

The Magazine That Likes You Just The Way You Are

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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**MOUNT
EVEREST**

NOT SO VERY
BIG AFTER ALL

**SLAVOJ
ŽIŽEK**

USEFUL OR
USELESS?

**DOGGY
DOO DNA**

OH, THEY'RE
COLLECTING IT

**NAOMI
KLEIN**

WILL FIX
ALL THIS



FRONT MATTER

A N A R C H Y I S G O O D

REGARDING OCTOPUS ON FACE

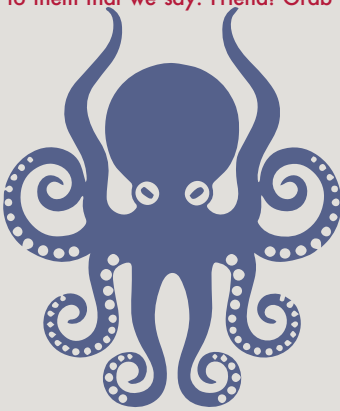
In the last edition, there appeared a Public Service Announcement placed by the Ad Council, warning readers of the dangers of placing a live octopus on their face. A number of readers wrote in to question the necessity of the notice, arguing that "nobody needs to be told not to put an octopus on their face." These readers said that the deleterious effects of attaching cephalopods to one's visage were so self-evident as to be unworthy of note in a serious magazine.

How dearly we wish we could concur. Alas, it is not so obvious as one might hope. Consider this recent item from the *Fisherman's Gazette*:

A woman's ill-advised photo attempt with an octopus recently went horribly wrong: After she draped the cephalopod on her face, the octopus dug in with its suckers and bit her on the chin, causing a painful infection that sent her to the emergency room.

There is, then, at least one individual who could have benefitted

from the PSA. Alas, for her it came too late. But undoubtedly there are countless others, and we still hold hope that we can reach them in time. We can see them now, standing on the seashore, looking down into a tide pool, hand hesitating above a tiny blue-ringed octopus, as they think to themselves: "Ought I to place this squishy creature upon my visage? Do I dare?" It is to them that we say: Friend! Grab



not the octopus! The consequences can only be disastrous! Spare yourself calamity!

Reader, you may laugh. "I would never put an octopus on my face," you say. "I am intelligent." Your complacency, however, is unbecoming. Can you be so sure? When you are standing with a group of peers next to a tank at the aquarium, and they begin chanting "Do it, do it, do it!" and bet you \$100 that you won't, can you say for certain that you would never succumb? Remember the lesson of the Milgram Experiment: We know not what we are capable of, under the right circumstances. When your moment comes, and you are poised ready to do the now-unthinkable, perhaps it will be the sage words of *Current Affairs* that come flooding back into your mind: it may seem like a good idea to put this octopus on your face now, but reflect upon the lessons learned by those who have put octopuses on their faces before you. This kind of counsel is what we are here for.

DO NOT LISTEN TO THEM WHEN THEY TELL YOU TO ACCUSTOM YOURSELF TO THINGS AS THEY ARE

From the moment of your birth, you were made to feel powerless. You were told that this was all there is, that you had better suck it up and get used to it. And perhaps that is precisely what you did. You sighed and accepted that your fate was beyond your control, that you were enmeshed within the Logic of a System. Systems, the professor said, acted upon individuals, not the other way around, and to think you could nudge the Logic this way or that according to your own whims and fancies was the height of hubristic folly.

We are here, dear reader, to tell you that the professor was an ass. The circumstances may not be of your choosing, but the future is yours to be molded in accordance with whatever mad preferences and grandiose designs you may possess. If you can dream of a thing, it is worth attempting.

As for us, we shall be here cheering you along the way. This is not just a magazine. It is a friend you can lean on, one who will tell you that you are great even when you obviously are not, one that will love you always in spite of your severe character flaws. We are here to help you through your thing, whatever it is. Godspeed!

THE EDITOR'S MEMOIRS

We would like to take a moment to formerly distance ourselves from the newly-published book *My Affairs: A Memoir of the Magazine Industry* (2016-2076). The work, published by Pullman Maritime Press, is authored by the editor of this magazine, and concerns work conducted at this magazine, but has not undergone review by the Legal Department of this magazine. We have been reliably informed by early readers of advance copies that the book contains matter that may constitute libel, specifically against the editor and publisher of *Jacobin* magazine, Bhaskar Sunkara, and the editor of *Highlights for Children*, Betty Rose Dewdrop. We would like to reassure the interested parties that *Current Affairs* bears nothing but goodwill toward the editors and publishers of all other mainstream periodicals save one (and we have made it repeatedly clear what the one is).



THE CODE
This magazine is entirely written in code. Decipher it to find our "alternate meaning."

YOU ARE A SOLDIER

in the war for subscriptions



Why This Magazine Is Flat

Have you ever wondered why most magazines are flat? Or have you simply accepted it, like you unquestioningly accept most other dogmas and statuses quo? It could, however, be otherwise: Surely you have heard of a "pop-up book," in which each new page offers some three-dimensional construction that leaps up to greet you. Why is this magazine not filled to the brim with pop-ups?

It is certainly not because the Editor does not desire it. For some time, it has been the official editorial position that this must become an all-pop-up magazine as soon as fiscally prudent. Alas, it is not yet fiscally prudent. Thanks to the curse of Capitalism, we are only permitted to do what we can "afford" to do, and giant pop-up strawberries, Draculas, and informative bar graphs are not yet "in the cards." Would that it were so! But here you can help: Every dollar you give us, every additional passerby you cajole into subscribing, helps us get closer and closer to the ultimate goal: a fully three-dimensional periodical, overflowing with cut-outs, pop-ups, textures, scratch-n-sniffs, peel-offs, lickables, and fold-ins. Want a fully edible magazine? Want one with free toys inside, and "special glasses"? So do we. But the Market has not yet decided that this is necessary. It is up to you to help the Market make up its mind. Give us money, and watch this magazine become more wondrous than ever before.

LET THE DAMNED CATS INTO THE DAMNED MUSEUM

Distressing news out of Hiroshima: The Onomichi City Art Museum has spent considerable resources on keeping out two art-appreciating cats who have made repeated attempts to enter through the front door. Each afternoon, according to an item in the *Hiroshima Noontime Gazette*, the cats approach the museum and are rebuffed by guards:

"The two male cats have made trying to visit the museum their principal pastime. Almost every day, they will hover by the automatic doors, before being gently ushered out by a white-gloved security guard. And though they're no closer to making it in to see the art (and the cat-themed show has long since moved on), they've now attained a certain amount of internet stardom.

The museum regularly posts videos of the cats and their stand-offs with the guards. Photographs by tourists and locals have traveled around the globe. The cats have even inspired a range of merchandise for the museum, though their new-found celebrity has made it hard to keep up with demand."

The museum now sells tote bags featuring a cartoon of a cat stuck in the entrance door, with a guard pointing at it and telling it to leave. Needless to say, we find this appalling and monstrous. Museum access should not be determined by one's income level or species, and the purpose of a museum is to provide universal access to culture for all who care to enjoy it. A museum guard is there to keep the art inside, not to keep the "wrong" patrons outside.

The cats of Hiroshima have the full support of *Current Affairs* in their effort to access the Onomichi Museum. We will even sneak them in ourselves the next time we deliver a bundle of new issues to the Museum gift shop. We hereby demand that the museum guards stand down and let the cats pass, lest the Museum wish to incur the wrath of our Editorial Board and be denounced from these pages every month. What is happening is a grotesque injustice that must be rectified immediately if Japan is to maintain any pretense of being a state that respects the rights of all residents. Let in the cats!



LET NOBODY ELSE READ THIS ISSUE

POOR BOSTON: INFINITE GROWTH
 The Editors would like to take a moment to express sympathy for anyone who happens to live in Boston. We realize that it is not an easy life. Hang in there! Someday you may live somewhere else.
Some say it's "impossible."
DARE TO BELIEVE!

Keep Sending NOTES LIKE THIS

*Dear Current Affairs,
 I hope you're all doing well. This is just a quick note of appreciation: Your work is incredibly insightful, refreshingly hilarious, and compassionate, human—all in all it fills me with hope.*
Miguel

BETRAY YOU, WILL WE? NO!

There are magazines, believe it or not, that will sell you out. Quite literally: if someone asks to purchase a list of their subscribers' home addresses, the only question will be whether the price is right. Not so here at *Current Affairs*: when the peddlers of enrichment schemes and serpent tonics show up in the Editor's office, he swiftly shows them the trapdoor. (There is a manatee-infested swimming pool beneath CAHQ, and few salesmen get out alive. While the manatee's bite is usually non-fatal, its "death-cuddle" has smothered the life out of many a wandering grifter.) Harsh? Indubitably, but we have always put ethics over mercy. "There is nothing we will not do for you," we tell subscribers, and that does not exclude casual manslaughter. The *Economist* will probably sell your data to security firms and algorithm manufacturers. Us? We would rather jump in front of a train. (Perhaps not a moving one, but the gesture is the same.) What was it Richard Astley said about never letting one down, never giving one up, never running around and deserting one? That's us, with you. We trust you admire the shape and potency of our scruples.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ENDORSES THE BAYOU BISCUIT

As one of the United States' most influential publications, we at the *Current Affairs* editorial board have long struggled with the matter of endorsing particular candidates in U.S. elections. We do not wish to be mere cheerleaders for one candidate over another, and we will always strive to be objective and honest in our assessment of any given political figure. However, the upcoming 2020 election is simply too important to stand idly by, claiming "neutrality" in a battle where one individual clearly stands, head and shoulders, above the rest.

The election we are referring to is, of course, the 2020 election for the Louisiana Comptroller of Mid-Sized Drainage Ponds, and the candidate that *Current Affairs* wholeheartedly endorses is (of course) none other than Pierre Harlequin "The Bayou Biscuit" DuDevereauxBois.

We are aware that this endorsement will ruffle some feathers. While Monsieur DuDevereauxBois (henceforth "The Biscuit") is enormously popular with his base, he has also been the center of a number of controversies during his long and complicated stint in Louisiana politics. Some quibble over the fact that he is wanted in six states for grand larceny of an airboat, and is currently on trial for "attempted theft of a swamp." However, we at *Current Affairs* still believe in the presumption of innocence, and would urge voters not to be distracted by such trifles. If anything, attempting to steal a swamp shows exactly the type of initiative and outside-the-box thinking which is sorely needed in our elected officials.

Needless to say, we reject the ridiculous and baseless accusations against the Biscuit that have been levelled by the anti-Biscuit media. The sugges-

tion that he tried to poison his nemesis, John "The Manatee" LaRoux, is patently absurd, as the Biscuit has dozens of nemeses and it would make no sense to poison just one. Furthermore, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Biscuit is "the ringleader of a highly complex Ponzi scheme based around the sale of pinky rings", or that he "runs a chain of false post offices along the I-49."

We urge our readers to elect Pierre Harlequin DuDevereauxBois to the office of Comptroller of Mid-Sized Drainage Ponds. There is no-one who knows ponds better than him, thanks to his background as a door-to-door salesman of used alligator saddles. There is no-one who is better at "getting things done," without regard for such obstacles as laws and regulations. There is no-one who looks better in a hat. Vote Bayou Biscuit, if you know what's good for you!

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the all new WASHINGTON CONSENSUS

An ultra-left critic of ours on social media writes: "Jacobin, *Current Affairs*, *The Intercept* = new generation manufacturing Washington consensus"

While we certainly object to the critic's implication that there is something wrong with *Current Affairs* being the Washington consensus, it is impossible to doubt the factual claim: we are, indeed, the capital's most influential publication. This is the magazine turned to by presidents and potentates for advice, the magazine from which America's Thought Leaders daily siphon their Thoughts. Each morning as she looks down her list of upcoming votes, Nancy Pelosi asks an aide "But where does *Current Affairs* stand on the matter?" The heads of America's corporate conglomerates dare not make a decision without first 'phoning the Editor of *Current Affairs* to ask whether this magazine would criticize the choice, should it be made. A murmur of disapproval from the Editor is sufficient to scupper most would-be projects.

It is not easy being so important. Imagine having your word become binding law the moment of its being spoken. Imagine billions of people hanging on your every syllable, looking to you for cues as to what action they should take next. Imagine being able to end empires with a single breath, to take or create life with a twitch of the forefinger. But if you think we shoulder this responsibility lightly, you are in error. We feel a deep and abiding sense of noblesse oblige. We cannot promise never to abuse our power, but we promise that the dictatorship of *Current Affairs* shall always strive to be a benevolent one.



If You Like Doves More Than Pigeons
 YOU ARE A RACIST

THEY ARE THE SAME BIRD
 The Audubon Society



BORED AT WORK?

Cut out these squares and tape them on your boss's belongings...

REMEMBER MATTHEW 19:24!	Fun Fact PROPERTY IS THEFT!	THOSE UPON WHOM YOU TRAMPLE IN THIS LIFE WILL SEEK THEIR VENGEANCE IN THE NEXT
THERE IS STILL TIME TO REPENT		WEALTH IS A CRIME

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*[this article was bumped to
the next issue and the editor
began eating the cupcake]*



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no man is an ISLAND?

by AISLING MCCREA

JUST GO WITH ME HERE: ONE DAY, YOU WAKE UP tied to a bed, in a room you've never seen before. You feel woozy, and when you try to speak, the only thing that comes out of your mouth is a series of incomprehensible sounds. There's a window to your right. You're in the middle of the desert; nothing but sand as far as you can see.

Someone enters the room and tells you they've kidnapped you, drugged you, and taken you to their private compound. The effect of the drug is unusually long-lasting, and although it gradually wears off, it will be a process of years before you can walk, talk, and take care of yourself. Your kidnapper tells you that as a member of the compound, you must abide by the compound's rules, and you will be punished if you disobey. If you produce anything of value in the compound, the compound leaders will take some of it for themselves. This is only fair, since the compound is also providing you with *so* much care—letting you use the roads between buildings, and the library, and don't forget the *years* of assistance you'll require while you're still in this tricky and unproductive state, being redeveloped into a good and productive member of the compound (it'll take 12 years, most likely).

"But I didn't ask for any of this!" you say, or at least you would say if your tongue didn't feel like a fat lazy worm in your mouth. Your kidnapper seems to understand you, though.

"So? You're here now, and you have a responsibility to obey our rules and pay your dues. It doesn't matter if you don't want to use the roads, the library, the educational center. This is our society. You were born into it. You'll obey us whether you like it or not."

"What if I want to go somewhere else?"

"Well, there are other compounds around here. But no matter which one you go to, you'll always be under someone's control, and will need to obey their rules, pay their tithes. And if you want to reject all of them, and walk out into the hostile unknown, by yourself, with no help? Well, good luck with that. Don't let me stop you."

Feels unjust? If you ask a libertarian, this is what it means to be born and raised under the tyranny of the state.

NOT ALL LIBERTARIANS, OF COURSE. SOME libertarians *love* the state, or at least their particular state. (It's all "don't tread on me" this and "small government that" until someone disrespects a favorite flag or police force. Then, all of a sudden, it's "let me lend you my boots so you can stomp even more stompily.") Other libertarians dislike what they deem to be overreaches of the state (workplace safety regulations, child protective services, age of consent laws) but grudgingly accept that the state must have at least some powers, such as the ability to enforce contracts or mobilize against outside invasion, in order to ensure that people can safely practice their (primarily economic) freedom. However, there are some who take the principles of libertarianism, and ask a truly radical question: how can you be truly free, if you are forced from birth to submit to the authority of a state you did not consent to be part of? How can you be free if you can't even leave this state without getting permission to be a resident in another state, abandoning one tyrant in favor of another? Pretty much all land on earth has been claimed by someone. Where can you go if you wish to be truly free?

PADDY ROY BATES WAS SIMPLY NOT built for a quiet life. Born in London in 1921, he spent his youth fighting dictators. According to his family, he joined the International Brigades in Spain at age 15, then fought in World War II in North Africa, Italy, and the Middle East, rising rapidly through the ranks and eventually earning the title of Major. In the 1960s, he took an interest in the flourishing new subculture of *pirate radio*. At that time, many British DJs were growing frustrated with the restrictive culture at the BBC's radio stations; its crusty, uncool managers seemed uninterested in the exciting new wave of pop and rock music, and promoting lesser-known artists was heavily discouraged. So the DJs came up with a rather unorthodox solution: buy boats, and broadcast from the sea. Close enough that the signals could be received in the United Kingdom, but floating just beyond the limits of the U.K.'s territorial control.

Bates began his own pirate radio station a few miles off England's east coast, setting himself up on a disused naval defense platform that the government had failed to dismantle after World War II (which, conveniently enough, still had the necessary radio equipment left on it). But the radio project was short-lived, and plagued with problems. Bates did not have the funds to keep the station going on his own, and he had to deal with rival pirate stations broadcasting from the same area and disputing his right to the platform. What's more, the U.K. government finally had enough of the likes of Bates, his fellow radio pirates, and their devil-may-care approach to legal loopholes. In 1967, Parliament passed the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act, which forbid British citizens to participate in illegal broadcasts, even if they were outside territorial waters. Naturally, Bates responded to this hostile action the way any of us would—he declared that the disused naval platform was actually an independent nation named the 'Principality of Sealand', and that the U.K.'s law could not touch him. The land he was on did not belong to the United Kingdom, nor did it belong to France, the Netherlands, or any other supposedly more legitimate state. He was on *terra nullius*—no-one's land. Or at least, it had been *terra nullius*. Now it was *terra Bates*.

If the Principality of Sealand was a joke, it was one Bates took very seriously. Following its declaration of independence, Sealand's military forces—"military forces" here meaning Bates and his son, Michael—ruthlessly defended its territory, repelling boats from both rival pirate radio stations and the U.K.'s Royal Navy with guns and petrol bombs. (The U.K. courts found that they could not try the Bates family for these violent acts, since they were not in U.K. territory at the time). Although the United Kingdom refused to officially recognize the nation of Sealand, the whole "petrol bomb" thing suggested that on balance, they felt it was better to leave the Principality alone, and from then on, the isolated micronation was allowed to exist in a queasy state of semi-nationhood. Although Bates

died in 2012, Sealand continues to exist, under the benevolent rule of his son. Its motto is "E Mare Libertas"—*from the sea, freedom*.

Looking at Sealand's official website, it is easy to dismiss it as a kitschy little novelty. (If you wish, you can visit sealandgov.org and even purchase a title. Becoming a Duke or Duchess of Sealand will cost you £499.99, while Lord/Lady is a bargain at £29.99. You can also buy commemorative coins, keychains, or an 'I ♥ Sealand' t-shirt). But the cutesy PR hides some grueling truths. It's no easy feat to found a state in an age where most hospitable land is taken and new attempts at settler-colonialism are frowned upon, and those who attempt it can often find themselves encountering a whole host of troubles from unexpected places.

FOR STARTERS, SEALAND IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE place to live. Although Sealand has issued about 150,000 passports in its lifetime, only a handful of people have ever spent significant amounts of time there, given that it's, well, a platform in the middle of the sea. The Bates family have fashioned the interior into a reasonably cosy home, but anyone who stays there relies heavily on stockpiles of tinned food, and needs to travel to and from the mainland either by helicopter or by a small boat that has to be lifted onto the platform via an intricate pulley system. (Roy Bates' son, the reigning monarch Prince Michael of Sealand, lives primarily in the United Kingdom.) Furthermore, Sealand's existence is contingent on the fact that the Bates family have the privilege of retaining their British citizenship, and can come and go as they please whenever they need food, fuel, or to see the latest Marvel movie. Realistically, Sealand could easily be crushed if it were ever considered a real threat, but as the situation stands, it's mostly thought of as the mere art project of a grouchy eccentric, and therefore its existence is generously permitted. While the creation of Sealand makes for a fun story, it also offers a glimpse into how enormously difficult it is for a state to have true and absolute independence. After all, even "real" states depend on others for trade, and those that reject international ties and attempt total self-sufficiency, such as North Korea with its *Juche* ideology, do not yield encouraging results. Those who wish to create their own state find themselves in a bind: either they must enter into a sort of devil's bargain with a "real" state—usually either their state of birth, or whichever state is close by and reasonably tolerant—or they must submit themselves to being truly alone (and probably starving). If you are a free-spirited individual, and you are angered by the shackles of your statehood, the case of Sealand raises some important philosophical questions. What is the point of going to all the effort of creating, declaring, and defending your own sovereign territory if you're only going to end up reliant on other states anyway? What's the difference between being subject to the whims of your home country's policy within the state's borders, versus outside the state's borders...except that outside the



The Principality of Sealand, small but mighty. Photo by Ryan Lackey.

state's borders you're very cold and can't get Wi-Fi?

The creation of Sealand caused other problems, too. After the mid-1970s, Bates Sr. turned his damp and salty kingdom into a cottage industry, handing out positions in the Sealand "government" and selling those Sealand passports. Some of these went to genuine enthusiasts for the project, such as Bates' close friend Mike Barrington, who helped set up much of the infrastructure. But not everyone who took an interest in the Principality had peaceful intentions. In 1978, a crew of German and Dutch mercenaries attempted an armed invasion of Sealand, approaching the platform on jet skis and by helicopter. They had been hired by Sealand's then-prime minister, a German national by the name of Alexander Achenbach, who desired to turn Sealand into a luxury offshore casino. There was an armed struggle, and the invaders were taken hostage and eventually released after several weeks of negotiations between Bates and a German diplomat. In addition, it was eventually discovered that Sealand passports were being sold to finance an international drug trafficking ring. As it turns out, managing a state can get a little stressful once the novelty of picking out a flag and a crest has worn off.

IS CREATING YOUR OWN STATE WORTH IT? THAT probably depends on your motivations. While many micronations are the work of committed eccentrics looking for fun, and others are little more than publicity stunts, some are born out of an attempt to make a serious political stand. Many of these are laudable and arise

from clearly valid complaints, such as the Sovereign Yidindji Government, an indigenous nation that seceded from the Australian government in 2014 and claims part of Queensland. Others are somewhat less sympathetic, such as the short-lived Outer Baldonia, formerly located on Outer Bald Tusket Island off the coast of Nova Scotia, which seems to have existed primarily as a vehicle for the founder to vent his frustrations about his wife. (Outer Baldonia's constitution promised "[t]he right of freedom from question, nagging, shaving, interruption, women, taxes, politics, wars, monologues, cant and inhibitions" and "the right to sleep all day and stay up all night." Perhaps the money spent on minting coins might have been better spent on a couples therapist.) But even micronations that seem at first glance to have been created out of pettiness sometimes shed light on real problems. In 1977, the small Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye was declared an independent kingdom by local bookseller Richard Booth. Although tongue-in-cheek, the declaration was a response to Booth's frustration that the town was being neglected by multiple levels of indifferent government. As a result of Booth's "kingship," the town gained attention and tourism, the local community was strengthened, more businesses were built, and today the tiny town (population: around 1500) is nationally famous for its bookstores. At other times, people have declared their homes to be states in an attempt to defend themselves against eviction, or to protest decisions by local government that were having deleterious effects on their lives. Although these strategies are hit-and-miss in their ability to protect an individual against their govern-

ment, one does have to admire the stubbornness of a person who creates nationhood out of thin air, just to prove a point.

And then, well, there are the libertarians.

There have been many attempts to create a libertarian state. (Well, the term *state* is perhaps a little tyrannical. A libertarian *community*. A libertarian *area*. A libertarian *freedom space*.) There was the Republic of Minerva, which was going to be built on a Pacific coral reef—this one had a good start, with its founders even managing to construct a steel tower on the reef in 1971, before their claim was crushed by the Tongan government. There was New Utopia, a piece of underwater land claimed in the 1990s by Howard “Prince Lazarus” Turney, a businessman obsessed with becoming physically immortal (he has since died). There have been less ambitious projects that did not attempt secession

fair to assign someone a state at birth that they cannot consent to? From a practical perspective, it’s hard to see any way around it. Babies can’t take care of themselves, and someone has to be responsible for us in our infancy; still, there’s a great deal of danger in allowing parents absolute autonomy over their children, and most countries have decided that the state is responsible for ensuring that children’s rights are protected. But how can one justify tagging a newborn child with one statehood or another? A baby has no stated values or preferences. To assign a baby a certain statehood is to determine their entire life: their constitutional rights, their responsibilities, the range of services and lifestyle they can expect to have, where they will be able to travel once they are old enough. From a pragmatic perspective, it’s hard to imagine any other

“This is not to suggest that babies should form their own microstates...”

from existing states, but merely peaceful co-existence. There was Glenn Beck’s “Independence, U.S.A.,” a planned self-sufficient city for freedom-loving Americans, the plans for which were quietly dropped not long after it was announced. And there was Galt’s Gulch Chile, the Ayn Rand-inspired community built by four libertarian adventurers in 2012. Unlike most libertarian communities, Galt’s Gulch Chile actually got off the ground, before swiftly devolving into Real Housewives-style drama, in which all the founders accused each other of being grifters and sociopaths. Many would-be residents and investors were furious to learn that the parcels of land they’d bought were not properly zoned, their water rights were not secured, and the founders had, in general, not done their due diligence. (No doubt this will come as a shock to anyone who has encountered libertarians before.)

IT’S EASY TO MOCK THESE OBVIOUSLY DOOMED, self-important projects. (Fun, too.) But laughing at failed attempts to explore new ways of living might also be a way of avoiding some difficult questions. If someone really wishes to live in a manner that is incompatible with the state they belong to, and is not causing any major harm to others, why can’t they renounce that state and form a new one? Why do existing states make it so hard to escape their grasp? It is possible to renounce one’s citizenship, but being gifted citizenship of another existing state is not guaranteed, and the lack of hospitable *terra nullius* makes it almost impossible to form a true state that is recognized internationally. And is it actually

way of doing things. But from a principled perspective, it’s almost impossible to defend.

This is not to suggest that babies should form their own microstates. Although our publication has praised microstates in the past, it is not, and never has been, the position of *Current Affairs* that there should be a “baby nation” (despite the demands from literally dozens of readers that we reconsider our stance on the matter). But even if you are unconvinced that the difficulty of forming new states is proof that we live on a tyrannical planet, these questions do open our eyes to some of the absurdities within our system. Why should a French or a German citizen be born with access to world-class services and well-protected rights (actual implementation on the basis of minority status may differ), while a Somali citizen is not only denied those things, but also faces huge obstacles in becoming a citizen (or even a resident) of anywhere else? If you are born a citizen of Japan, there are 190 countries you can travel to freely without a visa; if you are a citizen of Afghanistan, there are only 25. If you are born a U.K. citizen, and feel like a change of scene, you can pay \$7 for permission to go to Canada, hop on a flight, and stay for up to six months without anyone bothering you. If you are born in a refugee camp, it can take years before you even get a chance to live in a place like Canada. So how can we possibly consider ourselves to be people who care about freedom and autonomy, when thanks to borders our destinies are practically assigned to us at birth? Is it absurd to form your own state? Or is it more absurd to have states in the first place? ✚

A photograph of three men stacked on top of each other, all reading 'Current Affairs' magazine. The man at the bottom is sitting on a bench, the middle man is on his shoulders, and the top man is on the middle man's shoulders. They are outdoors near railroad tracks. The man at the top is wearing a suit and glasses, the middle man has tattoos and is wearing a dark shirt, and the bottom man has a beard and is wearing a plaid shirt over a t-shirt. The magazine covers show various articles and images, including one with a sailboat and another with a cat.

ON TOP OR NOT

*No matter who you are or
where you sit, you deserve to
read Current Affairs.*

currentaffairs.org



How Britain Got Its

NHS

by Nathan J. Robinson

USUALLY IT'S MUCH EASIER TO DESTROY THAN TO create, but getting rid of institutions can be difficult. Once something is put in place, and people become used to it, it's hard for them to even begin to imagine a world without it. It took a hard, decades-long fight to get the eight-hour workday. Child labor laws seem obvious and indispensable today, but they came after generations of kids were sent up chimneys and down mine shafts and into cotton fields. Today we have free public schools all over the country, but we did not always. It took two centuries of effort by reformers and educators to make universal free public schooling a reality. Someday, perhaps, universal free public college will seem just as natural and permanent.

The National Health Service (NHS) is the pride of Britain. Most respondents in a public poll called it the country's single greatest achievement—this in the land that gave us Shakespeare, Stonehenge, cheddar cheese, and Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of The Moon*. The NHS provides every U.K. resident, from their birth to their death, with healthcare that is free at the point of use. It is good at what it does: despite the scare stories about wait times and rationing, it is still often ranked one of the best health systems in the world, beating out Canada, France, Germany, Australia, and (of course) the United States. Efforts to privatize and dismantle it have never succeeded—British people are so protective of the service that even Conservative governments have to lavish praise on the NHS and affirm their dedication to its socialistic founding principles.

Americans may have a hard time understanding just how much easier British people's lives are thanks to the NHS. If you need to go to the doctor, you look one up, book an appointment, go, get treated, and leave. They do not have to be “in your network.” There are no co-pays, no deductibles. If you lose your job, your healthcare is unaffected. Nor does it make a difference if you move to a different part of the country. You will not be billed for your ambulance ride. You will not be billed for your appointment. You will not be given a \$629

band-aid or a \$5,000 ice pack or an \$18,000 bottle of formula. You will not spend hours on the phone with an insurance company trying to figure out why some parts of your hospital visit were covered and others weren't. You will feel *free*—free to think about getting well instead of about how to pay for treatment. As my British colleague Aisling McCrea has written, Americans who love freedom and hate bureaucracy should be clamoring for socialized medicine.

BUT TO APPRECIATE HOW REMARKABLE THE NHS IS, it's also necessary to remember that for most of British history, it didn't exist. This unique egalitarian institution, which guarantees every person access to a good standard of care, even if they are otherwise destitute, is frequently celebrated as an embodiment of “Britishness” or the national spirit. British society, however, has historically been notable for its distinctly *unequal* character. Britain is a land with a vicious and rigid class system, where status is signified by the subtlest of differences. (E.g. do you say “napkin” or “serviette,” “jam” or “preserve,” “sofa” or “settee”?) It is strange, when we think of Dickensian England with its earls and its chimney sweeps, to think that socialized medicine would be fully instituted here before the middle of the next century. The United States, the famous land of “equal opportunity,” doesn't even guarantee sick *infants* equal care.

Why, then, does Britain have an NHS? Partly because socialists fought for it, and stubbornly refused to accept the status quo. The so-called father of the NHS, Aneurin Bevan, was a radical and obstinate democratic socialist, who as Minister of Health battled the British Medical Association and was determined to implement a system that satisfied the left's core principles. It would be free at the point of use, it would be comprehensive in its coverage, and it would be open to all.

Bevan is a singular character in British political history. Born into a Welsh coal mining family, he had five siblings die in childbirth or childhood. The poverty Bevan saw around him in mining country turned him into a lifelong class warrior, and he became infamous for

LEFT: Nurses with the first babies born on the NHS, 1948



ABOVE: Bevan visits a patient on the first day of the NHS's operation. RIGHT: Material advertising new government benefits to Britons

stating openly (on the eve of the NHS's debut, no less) that he would "hate" the Tories for as long as he lived, and considered them "lower than vermin" for letting so many "first class people" live and die in destitution. Bevan's dream for the NHS was partly inspired by the Tredegar Medical Aid Society of his Welsh hometown, a subscription medical service whereby inhabitants paid a small regular fee in exchange for free-at-the-point-of-use medical care. It had proved hugely popular locally, and Bevan wanted to see the model expanded nationwide.

Though he was on the radical left of the Labour Party, and ended up on the margins in the years before his death in 1960, Bevan was known as one of the greatest orators Britain had produced, and those who worked with him found him surprisingly warm, congenial, and pragmatic. Those who fought him over the NHS found that he was willing to do business and understood the need to work within existing political reality. Bevan was no utopian; he wanted a health system that actually worked for the people it served. Thanks in part to his skillful stewardship of the service during its early days, that is exactly the kind of system the country got, and the editor of the *British Medical Journal* later said Bevan was the "most brilliant Minister of Health this country has ever had."

But it would be a mistake to attribute too much responsibility to Bevan alone. In fact, by the time he became Minister of Health, much of his work had been done for him. Over the course of decades, a consensus had emerged among policy-makers and the general public that there needed to be some kind of overhaul of British medicine. In fact, in some quarters there was even a sense that a kind of national health service was "inevitable" and the only question was what form it would take. Rudolf Klein, in *The Politics of the NHS*, writes that "the acceptance of the need for a national health service long predates" World War II, and there was a prevailing belief that "the logic of circumstances, rather than the ideology of politicians or the

demands of pressure groups" would create a national health service. Sir Arthur MacNalty, the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, had said in 1939 that "it is a revolutionary change, but it is one that must inevitably come, because the voluntary system with all its excellent attributes is unsited to the modern needs of the whole population." The famous "Beveridge Report," issued in 1942 by Liberal economist William Beveridge, had sketched the foundations of the postwar welfare state, which would tackle the "five giants" of "Want... Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness." The dense report became an unexpected bestseller, and Britons everywhere were talking about it and overwhelmingly approved of its vision. When the end of the war came, there was a public expectation that the proposals made years earlier would now be acted upon.

In fact, Klein writes that in some ways Bevan's NHS was modest, but that "the virulent hostility of Bevan's critics... flattered his achievement and exaggerated the extent to which he broke with the sedimentary consensus that had been built up over the previous years." Winston Churchill's government, in 1943, had published a white paper proposing "a comprehensive health service for everybody in the country" and Churchill himself had said that:

"The discoveries of healing science must be the inheritance of all: that is clear. Disease must be attacked whether it occurs in the poorest or the richest man or woman, simply on the ground that it is the enemy: and it must be attacked in the same way that the fire brigade will give its full assistance to the humble cottage as it will give it to the most important mansion... Our policy is to create a national health service, in order to secure that everybody in the country, irrespective of means, age, sex, or occupation, shall have equal opportunities to benefit from the best and most up-to-date medical and allied services available."

These words would place Churchill among the far left of the contemporary U.S. Democratic Party. The idea of treating hospitals like fire departments is actually even *more* socialistic than current "Medi-

care For All” plans, which provide a government insurance scheme but do not envision government-provided medical services.

Thus if we ask the question “How do you get an NHS?” and answer “Make a socialist your Minister of Health,” we’d be disastrously wrong. Bevan was able to beat the doctors because he had the public, and the “tides of history,” on his side. In a 1942 poll, 88 percent of Britons agreed with the proposal that “doctors and hospital services should be extended, free of charge, to every person” while only 6 percent disagreed. Politics precedes policy, meaning that having government officials introduce a specific plan is actually the *last* step. First you have to convince people that a plan is needed and build the power to carry it out.

Unfortunately, the question “What are the necessary social conditions to allow you to introduce an NHS?” must partly be answered: “A devastating war that creates a sense of comradeship and requires de facto nationalization of the hospitals.” Brian Watkin writes in *The National Health Service: The First Phase* that “war created the opportunity to think in terms of reconstruction and to capture the imagination of a people face to face with annihilation through gestures and language which at other times might have seemed inflated and rhetorical.” War also created the basic infrastructure for the service. It “generated confidence that it was actually possible to run a complex web of hospitals and services,” and made it so that a state health service had been “already practically established for the purposes of a national emergency.” Furthermore, there *had* been some kinds of free medical care before the war; the NHS was building on existing infrastructure.

It still took a political fight. Nearly 90 percent of British Medical Association doctors expressed disapproval of the NHS. A meeting of the BMA unanimously resolved that it was “so grossly at variance with the essential principles of our profession that it should be rejected absolutely by all practitioners.” Doctors who did support the service were often ostracized by their peers, and the Socialist Medical Association represented only a small fraction of practitioners. Bevan had to carefully make compromises to placate the doctors without sacrificing any of the core principles of the service.

WHEN THE NHS WAS SET TO DEBUT, there was a sense of apprehension in the government. Nobody knew whether the experiment would work. Countless impoverished people had been unable to afford

care, and there was fear that as soon as medicine became free, the system would become overwhelmed by the demand, with people using

far more services than the system could afford, stretching it beyond capacity, causing substantial cost overruns, and diminishing the ultimate quality of care. Familiar warnings were heard: socialized medicine would lead to equally shared misery.

The nightmare did not come to pass. A 1962 report found that the fears “so far proved to have been largely unfounded.” While the service was more costly than expected, and Conservative governments soon introduced new user fees, British health care has been impressively efficient. Today, the NHS ranks highly on measures of outcomes, and Britain does not spend an especially high percentage of its GDP on health-care. While the system is under strain, having been threatened by privatization and the failure to adequately expand its budget, it remains good at what it does, and most of its problems could easily be fixed by a government adequately committed to maintaining the service well.

The founding of the NHS offers some useful lessons for our own time. First, even a country with a rigid and ancient class system can achieve some measure of “socialist” institutions. (We can argue about whether the NHS “is socialism” but Bevan certainly thought it was, saying “a free health service is pure Socialism and as such it is opposed to the hedonism of capitalist society” and calling it “the greatest Socialist achievement of the Labor government.”) Victorian Britain turned into NHS Britain, a remarkable transformation that should offer encouraging evidence of the possibilities for change in the contemporary United States.

The bad news is: the interests opposed to Medicare For All are far stronger and more entrenched than those that tried to stop the NHS. Britain did not have the kind of giant powerful health insurance lobbying industry we have today, and the fight for single-payer in the U.S. will be far more vicious and difficult than the battle for the NHS is postwar Britain. But we do see that the opposition of the medical establishment is not always an insurmountable political obstacles. The vast majority of doctors opposed the establishment of the NHS. They were defeated, and once it was passed, they grudgingly accepted it, and have made no serious effort to get rid of it.

The first task, however, is to build political consensus. It took years from the first proposal of a national health service to its eventual passage and implementation. Advocates spent those years convincing people that the service was not only necessary, not only possible, but also virtually inevitable. This is the phase we are in here today: we have to show people what needs to be done, and build a strong public mandate for the

introduction of a new system. They did it in 1948 Britain, we can do it in the 2019 United States. ✚

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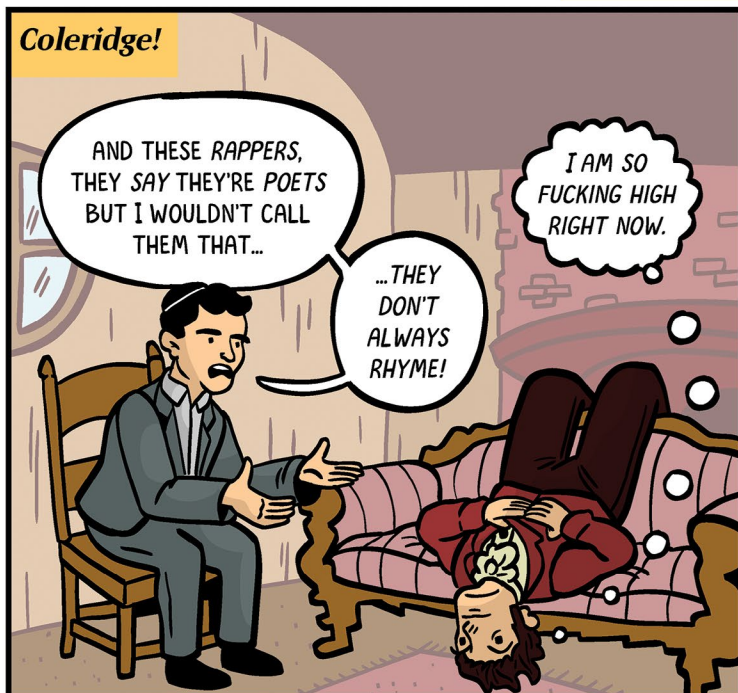
THE TIME TRAVAILS OF... *BEN SHAPIRO*



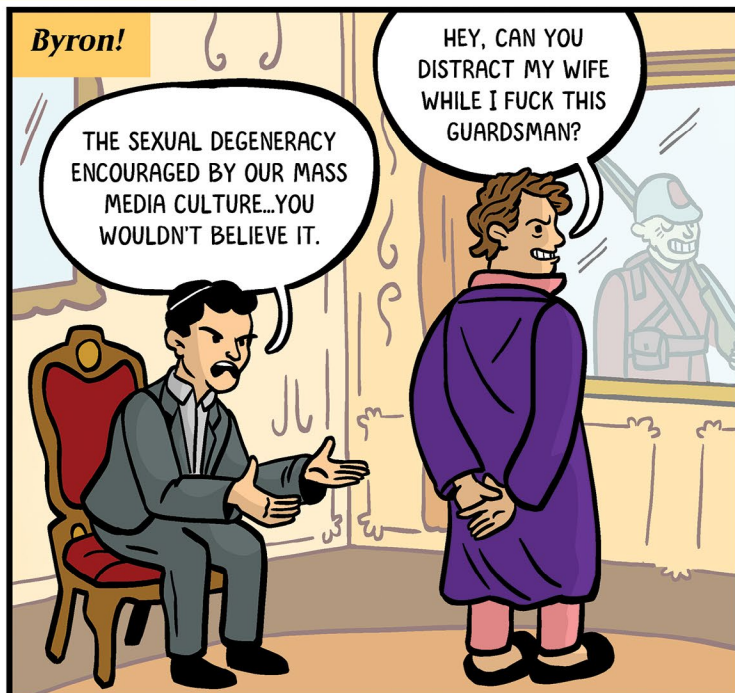
Thanks to an infusion of dark money from AEI, Koch Industries, the David Horowitz Freedom Center, and the Unreconstructed Knights of the Crusades, the conservative media empire has created a one-of-a-kind time travel device. Its mission: to take Ben Shapiro back in time to visit the glories of the Western past and safeguard the future. Join Ben as he:

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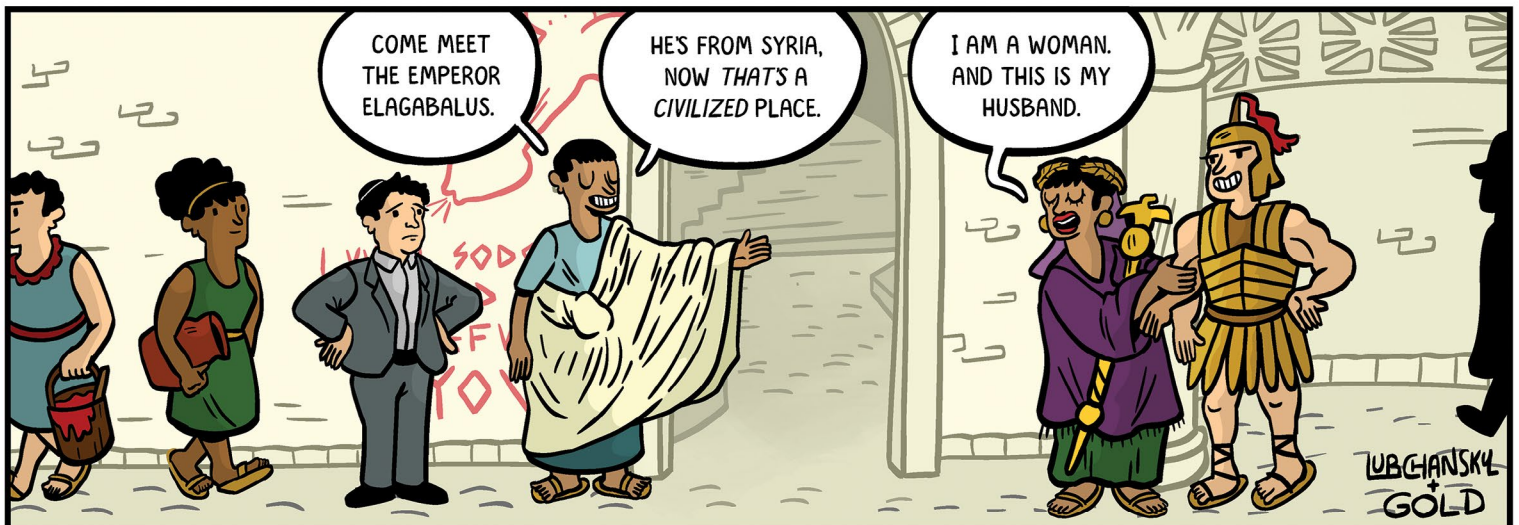
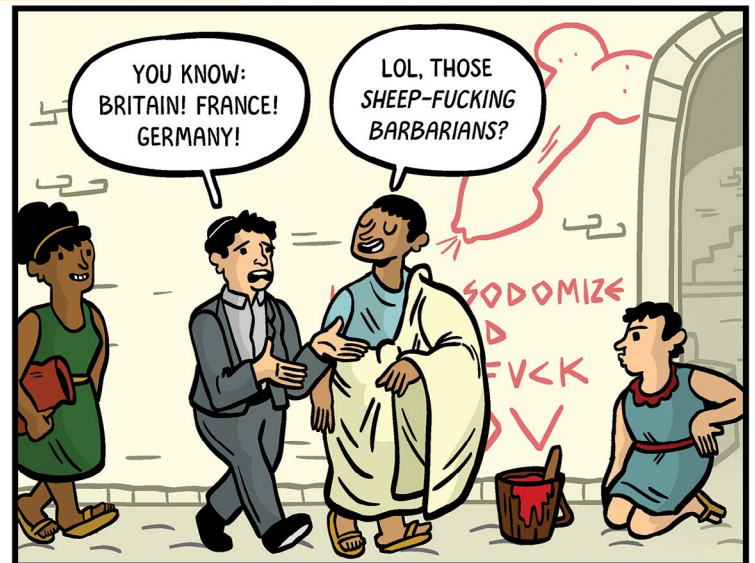
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...and arrives in Ancient Rome!



SPORTS AND THE RIGHT

BY LORENZO BRADFORD



IF, ON JUNETEENTH OF THIS YEAR, YOU TUNED INTO the hearing on H.R.40—the *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act*—you might have been surprised by the testimony of Burgess Owens, the former NFL player, Super Bowl Champion, and College Athlete Hall of Famer. He wasn't the only person with celebrity status to attend; witnesses invited by the Democratic party included Ta-Nehisi Coates, actor and activist Danny Glover, and filmmaker Katrina Browne. But Owens may have stood out because he was invited by Republicans to oppose the bill, along with Coleman Hughes, a Columbia undergraduate and *Quillette* columnist. Owens is currently an author and a guest contributor on Fox News, but more importantly, he's a leading voice in a popular yet under-analyzed school of right-wing thought in the Black community. This strain of thought is rooted in sports culture and proselytizes rugged individualism, hyper-nationalism, and adherence to conservative bootstrap philosophy. While some argue that these flaws make sports "inherently fascist," and thus irredeemable, I believe that the significance of sports in the Black community makes the fight for equity in sports an important piece of the broader struggle for racial justice.

Owens' testimony at the H.R.40 hearing was eccentric, to say the least. He began by recounting the story of his great-great-grandfather Silas Burgess, a man who "came to America shackled in the belly of a slave ship" and who, through his own industriousness, rose to become a "risk-taking entrepreneur" and "pillar of his community." Owens told Grandpa Silas' slave-to-riches story as proof that Black Americans have already demonstrated the ability to achieve success in America without special assistance. He balked at the notion that Black Americans should receive any compensation for past injustices and argued that previous generations would "be ashamed of the prevalence and acceptance of [this] demeaning victimhood within their proud race." He further insisted that the very idea of reparations "reinforces a spiritual view of racial relationships that is antithetical to America's Judeo-Christian foundation" and represents "a culturally Marxist idea promoted by socialists" which "denies the promise granted by an omnipotent God that we are truly equal."

While at times Owens' testimony felt like more of a response to the Chappelle Show's depiction of reparations than to H.R.40 itself, his most coherent points can be summarized as follows: (1) The social position of Black Americans today cannot be substantially improved by a deep analysis of slavery and its lasting structural impact, (2) attempting to do so will only create a class of villains and (godless/Marxist) victims, and (3) the answer for Black Americans is individual striving and good old-fashioned hard work. Or, as Owens stated succinctly: "Grandpa Silas never believed anyone owed him success. Why should I believe white Americans owe me anything?"

Amid the activism of Black athletes today, Owens' conspiracy-laden testimony may appear abnormal, and his conservatism may seem—to the casual observer—like an aberration in an otherwise progressive community of Black athletes. With so much publicity going to players protesting police brutality and Donald Trump, it's easy to conclude that most Black athletes share these viewpoints. But unfortunately, the way Owens transformed a narrative about racism and white supremacy into a *Rudy*-esque feel-good story of individual triumph is indicative of a popular strain of thought in many Black athletic circles. It is a philosophy promoted and monetized by Black

athletes and businesses via book deals, movie deals, motivational speeches and general inspo-porn.

As Hall of Fame linebacker Ray Lewis states in his 2015 autobiography *I Feel Like Going on: Life, Game, and Glory*:

Survival—that was the big message that came through in practice. We'd go at it, hard. One-on-one. And the boy who survived these battles was the boy who could get it done. Football, the game itself, was almost beside the point. It didn't much matter. The scoreboard, it didn't much matter. What mattered was what the game could teach you. What mattered was a sense of discipline... For me, the game became my sanctuary. It took me out of my own head and whatever ugliness was around me and just set me loose.

In Lewis' narrative, sports are essential: they literally taught him how to navigate through life. If "the boy who survived these battles was the boy who could get it done," then both life and sports come down to a matter of individual heroic effort. This brutal social Darwin-esque lesson, gleaned by a young Ray Lewis from football, could just as easily have been pulled from a book by Ayn Rand (unclear which is more harmful to the brain). In summation: your life will be brutish and short, there will be ugliness around you, learn to make peace with suffering and with endless struggle, worry about what you can control and leave the rest alone.

In Burgess Owens' interpretation of this philosophy, as told in his 2012 book *It's All About Team: Exposing the Black Talented Tenth*, Owens explains,

"I believe that success is a matter of choice not chance... I believe only through struggle and persistence can we take advantage of the special talents we have hidden within. It's not the Super Bowl Ring that I wear, but the character and resolve I exhibit during the downtimes, that defines me as a champion."

Here, in a book that I assume was comically unsuccessful due to choice not chance, Owens perfectly illustrates the fallacy at the core of his H.R.40 testimony and the bootstrap philosophy of sports more broadly. In both, success is merely a matter of choice. When an individual fails, they have only themselves to blame. When they succeed, it is due to their own grit and determination. The central lesson a Black athlete can glean from this message is that the social position of Black Americans today is due to individual bad choices. Examining the effects of a corrupt system or history of discrimination is just going to impede our progress. Needless to say, this perspective is entirely antithetical to the principles of racial justice work.

To be sure, these conservative principles didn't become commonplace in the Black athletic community solely because of individual players like Ray Lewis, Burgess Owens, Jim Brown, and others. In fact, it's more likely that their views were shaped or solidified by the right-wing propaganda that young Black athletes consume every day. This propaganda operates beneath the scenes to promote American Exceptionalism and idolize rugged individualism, averting all possibility of systemic critique of our country's exploitative racial caste system.

FOLLOWING THE COLIN Kaepernick-LED PROTESTS against police brutality, discussion raged over whether the former quarterback's actions were justified. Despite general bipartisan acknowledgement of the purpose of the protest—athletes were kneeling to bring attention to the issue of police treatment of Black Americans—there existed a sharp partisan divide over whether or not athletes should be required



to stand during the anthem. Some on the left felt the protests were an appropriate and even essential use of the giant platform gifted to star athletes. Some on the right argued for the separation of Sport and State, with one writer stating that a return to the pre-Kaepernick era would deliver “a message of unity that is much stronger than any one [individual’s] manipulation of a captive audience to voice their political position.”

But regardless of their position on the political spectrum, many fans and writers have still been operating under the assumption that Kaepernick introduced politics into an otherwise apolitical environment. Sports are generally agreed to be a great uniting force, where for a few brief but wonderful hours, people of different religions, races, sexualities, genders, and political leanings can come together, forget the ugliness around them, and be grateful that they aren’t New York Knicks fans.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS IT THAT WE ARE DECIDING to unite around? Despite the effort expended to make sports culture appear politically neutral on the surface, a deeper examination reveals clear right-wing political messaging.

On Super Bowl Sunday, for instance, the event will start with the National Anthem, usually followed by something like an Air Force F-18 flyover (costing hundreds of thousands of tax dollars), and maybe even a David Petraeus coin toss. Black players will be coached by a predominantly white leadership and “led” (often but not always) by a white quarterback—a position that some still believe requires too much intellect for Black people. The stands will be filled with a disproportionately white male audience yelling obscenities at the disproportionately Black male athletes

playing a sport where life-altering injuries are accumulated like Boy Scout badges. (I still *vaguely* remember my first concussion badge!) Further still, all of this will occur in a billion-dollar stadium often funded by corporate exploitation of public funds.

While watching from home, the jingoism will be brought to you in 4K resolution by way of multi-million-dollar advertisements that seek to exploit the patriotic atmosphere created by the NFL. (Classics include a Clint Eastwood commercial for Chrysler that proclaimed “it’s halftime in America too...except we are all scared because this isn’t a game,” a five-minute short on the American flag, and a Jeep Wrangler commercial displaying images of babies and veterans while the Star Spangled Banner plays ominously in the background.)

Accompanying every moment of on-field action will be play-by-play coverage that evokes images of war and violence to a comical extent. As George Carlin mimics in his skit on the violence of football:

In football, the object is for the quarterback, otherwise known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy, in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing his aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy’s defensive line. In baseball, the object is to go home and be safe.

What do you think? Is this a neutral, politics-free event or a Rupert Murdoch wet dream? Although the answer looks clear in hindsight, right-wing propaganda in sports is incredibly difficult to detect if you’ve been immersed in the culture since birth. The life-long normalization of this rhetoric and ideology influences behavior and encourages athletes to uphold a system that is damaging to athletes generally and to Black athletes in particular.

A

S A CHILD WHO ATE, SLEPT, AND BREATHED sports, the bland ubiquity of these markers shaped my beliefs without my knowledge. On Sundays, it *did* seem like sports were apolitical. The patriotic fanfare just felt like a natural, inextricable part of the game.

As a former athlete myself (I spent two years on Columbia University's football team), I can tell you that the indoctrination went deeper. While looking around the sports world, it *did* seem like success was a choice. When every player you idolize attributes their success to hard work and God, these concepts start to appear inextricable, and views like the ones Burgess Owens voiced in his H.R.40 testimony begin to appear reasonable.

The connections between success, hard work, and God are then reified by a sports media apparatus that shuns "overt politics" and obscures the influence of luck and privilege in favor of glorious hyper-individualistic success stories (e.g., Tim Tebow: The Chosen One, as the quarterback was literally called in an ESPN-produced documentary). Coaches often continue the success-as-choice indoctrination by taking on the "no excuses" approach that undergirds the views of many right-wing ideologues. Jordan Peterson's right-wing self-help doctrine, for example, often relies on the notion that people will find happiness if they stop making excuses, shut up, and work hard: "To stand up straight with your shoulders back is to accept the terrible responsibility of life, with eyes wide open... It means willingly undertaking the sacrifices necessary to generate a productive and meaningful reality (it means acting to please God, in the ancient language)." There are no excuses for failing to stand up straight and make sacrifices; to see the prevalence of this attitude in football, look no further than the autobiography titled *No Excuses* by former University of Oklahoma football head coach Bob Stoops, or the autobiography titled *No Excuses* by former Notre Dame football head coach Charlie Weis, or the autobiography titled *No Excuses* by former NFL player Derrick Coleman.

The right-wing propaganda turns extra exploitative as athletes transition past high school sports. Before an athlete chooses a college to attend, they undergo "official recruitment" and may participate in "official visits" to schools that show interest. These visits are, in theory, an opportunity for a young athlete to tour campuses and meet important people so that they can make an informed decision about where they'd like to spend the next four-plus years of their life. In reality, the visits are a chance for elite programs to flex their money by wining and dining their preferred athletes. Teams invest in multi-million dollar facilities with the explicit goal of being able to woo top talent to commit to their programs, thereby increasing their chances of winning games and making more money. As a teenager going through this process, it's difficult not to feel like you're being rewarded for adhering to the bootstrap doctrine. You fought; you won; you earned it. The glitz, glamour, and gratification that comes from achieving the goal you worked so hard for solidifies the beliefs that helped you get there. Furthermore, the schedule of a student-athlete surpasses a 40-hour work week and leaves little room for anything beyond the field or classroom. The money (thrown around, but not paid directly to athletes) and the busy schedule combine to uphold a system that exploits the labor of athletes generally and Black athletes in particular.

But the most exploitative part of college athletics may lie in how it heavily promotes the imagery of "bootstraps" and "hard work" to mask an unjust system. In the highest-grossing college sports (football, and then basketball), majority-Black labor is transformed into money for white executives. While most high schoolers resemble the stereotypical amateur athlete that plays for the love of the game, the average college athlete looks more like an exploited employee. Their labor is unpaid¹ and their value is solely based on how many wins (aka how much profit) they can make for the university. College athletes no longer play primarily for friends and family (who hopefully value them for more intrinsic reasons), but also to fatten the pockets of others. While the nice facilities and campus popularity can make some athletes feel like they have no reason to complain, corporations and NCAA execs rake in record profits as college athletes work for free.

The former Duke basketball freshman phenom Zion Williamson provides an illustrative example of the system's injustice. Earlier this year, Williamson was the main attraction in a star-studded rivalry game between Duke and the University of North Carolina. Over 4.3 million people watched from home while a sold-out crowd filled Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium. Celebrities in attendance included Spike Lee and Barack Obama. On the day of the game, tickets ran for \$4,000 each, surpassing ticket prices for admission to the most recent Super Bowl. Unfortunately, the excitement was short-lived. After only 34 seconds of play, Williamson ended up on the floor clutching his knee. The continuous stream of replays revealed the culprit: as Williamson had attempted to plant his foot to change direction, his foot had burst through his Nike shoe, injuring Williamson in the process. The horrific incident proved financially impactful. Nike finished the next day's trading down 1.1 percent—a \$1.1 billion loss, due in large part to a few Black teenagers playing basketball; teenagers whose piece of the overall revenue resulting from their labor includes little more than a free education.

Although the specifics of Williamson's case are unique, its peculiarities help shine a spotlight on the broader system of exploitation that Black athletes face. Despite the billions of dollars that college and professional athletes create through their own labor, a predominantly white cabal of executives, coaches, and front office personnel decide where the money goes. The players, college and professional, are told to "stick to sports," not politics, and are consumed by demanding schedules. Only when a grotesque accident like Williamson's occurs is it clear how much profit is actually being funneled through these systems, and how little control the players have except to act as living advertisements for defective shoes.

As in the workplace, the decision-makers at all levels of the sports world maintain this control by suppressing any and all criticism. In sports, questioning authority is often grounds for physical punishment (e.g., if you talk back to the coach, they'll order you to do sprints/up-downs/wall-squats). Vocalizing progressive beliefs can be seen as a "distraction" at best and cause for suspension at worst. To succeed in this system, an individual must always strive to be "coachable," a nebulous concept that basically tells players to always do what they're told, and to always do it with enthusiasm, and of course, with No Excuses or complaints. Players who can perform "coachability" are heralded as consummate professionals and team

¹ College athletes may be granted full or partial scholarships to cover the cost of their tuition, but if you're not being paid you're not being paid.



leaders, expected in turn to help keep dissenters in line. All these methods of control combine to encourage athletes, and especially Black athletes, to embrace the bootstraps philosophy that undergirds their exploitation instead of challenging the status quo. If this doesn't scream "authoritarian" yet, keep in mind that the NFL literally punished dancing.

BLOWBACK FROM THE NFL'S TRANSGRESSIONS (racial disparities in coach hirings/firings, poor handling of domestic violence by players, ignoring evidence of brain trauma, etc.) has pushed the league to slowly attempt to change its public image. They've commandeered Jay-Z, also known as the less famous parent of Blue Ivy, to aid in their new 'Inspire Change' initiative, and have begun donating money to charities with a social justice mission. Miraculously, even the charities themselves reinforce the right-wing messaging that sports culture seeks to foster in the Black community.

Take, for example, the Crushers Club, a Chicago-based charity that looks to give young people an alternative to gangs. The organization has recently come under fire after a series of tweets by founder Sally Hazelgrove went viral. One tweet in particular proves an apt symbol of the bootstraps respectability politics that is so popular in sports culture and so harmful to the Black community. Captioning a picture of herself with a dreadlock in one hand and scissors in the other, Hazelgrove writes: "And another Crusher let me cut his dreads off! It's symbolic of change and their desire for a better life!" Critics rightly noted that the tweet perpetuated the notion that Black people's natural hair is linked to deviousness and criminality. Twitter users responded by sharing pictures of their locs to fight against the stigma associated with Black natural hair. Hazelgrove promptly apologized while commentators on both sides maintained their party line.

The NFL could plausibly argue that they had no knowledge of Hazelgrove's prior tweets, but that's beside the point. The bigger lesson to be learned from this fiasco is that the NFL's new image looks exactly like the old. In an effort to change their image in communities of color, the NFL chose an organization whose politics epitomize the bootstraps ideology that sports teach young Black kids—i.e. no excuses, the problem is *you*, the problem is *your* hair, the problem is the choices *you* make, and never mind the institutional racism that surrounds you.

Crushers Club's stated mission is "to be the strongest alternative to gangs. We arm young people with the support and skills they need to restore their lives and improve their neighborhood. Crushers Club is

rooted in four ideals—respect, discipline, ownership, and love—that give our members a fighting chance." One of Crushers' major initiatives is their boxing program, which teaches students that "working hard and following rules is everything. No swearing. No talking about others. Lots of sit-ups, push-ups, and sparring. Discipline is the only way to win both inside and outside the ring." Sound familiar? Crushers' attempt to locate the root of societal problems like gangs, poverty and criminality inside the hearts of individual Black youth mirrors the worldview at the core of Burgess Owens' H.R.40 testimony and Ray Lewis' autobiography. It's part and parcel of the right-wing propaganda shoved down our throats during professional sports games. It's a core pillar upholding the infrastructure of college sports that allows the NCAA to exploit the labor of college athletes, and it echoes the calls by conservative commentators for Black athletes to "shut up [about the injustices in their communities] and dribble."

The very existence of Crushers highlights the omnipresence of this propaganda machine. The organization's stated social function in Chicago—keeping opportunity-deprived kids out of gangs by teaching them the merits of hard physical work, discipline, and obedience through sports—demonstrates the vital role that sports are expected to play within the Black community. Crushers mimics the "help" that has always been offered to Black Americans: a pep talk and a swift kick in the butt. Rather than making visible the systems that keep Black people from power, sports are used to gaslight Black athletes into thinking that any seeming injustice is all in their head. In the Black community, the bootstrap doctrine works like blinders on a horse: it keeps Black people focused on only what those in power want them to see. Unfortunately, given the history of disinvestment from Black communities, the situation is poised to get worse before it gets better.

AS MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE deleterious effects that playing football can have on the brain becomes public knowledge, families with means are choosing to skip football and/or sports altogether. The result of this white flight is a growing shift in American athletics. Black players already constitute a disproportionate amount of the football-playing population, and it appears their numbers are only growing.

For some families, the risks that football may have on brain development pale in comparison to their advantages. As Albert Samaha, author of *Never Ran, Never Will: Boyhood and Football in a Changing American Inner City*, explains: "Yes, football is dangerous, but so is leaving one's future in the hands of an unequal educational system. It's no wonder the sport still feels like a winning ticket." In poor, disinvested Black and Brown communities, sports serve an important social function that is not replicated elsewhere. Sports programs function as a ladder to opportunity (e.g., through college scholarships) and are some of the only programs that consistently receive funding. Organizations like Crushers Club receive contributions to help deliver their tough-love approach to Black children, all while Chicago schools remain grossly underfunded. In this system, especially in a city like Chicago, Black children are raised by the right-wing propaganda of sports culture, while white children are raised in progressive, well-resourced schools that offer a plethora of opportunities. The dynamic perfectly illustrates Martin Luther King Jr.'s belief that "this country has socialism for the

rich, and rugged individualism for the poor.”

Challenging the rugged individualism and bootstraps thinking that sports culture fosters within the Black community requires rethinking our engagement with sports. The recent legislation out of California that allows athletes to be compensated for the use of their name, image, and likeness is a necessary step forward. Greatly expanding initiatives like the Rooney rule, which requires NFL teams to interview at least one “diverse” candidate may also help to create marginal changes to the front office culture of professional sports. Writers like Dave Zirin and Jemele Hill represent progressive alternatives to the sports media status quo; amplifying their voices can help shift discourse. To be sure, all of these measures will prove inadequate, absent a transformation of the broader social conditions that young Black athletes face.

Due to the influence that sports can have in under-resourced Black communities, fighting for changes in the social conditions of Black

athletes will involve challenging the right-wing messaging disseminated through sports. This requires the overt bridging of sports with leftist politics. Fans can aid in this endeavor by pointing out the unacceptable politics at play within athletic culture and connecting these issues to wider structures of racial inequality, rather than by snarkily locating the problem within the hearts of fans themselves (e.g., equating all sports fandom to fascism). Merging leftist politics and sports isn’t without precedent, and highlighting this history can help connect and inspire a wider coalition. The movements to pay college athletes, to let college athletes unionize, to make sports safer, to increase pay for WNBA players and other professional women athletes, and to generally increase players’ rights can all be seen as pieces of a broader struggle for racial and economic justice. By not ceding sports to the right, we can demonstrate that organizing around principles of racial equity can benefit all aspects of our society. ✚

FACT CHECKS from Glenn Kessler of *The Washington Post*

In our new post-fact society, fact checks are more important than ever. As outright half-truths and manipulations of our precious data threaten to overwhelm all we hold dear and regular, we must hold the line. We must look the dishonesty of a murderous regime in the face, try to find equivalent evil on the opposing side, and bravely cry aloud the damning truth: “Pinocchio! Pinocchio! Pinocchio!”

We must fact-check everything. We must fact-check the fact-checks, and the meanings of words, and the nature of numbers. We may only forebear from fact-checking whoever is paying us to fact-check. To that end, The Glenn Kessler Clarity Corporation™ presents to you a series of rapid-fire fact checks, sponsored by the new hit TV shows *Bossbitch*, *Prestige Promenade*, and *Tom Clancy’s Mission: Venezuela*, available to stream now on Amazon Prime.

STATEMENT: “Donald Trump is a threat to democracy.”

RATING: 2 Pinocchios

REASON: The United States of America is a republic.



STATEMENT: “Joe Biden’s health care plan would leave millions of Americans uninsured.”

RATING: 4 Pinocchios

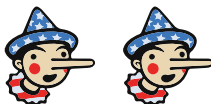
REASON: Under former Vice President Biden’s plan, 97% of Americans will be covered. There are 327.2 million Americans. So while some 9.816 million Americans will indeed be “uninsured” under Biden’s plan, 317.384 million Americans would still be insured. There are far more millions on one side of that equation than the other.



STATEMENT: “Bernie Sanders is a Senator from Vermont.”

RATING: 3 Pinocchios.

REASON: Bernie Sanders was born in Brooklyn. Therefore he is “from” Brooklyn, and has the accent to match, which according to our style guide we will render phonetically for reasons that are not important to think about.



STATEMENT: “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is the youngest Congresswoman in history.”

RATING: 3 Pinocchios

REASON: This is misleading. While in terms of age she may technically be the youngest congresswoman, this statement doesn’t adjust for how concepts of age change over time. In the medieval era, she would have been considered middle-aged.



STATEMENT: “The invasion of Iraq was justified.”

RATING: Geppetto checkmark

REASON: The invasion of Iraq, while politically contentious, was based upon openly stated justifications. It did not lack for justifications, and can therefore be said to have been justified. We are therefore awarding this claim our rare “Geppetto checkmark,” which indicates truthfulness, and has nothing to do with the making of or being like puppets.



STATEMENT: “Glenn Kessler needs to wipe off the stationary bike handlebars before moving on to another piece of gym equipment.”

RATING: 5 Pinocchios

REASON: The gym does not have an explicitly stated wipe-down policy, and also the very idea that Glenn Kessler, award-winning *Washington Post* journalist and fact-checker, can be told what to do by some bike messenger or we-wared congressional intern or whatever the hell you are is a goddamn pinocchio in itself.



STATEMENT: “Glen”

RATING: 3 ½ Pinocchios

REASON: The barista misspelled my name on my macchiato cup, even though “Glenn” is by far the more common modern spelling according to babynames.com. I will be downgrading Starbucks’ entire rating accordingly.



STATEMENT: “@emmamoldman: the bezos post could not have hired a more incompetent ass-kissing dweeb as its fact-checker if it tried”

RATING: Bottomless Pinocchios

REASON: While Jeff Bezos technically owns the *Washington Post*, the Glenn Kessler Clarity Corporation™, and Amazon (now streaming the hit TV shows *Bossbitch*, *Prestige Promenade*, and *Tom Clancy’s Mission: Venezuela*), it is inaccurate and unfair to refer to the *Washington Post* as “the Bezos Post.” For one, that simply—and quite obviously—isn’t the correct name. For another, while Jeff Bezos does legally own the *Washington Post*, he has no official role in its editorial operations. All *Washington Post* staffers are frequently informed that they have complete freedom to express themselves, it’s just that their salary and health benefits are up for review at the end of the year. Furthermore, in regards to the accusation of being an “ass-kissing dweeb,” I would like to inform Ms. Moldman that I have never once kissed a single butt.



ADVENTURE TOURISM

AND THE "MT. EVEREST" MYSTIQUE

by CAITLIN MYERS

THE PICTURES ARE UNBELIEVABLE. YOU CAN'T see the people at first—just their jackets, orange and blue and yellow, bright like birds against the snow. Hunched over in a line, along a thin ridge, on their way to the top of the highest mountain in the world. Some of the people in the pictures might already be dead. It's difficult to tell with all that gear, the goggles and the masks. Some didn't bring oxygen. It's become popular to attempt the final stretch, in that part of the atmosphere too oxygen-poor to sustain the human body, without it.

It was May 2019, the peak of the Mount Everest climbing season. People had come from near and far—India, China, France, England, and of course the United States—as they do every year. They sought glory for different reasons, some inscrutable and some dead obvious. Some were experienced visitors on their second, the third—and in one case, eighth—climb. Others were climbing for the first time. They were there to represent their countries and plant a flag, or to tick off an item on their bucket lists. Many more were not climbers, at least not in the adventurer sense; they were Sherpas, the indigenous people who bolster the Everest industry by working as mountain guides, carrying dozens of pounds of equipment up the mountain for their glory-seeking clients. Caught in a traf-

fic jam between the summit and the descent, 11 people died. Whatever peace or transcendence they hoped to find on Everest ended in that line, clamoring head-to-head with dozens of other people stuck in a cold and airless place. Most of the dead were brought back to their families quickly, but at least seven were not recovered till later, becoming temporary residents of a 200-person necropolis. Two-thirds of the bodies on Mount Everest have never been recovered due to the expense and danger of the task, and lie there instead as an eternal warning that conquest is not as assured as it looks.

Every country in that part of the world has tall mountains. Split between the countries of China, Nepal, India, and Bhutan, the Himalayas alone contain 14 peaks 26,200 feet above sea level or higher. In theory, mountaineers should have their pick. To most people, the difference between a 28,000 and a 29,000 foot peak is meaningless. High peaks are hard. But Everest is unlike its peers. The mountain's reputation is built on 150 years of adventure tourism and propaganda to advance imperialist interests. Climbing Everest is really only glorious because centuries of propaganda, mostly by the British Empire, have affixed glory to it. And of course, like any non-Western country heavily trafficked by Westerners, much effort has been made to reduce the land's indigenous people to window dress-

ing, despite their complex histories and culture, and the crucial role they play in maintaining the tourist industry at the world's third pole.

EARLY BRITISH COLONIZERS INITIALLY approached the Himalayas mostly through mapping and exploration. However, without satellites and planes, measuring mountains was an arduous task. Around 1830, a Welsh land surveyor named George Everest, who was the Surveyor General of India, requested the brightest mathematical minds to help him check his numbers on a trigonometric survey of India. The plan was to map out the mountains in the North, and triangulate the exact height of each one, to the inch. The European surveyors assumed the mountain had no local name even though a multitude of tribes, speaking a variety of languages and practicing a number of religious traditions, live scattered in isolated pockets across the highlands and at its base. We know the most famous residents in the valley below as the Sherpa people, who are so deeply enmeshed in the history of mountaineering that their name is often used as a synonym for “mountain guide.” They comprise four tribes, most of them Buddhist and descended from nomads on the Tibetan plateau. For centuries, they lived and worked in high altitude. Almost every mountain accessible or visible to the tribes has a name, sometimes more than one. Everest, a mountain in the home territory of several nations and many more ethnic groups, has at least three. The Sherpas called it Qomolangma, Tibetan for “Goddess Mother of the World,” and designated the slopes as holy, a mother mountain. In Nepali it is called Sagarmatha, translated sometimes as “Sky’s Head,” sometimes as “The Mountain So High No Bird Can Fly Over It.”

Radhanath Sikdar was recruited by George Everest from Hindu College to join the mapping effort in 1832. A brilliant young mathematician from a lower middle-class family in Kolkata, he received a variety of prestigious scholarships to college. He was the first Indian national on the survey, and, unlike George Everest, journeyed to physically lay eyes on the mountain in order to measure it. According to a letter from a colleague of Everest’s, one morning, Sikdar had exclaimed, “Sir, I have found the highest mountain in the world.” He had mis-measured the mountain peak at 29,000 feet. Upon recalculation, it was 29,002 feet high: indeed, the highest mountain in the world. The letter referred to Sikdar by a racist colonial term rather than by his name, but it was his discovery. Sikdar’s leading role in the discovery was acknowledged and celebrated at the time, but as the years wore on, he fell out of favor with the Empire. He spent his mid-career years protesting the treatment of survey development workers, who were paid a paltry monthly salary of 30 rupees despite

conducting the most dangerous parts of the work. Later, Sikdar would write and advocate against child marriage and for women’s education in India, publishing a feminist journal with a friend. In the end, his contribution to measuring the mountain was accidentally de-recognized after his death by the Survey Manual, a publication of worldwide topographic surveys. Accident or not, permanently recognizing homegrown genius would have defeated the ultimate purpose of this land exploration. The point was to colonize. To understand, measure, and name the landscape was to own it. Today, only Everest’s name meaningfully lives on as the name of the mountain.

Part of Mount Everest’s allure lies in the lethal difficulty of accessing it. It is unlikely that Sherpas in the valley below bothered to climb it all before Westerners came along. A huge, forbidding hunk of ice-covered, treacherous rock with no food sources—this is perhaps not the best energy investment for a villager who is just trying to get by. Nobody lives on Everest. Virtually no living things, except some stubborn varieties of moss, are stupid enough to try. Most ordinary people, or even serious mountaineers, would have immense difficulty reaching even halfway on their own; no one has ever summited alone. And before the advent of global tourism, Nepal had forbidden foreigners from crossing into its borders from its founding in 1769 until 1953, the year of the first successful summit of Mount Everest.

But before success came failure, which on the mountain is miserable and invariably ends in injury and death. (Shifting borders and ongoing territorial conflicts with China and India made exploration and failed climbs possible for early surveyors and foreign mountaineers. Half of the mountain remains in China, in the (disputed) state of Tibet.) George Mallory was the first known person who tried to climb Everest, in 1924. His life can be read, like any of ours, through a variety of lenses. He can be seen as a dedicated mountaineer, an admirable but misguided hero, or a foolhardy thrill-seeker. Mallory died on the slopes of Everest, certainly cold and likely alone. His ascent remains shrouded in mystery. No one knows how far up the mountain he went; if he indeed summited, and died on the way back down. His desiccated corpse, rope, and ice axe lie frozen below the last big ridge of the climb. These have become one of the many signposts that climbers use on their way up Mount Everest. Others include a man with green boots known as “Green Boots” and a woman whose conventionally attractive face is well-preserved enough to earn her the nickname “Sleeping Beauty.” Researchers have spent precious time and money sizing up Mallory’s corpse, looking for clues that he reached the summit, with no luck thus far.

The first successful attempt to climb Everest in recorded history was made by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. Norgay was a Sherpa, indigenous to Nepal, and something of an adventurer himself. During the expedition, the others would not



have made it without his support. In a later interview with the Indian and Nepalese presses, Hillary claimed that Norgay had reached the summit first. This was probably not true: standard mountaineering at the time called for the partner who had done less work to go first, and Norgay almost certainly carried much more of the load than the rest of the expedition. Most accounts of his participation in the summit, in *National Geographic* articles and guides called “Visit Nepal,” paint him as a happy man with a big smile, a willing assistant to the cause, rather than the most fundamental reason for its success. Unlike the ignored Sherpa guides of Mallory’s expedition, Norgay’s contribution is at least remembered; although Hillary received a knighthood, and Norgay did not. Nonetheless, he continues to be regarded as a hero among communities indigenous to the highlands of Nepal and Tibet. The story that he was actually the first to the top, whether true or not, has become a matter of regional pride.

IN THE CENTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL whirlwind around the mountain, the Sherpas remain economically dependent on the work that wrote Norgay into history: guiding climbers to the summit. Without Sherpas, there would be no Everest expeditions. The work of hauling equipment and fixing lines requires brotherhood, trust, and consistency. Sherpa guides have their own set of rules and protocols they follow, some of which are religious and some of which are more practical. For one, the mountain doesn’t like cussing, and to have sex on her body is completely taboo. She has a temper. While colonizers regarded this sort of sentiment as naive

local lore, it is true that Qomolangma kills people all the time. Respect for comrades is absolutely necessary for survival. Climbers, whose lives depend on the guides’ clear heads, ignore these rules at their own peril.

In the spring climbing season of 2013, two climbers tried to push past Sherpas who were in the midst of the extraordinarily dangerous work of fixing lines in the Khumbu Icefall, a section full of frozen crevasses and rickety bridges in need of constant repair. A furious fistfight ensued on the mountain, likely born out of fear and stress, and the climbers and guides had to be physically separated. Some blamed the climber who lobbed the word “motherfucker” at one of the guides. Others pointed to the trash on the slopes, the general pressure on guides to overextend themselves and incentivize climbing during unsafe weather. No one was seriously hurt that day, aside from a few bruised eyes and sore egos; nonetheless, the Sherpas were keenly aware of how easily something could have gone wrong on that narrow, icy pass.

Tensions flare for good reason. Being a Sherpa guide is statistically one of the world’s most dangerous jobs. 305 people have died attempting to climb Mount Everest, more than one-third of which were Sherpas. The death rate of a Sherpa guide hovers at 1.2 percent, higher than the majority of service work, construction, and commercial fishing. A year after the infamous fistfight, 16 Sherpas died at the Khumbu Icefall. Mistakes are rare for guides who frequently navigate Everest as often as 20 or 30 times per climbing season; tragedies are much more likely to result from natural disasters. Sherpas are trained to be attuned to the seasonal moods of the mountain, but as climate change loosens glaciers and whips up storms out of season, these moods are not always predictable. In

this case, annihilation was swift and deadly. The guides had been up early in the morning as usual, fixing lines so their clients could traverse the great crevasses safely. A freak avalanche thundered through camp too quickly for them to save themselves, and the Sherpas were buried.

This was a breaking point for the guide community. Sherpas are indispensable to the Everest climbing industry, and they know it. Unlike much of the world's labor, they cannot be replaced with a robot or a computer screen or a more desperate person willing to work for less. Companies can fly climbers to basecamp, but they can't walk them up. The knowledge of the mountains, and how to survive them, belongs to Sherpas alone. Mountain guides hold records for speed and for the number of times they've summited the mountain. In rural Nepal, these records are a source of pride for the community. On the other hand, since mountain climbing is their job, Sherpas are rarely recognized for their physical exploits and effort. These exploits are also a source of constant worry for guides' families, underlaid with the nagging truth that there's not much other choice in the region. Climbing income is crucial to the survival of Sherpa families. When deaths occur, they also take an additionally cruel emotional toll: often, the bodies are unrecoverable because the effort it takes to haul them down is too great.

As the indignities of the job, the crowdedness of the summit, and the arrogance of climbers have increased over the years, so have the frustrations of Sherpa guides. Elite climbers started bringing personal, better-paid guides to the mountain. While the Nepalese government made millions from permitting inexperienced climbers to traffic the slopes, Sherpa guides had frequently been skipping breakfast to fix lines and repair bridges in the pre-dawn hours and, in the case of the avalanche, dying in the process. Mourning families received a pittance from the Nepalese government. In 2014, as grief gave way to anger over the avalanche, basecamp began to rumble with rumors of a work stoppage. The guides' demands were simple: better insurance, a rescue fund, better training, and a premature end to the 2014 climbing season so that the guides could return home and mourn their dead.

Sherpa labor actions have existed for as long as the climbing industry. While Tenzing Norgay and his wide smile are the face of the first successful climb, the Hillary expedition started off on the wrong foot. One of the leaders had forced Sherpas to lie on the floor when they were staying at the British Embassy. In retaliation, the lower-ranking Sherpas peed on the road outside to send the leader a message. Strikes were frequent throughout the 1960s, with demands to increase the guides' pay, improve their access to amenities, and elevate their standing with foreign climbers. The results have been largely positive. Sherpa guides have gained access to elite mountaineer training, healthcare, and life insurance.

The 2014 strike also worked. The demands were granted and the Sherpa community took space to mourn. While sympathetic

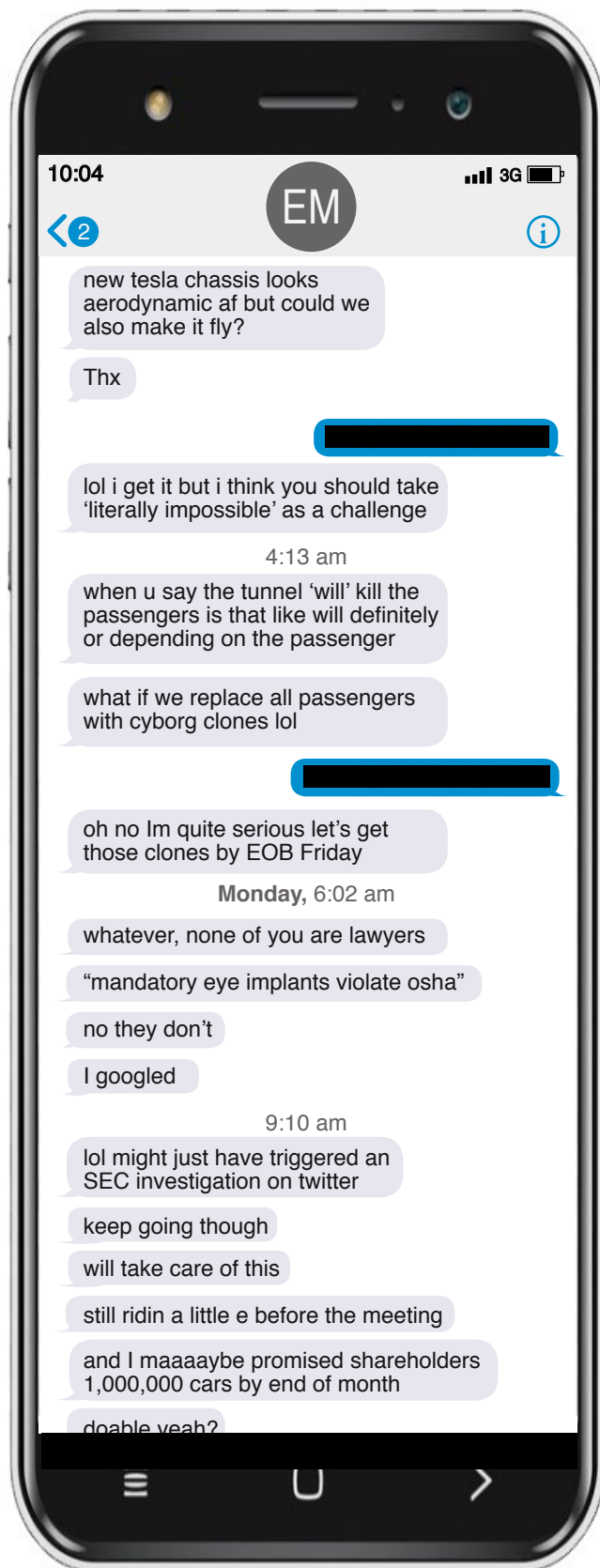
climbers donated money to the dead Sherpas' families after the avalanche, others were less understanding. According to a *New York Times* report, the reaction of most climbers was uncomfortable. Only a conscientious few were willing to turn around and go home. Climber David Roberts noted the general attitude as: "this is a tragedy, but we have paid all this money to get here." The climbers had come to reach the top, and they had no interest in letting anything get in their way. "There is even," Roberts said, "this macho sense of getting back on their horse."

TODAY, AN INTERNET SEARCH FOR information about climbing Mount Everest leads to a number of friendly outdoor guides, outfitters, and sellers of so-called adventure packages. The latter amount to a slightly discounted combination of training, equipment, flights to the location, and trustworthy Sherpa guides to be paid in Nepali rupees. In the space of a year, the guides will earn the equivalent of \$5,000. The sites sell these packages as rugged adventures. The names of British and American explorers loom large; their faces, chipped and reddened by the high winds, grin out from the webpage. The sites do not mention Sikdar or Norgay. That could be anyone up there, the websites imply, maybe even *you*, standing on the top of the world and positively ripped—as long as you're a Westerner, of course.

Companies sell several routes up the mountain to prospective adventurers. Nepal issues more climbing permits than China, and that face of the mountain is easier to climb. To summit in one shot from the bottom to the top is an outrageously stupid endeavor which would invariably end in death. There are four basecamps that must be reached first, one after the other, so that climbers can acclimate. The whole endeavor takes three months. There are extreme dangers along the way. The Khumbu Icefall, at the head of a glacier, is rife with cracks and crevasses that can open unexpectedly beneath during daytime melts. Avalanches occur frequently there. The Hillary Step, named for Sir Edmund, is in the "Death Zone" where human cells will begin to die no matter how much anyone has paid to be there. The Step is so sheer and narrow that climbers must traverse it single file. Though parts of the Step famously crumbled during a 2015 earthquake, reducing the difficulty of the climb, what remains is still incredibly narrow and steep. This is where the traffic jam killed 11 climbers in May 2019.

If you want to risk death, there are several pricing options. The basic package might cost \$69,000. This doesn't include the flight, or the \$11,000 climbing permit itself, which Nepal will grant to just about anyone who can pay for it. For just \$100,000

texts from ELON MUSK to his engineering team



more than the basic option, the luxury package promises a personal chef, personal toilet tents, a private heated kitchen, a private shower—and overall, less interaction with other climbers. Sherpa guides will carry the VIP client's television, lawn chair, specialty ingredients for their upper-crust meals, and coolers packed with light beer for consumption at base camp. However, even non-VIPs can count on Sherpa guides to perform the drudgery of mountain climbing, taking on most of the climbers' equipment and fixing their lines to ensure the climbers can reach glory in the timeframe of their vacation. You can have the mountain and your comforts, as long as you can pay for them.

The romanticism of climbing as rugged exploration has transformed into a much more 21st-century-friendly model based on profit and conquest. For those climbers with an extreme-sport approach to mountain climbing, the social rewards for the most daring, the most innovative, the most reckless are endless. Documentary crews and magazines will pay for the adventurous to conquer a high mountain and then a higher one yet, or to conquer it without equipment, or in record time, or while running. According to *Outside Magazine*, one of the primary causes of traffic on Everest these days is the stream of film crews constantly trailing mountaineers. And even with all the comforts available to wealthy climbers, more glory goes to those who attempt with as few amenities as possible. It's become fashionable for the most extreme climbers to summit without supplemental oxygen, which is crucial for keeping brain cells alive and wits sharp above the fourth camp.

Mount Everest is only a few feet taller than any number of the tallest peaks in the Himalayas, but it is (if you can believe it) the easiest and most straightforward to summit. Annapurna and K2 are favored by the most serious mountaineers, the kind of people for whom the idea of hiring someone to carry one's equipment is unthinkable. In his book *Into Thin Air*, outdoor writer and experienced mountaineer Jon Krakauer—who specializes in reporting on the folly of macho encounters with wilderness—notes that in the climbing community, Everest is considered something of a low-hanging fruit. Many serious mountaineers do climb it, comparing it to a strenuous hike, unlike the more technically challenging sheer rock face of the pyramid-shaped K2, which has claimed the lives of one-third of the total climbers who have attempted it. Besides, for a serious mountaineer, Everest's VIP package-climber dilettantes are a bit annoying.

Krakauer's book describes an environment in which summing Everest has become more and more of a competitive activity. He happens to have been present during one of Everest's most infamous disasters, a 1996 freak storm that killed six people. Foolishly, they had pushed ahead instead of turning back. While *Into Thin Air* was made into a movie, it seems unlikely that 2019's deadlier traffic jam will receive the same

WHY DO ANY OF US READ ABOUT MOUNT EVEREST, OR WRITE ABOUT IT, FOR THAT MATTER?

treatment. The 2019 event lacked the drama of storms and avalanches, resembling something more like a contagious wave of heart attacks in a grocery store line. The climbers keeled over while standing in line to view the top from just a few feet further up, which feels like a slightly shameful way to go.

The disaster of May 2019 was a long time coming. Every decade or so, a mass fatality on the mountain causes the adventure companies, Nepali bureaucrats, and eager would-be climbers to stop and weigh, yet another time, the risks and rewards of encouraging this industry to flourish. After the 1996 storm, much was made in the media of the petty rivalries and arrogance that led to the climbers being stranded in the storm, and Krakauer attempted to push for stricter limits on the fitness and experience of potential climbers. Very little changed politically as a result, since 1996 was a fairly average year on the mountain in terms of fatalities. In contrast, the disastrous if uncinematic May climbing season led to some new rules: climbers must undergo basic high-altitude climbing training before setting foot on the mountain, in addition to experience on another, smaller Nepalese Himalayan peak. Climbers are required to hire Sherpa guides, a move that is likely a result of Sherpa labor agitation. These steps are sure to make everyone safer. But as long as there are climbers on the mountain, there will be tragedy. Like the rest of the world, the Himalayan weather patterns are less predictable late-

ly, making the springtime climbing window less safe than it used to be. At the same time, adventure companies are offering more and more amenities, while promising success with more certainty. Nepal may be issuing fewer permits but the country, not wealthy to begin with, makes over \$4.5 million per year on Everest permits alone. The economy of the country, and the highlands around Everest, depends on travelers and trekkers. Without a doubt, people willing to pay for access will slip through the cracks of these new rules. It will only take one less-deadly climbing season or two. So long as adventure industries, magazines, star climbers, and whole countries stand to profit, the romance of it will rush back.

MEDIA IN AFFLUENT NATIONS IS RIFE WITH images of solo self-actualization that are inextricably tied to the classic colonial dream of the uninhabited landscape. Wealthy climbers, who have benefited from access to the best training and equipment are viewed as embodiments of physical strength and grace, in communion with solitude and masters of nature. It's much easier to look heroic as an adventurer in a foreign land than as someone who's lived by the mountain all their life and is simply climbing it for a job.

It's probably time to reassess what lies at the root of this romantic vision. Wanderlust, and the call to adventure, are not free from age-old colonial enterprises. Exploration creates profit for everyone from outdoor magazines to government bureaucrats to outfitters to the already affluent climbers themselves. Even the most "serious" mountaineering in the Himalayas has never been free of the risky, poorly compensated labor of indigenous workers. If anyone is the hero of this story, it's the Sherpa mountaineer who traverses the mountain by day and by night, 20 or 30 times a year, to the CEO's once-in-a-lifetime. No one who's traveled the world to climb Mount Everest has ever done it alone: the guide has always been there, bringing up the rear. Despite capitalist mythmaking, nothing is ever accomplished alone.

Why do any of us read about Mount Everest, or write about it, for that matter? Perhaps, for those who lead relatively comfortable lives, we live vicariously through tales of mastering elements, of being on top of the world, of the possibility of real stakes, of struggling for survival and winning. And on the flip side, the fascinating, horrid excesses of the very rich are always fun to hate. Given a chance, many more would-be adventurers would no doubt like to come and see it all for themselves. But unlike equally unprepared members of the owning-class, most readers of this story probably don't have \$75,000 or more to blow on a colonialist death wish. So here you are, finishing out this article and moving onto the next, in your chair, like a coward, thank God. ✚

Highlights

for Socialist Children

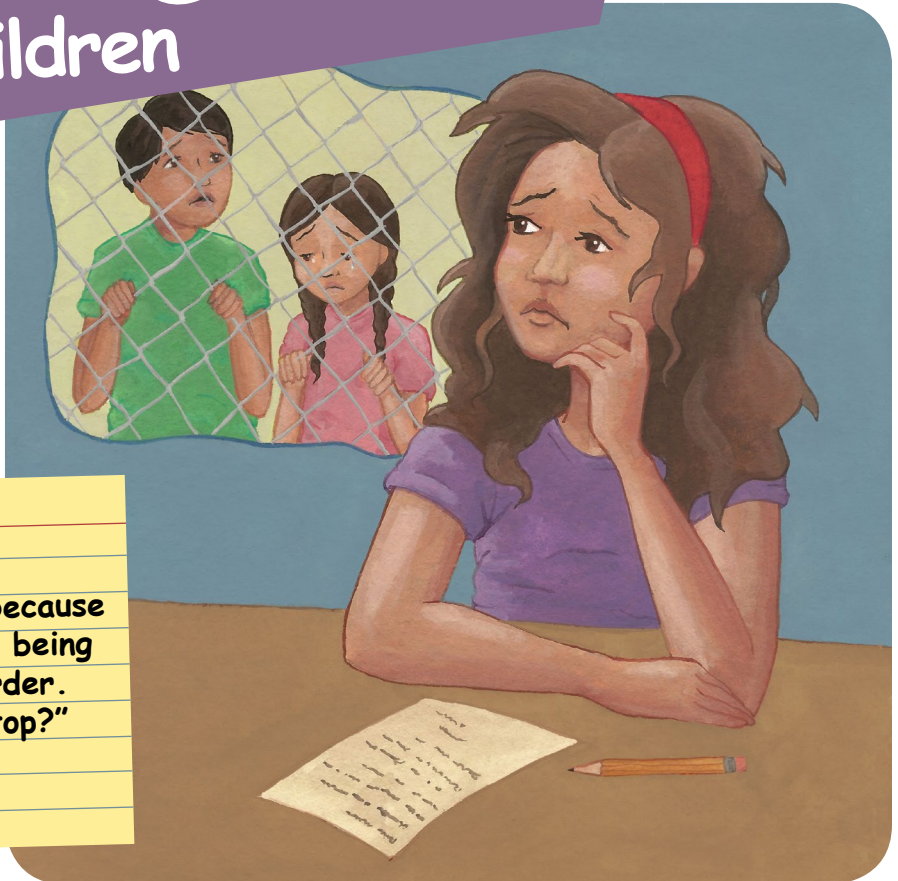
UNSCRAMBLE

Ask your parents to see a medical bill. Then: unscramble it!

ASK ARIZONA

"I'm 8 years old, and I'm upset because children my age and younger are being housed in baby jails at the border. What can I do to make this stop?"

- Upset in Oklahoma



Dear Upset,

I totally understand how you feel—I'm upset too! The answer, as usual, is to move beyond the question of what "I" can do, and into collective action. Join a protest, or help start one at your school. Start a school club in which you encourage the adults you know to vote for politicians who have vowed to abolish ICE. Do you know any kids whose parents work for ICE or CBP? Sneak into their garages at night, open the car hoods and disconnect the cable from the battery. Or you can try pouring regular dish soap into the gas tank. Don't do this alone:

make sure you have a buddy, and also that your stories are straight. You can help a lot more kids in baby jails if you don't get caught. Continue to escalate your public and private activities—daily political protests and nightly anarchic reign of terror—until ICE and CBP are finally abolished, and all the baby jails are liberated.

Ask Arizona next issue:

"My parents keep talking about their retirement fund—but by the time I'm old enough to retire, the planet will be a ball of molten flame!"



Experiment:

Can you figure out who is powerful and who isn't in this fight over free speech?



OIL AGE



How one commodity explains the entire rise of our modern age... and now threatens to destroy it.

BY SAMUEL MILLER MCDONALD

You probably know by now that one single commodity has been primarily responsible for your past and present—and will absolutely determine your future. One resource above all built the modern world, sustained it, and now threatens to destroy it.

Even as more people have come to worry about the climate crisis, there's still undue silence around fossil fuels themselves. We don't talk enough about their role in society, how they impact our daily lives, and what it might mean to live without them. There's a tacit assumption that we can throw up some solar panels and nuclear reactors and everything will generally stay the same as our current petro-economy, just with lower carbon emissions. To be fair, other commodities—like corn, cobalt, cotton, water—have also flown under our radars more than they should, whether they're components of our computer screens or the element composing much of our bodies. And while these other commodities are undoubtedly important, their production and distribution today completely depend on fossil fuels. Everything leads back to that stygian corpse fuel: carbon energy. Because of global ecological collapse, runaway climate change, and the death and destruction that accompany them, it's critical to understand the role that fossil fuels have played in the physical and political construction of our civilization.

For many in the Global North, buying gasoline is the most we ever directly engage with fossil fuels. Our extensive dependence on them and their central role in society remains hidden below the surface, so to speak, pushed to the fringes where marginalized people and animals suffer their consequences most acutely. But when you dig into their place in modern history, it's hard to overstate how instrumental fossil fuels have been in shaping, well, everything. How we use them—or don't—could determine the rest of humanity's time on earth and will absolutely mould the contours of future civilizations and their economies. As we know, we have to stop using fossil fuels immediately or they will continue to denude the world of what makes it unique among all other known planets in existence: its

habitability. But if we're going to build the movements and win the political fights necessary to get rid of fossil fuels we must understand one question in particular: how did we get here?

Early 19th Century: **COAL AND LABOR**

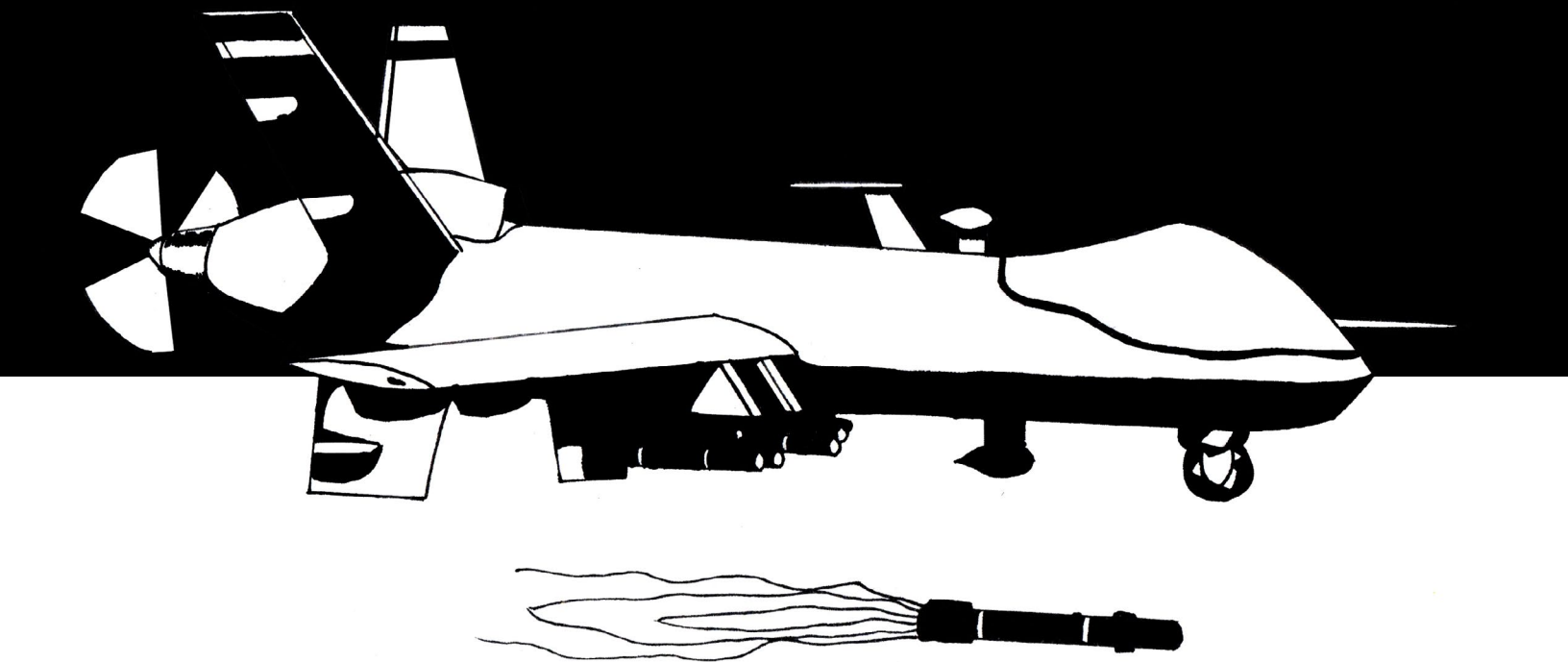


In the late 18th century, Britain sparked a revolution. The fuel that caught the spark and subsequently burst into flame was coal. This wasn't the first time or place in which humans had put it to use: coal, after all, is just a particular kind of dark rock made over millions of years from compressed plant matter. It can be found lying around on the surface of the earth, or stretching out in seams deep underground. People in ancient China used coal almost 6,000 years ago as ornamentation, and to smelt copper. Ancient Greeks also used it to fuel metalworking. Romans used it to heat public baths and the villas of the wealthy. Anglo-Saxons and Aztecs used it for fuel. Ancient Britons used it in funeral pyres. But its use in the modern era has been very different.

In the 18th century, a mixture of historical factors combined to make the rediscovery of coal exceptional. With unprecedented sophistication in maritime, infrastructure, and warfare technology, combined with burgeoning urbanization, a global trade network, vast natural resources seized at gunpoint from indigenous Americans, plus a large, disposable labor force toiling within a ruthless capitalism embedded in an entrenched caste system, the dynamite of an industrial revolution just needed one final ingredient to explode: the very dense energy contained within fossilized biomass like coal.

The first half of the 19th century was a bloody drama engineered by the Anglophone world, erecting soot-stained cities larger than any that had come before and finding new ways of deploying those black rocks to extract ever more capital from lands and bodies. Coal fed the engine driving a new mechanized imperialism. When paired with new inventions like electrification, steam engines, and power looms, coal changed everything. It enabled companies to extract and transport resources much faster and more intensely than ever before, and it also allowed managers to regiment labor with a brutal new efficiency. River-powered mills had relied on natural rhythms, the ancient tempos of seasonal swells and darkness more suited to the bodies of workers. Coal empowered managers to circumvent these hindrances to production, enforcing longer, harsher working hours that sought to transform living humans into machines.

Steamships and railroads had an enormous impact on the mechanization of everything, and were also key elements in the oppression of both enslaved Africans and Native peoples. In 1824, an Englishman named Edward Knight Collins joined his father in the shipping business, as they attempted to seize market dominance in the lucrative business of moving cotton from the southern United States across the world. The Collins Line built one of the world's first fleets of coal-powered steamships and played an important role in moving the commodities produced by slave labor to markets in the Northeast and across the Atlantic. Between the 1820s and 1830s, the rail industry, intimately linked with the burgeoning coal industry, erupted in the United States, as some of the first rail companies—like B&O, Mohawk & Hudson Railroad, and Saratoga & Schenectady Railroad—began to stretch their iron fingers westward, laying the



foundation of the transcontinental railroad. These early rail companies moved passengers more quickly and comfortably across large distances, helping to enable settlers' westward expansion.

But the introduction of coal—and the machines it could power—had a complex impact. As Columbia University professor Timothy Mitchell has illuminated in his book *Carbon Democracy*, coal helped fuel more egalitarian politics at the heart of the new carbon-based empire. Even as coal improved the ability of governments to subjugate land and people, and enabled managers to enforce more brutal hours, it also helped empower some workers to fight for better conditions. Coal mines, for example, provided miners the intimacy necessary to build strong relationships on which solidarity movements depend. They also provided privacy from bosses, allowing miners to conspire to coordinate strikes. The worker density of both water- and coal-powered factories further facilitated the kind of density, numbers, and close collaboration that allowed workers to organize against managers. It was miners and factory workers who built some of the first collective action labor movements in the modern world. And since miners in particular were central to the flow of this increasingly important energy source, a miner strike could halt a factory across the country or leave buildings unheated in cold winters, giving workers greater material power to demand better wages and conditions.

The first major factory strike of the Industrial Revolution (in the United States) took place in 1824, the same year that Edward Knight Collins joined his father's shipping business. Pawtucket, Rhode Island was home to some of the country's first textile mills, where factory owners, tired of the unreliability of child labor (dead kids do tend to gum up the works), turned to young women to run their looms, which included the newly invented, mechanized "power-looms." While many such machines were initially powered by water, they would soon benefit from steam power and electricity, and the distribution of their products depended on coal-powered steamships like the Collins Line moving commodities quickly across many miles.

Thinking young women workers would be easily cowed, managers

announced an expansion of the workday by an hour and a pay cut by a quarter, specifically targeting the power-loom weavers. But the women were not daunted, and 102 workers closed off the entrances to the factories. They had the support of the community, which had been waging a 30-year war against the town's industrialization. Their collective action terrified the mill owners, who had been conspiring with one another in the opposite direction: to reduce wages in concert. On the last day of the strike, the women (likely) burned down one of the factories. The next day, the owners agreed to negotiate. The success of the strike set off waves of similar actions by workers in other industries.

But despite the strikes, industrialization—driven by a wealthy owner class and the promise of the new capital that coal and cotton could deliver—continued to spread over the United Kingdom and the northeastern United States, creating packed and filthy cities, mines, and factories.

Latter 19th Century: **CIVIL WAR AND ROBBER BARONS**

NEW STEAMSHIP TECHNOLOGY WAS still primitive, and in 1854 Collins lost his wife and two children in the wreck—along with some 300 other passengers—of one of his coal-powered ships. After several other disasters, and due to its dependence on prodigious amounts of coal, the Collins Line struggled to obtain profitability. To survive, the company depended on federal subsidies of \$385,000 a year. But even this was insufficient to maintain the business, so Collins demanded a doubling of the annual subsidies. Typical myth-making about the Industrial Revolution casts the captains of industry as pioneering protagonists singlehandedly building whole new industries, taming the wild frontiers or the chaotic seas. But in reality, their carbon-based empires were dependent on a federal government sanctioning slave labor, worker exploitation, and violent seizure of land, not to mention handing out loads of cash. The government was the powerful adhesive holding together a grotesque new fossil fueled-economy of wealth and misery.

Like the steamship companies, the Pawtucket factories and other textile mills in the Northeast also depended on the vast quantities of cotton picked by enslaved African people. Even as, worldwide, old forms of enslavement, serfdom, and indentured servitude were (mostly) coming to an end, and new forms of waged exploitation were taking their place, the atrocious system of chattel slavery remained intact in the United States. It was too lucrative for too many business interests.

Though the North benefited from Southern slavery, the new form of mass politics that arose partly from processes unleashed or enabled by industrialization continued to create openings for more egalitarian values to gain power, and helped push the government in a more moral direction. Different forms of slavery have existed for millennia, ranging from war captives to land-bound serfdom to chattel slavery. And though some form of abolitionist values have coalesced at the fringes of many different civilizations, they rarely gained power sufficient to abolish forced labor for extended periods. The caloric limits of complex agriculture—the resources it can yield per person—simply advantage stratified, unwaged labor and broad poverty. Before petroleum-synthesized and mechanized production, agricultural yields were more fixed. Ancient agrarian empires typically stratified into sharp hierarchies with small ruling classes hoarding the harvests; they could justify and reproduce this stratification by organizing major public works projects and building more coordinated, effective militaries to spread their dominion.¹

WHILE ADHERING TO SOME OF THE OLD IMPERIAL laws and stratified classes, the new industrial mode of production also helped crack open this ancient lineage of subjugation. It was hardly the only factor in ending slavery: the work of abolitionists, particularly Black abolitionists like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass,

¹ For more on the relationship between agrarian and industrial modes of production, see *Cannibals and Kings* by Marvin Harris and *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels* by Ian Morris.

and William Still, was obviously more critical to the cause. But the new mass politics coming out of factories and coal mines, combined with the flood of resources now more broadly available to larger, denser populations, and the shifting power relations between new wealth, old wealth, and popular movements played an important role in bringing down slavery. It was not moral force alone that won the North its victory. It was also industrial force.

The Civil War was, in economic terms, a battle between an agrarian mode of production and an industrial one. Slavery ended primarily because of the hard work and sacrifice of abolitionists, but also because the burgeoning fossil fuel industrial economy could get by efficiently on waged labor, accommodate more dense populations, and produce better weapons carried by more soldiers than an agrarian one. At its peak, the Union army was double the size of the Confederate army. The Union was also over three times richer than the Confederacy, more than twice as populous, enjoyed an agricultural advantage (while Confederate states led the nation in tobacco and rice yields, the Union produced more calorie-dense, strategically valuable commodities like wheat, corn, livestock, and horses), and had ten times as many factory workers in five times as many factories. Abolitionist Theodore Parker would write a phrase that has echoed from the pulpits and podiums of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr and Barack Obama: “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one [...] And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” In the case of the Civil War, the arc of the moral universe did not bend by itself: it was bent by the sacrifice of black abolitionists and organized labor, and was certainly helped in its bending by coal, artillery, and industry.

Victories for liberty were short-lived. The latter half of the 19th century was characterized by consolidation of the continent’s stolen resources, thanks to the rise of a metastasizing industrial oligarchy and the violent conquest of the west. Industrialists like John D. Rockefeller (oil), Andrew Carnegie (steel), Cornelius Vanderbilt (rail), and J.P. Morgan (finance) swallowed up huge fortunes—all dependent



on fossil fuels and valued in the hundreds of billions of dollars (in 2019 terms). Rockefeller and the others used their money to bribe government officials and to build price-fixing monopolies and trusts. They came to rule the government and economy of the Gilded Age. As a result, wealth inequality skyrocketed. As Colin Woodard writes in *American Character*, by 1890 “the richest 1 percent of Americans had the same combined income as the bottom 50 percent and owned more property than the other 99 percent.” In 1905, “two-thirds of the Senate was under railroad control” as rail corporations funneled wealth to influence policy.

This growing inequality was partly thanks to fossil fuels, which could be easily concentrated, controlled, and transformed into liquid capital by a small management class. But, again, industrialists did not single-handedly build a social Darwinian nightmare. The federal government played its own role in suppressing workers and activists. While corporations hired violent strikebreakers, the government provided a repressive police and military presence to stem the rising swell of populist, egalitarian values. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877, for example, saw federal troops and militias murder dozens of striking workers. Fossil fuels, guns, and industry may have provided the material forces that defeated the Confederacy, but they also built the Gilded Age.

Meanwhile, with abundant natural resources in North America opened by vicious conquest, tens of thousands of workers toiled in harsh conditions to build a new transcontinental network of railroads. Hundreds of Chinese immigrants perished in the effort. Coal-powered trains and industrially mass-produced weapons like the Colt revolver further allowed white settlers to expand their numbers and decimate the Native populations and wildlife in their path. Western nations like the Sioux and Comanche depended on huge migratory herds of bison for food, shelter, and tools—that is, for their material survival. While the United States has implemented many policies over the course of its history in the quest to remove

Natives from their own lands, the slaughter of tens of millions of bison was one of the bloodiest and cruelest. “Kill every buffalo you can! Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone,” as one colonel said. Here again, one form of production—in this case a foraging, semi-agrarian one—clashed violently with industrial production driven westward on the fires of coal and oil. And again, because of their inherent strategic advantages, fossil fuels triumphed.

Early 20th Century:

PROGRESSIVE ERA AND WORLD WARS

IN 1902, THE UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA threatened to shut down much of the country’s winter fuel source in an effort to get an eight-hour workday (it was ten at the time) and a wage increase. Coal miners in general played a vital role in wresting power from owners to workers; as Mitchell writes in *Carbon Democracy*, “Between 1881 and 1905, coal miners in the United States went on strike at a rate of about three times the average for workers in all major industries, and at double the rate of the next-highest industry...”

This anthracite coal strike was the first to bring in the federal government as an arbitrator. President Theodore Roosevelt intervened to settle the strike, which played an important role in his “Square Deal” policy—an early inspiration for his cousin’s New Deal legislation thirty years later—and was a vital point in the burgeoning Progressive Era. At this time, the labor movement and other left-wing movements began to gain power and force more egalitarian values into the fossil fuel industrial economy. Successful women’s suffrage movements and new labor protections showed the promise of the mass politics that had emerged in the previous century, though many such movements remained segregated along racial lines. Segregationist policies and mass disenfranchisement were legally codified in Southern states, but the North also carried its own racist demons into the Progressive Era. The concentration of higher densities of people in cities, factories, and mines produced the kind of close relationship-building with one’s fellow class members necessary for democratic solidarity movements to succeed, while at the same time, persistent lines of ethnic division between whites, former slaves and their descendants, and new immigrants—variously stoked or manufactured by the wealthy—remained obstacles to broader solidarity.

In 1901, a year before the anthracite strike, the fossilized remains of living creatures who last walked the surface of the earth during the Jurassic suddenly burst forth in Texas. This rapidly became the largest oilfield in the world at the time. Though oil had become increasingly important in the latter half of the 19th century, the discovery in Texas portended an acceleration of the fossil fuel economy. As Henry Ford ramped up automobile manufacturing, and internal combustion engines became increasingly sophisticated, oil promised to unleash a deadly new era.

In fact, oil was in some ways responsible for the violent upheavals of the first half of the 20th century. In the United Kingdom, coal miners played an important role in forcing concessions from the British ruling class and implementing more common-good policies like healthcare programs and pensions. The British government, with imperialist aristocrat Winston Churchill leading the charge, turned to foreign oil as a means of undercutting the power of coal miners and other trade unions. With the Navy’s annual budget taking a cut to pay for some of the new welfare programs, Churchill



sought to shift the Royal Navy to steam engines powered solely by oil: a costly transformation. While the United States enjoyed many domestic oil sources, European powers depended more on the pipeline and maritime routes that could move oil from Mesopotamia and Persia. This, along with other competing colonialist projects, was one of the points of tension between the European powers that flared up into World War I. As Abel G. Sterling writes for *Current Affairs*, “The First World War was an imperial war waged by empires for empire.”

To that end, World War I was also, arguably, the first large-scale war for oil. Besides the struggle for access to resources, it was notably the first theater of mechanized combat. Mounted cavalry units were still deployed on the battlefield, but an increasing number of tanks and airforces fought alongside and above them. Petroleum gave unprecedented strategic advantages to the countries that could control it, enabling them to manufacture weapons and vehicles at a large scale very quickly, and then to move those heavily-armored ships and tanks rapidly across long distances. But just as oil facilitated the scale of World War I, and drove some of the reasoning behind it, the war also bolstered the supremacy of oil, helping to cement it as one of the most important resources underpinning industrial militaries and economies.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR, REVOLUTIONS AND genocides uprooted the old world. In its place, a new system of governance over the world’s petroleum resources began to coalesce. From World War I, Mitchell writes, “emerged [...] a new machinery to control the oil regions of the Middle East—the system of League of Nations Mandates,” which partitioned petroleum-rich countries, transferring control to the victors of the war. The frenzy of extraction and consumption accelerated as fossil fuels supercharged the Roaring Twenties. The mechanization and industrialization of everything—of agriculture, transportation, manufacturing, construction, and the spread of electrification—built modernity. But the uneasy peace forged by the close of World War I could not contain the unrest caused by growing inequality, or the ambitions of industrialized states that sought to expand their reach, both in Europe and in far-flung colonial possessions. Soon the extreme voracity of the fossil-fueled economy would drive toward self-destruction. The market crash of 1929 ushered in the modern world’s greatest economic depression, leaving devastating inequality and desperation in its wake. The crash would be the cataclysm that broke apart the post-World War I order and initiated another descent into world war.

Many of the battles of World War II would, again, have a great deal to do with access to petroleum resources. The attack on Pearl Harbor is perhaps the most famous American example of this. At the time, Japan was heavily dependent on U.S. trade, and particularly on its oil exports. In an attempt to influence Japan, the United States cut off 90 percent of Japan’s oil in 1941. As historian Daniel Yergin has pointed out, Emperor Hirohito believed “Japan went to war with the United States because of oil—and lost the war because of oil.” So World War II was also arguably an oil war, and, like World War I, for reasons that went beyond the scramble for resources. World War II’s monumental brutality—the sheer scale of annihilation—was facilitated not just by fascist ideology but also by fossil fuels. Machine guns literally mechanized murder, the Holocaust was genocide conducted at an industrial scale with industrial tools, increasingly advanced airpower dropped firebombs, artillery launched rockets, vast fleets of tanks

and warships pocked or razed thousand-year-old cities, and devastation was wrought at the very foundations of matter as the atom bombs were dropped on Japan. Undergirding all these technologies, fossil fuels helped deliver a new age of terror.

The war would claim some 80 million lives, and, though its political causes went far beyond any single resource, fossil fuel industrialization destroyed many lives well beyond the battlefield and the concentration camps. The mechanization of agriculture, urbanization, and transition to industrial manufacturing that was enforced by massive imperialist governments like Mao’s and Stalin’s contributed their own unimaginable numbers to industrialization’s death toll—not considered a tragedy, just a statistic, to paraphrase the idiom (probably erroneously) attributed to Stalin. Though communist ideology is often colloquially blamed for these deaths, all industrialization has led to mass murder, including the version administered by western capitalism. It’s just that the capitalist version occurred over a longer period of time, and affected a more dispersed and diverse population. Whether American capitalist robber barons, European monarchs and aristocrats, Russian tsars or Soviet General Secretaries, every ruling class that has spread fossil fuel industrialization has done so viciously, violently, and without regard for anyone except those groups who could successfully organize and fight for their lives.



Latter 20th Century: **NEW DEALERS AND NEOLIBERALS**

AFTER MANY DECADES, STRENUOUS ORGANIZING, and dozens of strikes, labor movements in the United States finally forced concessions that led to increasingly improved conditions. Inspired by some waves of sit-down strikes started by autoworkers in Michigan, a million workers went on strike in 1934. Their agitating for a more egalitarian economy and humane working conditions descended from the movements stretching back to the Pawtucket mill workers and coal miners at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

Responding to the growing labor movement (and Socialist and Communist Parties) as the Great Depression wore on into the late 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began to pass the sweeping legislation he called the New Deal. These policies helped stabilize the economy and build up employment rates. Coupled with war mobilization, they also continued to mechanize agriculture, expand manufacturing, lay the foundations for a car-dependent infrastructure, and supercharge fossil-fueled production. The result was a postwar period

characterized by accelerated industrial manufacturing and abundant access to airplanes, automobiles, chemicals, and consumer products, plus a brief dip in inequality. New Deal policies—and Keynesian, social democratic economic philosophy more broadly—did much to reduce the rampant inequality of pre war America. Its benefits did not extend equally to black communities, however, instead building a mostly white middle class. This racially segregated prosperity would help placate white segments of the labor movement while managers and large, consolidated corporations continued to dominate the fossil fuel industrial economy and, slowly, began to restore their prewar dominance.

The wealthiest Americans quickly grew tired of even the modest concessions they had made to working Americans. Though the beginnings of elite alliances were forged mid-century, it wasn't until the 1970s that wealthy interests saw an opening to reassert their power. The 1973 oil crisis quadrupled oil prices and, in the U.S.'s heavily oil-dependent economy, compounded the 1973-74 stock market crash. This crack in the social democratic, Keynesian economy built by the New Deal created an opening for a competing economic philosophy, and for elites to reassert the complete power over the government and economy they had enjoyed before World War II.

Corporate managers—and old-money aristocrats like Friedrich von Hayek—worked together to found and fund a network of think tanks, research foundations, media institutions, and trade groups. The Mont Pelerin Society—named after the swanky Swiss resort where Hayek launched the movement—sat at the heart of this network. Its affiliates would spawn offshoots like the Adam Smith Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Institute for Economic Affairs, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Cato Institute.² This transatlantic network had one primary purpose: to dismantle Keynesian egalitarianism. Hayek, who had been a university buddy of Keynes', argued that the social democratic macroeconomic theory practiced in the welfare states of the United States and the United Kingdom was a stepping stone to authoritarianism. In its place, Hayek and his acolytes (such as economist Milton Friedman) sought to restore extreme prewar inequality using an updated version of laissez-faire econom-

ics, which they vaingloriously imagined as a new kind of liberalism, appropriately named neoliberalism. Friedman noted that they had been waiting for a fissure in the New Deal consensus, realizing it was important that "there was an alternative ready there to be picked up." Their project was wildly successful. After relentless media campaigns, dubious scholarly research, political moves to undermine unions, and legislative triangulating, these think tanks managed to dominate a whole generation of political discourse. Since the 1970s, inequality has grown rapidly, reaching levels not seen since just before the Great Depression.

What many economists refer to as market liberalization—the opening of nations and markets that had been "closed" during the Cold War—is more or less ideological neoliberalization. Stratified nations like the former Soviet states and China, which had once nurtured pretenses to egalitarianism, found that the neoliberalization invented by their Western counterparts could concentrate wealth more efficiently within their ruling classes than state communism could by itself. China is now second only to the United States in terms of its number of billionaires, and seems to be creating new ones much more rapidly.

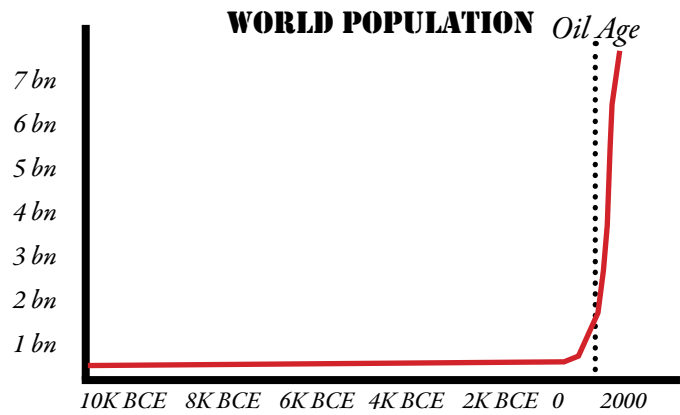
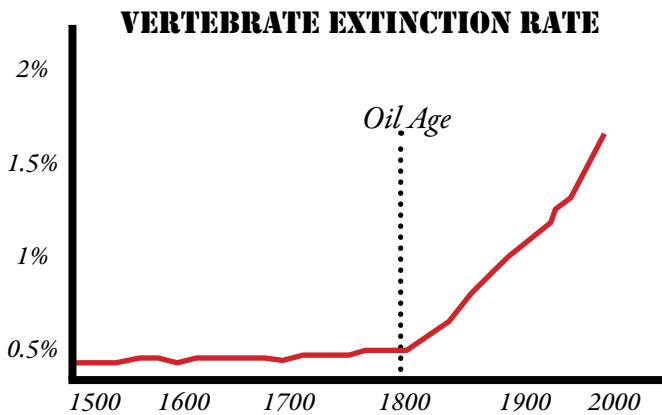
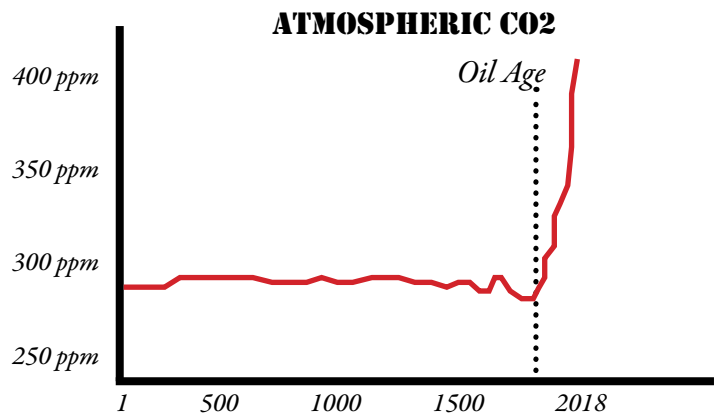
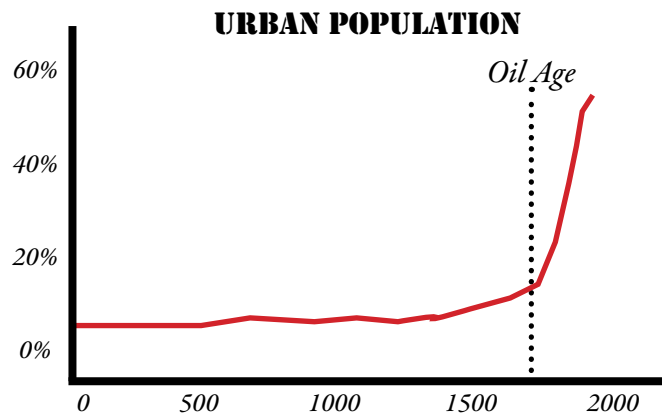
LONG WITH THE THUGGISH, KLEPTOCRATIC TURN in governments more interested in protecting the interests of consolidated wealth than their citizens, there has also been an acceleration of fossil fuel production and extraction. Neoliberalization has exposed vast tropical forests (and their native inhabitants) to profit-glutted international corporations and revenue-hungry governments who use carbon energy to extract ever greater quantities of resources. It has also helped deploy and displace huge populations of workers to serve global capital, often in horrendous conditions. And since 1970, vertebrate wildlife populations have declined 60 percent on average, triggering a mass extinction event on par with the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction from the meteorite that hit Earth 66 million years ago and wiped out the last of the dinosaurs. More than half of all greenhouse gas emissions from industrialization have been emitted since Rick Astley topped the charts (1988). From this frenetic burning of fossil fuels, whole new economic sectors have arisen. The digital revolution, for all its vaunted innovation, is the entropic last gasp of the Industrial Revolution. Virtual space is little more than a two-dimensional projection of the space occupied by data centers burning oceans of gas and mountains of coal. Electronics are assembled from rocks hauled on the backs of workers digging rare-earth metals from increasingly toxic and depleted mines and transported in oil-fueled cargo ships.

Meanwhile, access to petroleum has continued to dominate geopolitical strategy and alliances. Because of its immense oil reserves, the Middle East has remained an important strategic center, the reverberations of which persist in foreign policy and military conflicts even a century after the League of Nations Mandates. To this day, fossil fuel-rich imperial states, like the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and Russia have continued to launch military invasions in the region. The oil curse—the phenomenon in which oil-rich countries tend to be less democratic, more repressive, and belligerent—has not only heavily impacted the monarchic, autocratic states within this region, but also the U.N. Security Council states that have continually found it in their interests to build military bases and puppet regimes there. Contemporary imperial-

² For an excellent, rigorous historical account of this movement, see *Masters of the Universe* by Daniel Stedman Jones.







SOURCES <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization> <https://www.madeinsci.com/society/science/infographic-charting-the-worlds-sixth-mass-extinction/> <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth> <http://jaysonlusk.com/blog/2016/6/26/the-evolution-of-american-agriculture> <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/climateChange/CCS/Anthropogenic.html> <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

ism and colonialism center on access to strategic oil and gas shales, as well as pipeline routes. The military advantage that petroleum provides—and almost certainly will continue to provide indefinitely—likely represents one of the most difficult obstacles to reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. Oil wars like the U.S. invasion of Iraq will continue to be waged for as long as we live in a fossil fuel economy. And all such wars will conspire to maintain carbon supremacy.

FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRIALIZATION SINCE 1800 HAS enabled (certain) human populations to skyrocket exponentially and doomed wildlife populations to plummet. Urbanization has exploded while old growth forests have fallen precipitously. With rapid urbanization, tens of thousands of cities have paved over hundreds of thousands—possibly millions—of square miles. New methods of mass murder, surveillance, and worker exploitation have arisen. Simultaneously, fossil fuel-enabled technology has produced synthetic fertilizers and pesticides that have dramatically increased agricultural yields, helping to reduce extreme poverty. Industrialization has facilitated technology that has synthesized medicines capable of curing infectious diseases cheaply, reducing infant mortality, and healing previously catastrophic wounds, all of which have raised life expectancy globally. The mass politics of abolitionism, the Pawtucket mills, the coal mines, and economic sectors that have only existed in the fossil fuel era have spread broader access to material affluence and political autonomy.

The annual economic growth mandate that modern economists have come to expect is not merely a feature of capitalism or modernity; it is also a feature of fossilized energy stripped out of time and burned to add a surplus of caloric energy—and thus, capital—to a world that cannot physically absorb it without severe, destabilizing consequences. The shift

toward a degrowth economy that many on the left now advocate for, one that reduces extractive intensity, imperial aspirations, and rescinds the growth mandate, will happen inevitably as fossil fuels cease to be used, whether by choice or from scarcity. As economies continue to rip this surplus energy from the ground to perpetuate their survival or gluttony, the unstoppable, nonlinear forces of climate change threaten to proceed without interruption into fatal and innumerable calamities.

Despite the real material benefits they have given some of us, fossil fuels have facilitated and accelerated humanity's abusive relationship to the rest of life on earth, and, in some ways, rulers' abusive relationships to the rest of humanity. Oil, coal, and gas serve to power the machines that people have used to over-exploit every single ecological system, pushing thousands of species to extinction. Fossil-fueled machines rip more nutrients from topsoil than can readily be replenished, strip trees from the ground faster than hand saws and axes ever could, scrape marine life indiscriminately from the oceans faster than it can rebound, flatten mountains, level cities, launch drones, surveil nations, and pump out billions of tons of plastic that are now raining from the skies. Without fossil fuels, these machines simply could not exist. Right now, there's no alternative technology that can deliver the same density and flexibility of fuel capable of powering such techniques of devastation. The wealth that comes from selling carved-up natural resources flows to a tiny group of very wealthy people and highly militarized states. The nature of fossil fuels means they deliver almost unimaginable abundance to a few and increased abundance to some—but for only a short time, before they fatally deny the future. Fossil fuels have kindled the growth and violence of the past two centuries; but in their grand, brief conflagration, they threaten to condemn our whole future to permanent darkness. ♦

Highlights

for Socialist Children

THE
DIY
PAGE

CRAFT CHALLENGE

What You'll Need

- Sticks
- Leaves (for decoration)
- Pocket knife
- Complete inability to give a shit that adults think you shouldn't be using a pocket knife while in the meantime they're destroying the planet and your entire future through their greed, inattention, and love of gas-guzzling SUVs which have given them a sense of power, control, and masculinity in an increasingly unstable world.

What You'll Do

1. Collect the sticks.
2. Carve them into an appropriate message that expresses your understanding of the relationship between capitalist exploitation, consumerism, and the feverish planet.



3. Tuck in leaves for decoration, if desired.
Place the sign in your front yard and stand beside it, casually flicking your knife and fucking daring anybody to goddamn mess with you. Don't go it alone; bring friends. Bring a whole posse of knife-wielding, bloody bandanna-wearing tots (see recipe below). Refuse to stand down until your demands for a Green New Deal, at the very minimum, are met.

RECIPE: Raspberry Lemonade Tear Gas Repellent

A gas mask is the best defense against tear gas incendiaries thrown by police against citizens exercising their legal right to protest, but if you don't have one, here's how to make a homespun substitute.

What You'll Need

- 4 cups water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup confectioner's sugar
- 2 cups organic lemon juice
- 1 cup fresh raspberries
- 1 plastic bag
- 1 bandanna or other cloth face mask

What To Do

1. With a parent's help, place the raspberries in a blender or mixer. Pulse until raspberries are fully liquid. Strain out any remaining bits.
2. Fill a pot with the water and add the confectioner's sugar, stirring over low heat. When fully dissolved,

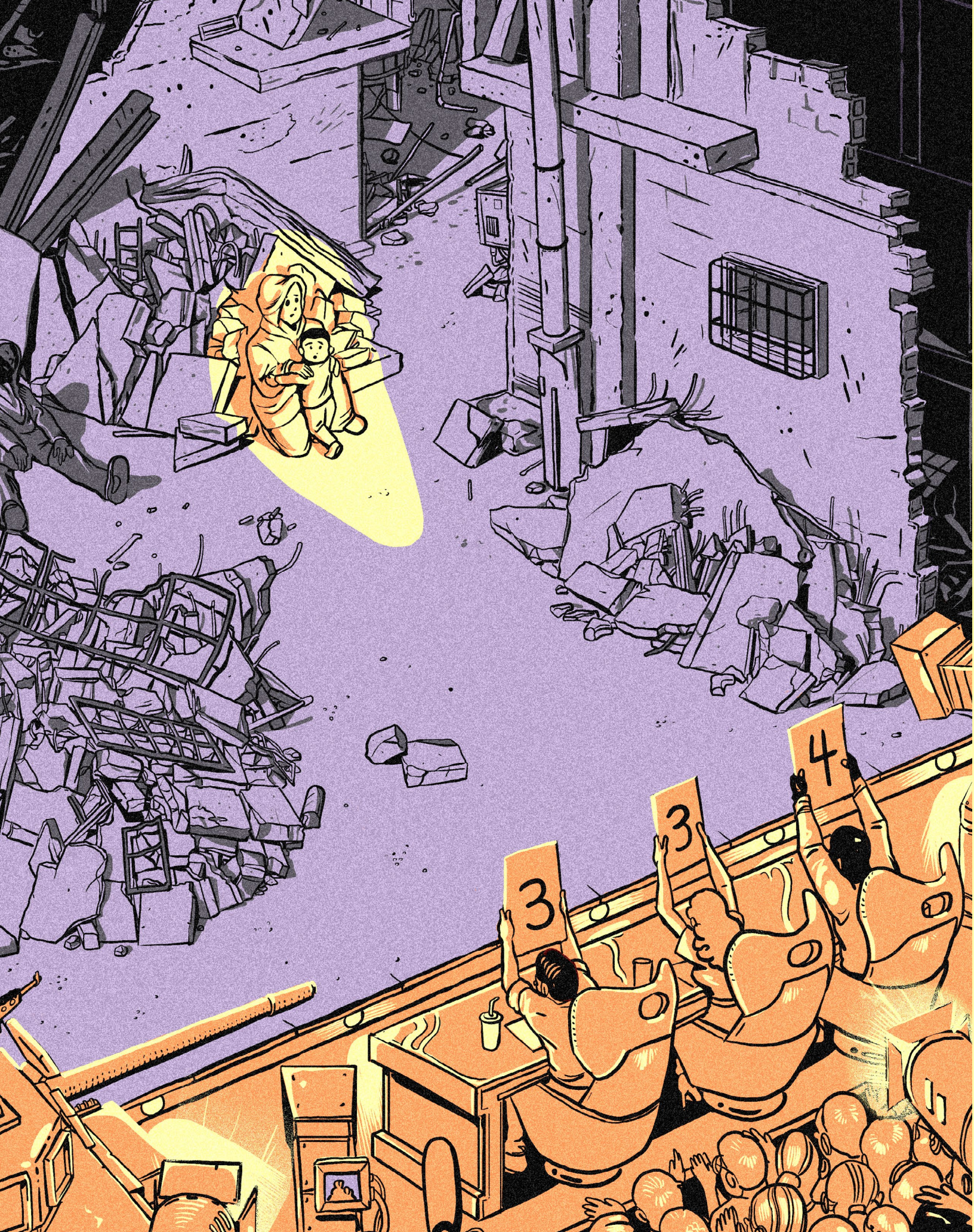
remove from the stove.

3. Add the raspberry juice to the water and sugar, stirring constantly. Add the lemon juice.
4. Pour some of the mixture inside the plastic bag, enough to fill it a third of the way.
5. Add the bandanna (or other cloth face mask) and let sit overnight.
6. In the morning, you have a fully functional tear gas repelling-mask! It's also dark pink, which will make you look like you are so furious you are spitting blood, and the powers that be had better fucking listen.

Extend The Fun

Bring the rest of the raspberry lemonade to the protest to keep your fellow activists happy and well-hydrated! The cops probably won't shoot a kid carrying a jug of pink lemonade, but if they do, at least the iconic image will help the cause.





THE REFUGEE MERITOCRACY

by Dolly Church

IN SEPTEMBER 2019, DEPUTY ITALIAN PRIME Minister Matteo Salvini left office. An infamously hardline economic and social conservative, Salvini's bread-and-butter issue has always been immigration—specifically, he'd like a lot less of it. His reign resulted in a significant increase in the number of asylum applications rejected in Italy: from 17,500 between October 2017 and January 2018 to nearly 25,000 between October 2018 and January 2019. At the same time, he implemented policies that limited asylum eligibility, and also removed humanitarian protections for migrants who have been denied asylum.

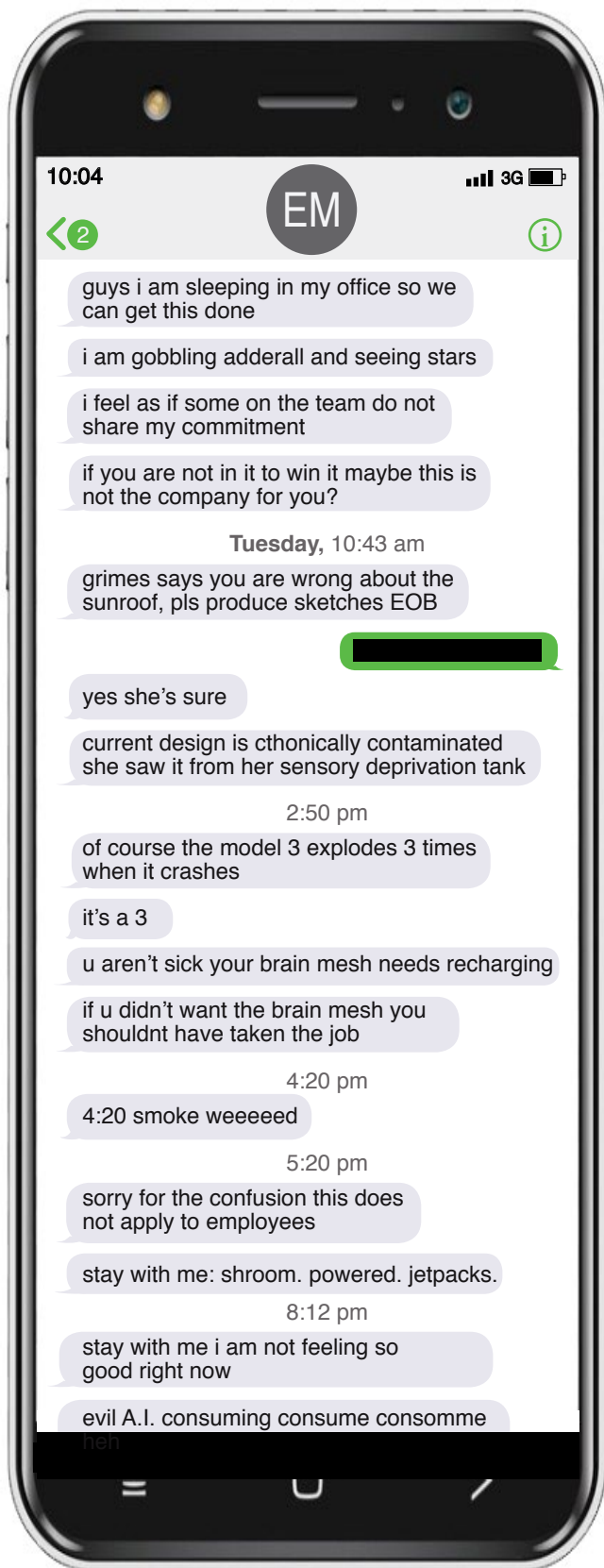
But Salvini's cruelest act of all took place this past summer, when he banned charity rescue ships from helping stranded asylum-seekers onto Italian shores. As sunbathers lined up their deck chairs on the idyllic island of Lampedusa, 500 refugees waited on board the rescue ships—within eyeshot of the beach—for Europe to decide if they could enter. After 19 days in gruelling conditions, they were finally allowed to land, and scattered among the countries that would take them. But not every refugee in Italy was having such a bad month. Unbeknownst to the terrified, heat-exhausted refugees on the ships, something miraculous was unfolding 390km away on the Italian mainland. In the buzzing streets of Catania, at the foot of Mt. Etna, a stage had been prepared, an audience assembled, and a panel of celebrity guests convened, for an event known as... *Refugees Got Talent*.

As part of the World Refugee Day celebrations, *Refugees Got Talent* was backed by the UN High Commissioner for Refu-

gees and judged by *Riot Club* actor Douglas Booth, alongside actress Francesca Ferro, musician Paolo Li Rosi, and the choreographer Lino Privitera. Over the course of the night, thirteen performers, including a reggae artist from Sierra Leone and a dancer from Colombia, took to the stage in an effort to display the spectacular and prove the trivially obvious. The U.N. Press Officer, Marco Ruttono, claimed that the event served as a powerful reminder: that “refugees are people like all others.” The Creative Director, Francesco Patane, described it as an opportunity to show the audience that refugees “are skilled and talented people,” who are “contributing to make our countries better places.” Competitors break-danced, rapped, and sung their way through the evening, cheered on by a slick host who broke down the events and galvanized the audience into rounds of applause. While a show like this might feel entertaining, even inspiring, it raises an uncomfortable question: why should people who have lost everything have to put themselves on display and showcase their usefulness for us to deem them worthy of help?

Salvini's anti-immigrant rhetoric often centers around a strawman: the “fake refugee” or the “crafty migrant” (a staple of the official Bigot's Lexicon, somewhere between “benefit scrounger” and “welfare queen.”) This framing suggests that migrants who come to Europe for purely “economic reasons” regularly use and abuse the asylum system, faking their trauma just to get jobs in European countries. These stereotypes are designed to stack the deck against all immigrants: if you *want* to move to Italy to contribute your labor, then you are unwelcome, but if you *have* to move because of displacement, then

texts from ELON MUSK to his engineering team



some contribution is expected, even while your motives are regarded with suspicion. The migrant worker is a parasite, while the refugee is either a burden or a liar.

The winner of *Refugees Got Talent*, a teenager from Nigeria named Hannah Imordi, directly challenged this assumption through her poem: “The Journey.” Imordi dedicated the poem to, as per the *Guardian*, “those who doubt whether refugees have justified reasons for leaving their home countries.” The poem dealt with the difficulties of displacement and of adapting to somewhere new: “In this different world, I look for acceptance. In this different culture... I seek help. What does tomorrow hold for me?” After receiving her medal, Imordi downplayed her achievements, claiming that making it to the finals was “not as important... as having the opportunity to state in poetry that millions of people are forced to leave their countries because of war, poverty and religion.”

In Italy, it seems, the preternaturally talented refugee is the only narrow category of immigrant that deserves to be welcomed. The uncanniness of *Refugees Got Talent* may lie in the fact that it’s a *competition*, where the refugees’ talents are pitted against each other in order to produce a winner, the Most Deserving Refugee of All. To stay in your new country, *Refugees Got Talent* implies, you must have extraordinary abilities to offer and also be willing to scrabble against your fellow refugees for the entertainment of the comfortably established public. If you can’t or won’t participate, then you are rejecting a larger cultural precept: the idea that worth can be proven, and that people should be required to prove it.

WHY DO WE WATCH TALENT shows? Beneath the bric-a-brac of ventriloquist dummies and doggie bow-ties, they are all about social inclusion. They are about getting “normal” people together, whether clustered around the living-room TV or assembled on the stage. It doesn’t matter if you are a Carphone Warehouse salesman from Bristol (Paul Potts, *Britain’s Got Talent*), a troop of waste collectors from Manila (Junior New System, *America’s Got Talent*) or even a migrant on the brink of deportation (Gamuh Nhenghu, *The X Factor*)—anyone can take home the prize. The underlying sentiment of talent shows is the same one that animates corny sports movies and the speeches of politicians on the campaign trail: the promise of meritocracy.

This is the hook that has made Simon Cowell millions from both the *X Factor* and *Got Talent* franchises. As he explained in *Parade*: “everyone comes in under an equal footing and that makes it a good competition.” His shows claim to go beyond the vapidness of the music industry, dispelling the idea that you have to look a certain way or have the right connections, instead emphasizing that what *really* matters is having skill, courage and determination. (Consider *The Voice*, a show in which the judges don’t even see what the contestants look like until they’ve heard the quality of their singing.) These talent shows

are also as much about the journeys of their participants as the music itself, lacquered in the rhetoric of “dreams.” If you look at autobiographies of talent show victors, from Girls Aloud’s *Dreams that Glitter* to Susan Boyle’s *I Dreamed a Dream* to Leona Lewis’ simply-named *Dreams*, you may find a bit of a pattern, and an identical premise: that great ambitions exist to be fulfilled. In *Refugees Got Talent*, the stakes are inflated: the contestants are victims of war, and the dream isn’t for a record deal or a magazine cover, but simply to be allowed to live an ordinary life in a safe place.

The term “talent” could be applied to almost anything a person can do well, from elbow-licking to speed-eating. But while the competition may well be diverse, the adjudicators of concepts like “talent” tend to look alike and share a similar cultural background. (This was certainly the case with *Refugees Got Talent*, where the contestants were subject to the opinions of an all-white panel). In his *Parade* interview, Simon Cowell demonstrated the issues produced by having such a monolithic perspective. When asked about the difficulty of being a judge, he responded with an example: “When you’ve got an Eastern European balancing act, doing a triple thriller (or whatever they call them)... I’m thinking, I don’t really know much about that. Is that good or not very good?” Talent is thereby equated with familiarity—when the people in charge of assessing “talent” encounter artists from outside their bubble, they struggle to empathize with and understand their work, undermining the idea that everyone starts on “equal footing.” Broadly speaking, when thinking of a judging panel like the one on *America’s Got Talent*, the image conjured is fairly generic: the teeth are white and the dresses tight and the gender spread is about even, usually consisting of two celebrities and an older “industry guy” who “knows a star when he sees ‘em.” Cowell has long had a monopoly over this role, starting in *Pop Idol*, way back in the era when contestants wore bad jeans and leather jackets. He is a famously vicious judge: “Mr. Nasty,” the one you boo along to. But “Mr. Nasty” figures are popular, if divisive. Hell, we put one in the Oval Office, didn’t we?

Donald Trump is himself a former competition-show judge, and is appealing in the same manner as Simon Cowell, Gordon Ramsay, and half-a-dozen other notorious TV judges whose bullying is mistaken for honesty. Whether they loved or hated him, people loved to watch Trump whip out his finger guns and dish out his tagline: “you’re fired!” But over time, this pantomime-villain role revealed itself to be his actual personality, and *The Apprentice* set became the actual headquarters of his campaign. Simultaneously, the jurisdiction of Trump’s judgment has widened to include entire nation-states (“shithole countries”) and immigrant populations (“rapists” and “criminals.”) His declarations of worthiness or “fireability” have been enshrined in a series of cruel and life-threatening policies. And instead of being offset by a conciliatory Heidi Klum or Aleasha Dixon, Donald Trump is now flanked by Stephen Miller, a dangerous true believer and the probable architect of his boss’ most evil schemes.

“The artificially constructed meritocracy of talent shows might seem like a ratings gimmick, but it has also crept into immigration policies...”

The presidency of Donald Trump has exposed what happens when you mistake the staged theatrics of talent shows for a real model of meritocracy. Talent shows are really just dramas that happen to feature real people. The competitors’ difficult life stories are highlighted, and the huge heaving crowd is juxtaposed against the single pin-prick of the contestant on the stage, all to demonstrate how heavily the odds are stacked against each individual. This draws the audience in, practically forcing them to feel sympathy. (In fact, the smaller and more nervous the contestants are, the more audiences like it: stick a child belting Whitney Houston on stage, and watch them weep.) As we watch swathes of talented, committed people perform in these competitions, it feels natural to question why they haven’t succeeded before. It could have to do with the fact that artistic career paths are usually reserved for those who can afford them. It could be that they didn’t “dream hard” enough in the past. It could be that they previously failed to present themselves in a way that made them appealing to whichever talent scout or record exec happened to hear their demo. Talent show failures are portrayed in all their caterwauling glory, and subject to mockery by the judges, so we can laugh at them for deserving to lose.

The artificially constructed meritocracy of talent shows might seem like a mere ratings gimmick, but it’s also crept insidiously into immigration policies in the form of points-based systems. Recently endorsed by political bedfellows Boris Johnson and Donald Trump, the points-based approach would effectively make migration one big talent show, where immigrants are the contestants and “talent” is judged by the elitist criteria of education, English proficiency, age, and job prospects. Like a scoring card, the idea is that each applicant would accrue a certain amount of points in each category, and their total score would determine their status, marking a shift away from America’s current migration priorities, which, according to Trump, “discriminate against genius.”



THE IDEA OF INSTITUTING A MIGRATION policy based on ability is by no means new. Entertained by Truman and George H.W. Bush, it was most notably pushed by John F. Kennedy, who touted it as an alternative to the overtly racist 1924 Immigration Act. In the face of a galvanised Civil Rights Movement, having national origin quotas that purposefully excluded workers from Asia and Africa looked antiquated, so Kennedy turned instead to the “neutral” criteria of “skills.” Lyndon B. Johnson took up the policy briefly after Kennedy’s death, but it was shelved following pushback from Southern Democrats who feared economic competition from immigrants. The parties settled on prioritizing family unification instead, which may at first sound more humane. But before we start celebrating their progressivism, it should be noted that their intent wasn’t to actually change the *consequences* of the racial quotas, just to accomplish the same thing by more subtle means. The family unification system allocated visas to the relatives of citizens who were already living in America. At the time, the United States was predominantly white and the demographics were expected (incorrectly) to stay roughly the same as people migrated in. Family unification was not intended to be revolutionary, as Johnson explicitly stated upon passing the bill in 1965: “it does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives...”

In eulogizing current merit-based systems, Trump has looked towards Canada and Australia. In both systems, potential migrants are not required to have job offers prior to arrival, but the criteria that determines “skill,” is similar, focusing primarily on education and work experience. The Australian points system is shaped largely around employer demands, where visas are distributed according to the availability of jobs. The problem with such an approach is that it has been coupled with a strict cap on permanent residency (160,000 immigrants a year), and its method of allocating points can be very discriminatory—for example, zero points are given to those over the age of 50, as well as those with only “competent” English skills. The Canadian system is rooted in the charmingly named “human capital model,” which values migrants who have skills

that will “boost the economy long-term,” rather than meeting immediate employment demands. This has resulted in some difficulties with migrant underemployment: many “skilled” immigrants, equipped though they may be with degrees in “respectable” fields, have struggled to find jobs for various reasons, ranging from employers’ lack of familiarity with foreign qualifications to workers’ lack of professional connections. This often leads immigrants to seek work elsewhere in the service sectors. At the same time, the reduction in “low-skill” workers has led to shortages in many labor-intensive technical fields like agriculture and construction. The solution, condemned as a “form of apartheid” by labor rights organizers, has been to admit temporary foreign workers (TFWs), who are tied to particular employers and are often denied the most basic working rights, while being unable to speak out for fear of deportation.

Trump and his advisers have made it clear that they want to move sharply away from the family-based immigration model and toward some sort of points-based system. Family-based immigration has been relabeled in the right-wing press as “chain migration,” a conservative boogeyman for the perfectly legal and understandable movement of family members seeking to join other family members. The defense of the points-based strategy by Republicans has been somewhat predictable; Georgia senator David Perdue has cited its potential to boost the economy, while others, such as North Dakota senator Kevin Cramer, claim it as a bipartisan compromise because it does not explicitly slash immigration in absolute numbers. More than a compromise, what the points-based system represents for these conservatives is a means to disguise their naked prejudice against blue-collar (and mostly non-white) immigrants.

THE CONCEPT OF “MERIT” HERE is similar to the “talent” that is assessed on competition shows—it’s meaningless until it’s defined by the people in charge. Any immigration system can be understood as merit-based, in that they always reflect a nation’s priorities. (Germany’s priorities might look very different from, say, Qatar’s.) Unsurprisingly, it seems that Trump’s definition of merit will likely reward those who are most like him. In *Gender, Migration and the Global Race for Talent*, Anna Boucher discusses how the definition of “skill” used by governments with points-based systems tends to exclude women by devaluing female-dominated sectors, such as caregiving and hospitality, in favour of employees in male-dominated STEM fields. Likewise, conservative economist George J. Borjas argues that points-based systems of immigration are biased in favor of national-origin groups from “high-income, high-skill countries.” This is because wealthier countries can afford to equip their citizens with the skills to make them “desirable” in point-based systems, such as

a high level of education. More recently, research conducted by Neil Malhotra and Benjamin Newman makes the case that Trump's policy is a simple anti-Hispanic dog whistle to his supporters, in that "it constitutes a preference for those atypical of the existing immigrant population." In their findings, those who scored highly as biased against Hispanics "cared much more about education and skills when considering the entry of Latinos." At the same time, they were also "more likely to penalize a Hispanic immigrant for being low-skilled" than a white immigrant. This indicates that the demand for a merit-based system is more about prioritizing white migrants than it is about identifying "talent."

In *Refugees Got Talent*, the notion of meritocracy is upcycled into a gaudy aesthetic, and the machinations of talent shows serve as warped reminders of the injustices that asylum-seekers face. The competitive nature of free-market capitalism is made manifest on stage, as contestants are encouraged to prove their worth against each other. This creates the illusion that each contestant has been given a fair chance, while denying them the means to criticize the structures that rejected them, lest they be considered *sore losers*.

But what happens to the losers of talent shows? Do they just go home? Do they return to the same nine-to-five as before? Do they manage to secure deals elsewhere? With the exception of a few noisy characters that end up as fodder for the tabloid press, these questions tend to go unanswered. But the stakes in the case of talent shows are comparatively trivial. The glaring holes in Trump's proposed immigration plan are not. The people who will most likely lose out are those who previously benefited from family-based green cards, a demographic that constituted 66 percent of total migrant admissions in 2017. As in Canada, a points-based system may also give greater power to American employers to exploit their workers through temporary visas—as Trump has already done to his staff at Mar-a-Lago. As Suzy Lee recently explained in *Catalyst*, employers want immigration systems to be adaptable: "growing to meet demand during periods of expansion or native labor unrest, but restricted when not needed." For America, this will mean a precarious labor market, where the flow of migration is permitted but only when rich people deem it beneficial, and only with the prerequisite that such workers are denied the benefits they deserve.

Throughout his 25-minute address on this issue back in May, Trump made no reference to what his strategy will mean for the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States. Similarly, he made no mention of DACA recipients, popularly known as "The Dreamers." What his proposal did disclose was a planned reduction in refugee admission to 10 percent, down from the current 22 percent. More recently, he has toyed with the idea of ending the refugee program entirely, or cutting admission to 10,000 and giving preferential treatment to those who help forward America's agenda, such as Iraqi and Afghan citizens who work alongside the armed forces. He also championed Lindsey Graham, who

has outlined his own brutish border security bill, one which would force asylum-seekers to apply from their home countries instead of in the United States. The bill would also attempt to override the Flores settlement, which limits the amount of time during which children can be detained, extending the duration from 20 days to 100 days, as well as making it easier to deport unaccompanied children to Central America without trial. By removing "incentive[s]," he claims that the "humanitarian crisis will begin to repair itself." This calls for some translation: by removing "incentives," he means "make immigration hellishly impossible for almost everyone," and by "repair itself" he means "go elsewhere."

SO WHAT HAPPENS TO THE "UNDESERVING" refugees, the ones who are unable to sufficiently prove their "talent"? Their performance is always a disappearing act. They shuffle on stage to either derision or pity, before being swiftly shown out the door and out of public consciousness. Occasionally, they are used as examples by the media to further political ends—as Fox News did so with their misreporting of the "migrant caravans" just before the midterms. When faced with this kind of vilification, it's hard to know what is worse: refugees being rejected for lack of "talent," the prejudicial notion that they are incapable of having it, or the presumption that they should have to display it in the first place before being permitted safety and freedom.

Refugees Got Talent is a microcosm of the game refugees are already playing when seeking asylum. Until we free ourselves from the notion that refugees should have to perform tricks before they can be permitted to live safely and securely, immigration systems will never be capable of dispensing justice. It doesn't matter whether you call it a points-based system, a skills-based system, or a "human capital" system—right now, it's nothing more than a bunch of cheap, tacky talent shows. ✦



"I want to die."

MAKE YOUR LITERARY

If you've dreamed of being a famous writer, but have figured out that making it in the literary world is less about talent and more about appealing to an extremely narrow spectrum of insufferable people on the East and West Sides (and now Brooklyn too!) then congratulations: you're already halfway there. To bag that literary award, you don't have to slave away thinking of original storytelling techniques and heartbreaking natural dialogue. Just mix and match the elements below and create your critically-acclaimed (though not very lucrative!) literary sensation of the century (until the next one comes along in six months.)

CHARACTERS

- An aimless young man
- A middle-aged professor
- A vulnerable young woman exploring her sexuality (male authors only)
- A minority character that teaches the protagonist a valuable lesson (white authors only)
- An excessively precocious child

SETTINGS

- A college
- A university
- A college within a university
- New York (Manhattan)
- New York (Brooklyn)
- Rambling journey abroad

PLOT DEVICES

- Car accident
- A young person learns a family secret
- Family secret discovered because of car accident
- Divorce
- Divorce because of car accident



UNNECESSARY PUNCTUATION

- ...
- (interrobang)
- he said
- [footnote:]
- &&&

DRUG USE DESCRIBED WITH SUCH KNOWING DETAIL THAT THE AUTHOR SEEMS COOL TO PEOPLE WHO ARE STILL IMPRESSED BY THAT KIND OF THING

- Heroin
- Peyote
- Ayahwasca
- Ketamine
- Scotch, the really manly kind

SURPRISING ADJECTIVE USED IN DESCRIPTION OF TITS

- Inclement
- Plebian
- Cultured
- Prolific
- Unrepentant

OUR OWN MY NOVEL

ANIMAL THAT DIES TO MAKE THE PROTAGONIST FEEL SOMETHING

Dog
Cat
Rabbit
Coyote
Dehumanized poor person



HEAVY-HANDED SYMBOLISM

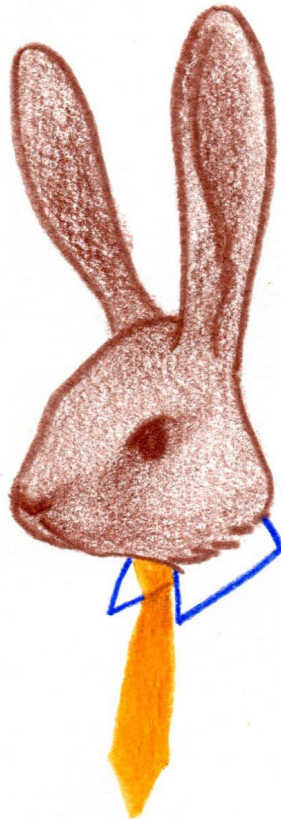
Shattered mug
Shattered mirror
Shattered pelvis
Sudden clouds
Sudden sunlight

REMARKABLE COINCIDENCE

Gun misfires
Storm breaks
Vacation run-in
Stranger is secret sibling
Sibling is secret stranger

CLUMSILY-INSERTED HISTORICAL EVENT

9/11
9/11 again
WWII (generally)
The Holocaust (specifically)
2016 election



BACK-COVER PRAISE COMPLETELY UNCONNECTED TO THE CONTENT

Engrossing
One for the ages
Hilarious
Honest
A real wowzer



SCANDAL IN WHICH THE AUTHOR IS EMBROILED 6 MONTHS AFTER THEY WIN AN AWARD

Plagiarized female author
Harassed female author
Everything in the book was true but real life is an elaborate series of lies
Accessory to murder of socialite
Tweeted a coked-out confession
Set sail on the spacious seas of the mind in search of holy Truth (stole yacht)





WHAT IS ŽIŽEK FOR?

BY THOMAS MOLLER-NIELSEN

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE: “*What would be my—how should I call it—spontaneous attitude towards the universe? It’s a very dark one. The first one—the first thesis would have been—a kind of total vanity. There is nothing, basically. I mean it quite literally. Like, ultimately—ultimately—there are just some fragments, some vanishing things, if you look at the universe it’s one big void. But then, how do things emerge? Here, I feel a kind of spontaneous affinity with quantum physics, where, you know, the idea there is that the universe is a void, but a kind of a positively charged void, and then particular things appear when the balance of the void is disturbed. And I like this idea spontaneously very much, the fact that it’s not just nothing, things are out there. It means something went terribly wrong, that what we call creation is a kind of a cosmic imbalance, a cosmic catastrophe, that things exist by mistake. And I’m even ready to go to the end and claim that the only way to counteract this is to assume the mistake and go to the end. And we have a name for this, it’s called “love.” Isn’t love precisely this kind of a cosmic imbalance? I was always disgusted with this notion of “I love the world, universal love.” I don’t like the world. I’m basically someone in between I hate the world or I’m indifferent towards it. But the of whole of reality, it’s just it, it’s stupid. It is out there. I don’t care about it. Love for me is an extremely violent act. Love is not “I love you all.” Love means, I pick out something, and you know, again it’s this structure of imbalance, even if this something is just a small detail, a fragile individual person, I say “I love you more than anything else.” In this quite formal sense love is evil.*”

Having conducted an informal poll among friends and family members, my strong suspicion is that your reaction to this passage—which, as you can see, ranges over such seemingly disparate topics as the meaning of the universe, quantum physics and the emergence of matter, and the nature of love—will fall into one of three categories: (i) You believe that it expresses something profoundly insightful; (ii) You believe that it expresses insane gibberish; (iii) You are utterly unsure what to make of it: *perhaps* it is saying something insightful about the universe, creation, emergence, quantum physics or love; or maybe, in fact, it’s just unbridled lunacy posing as philosophical profundity.

If you fall into the first category, you most likely are—or would be—a

Slavoj Žižek fan: the above passage is a verbatim transcript of the start of the popular 2005 documentary film about the 70-year-old Slovenian philosopher, entitled (somewhat unimaginatively) *Žižek!*. And you’re in good company. Described on his book covers and lecture tours as a “Hegelian philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst, and political activist,” Žižek—a self-described “radical leftist”—is one of the only intellectuals alive today who has an entire journal exclusively dedicated to discussing his ideas. Prestigious newspapers and magazines have labelled Žižek a “celebrity philosopher” with “rockstar popularity” who has a “fanatical global following,” the “Elvis of cultural theory,” and, perhaps most (in) famously, as the “most dangerous philosopher in the West.” Millions of people have watched his lectures and videos on YouTube; thousands of students, academics, and laypeople have bought his books; and many thousands more have attended his lectures: 3,000 people recently packed out the Sony Centre in Toronto, where Žižek held a debate with the Canadian clinical psychologist and fellow public intellectual Jordan Peterson. Tickets were sold for as much as \$1,500.

If, however, you fall into the second category of people, you’re not in bad company either. In a much-read analysis of Žižek’s work in the *New York Review of Books*, the distinguished British political philosopher John Gray claimed that Žižek’s work merely “[a]chiev[es] a deceptive substance,” before eventually concluding that “Žižek’s work ... amounts to less than nothing”. Harvard evolutionary psychologist and popular public intellectual Steven Pinker openly described Žižek on Twitter as a “charlatan” (as well as a “student-detesting ... plagiarist”); and Noam Chomsky, perhaps the world’s foremost public intellectual, recently accused Žižek of engaging in “theoretical posturing” by “using fancy words,” but that Žižek’s work ultimately contains “no content ...

beyond the level of something which you can explain in five minutes to a 12-year-old.”

Finally, if you fall into the third category of people, you’re also likely in good company too—though you’ll rarely, if ever, find such agnosticism publicly expressed by other academics and public intellectuals (or even, for that matter, by individuals online). Discussions of Žižek’s work—as is the case in much of public discourse these days—tends to be heavily polarized: people either love him or hate him. Those who are unsure what to think mostly remain silent.

I should lay my cards on the table at the outset: I am not at all unsure what I think of Žižek—I fall squarely within the second category of people listed above. More specifically, I, too, think that Žižek is, at his best, a posturing charlatan. However, I also think that, at his worst, he is significantly worse than that: he is also a reactionary and at times even racist individual whose continued acceptance and, in some sectors, even quasi-veneration by the left is, I think, deeply harmful to the global progressive cause.

I realize that these are serious allegations, and that they require a significant amount of substantiation. Let me, then, prove the charges.

RACISM

LET US BEGIN BY EXAMINING CLAIMS FOR WHICH ŽIŽEK HAS garnered a significant amount of criticism over the last couple of years—namely, those related to Islam and the European refugee crisis, as spelled out in his 2016 book *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with our Neighbours* (ADB).

Much of what Žižek writes in ADB very much conforms to what a self-proclaimed leftist would say on these issues. For instance, he writes that the “ultimate causes” of the refugee crisis are a combination of both “the dynamics of global capitalism” as well as “Western military intervention” in Libya and Iraq. Moreover, he writes that Western Europeans are “preventing” Africans from “changing their societies” through “devastating” forms of “economic neocolonialism,” often mediated by international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Žižek also argues that “our goal” as global progressives should be to “reconstruct global society” such that the “desperate refugees” are no longer forced to flee their country of origin—which thus (presumably) entails ending such Western military interventions and economic neocolonialist policies throughout Africa and the wider Middle-East. Later in the book, Žižek also explicitly states that “the principal threat to Europe does not come in the shape of Muslim immigrants but in its anti-immigrant populist defenders,” and that “Europe will have to reassert its full commitment to providing means for the dignified survival of refugees.” (Furthermore, in a television interview with Mehdi Hasan on Al Jazeera’s *UpFront*, Žižek was also similarly explicit that he wants “even more refugees” to be allowed to seek asylum in Europe.)

In summary, Žižek believes that: (i) the West bears significant responsibility for causing the refugee crisis; (ii) Europe should (therefore) do the morally acceptable thing and open its doors to the refugees; and (iii) to deal with the root cause of the crisis, Europe should ultimately cease its destructive economic policies and military ventures in Africa and the Middle-East.

To repeat: all of these points are, of course, very standard things for a leftist to say. (I agree with all of them.) However, throughout the book Žižek is also keen to establish a fourth, core thesis in his book, one that leftists would not standardly subscribe to—namely, that Europe should open its doors to the refugees *in spite of the cultural incompatibility of refugees and Western citizens*. More specifically, in the book Žižek openly defends Samuel Huntington’s (in)famous thesis of the

“clash of civilizations” between Islam and the Western world. As he writes: “We are definitely in the midst of the clash of civilizations (the Christian West versus radicalized Islam).”

Lest one think that such a remark was some kind of a bizarre anomaly, Žižek, in fact, makes virtually identical remarks at two different points later in the book. Thus, he writes that “the refugees want to have their cake and eat it. They basically expect to get the best of the Western welfare state while retaining their specific way of life, which is in some of its key features incompatible with the ideological foundations of the Western welfare state”; and, perhaps most explicitly, near the end of the book he unambiguously states that “it is a simple fact that most of the refugees come from a culture that is incompatible with Western European notions of human rights.”

Exhuming the rotting corpse of Huntington’s repeatedly debunked thesis is, obviously, a rather strange—not to mention highly inflammatory—thing for a self-proclaimed “radical leftist” to do. Hence, the obvious question is: What reasons does Žižek provide for thinking that there is such a “clash”? More specifically: *What* are these “Western notions of human rights,” and *why* is Islam ostensibly incompatible with them?

Žižek is not entirely explicit on these points. However, from what he writes, it appears that he believes that “Western” and “Islamic” culture are irreconcilable for at least two different reasons. The first, he writes, is because “Muslims find it impossible to bear blasphemous images and reckless humor,” which is apparently incompatible with “Western notions” of free speech. And the second is that “the subordination of women” is “part of the Muslim life-world,” which conflicts with “Western values” relating to women’s equality.

To talk this way about the world’s 1.8 billion Muslims—and, moreover, to do so while providing virtually no substantiating evidence—is incredibly provocative, to say the least. Moreover—as Žižek is surely well aware—to talk of “Western notions of free of speech” is itself an exceedingly gross simplification: for one thing, there are significant differences between European and American free speech laws and attitudes; for another, even *within* Europe there are enormous differences in interpretation of the notion of “free speech.” (Thus, for instance—to use Žižek’s phraseology—the German government actually “finds it impossible to bear” the denial of the Holocaust.) Moreover, by claiming that Islam inherently conflicts with the (“Western”) concept of free speech, Žižek ignores the enormous differences in the interpretation and implementation of free speech laws in the world’s 50 majority Muslim countries, as well as the fact that, when asked, most Muslims around the world in fact express support for “Western values,” including (but not limited to) freedom of speech. Last but not least, levelling such an accusation against Islam is also deeply hypocritical, given that Žižek himself has *openly advocated* criminalising certain forms of speech. As he writes in his (2018) book *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*: “The only thing we can do ... is to mobilize the broadest international public in order to directly criminalize *any* talk of the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.”

What about the claim that the “subordination of women” is “part of the Muslim life-world”? This will undoubtedly come as a surprise to, for instance, many of the women living in Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority country. This is a country which has previously elected a female president (unlike, say, the U.S. and many other European countries); where more than 40 percent of women occupy senior management positions (a percentage twice as high as in Spain, the U.K., and the U.S.); and which has a higher proportion of elected women government officials than many countries in Europe (and exactly the same the proportion as the U.S.).

What evidence does Žižek himself adduce in support of his claim regarding Islam's attitude towards women? Apparently—and, indeed, almost absurdly—the *only* piece of evidence he cites in his book is the infamous 2015-16 New Year's Eve Cologne attacks, when several hundred men—many of whom were apparently of North African descent—were alleged to have sexually assaulted hundreds of women near the city's central train station. According to Žižek, the attack was:

[A] public spectacle of instilling fear and humiliation, of exposing the privileged Germans to painful helplessness [...] [N]aïve attempts to enlighten immigrants (explaining to them that our sexual mores are different, that a woman who walks in public in a miniskirt and smiles does not thereby signal sexual invitation, and so on) are examples of breathtaking stupidity. Immigrants know all this perfectly well – and that's why they are doing it. They are well aware that what they are doing is foreign to our predominant culture, and they are doing it precisely to wound our sensitivities.

In an interview on Al Jazeera's *UpFront* television program, presenter Mehdi Hasan confronted Žižek over this passage:

HASAN: *How is this not a statement that couldn't come out of the mouth of Marine Le Pen, of the Golden Dawn, of all sorts of horrible groups? ... Immigrants as a whole are trying to wound European sensitivities?*

ŽIŽEK: *Not immigrants, those who did [what happened] there [in Cologne]... And I spoke with people from there...*

HASAN: *So you took an attack, and generalized, to make a generalized point about European culture? How is that not bigotry? How is that not what the far right does?*

ŽIŽEK: *Wait a minute. It was absolutely not a sexual attack in the sense of rapes and so on. It was a kind of a—if I may use your term—sort of a provocation, if I may use the word that you used...*

HASAN: *The attackers were provoking who? European culture? Seriously? A bunch of drunk thugs?*

ŽIŽEK: *My Arab friends told me that what happened in Cologne was also happening on Tahrir Square in Egypt...*

HASAN: *And what do you extrapolate from that? What's your conclusion?*

ŽIŽEK: *Nothing...*

HASAN: *Nothing?! But it happens in Germany at the Oktoberfest in Munich, it happens at Mardi Gras...*

ŽIŽEK: *It's not the same...*

HASAN: *Why is it not the same? Women get attacked in public places all over the world. Why are you racializing it? Why are you culturalizing it?*

ŽIŽEK: *No, I think you are here absolutely simplifying things...*

HASAN: *You are! Sorry Slavoj, you just said to me that it happens in Tahrir Square and it happens in Cologne. What happens? What is the lesson from Cologne and Tahrir Square that you are making? That you think is worth making?*

ŽIŽEK: *The lesson is that we should learn to talk openly about all these problems and not try to whitewash them and so on.*

Žižek's alleged "lesson," however, naturally only raises the further question: What, exactly, are "these problems," if they're *not* equivalent to the fact that "the subordination of women" is "part of the Muslim life-world"—an alleged problem for which he has (still) not provided any serious evidence?

Žižek's issues with Islam, however, do not end with its (alleged) violations of "Western values" of free speech and women's equality. In two particularly outrageous passages, he suggests that: (i) any form of political Islam—even of the "moderate" variety—is tantamount to fascism; and (ii) that a pedophilia scandal in the U.K. city of Rotherham perpetrated by men of predominantly Pakistani descent suggests that young Pakistanis are inherently predisposed toward pedophilia:

(1) *The political choices provided by Islam can be clearly identified: they reach from Fascist nihilism, which parasitizes on capitalism, up to what Saudi Arabia stands for ... The most Islam can offer (in its "moderate" version) is yet another "alternative modernity," a vision of capitalism without its antagonisms, which cannot but resemble Fascism.*

(2) *One can well imagine a non-pedophilic [Catholic] priest who, after years of service, gets involved in paedophilia because the very logic of the institution seduces him into it. Such an "institutional unconscious" designates the obscene disavowed underside that sustains the public institution ... In other words, it is not simply that, for conformist reasons, the Church tries to hush up its paedophilic scandals; rather, in defending itself, the Church is defending its innermost obscene secret. What this means is that identifying oneself with this secret side is a key constituent of the very identity of a Catholic priest. If a priest seriously—not just rhetorically—denounces these scandals, he thereby excludes himself from the ecclesiastic community, he is no longer "one of us." ... We should approach the Rotherham events in exactly the same way. Here, we are dealing with the 'political unconscious' of the Pakistani Muslim Youth.*

Regarding the first claim: this would appear to have the absurd consequence that the only forms of political Islam that exist are extremist versions of Sunni Wahhabi-Salafism, and (hence) that, for instance, the Ennahdha Party in Tunisia is either a fascist party or isn't truly Islamic. Regarding the second claim: putting aside the (outrageous) claim that pedophilia is "a key constituent of the very identity of a Catholic priest," I find it impossible not to read this passage as suggesting that pedophilia features as a "key constituent of the very identity" of "Pakistani Muslim Youth"—which, I think, can only plausibly be read as a textbook instance of racism of the most debased variety.

In short, Žižek's views on (Muslim) immigrants and refugees can be roughly summarized as follows: despite the fact that the majority of immigrants are inherently predisposed towards fascism, pedophilia, the subordination of women and the hatred of free speech, Europe should, nevertheless, open its doors to them and guarantee their "dignified survival." It's a position that, to my knowledge, has not been defended in the literature before, possibly because it's so patently absurd: after all, if someone *really* believed that the refugees were pedophilic women-subordinating freedom-hating fascists, *why on Earth* would he or she want Europe to allow them in? Indeed, one suspects that, by attempting to carve a niche for himself by finding a "third way" between the "left-wing" view that Europe should "open its doors widely" to the refugees and the "right-wing" view Europe should "pull up the drawbridge," Žižek has ended up endorsing a position—one might even call it a form of racist humanitarianism—that leaves him not only wide open to criticism, but also outright ridicule, on both fronts.

HOW TO WRITE LIKE ŽIŽEK

1. Use at least one of—and preferably more than one of—the following words: obscene, obscenity, perverse, perversion, ambiguous, ambiguity, paradox, paradoxically, sex, sexualization, ideology, ideologically, (self-)negation.
2. Use at least one—and preferably more than one—"emphasizing" word such as: precisely, absolutely, definitely, definitively, radically, fully, fundamentally.
3. Refer to—and, preferably, allow the sentence to be interpreted as a critique of—capitalism, political correctness, "liberal" (aka insufficiently radical) leftists, or minorities (especially Muslim immigrants).
4. Refer to one of—and preferably refer to more than one of—the following philosophers: Hegel, Lacan, Marx, Freud, Badiou, and/or one of the following historical figures: Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Lenin.
5. Make use of at least one—and preferably more than one—"technical" Hegelian/Lacanian/Badiouan/psychoanalytic concept: the Real, the Absolute, the Event, the Nothing, the Void, the non-All, the object petit a, the Transcendental, the superego.

THREE EXAMPLES

"But is not the obscene ambiguity of capitalism precisely an Event in Badiou's sense—that is, a paradoxical (self-)negation of the Real?"

"Here we must absolutely reject the implied distinction between the ideology of Stalinism and its leftist liberal perversion; rather, we must fully embrace the inherent paradoxicality of the Hegelian Absolute."

"Lacan's theory of sexualization definitively offers an answer: the Nothing as embraced by Muslim immigrants is fundamentally obscene in more than a purely ideological sense—it is transcendently constituted; it is radically sexualised."

REACTIONARYISM

BUT IT IS NOT MERELY ON THE TOPIC OF REFUGEES THAT ŽIŽEK has expressed views that many—and not only those on the progressive left—would find deeply troubling. To list just a few of them: he openly supported Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (a position he has since proudly defended); he recommended that French voters abstain in the second round of the 2017 French presidential election, his reason being that the choice between the pro-EU, pro-NATO, neoliberal Emmanuel Macron and the anti-EU, anti-NATO, neofascist Marine Le Pen—who has compared Muslim immigrants in France to Nazis—represented a “false choice”; he has recommended that Europe should consider enacting the “global militarization of society”, including, e.g., the introduction of universal conscription, as one potential means of responding to the refugee crisis; he has suggested that the West might need to engage in terrorism in order to defeat ISIS (“In order to bring about this destruction [of ISIS] ... we must avoid ... engaging in the usual Left-liberal litany of ‘One cannot fight terror with terror, violence only breeds more violence’”); he has suggested that certain forms of political engagement may permit one to carry out moral atrocities (“We should absolutely reject ... the idea that we should be ready to constrain our political or [religious-political] engagement when it leads us to violate elementary moral norms, when it makes us commit mass killings and cause other forms of suffering”); he has repeatedly shown contempt for ordinary people (calling 99 percent of them “boring idiots”), and has even gone as far as to claim that he “does not believe there is anything really authentic in ordinary people’s actual worries”; and, most preposterously—and worryingly—he has explicitly expressed his preference for “the worst of Stalinism [over] the best of the liberal-capitalist welfare state.”

Plainly, many of these claims are simply indefensible; and, indeed, even Žižek himself often evinces little interest in trying to defend them. Moreover, to the extent that any kind of argument can be discerned behind these claims, they are often—as I will now attempt to show—extraordinarily weak.

Take, for instance, Žižek’s support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Although Žižek claims to be “horrified” by the (prospect of the) Trump presidency, his support for Trump in the U.S. election was based on the presumption that his victory would “trigger a process of radicalisation in the Democratic Party – and this process is our only hope”; or, as he told Channel 4’s Cathy Newman in a U.K. television interview: “I want right-wing chaos so that the New Left will save us from it.”

Now, put aside the inherent danger in voting in as U.S. president a climate change-denying clown who has pushed the U.S. to the brink of a potentially catastrophic war with Iran and a species-ending war with Russia; for there are, at least, two other serious problems with Žižek’s claim here.

The first is its apparent inconsistency with some of Žižek’s other professed beliefs, in particular his claim that Trump “is really a centrist liberal ... he is really a pretty ordinary, centrist politician,” as well as his previous assertion that “we have to abandon the idea that there is something emancipatory in extreme experiences, that they enable us to open our eyes to the ultimate truth of a situation.” After all, if Trump really is just a centrist liberal, how will he provide the “right-wing chaos” that Žižek desires? Moreover, if there is “nothing emancipatory in extreme experiences”—and, surely, Trump’s election would count as just such an example—then why does Žižek express faith in the claim that the left will be invigorated by Trump’s victory? Furthermore, if

Žižek *really* wants right-wing chaos, why didn’t he simply recommend voting outright for Marine Le Pen?

The second, less *ad hominem* problem with Žižek’s claim, on the other hand, is the complete and utter *lack of evidence* that he provides for it. *Why*, exactly, is right-wing chaos a necessary precursor for radical change? *Why* does he think that Trump (or Le Pen’s) victory might (re)invigorate the left, rather than destroy it? *Why* does he think it is impossible for leftists to vote for the lesser immediate evil *now* in, e.g., Clinton and Macron, while simultaneously organising in order to enact more progressive political change *in the future*? And *why on earth* (at least in Trump’s case) does he think it’d be a good idea to actually *vote* for the “disaster” that Žižek—as well as nearly every other sane individual on planet Earth—is so keen to avoid? To use Žižek’s own phraseology once again: if voting for Clinton or Macron was like “offering us as a cure the very thing that caused the illness,” this surely only raises the obvious question: Why in God’s name vote for the symptom of an illness?

In summary: Žižek holds deeply reactionary views on a number of important political issues, including (but not limited to) those relating to recent Western presidential elections. Many of his more outrageous claims, e.g., expressing support for state-sponsored Western terrorism) are, to my knowledge, never substantiated in any of his works. Moreover, those views that he does attempt to substantiate are done so by evidence or argumentation of the flimsiest variety—and sometimes even straightforwardly contradict some of his other professed beliefs.

CHARLATANISM

THUS FAR, WE HAVE DISCUSSED ŽIŽEK’S BIGOTRY AND THE OFTEN remarkably poor amount of evidence or level of argumentation that he often adduces in support of some of his more controversial positions.

What we have not discussed so far, however, is another major feature—perhaps *the* major feature—of Žižek’s work, namely, his (remarkable) discursiveness.

Take, for instance, his most recent book, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*, published by Penguin’s Allen Lane, a publishing house which on its website claims to be “the leading publisher in the UK of bestselling serious non-fiction.... Our books are renowned for their quality and their originality of thought.” The book features a glowing endorsement from Greek economist and renowned leftist public intellectual Yanis Varoufakis on its back cover, who writes that “Žižek’s excellent new book serves humanity a way that only authentic philosophy can.”

What is the book about? It’s jacket cover informs us that:

In recent years, techno-scientific progress has started to transform our world—changing it almost beyond recognition. Here renowned philosopher Slavoj Žižek turns his gaze on the brave new world of Big Tech, revealing how, with each new wave of innovation, we find ourselves moving closer and closer to a bizarrely literal realisation of Marx’s prediction that ‘all that is solid melts into air’. ... Like a Thief in Broad Daylight illuminates the new dangers as well as the radical possibilities thrown up by today’s technological and scientific advances, and their electrifying implications for us all.

Thus, the book is ostensibly about science and technology, and in particular its impact on future (and present) human society and politics. This belief is further reinforced by the book’s subtitle: “Power in the Era of Post-Humanity,” as well as by the fact that Žižek himself mentions in the book’s second paragraph “the shattering impact [on humans] of modern sciences, especially brain sciences and biogenetics,” and how “the progress of today’s sciences destroys the basic presuppositions of our everyday notion of reality.”

As one quickly progresses through the book, however, one soon recalls the old adage about not judging a book by its cover—or, apparently, by its introduction or (sub)title. The book is not about technology. It is not about science. It is not about “power in the era of

post-humanity". It is not, in truth, about anything at all. In fact—if anything—it is largely about sex.

Here is a selection of excerpts from the book—which, to repeat, is *supposedly about the impact of science and technology on human affairs*:

✦ "...I doubt that the American comedian Louis CK's acts, deplorable and lewd as they are, could be put on the same level as direct sexual violence."

✦ "[W]here does Lenin stand [on the issue of] mak[ing] a risky radical gesture without being able to foresee all its possible consequences?"

✦ "In what sense can the self-critical admission of one's responsibility for serious mistakes be compared to the need to shit and fart?"

✦ "[W]e should never forget that the LGBT+ struggle can also be co-opted by mainstream liberalism against 'class essentialism' of the Left."

✦ "A Europe where Marine Le Pen or Geert Wilders are in power is no longer Europe."

✦ "[Robert E. Lee] may well have been a gentleman with nice manners and personal honesty, but he nonetheless dealt brutally with slaves..."

✦ "Some perceptive observers have already noticed how the only form of sexual relation that fully meets politically correct criteria would be a contract drawn up between sado-masochistic partners."

✦ "Although I am not a fan of Sex and the City, an interesting point is made in one of the episodes where Miranda gets involved with a guy who likes to talk dirty during sex, and since she prefers to keep silent, he asks her also to voice whatever dirty things pop up in her mind, with no restraint. ... In the middle of her babble she mentions that she has noticed how he enjoys it when, while he makes love to her, he pushes her finger into his ass... The lesson of this incident is important: even the universality of talking freely is based on some exceptions other than extreme brutality."

✦ "[T]he paradigmatic hardcore sexual position (and shot) is that of the woman lying on her back with her legs spread wide backwards and her knees above her shoulders; the camera is in front, showing the man's penis penetrating her vagina (the man's face is as a rule invisible; he is reduced to an instrument), but what we see in the background between her thighs is her face in the thrall of orgasmic bliss.... This elementary hardcore scene perfectly renders the minimal reflexivity that cuts from within every immediate orgasmic One."

✦ "There are many good things to say about [the 1935 film] Top Hat, beginning with the role of tap-dancing as a disturbing intrusion into the daily routine..."

✦ "The first and obvious Lacanian reading of La La Land would see its plot as yet another variation on the theme of 'there is no sexual relationship...'"

✦ "What can we learn from Hegel about Donald Trump and his liberal critics?"

✦ "Was ...Stalin not the big jokester of the twentieth century?"

✦ "The question is, how does an emancipatory-revolutionary collective which embodies the 'general will' affect intense erotic passion?"

✦ "[W]ho, then, really deserves [the Nobel Peace Prize]?"

✦ "Let's compare the sexual lives of two US presidents, Kennedy and Trump."

In between all of these profound reflections on farting, porn, Robert E. Lee, Lenin, *La La Land*, and the sexual lives of US presidents, there are—as far as I could tell—only *three* places in the book which have even a minimal bearing on the issue of technology and its impact on humans.

The first is when Žižek briefly discusses the philosophical impact of newly-developed "mind control techniques", in particular an experiment (for which Žižek does not provide a reference) conducted at New York University in 2002, in which a rat's brain was "control[led]" by an "external machine." "Will I remain totally unaware that my movements are being steered, or will I realize that something is wrong, that an external power is determining them?" Žižek asks—before immediately ignoring the question and moving on to discuss the Greek eurozone crisis. (The alleged link between the two subjects is that Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is, according to Žižek, an example of a "steered human being in our political reality".)

The second time Žižek discusses technology's impact on humans is when he briefly considers the philosophical consequences of a potential new law in Egypt which would (Žižek claims) make it "illegal for people to believe in God, even if they don't talk about it." This leads Žižek to ask the question: "[H]ow will authorities establish if someone is an atheist if he doesn't even talk about it?... [W]ill they scan the suspect's brain with the devices used by neuro-theologists trying to determine if there are traces of religious experiences in his neurons?" Having asked this question, Žižek again immediately ignores it. Further down the same page, we find him discussing "the wave of

paedophilia" among American Catholic priests. (I'm not joking.)

The third and final time when Žižek discusses the stated themes of the book is when he offers a 20-page analysis of the film *Blade Runner 2049*—a large portion of which is drawn directly from Wikipedia.

In brief, Žižek's book isn't about technology at all. Indeed, it's a book which is about virtually *anything but* technology. It's about identity politics; it's about LGBT+ rights; it's about Macron and Le Pen; it's about Clinton and Trump; it's about the Europe and the European Union; it's about immigrants and refugees; it's about Islam, Christianity, Judaism and atheism; it's about Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; it's about sex; it's about porn; it's about movies and TV shows; it's about the Russian Revolution; it's about Lenin; it's about Stalin; it's about Hegel; it's about Hitler; it's about Lacan; it's about Badiou... In short, it's about everything—and, in an important and obvious sense, nothing.

Curiously, Žižek himself would very likely agree with this assessment: as he himself says, "a lot of what I write is blah, blah, bullshit, a diversion from the 700-page book on Hegel I should be writing." Fair enough—so let's turn to that, his (2013) work *Less Than Nothing*, which Amazon describes as "the pinnacle publication of a distinguished career," and which Žižek himself has described as "my true life's work." Here is Žižek's summary of the central thesis of *Less Than Nothing*:

"Less Than Nothing endeavors to draw all the ontological consequences from this eppur si muove [a phrase alleged to have been uttered by Galileo when forced by the Inquisition to recant his claim that the Earth moves around the sun]. Here is the formula [of Less Than Nothing] at its most elementary: "moving" is the striving to reach the void, namely, "things move," there is something instead of nothing, not because reality is in excess in comparison with mere nothing, but because reality is less than nothing. This is why reality has to be supplemented by fiction: to conceal its emptiness."

Confused? I certainly was. How can *something exist*, and yet simultaneously *nothing exist*—or rather, *less-than-not-exist*? Furthermore, who—or what—is "supplementing reality by fiction," if (less than) nothing exists? Are, e.g., novels being written by things that don't exist—or perhaps by things that don't even *not* exist? Does Žižek exist? If he doesn't—or if he doesn't-even-not-exist—then who the hell wrote the book I'm reading? What's more, who the hell is reading it?

But perhaps, I thought, I might be able to get a better grip on the book's central thesis by beginning with its subtitle: "Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism." As someone who's always struggled with understanding just what, exactly, dialectical materialism



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consists of, I was curious to see to what extent Žižek was able to enlighten me. (Curious, but not especially hopeful.)

Here are some relevant excerpts from the book:

✦ *"Here are the very last lines of Parmenides:*

Then may we not sum up the argument in a word and say truly: If one is not, then nothing is?

Certainly.

Let thus much be said; and further let us affirm what seems to be the truth, that, whether one is or is not, one and the others in relation to themselves and one another, all of them, in every way, are and are not, and appear to be and appear not to be.

Most true.

Is this not the most succinct, minimal definition of dialectical materialism? If there is no One, just multiplicities of multiplicities, then the ultimate reality is the Void itself; all determinate things 'are and are not.'"

✦ *"Buddhism thus provides a radical answer to the question 'Why is there something and not nothing?': there is only Nothing, nothing 'really exists,' all 'somethings,' all determinate entities, emerge only from a subjective perspectival illusion. Dialectical materialism here goes a step further: even Nothing does not exist—if by 'Nothing' we mean the primordial abyss in which all differences are obliterated. What, ultimately, 'there is' is only the absolute Difference, the self-repelling Gap."*

✦ *"[D]ialectical materialism begins with the axiom of de-centering: the sex organs involved in copulation function as 'organs without bodies,' organs invested with libidinal intensity which are experienced as minimally separated from the subjects' bodies—it is not the subjects themselves who copulate but their organs 'out there.' [...] This means that even (or precisely) in the most intense sexual activity, the participating subject is reduced to the role of a helpless, passive observer of its own activity, to a gaze fascinated by what is taking place..."*

✦ *"The true foundation of dialectical materialism is not the necessity of contingency, but the contingency of necessity."*

✦ *"[According to] dialectical materialism ... there is no 'objective' reality, every reality is already transcendently constituted."*

✦ *"[O]ne cannot help noticing that, as to the positive content of Hawking's Theory of Everything, it bears an unmistakable resemblance to dialectical materialism, or is at least fully compatible with a reasonable version of dialectical materialism."*

Thus, dialectical materialism, as construed by Žižek, is the thesis that: (i) nothing exists; (ii) nothing (or Nothing) does not exist; (iii) in general, things both exist and don't exist; however, (iv) "absolute Difference" (aka "the self-repelling Gap") exists, while (v) objective reality definitely does not exist. It also claims—in fact, it even "begins with" the thesis—that (vi) sex (which seems to exist) is a passive experience for all sexual participants (who also seem to exist—at least while having sex). Ultimately, though, dialectical materialism's "true foundation" is the thesis that: (vi) necessity (a concept which, presumably, exists) is contingent (a concept which also apparently exists). Oh, and if you're still unsure what the thesis of dialectical materialism is: (vii) Hawking's (uncompleted, and hence presumably only semi-existing) Theory of Everything "unmistakably resembles" it. So there.

Is such almost comic obscurity intentional on Žižek's part? It's certainly possible—though, interestingly, Žižek himself denies that it is: in the 2005 documentary *Žižek!*, Žižek unequivocally affirms that he's "a total enlightenment person. I believe in clear sentences and so on."

On the (dubious) presumption of Žižek's intellectual honesty, then, we are apparently left with two options:

(1) Žižek has expressed these ideas as close to clearly as one possibly can, but the ideas themselves are too complicated for most of us (except, e.g., Žižek) to understand;

(2) Žižek has honestly tried to express these ideas as clearly as he can, but he has done so in a suboptimal way (due to, for instance, a poor writing style, lack of intelligence, etc.).

Though (1) is, of course, always a possibility, I see little evidence to suggest that only Žižek, as well as, perhaps, a smattering of other Hegelian/Lacanian philosophers, are capable of grasping such ostensibly complex philosophical ideas—for the simple reason that, from what I can gather from the comprehensible part of his writing, Žižek isn't really that smart.

I won't try to give an analysis of the rest of the book, much of which

is virtually indistinguishable from what one will read in essays produced by the various postmodern essay generators that one can find online (e.g., "when Meillassoux asserts contingency as the only necessity, his mistake is to conceive this assertion according to the masculine side of Lacan's formulae of sexuation, that is, according to the logic of universality and its constitutive exception"). So let us, instead, take a step back, and ask ourselves the obvious question: Why, in spite of his repetitiveness, his racism, his reactionary tendencies, his inconsistent beliefs, his complete inability to stick to a single topic, and his virtually self-evident charlatanism, does Žižek have such major appeal among audiences today?

FINAL THOUGHTS

This question is, I think, ill-posed. That is, I do not believe that Žižek is celebrated around the world *in spite of* the fact that he clearly possesses all of the negative qualities enumerated above. Rather, I suspect, he is celebrated in large part precisely *because of* them.

In particular, I think that his "controversial" positions on refugees and Islam are almost ideally suited to a contemporary media culture that thrives on outrage; I believe that his discursiveness is a perfect match for an age in which our attention spans are growing ever shorter (thanks, in part, to our increasing use of social media); and I suspect that the (astoundingly) repetitive nature of his writing simply isn't a problem, and may even be beneficial, in a broader intellectual culture in which people only seldom read books. As my friend the philosopher James Williams has put it, in much in the same way that Donald Trump was the perfect "clickbait candidate," Žižek is the ultimate "clickbait philosopher": ideally suited for TV sound bites, he'll give us our commodified "radicalism," one insane, outrageously provocative quote at a time.

That said, I doubt that there is any single reason why people like reading, watching, or listening to Žižek. Some, I suspect, take pleasure in his regular use of coarse or seedy jokes; some might like his frequent references to popular culture; others, perhaps, merely enjoy the overall effect of his physical appearance and mannerisms (his heavy accent, his lisp, his incessant tics, and his invariably dishevelled look); and others, I suspect, are simply hoodwinked (by the media, by their teachers, by their friends, or even by Žižek himself) into thinking that what they are reading or listening to is truly profound thought—when, in fact, it is anything but.

Žižek's fame is—and will likely continue to be—significantly deleterious to the global left. Right-wingers tend to mock him, and appeal to him as a textbook example of a moronic leftist Marxist intellectual (and not without some justification). At the same time, many progressives, having been repeatedly informed (albeit sometimes only implicitly) by the media class that *this is what a leftist intellectual is like*, will likely be tempted by the false dilemma of: (i) trying to defend him in the name of "progressivism"—a doomed, and even dangerous enterprise; or, even worse, (ii) rejecting him and, as a result, rejecting their progressive politics or instincts.

It is a truism that today the left—and, indeed, wider human society—faces many important challenges, including addressing and limiting the future (and present) impact of climate change and consequent biodiversity loss, eliminating the ever-present (and growing) threat of nuclear war, and combating numerous forms of global inequality. The world doesn't need to—and, arguably, cannot really afford—to provide Slavoj Žižek with a platform from which he can aimlessly pontificate about shits and farts, about pedophilic Muslims, and existent-cum-nonexistent somethings/nothings. We can do better. ✦

Highlights

for Socialist Children



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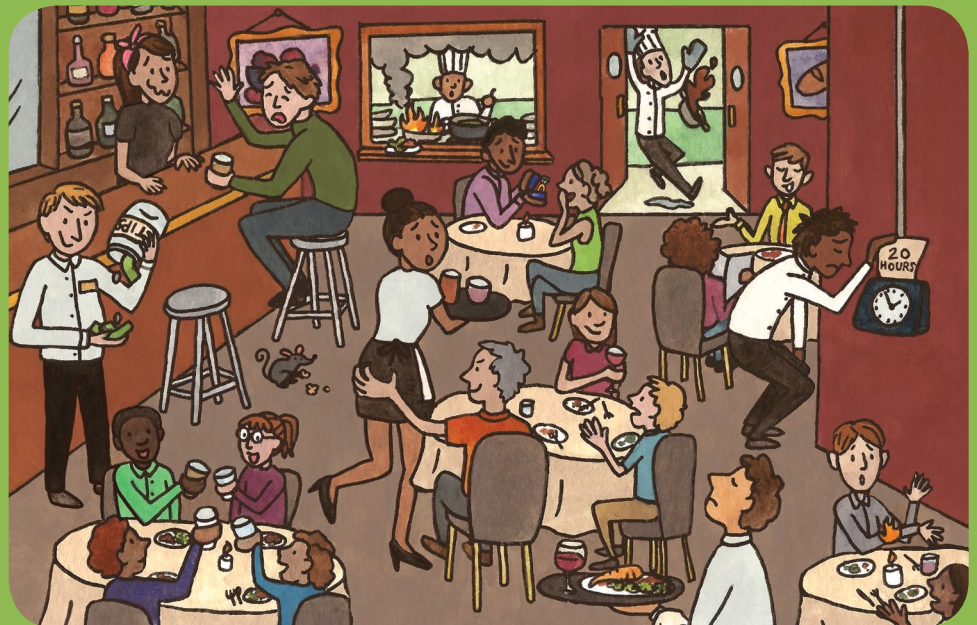
Exploitation

Wage theft

Emotional labor

Unsafe working conditions

Sexual harassment





fuck the POOLICE

by Tyler Walicek

THOUGH MAGIC MAY HAVE CEASED TO exist as a force in our culture, the world still reserves room for instances of its cousin: the absurd. Weirdness and absurdity are often a source of art, laughter, and wonder. Yet the weirdness of capitalism is, perversely, a homogenizing weirdness. Truly crass phenomena manifest when everything is inscribed with the profit motive: proposals to equip homeless people as roaming Wi-Fi hotspots, click farms that auto-generate monstrous YouTube videos for kids, a land-fill where Amazon dumps millions of brand-new, unsold products a year. Life becomes the same *kind* of weird: selfish and extravagant and hostile, often barbarically so. When everyone has an angle, the world is full of sharp edges.

The following story is a particularly vivid example of the bizarreness generated by the convulsions of late capital. It sits at the crossroads of some of neoliberalism's most pernicious elements: biotech data collection, surveillance capitalism, overbearing landlords, privatization, and elf-themed vacation resorts. But this tale begins, incredibly, with dog shit.

My partner was dog-sitting for an adorable and skittish mutt named Angel. She had been previously warned by Angel's owners that their San Francisco apartment building—one of those overpriced steel-and-glass Faraday cages stuffed with tech workers—had an unusual stipulation. Management required all dog owners to submit a sample of their pet's DNA in order to identify the culprit behind any unattended turds. She'd have to be extremely careful not to miss any of Angel's handiwork, or the owners could get slapped with a fine.

When my partner told me about this intersection of Home Owners Association-style shit snitchery and genetic sequencing, I was horrified and intrigued. What an inefficient, round-about, and ludicrously intrusive method of ratting out a few inconsiderate or distracted tenants. I immediately posted a tweet expressing my amazement. The company, despite not being named in my post, tracked down my complaint and ham-fistedly tried to reply. "*Actually*, it costs properties less to do our program in the long run!" they chirped. This filled me with the immediate urge to destroy them. I began to dig deeper.

The company in question is called, cloyingly, "PooPrints," and as a result I will be forced to type that out over and over again. (Personally, I would have opted for "SpotCheck.") PooPrints has established an elaborate system to monetize worthless waste. First, the landlord requires—as a contractual rental condition—that tenants pay a fee to have their dog's cheek swabbed and its DNA sent to PooPrints headquarters. A cursory Internet search reveals that plenty of tenants are both indignant about the fee and resistant to such invasive measures. If an unauthorized excretion is located, it's sampled and sent to the lab at a cost to the landlord of about \$70. PooPrints then informs the property owner of any positive matches, and the owner charges a fee (in the case of one tenant I spoke to, as much as \$500) to recoup their costs and make a profit. This system is in place at over 3,000 locations. Notably, if the landlord is able to pinpoint offending dogs and levy fees as intended, profit comes at the dog owner's significant expense. Everyone benefits, except—as usual under capitalism—the lowly tenant. (The dog is also an exploited worker whose surplus defecatory

labor value is being appropriated). It's long been theorized that capital would run into hard limits on its ability to scoop up profits, but Marx clearly failed to account for the innovation of poop cops.

Now of course, it's also true that the PooPrints business model seems fatally flawed: if fecal surveillance is successful in discouraging poop abandonment, then those \$70 testing fees will dry up like a turd in the sun. But for the moment, the company is ostensibly profitable. We'll see in five years—it seems likely that this weird boondoggle outfit will fold, at which point the DNA and associated demographic info will be sold off to all manner of interested parties (assuming the company hasn't started doing this already).

POOPRINTS AND ITS UNGLAMOROUS work represent a cross-section, a tiny biopsied sample, of a feedback cycle that we have witnessed gathering momentum ever since the advent of neoliberalism around 50 years ago. Since then, capital, reasserting its power after the cultural gains made by radical undercurrents in the 1930s-1960s, has sought to reverse earlier social-democratic compromises and privatize every conceivable resource. A wayward dog poop, the smallest biohazardous accident, becomes a vector for profit-making. Disorder anywhere in the world always means a chance to swoop in and charge for services, just as the notorious Blackwater security was deployed to New Orleans after Katrina on the public dime. On the grander scale, we can see how corporate and governmental surveillance, increasingly common environmental catastrophes, and good old-fashioned capitalist profiteering intersect and reinforce each other. Technology and surveillance are deployed in the service of rent-seeking institutions (such as property managers, in the case of PooPrints). The state and the justice system aid in this venture, enforcing contracts and keeping these practices legally viable. The accumulation of wealth by the rent-seekers and investors and assorted capitalist interests grants them further control over the culture, the state, and the means of production.

The scale of the injustices committed might vary wildly, but the mechanism is the same. Surveillance facilitates control, which in turn facilitates profit. Militarized police forces deploy advanced technologies, like camera-equipped drones, Stingray cell phone data harvesters, and social media surveillance algorithms, all to snatch up those whom the state defines as criminals. Arresting citizens on a vast scale under drug laws and false and racialized pretenses has resulted in our very own gulag archipelago, imprisoning 2.3 million souls. Private prisons profit from keeping people incarcerated, and other private corporations take advantage of virtually free prison labor. The joint assault of high technology and oppressive systems of con-

trol is emblematic of the general alliance of privatization and exploitation that is being inflicted upon our social, political, and natural worlds.

Now, to be clear—and to avoid slapping *Current Affairs* with a libel lawsuit—PooPrints itself, as far as I can determine, perfectly complies with the letter of the law. The company was founded as a division of BioPet Laboratories in 2008 by Tom Boyd, an extremely wealthy 80-year-old Tennessee capitalist. (“I think you become an entrepreneur simply because you want to make money,” Boyd has been quoted as saying. That seems to be about how deep his motivations go, borne out by the fact that he has started 17 profitable companies. Apparently, his appetite for wealth has yet to be sated.) Boyd claims that BioPet was the first to come up with the idea of monetizing dog poop, though the exact concept behind PooPrints was proposed in a 2005 *New York Times Magazine* article by the authors of the popular (and discredited) *Freakonomics*, predating PooPrints by years, so perhaps we shouldn't give BioPet too much credit.

Boyd touts the precision and reach of the underlying biometric processes and identification databases: “Once that dog goes in [the registry], he can be recognized anywhere in the world [...] He can never get away.” Why not use security cameras to catch a dog in the act, you might ask? “Prove it,” says Boyd. “You go to court...they'll bring out ten dogs that look the same way.” It seems odd to note that a dog “can never get away” by fleeing to another country, since presumably dogs are not on the run from INTERPOL. Nor will they be hauled into dog court and put in a lineup, adorable though that might be. It rather feels like “dogs” *might* be operating as a bit of a stand-in for other coded subjects here. Whatever Boyd's intentions for the future of this particular company, the fact remains that DNA surveillance is a powerful tool that can be and has been easily extended to humans.

You might think the idea of a company using technology to track *human* feces is mere dystopian paranoia, but it's already being done. And, of course, it's being weaponized against our society's most vulnerable members. In my former home of San Francisco, a buildup of human waste in the streets has sparked a crisis that has enraged both homeless advocates and resident techies, albeit for very different reasons. The techies, infuriated by the injustice of being forced to look at the physical evidence of homeless people's desperation and stolen dignity, have programmed a tattletale app, SnapCrap, to keep track of instances of public defecation. (In his self-aggrandizing manifesto, the creator of SnapCrap laments the death of his fantasy of California as “the greatest state in the country” and claims that it was “time to give the city the app it deserved.”)

Of course, the waste crisis is really a housing crisis, and a symptom of the growing privatization of public space. The existing public bathrooms in San Francisco are woefully in-

adequate. Rather than improve public restroom facilities, or tackle the housing shortage in any serious way, the city prefers to deploy Public Works and the police in efforts to euphemistically “sweep” away the problem—thus implying that the homeless are trash. These “sweep” operations are both counterproductive and flagrantly inhumane: they are a very efficient means of tormenting the homeless, confiscating or destroying their possessions, and shifting them from their present location to a different spot around the corner, where they continue to be homeless. Given the thousands of dollars that cities will expend just to trash some disabled homeless people’s wheelchairs, it’s not unimaginable that a government entity, contracting with private interests, could begin sampling public human waste and connecting the DNA to criminal databases: a kind of unholy synergy between PooPrints and SnapCrap. You may think it’s unlikely, but I wouldn’t underestimate the state’s enthusiasm for imposing new burdensome penalties on the poor, particularly when profit is in the equation.

In fact, biometric data collection is rapidly scaling up, and there are already clear indications that the government is eager to gain access to the genetic information being amassed by private companies under various auspices. Some forms of invasive DNA collection have encountered legal hurdles: the 2008 Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act bans employer testing of DNA to screen employees, although that didn’t stop Atlas Logistics Group from forcing employees to submit to a cheek swab to pin down a phantom office defecator in 2015. There was a lawsuit, which the employees won, so it appears we are momentarily safe from DNA testing at work. But DNA voluntarily given to a private company for one particular purpose can potentially be accessed by other entities, including the government, for totally different purposes. PooPrints, for example, contracts with government municipalities and Homeowner and Condo Owner Associations, in addition to property managers. As was widely remarked upon, the Golden State Killer was caught because law enforcement was able to access his relatives’ genetic information, thanks to the largely unregulated DNA testing industry (23andMe, Ancestry.com, and the like). FamilyTreeDNA turned out to have no qualms about regularly sharing their database with the FBI. Ancestry.com gave data to the Google-founded Calico, which is attempting to put a stop to aging. 23andMe made a deal with noted evil pharma corporation GlaxoSmithKline to use its data to help develop new drugs. Helix collects customer DNA data to offer them health insights, then gives the data to app developers. And naturally, the NYPD (that old civil-rights-violation standby) maintains a DNA database of—at the time of writing—82,000 citizens, plenty of whom were never convicted of anything, merely questioned in connection to a crime. The database includes samples from children as young as 10.

IN RESEARCHING THE ORIGIN STORY OF THIS dogshit company, I found myself drawn into another capitalist parable: the story of the Boyd family, the excremental entrepreneurs behind PooPrints. As mentioned earlier, Tom Boyd is a wealthy Tennessean. His son, Randy Boyd, owns a company called Radio Systems Corporation, which does \$400 million a year in sales. Randy himself reported \$42 million in taxable income across 2015 and 2016. (Randy paints himself in interviews as a rags-to-riches success story, relating how his father made him buy his own clothes and



A PooPrints DNA test kit

work in the family factory—never pampered, never spoiled by his family’s wealth, a central casting archetype of the hard-working white American male. Of course, most workers don’t leap from the factory floor to head of international sales in one go, but let’s not discount the impact of a properly success-directed mindset.)

After his apprenticeship with his father’s company, Randy struck out on his own selling pet supplies, and soon hit it big with some classic entrepreneurial ingenuity: he waited for the patent on his competitor’s flagship “Invisible Fence” product to expire, then copied it. (As we will see, the Boyds have a knack for riding the line of copyright infringement.) Radio Systems Corporation rapidly expanded and became a pet supply behemoth, selling microchipped pet doors, shock collars, containment fences, GPS tracking systems, and other unsettling technologies that are currently only for pets. (We’ll see if Radio Systems branches out as the planet continues to heat up—the *Guardian* recently reported on a meeting of apocalypse-conscious billionaires who discussed “making guards wear disciplinary collars of some kind in return for their survival.”)

Last year, an investigation by the *Tennessean* uncovered Radio Systems’ rather brazen tax evasion scheme. The company’s Ireland division serves as a routing center for a legal tax dodge known as the “double Irish,” in which income is channeled through an Irish subsidiary before being cached in a traditional tax haven (in the case of Radio Systems, the

SURVEILLANCE FACILITATES CONTROL, WHICH IN TURN FACILITATES PROFIT.

Cayman Islands). The report noted that after “analyzing the company’s tax records, University of California-Irvine School of Law professor Omri Marian estimated...the company paid an effective tax rate of a little more than one percent.”

Randy has in recent years made the traditional move from the world of business into politics, strolling through the revolving door with breezy confidence. Despite having zero educational experience beyond funding scholarships, he was made chair of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and special adviser to Tennessee Governor Haslam. He proceeded to help engineer the University of Tennessee’s “Drive to 55,” marketed as a plan to improve graduation rates. As reported by the *Associated Press*, leaked documents subsequently made clear that the officials responsible for Drive to 55 were mainly interested in maximizing profits by selling off public university real estate, increasing the use of telecommuting and temporary offices, and decommissioning historic buildings.

After that, Randy’s career reached new heights. Slashing budgets and diverting money from public coffers into private hands results in handsome rewards, after all. It may seem uncouth for a man who is still serving as CEO of a massive business to score an appointment as Tennessee’s Commissioner for Economic and Community Development, or for someone who has never worked as a teacher or administrator to

become the Interim President of the University of Tennessee, but Randy’s wealth, connections, and eye for profiteering have landed him some lucrative sinecures. (He remains UT Interim President to this day). Perhaps all this success went to his head, because he launched a campaign for the Republican gubernatorial nomination in 2018, only to fall flat on his face during the primaries. (He also received at least \$90,000 in campaign donations from companies that had received money from state incentives during his officeholding.)

So some guy got rich by copying someone else’s idea, tormented a lot of factory workers in China to make products that in turn tormented a lot of dogs with electric shocks, and, as a result, will now decide how an entire state’s schools should be run.

BUT THE ABSURDITY DOESN’T STOP THERE.

The elder Boyd, Randy’s father, apparently feeling unfulfilled by his dogshit empire, has embarked on a new venture. It’s an experiment in utopianism called “Ancient Lore Village,” a 40-acre “resort inn” with over 150 dwellings, a conference center, and a restaurant. “The village will reflect only good and togetherness,” Boyd says. “Everything is designed so that those who stay with us feel connected to each other.” (Incidentally, it costs upwards of \$200 a night to experience this gift of togetherness.) Upon viewing the design of the housing, the names of the characters, and even the font on the marketing materials, you might be forgiven for thinking that Ancient Lore Village is just an ersatz Middle-Earth resort, and probably some form of legally actionable copyright infringement.

Nonsense, says Tom Boyd. Ancient Lore Village isn’t based on *Lord of the Rings*, but on Tom Boyd’s own book. This wholly original work of fiction is called *The Bobbins: Outcast to the Inner Earth*. The main character’s name is, stupendously, “Bokee Bobbins.” Any resemblance to fictional persons is purely coincidental. I refused to pay \$40 to obtain a copy, but evidently, the 77-page tome follows the cherubic Bokee as he travels to the exotic “Third Dimension,” where presumably he discovers that objects have depth. He also encounters magical villages of dwarves, elves, leprechauns, fairies, orcs, gremlins, and yetis, and comes to accept that, while the creatures all have differing cultures and, uh, skin tones, they are all united in their desire to worship their creator, “OOoomah.” (This is not a typo.) The book also apparently includes “winged dogs, enchanted hula hoops, and an interdimensional portal to death.” Thinly-veiled self-inserts of Boyd family members all make appearances, with Bokee standing in for a young Tom.

Despite this display of immersive world-building, I find it hard to believe that Boyd cares much for the art of fantasy fiction. The only appeal it seems to have for him—apart from allowing him to lay an entirely unconvincing claim to original intellectual property and market a tourist trap around it—is

the chance to make himself, his family, and his dogs the protagonists of a fantasy epic, just as they see themselves as the protagonists of a quintessential American fable: that of the rags-to-riches bootstrap millionaires.

As it happens, Boyd's visionary project is facing some local resistance. Knoxville residents have organized against the resort's construction and the associated rezoning and traffic increases. But fortunately for everyone, the charms of Ancient Lore will not be confined to the original Walmart-adjacent property in Knoxville. There are plans to build fourteen more of them across the South.

IN A WAY, TOM AND RANDY BOYD DO INDEED live in a parallel fantasy world. They're insulated both by wealth and by a system artificially rigged to abet the amassment of that wealth. They are able to avoid taxes by paying experts to rig up arcane legal and financial structures. The marginal utility of their wealth exists in a different universe than the rest of us.

With technology and capital greasing the slide, enterprises like PooPrints, Radio Systems Corporation, Ancient Lore Village, and countless others continue to bring the fantasies of the rich to life. Because of their stranglehold on politics, the rest of us are subjected to their whims, no matter how facile,

obtrusive, or harmful they might be to our bodies and our communities. Ancient Lore Village is, in perspective, pretty innocuous, though it's an unbearably corny and cynical enterprise. But when a billionaire's fantasy is more about coal-fired power plants, complicit regulatory agencies, invasive data collection, wage theft, and union-busting—as is very often the case—they are, by virtue of our system, able to conjure and wield powerful forces with relative ease. They have built for themselves a world of luxury and wonder, bounded and privatized, available to the select desirables that can pay.

If sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, sufficiently advanced capitalism might be said to resemble a malevolent form of alchemy. Literal shit can now be transmuted into ill-gotten gold. Seemingly disparate nodes of capital and government—biotech, surveillance, the justice system, real estate—feed into and buttress each other. To the last, capitalists will seek rent through exclusion, exploitation, control, and outright theft. Any fantasyland peace peddled by the marriage of surveillance and private profit is a negative peace: “the absence of tension, not the presence of justice.” Under capitalism, we can never forget that it's the Boyds of the world who will profit from fear, chaos, and ordinary human (and canine) mistakes. The rest of us will have to pick up the pieces. ✚

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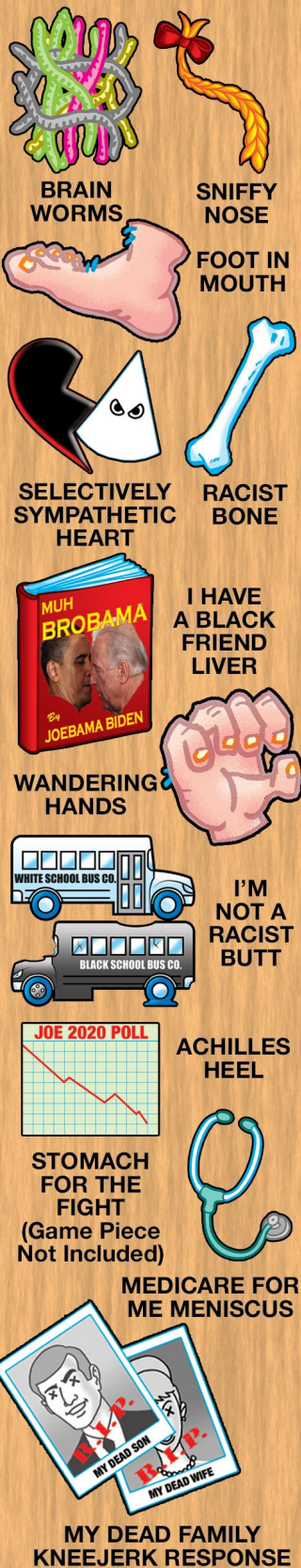
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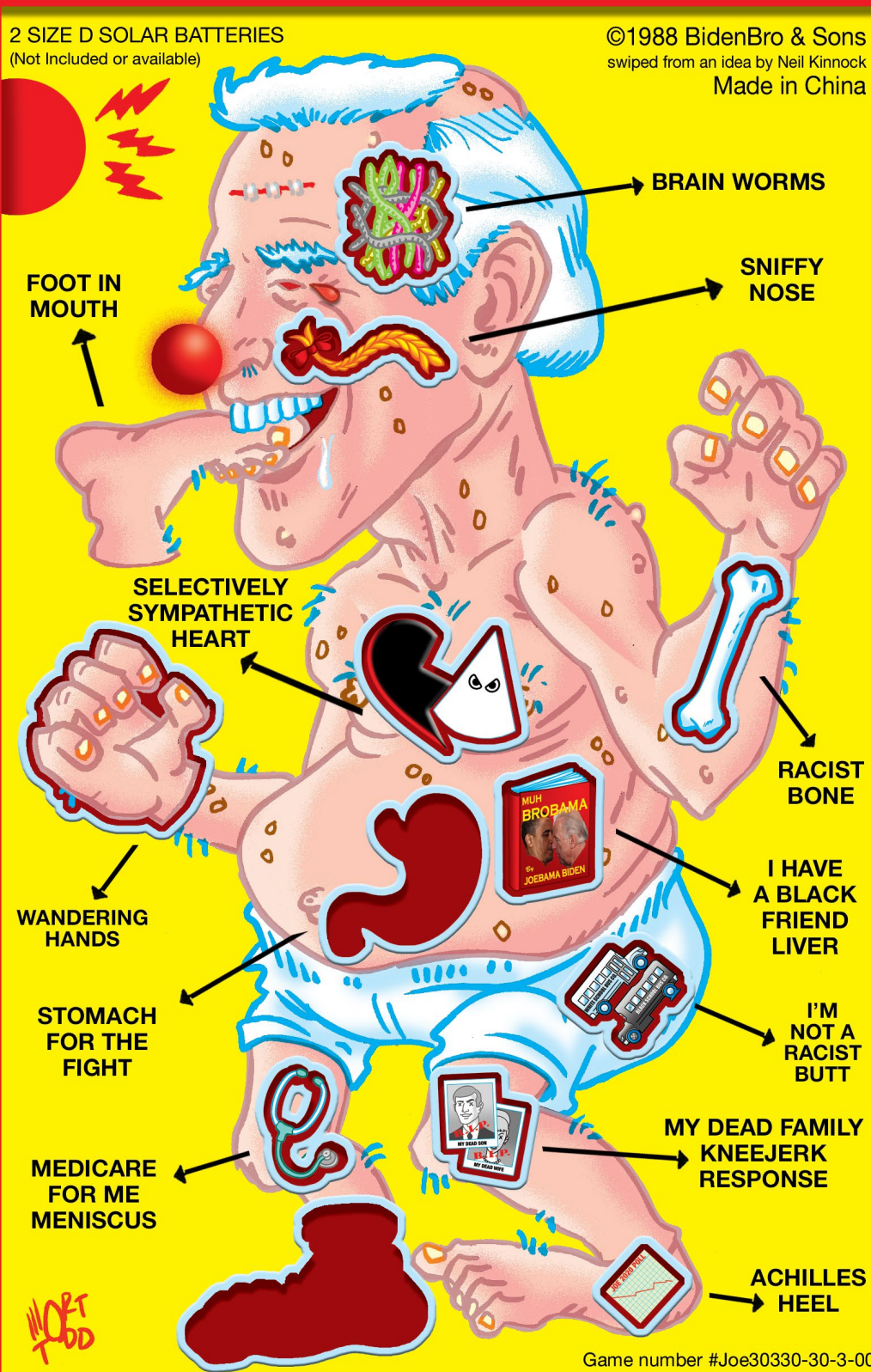
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cheating at MONOPOLY

by ROB LARSON

WHENEVER FRESH WAVES OF SCANDAL CRASH INTO Big Tech, its defenders reliably bring up the cutting-edge technology itself. Sure, they may be incredibly powerful, but hey they earned it—Gates and Jobs and Bezos and Zuckerberg had to *invent* the technology that made them rich, right? Say what you want about our private sector innovators, at least the private sector brings us wondrous innovations in the first place.

Except, of course, that the original name for the Internet was ARPANET, because it was developed by the U.S. military's research arm and affiliated universities. The original address of Google was not google.com but google.stanford.edu, because it was developed in a publicly-subsidized research campus. The original Wi-Fi network was ALOHAnet, because the University of Hawaii struggled to network its island campuses and developed new radio technology to do it.

In fact, nearly *all* the scientific and engineering research that went into today's fancy high-tech products and services came from the public sector—primarily the research universities and the military system. Vanessa Bee observed in these pages that capitalism can in fact constrain innovation, as workers alienated from management may not wish to jeopardize their jobs by reporting ideas for innovations, since disruption often means cutting payroll. And the near-term pressure to turn innovations into new profitability closes off many promising but perhaps slower research channels, leaving basic R&D in decline. She notes that public institutions are naturally better at long-term research, where creators are free to experiment without the short leash of a corporate overseer.

Even a very brief review of modern tech history proves the case, and helps us see where resources are best used to develop the science and technology of the future. It also shows where the credit really belongs for today's enormous online platforms, which host all our shallow lifestyle posts, hyper-partisan bickering, and delightful cat videos.

THE ADVENT OF ARPANET

Consider the Internet and its most popular application, the World Wide Web. The system that would become the Internet first arose in

the 1960s in response to multiple needs of federal agencies: a desire by scientists to share access to then-scarce computing resources, and the U.S. military's need for a decentralized, redundantly-connected network that could survive a Cold War nuclear blast, plus information management to handle the global U.S. spying network. The project was taken up by ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Administration, the Pentagon's main research arm.

The technology to provide both these goals was eventually found in "packet switching," a means of sending information in which a message or data is broken down into packets with address information attached, sent through a communication network and reassembled at its destination back into the original message. This technology had costs from having to include routing info on so many packets, but it made the system flexible and allowed for cheaper hardware.

ARPA funded the leasing of communication lines from the then-monopolist of U.S. telecommunications, AT&T, and organized the project. The first ARPANET computing installation to be connected was UCLA in September 1969, followed by the other early network nodes of UC Santa Barbara, the University of Utah, and the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). A good deal of technical details had to be painstakingly ironed out, yet decisions were mostly made through a consensus process among users and operators, and ARPA's funding gave it the ability to coerce holdouts.

Even in the early days of limited network use in the 1970s, user activism was common, including in the Users Interest Working Group (USING), which lobbied for more applications funding and other issues. But as Janet Abbate observes in her essential book *Inventing the Internet*:

Faced with organized action by users, the ARPA managers were evidently afraid that the network might slip out of their control. Members of USING were dissuaded from pushing their demands by ARPA program manager Craig Fields, who made it clear that the authority to make plans for the network lay with ARPA, not with USING...The fate of USING revealed the limits of ARPA's generally non-hierarchical management approach. Individual users or research teams had tacit or explicit permission to add hardware and software to the system; ARPA even gave financial support for some of these experiments. However, users

as a group had no say in the design decisions or funding priorities of the ARPANET project. The ARPANET experience is a reminder that the efforts of individuals to build virtual communities are constrained by the realities of money and power that support the infrastructure of cyberspace.

More and more scientists were using ARPANET to transmit data sets and gain access to computing power, analyzing seismic and weather data, modeling molecules, and advancing medicine. And packet-switching technology was being applied to other communications media, so by the 1970s ARPA was running three experimental networks—the wired ARPANET, the Bay-area radio-based PRNET, and the satellite-based SATNET.

It was only when ARPA successfully demonstrated interconnection of these different network systems that the Internet could be born. This required devising technology for connecting them, called protocols, which had to be designed to run on many different computers and allow for an orderly flow of data between hosts. The solution, after prolonged design debate under ARPA's aegis, was a set of protocols known as the Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol (TCP/IP), with the former arranging the flow of packets and the latter managing the articulation among the different networks. TCP/IP was well-suited for the military, which eventually adopted it and thus gave it a great impetus to spread as an informal standard.

Importantly, ARPA insisted the protocols, as well as source code for the computers connecting the ARPANET, and other crucial information be publicly available and not the property of its primary contractors. As Abbate comments, "Beyond [cutting-edge research center] Xerox PARC...there seems to have been no corporate participation in the design of the Internet." And as the excellent *Misunderstanding the Internet* recounts, "Indeed, in 1972 the telecommunication giant AT&T declined the government's offer to take over ARPANET, the forerunner of the modern internet, on the grounds that it was not likely to make a profit." IBM also turned it down.

So it was ARPA that made the triumphant demonstration of the Internet, a network of networks, when on November 22, 1977, packets of data were broadcast from a traveling van on a California highway with PRNET, to an ARPANET gateway, into space through SATNET to Europe, and back via ARPANET to California. This proof of concept excited the technical community and spurred interest among many research and defense bodies, which joined the network and adopted its open protocols, often with ARPA help or funding. In time the military insisted that all ARPA sites adopt them, which meant long hours reconfiguring host computers, but helped further the technical standards required for internetworking. The military also segregated its network (MILNET) off from ARPANET in 1983, putting the latter under civilian control and letting university researchers dominate its user base once again.

INVENTAGON

In the early 1980s, the Internet grew as many more universities were connected to ARPANET via their computer science departments' phone line-based connections, mainly through funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the major U.S. basic research supporter. ARPA helped finance these local area networks too, while the NSF helped bring large regional networks of universities online, and leased high-speed lines for a "backbone," a central network to manage the rising packet-switching traffic. This NSFNET overlapped

with ARPANET for a time and shared costs, but by the time most universities were networked in the late 1980s the ARPANET was showing its age. 20 years is a long interval in computer science terms, and military overseers decided to retire it as obsolete, transferring the ARPANET nodes to the NSFNET, formally dismantling the former in February 1990.

As usage climbed, U.S. telecom companies finally began taking an interest and pressure rose to privatize the network, as private investment in commercial networks for companies, schools, or individuals had gradually spread in the wake of the pioneering ARPA and NSF networks. By the early 1990s, it became possible for the commercial spinoffs of the early contractors to take over as "a whole parallel structure of commercial TCP/IP networks had evolved."

Considering the usual story of online tech arising from brilliant small business startups, it's hilarious that Colonel Heidi Hedien ordered commercialization of the technology, for the nominal reason that it would mean multiple commercial suppliers of the networking tech. This included a \$20 million fund for computer manufacturers to port TCP/IP to their products, which Abbate openly calls "technology transfer," a phrase better known in this era for condemning Chinese governmental requirements that Western companies share tech secrets in exchange for access to China's giant market. But the technology currently being forcibly transferred relies on tax-funded work forked right over to the business world decades ago, and they were paid for the privilege.

Indeed, Abbate's own rather conservative book's summary leaves the conventional view dead in the water:

The story of the Internet's origins departs from explanations of technical innovation that center on individual inventors or on the pull of markets. [ARPANET and packet-switch designers] were neither captains of industry nor 'two guys tinkering in a garage.' The Internet was not built in response to popular demand, real or imagined; its subsequent mass appeal had no part in the decisions made in 1973. Rather, the project reflected the command economy of military procurement, where specialized performance is everything and money is no object, and the research ethos of the university, where experimental interest and technical elegance take precedence over commercial application.

The lone garage-tinkering disruptive startup is such a widely-held trope that even the most conspicuously suspicious frauds can get away with it, as long as they act like Steve Jobs.

Under the NSF's 1991 privatization plan, Internet service would be taken over by market firms, including some of the phone and cable companies, to be designated as Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The ISPs would provide better service and investment than government bodies since they were to compete and provide their own gateways among their network backbones. The transfer from NSFNET to commercial ISPs was effected on April 30, 1995, marking the end of U.S. government ownership of the Internet's systems and infrastructure.

But the cable ISPs went on a massive merger binge after deregulation under the Telecommunications Act of 1995, becoming the cell phone oligopolists and the great regional monopolies like Comcast and AT&T. So while the loss of control by the authoritarian military may sound appealing, the history comports with the main message of the authors of *Misunderstanding the Internet*, who found that early optimistic forecasts of the Internet's potential "all had one

enormous error at their center. They failed to recognize that the impact of technology is filtered through the structures and processes of society...In brief, the rise of the internet was accompanied by the decline of its freedom.”

After privatization came the rise of the Web—but not due to corporate innovation. Tim Berners-Lee is famous for developing the three main technologies that constitute the standard protocols needed for any user to get on the Web and view information. Working at the giant particle accelerator at CERN, with an enormous amount of technical equipment for testing fundamental particles, he developed a “memory aid” that allowed the creation of documents where words could be clicked, leading to other documents explaining the term. This became “hypertext” and Berners-Lee pioneered the acceptance of a decentralized protocol system for it. This meant some links could become “dead,” but the system would be open to independent users.

Then came the encoding language (HTML) and the system for creating addresses for various sites and pages, the universal resource locator URL. Berners-Lee also set up and wrote the software for the first computer “server” that made documents available to online users. Crucially, CERN had adopted TCP/IP, so the Web could run on top of those protocols and be used by anyone connected to the ARPANET/NSFNET.

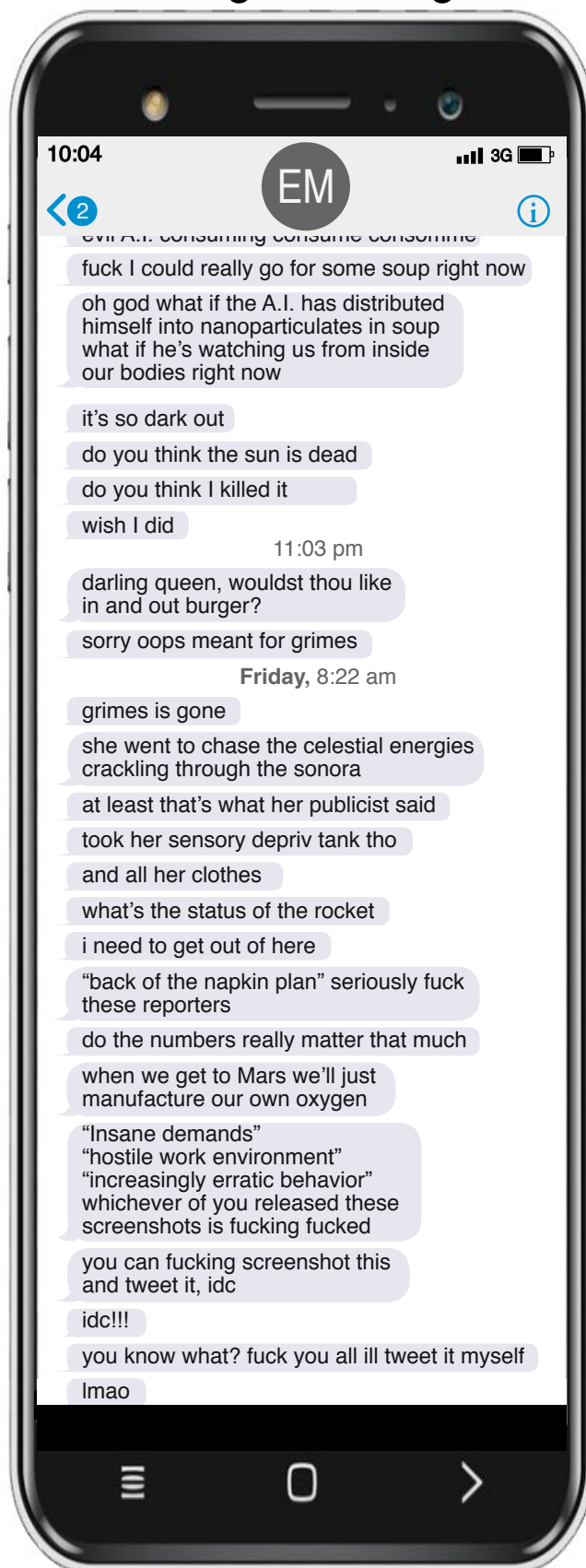
Fascinatingly, in addition to the military’s failed attempts to get private corporations to take over the early Internet, there was a private market-based attempt to make global hypertext systems similar to the one created at CERN. Engineer Ted Nelson developed a project called “Xanadu,” but as the press recounts, “Nelson wanted Xanadu to make a profit, and this vastly complicated the system, which never got off the ground. Berners-Lee, in contrast, persuaded CERN to let go of intellectual property to get the Web airborne.” Berners-Lee has since indicated his concern that the World Wide Web’s potential has been undermined. Quoted in Eli Pariser’s *The Filter Bubble*, he says “Some of its most successful inhabitants have begun to chip away at its principles. Large social-networking sites are walling off information posted by their users from the rest of the Web...the Web could be broken into fragmented islands.”

MOBILIZING FOR MOBILE

Let’s turn to Wi-Fi, the modern world’s favorite thing to both use and complain about. The local radio signals that allow mobile computing within range of a router at home or business are the principal means of Internet access today, and perhaps unsurprisingly Wi-Fi was invented by a research university. Tech journalist Brian Merchant writes, “While wireless cell networks evolved from massive government-backed projects, the main way our phones get online began as a far-flung academic hackaround. Wi-Fi began long before the web as we know it existed and was actually developed along the same timeline as ARPANET.” As I mentioned, in the 1960s, the University of Hawaii’s various island labs couldn’t communicate with the main computer in Honolulu. Using a pair of high-speed UHF channels to access computing resources, “the project would grow into the aptly named ALOHAnet, the precursor to Wi-Fi.” The project was also partially funded by ARPA and the U.S. Navy.

Meanwhile, although Apple is the tech giant most associated with slick mobile technology, it arguably owes the most to public

texts from ELON MUSK to his engineering team



research. The famously sensitive multi-touch interface of the iPhone and later smartphone and tablet models owes an enormous amount to public research, despite Jobs' claim at the original launch to have originated the technology, "And, boy, have we patented it." Amazingly, the first screen surface able to detect multiple simultaneous finger movements was developed in the 1970s by an engineer at CERN, the same particle collider complex where Berners-Lee would later develop the Internet Protocols.

Merchant notes that "while Jobs publicly claimed the invention as Apple's own, multi-touch was developed decades earlier by a trail of pioneers from places as varied as CERN's particle-accelerator labs to the University of Toronto to a start-up bent on empowering the disabled. Institutions like Bell Labs and CERN incubated research and experimentation; government poured in hundreds of millions of dollars to support them." The touch-sensitive "capacitive screens" themselves, which take advantage of the human body's own ability to conduct electricity, arose from research by the Royal Radar Establishment, a U.K. military body, in the 1960s. The highly versatile multi-touch interface itself, which allows many different commands and actions from the user, was developed by a University of Delaware PhD candidate under an NSF-CIA research program. He later commercialized the technology, and his company was bought by Apple in 2005, two years prior to the first iPhone release.

The overall innovation process was especially well-described by a government report from the conservative Bush years, by the science-promoting body the Office of Science and Technology Policy, which in a February 2006 report on digital technology analyzed the iPod, Steve Jobs' celebrated smartphone predecessor. It itemizes the important components, from the drive to the memory to the battery, and documents their development through public-sector research. The complex LCD display was the result of research from the Defense Department, National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health; basic research on processing radio signals was funded by the Army Research Office; the DRAM memory cache was developed by IBM with DARPA funding. The report concluded that the iPod "illustrates the unexpected benefits of basic research... The device itself is innovative, but it built upon a broad platform of component technologies, each derived from fundamental studies in physical science, mathematics, and engineering."

But *The Entrepreneurial State* by Mariana Mazzucato is by far the best consideration of all these issues, including the origins of the smartphone era. She observes that what fundamentally makes a smartphone smart is its connection to the Internet and other online applications, which as we've seen rely completely on the networks created and nurtured over many years by ARPA and the NSF. The Global Positioning System required for Google Maps and finding local resources was developed by the DoD in the 1970s for more accurate deployments of material and munitions. Only in the 1990s was it released and quickly swamped with civilian use.

The attractive liquid-crystal displays, too, owe their existence to Cold War military investments, spurred by worries that dominant Japanese display suppliers lacked adequate capacity to meet U.S. demand alone. So the Pentagon organized an industry consortium working on flat panel displays, with the breakthrough technology under development at the manufacturer Westinghouse. Mazzucato notes that "the research carried out at Westinghouse was almost entirely funded by the U.S. Army." But the company then shut down the program, leading the

project head to appeal to a series of U.S. computer giants—IBM, Compaq, Xerox, 3M, only to be turned away by all of them until he received a contract from ARPA in the late 1980s. Further, the lithium-ion batteries essential to today's power-hungry devices have a similar story of early funding from the NSF and the Department of Energy. And cellular communications standards, and the early system development needed to prove the concept, were heavily supported by European governmental investments in signal processing.

And so on. Jobs sure was proud of his role in designing the device, but his engineers relied on decades of taxpayers funding these research agencies whose investments created all the fancy tiny components of the slick device you use to text your friends and take pictures of your pets.

IPHONIES

And beyond the fundamental Internet and Web networks, even the technologies at the hearts of the Big Tech online platforms themselves often derive from public work. Bill Gates' and Paul Allen's original BASIC-MS operating system, which they sold to IBM and which ended up dominating the global market for many years, was written in the BASIC computer language. This language was created by professors at Dartmouth in 1964 with funding from the National Science Foundation. Later Gates was filled with scorn that the public might oppose his use of this technology to utterly monopolize computing.

And beside smartphone multi-touch interfaces, Apple had even more fundamental roots in public-sector technology. The PARC research facility, from which Steve Jobs obtained the basics of the Graphic User Interface that became the Mac and eventually all computer interfaces, had several former ARPA researchers working on those display concepts. The prominent *Wired* journalist Steve Levy wrote, "this little-known branch of Defense was quietly kick-starting the computer revolution that would result in the Macintosh."

The most visionary action that can be contributed to the world's richest man, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, is that in the Web's early days he was "doubling and tripling his bet on the Internet," as his biographer puts it. A wily business move perhaps, but it amounts to recognizing a good opportunity to make money on technology developed by federal taxpayers over the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, Facebook's deferential corporate biographer David Kirkpatrick wrote: "Something like Facebook was envisioned by engineers who laid the groundwork for the Internet. In a 1968 essay by J. C. R. Licklider and Robert W. Taylor 'The Computer as Communication Device,' the two essentially envisioned Facebook's basic social network. They worked for ARPA."

And of course Google itself, considered the most academically-inspired of the megacap tech behemoths, was originally google.stanford.edu. There it was developed by taxpayers of the U.S. and the State of California, with the long-term research stability of a major research institution and freedom from the need to turn a short-term dollar. There, Page and Brin could state with detachment in an early research paper still viewable online, that "advertising funded search engines will be inherently biased towards the advertisers... We believe the issue of advertising causes enough mixed incentives that it is crucial to have a competitive search engine that is transparent and in the academic realm." Obviously they got over that, as Google has played the leading role in covering the Internet with ugly, slow-loading, brain-eroding eyesore advertisements. (And was eventually fined \$2.7 billion by the European Commission for illegally favoring its comparison-

shopping services at the expense of competitors.)

Google's search algorithms have been hugely elaborated since it became a private company, of course, but once in the realm of the marketplace technology evolves only in directions that engorge profitability. Data scientist Cathy O'Neil's distressing and digestible book *Weapons of Math Destruction* reviews harmful software algorithms, ones with no transparency or dynamic learning to improve on known previous errors. She notes that, "In the case of web giants like Google, Amazon, and Facebook, these precisely tailored algorithms alone are worth hundreds of billions of dollars," yet:

Our livelihoods increasingly depend on our ability to make our case to machines. The clearest example of this is Google. For businesses, whether it's a bed-and-breakfast or an auto repair shop, success hinges on showing up on the first page of search results. Now individuals face similar challenges, whether trying to get a foot in the door of a company, to climb the ranks—or even to survive waves of layoffs.

O'Neil also notices that these harmful algorithms "tend to punish the poor...The privileged, we'll see time and again, are processed more by people, the masses by machines."

A similar story emerges with artificial intelligence, considered among the most advanced of technological fields today, with origins again in public research. Merchant observes that "before Siri was a core functionality of the iPhone, it was an app on the App Store launched by a well-funded Silicon Valley start-up. Before that, it was a research project at Stanford backed by the Defense Department with the aim of creating an artificially intelligent assistant." The technology included the spoken interface so associated with AI in the popular imagination. "As with much of the advanced computer research around Stanford then, ARPA was doing the funding. It would mark a decades-long interest in the field of AI from the agency, which would fund multiple speech recognition projects in the 1970s."

The field is advancing based on deep neural networks—computer algorithms modeled on the human brain that crunch data and attempt to learn to do different tasks. The most elaborate algorithms, however, will be corporate property, and companies will resist divulging their proprietary code just as they already do for more conventional algorithms that sort search results and screen loan applicants. The *Wall Street Journal* observes, "For the corporations, the algorithms will be proprietary tools to assess your loan-worthiness, your job applications, and your risk of stroke. Many balk at the costs of developing systems that not only learn to make decisions, but that also explain those decisions to outsiders."

This likely means a powerful new tool will gradually emerge for the tech giants, and be developed as recklessly as the rivalry among monopolists allows. The industry has tried to pre-empt serious government regulation by creating a number of proposed ethical guidelines, but it's unlikely these entities will propose anything that could limit the future profitable exploitation of the technology they're investing in today. So far U.S. administrations have been willing to allow self-regulation and these guidelines are evidently intended to perpetuate that permissiveness.

There are institutional reasons why major technological leaps are so often made by publicly-backed research entities rather than private companies. Only states and publicly-funded research institutions can support long-term basic scientific research, which by its nature is based on exploring the unknown and is never sure of any breakthrough, let alone a money-making one. Plus, scientific research and experimental engineering are expensive, with costly professionals like trained scientists

and fancy research and prototyping equipment.

Private institutions are under systemic and legal obligations to make money quickly to reward their capitalist investors, and expensive, uncertain long-term research is inevitably harder and harder to justify as quarters tick by with few money-making breakthroughs to show for it. A partial exception exists if a company is somewhat insulated from market pressures by monopoly power, like Google and the other megacap platform companies. With these market incentives against research, it's no wonder then that the Internet, the Web, the GUI, modern processors, Wi-Fi signaling, fundamental computer languages, and even Google itself arose from the academic or military research settings, where steady funding is more or less assured and near-term stock prices don't drive whether projects get axed. Bee observes that "innovation in this area is less motivated by extracting profit, and more so by signifiers of prestige, career appointments, recognition, publication, project funding, and prizes."

THE HISTORY IS LONG—MARCONI DEVELOPED radio for the Royal Navy, Berners-Lee the Web protocols for CERN. The OSTP notes, "Past DoD research has resulted in revolutionary technological capabilities such as radar, digital computers, wireless mobile communications, lasers, fiber optics, composite materials, the Internet (and other 'packet switched' networks), and satellite navigation." Mazzucato observes that private businesses dominate overall spending on research and development (R&D), responsible for 67 percent of the total. However, on *basic* R&D, studying subjects with no immediate commercial value and sometimes discovering basic new technologies, the federal government together with the university system hugely dominate at 72 percent.

The point of course isn't that the military should have discretion on where it spends its hundreds upon hundreds of billions of dollars each year, or that the warped pitiless nightmare of modern war is worth it for its high-tech spinoffs. The point is that the public setting is the natural space for scientific and technological research, providing the funding, managing the long-run research uncertainty, and maybe imposing some publicly-demanded constraints on what can be done with the tech.

Not only is technology too important to be left to the technology industry, it didn't even come from them in the first place. A movement for online socialism would demand that the crucial platforms be socialized—brought under the control of the people who run them and make them successful—the engineers, phone industry workers, and all of us content creators. We could decide democratically the broad direction of future research, the limits to the use of our personal data, and utilize the potential of the Internet for its most positive educational and fulfillment possibilities. And we could tell the one percent just what the fucking Terms of Service are. ♣



"In THIS economy?"

UTOPIA OF THE MONTH

Could this be your future? Ha ha, we hope not! But look closely and you'll find an important commentary on the political situation of our own time. Can you see what it is? If so, does it trouble you? Does it make you shiver? Does it?







NAOMI KLEIN

on the urgency of a Green New Deal

Current Affairs editors Nathan J. Robinson and Lyta Gold recently spoke with writer and climate activist Naomi Klein, author of *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*. We began by asking her about a recent article in the *New Yorker* by Jonathan Franzen called “What If We Stopped Pretending The Climate Apocalypse Can Be Stopped?” which argues that activists (like Klein) are foolish to believe they can meaningfully halt climate change. Franzen encourages a kind of resignation and shows little interest in the kind of ambitious climate policies Klein is pushing for. The interview was transcribed by Addison Kane and has been edited lightly for grammar and readability.

NATHAN J. ROBINSON: *I assume you don't think that Jonathan Franzen is wrong about how bad the threat of climate change is, but that you disagree with the pessimism, the sense that we're doomed.*

NAOMI KLEIN: I've written a lot about why it is that people on the far right of the political spectrum have to deny the reality of climate change. It's pretty clear, if you subscribe to a worldview that the market is always right, that people essentially always deserve their fate, that every time people get together to try to do something, terrible things happen—then, climate change is going to make your head explode, because it requires that we get in the way of markets, in a huge way, invest in the public sphere, reverse a whole lot of privatizations, and plan and manage our economy. And so it is a profound crisis to that worldview, so the science must be denied.

But there is another worldview that the reality of climate change also finds impossible to metabolize, and that is the worldview of the liberal centrist, who prides themselves on being progressive on various issues, but never take anything too far or get too excited about anything. [This person] is generally very suspicious of the riffraff of social movements, and keeps them at a very safe distance, and much

prefers the company of birds—not that there's anything wrong with that! But I think that this cohort, for a while now, has not been *denying* the science of climate change, but has adopted this posture of melancholic doom in the face of it, because they *do* understand the science, they do understand how much change is required, but they fundamentally don't believe in mass organized people. They're kind of afraid of it. They think it's kind of cringeful and a little bit scary. Therefore, the verdict is: we're doomed.

And I see the Franzen piece in that tradition, but he is by no means alone. And it's in many ways useful that he laid it out in that way. And I think it's a big part of the reason why, in the presidential Democratic primaries we're finally having this full-throated debate about the Green New Deal, that is so useful, because pretty much everyone alive, almost everyone alive in the United States, right now, doesn't have a collective memory of a time when people built good things together. Certainly, my historical memory is all about a period of un-making, of dismantling, of chipping away... That is why it is so exciting to me that when we talk about a Green New Deal, we necessarily have to remember the original New Deal, because that revives a memory of when, in the face of peril and crisis, there was an interplay between mass organized people, and politicians willing to be pushed, [which] ushered in an era of very rapid transformation, with social good at the center of the project.

Recognizing all of the failures—recognizing who was excluded: that African-American workers were excluded from any programs, that domestic workers were excluded, that this was an era of a huge number of Mexican-Americans being deported, that there was systemic discrimination—we know all of that, but it is also true that there was a spirit of working-class solidarity during the New Deal era that was very real.

LYTA GOLD: *One of the arguments that Franzen uses, is that he argues human nature itself won't allow for any sincere climate mobilization.*

So it's really funny for you to bring up the fact that we have mobilized society before. One of the essays in On Fire is called "Capitalism Killed Climate Momentum, Not Human Nature." How often do you see this ideology?

NK: This argument keeps coming up, right? And it keeps coming up in elite liberal publications that are doing some of the best climate coverage in the world. It's just when it comes to the idea that *people* might actually be behind the wheel of history that folks get queasy. Whenever human nature is invoked as the reason why we will or won't do something, I always become a little bit wary, because humans are many things, and there's no doubt that we live in a culture that has rewarded *parts* of our nature that are really incompatible with being able to hold in our heads the severity of the climate crisis, and to be able to come together in a spirit of cooperation and emergency to profoundly transform the way we live.

Now, I don't think our chances are good. I think we have a pathway, which is very, very, very thin, and very unlikely—that we *might* just manage to come together in time to change enough that we could keep temperatures below a level where there would still be significant parts of our planet that would continue to support human life. That's my *utopia*, by the way! This is why when liberals say, "don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good," I'm like, that train left the station a long time ago. We've already lost Arctic sea ice, the Great Barrier Reef, and we're losing the Amazon. No one is talking about perfect, okay? We're talking about survival.

And this is what the student youth movement has inserted into the political debate. That clarity of "we're fighting for our lives," which is a message that people living in places like the Marshall Islands and Bangladesh have been trying to get our attention about for a very long time. They've been ignored because at the heart of our failure to respond to this crisis is white supremacy. It is the fact that the people who have been most clearly fighting to survive have not been white people. And that's why climate change has been talked about as an issue off in the future, as huge amounts of coastal Bangladesh disappear, and whole island nations face disappearance, and a large part of Africa becomes uninhabitable because of drought.

NJR: *Your framework is powerful, because it's a framework of determination, rather than "optimism," and I guess someone like Franzen doesn't have to feel the urgency of that determination, because he's going to be fine.*

NK: The reaction that a lot of people had to that piece was against [the] posture of "it's all too late, I've done the math and I think our chances are so slim that I'd rather just look after my little patch, here." That assumes a level of [comfort] that cannot be assumed by the vast majority of people on this planet. So people are fighting for their lives, whether they're fighting in context of a movement, or whether they're fighting to get on a leaky boat.

NJR: *You've recently been trying to expand people's imaginations, like with the video about the future that you did with Molly Crabapple and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. You quote Ursula Le Guin on how capitalism seems so permanent, but the divine right of kings once seemed permanent, too. I constantly come back to that phrase that it's "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism," and it seems like you've been thinking recently that one of*

the things we need to do is have these visions of what can be possible.

NK: We did that last night, again, at the event with Greta Thunberg. We invited three really young climate activists to—rather than give a speech about what is wrong right now—to put themselves ten years in the future, and tell the story of how we broke through. And some of them are involved in suing the U.S. government, and they imagine winning that lawsuit, and what it would do, and how it would be enforced, having a rule that has to be enforced, and all of the speakers were actually indigenous, and talked about a revolution in respect for indigenous values, and it was so beautiful. And it was really striking to me that all our speakers were in their 20s, but I think one was in her late teens, and when we gave them this assignment, would you write something from the future, about how we won, they didn't miss a beat. And they're like, sure! And reimagining the border, reimagining the relationship with indigenous knowledge, reimagining communities of color that have been systematically neglected, I think they are doing an amazing job with that.

It really made me so hopeful, because I really do think that this generation, the biggest difference is that they're just not as colonized by neoliberalism as previous generations. They didn't get the hard sell, because the ideological project has been in crisis their whole lives. They've grown up in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, and their imaginations weren't policed in the same way that people in their 30s and certainly 40s and 50s have had our imaginations policed, and so they're more capable of imagining a better future, and that makes me really hopeful, because when we wrote *The Leap*, four years ago, and we had the meeting of 15 movement leaders to try to write this People's Platform, which is sort of a proto-Green New Deal, it was really hard. Adrian Brown, who was the incredible facilitator, put these questions like, "the future, what does it look like?" And a lot of folks were just like, "Whoa, nobody has ever asked me about that before." And it was a lot of work to get people—myself included—out of the posture of fighting a game we've spent our whole lives on, and imagine what we actually want instead. And so I found it really exciting that it was easy for them to picture that different future.

NJR: *It does feel like a lot has changed in the last year. A year ago, it was probably pretty unimaginable that CNN would devote seven hours to climate change, like they did the other night. I don't know if it even came up in the 2016 debates.*

NK: It didn't. And more than that, if you think about when the staccato hurricanes of Irma, and Harvey, and then Maria hit in 2017, CNN and every other major network were systematically not mentioning climate change. They're still having trouble with it, but any time, if anybody mentioned climate change, in context of those hurricanes, they were accused of politicizing the disaster, there was this idea that it was sort of unseemly to talk about climate change in the midst of a climate-fueled disaster. There are many things that I found striking about that seven-hour climate marathon on CNN, but the most striking moment for me was when they had one huge screen onstage that was showing live footage of a wildfire near Los Angeles, and on the other screen, they were showing live footage of Hurricane Dorian, and in the

middle, was the phrase “Climate Emergency.” That is an absolute transformation in the discourse.

LG: *Something you talk about in the book is the way that there’s been a movement away from complete denialism on the right wing, to just a casual acceptance of eco-fascism. You saw in the Christchurch massacre, the shooter’s manifesto referenced that. Do you feel that there’s going to be a lot more of this just sort of automatic flip to to eco-fascism?*

NK: I mean, yeah, I think the days of outright climate change denialism are outnumbered. There’s been a strange fixation of “how do you change the mind of a climate denier?” and get them to accept the science, which I’ve always found very misguided, just politically, because I think the much bigger issue is that we have huge numbers of people who do not deny the science, but feel totally hopeless, don’t see a way out, have accepted the human nature argument. That’s much more fertile territory to engage with than trying to convince somebody who denies climate change, because their entire worldview would collapse if the science is true, and we have to do the things that are required to radically lower emissions.

The other reason why it’s incredibly misguided is because you aren’t going to collapse that worldview. It’s interesting, because there’s all kinds of social science that shows that there is an incredibly tight correlation between people who hold what they call a “hierarchical worldview,” and those who deny climate change. Those with a hierarchical worldview, they basically agree with statements like, “people basically get what they deserve.” It’s people who have a fundamental comfort level with massive levels of inequality, because they really do believe the people who are there at the top of the hierarchy are there because they’re better. So, the problem with trying to get those people to believe in climate change is that they aren’t going to let go of their hierarchical worldview, and if they do, and they are starting to admit that climate change is really happening, they’re not going to be like, “hey, let’s rejoin the Paris Accord, and pay our climate debts, and have a justice-based transition.” No. What they are going to do is apply the reality of ecological breakdown, and a future of scarcity, and mass migration to their hierarchical framework. It’s going to have to fit within that.

So, we are already seeing what that looks like. Even if Donald Trump supposedly doesn’t believe in climate change, and thinks it’s a Chinese hoax, as he’s said in a couple tweets. Trump *should* know that climate change is happening. He’s had to redesign his golf courses because of sea level rise. He knows it’s happening. But if you are deeply invested in that hierarchical worldview, and you know that climate change is happening, then what you need is a narrative that allows you to justify fortressing the borders, allowing people to die in the desert, in concentration camps, in the Mediterranean. This is what is happening—not just in the United States, it’s happening in Europe, it’s happening in Australia, it’s happening to a lesser extent in Canada. We are seeing what I’m calling climate barbarism, and I definitely would say that it’s the only thing scarier than the proverbial racist uncle whose brain is addled by Fox News, and who denies climate change. The only thing scarier than that is the Fox News-addled racist uncle who stops denying climate change, and then uses that as the pretext for why there needs to be an absolutely brutal regime of essentially genocide on the borders.

NJR: *One thing that I wanted to ask you about is this critique that the Green New Deal, because it is an economic policy, a climate policy, and a social policy, the critique that says this is just the left’s wish-list, and they’re just trying to impose it. And you talk about why that isn’t true, and why it is so crucial to have a systemic way of thinking that understands that these elements are inseparable and have to be done together.*

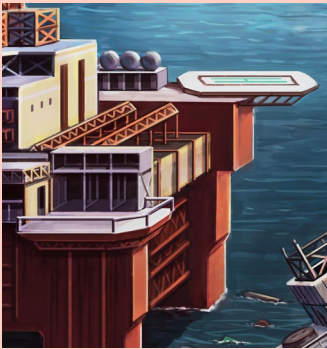
NK: There are a lot of reasons why it’s intensely pragmatic to be as holistic as possible, when we think about how we’re going to transform our economy. One would have to do with backlash. Neoliberal responses to the climate crisis have been tried in many different national governments, or by subnational governments in the United States, whether it’s a carbon tax, or different kinds of fees and tariffs, and in many cases what happens is that you’ll introduce a policy that does very little to lower emissions—certainly not on the scale that we need—but it actually does make life more expensive for working people, and it generates a huge backlash, and the narrative solidifies that people have to choose. Take the slogan of the yellow vest movement in France: “you care about the end of the world, we care about the end of the month.” This idea that caring about the habitability of this planet is some sort of luxury for coastal elites.

So I think backlash is one reason why we shouldn’t be looking for that very narrow climate policy that is just a tax, or just narrowly focused on energy. The other reason is that we need to build coalitions of people who are really going to fight for this. And people fight for their lives, and they fight for their schools, and they fight for jobs, and it is true that we live in a time of tremendous economic stress and precarity, and that people aren’t naturally going to prioritize [climate]. So, if we are able to design policies that marry the need for greater economic security, and dignity, and control of our lives, and basic goods and services, like schools, and healthcare, people are going to fight for that. Not only are they not going to backlash against it, they are going to fight for it, because it’s not just better than a future of apocalypse, it’s better than the lives that they have right now. ✦



“It’s five o’clock somewhere!”

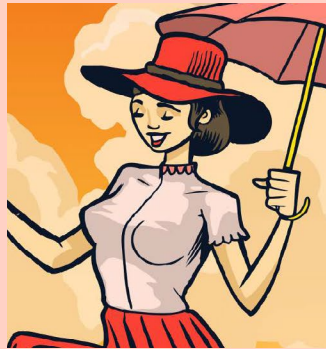
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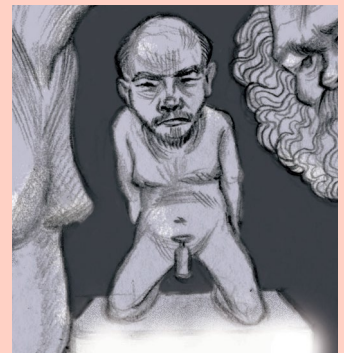
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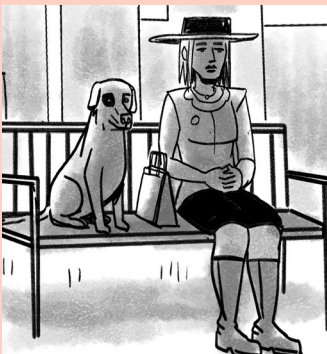
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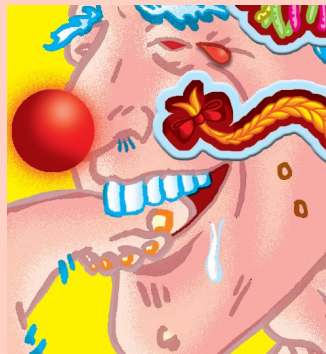
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