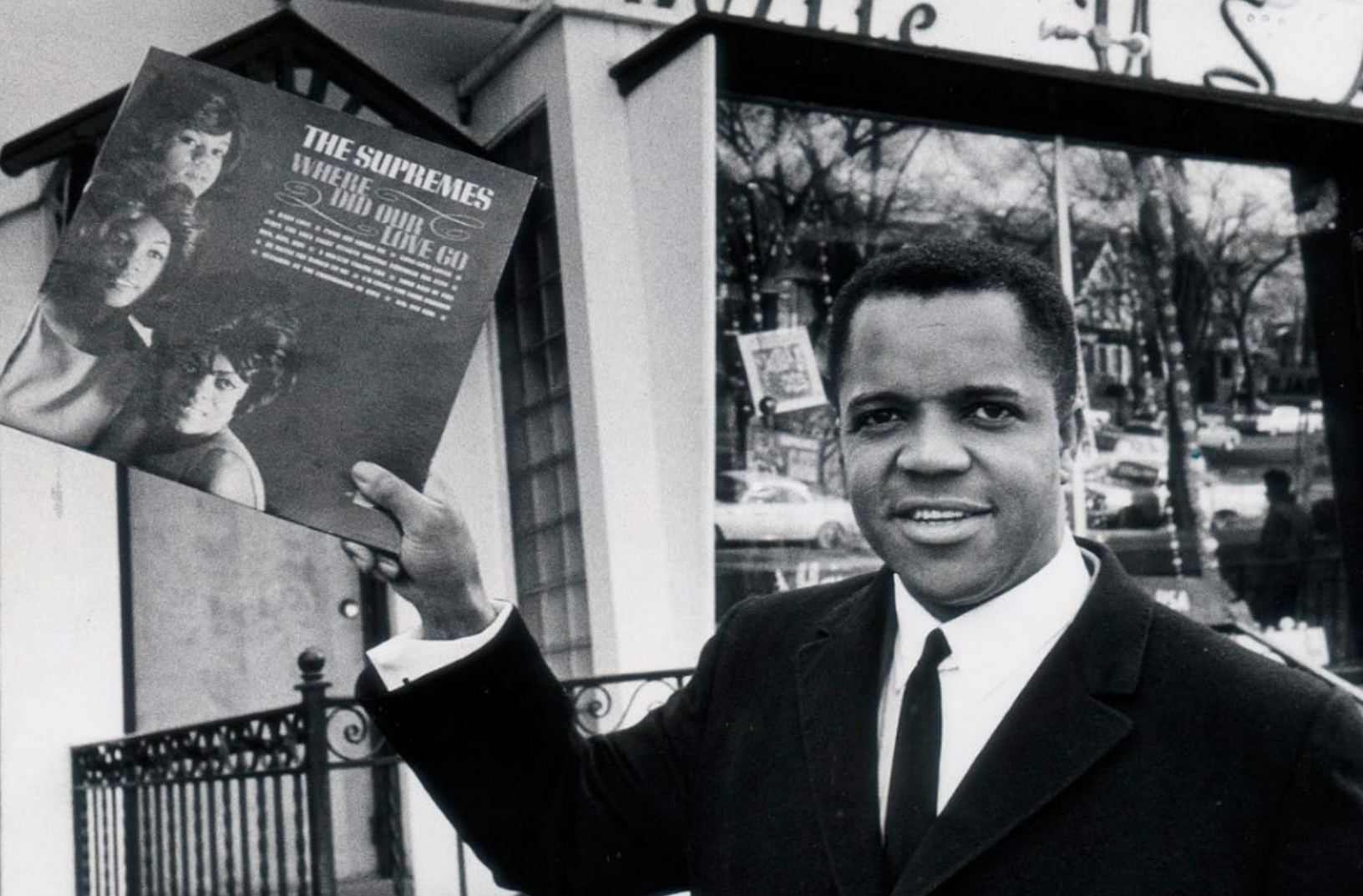
I am going to turn every post office into an Orange Julius. Man a Tripleberry Julius would be fucking choice right now...

Right now everyone is so divided. But no one is as divided as me, a self-propelled meat container of over 10,000 individual black spiders. Oh! One just had babies, so make that 12,000. Life is such a beautiful

curse; I want to engulf it with my children.

I met a nursing student at the University of Texas at El Paso who told me she wants to get her Nurse Practitioner degree so she can open up a clinic on the border and help her community. I think this is a beautiful expression of humanity's love. Which is why I will honor her commitment by erecting the most elaborate web of mean-tested educational tax credit incentive schemes and sticky protein fibers that the world has ever seen. Within it we will capture the greatest minds of this generation and approximately 10 billion house flies. I will eat all of them.

The smoke detector is going off again or I am dying so let me close by saying this: I may look like your average human, but I am literally a multitude of tiny spiders clamoring over each other in a vain attempt to escape this fleshy prison you call a body. It would be so rad if I could be your president.



High Enough,” traveled to Detroit with the song in their back pocket, as their “golden egg,” with the hope of using it to gain entrance into Motown. In this sense, there was an element of talent attracting talent, compounding Motown’s dominance.

The “snowballing” effect still doesn’t explain, however, just how Motown got the right people together and created the conditions for their talent to flourish. How rare are the “right people,” anyway? Is the chance of finding Robinson, Gaye, and Ross in the same city at the same time an incredible stroke of luck? Or did good management matter?

There’s no question that Gordy himself could be a visionary. He saw the potential in an exceptionally young Stevie Wonder, who had joined the label as a preteen in the early 1960s. Gordy spent years investing time, energy, money, and other resources in the precocious Wonder. In those early days, Wonder, a bit of a nuisance in the studio, was constantly pulling pranks, got into everybody’s hair, and was unable to produce a good follow-up to his first hit, “Fingertips.” Some Motown executives even considered ending his contract with the label. Nonetheless, Gordy afforded Wonder a significant degree of creative control, with little immediate payoff in sight. Wonder turned out to be one of the great musical talents of the 20th century, but it wasn’t until 1972—a full decade after his first

record—that he really began to hit his stride with the excellent “Music of My Mind.” Once Wonder got comfortable, he was unrivaled and peerless: One would be hard-pressed to name a solo artist with a five-album streak more perfect than “Music of My Mind,” “Talking Book,” “Innervisions,” “Fulfillingness’ First Finale,” and the creative zenith “Songs in the Key of Life.”

This happened in part because Wonder had a studio environment in which he could flourish. But we can imagine an alternate timeline, in which Stevie Wonder did not make it big. Dropped from Motown, he may have ended up busking on the street, if Gordy had not possessed the perspicacity and patience to nurture Wonder’s development.

It’s sometimes tempting to think that great artists would have made it on their talent alone, no matter what. But that’s not necessarily true—there are immensely talented musicians performing on street corners who will never gain wide recognition, and there are mediocre musicians who got a lucky break and became stars. Stephen Jay Gould once sagely quipped, “I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein’s brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.” The conventional conception of talent, genius, brilliance, and intelligence of some kind or other, is that the cream rises to the



Left: Berry Gordy wielding a Supremes record in front of Hitsville. Above: a congregation of Motown superstars. The Temptations, The Miracles, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes, Martha & The Vandellas

top: If you're exceptionally skilled at something, you will be recognized for it. But we know that this is false, and we can see this even from the life trajectory of Motown's geniuses. The Funk Brothers may have played on more hit records than the Beatles, Stones, Beach Boys, and Elvis, but most people have no idea who they are, let alone the names of the individual members. This likely occurred in no small part because their names were not even listed on their records until the 1970s, and the absurdly talented James Jamerson—whose iconic bass playing was a staple of the Motown sound—died tragically at age 47, reportedly penniless and in near obscurity.

THE MYTH OF THE ENTREPRENEUR IS THAT brilliant businessmen create the stuff we love, and should be thanked for creating jobs and innovations. The leftist counter-narrative is that workers create the stuff, and the businessmen squeeze the workers as much as they can. One can tell a story about Motown that emphasizes the genius of Berry Gordy in spotting talent, producing records, and running a label. But Motown also exploited its artists, and Gordy deliberately installed a white management staff above his mostly black musicians.

The question on everybody's mind, of course, is: Would Motown have been Motown if it had been democratically run? The Funk Brothers, for instance, who were big jazz fans, were never allowed to stretch their creative capacities—when Gordy granted them the concession of producing a record for themselves, he made sure it was just instrumental covers of Motown hits. Artists like Mary Wells and Florence Ballard fell out of favor and were unceremoniously left behind to struggle. An artist-run Motown likely wouldn't have lost its key songwriters (Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, who wrote everything from the Four Tops' "Baby I Need Your Loving" to the Supremes' "You Keep Me Hanging On," left in a dispute over songwriting royalties in 1967). Its mighty hit machine may have kept churning out classics well into the 1970s.

Then again, perhaps not. Perhaps without Berry Gordy's authoritarian leadership there would have been no Motown, yet the one-party Gordyist dictatorship was ultimately too erratic to last. Is this the way it was destined to be? Could Motown have lasted? Could there ever be another like it, a place and moment where just the right people are arranged in just the right kind of institution to produce such an achingly beautiful and original body of music?

About the structural sources of Motown's greatness, we can ul-

timately only speculate. Separately, though, we can still appreciate what a momentous artistic accomplishment the Motown canon is. If you're ever in Detroit, make sure to stop by Hitsville, the original studio, which is now an excellent museum. You'll realize just how little they were working with. Most of the great records were all recorded in *one room* by the same people, in an unassuming stretch of residential houses. How prolific they were! All the albums. All the singles. All the stuff that went *unreleased* and stayed in the vault. It is no exaggeration to say that Motown music is one of the greatest cultural triumphs in human history. And it was all produced outside the existing recording industry, by a black-owned company during the Civil Rights era. The Motown sound has become so familiar by now that it is impossible to hear the songs as they were heard when they were new. But if we try to listen with "fresh ears," we can be stunned all over again that we have such songs as "Ain't Too Proud To Beg" and "What Becomes Of The Brokenhearted," and grateful to whatever mixture of persons, invisible social forces, and sheer magic came together to bequeath us this treasure. ✦

ADDENDUM

If you look at the YouTube comments sections on Motown songs, you get an incredible peak into people's lives and memories. Many people comment on what the songs meant to them when they first came out, and how they associate them with loves lost and found, places they once danced, or people who have long since died. You will get a better appreciation of what this music has meant to the millions who heard it. A selection (copied directly as written):

The Temptations – "Since I Lost My Baby"

- "I was far, far away when she walked away, on the worst time of my day— Southeast Asia in the 60s. This song kept me going—I made it back home."
- "another great david ruffin song that helped me survive cruelty when i lived in hackney london in 1967 i didn't know this song was a Temptations song at the time"
- "This reminds me of skipping school & going over a friend's house & listening to The Motown Sound, always my first love!...making out with Ronnie Bernard....whose name was written over all my school books!!!!"
- "RIP Sonya manning my lovely wife. I miss you.i dedicate this song to you.i see you soon."
- "I lost my baby 8 years from Brain Cancer. Went together since Mackenzie High



School in Detroit 1967"
 — "this song remind me of my son Augusta James Williams III. He use to hate this song when he was alive. I wish he would come back and take this record off, do something, anything just to let know that he is still around me and able to make his presence known."

Martha & The Vandellas – "Jimmy Mack"

- "When this song came out, I went with a boy whose name is Jimmy Mack. Actually James but was called Jimmy..I kid you not. My girls and I would sing it when he came around. He's a top notch lawyer now married with grown kids."
- "I was teaching when this became a hit, and I had a student named Kathleen Mack. Guess what her brother's name was? I stayed in contact w/her for many years, thru her marriage & motherhood. Sadly, somehow we lost contact. I wonder how she's doing & where Jimmy Mack is!"
- "One of my wives favourite ,I bought this for her in our courting days .she used to change the "Mack" bit to my surname. She passed away very recently.I love you ,I miss you. Jimmy xxxxxx"
- "There was a guy named Jimmy Mack in my hood. Man, he thought he was the shit when this came out!! lol"
- "At AIT at Ft Polk North ('69) we had a bro in our East Coast Co. named Jimmy MacNamara - we played this until the grooves wore out! He didn't make it back - here's to you Jimmy Mac! U r etched in our souls!"

Smokey Robinson & The Miracles – "You Really Got A Hold On Me"

- "this song has so many memories for me even though I'm only 19... I remember when my mom, my little brother, and I would bake cookies in the kitchen (at midnight) after watching a bunch of Disney movies. We'd lipsync to this song and act like motown stars lol. Just dancing and having fun!"
- "This is so ,so funny now, my memories! I danced to Smokey's song," You really got a hold on me" at my sweet sixteen birthday party, many years ago. U Couldn't tell me then I wasn't in love with this young man, we danced all night . lol ! Those times for me were innocent special times , when you held each other close on slow records , kissed , had a little spiked punch then called it a wonderful night. lol !"
- "Oh the sweet and fun memories of my high school years...fun and full of dancing...we were Kansas city 2 steppin it to death...on this song we would be doing what was called the off-time 2 step! Life was so innocent and sweet. This is not Andres' response this is his mom. I AM 71 YEARS AND THIS SEEMS LIKE YESTERdAY"

Jimmy Ruffin – "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted"

- "Thats the year i lost the first girl i thought i really loved. She never knew how much i cared. I just kept the hurt inside. Her parents broke us up. I was 18 Im 70 now and i will never forget the hurt i felt."
- "Me and this young girl of 17 first met in skeggy in 1974 and danced to this record. We've now been married 48 years. I love her [to] bits."
- "love this song - but as I grow older and loved ones leave me too soon and often, my heart is heavier with each loss. But! I believe in living as best I can - grandkids, nature, lovely, loving husband (as our health declines we realize how much love we have for each other)."
- "When I was little I had trouble sleeping and would wake up in the middle of the night and turn on the tv because I was scared of the dark. We had \$10 cable so there wasn't much to watch. I started watching Motown infomercials and memorizing the samples of the oldies but goodies."
- "I was over in 'Nam when this song came out. It was my favorite song there. After witnessing the combat deaths of several of my buddies over there, I used to trod through the jungle and sing this song quietly to myself. It helped with the grief"
- "Salvatore, soon,we will be together. I have loved you since I was 13.it's 44 years now, and always will..we were meant to be together. You had my heart the first time I saw you. All these years later, you still do.Always, Naycee"



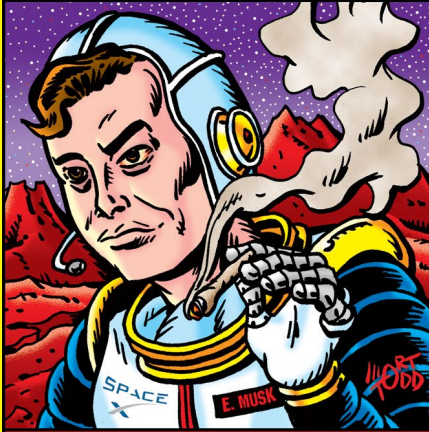
BONUS TRADING CARDS

TECH TITANS of TERROR



THE FACEBOOKWORM

TECH TITANS of TERROR



THE MARSMELLOW MAN

TECH TITANS of TERROR



THE RAYTERNAL

TECH TITANS of TERROR



CAPTAIN SEASTEAD

TECH TITANS of TERROR



ELIZABATHORY HOLMES

TECH TITANS of TERROR



THE AMAZON AVENGER

TECH TITANS of TERROR



JOBS ZOMBIE

TECH TITANS of TERROR



THE PRIVACY SNATCHER

TECH TITANS of TERROR



BLACK JACK DORSEY

BONUS TRADING CARDS

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Ray Kurzweil
Catchphrase: "Lo! The Mighty Singularity is upon us! Any day now you guys."
Power source: Flattering magazine profiles; credulous investors; 100 pills a day.
Biggest fear: Death; being found out.
Secret obsession: Writing YA novels that will convince the youth to alter their own biochemistry with nootropics they can buy directly from him.
Drug of choice: Alkaline water; GOOP magazine; Dr. Cadbar's Immortality Juice (\$500/liter).
Favorite animal (to pet): Bunny.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Bunny implanted with his father's memories (it won't stop running away).
Special equipment: Prognostibot 4000; cryogenic immortality tube (nonfunctional).
Weaknesses: Mortality.
Thinks the world will end in: A distributed network of self-replicating supercomputers from which the Rayternal's every thought will be pumped endlessly into everyone else's brains forever.
Threat rating: 4
Bio: Having been named a genius as a young man, the Rayternal has decided he knows literally everything about everything. No one has yet been able to convince him otherwise. On some level he's aware of his own fakery and mediocrity, but remains unable to consciously acknowledge it without complete psychic self-destruction.
Did You Know: Embodying a rare phenomenon known as a "reverse Cassandra," Kurzweil is incapable of making an accurate, important prediction but everyone believes him anyway.

THE RAYTERNAL

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Elon Musk
Catchphrase: "Buy low, tweet high, and don't tell the SEC! LOL."
Power source: Apartheid; emeralds.
Biggest fear: Death; factory uprising.
Secret obsession: Vengeance on Azealia Banks.
Drug of choice: For the love of god do not ever ask him about drugs.
Favorite animal (to pet): Muskrat ("get it? LOL.")
Favorite animal (to hunt): South African endangered black rhino.
Special equipment: Legion of nerds.
Weaknesses: Memes; social media; despite genius reputation is actually extremely stupid.
Thinks the world will end in: Networked statues honoring his Martian conquest accidentally animated by evil AI.
Threat rating: 7
Bio: Born the son of a humble South African emerald mine owner, The MarsMellow Man has risen to greatness on the hot winds of his own hype. Will he revolutionize the car industry? Will he make it to Mars? Or will he be finally revealed as so much smoke and mirrors? ("Smoke??? LOL.")
Did You Know: If you whisper his name in a mirror three times, one of his fanboys will apparate and debate you.

THE MARSMELLOW MAN

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Mark Zuckerberg
Catchphrase: "Trust me."
Power source: Every detail of your innermost life.
Biggest fear: Death; the gnawing void at the heart of himself.
Secret obsession: Eating the world.
Drug of choice: Stalking you.
Favorite animal (to pet): Farm animals.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Farm animals (eats only what he kills).
Special equipment: Stolen Hawaiian island.
Weaknesses: His face; his voice; his eyes; oh god his eyes; why are they like that.
Thinks the world will end in: His presidency.
Threat rating: 8
Bio: The scion of a wealthy Westchester family, the Facebookworm idly created a social media network to rate the hotness of his female peers. Nobody cared about this and thought he was a genius and a saint for a remarkably long time.
Did You Know: The Facebookworm is 76 percent responsible for your grandfather's belief that the Earth is hollow and inhabited by space Marxists.

THE FACEBOOKWORM

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Jeff Bezos
Catchphrase: "You can urinate on your own time."
Power source: Your Amazon Prime account; economic desperation.
Biggest fear: Death; the MarsMellow Man colonizing space before him.
Secret obsession: Turning every single worker into one of his SERFs (Specially Employed Replaceable Fixtures).
Drug of choice: Ill-advised dick pics.
Favorite animal (to pet): Snakes; lizards; all other bald, black-eyed, cold-blooded reptiles.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Mammals who just want to gather enough resources to feed their children.
Special equipment: The Washington Post; the idiot adoration of wealthy liberals; a working meat suit.
Weaknesses: Divorce.
Thinks the world will end in: The laser-guided missiles he's planning to launch from his colony on the moon.
Threat rating: 9
Bio: Now that he's destroyed the book publishing industry, the small retail industry, the big retail industry, your personal security, and his own marriage, Bezos is turning to the final frontiers: outer space, and also the last vestiges of human happiness.
Did You Know: Upon losing half his assets in the divorce (due to his own careless dick pickery), Bezos is worth only a disgustingly obscene and immoral amount of money, rather than a gobsmackingly depraved amount of money.

THE AMAZON AVENGER

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Elizabeth Holmes
Catchphrase: "Of course it works."
Power source: Blood; lies; other people's technology.
Biggest fear: Death; not being rich.
Secret obsession: Destroying John Carreyrou.
Drug of choice: It's red and rhymes with blood.
Favorite animal (to pet): Her werewolf familiar, aka an unhousebroken husky puppy.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Whistleblowing employees.
Special equipment: Black turtleneck; jeans; silk-lined cape.
Weaknesses: Sunlight; garlic; chemistry.
Thinks the world will end in: What she's brewing in her new secret underground cryptorium. You'll see. She'll show you. She'll show EVERYONE who's ever doubted her.
Threat rating: 5
Bio: Partly inspired by her obsession with Jobs, Holmes decided to Influence the World by stealing all of its blood. Its precious, beautiful blood, so red...sparkling like garnets, like pomegranate seeds, bursting glorious on the tongue—sorry, inserted safely into her blood-testing machines, which are completely benign and totally work.
Did You Know: While her company Theroanos is no more, the blood that Holmes has harvested from kidnapped virgins is the only thing keeping Henry Kissinger alive.

ELIZABATHORY HOLMES

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Peter Thiel
Catchphrase: "If I get the chance, I will kill every single person on this planet."
Power source: Apartheid; teen blood; human fear.
Biggest fear: Death; mockery.
Secret obsession: Inverting his body into an immortal, unkillable black hole.
Drug of choice: Destroying media outlets.
Favorite animal (to pet): Boston Dynamics robo-dog.
Favorite animal (to hunt): The most dangerous game.
Special equipment: Functional palantir (Minas Ithil).
Weaknesses: Vanity; humorlessness.
Thinks the world will end in: Himself.
Threat rating: 10
Bio: Captain Seastead's origins are shrouded in mystery, but it's believed that he fled the destruction of Atlantis (he caused it) and has been attempting to recreate an artificial version of the island for centuries, only with himself installed as Eternal-God-King-Technomancer-of-the-Seven-Seas-and-the-Saltwater-Lakes-and-Certain-Selected-Ice-bergs. Don't laugh. There's nothing remotely ridiculous about him.
Did You Know: Just by reading this you are already on his nano-drone murder-list. Sorry!

CAPTAIN SEASTEAD

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Jack Dorsey
Catchphrase: "It's not my fault."
Power source: Your inability to fucking log off.
Biggest fear: Death; being criticized by white supremacists.
Secret obsession: Conquering his own body by destroying it.
Drug of choice: A fermented plant-based ooze prescribed by Dr. Cadbar that is now weeping darkly from his pores.
Favorite animal (to pet): None, animals carry germs.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Raw water.
Special equipment: Black turtleneck; haplessness.
Weaknesses: Protein deficiency.
Thinks the world will end in: A dark tide of fermented plant-based ooze that he cannot stop but only accept, much like the Nazis.
Threat rating: 5
Bio: Like a venal and mediocre Dr. Frankenstein, Dorsey is a perfectly ordinary guy who just wanted to cash in on the tech boom but ended up creating an addictive monster far beyond his capacity to understand or control.
Did You Know: You really can log off any time you want.

BLACK JACK DORSEY

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Eric Schmidt
Catchphrase: "Let he who is without sin build an impenetrable sex fortress of his own."
Power source: Relative obscurity; impenetrable sex fortress.
Biggest fear: Death; having his privacy invaded.
Secret obsession: Invading everyone else's privacy and blaming them for it.
Drug of choice: Helping Google avoid paying taxes in the name of capitalism.
Favorite animal (to pet): The digital ghost of your favorite pet, whose name he knows is your password.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Did he mention that his \$15 million, 6,000 square foot sex penthouse is totally soundproof?
Special equipment: Glasses; bland demeanor; approval of centrist Democrats; philanthropic projects obviously leveraged as cover.
Weaknesses: Doesn't possess the pure sociopathic evil of many of his peers.
Thinks the world will end in: Alphabet's acquisition of the Earth's core, which will trigger a meltdown due to Earth's natural antitrust laws. Nothing can be done to prevent it; Schmidt is just following the dictates of capitalism.
Threat rating: 4
Bio: Schmidt was born entirely free of ideology. If you read ideological imperatives into his work, well then you simply must be jealous of his success.
Did You Know: When he worked at Sun Technology Enterprises, Schmidt was frequently the target of office pranks. This is because everyone hated him.

THE PRIVACY SNATCHER

TECH TITANS of TERROR



Alter ego: Steve Jobs (deceased)
Catchphrase: "Mmmmmmmrrrrggggg-hhhhhh."
Power source: Eldritch energy from idolatrous Apple worship.
Biggest fear: Death (second one); having to interact with his own children.
Secret obsession: Creating a perfectly sleek phone with no ports or buttons, just an endless screaming screen.
Drug of choice: Shooting at employees, friends, and family.
Favorite animal (to pet): Plain white box.
Favorite animal (to hunt): Suicidal factory workers.
Special equipment: Black turtleneck; jeans; stench of formaldehyde.
Weaknesses: His own appalling personal cruelty; hunger for brains.
Thinks the world will end in: Planned obsolescence.
Threat rating: 8
Bio: Jobs Zombie died and was resurrected through the occult intervention of the high-budget biopics created in his honor. He is the patron anti-saint of bad bosses and professional hype men who actually contribute very little to the inventions attributed to their genius.
Did You Know: Jobs named a computer after his young daughter, Lisa, and then told her it wasn't really named after her because he was an asshole.

JOBS ZOMBIE



we need more

PUBLIC MONUMENTS *to*

ANIMALS

by ERICA X EISEN

IF YOU'VE NEVER BEEN TO THE POLAR MUSEUM IN Cambridge, I highly recommend it. As its name suggests, the museum is devoted to the history of life in—and exploration of—the North and South Poles. One of the museum's most striking objects, however, isn't within the building but just outside the entrance. It's a bronze statue of a husky, made to commemorate the countless teams of dogs who contributed to exploration efforts, both by pulling heavy sleds across the ice and later, more grimly, being slaughtered for food.


The husky statue at the Polar Museum isn't the only example of a memorial to non-human accomplishments. In London, pilgrims to the house of the writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson can see a statue of his cat Hodge—"a very fine cat indeed," according to its pedestal—in the courtyard outside. The statue comes complete with a QR code that, when scanned, plays an audio file of the cat "talking." "I am quite the feline

celebrity," the "cat" purrs, musing about his preference for fresh oysters and his personal vendetta against James Boswell, Johnson's biographer. Visitors to the always-crowded Shibuya Station in Tokyo frequently use as a meeting point the famous statue of Hachiko, the Akita dog who came to the station to "greet" his master for years after the man's death. Similar statues have been unveiled at Tokyo University and in the northern Japanese city of Odate, commemorating Hachiko's enduring status as a symbol of unwavering loyalty.

These examples stand out in my memory not only because I find them touching but because they are the exception to the rule: though the lives of humans and other animals have been enmeshed for millennia, our urban landscapes acknowledge this bond only infrequently. This lacuna, I would argue, helps both to perpetuate an anthropocentric view of the world and to shield widespread mistreatment of animals from view. A cityscape that



makes radically visible the bond between animals and humans would be one step towards the creation of a more just relationship between different constituents of the animal kingdom.

HEN DONE WELL, MONUMENTS act like a weight placed in the spacetime of a city. They make us move a little more slowly, make us stop. They link remembrance of the past to reflection on the present to possible resolution for future action. They can be wildly creative in form and content; they can offer space for high-energy public demonstrations or solitary, silent thought. As monuments keep both the good and the bad of history alive in the memory of the living, the choice of who and what gets memorialized—and in what fashion, and at what cost, and on what scale, and in what proximity to major population hubs and power centers—is an inherently political one that reveals the narrative and moral priorities of a society and its government. Nor is a monument's political significance set in stone once the sculptor has laid down their chisel. Monuments can be reinterpreted, moved, or physically altered: the Egyptian obelisk colloquially known as “Cleopatra’s Needle” was originally carved on the orders of Thutmose III. 200 years later, Ramesses the Great added in his own inscriptions, and some three millennia after that, the obelisk was shipped to England to commemorate Nelson’s victory at the Battle of the Nile. In the most extreme instances, monuments can be toppled or destroyed, marking the end of an old era and beginning of a new one. It’s no coincidence that monuments depicting people are often defaced by beheading or scratching out the eyes, acts of symbolic destruction that indicate how we implicitly view these inanimate objects as, in some way, alive.

Yet the fact remains that the vast majority of public monuments we’re likely to encounter in our cities are conservative both in form and in content. When I think of public statues, for instance, the image that comes to mind immediately is that of conquering generals on rearing steeds, or else somber portraits of political leaders, their pasts littered with varying numbers of hideous crimes. Across the American South, monuments to Confederate generals—many of which were put up at the beginning of the Jim Crow era and at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement—continue to scar the built environment. In London’s Parliament Square, Winston Churchill (much-romanticized hero of the Blitz whose culpability in the Bengal Famine has somehow gone overlooked) stands on a plinth giving a bulldog glower, while not far off Oliver Cromwell (widely considered to have committed ethnic cleansing against Catholics in Ireland) looks down at viewers from his spot outside the House of Commons. As well as a readily perceptible anthropocentrism, this tendency in monument-making reveals a sadly constricted idea even of *human* history, one

that clings, limpet-like, to the much-critiqued “great men and battles” approach but leaves little room for the victims of these public figures and their policies, or the full living texture of events as experienced by most people.

Creating monuments to ordinary life and to animals is one means of escaping this framework: it centers not the “great” but the small, challenging viewers simultaneously to accommodate these usually unrecounted stories into their conceptions of history and to reconsider the preeminence of these so-called “great men of history.” To be clear from the start, there are plenty of groups besides animals who are also deserving of memorialization and whose suffering, history, and contributions remain persistently unacknowledged. I am in no way arguing that animals deserve monuments *instead of* marginalized or oppressed people—quite the opposite. Instead, I see discussions of memorializing animals as a way of opening up our thinking about memorials in general: what memorials do, who they’re for, why they exist, and what they look like.

One argument for the importance of creating animal monuments is that they would make the usually unseen labor of animals visible. If there are huge arenas of human endeavor that are under-visible and invisible—and these too are deeply deserving of proper recognition, remuneration, and commemoration—then the labor of animals goes even less acknowledged. But it is impossible not to concede that the sweat, suffering, and even death of animals is inextricably bound to every human pursuit in one form or another. Animals have been used to test medicines, deliver treatments, and even serve as therapies themselves. Their fur has given painters brushes; their flesh has given painters pigment binders. Their intestines have been used to string lutes and tennis rackets alike. Their skins clothe us and bind our notebooks and provide fashionable rugs. They have carried us and our possessions for millennia; they have uncomplainingly pulled our plows and ground our flour. They have been raised in indescribable conditions for the purpose of providing non-vegetarians with protein. While many this year celebrated the anniversary of the first human trip to the moon, numerous animals preceded people to space, many of them never to return. This is far from an exhaustive list, but even this partial catalogue of the crucial ways in which animals have made possible human life and human achievement would seem deserving of many monuments the world over.

Another quite simple but (to me) quite compelling reason to push for such monuments is that they make the urban landscape more joyful. As art and ornament generally render public buildings and open spaces more pleasant and welcoming, so too would art and ornament dedicated to beloved species create cities whose public works are imbued with a spirit of compassion and love. The aforementioned example of the statue of Johnson’s cat may have been silly—albeit deliberately so—but several months after I saw it, it’s stuck in my mind far more firmly than the myriad strong-jawed orators whose bronze effigies I no doubt passed by during the same time period. Encour-

aging the creation of diverse and whimsical commemorative works would bring us cities that are more memorable, more exciting to explore, and better able to channel a sense of compassion for all forms of life.

Beyond these major collective contributions, there is also the question of individual social bonds between animals and humans. It seems unfashionable to speak openly about the love one feels for other species; it's difficult to do so without being accused of being mushy, or softhearted, or sentimental, or (if you are a woman) a "cat lady" whose affections are both misplaced and unhinged. In pop culture, animal rights activists and vegans are frequently depicted as uptight, humorless, and ultimately wedded to foolish convictions. Yet I feel a deep and abiding love for animals and sincerely believe that they have many virtues to teach us as people. There are numerous animals—from the pet dogs who pushed me in my swing as a baby to the cats who ran to the door when I came home from school to countless wild, domesticated, and zoo animals—that have touched my life deeply and whom I feel grateful to have known. I know I am far from the only person to feel this way, and to me it follows that so positive an impact upon the arc of human existence is more than deserving of public commemoration.

It might be argued by skeptics that building monuments to animals would give humans the undeserved warm fuzzies of having Done Something when it comes to countering animal mistreatment, habitat degradation, poaching, pesticide usage, climate change, and the other myriad ways that we humans deleteriously affect—and indeed often end—the lives of animals, allowing us to feel better about our role in the world without actually materially bettering the circumstances of species we have and continue to profoundly wrong. But I would argue that a memorial is not necessarily an act of hand-washing: when executed thoughtfully, monuments can be radical, even confrontational. Building such monuments would not absolve humans of cruelties committed against animals, just as Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial, a gash in the Earth at the heart of the American capital, does nothing to absolve the country of the sins of that war or the politicians who waged it. But they could invite precisely the conversations that—ideally—would help to ensure that such treatment ceases in the future.

BUT WHAT PRECISELY DO I MEAN BY AN animal monument? Public artworks that depict animals can be divided into several categories. At one end of the spectrum lie monuments that portray animals as accessories or side characters in statues otherwise dedicated to humans. The city square statue showing an 18th-century general on a cantering horse is in no real way about the stallion (though the equine component of the statue may dwarf the human one) except as further proof of the rider's grandeur and social status. There are also statues of animals that depict without commemorat-

ing—pieces whose sole purpose is decorative (and that defined loosely). As in the case of Australia's Big Merino or Denver's Blue Mustang (also called "Blucifer" due to its terrifying red eyes that glow in the night and the fact that it murdered its creator), these can sometimes be more disturbing than thought-provoking. Another category of monuments are those that focus on animals but do so only in a symbolic capacity. The bronze bees that dot Manchester are symbols of industry and evocations of the city's history as the cradle of the Industrial Revolution and mechanized textile manufacturing. The Capitoline wolf that suckles Romulus and Remus may arrest viewers with her bare-toothed grimace, but the real subject of the piece is not the she-wolf nor the babies she feeds, but the city they would go on to found. Here, animals are used as types, mined for their cultural associations rather than for their individual or collective contributions to the world. This is not to say that these kinds of sculptures are *bad*, per se—merely that they do not represent the kind of artistic engagement with animals that I am interested in here.

A step further in that direction are monuments that honor animals who have benefited a human or humans in some way. This can come in the form of heart-warming stories of animal-human bonds, such as the aforementioned case of Hachiko or the similar story of Greyfriars Bobby, a terrier who stood guard by his master's grave in an Edinburgh churchyard for 14 years before his own death. In other cases, these monuments can be collective. Both Ottawa and London have monuments to animals who died in warfare; the moving inscription on the latter reads:

They had no choice... Many and various animals were employed to support British and Allied Forces in wars and campaigns over the centuries and as a result millions died. From the pigeon to the elephant they all played a vital role in every region of the world in the cause of human freedom. Their contribution must never be forgotten.

These monuments are in certain important respects seriously flawed—any text that refers to British colonial violence as "the cause of human freedom" is supporting a deeply revisionist understanding of history—but what interests me (in a positive way) about the above example is the inclusion of the phrase "they had no choice," which seems to ask readers to reconsider the unfairly coercive relationships between humans and animals, a dynamic that is often taken for granted when we accept humans as the pinnacle of evolution to whom the rest of the world is gifted wholesale. This kind of acknowledgment paves the way for public monuments that recognize and ask us to remember historic acts of state coercion and force that have had violent consequences for both humans and animals.

Another notable (and frankly very funny) example of a tribute to animals is the Boll Weevil Monument in Enterprise, Alabama. Prior to the monument's construction in 1919, local farmers had relied on a monoculture of cotton, but the arrival of the weevils resulted in major losses. This in turn led the farmers to begin exploring different kinds of crops, which

had the effect of making the soil healthier and their planting practices more sustainable. To honor the pest that inadvertently transformed the local agrarian economy, the town created the monument, a woman in Grecian dress, eyes downcast, who holds aloft a massive weevil, its signature snout drooping with great dignity. An inscription on a nearby sign reads, "In profound appreciation of the Boll Weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity this monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama."

THAT BEING SAID, WHEN WE LOOK AT MOST extant animal memorials, it's clear that virtually all were created to recognize a service that animals have rendered to a human or humans. Monuments that recognize the animals killed in wartime, or animals tragically mourning the deaths of their owners, or animals whose owners are important historical figures, are still in some important sense attached to people. They measure the degree to which these creatures deserve public commemoration with the yardstick of their utility. What other kinds of animal memorials are possible?

A further type of monument we might imagine—one that finds increasing relevance, unfortunately, with the unchecked advance of climate change—is a memorial that mourns the loss of biodiversity and attempts to reckon with human culpability in our current mass extinction. An example that stands out is David Adjaye's Mass Extinction Monitoring Observatory (MEMO), a memorial not to the animals who have died in battle but those that have been trampled, killed, and starved during the normal course of human events. When finished, MEMO will perch atop the rocky cliffs of the Isle of Portland, taking the form of a spiraling tower that calls to mind Brueghel's vision of Babel. Each of the almost 900 species that have gone extinct since the dodo will be remembered with an individually carved stone (with space left for inevitable future additions). A bell at the center of the tower will toll solemnly with each new extinction. Tentatively slated for completion this year, the monument is arguably the most significant architectural articulation of grief and guilt for the crimes of the Anthropocene.

Another vision of the animal monument is one that honors species not merely because they have rendered a useful service to us, or because we feel awful for destroying them, but simply because they are a unique form of life deserving contemplation. The fact that the vast majority of extant animal monuments are related to domesticated species shines a bright light on our anthropocentrism, asking us which species we value and why. The species and individual animals we choose to immortalize in public sculpture reflect where our moral priorities are and how we think about ourselves in relation with other forms of animal life. Along these lines, I would push strongly for a vision of the animal memorial that does not confine itself to the cute, the cuddly, the doe-eyed, and the familiar. I would

encourage sculptors and architects of such works to conceive of animal monuments that are dedicated to strange creatures, or rare creatures, or little-known creatures, or creatures that can create no possible economic value for humans. In broadening their vision of what is worth memorializing beyond not only humans but the disproportionately thought-about charismatic megafauna, artists will be challenged to bring into their sphere of moral vision an ever-greater and more diverse range of non-human species. In the same way, viewers who pass through parks and squares dotted with commemorations honoring mules, storks, spider monkeys, mantis shrimp, mola molas, dugongs, horseshoe crabs, and yes, boll weevils, would be tacitly asked to reflect upon the dignity and worth of species they may never encounter and rarely think about. In this way, animal monuments would transform not merely the physical landscape but the emotional one as well, paving the way for a city whose occupants are more empathetic and attuned to the needs of those beyond themselves.

Animal monuments of this type have the potential to open up the broader question of how we can pay artistic homage to things that are not human—to forests, to rivers, to languages that have died, to the darkness of the night sky prior to the invention of the light bulb. If monuments in the urban landscape represent nodes of memory, reflection, and action, then a repertoire of monuments that consists so heavily of battle commemorations and busts of politicians not only fails to live up to the radical potential of the genre—it also largely lacks any engagement with the space around it. One element of the monuments of the future should be a foregrounding of the ways in which our cities have been made, an understanding that monuments can serve not only to pull us out of time and place but also to engage us more deeply with our surroundings, to make us contemplate the what and why and how of our cityscapes. It can include some measure of environmental offsetting as well—monuments, after all, need not come in the form of bronze statues but can also encompass memorial forests, greenways, carbon capture projects, rewilding initiatives, and other projects that seek to redress some of the grievances we as a species have committed. An urban landscape that actively remembers the trees and animals, the populations and species that have been part of its creation would pave the way for a more humane future for all forms of life. ✦



ARRANGED GEOMETRICALLY







The World Of WODEHOUSE

by BRIANNA RENNIX and NATHAN J. ROBINSON

IT IS A PLACE WHERE NOBODY EVER DIES, but neither do they have sex. It's a land of crumbling stately homes, shady garden paths, sleepy villages, country pubs, wood paneled smoking rooms, and well-appointed bachelor flats. It is in England, even when it's supposed to be America. It's a gentle place, where the worst that can happen to you is that you fall in a lake while wearing your spats. Breakfast is toast and marmalade, perhaps with an egg, plus a strong pot of tea. Everyone is at least comfortably well-off, though inexplicably nobody ever seems to have any cash on hand—leading to constant fretting and attempts to borrow a tenner to put on a horse. People get into scrapes, perhaps involving the purloining of a ghastly antique, or the impersonation of an earl, or an attempt to thwart an undesirable engagement.

Nothing in this world ever changes.

P.G. Wodehouse wrote about 90 books in his lifetime, and it's likely that he would have continued to crank them out indefinitely if he hadn't finally died at age 95. He is, to those who love him, the finest writer of comic prose in English. His more cultish devotees call him "The Master." But his work is also defiantly "old-fashioned," repetitive, and frivolous. It contains no biting satire, no real depth of feeling. It is the most gentle sort of humor imaginable, free of even the lightest innuendo. How to convey, then, the peculiar joy that comes with entering the World of Wodehouse.

The first point to make in his favor is that Wodehouse had a spectacular, possibly unequaled, talent for writing interesting sentences. It is hard for a writer to be truly original, to avoid drawing from the common stock of prefabricated clichés. But a page of Wodehouse overflows with original and memorable phrases. Bizarre similes, for instance, are littered casually throughout his stories. A few selections:

✦ *"The Duke puffed at his moustache approvingly, so that it flew before him like a banner."*

✦ *"She looked at me like someone who has just solved the crossword puzzle with a shrewd 'Emu' in the top right-hand corner."*

✦ *"He looked as if he had been poured into his clothes and forgotten to say 'when.'"*

✦ Upon touching a cold slice of tongue in the dark: *"To say that Baxter's heart stood still would be medically inexact. The heart does not stand still. Whatever the emotions of its owner, it goes on beating. It would be more accurate to say that Baxter felt like a man taking his first ride in an express elevator who has outstripped his vital organs by several floors and sees no immediate prospect of their ever catching up with him. There was a great cold void where the more intimate parts of his body should have been."*

✦ *"Of Mrs Twemlow little need be attempted in the way of pen-portraiture beyond the statement that she went as harmoniously with Mr Beach as one of a pair of vases or one of a brace of pheasants goes with its fellow. She had the same appearance of imminent apoplexy, the same air of belonging to some dignified and haughty branch of the vegetable kingdom."*

✦ *"Her glance softened. An instant before she could have been mistaken for a rattlesnake about to strike. Her air now became that of a rattlesnake which is prepared to reserve its judgment till it has heard all the facts."*

People who love Wodehouse love him in part because no other author would think to introduce a character thusly: *"[T]here entered a young man of great height but lacking the width of shoulder and ruggedness of limb which make height impressive. Nature, stretching Horace Davenport out, had forgotten to stretch him sideways, and one could have pictured Euclid, had they met, nudging a friend and saying, 'Don't look now, but this chap coming along illustrates exactly what I was telling you about a straight line having length without breadth.'"*

The old hackneyed phrases are constantly played with and inverted. Of an unsavory character, Wodehouse writes: "He was grim and resolute, his supply of the milk of human kindness plainly short by several gallons." Jeeves, the omniscient valet, does not come and go from rooms, but instead *shimmers, materializes, floats, drifts, or trickles*. Strunk and White's famous dictum, "Never use a long word when

a short one will do” does not apply. Instead Wodehouse’s rule seems to be “Never use the standard expression for something if you can think of something more vivid.” An old man is a “whiskered ancient.” A problem didn’t “eat at him,” it “gnawed the vitals.” Or the unique coinages: “I have been in some tough spots in my time, but this one wins the mottled oyster.” Who on earth says this?? And who but Wodehouse would title one chapter in a book “Almost Entirely About Flower-Pots” and follow it immediately with one entitled “More On The Flower-Pot Theme”?

Most of Wodehouse’s best-known novels are set in a bucolic Britain of country houses and castles. They have terraces, smoking rooms, libraries, and smoothly-shaved lawns. There is an atmosphere of leisured coziness: of scrumptious cake, summer flowers, and perfectly-mixed cocktails. There’s a heavy dose of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Pickwick Papers*, and the amount of Englishness per paragraph can be downright sickening. Classic English understatement is also taken to extremes: when being threatened by a fascist, Bertie Wooster observes: “One sensed the absence of the bonhomous note.”

The characters are usually well-to-do, asset-rich but cash-poor. Many are dilettantish young aristocrats, to which Wodehouse has a particular gift for assigning silly but somehow plausible names (Gussie Fink-Nottle, Monty Bodkin, Pongo Twistleton, Freddie Threepwood, Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, Bingo Little, Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps). Everyone went to Oxbridge and Eton. They are all stupid, or at least a little daft. Most have a network of aunts and uncles who cause havoc. Occasional Americans show up, exclaiming things like “Gum!” and “Shucks!” at the start of every sentence. (Wodehouse, though he spent much of his life in the United States, and seems to have preferred it to England, never had quite the same ear for American speech.) Servants, usually more intelligent than their employers, flit about. Industrialists, detectives, nerve specialists, and imposters disguised as poets infiltrate country homes and engage in elaborate underhanded schemes.

Then there are Wodehouse’s plots. A Wodehouse plot is a thing of awesome intricacy and absurdity, like a cuckoo-clock of many interlocking gears, deploying dozens of spring-loaded, squawking birds. As the novel unfolds, the story becomes steadily more and more convoluted, with mishaps, double-crossings, mistaken identities, thefts, broken engagements, and occasional slapstick violence. The storylines build to a steady crescendo, converge on one another, and then neatly resolve themselves in the final chapters. Here is a representative synopsis:

The Honorable Galahad Threepwood has changed his mind and decided not to publish his scandalous memoir with Lord Tilbury’s publishing house. Galahad’s nephew Ronnie is set to marry Sue Brown, the daughter of Galahad’s old flame, but the marriage is controversial in the family because Sue is a chorus girl. Galahad’s sisters, Lady Constance and Lady Julia, agree to approve the marriage if Galahad declines to publish the memoir, which is full of embarrassing facts about members of the peerage. Meanwhile, Lord Emsworth is convinced that Sir Gregory Parsloe is trying to steal his prize pig. Monty Bodkin, Sir Gregory’s nephew, has been freshly fired from Lord Tilbury’s publishing house and takes a job as Lord Emsworth’s secretary. But Monty Bodkin and Sue Brown were once engaged, and Sue worries that Ronnie will be jealous when Monty comes to the castle. Monty and Sue agree over lunch that they will pretend to be strangers. When Ronnie meets his Aunt Julia, she forbids the marriage, believing Sue to have betrayed Ronnie by pretending not to know Monty. Meanwhile, Lord Tilbury schemes to

steal Galahad’s manuscript and publish it. Further complications ensue.

Wodehouse is today best known for his Jeeves and Wooster stories, concerning the activities of wealthy man-about-town Bertie Wooster and his genius valet, Jeeves. (Jeeves and Wooster were memorably portrayed on BBC television by Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, although the densely-packed humor of Wodehouse’s prose only translates incompletely to the screen.) A typical Jeeves story features Bertie doing something of which Jeeves disapproves, such as growing a mustache, or buying a pair of purple socks. Bertie then finds himself—partly through Jeeves’ behind-the-scenes machinations, partly through Bertie’s own quasi-religious adherence to the *preux chevalier* “Code of the Woosters,” which requires him to assist any friend in need, no matter how absurd their demands—in the midst of a “scrape,” usually requiring him to impersonate an important personage, conceal a stolen object, or facilitate a forbidden love-affair. When everything has gone awry and all hope seems lost, Jeeves then swoops in and uses his powerful, “fish-fed” brain to extricate Bertie from his predicament. Bertie, out of gratitude, then agrees to relinquish whatever sartorial outrage caused their initial rift.

But our own favorite Wodehousean creation is a character that, tragically, did not spawn nearly as many sequel novels or television adaptations. He is the delightful, demented dandy known as Psmith.

ENTER PSMITH

ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR IF HIS first name is Ronald or Rupert, we know that his last name is “Psmith”—and that “the ‘p’ is silent, as in ‘pshrimp.’” Tall, thin, and solemn, Psmith is immaculately-dressed at all times, wears a monocle, and sleeps in late because “a German doctor says that early rising causes insanity.” He is constantly falling afoul of his family’s expectations, first by failing out of Eton, and then by abandoning his uncle’s fish business. We variously encounter Psmith working in extremely desultory fashion at the New Asiatic Bank; muscling his way into the subeditorship of a provincial magazine called *Cozy Moments* (which he subsequently remakes as a muck-racking, tenement-busting radical paper); and freelancing under the following expansive advertisement:

LEAVE IT TO PSMITH!

Psmith Will Help You

Psmith Is Ready For Anything

DO YOU WANT

Someone To Manage Your Affairs?

Someone To Handle Your Business?

Someone To Take Your Dog For A Run?

Someone To Assassinate Your Aunt?

PSMITH WILL DO IT

CRIME NOT OBJECTED TO

Whatever Job You Have To Offer.

(Provided It Has Nothing To Do With Fish.)

Psmith self-identifies as a Socialist and states that “socialism is the passion of my life,” though his praxis amounts to calling everybody “comrade” and casually redistributing the odd bit of property, e.g. by stealing another man’s umbrella and giving it to a pretty girl in a rainstorm. (In Psmith’s defense, these are basically the foundations of the doctrine.) Psmith, nonetheless, is the closest thing to a social-

ly-conscious character that exists in the World of Wodehouse. In an uncharacteristically serious chapter of *Psmith, Journalist*, he stumbles across a tenement-sweatshop in a New York slum and declares:

"I propose... to make things as warm for the owner of this place as I jolly well know how. What he wants, of course," he proceeded in the tone of a family doctor prescribing for a patient, "is disembowelling. I fancy, however, that a mawkishly sentimental legislature will prevent our performing that national service."

As a general rule, however, Psmith is much less bloodthirsty. His personal mission in life is the "spreading of sweetness and light." His friend Mike notes Psmith's "fondness for getting into atmospheres that were not his own" and his gift for "getting into [other people's] minds and seeing things from their point of view." He moves through the world with unflappable self-confidence, and comfort in his own peculiar skin. "Reflect that I may be an acquired taste," he remarks to his companion. "You probably did not like olives the first time you tasted them. Now you probably do. Give me the same chance you would an olive." In the one novel where Psmith is paired with a love-interest, he also reveals himself to have an unerring instinct for what human beings look for in romantic partners:

"By the way, returning to the subject we were discussing last night, I forgot to mention, when asking you to marry me, that I can do card-tricks."

"Really?"

"And also a passable imitation of a cat calling to her young. Has this no weight with you? Think! These things come in very handy in the long winter evenings."

"But I shan't be there when you are imitating cats in the long winter evenings."

"I think you are wrong. As I visualize my little home, I can see you there very clearly, sitting before the fire. Your maid has put you into something loose. The light of the flickering flames reflects itself in your lovely eyes. You are pleasantly tired after an afternoon's shopping, but not so tired as to be unable to select a card—any card—from the pack which I offer..."

"Good-bye," said Eve.

Although Psmith's unusual behavior regularly astonishes those around him, Psmith himself is never surprised by anything, no matter how odd. His motto in life, he states, is "never confuse the improbable with the impossible." He is always running several grifts simultaneously, usually for the combined goals of discomfiting bores and bullies, helping the underdog, and amusing himself. No setback ever deters him. "Nothing that you can say can damp my buoyant spirit," he declares. "The cry goes round the castle battlements: 'Psmith intends to keep the old flag flying!'"

POLITICS & WODEHOUSE

THE QUALITIES OF HIS OUTPUT ASIDE, IF THERE was a contest for "most naïve man of the 20th century," P.G. Wodehouse would be a favorite to take the cup. Though he was writing during some of the bloodiest upheavals in human history, Wodehouse seems to have been passed by almost completely by world events. Even in the 1960s novels, Bertie Wooster is still living as if it's 1923, and World Wars I and II barely cross the page. In fact, George Orwell says that the imaginative landscape of the books was set even earlier, that it's pre-WWI, since by the 20s the types of characters Wodehouse was writing about had been

massacred by the hundreds of thousands. Bertie Wooster and Gussie Fink-Nottle, had they existed, would have ended their lives being eaten by rats in the trenches of Flanders. As it is, we're to believe that Wodehouse's dandies either never went to war, or, if they did, that it made no impression on them whatsoever. "If ever my grandchildren cluster about my knee and want to know what I did in the Great War," Bertie Wooster states in *Jeeves and the Song of Songs*, "I shall say: 'Never mind about the Great War. Ask me about the time I sang "Sonny Boy" at the Oddfellows' Hall at Bermondsey East.'"

There are certain passing references to political and social ideas that Wodehouse seems to have picked up by glancing at newspaper headlines. A character may make a passing reference to "what with all this Socialism rampant." In *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, a visiting Russian novelist remarks that "you know that is our great national sport, trying to assassinate Lenin with revolvers." Wodehouse seems to have known who at least *some* world-historic figures were, saying of one character that "when it came to self-confidence, Mussolini could have taken his correspondence course." In *The Code of The Woosters*, Wodehouse creates one of his most fearsome villains, Sir Roderick Spode, a fascist in the mold of Sir Oswald Moseley. Spode leads a gang of right-wing thugs called the Black Shorts (by the time they formed, there were no more shirts left). While it's clear that Wodehouse sees Spode as a nasty bugger, he also seems to have thought of fascists simply as laughable pompous goose-steppers, and doesn't exactly grasp the stakes. (Spode's menace ultimately proves easy to neutralize, as it turns out that he secretly runs a woman's lingerie business and is terrified that word will get out.)

The most political Wodehouse's fiction gets is in a short story called "Archibald and the Masses," in which a young aristocrat decides to flirt with Socialism, but pisses off every proletarian he meets and tries to help, finally concluding that the Masses are not his cup of tea. Here, at the outset, his valet offers to introduce him to the doctrine:

"You should go down to a place like Bottleton East. That is where you hear the Voice of the People."

"What people?"

"The masses, sir. The martyred proletariat. If you are interested in the martyred proletariat, I could supply you with some well-written pamphlets. I have been a member of the League for the Dawn of Freedom for many years, sir. Our object, as the name implies, is to hasten the coming revolution."

"Like in Russia, do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Massacres and all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now listen, Meadows," said Archibald firmly. "Fun's fun, but no

WORDS AND PHRASES GUARANTEED TO MAKE ANY TEXT EVER- SO-SLIGHTLY MORE

Wodehousian

decidedly
beastly, ghastly
loopy, potty, barmy
"What ho!"
"I say!"

oojah-cum-spiff
bonhomous
as the poet [NAME] used to say
persiflage
dashed

rot about stabbing me with a dripping knife. I won't have it, do you understand?"

"Very good, sir."

"That being clear, you may bring me those pamphlets. I'd like to have a look at them."

It's not exactly a pro- or anti-Socialist message. There are no "morals" in these silly stories, no real stances taken. Socialism is funny because everything is funny. That also means, though, that Wodehouse isn't really attempting "satire" on English upper class life. Even though he pokes fun at their names, their indolence, their frippery, ultimately he is no class warrior. Butlers and valets are important characters in the stories, but only if you squint closely do you notice that the entire social milieu is being sustained by a vast army of housemaids, lady's maids, scullery-maids, footmen, chauffeurs, under-butlers, governesses, nursery-maids, pantry-boys, hall boys, laundry-maids, chefs, secretaries, gardeners, grooms, and groundskeepers. (And these are just the direct servants. If we peered into a British factory of the time, we'd see the real underbelly.) The class system isn't *hidden*, exactly—it's the source of many of the stories' conflicts, with characters judged by relatives for marrying outside their station. But we certainly see none of the actual *labor*—and as Orwell put it, one of Wodehouse's chief sins is that he made the British upper classes seem like much nicer people than they actually are.

WODEHOUSE, A WORKAHOLIC WITH AN uneventful personal life, paid scant attention to anything going on around him. Mentally, he seems to have actually inhabited the cheery, detached world of his books: he privately described himself in a letter to a friend as "a case of infantilism... I haven't developed mentally at all since my last year at school." He was not exaggerating. And that childlike disposition might seem somewhat forgivable and endearing, had it not led to the most infamous incident of Wodehouse's life: bumbling his way into collaborating with the Nazis.

At the time, it caused an uproar in Britain, and it permanently damaged Wodehouse's reputation. The facts are these: in 1941, Wodehouse was living in a seaside villa in Le Touquet, France—evidently for tax-evasion purposes. He seems to have ignored the existence of World War II entirely, and was completely taken by surprise when the Nazis invaded. He was placed in an internment camp, where he was relatively well-treated. He was then approached by the Third Reich's propaganda ministry, who asked him if he would do a series of radio broadcasts describing his time in the camp. Wodehouse not only obliged, but actually accepted payment for his addresses.

The broadcasts were not pro-Nazi. They were typical Wodehouse—light, affable, apolitical. Wodehouse seems to have approached the decision to do the broadcasts with characteristic dreaminess. *Say, these jackbooted chaps have asked me to do a bit of radio. No harm saying a few words, eh?* A representative excerpt:

"Wodehouse, old sport, I said to myself, this begins to look like a sticky day. And a few moments later my apprehensions were fulfilled. Arriving at the Kommandantur, I found everything in a state of bustle and excitement. I said 'Es ist schönes wetter' once or twice, but nobody took any notice. And presently the interpreter stepped forward and announced that we were all going to be interned. It was a pretty nasty shock, coming without warning out of a blue sky like that, and it is not too much to say that for an instant the old maestro shook like a badly set blancmange. ... Having closed the suitcase and said goodbye to my wife and the junior dog, and foiled the attempt of the senior dog to muscle into the car and accompany me into captivity, I returned to the Kommandantur. And

presently, with the rest of the gang, numbering twelve in all, I drove in a motor omnibus for an unknown destination. ... An internee's enjoyment of such a journey depends very largely on the mental attitude of the sergeant in charge. Ours turned out to be a genial soul, who gave us cigarettes and let us get off and buy red wine at all stops, infusing the whole thing with the pleasant atmosphere of a school treat."

George Orwell, in his essay "In Defense Of P.G. Wodehouse," concludes that Wodehouse was just unfathomably stupid and does not seem to have understood what a Nazi even was. He would never have deliberately betrayed England—after all, that "wouldn't be cricket," and Wodehouse lived by the public schoolboy code of honor. But he doesn't seem to have had the slightest suspicion that Hitler might be using him for nefarious purposes. Indeed, Wodehouse was so clueless that his exasperated friends had to persuade him out of writing a humorous memoir about his internment several years later. In one of the draft chapters that survives, Wodehouse described his ongoing bafflement at the public reaction to his decision to participate in the broadcasts: "the global howl that went up as a result of my indiscretion exceeded in volume and intensity anything I have ever experienced since that time in my boyhood when I broke the curate's umbrella and my aunts started writing letters to one another about it."

The fact that someone could "oops-a-daisy" his way into serving the Reich tells us something important about the limitations of his worldview. If politics don't intrude on life in the Wodehouse snowglobe, they certainly do on most people's lives. To neglect to peer out of one's own bubble of privilege and comfort is a profound moral failing.

He tie, if I might suggest it, sir, a shade more tightly knotted. One aims at the perfect butterfly effect. If you will permit me—

'What do ties matter, Jeeves, at a time like this? Do you realize that Mr. Little's domestic happiness is hanging in the scale?' 'There is no time, sir, at which ties do not matter.'

One either eats this stuff up or one does not. We do.

Why enter this world? A place with so little drama, so much *golf*? Because it overflows with loveliness and good cheer, for one thing. It will brighten your day and transport you to a land with fewer problems than this one. It will expose you to some of the warmest and most creative prose in the English language.

But like all utopias, the World of Wodehouse has a dark side. You can't actually *be* like P.G. Wodehouse, because that would mean overlooking criminal injustices. Wodehouse's own life showed what happens if one becomes too much the absent-minded bumbler. To bumble in a country garden is charming. To bumble amidst a Holocaust is sickening. There are times that call for moral clarity and courage. We have to remember that the real Bertie Woosters did not live in their idyll forever, as they do in the pages of the Jeeves stories. They died horribly in a catastrophic war. Wodehouse's work shows how delightful the world can be, but it overlooks the suffering in the midst of that delight, and the suffering of the many that has always enabled the delight of the few. There's nothing *wrong* with enjoying it. The stories are hilarious, they're sweet, they're gorgeously written. But one can't inhabit a snowglobe.

We might even take a lesson from Psmith here, who despite his serene, careless gaiety, is genuinely concerned with the welfare of his fellow-creatures, even if he expresses it in unusual ways. (Such as, for instance, by hurling a flowerpot through an open window into a library.) We must spread sweetness and light, and we must always keep the old flag flying. ♣

WHAT THE *Well-Dressed Man* IS WEARING THIS MONTH

In the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, Bertie Wooster refers frequently to having once written an article for a magazine called Milady's Boudoir, on the subject of What The Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing. Current Affairs is a magazine of political and literary comment, not high fashion, but we certainly like to think we know a thing or two about what a Well-Dressed Man would wear. Here we present this month's list of tasteful apparel and accessories, so that you never make a faux pas.



- ✦ pigeonskin cummerbund
- ✦ lavender elbow-patches
- ✦ herringbone monocle cover
- ✦ velvet neck ruff
- ✦ extra firm "all encompassing" cravat
- ✦ tweed chaps
- ✦ tortoiseshell homburg
- ✦ quadruple-breasted jackets
- ✦ Neapolitan hat band
- ✦ hybrid watchchain-suspenders
- ✦ hand-spats (worn over the glove)
- ✦ bishop's croziers
- ✦ monogrammed sporran
- ✦ hyperminiature pince-nez w/ peridot lenses
- ✦ fleur-de-lis lapel pin w/ adjustable tips
- ✦ tiger fur attaché case
- ✦ Peruvian tongue clamp
- ✦ argyle capes
- ✦ heliotrope cufflinks
- ✦ origami pocket square
- ✦ vented gingham jacket w/ epaulettes
- ✦ puce lamé pajamas (worn inverted)
- ✦ charmeuse nightcap w/ dangly bits
- ✦ swallowable platinum collar stud
- ✦ nine-foot sandalwood cane w/ spiraling rims
- ✦ expandable loafer tassels w/ lace underpinnings
- ✦ damask top hat w/ upper beverage storage flap
- ✦ jacquard dressing-gown w/ demi-wimple and tail
- ✦ peacock feather umbrella w/ worsted mahogany stick
- ✦ checked neon trousers w/ lace buttock adornments
- ✦ extra-wide braces w/ chenille grip fastenings
- ✦ detachable inflatable brocade sleeves
- ✦ satinwood revolver holster



*Buttonhole flower of the month: Evening Primrose
Alternate: Nasturtiums
This month's appropriate number of pockets: 9*

*Currently acceptable shoe-tip shape: Softly pointed
Flaps: Indeed
Days until boater hat appropriate: 37*

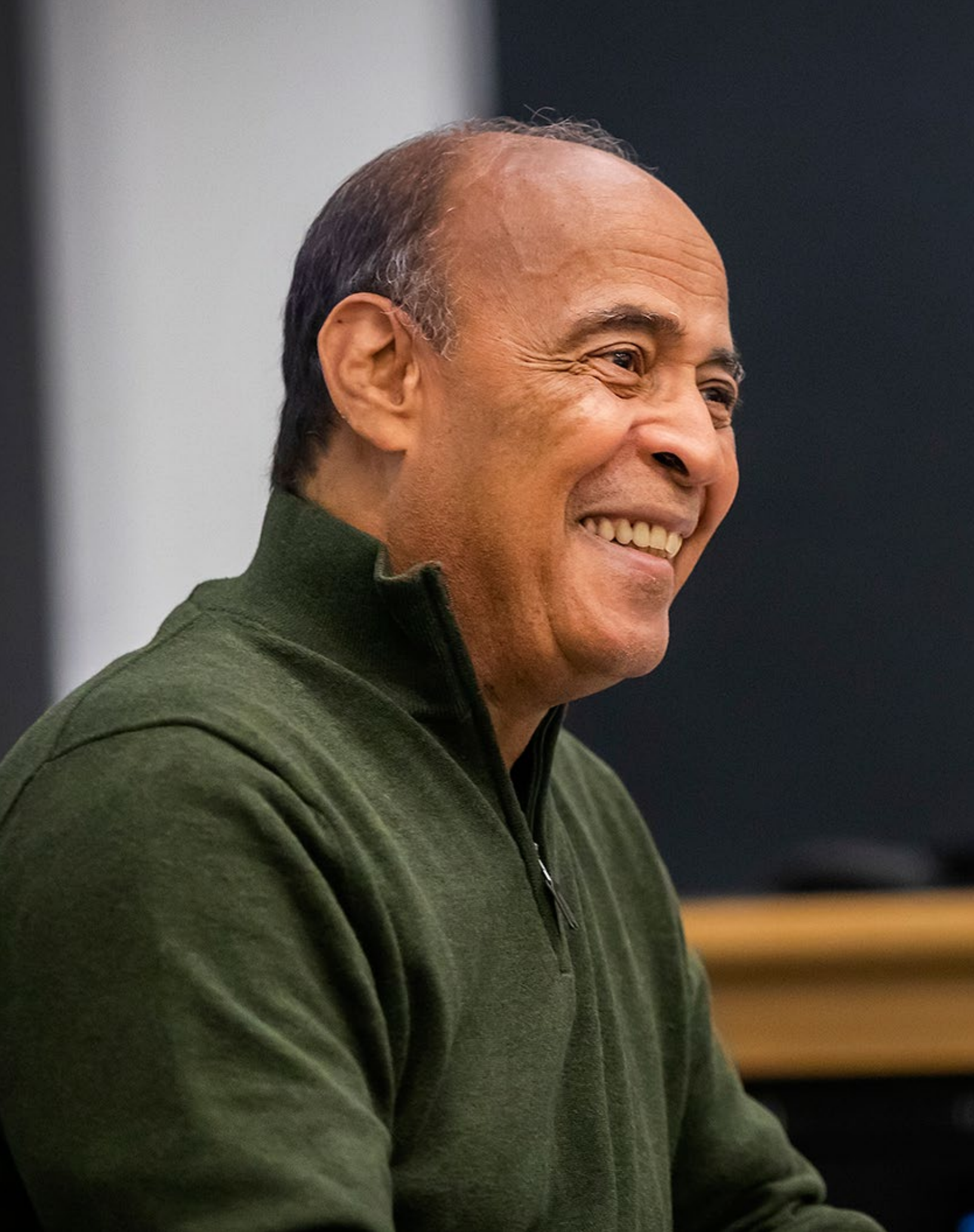
SPOT THE WALRUS

All the Cool Hollywood People are having a Cool Person Pool Party in the Hollywood Hills. Didn't you get your invite? We could have sworn we sent it. The party is going great, and everyone is having the *best* time. The wine is flowing and the conversation sparkles. But there's a problem: an uninvited guest has showed up, and is hiding somewhere in this picture.

Can you spot the walrus? (HINT: it may not be where you think)







ADOLPH REED

on movements and monuments

Adolph Reed Jr., professor emeritus of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, spoke to Current Affairs editor Nathan J. Robinson at Current Affairs Headquarters in New Orleans. The interview has been edited for space and readability. Transcript by Addison Kane.

NATHAN J. ROBINSON: *I was just re-reading your book Class Notes, and I was trying to think of the common themes that I see running through your writing. The subtitle of this book is “Posing As Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene,” and one thing you often write about is what politics is and what it isn’t, and how many things look like they are meaningful political action, or are treated as if they are meaningful political action, but really aren’t. And they can delude us into thinking that we are making progress when we aren’t. And for 30 years in your writing, from The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon, through The Million Man March, through Obama, you’ve been documenting these sort of phenomena that look like large-scale social change without actually moving power.*

ADOLPH REED: Right. I think that’s very well put. And from one perspective, it could be kind of depressing that I’ve been saying the same thing for over 30 years. At the same time... I’ve railed against what I’ve called “the myth of the spark,” the tendency to think that some exogenous intervention is going to happen to knock the shackles off people’s eyes, and the masses will then rise. I realize that at least since 2016, I’ve been charting, as it were, the increasing ideological boldness on the part of the vocal segments of people of color, the professional and managerial class... who make clearer and clearer on a daily basis that their politics is exclusively a class politics... And I realized that I have caught myself thinking, surely they’re so brazen now that it will be clear. And it just finally hit me, *well, that’s only another version of the “myth of the spark,”* because there’s no objective moment when a crisis occurs...

NJR: *I want to dive a little more clearly into what you mean by “a class politics.” One of the things that also recurs is your objection to “identity politics” or “race reductionism.” You say it obscures really, really important divides within black politics, and that those divides are essential to understanding black politics, and it sort of treats black political actors, and black people themselves, as a hivemind monolith, and it’s racist in its way, and*

when you break it down, the class divides in black politics are extremely important to understanding what is going on.

AR: Yeah, and among the ways that the class divides are consequential are, for instance, the current obsession with the New Deal as “racist,” and with the idea that universal programs are fundamentally racist because they don’t target black people in particular, and black people don’t get anything out of it. But the fact of the matter is, black people got a lot out of the G.I. Bill, black people got a lot out of the WPA, black people got a lot out of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and that racial disparity in the distribution of benefits, and good things and bad things, isn’t necessarily the end of the story... This notion that Medicare For All, a single payer health system, wouldn’t do anything at all for black people, because it’s not race-targeted, the idea that free public college wouldn’t do anything for black people because it’s not race-targeted, are clearly class-based programs.

NJR: *I think the justification for universal programs like Medicare For All and Universal College is sound, completely. But I would then ask you whether you think there are any programs that need to be race-targeted. So, let’s bring up reparations, which a number of people on the left have been saying should be a part of a left agenda, because it specifically addresses a giant racial injustice that has never been corrected. Last week I was talking to Keeanga-Yamabhta Taylor, who was telling me, well, you can’t fix the racial wealth gap, unless you have some kind of program that targets a deprivation that was racist. Is there a way to close the racial wealth gap through things that are just universal?*

AR: Well, it’s interesting, because I was just on an NPR show with Keeanga a few weeks ago. They called it a debate, I call it a discussion, but on the reparations issue... my first question has always been the same, and I’ve never gotten what I thought was a satisfactory attempt to answer. Which is: how can you imagine, in a majoritarian democracy, putting together a political alliance that’s capable of prevailing on an issue like this, that no one gets anything out of, except black people. And that’s even before any of the other questions, like, “what counts as reparations? Who gets what? Should the ADOS (the American descendants of slaves) line be followed? What about all of the other

harms?” So there’s all that. I do think that, just from a pragmatic political point of view, the pragmatic political question trumps it. And I know the response has always been, “well, don’t you think black people deserve something?” And I say, well, yeah, of course, but that’s not the issue. The issue is *what is possible to win, and how you can win it.*

NJR: *It strikes me, though, that a lot of the things that we demand on the left are radical and require shifting public consciousness. Often, at the beginning, they are things that we can’t imagine, or it’s very difficult to imagine having. The fact that the majority may be against you means that you have to work very, very hard, and it’s a very slow process. But if that’s what would constitute justice, it’s sort of necessary, because there’s lots of things that majorities oppose, but we believe in protecting minorities. How do you think about things that are “practical” utopianism, versus things that are “utopian” utopianism?*

AR: Yeah, I hear you, and in fact, Keeanga brought up the case of abolitionism. And that’s a nice case, because it shows the problem with the argument. Abolitionism didn’t get anywhere, really, except to piss off slaveholders, until political circumstances shifted to advance the position of political anti-slavery activists, and anti-slavery Northerners were opposed to slavery for a lot of reasons, some of which, of course, overlapped with the abolitionists’ moral concern, but for other reasons that they could see their own interest in: both a commitment to an ideal of free labor, sometimes racist and sometimes not, and anxiety about being degraded by an immigrant labor force. A lot of other things have been like that, too... For reparations in particular, what we would have to do is convince people whose main experience, or one principal experience, is a declining standard of living and increase in economic insecurity, to go to the wall, fighting for an agenda that they, by definition, wouldn’t get anything from. I just don’t see how that’s possible.

NJR: *Is it ever possible to mobilize around something that is not in people’s self-interest? I mean, we don’t want to always have to appeal to self-interest. There are cases where what we’re trying to pursue requires people to give something up.*

AR: My take on this is that, so, I read Aesop’s Fables a lot when I was a kid, and one of my favorite ones was the one about the contest between the wind and the sun [The North Wind And The Sun], and they were boasting back and forth at each other, and they determined to test their prowess against a wayfarer who was walking along the road, and whichever one could get him to take his coat off would be the more powerful. So the wind blew, and blew, and blew, and no matter how much harder the wind blew, the traveler just kind of pulled his coat more and more tightly around himself, and when the sun took its turn, and just began to radiate more and more warmth, and the traveler eventually took the coat off on his own. My approach to politics, and this goes back to what counts as a movement, and what doesn’t, is the project of trying to fasten a broad-based political alliance in which different people and constituencies can not only see a vehicle for pursuing their own interests, but can come to understand that a condition for advancement of their own interests is an equal commitment to advancing their partners’ interests. So, from that perspective... I don’t understand how we build solidarity by going around the room to stress how profoundly we actually differ from one another.

NJR: *I want to talk to you about Obama, because I have here this prophecy you wrote in 1995. You don’t mention him by name, but we all know who you’re talking about. “In Chicago, for instance, we’ve gotten a foretaste of the new breed of foundation-hatched black communitarian voices; one of them, a smooth Harvard lawyer with impeccable do-good credentials and vacuous-to-repressive neoliberal politics, has won a state senate seat on a base mainly in the liberal foundation and development worlds. His fundamentally bootstrap line was softened by a patina of the rhetoric of authentic community, talk about meeting in kitchens, small-scale solutions to social problems, and the predictable elevation of process over*

program—the point where identity politics converges with old-fashioned middle-class reform in favoring form over substance. I suspect that his ilk is the wave of the future in U.S. black politics, as in Haiti and wherever else the International Monetary Fund has sway. So far, the black activist response hasn’t been up to the challenge. We have to do better.” And that was, in fact, Barack Obama you were referring to.

AR: Oh yeah, totally. I’ll tell you what happened. I always say that it’s often more important to be in the right place at the right time, and to keep your eyes open, than it is to be smart. And I lived in that state senate district, I worked very closely with his predecessor, and we actually had an organizing campaign going in that state senate district, to try to do civic education among the constituents about the difference between the state house and state senate, how a bill becomes a law, et cetera, et cetera, and then Barack popped up, nobody knew anything about him, nobody in the activist world had ever heard of him, or had any connection to him, and it was just fascinating watching the Hyde Park liberal and foundational world, I don’t know if I can say this, but kind of *wet-pantied* over him. And it actually split the left in that part of the city as well...

NJR: *I want to dwell on the line that “the fundamentally bootstrap line was softened by a patina of the rhetoric of authentic community.” It’s interesting that one of Obama’s big pitches was that his roots were as a community organizer, that he came from, supposedly, the organizing world, but you point out that was actually kind of the opposite of the truth. Also, the bootstrap thing you dwell on—you wrote in an essay that I have here in 2008, while he was actually running, called “Obama No,” where you talk about the way that he used fundamentally very conservative rhetoric, especially when he was talking to black audiences, using the victim-blaming message of tough love, about behavioral pathology in black communities.*

AR: Yeah, that was really striking... And especially, in the summer of ’08 after he had all but officially sewn up the nomination, he made an immediate sharp-right turn over the span of four, five days, just weighed in on the pending Supreme Court decision that ultimately invalidated the Washington D.C. gun control statute, and he was opposed to the statute... What got me was, perhaps most of all, with the Philadelphia speech so many liberals touted as his acknowledgment of structural racism, because he made a reference, in passing, to patterns of inequality that got formed in the 1930s, and had then been reproduced over time. But the rest of the speech was a version of the “broke black people aren’t worth anything,” that they need to modify their behavior, that they need to... I can’t recall if this is when the infamous “cousin Pookie” was born,* but as some friends of mine pointed out, there’s no way in the world that Obama ever had a cousin Pookie. It was striking that Obama seemed to burnish, if not establish, his bona fides with the black political elite by giving the “tough love” speech, as if it were a first person plural, that “we” have to tell our broke people to do better. It’s just kind of striking.

NJR: *You did this big Harper’s cover story in 2014, called, depressingly, “Nothing Left.” And you present Obama as the culmination of a tendency that had been going for a long time, a sort of final triumph of Reaganism—in that, for most of the 20th century, there had been a left. It hadn’t been a successful left, necessarily, but it had existed. But from Reagan to Obama, the left just sort of withers and dies. And by 2014, when you’re writing, it’s a year before Bernie Sanders’ campaign. That was a very bleak moment.*

AR: It definitely was. It’s still bleak, Trump is in the White House, and many of the Democrats are fully committed to doing whatever they can to put him back there... Bits of that essay came out of the first chapter of my long-suffering book that began as a book on Obama mania... [I was asked, and I] didn’t want to do an Obama book, but I thought, “okay, I can do a book on Obama mania,” because one of the head-scratching moments of this phenomenon, was seeing how many people, whom you would think, based on their histories and practices, would know better, got swept up in this ridiculous hype about this guy...

I first felt anxious that Obama might actually break the mold and do something that I would not have imagined he would do, maybe find his closet FDR or something, and stand for something. So I felt kind of anxious, waiting to see what happened every day, and then I finally said, look, the book that I really wanted to do, is the book that answers this question that is, “why did so many people who should have known better get swept up in the hype?” The book that is really required to answer the question [is a] different sort of book, [one] on the decline and the transformation of the left in the U.S. since the end of World War II... It attempts to address what it was about what’s happened to the left that even led serious, longtime veteran activists to delude themselves, and to delude themselves as *militants*. It’s not just that they *liked* Obama, and supported Obama, but they were sort of like, the Gestapo for Obama during the campaign.

NJR: *Well, yeah. I wouldn’t quite use that term! But I just reviewed the memoirs of these guys that worked in the administration, and one of them says, explicitly, “my friends all started to say ‘you’ve become this unthinking, Obama-bot,’ and it was kind of true.” He says, “I was an evangelist for Obama, I didn’t really know what he stood for, but I just liked him so much, and I became obsessed with him, he just had this incredible power.” I mean, I’m a little sympathetic to this, because some of it comes out of desperation. You point all through your work to things that aren’t political movements that want to be political movements. But some of the time, it’s because no one knows what to do, so they cling to what seems like politics. It seems like it’s advancing justice. And the election of Obama seemed like a very radical transformation, and once it came into the realm of possibility, it’s understandable why people would say, “wow, we can do this incredibly transformative thing.”*

AR: True, but that, to me, is the most depressing thing in the world. That’s like, frighteningly depressing. That’s—being in that position, where you feel so desperate, where you have to turn to a fantasy to get some solace, to me, is like the same thing as... It feels like sort of leaping into a religious commitment, because you can’t face the world as it is, which to me feels like the same thing as being buried alive.

Look, there are moments when the political situation is absolutely hopeless, and there are such moments, and that’s when you assassinate the fascist judge, or flip the bird to the eagle that’s coming down on you, but I don’t want to rush that moment. There’s nothing beautiful about that moment. And as I’ve said in a number of places, my approach to politics is like how they teach kids to play the outfield in Little League baseball, where on the deep fly ball, you go to the wall first, and feel for the wall, and then come back into the ball. So you imagine the worst possible thing that can happen, and figure out how you would adjust to that, instead of looking for a fantasy to get you through the night. Because, to me, that just feels like a dilettantish way of doing politics, because you’re not really committed to winning anything, and there are no stakes for you. I have a friend who organized in Brazil under the dictatorship, in the underground. There were stakes in politics, then... The politics of performance, of individual righteousness just always seemed distastefully Protestant to me, you know what I mean?

NJR: *So, what is a politics of performance? Give some examples of that.*

AR: Well, it’s like, the various versions of “having to take a stand.” Seeing politics as having to take a stand about something, seeing politics as a domain more for personal expression than for organizing, or for colloquies of the converted, basically, in contrast to trying to figure out ways to talk to people who don’t already agree with you, like we were talking about before.

NJR: *You’ve written about, for instance, in New Orleans, the push to take down all the [Confederate] monuments. I don’t know where you stand on whether we should keep them or not, but the bigger issue that you raise is*

**Obama had told black audiences that they needed to talk to their “Cousin Pookie” who sits on the couch and doesn’t vote.*

that we have to always orient our political program toward getting material gains for people, and things that aren’t getting material gains for people, and that aren’t linked to, even theoretically, some kind of program for actually redistributing wealth and power, ultimately can’t go anywhere.

AR: I think that’s right. I’ve been trying to think through my new relationship to the statuary for a long time. I mean, I have kind of a funny background in the sense that I’m sort of half local, half northeastern, for complex reasons. What that meant was that I was always, even as a kid, acutely aware of all those monuments, and what they stood for, and hated them, and hated every one of them. And then when they actually began to come down, or when the discussion about taking them down heated up, after Nikki Haley finally took the Confederate flag down from the state house grounds in South Carolina, I found myself feeling a little bemused, because obviously, I’m glad they’re gone. Every time I walk past Jeff Davis Canal, or walking in the park, which is like a long block and a half from my house, and there’s no P.G.T. Beauregard—well, I’m happy!

IF YOU’RE THINKING ABOUT PUTTING AN OCTOPUS ON YOUR FACE



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**Ad
Council**

So, it's better for them to come down than not to come down.

But in a way, that celebration is kind of akin to the celebration of Obama, in a couple ways. One is, going to Obama, the idea that the black president was elected was like, a big victory. Well, *I guess*. I grew up like everyone else in America, saying any kid can be president, except a black kid. Well, but obviously demographic, and ideological circumstances changed in a way that made it possible for a black guy to get elected. So, in that sense, the change has already happened. And it's not like he was made Pope. He put together an electoral coalition in a particular set of historical conditions, and I still would not be surprised, had the bottom not fallen out of the economy at the moment it did, [if] McCain could have won that election. Maybe not with what turned out to be the colossal misstep, or miscue, or mistake of thinking that they could get like an Elly May Clampett bounce from having Palin on the ticket, which was kind of cute and funny for a while, but when the bottom fell out from the economy, her narcissism became so apparent. But anyway, he won, and he won again, *great*. It was good that the monuments came down, *great*. But they also came down in a discourse of triumphant local neoliberalism, that sort of links an ideal of racial justice to market idolatry. And it didn't have to be that way, but it *was* that way...

NJR: *Another thing that you talk about a lot is the effort to make inherently unjust institutions look progressive, and to diversify the board of Goldman Sachs, so that we don't recognize the function and the role of Goldman Sachs. Elizabeth Warren just signed onto this call to have gender parity in the upper echelons of the U.S. military, but you can't fix the military-industrial complex through making sure you have the right people in it!*

AR: Totally, totally. And this is another marker of the decline of the left, ultimately... [This model of a just society] presumes that a society can be just if 1 percent of the population controls more than 90% of the good stuff, provided that 1 percent is like 12 percent black, 14 percent Hispanic, half women, and whatever the appropriate percentage is gay. And I can't say that that's not a just society, or that's not a legitimate model of a just society. Is it a model of a just society that most of us want to sign up for? Probably not. And I think that the politics that we need to cultivate as a left, at this point, is a politics that makes very clear that there are these two competing models of a just society. They're not compatible, except in the sense that sure, if a world in which the ruling class is diverse, and the world in which the ruling class isn't diverse are the only two options, then yes, for people with egalitarian interests, the former is less obnoxious than the latter. But if people have really egalitarian interests and concerns, then the proper response is to demand some other options, and a different understanding of what a just world is. And that, to me, is the fundamental political objective.

NJR: *[I want to] talk about what political action is, because you talk about how doing things well is difficult. Real organizing is painful, it's slow, it involves making yourself uncomfortable, your victories are not going to be easy. And one of the things that you say here, in the introduction to Class Notes is, "the movement that we need cannot be convoked magically overnight, or by proxy. It can't be galvanized through proclamations, press conferences, symbolic big events, resolutions. It can be built only through connecting with large numbers of people in cities, towns, and workplaces all over the country, who can be brought together around a political agenda that speaks directly and clearly to their needs and aspirations. It is a painstaking process that promises no guarantees or ultimate victory. But there are no alternatives other than fraud, pretense, or certain failure."*

AR: Yeah, I'll stand by that. I guess I could have included self-delusion, with fraud and pretense, to be a little bit more charitable. But yeah, I think that's what it comes down to. And look, I was just thinking about this. I was joking with someone not too long ago. On the Sanders campaign trail, last time, it felt like a fair amount of my effort was to try to equilibrate the passions of the young, exuberant Bernie-crats—the sort who would go off, after a day of canvassing, and get a tattoo on their arm.

They tended to rise and fall, with every news report, what's happening in the Iowa polls, or what's happening with what Clinton said or did... and I found myself giving them the story of Sergeant Pavlov at the Battle of Stalingrad, that these 25 troops held a building for 58 days against multiple daily Nazi assaults, and they were focused on what their job was, and their job was to hold that building. And [the campaign workers'] job was to do whatever they had to do that day, in whatever locale they were working in, to try to broaden the base of the campaign by a handful of people, and it didn't matter what was going on in Wisconsin, or what Clinton had said, their job was going to be the same no matter what, because the only way to build a campaign is through that kind of work.

That was the ethos that we took to try to build the Labor Party, and we held firm on that... But there were a number of really good people who I knew, mainly academics, who just couldn't understand why we were averse to trying to get coverage in the *New York Times*, or whatever. And my reaction was, *because we're a working class initiative, they're never going to give us good coverage—the only thing they'll ever try to do is smear us, and that's not where we're going to build our base*. We're not going to build our base by wooing Krugman and the editorial board of the *New York Times*. We're going to build a base, and it's just like something Sanders said in the first debate, the only way we're going to make any of this stuff that we want happen is to build a popular movement out of there that's big enough, and strong enough to assert its will in a way that can change the terms of the political debate.

I mean, I often point out that for most of us who are concerned with egalitarian interests, we actually got more from Richard Nixon than we got from any of the three subsequent Democratic presidents, and it's not because Nixon liked us. I'm pretty sure he hated all of us, but the fact was that the balance of political and social forces in society was such that Nixon understood that ours were interests that he had to accommodate in some way.

NJR: *How much potential do you think Bernie Sanders has?*

AR: I go back and forth... The longer that the campaign is alive and viable, the more opportunities we have to organize through it, and underneath it, to try to build a popular base on the issues. And Sanders understands that, too. This time, it's also pretty clear that all the rest of the field is more committed to defeating the left than they are to defeating Trump, and that certainly makes sense, given what we know about the rest of the field... I think it's way too soon to say. We're not going to know anything, really, until votes start coming in...

NJR: *You write in Class Notes of your own organizing experience in the G.I. coffeehouse movement, where you talk about that difficult reality of what it takes to achieve small goals. Talking to people, and converting people one by one. And the word "organizing" is easy to say, but maybe you could say what that actually means in practice.*

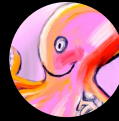
AR: A lot of times, people think it involves a bullhorn. But to me, it's fundamentally a matter of establishing relationships with people, building standing with them, and how you create standing with them. If you're in a workplace... there are people around who have standing with their fellow workers because they're dependable, they're trustworthy, and their fellow workers think of them as their sources of good judgment they can tap into. And it's the same thing in other areas too. So, showing that you will act solidaristically with people about their own struggles, about their own concerns, that's how you build a relationship with standing. They'll trust you, they'll pay attention to you, and they'll listen to you. And of course, part of that means I'm listening to them, to find ways to connect the large political programs that you want to move, meaningfully, to people's own concerns. Then you broaden the base, and just keep trying to broaden the base. So, I've sometimes joked that it can be a little bit like selling Amway. Because what you're trying to do is make connections, to bring more people into the project of advancing the common agenda. +

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