

*The Magazine That Makes People Fall In Love*

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

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IN THIS HERE EDITION:

## **THE NEW ALTERNATIVE RIGHT**

Brianna Rennix ponders how to destroy them

## **FEMINISTS AGAINST CLINTON**

Liza Featherstone curates a dissection

## **WHY JOURNALISTS LOVE TWITTER**

Emily Robinson on media laziness





# THE WRITERS & THE ARTISTS

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("Libros," p. 65)

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# CRUEL TO BE KIND?

We were recently shocked to overhear a blogger make the following declaration: "Current Affairs are great. Just don't disagree with them, or they will be really, really mean to you." The remark caught us off guard, as we had always considered ourselves the friendliest and most fair-minded of publications. Were we really so hostile to those who dared oppose us? To find the answer, we reviewed our three most recent editions, compiling a list of the people about whom we made rude or disparaging remarks in each one. As it turns out, our blog-friend's warning was all too true. We are, indeed, incredibly mean. Instead of denying it, then, we shall insist that it is justified. After all, cruelty is the highest form of kindness.

## MARCH/APRIL

*The Economist*  
Ayn Rand  
Jonathan Franzen  
Ruth Bader Ginsburg  
all Marxists  
Nicholas Kristof  
the rest of the *New York Times*  
online feminists  
the President of Uzbekistan  
*The New Republic*  
Ta-Nehisi Coates  
Antonin Scalia  
Bill O'Reilly  
Jamel Bouie  
the Confederacy  
Islamism  
Anarchists  
Jeff Koons  
Elizabeth Gilbert  
the Governor of Michigan  
Tyler Cowen  
*Jacobin* magazine  
the entire field of sociology  
libertarianism  
Joseph Stalin  
Hillary Clinton

## MAY/JUNE

The Nation of Islam  
Duncan Kennedy  
Ted Cruz  
Hillary Clinton  
Ezra Klein  
Bill Clinton  
Marc Ambinder  
Michael Eric Dyson  
Peter Thiel  
Nicholas Kristof  
Niall Ferguson  
Richard Dawkins  
Paul Clement  
Antonin Scalia  
Kim Jong Un  
ISIS  
Friedrich Engels  
Princeton University  
Forensic scientists  
John F. Kennedy  
J. Bradford DeLong

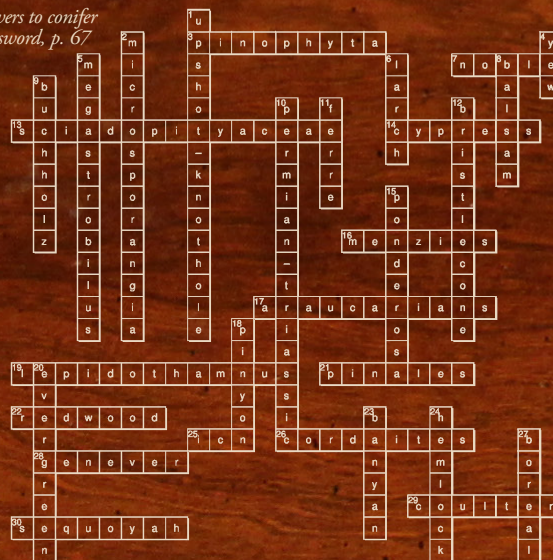
## JULY/AUGUST

Chuck Norris  
Joni Mitchell  
Chemtrail theorists  
Dave Eggers  
Peter Thiel  
Antonin Scalia  
Elizabeth Holmes  
Alan Dershowitz  
Alexis Tsipiras  
David Graeber  
Teach For America  
Anarchists  
Israel  
Graduate students  
Ethan Couch  
The Jonas Brothers  
Bill Clinton  
Ron Paul  
Ted Cruz  
Ramzan Kadyrov  
Lin-Manuel Miranda  
Jonathan Tepperman  
Barack Obama  
Rupert Murdoch  
The New Yorker  
Leon Trotsky

"You've gotta be cruel  
to be kind!"

—NICK LOWE

Answers to conifer  
crossword, p. 67



**SALUD,  
OTTO!  
SALUD,  
BERNIE!**

Our bimonthly salute  
to two imprisoned  
comrades, Bernard  
Noble of New Orleans  
and Otto Warmbier of  
North Korea.

Cheers, lads. Been  
contemplating you lots  
lately, though that's  
nothing unusual. Tried  
to sneak through a cake  
containing a trowel and  
some heavy explosives,  
but the bastards saw  
right through it.  
Currently preparing to  
send a Rita Hayworth  
poster, which you will  
know what to do with.  
Stay spy, chap-o's.

# CORRECCIONES

In recent editions of this magazine, it has become a custom and practice to issue so-called "corrections," in which we grovel pitifully over our errors and beg our paid subscribers to forgive our wrongdoing. We adopted this practice for two reasons. First, it seemed as if All Legitimate Publications did so, and if there is one thing *Current Affairs* is, it is legitimate. Second, we wished to use our little corrections box in the same tricky way that our peers at the *New York Times* deploy it: to signal to the reader that if these are the corrections, everything else in our publication must unquestionably be true. However, over these past issues we have grown as a magazine. We are now an altogether worldlier publication. Our editors are no longer the green-fingered virgins of the May/June edition. No, the autumn is here, and they are now cigar-chomping, suspender-wearing members of the hardboiled school of editorial cynicism. All of this is by way of saying the following: we are tired of apologizing, tired of prostrating ourselves before the pedants who demand "factual exactitude" and "lack of typos." Henceforth, *Current Affairs* shall apologize for nothing! (Unless we do something really and truly morally heinous.) ♦

# BLASPHEMIES

LATELY IT HAS seemed to us as if blasphemy has been going worryingly out of fashion. We attribute this unfortunate decline in the heretical and profane to the effect of one Richard Dawkins, who has always given blasphemy a bad name. In Dawkinsian *praxis* (and practice), blasphemy becomes something joyless on bleak. Neil deGrasse Tyson spoils our favorite films by telling us that science simply doesn't work that way. When Dawkins isn't sending hateful tweets about feminists or the kid who brought the

clock to school, he plods through classic children's stories, explaining the various fallacies they embody. Good God, what a drag. It's enough to turn anybody religious.

The bitterness and arrogance of our contemporary atheist sourpusses are somewhat depressing, partially because the fact of their repellent personalities does not make religion any less false. Far from successfully talking people into surrendering their superstitions, the Dawkins/Harris/Hitchens gang have simply made it look like "athe-

ism" is just a sign one pins to one's self reading "I am a noisy white man who has many things I would like to explain to you." Alas! Blasphemy used to be such fun. Popes, priests, and pastors are fundamentally silly people, who deserve to have their robes yanked and their hats parodied. The gleeful parade of anticlerical socialism has been viciously rained upon by dreary Oxonian Islamophobes. For shame. Well, you won't stop us! All religions are a form of socially sanctioned lunacy, and the human brain will

not find peace and enlightenment until they are eradicated from the earth (by mockery, of course, not by force). A good idea should not be abandoned simply because most of the people who currently hold it happen to be assholes. Or perhaps it should. No, it shouldn't. It must be saved from them, not surrendered to them!

Ah, but don't think our stance means we believe we Rationally Understand the Universe and you don't. All we can be certain of is the infinite extent of our own cluelessness. ♦



*for*  
READERS  
*of extraordinary*  
DISCERNMENT  
*& unimpeachable*  
TASTE



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FINEST ISRAELI COLOGNE



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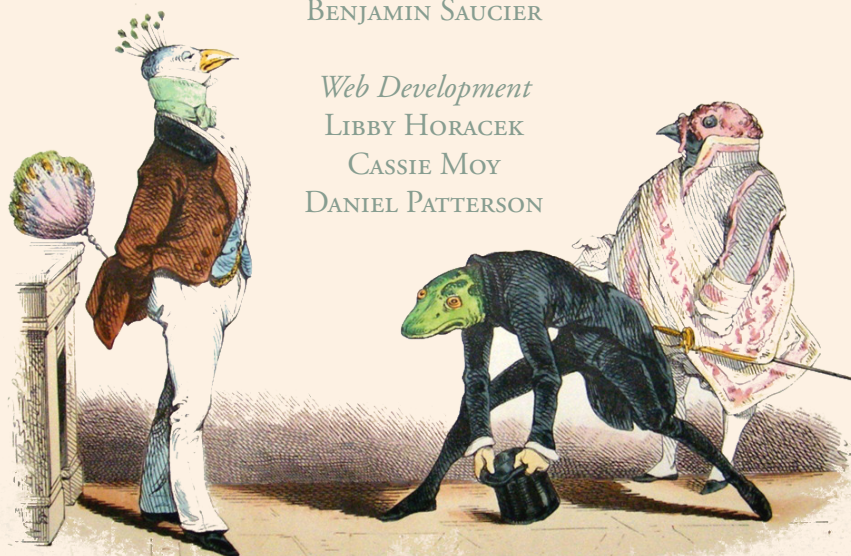
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# correspondence

## Re: You Should Be Terrified That People Who Like 'Hamilton' Ran Our Country

TO THE EDITORS:

Alex Nichols' recent review of Lin-Manuel-Miranda's Broadway musical *Hamilton* was, in polite terms, garbage. Nichols debased *Current Affairs* with a review that was factually inaccurate, intellectually lacking, and devoid of both insight and dignity. Put in a different way: the review was corny. Rarely has a review so disgusted me.

Nichols' problem is not that he failed to see *Hamilton* before offering his critique. While a serious critic would review a play only after having seen it, one can imagine reasons to review a play without seeing it. The critique might be more about society than the play itself. But Nichols wants to take down both *Hamilton* and critique America generally, and current trade practices of the Obama administration, specifically. He fails. Not only does he seem unaware of Ron Chernow's biography of *Hamilton*, he also seems clueless about the level of detail and historical accuracy in the play. No, let me correct that: Nichols writes as if Miranda's narrative skills, compositional skills, and historical accuracy are not considerations but inconveniences that can be ignored as he creates a review of a fictitious shadow *Hamilton* that only he (Nichols) would recognize.

By reviews end, it's not clear if Nichols' problem with the show is that a Latino would dare to tell this particular American narrative and center people who look like himself as a reflection of America, that this story would be told in the language of hip-hop, or that Miranda chose to do something other than turn *Hamilton* into an expose about slavery and racism in America. Every story contains multitudes and at some level artists should be judged both by the narratives they tell and the narratives they leave out. Nichols can think of *Hamilton* in terms of the latter, it seems.

Racism is a peculiar thing. One might just write this review off as the modern tendency to raise snark to the level of wisdom, but this would be a mistake. Nichols' failure is that of the typical racist; he lacks imagination. In his world, people of color lack agency. To show this, he cherry-picks quotes from cast members to show that they are obtuse. He writes that Miranda says the use of black actors is to allow "you to leave whatever cultural baggage you have about the founding fathers at the door." For Nichols, this notion itself is illegitimate.

And to Nichols' critique of the show's cost. Miranda has made sure over 20,000 New York high school students saw the show for free. My tickets, they came in at the steep price of 137 dollars. This review is rubbish. The strawman Nichols makes of *Hamilton* falls far below the standard that *Current Affairs* has set. He wants to attack President Obama and "the political establishment." Such is fine. But to do so

in this unseemly way is a disservice to both readers of *Current Affairs* and to those who produce the magazine.

R. DWAYNE BETTS  
New Haven, CT

*CA: We confess to being unable to comprehend the argument that the article was "racist" or denied the agency of people of color. After all, the article expressed three fundamental positions: (1) Hamilton is cheesy (Surely a matter of subjective opinion). (2) By painting a glowing portrait of a racist era, Hamilton obscures historical truth. (3) American elites love Hamilton, precisely because it reinforces the Horatio Alger myth of American history, a myth that is dangerous insofar as it implicitly exonerates the country of its crimes. Since we place the blame for these things squarely on Lin-Manuel Miranda and his cast, it is difficult to see how we could be denying the agency of people of color. And frankly, it's not clear to us from your letter why any of the 3 above arguments are false. Also: you really believe \$137 is an affordable night out? Goodness, only in NYC!*

TO THE EDITORS:

I am writing because, not being familiar with "Current Affairs", was not sure if your publication is a parody piece or an attempt at a meaningful and serious contribution to contemporary American culture. Maybe the article is a parody (or pure clickbait) but would appreciate some insight, as I am sensitive to falling into what one might call "troll traps."

Also, does the Editorial Board choose the titles of its article? Or does the author? Did anyone think it was maybe a bit hyperbolic? I mean, I imagine a lot of great leaders liked the movie *Dumb & Dumber* and it didn't in any way deal with our legacy of slavery, the ills of global capitalism, or identity in a multicultural society. Maybe I am naive and not sufficiently terrified. I did click on it though, so maybe mission accomplished(?).

Also, if the author did see it, was his expectation that a 3-hour musical written for a mass market was going to treat *Hamilton* like some multi-volume Howard Zinn book? I mean, it also contained no songs about the Native Americans, whether the Constitution entrenched existing economic structures/class, the relative merits of internal improvements (and whether best left to states or local governments), the defaults in the original Bill of Rights (e.g., states still had established churches), and whether communities whose structures and morals were largely religiously postmillennial (esp. in North) was a good thing, especially for women (among other subjects not found in the musical).

Also, if you haven't seen it, Michelle Obama recently did "Carpool Karaoke" with James Corden. Michelle clearly is rocking out to a number of songs. I would also appreciate whether I should be terrified that the wife of the leader of the free world is singing along to a song that perpetuates the demand for blood diamonds.

I thought one of the merits of the musical was that its appeal fell somewhere on a shared plane of American understanding, that its takeaways were a reminder of our original aspirations (however missing from the start and incomplete today), and that, following liberals like Richard Rorty, elements of a shared positive cultural canon is important in sustaining a thinking polity and fostering unity in a multicultural society. I sure hope that article was a parody because if not, boy am I wrong!

MATT S.

*CA: Perhaps you mistake the object of our ire: it is that very Shared Plane of American Understanding that we most dislike. And while we fully concur that the film Dumb and Dumber serves as a fine point of comparison for understanding Hamilton, you and Richard Rorty are welcome to keep your Positive Cultural Canon to yourselves.*

TO THE EDITORS:

Has Alex Nichols seen *Hamilton*? Has Alex Nichols listened to the original cast recording? Obviously not. Maybe the article was written out of sour grapes at not being able to snag a ticket; but at any rate it's pretty shoddy journalism to publish something about which the author is completely clueless. When the author does finally research their subject and listen or watch I think they will be very embarrassed.

*Hamilton* is not a documentary or some museum diorama of the time period. It is an unabashed, heart-on-its-sleeve musical based on a book about a specific person. The play is three hours long as it is. Something had to go. John Adams had to go, Ben Franklin had to go, they couldn't do everything. Much like when they were writing the Declaration of Independence and they needed to excise the clause about slavery in order to not jeopardize independence.

Honestly, in this era of debauchery and butchery and death and torture and horror daily in the news the one shining light is Lin-Manuel Miranda who I believe is the reincarnation of Shakespeare among us. And your 'author' who has no idea what he is talking about has the nerve to slander everything they are trying to do.

Exploitation of the musical to promote a shallow take on society, what he is accusing *Hamilton* of being, is exactly what the author of this article has done. I'm so sick and tired of the cynicism and ironic take-down of everything that's good in this world.

Can there not be one thing in this world safe from smug irony and snide cynicism? This show is a shining light in a world of horror and bad news. It is a love letter to musicals, to being young and feeling like you can do anything. It's a love letter to New York and to joy and jubilation. What was the intention behind the show? Generosity. Giving the audience the best show they could possibly imagine. And someone has to go and shit all over it.

Good day, editors.  
ELIZABETH DENNEHY

*CA: Our sincerest regrets. If we had known before publication that Lin-Manuel Miranda was the living reincarnation of Shakespeare, you have our assurance that we never would have taken an enormous shit on him.*

## Re: The Great American Chemtrail

TO THE EDITORS:

Just an FYI for the editing staff of *Current Affairs*, the public is waking up to the global geoengineering/solar radiation management issue (systematically and intentionally labeled "chemtrails" by the propaganda piece your magazine printed). How will the population feel about "Current Affairs" helping the government hide this most critical issue? Legal efforts are already underway in the US and Canada to expose the ongoing climate engineering operations, perhaps "Current Affairs" should reconsider the position they are taking of completely deceiving the population. Again, one can only imagine how furious the public will be toward all those that helped to hide the devastating and illegal climate engineering operations, once they are fully awakened.

DALE WIGINGTON

*CA: Thanks for the tip, Dale, but it's hopeless. As you can see from our other correspondence, the public is already furious with us. Though they seem far more concerned that we disparaged the Alexander Hamilton musical than that we enabled a vast government coverup of chemical brainwashing programs. The public's priorities, it seems, differ somewhat from your own.*









# 1000 WAYS *to misinterpret* NOAM CHOMSKY

*by Norbert Hornstein and Nathan J. Robinson*

Nearly everybody who ever writes about Noam Chomsky badly misstates his beliefs. That's somewhat predictable, since the moment you write *about* him to begin with, you've already rejected one of his most important principles, which is that when it comes to politics and science, the ideas advanced are far more relevant than the (murky, largely unfathomable) motivations of the people advancing them. Thus, when writers write about Chomsky, it's almost certain that they don't understand him, because if they understood him they probably wouldn't be writing about *him* to begin with. Rather, they would be writing about his claims and the arguments and evidence he marshals in support of these claims. Oddly, this rarely happens.

In fact, an almost universal characteristic of those who write about Chomsky is that they seem never to have carefully read anything he has written. It's easy to be cynical about the media, and assume that bias and misrepresentation are commonplace. But popular Chomsky-writing is often downright bizarre, not because it simply exhibits a distaste for him, but because it frequently accuses him of making arguments and holding beliefs that he has never once held, or that he has spent a lifetime vocally

rejecting. No matter how many times Chomsky makes an assertion in print, academics and journalists will vigorously insist that he believes the exact opposite of that assertion. When Chomsky speaks, writers seem to hear what they think Chomsky *would or should* say, regardless of what he actually *does* say.

This has been going on for as long as Chomsky has been in public life. If he defends the right of free speech for Holocaust deniers, he is accused of denying the Holocaust. If he says he supports the tactic of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions against Israel, he is accused of opposing the tactic of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions against Israel. If he says he does not support Hillary Clinton's but would vote for her if he lived in a swing state, he is accused of supporting Hillary Clinton's policies.

Ordinarily, when someone has stated something emphatically, repeatedly, and in plain language, it is not worth responding to those who insist one has said something else. But lately, such a vast new flurry of misrepresentation has erupted that it is worth taking the time to examine some cases in detail. Once we understand the extreme degree to which Chomsky's positions have been misstated, we cannot help but



reach a deeply troubling conclusion about the fate of truth in mainstream institutions. The facts are so simple, and the falsehoods so plain, that they should trouble anybody who wishes to maintain the slightest confidence that what they read in books and newspapers has some relationship to the facts.

In the last few months, two new major books about Noam Chomsky have been released by major publishers. The first, Tom Wolfe's *The Kingdom of Speech*, is published by Little, Brown, and has been praised in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The second, Chris Knight's *Decoding Chomsky*, is being published by the Yale University Press this month and has received a sympathetic nod in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Both of these books attempt the same task: they wish to demolish Noam Chomsky's reputation as an intellectual. They are perfectly open about this goal. Chomsky is one of the most highly-cited scholars of all time, and both Wolfe and Knight feel his reputation is undeserved. Each a different approach. Wolfe argues that Chomsky's linguistic theories are disproven, and portrays Chomsky as a haughty exemplar of *radical chic*, whose political attitudes were "pre-fixed in a shtetl in Russia half a century before he was born," and whose armchair theorizing about language has been discredited. Knight says that Chomsky's linguistic output is "not really science but scientism," incomprehensible nonsense produced to serve the "Pentagon-funded war science community."

These authors approach Chomsky from different political perspectives. Wolfe is a conservative, who believes Chomsky represents the kind of elite radicalism he has spent his career lampooning. Knight is a Marxist, who dislikes Chomsky's skepticism of revolutionary politics and poststructuralist theory. Despite that, each book is ostensibly concerned with Chomsky's linguistics. Neither Wolfe nor Knight is a linguist, but each rests his demolition of Chomsky primarily on an attempt to discredit his scholarly rather than political work.

But one cannot separate these books neatly from the political agendas of the authors. Both believe that Chomsky's reputation in linguistics has illicitly enhanced his reputation as a political analyst and critic. Both refrain from attacking Chomsky's political views head on. Both aim to discredit his politics by attacking his scientific/linguistic claims. The strategy is simple: poison the well and all that comes forth is discredited. Expose the scientific work as wrong, even fraudulent, and the political views are discredited.

Intellectually speaking this strategy should not succeed. After all, one can be right about one thing and wrong about another. Yet this sort of approach is frequently rhetorically effective. It is a tribute to the power of Chomsky's political views and the evidence he presents in their support that so many critics of his politics feel that the best strategy for undermining them is to attack his linguistics. However, even this course of criticism is only effective to the degree that it gets the linguistics right. Wolfe and Knight are so far from understanding even the basic issues about which they write that it is astonishing that their works have made it to print.

**T**OM WOLFE'S ATTACK ON CHOMSKY'S LINGUISTICS CENTERS ON what might seem like a rather obscure question: is Pirahã, a language spoken by a small Amazonian tribe, "recursive"? Despite its seeming obscurity, this technical linguistic issue has attracted an unusual amount of attention from the mainstream press, starting with a 2007 *New Yorker* article by John Calapinto. It has also attracted an unusual amount of misunderstanding.

The story here, as told by Calapinto and Wolfe, is roughly as follows: at the core of Noam Chomsky's linguistics is the idea that all human languages have a property called "recursion." However, a rugged field linguist named Daniel Everett once ventured deep into the Amazon, discovering a tribe called the Pirahã, whose language had no recursion at all. When Everett came back from the jungle, and tried to show that he had destroyed the foundations of Chomsky's linguistic theories, legions of Chomsky acolytes attempted to smear and discredit him, in order to preserve the reputation of their master. By publicizing Everett's findings, Wolfe hopes to slay Chomsky once and for all.

It's a good story, except for a single small wrinkle: the "idea" supposedly held by Noam Chomsky isn't one he has ever actually held. Chomsky never believed that all languages had recursion. He believed that all *people* had the *capacity* to acquire languages with recursion. Thus, even without understanding recursion itself, we can understand why Chomsky was

totally unfazed by Everett's fieldwork. It simply had no bearing whatsoever on Chomsky's underlying thesis. Picturing likely Chomsky's reaction to the discovery of Pirahã, E.J. Spode imagines the following dialogue:

*Chomsky is working at his computer when a student rushes in.*

STUDENT: Professor Chomsky! They've discovered an Amazonian tribe that has a language without recursion!

CHOMSKY [slowly turning from his computer]: Can they learn Portuguese?

STUDENT: Well... yes.

*Chomsky slowly turns back to his computer.*

In the 1970's, Weekend Update on *Saturday Night Live* used to feature a character named Emily Litella, played by Gilda Radner. Emily was an elderly lady with a hearing problem, who used to humorously misinterpret various issues of topical concern. She would wonder why people were concerned by all the "sax and violins on television." Or she would wonder: "What is all this fuss I hear about the Supreme Court decision on a 'deaf' penalty? It's terrible! Deaf people have enough problems as it is!" Dan Everett, and Tom Wolfe as his chronicler, misinterprets Chomsky so badly that he appears to be reenacting an Emily Litella sketch. "All human languages have recursion, you say?" "No, I said that *while* all human languages don't necessarily have recursion, the internal *faculty* of language clearly must." "Well, that can't be right, since I found a language without recursion!"

So Everett's claims concerning recursion in Pirahã are logically irrelevant to Chomsky's claims that recursion is a central universal property of the faculty of language. The press and Wolfe have presented a thing called the "Everett/Chomsky debate," even though debate is impossible as Everett's claims have no bearing on the truth of Chomsky's. Tom Wolfe's book treats Everett as having slain Chomsky, even though neither Everett or Wolfe have the faintest understanding of what Chomsky is arguing. Worse, Wolfe treats every linguist who attempted to point out the mistake as a hyper-protective cult member. To Wolfe, a paper rebutting Everett's claims was nothing but "a swollen corpus of objections—cosmic, small-minded, and everything in between." As E.J. Spode writes, for Wolfe "all the dreary loathsome facts in that paper just made the case for recursion in Pirahã even better. [What could be] a more reliable sign that you are right than that people start arguing against you with things like 'facts'? Screw facts!" Wolfe is committed to telling a good yarn (naturally, with a lot of ellipses and sound effects). So Everett is "a rugged outdoorsman, a hard rider with a thatchy reddish beard and a head of thick thatchy reddish hair" who "could have passed for a ranch hand or a West Virginia gas driller." And Chomsky is an air-conditioned office-bound nerd, with a blinkered shtetl mentality (yes, there is a thick undercurrent of anti-Semitism to the characterization of Everett as hardy, muscular Christian and Chomsky as feeble, nerdy Jew). Chomsky's peeved reaction to the Everett controversy is treated as a haughty disdain for those who disagree with him. Nowhere is it considered, by Wolfe or his reviewers, that Chomsky might simply be exasperated because Everett claims to have disproven a theory whose content he doesn't actually comprehend. And because Wolfe himself depends entirely on Everett's work, adding nothing but flashy rhetoric and invective (e.g. derogatory nicknames), every word of *The Kingdom of Speech* is irrelevant to assessing Noam Chomsky's actual contentions.

**L**IKE WOLFE, CHRIS KNIGHT BELIEVES that Noam Chomsky's work in linguistics is "nonsense." However, as a fellow left-wing radical, Knight shares many of Chomsky's political beliefs, and considers Chomsky an insightful political thinker. Knight therefore feels he must wrestle with the "two Chomskys" puzzle. How, he wonders, can someone whose linguistic work is so self-evidently atrocious be such a capable political analyst? (Note, this is the opposite of the usual "two Chomskys" question asked by Chomsky's opponents, which is "How can such a capable linguist produce such political childishness?" The *New York Times* described it in 1979 as "the problem of an opinionated historian inhabiting the same skin as the brilliant and subtle linguist.")

Knight believes that Chomsky's entire corpus of linguistic work is a web of fallacy and deception, though he acknowledges having "no training in theoretical linguistics" (Knight and Wolfe thus share a similar confidence in their ability to demolish fundamental parts of a field they have seemingly never taken so much as an introductory-level class in.) Knight begins from the premise that Chomsky's approach to linguistics *cannot* make sense. This, he





says, is because Chomsky believes in a kind of “value-free” science, divorced from political content. Chomsky believes that the “social and cultural” dimensions of language are irrelevant to studying it. Knight says that Chomsky’s linguistics work contains a “foundational error,” namely that it views the human brain as a “biological object with a certain weight and size.” This is a mistake, “since the mind, being intersubjective, cannot be pinned down this way.” After all, “minds reflect back on each other, interpenetrate one another and so transcend the confines of the skull.” (Interpenetration goes undefined. Intersubjectivity apparently has something to do with the fact that people communicate. What “transcending the confines of the skull” involves, God only knows.)

In writing all of this, Knight simply misunderstands Chomsky. Chomsky has never stated that one can understand *everything* about language by studying the brain, and or that there are not cultural dimensions to language use. Rather, the aspect of language that Chomsky himself is interested is *that which is common to all human beings*. Put another way, Chomsky is interested in understanding what makes languages the same rather than what makes them different, even though they obviously differ.

Knight says that Chomsky “acknowledges no socially constructed persons, no communities, no traditions” and believes there is “no environment or context in which speaking takes place.” For Knight, these “strange doctrines” are so transparently false that they would be “unlikely to have prevailed” on their own merit, hence the need to invoke the Pentagon in order to explain their success. Indeed, Chomsky would certainly agree that these are “strange doctrines.” Fortunately, he

has never espoused anything resembling them. Again, the mistake is straightforward. Chomsky believes that one does not need to understand “context” in order to examine the *particular* properties of language into which he is inquiring. That is because he is interested in the facts about language that do *not* vary by context. The statement “variations in tradition do not affect this question” is different from “there are no variations in tradition.” Of course Chomsky believes that speaking takes place in “communities” and that societies and cultures vary widely. But if you want to understand the properties that are common to all human beings, it’s precisely the “social and cultural dimensions” that you *don’t* want to look at.

There may well be two Noam Chomskys. But if there are, they are not the “linguistic” Noam Chomsky and the “political” Noam Chomsky. They are the Noam Chomsky that Chris Knight believes exists, and the Noam Chomsky that actually exists.

**T**HE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THESE TWO BOOKS IS NOT that they are *wrong*, although they are. It is that neither of them actually understand the ideas they intend to attack. When Chris Knight emailed Noam Chomsky, and asked what Chomsky thought of Knight’s criticism of his theories, Chomsky replied that he could not detect any criticism of his theories. (Knight reprints the remark in his book, inexplicably proud of it rather than embarrassed by it.) We therefore have two books which do not actually have a basic factual command of their subject matter. Yet at no point in the publication process





## THE CURRENT AFFAIRS INTERVIEW with CAITLIN FLANAGAN of The New York Times

We spoke with Caitlin Flanagan to clarify some of her comments on Noam Chomsky's work. The interview was conducted via Twitter. As is Current Affairs' customary practice, the participant was unaware that this Twitter exchange constituted an "interview." But it did.

**CA: Are you aware of Noam Chomsky's actual beliefs and writings at all?**

CF: I am, thank you.

**CA: So you are aware that the Wolfe book is based on a factual misunderstanding of Chomsky's beliefs about recursion?**

CF: I don't think it's based on recursion...

**CA: And you are aware that your depiction of his view of intellectuals is the direct opposite of his actual view?**

CF: Do you think Chomsky was enjoining "intellectuals" to remain tools of the state?

**CA: Of course not. Which is why we explained precisely what he was and was not enjoining.**

CF: What line of my essay contradicts your assertions?

**CA: "whose opinions on American foreign policy were inherently more valuable than those of the common men" Which is the opposite of his belief. And you did not note that the person you are writing about doesn't believe this.**

CF: Do you think his essay had any effect on American college professors? In terms of re-imagining their right role in society?

**CA: No. As Chomsky has documented, intellectuals have always been self-important and felt it their duty to issue pronouncements. [Anyway,] do you admit that Chomsky is strongly against the position that intellectuals have "inherently more valuable" opinions?**

CF: Without Chomsky, student anti-war demonstrations would not have found support from so many faculty members...

**CA: So no contrition over the error, no actual counterargument? [You] asked which exact parts of [the] article were mistaken, we told [you] precisely.**

CF: You did not cite one single mistake.

**CA: "people whose opinions on American foreign policy were inherently more valuable than those of the common men"**

CF: There is no mistake. ["The Responsibility of Intellectuals"] was hugely influential. You shortchange Chomsky.

**CA: It's interesting that you've admitted you find Chomsky's actual words irrelevant to whether Wolfe's attack on him is fair.**

CF: My opinion on this is irrelevant to your assertion. The opinion of the original readers of the essay is what matters.

**CA: So Chomsky's own beliefs are irrelevant to whether it is fair to smear him? You don't even feel compelled to note them?**

CF: Chomsky was instrumental in changing national opinion on the war - which he did by awakening academics to a powerful new role. Your reading of this essay - and its literary effect - is literal and ultimately dismissive of its power.

**CA: Wait, this is your defense? [Our] failure is that [we are] reading Chomsky as literally saying what Chomsky is literally saying??**

At this point, Caitlin Flanagan ceased to respond.

did the editors at Yale or Little, Brown actually step in to check whether the book's central contentions were truthful. Their edits, presumably, were entirely stylistic. Thus there is evidently no mechanism at major publishing houses to check whether anything a book is saying is actually true.

Here we have to ask an important question: how can so many respectable institutions print such scurrilous attacks on a man whose ideas they don't even bother to understand? Why *wouldn't* they try to get the facts right? This is where politics must necessarily come in. Those that jump to dismiss Chomsky's linguistic work often quickly move on to their dismissals of his political arguments. Consider Caitlin Flanagan's warm *New York Times* review of Wolfe's book. Flanagan buys Wolfe's arguments about the linguistics, and says that in 100 years it is Wolfe's ideas rather than Chomsky's that will endure. But she also detests Chomsky's politics. As she writes:

*Much that is distasteful — and, at worst, fraudulent — about the American university system can be traced, ultimately, to [Chomsky's 1967 essay] "The Responsibility of Intellectuals." It allowed every plodding English department adjunct and uninspired life sciences prof to imagine themselves not as instructors but as "intellectuals," people whose opinions on American foreign policy were inherently more valuable than those of the common men and women whom, ironically, they claimed to champion...*

Flanagan's discussion of "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" is yet another example of a passage expressing the exact opposite of the truth. Chomsky's essay was concerned with condemning intellectuals. Chomsky mocks the popular conception that the academics who advise governments (the "best and the brightest" who plotted U.S.'s bloody invasion of South Vietnam) are "responsible intellectuals." Arguing against the view that intellectuals have some unique role in managing society, Chomsky suggests that they should perhaps limit themselves to the more modest (and less glamorous) task of simply telling the truth. As he explains:

*It's a very attractive conception that, 'We are the rational, intelligent people, and management and decision-making should be in our hands.' Actually, as I've pointed out in some of the things I've written, it's very close to Bolshevism... And it underlies the fear and dislike of democracy that runs through elite culture always, and very dramatically right now... The claims to expertise are very striking. So, economists tell you, 'We know how to run the economy'; the political scientists tell you, 'We know how to run the world, and you keep out of it because you don't have special knowledge and training.'*

Far from having contempt for "the common men and women," as Flanagan says, Chomsky is centrally concerned with rejecting the claims that intellectuals "know best" and can decide what people ought to do. Instead, he believes in a decentralized democracy, in which ordinary people have control over their own lives, and which the authority of academic expertise is constantly interrogated.

It's unwise to speculate on the motivations of particular writers (after all, this is precisely what Knight tries to do). But we could make an observation, which is that for the people who make these misrepresentations, Chomsky's

beliefs (if accepted) are profoundly threatening. Chris Knight, for example, is a Marxist, an anthropologist, and a radical relativist (insofar as he sees scientific thought as little more than a product of political interests). He has *defined* himself by these things. Noam Chomsky is highly skeptical of revolutionary Marxism and sees Knight's kind of relativism as unwarranted and irrational. Tom Wolfe is a conservative. He built part of his reputation on the idea of "radical chic." The idea that someone could hold radical political convictions for intelligent and rational (rather than status-seeking) reasons threatens Wolfe's worldview and thesis. *If what Chomsky says is true*, then the ideas these men have invested their lives in are worthless. Knight, for example, notes in frustration that Chomsky rejects the "fundamental Marxist insight" that "it is not consciousness which determines conditions, but the other way around." Chomsky, faced with this "insight," would point out that it is either vacuous or a truism. To accept Chomsky would therefore necessitate abandoning orthodox Marxist theory.

Thus both men have a powerful incentive to destroy Chomsky, and to convince themselves and others that he is a fraud with nothing to say. So Knight dismisses Chomsky as suffering from a kind of psychological schizophrenia stemming from his guilt at working for MIT. And Wolfe treats Chomsky as a poseur who has relied on dirty tricks to keep his scholarly reputation alive.

There is a larger question, however, that goes beyond the psychology of individual writers and that bears consideration: why do major highbrow publications continually misrepresent Chomsky's scientific and political views? Why do they uncritically publish the shoddy work of people like Wolfe and Knight? Chomsky and Edward S. Herman have a theory about this, that of "manufacturing consent," which fits the phenomena fairly well. Chomsky's *actual* views challenge the moral authority of these mainstream institutions. He denies that they have expert knowledge that gives them special unquestionable authority on social and political matters. There may be other reasons for their mischaracterizing Chomsky's views, but it is unsurprising that they would be reluctant to present those views fairly.

In mounting their attacks, neither Wolfe nor Knight produces substantive evidence against Chomsky's actual positions. Knight relies on speculative psychoanalysis, Wolfe deploys his usual mix of exclamation points and onomatopoeia. In a rational world, Chomsky's reputation would easily escape such attacks unscathed. But we do not live in a particularly rational world. We live in the world Chomsky depicts in his writings, in which propaganda passes for fact, oligarchy passes for democracy, and atrocities pass for humanitarianism. We live in a world in which authors can tell any number of lies they like, if it helps us to avoid having to confront dissenting arguments on their merits. Truth, however, is independent of any individual's opinion, and we would all be better off if instead of focusing on who Noam Chomsky is and what we imagine he might say, we focused on what Noam Chomsky actually says and the reasons he gives for saying it. ♦



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## **Does a police officer need a reason to pull me over?**

Legally, yes, but you can't refuse to pull over just because the officer doesn't have a reason, so in reality, no.

## **Do I have the right to refuse a search?**

Legally, yes, but an officer might just search your car anyway and then say that you consented, so in reality, no.

## **Does an officer have to have probable cause in order to arrest me?**

Legally, yes, but if the officer doesn't have probable cause he might just arrest you anyway, so in reality, no.

## **Can an officer use deadly force on me even if I pose no threat?**

Legally, no, but an officer could just use deadly force on you anyway, so in reality, yes.

**TECHNICALLY YOU HAVE RIGHTS.  
IF KNOWING THEM MAKES YOU  
HAPPY, GO FOR IT.**





# FALSE CHOICE



Feminist writers take on  
Hillary Clinton...



# LES

HILLARY CLINTON'S presidential nomination has widely been seen as a historic milestone for women. But a number of feminists are not so sure that Clinton's campaign is entirely good news for the cause.

**FALSE CHOICES:** THE FAUX FEMINISM OF HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON (Verso, 192pp., \$14.95) brings together a number of essays by feminist writers, exploring different aspects of Clinton's policies and career, and making the case that a serious feminist politics requires a more critical stance on Clinton. **CURRENT AFFAIRS** recently spoke to **THE NATION**'s Liza Featherstone, who edited the book, along with Yasmin Nair and Margaret Corvid, who each contributed to it. Speaking on the day after Clinton's nomination in Philadelphia, we asked why they don't think of Clinton as a feminist hero, and what kind of feminism they do believe in.

**CA:** We're here on the day after the nomination of the first female candidate for a major party and my question is... isn't this an exciting historic moment?

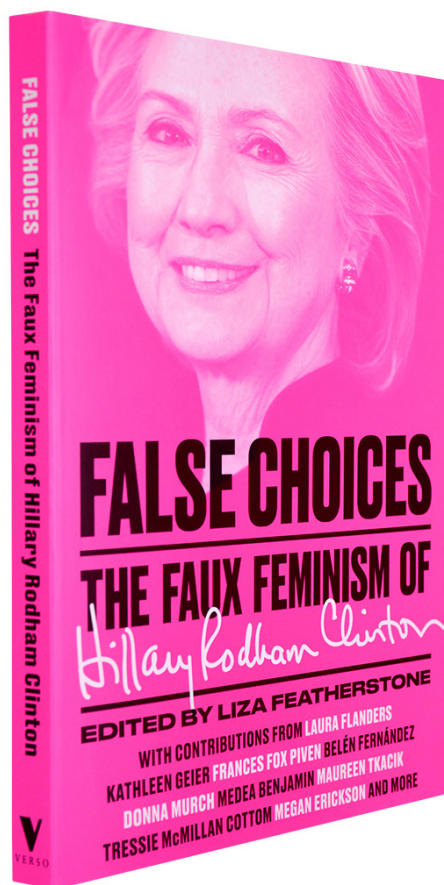
**LF:** That's your question?! Ok. No, it isn't very exciting to me. I guess the first female anything is always a bit of a milestone. But in the case of Hillary we've been hearing about her inevitability for so long, and her long established anointment as a part of the political elite. We've seen this in other countries where a female political figure rises to prominence from her family connections, and it's really nothing new or interesting. We haven't seen in those countries that it leads to a great breaking of barriers for other women. And I don't think that British women who lost their council housing saw Maggie Thatcher's presence at the top of the political structure as extremely empowering or exciting. Similarly, I think we're going to see this as a major non-event for American women.

**MC:** I'm actually a little bit critical and disappointed in all of the coverage denoting this a historic moment. In my own circles I have a lot of liberal friends, people who are saying to vote for Hillary and are extremely excited about this—representation is important to them. But

I think the focus on representation is even worse than nothing at all because it closes out opportunities for us to say that feminism is about something more than representation. It's about systemic structural change that gives women from all areas, races, classes and nationalities more opportunities to be safe, more opportunities to have a good life and have their human rights respected. And so you can talk about Hillary being the first woman as a major nominee, but besides her gender, nearly everything else is against women. That includes her support for neo-liberalism and imperialism. It includes nominating a Vice Presidential candidate who's soft on choice and is a very big hawk for free trade. You could just keep going down the list. It's all very disappointing.

**YN:** I remember the years of Margaret Thatcher and I'm glad Liza brought her up. Thatcher is responsible for the decline of the central welfare state as we know it. She was a woman who was profoundly anti-family, anti-women, anti-union, you name it. But also I remember growing up under Indira Gandhi and other women leaders in the region of what is now known as South Asia. All of whom came out of powerful families. And Indira Gandhi had terrible policies, which included forced sterilization, particularly of lower income men. The dynastic aspect makes an interesting parallel. She came out of a very powerful family and birthed a party that remains more or less now within the purview of one family. After Ranjiv there was Sanjay and so on. And Hillary Clinton is establishing something similar. She's who's also an ex president and she has a daughter who is being given the Clinton Foundation to run. What I see is exactly what we saw with the Gandhis. There's an ongoing accumulation of cultural and financial capital across generations. And everyone ignores the dynastic element. We had two Bushes, we could have more. We have the great possibility of two Clintons, perhaps even more, because Chelsea Clinton is very young, she'll have more children, and then I'm sure she'll enter politics, followed by the children. So for people who talk about this as a historic achievement, there's a terrible precedent for this kind of historic achievement.





“THEY WERE **ALWAYS A PARTNERSHIP.** WHEN YOU LOOK AT SOME OF BILL’S MOST **REACTIONARY POLICIES,** THAT’S WHERE YOU SEE HILLARY BEING A PROMINENT **INTELLECTUAL PARTNER** IN CRAFTING THE POLICY...”

**LF:** I’m glad you’re talking about the dynastic aspects. After Michelle Obama spoke at the convention, it was really striking how many people said “Oh, *she* should be president.” Are people just craving these dynasties? What did we have an American revolution for? The one accomplishment of our bourgeois revolution was that we overthrew the idea of monarchy here. Yet people just seem to be pathologically creating and recreating it.

**CA:** *Speaking of the Clintons as a family, to what extent does it make sense to talk about “Clintonism” as a unified philosophy? Every time you associate Hillary with the misdeeds or destructive legacy of Bill there’s a lot of pushback. People say, quite plausibly, that you can’t blame a woman for the crimes of her husband. Yet at the same time there is a massive effort on the part of the Clinton campaign to take credit for the first Clinton Administration’s economic gains. So should we be talking Hillary as part of something larger called “Clintonism” or not?*

**LF:** It absolutely makes sense to talk about Clintonism. It’s absurd when people say it’s unfair to associate Hilary with the crimes of Bill. After all, it’s not

as though she was folding the laundry while all of this was going on. They’ve been a team the entire time, even back in Arkansas they were known as “Bil-lary” and they were sold as a twofer. When Bill was first elected, sometimes you’d get some condescending Republican saying “Oh, ha ha, she’s the one who should be president.” Well, obviously there’s sexism there. But they *were* always a partnership. And when you look at some of Bill’s most reactionary policies, that’s particularly where you see Hillary being a prominent intellectual partner in crafting the policy as well as a prominent political partner in drumming up support and pushing for it. We see her right there all along the way. So I think it is ridiculous to think she is some sort of waiflike Alice James figure in the back while the men are doing things. It’s a strange sort of victim feminism there.

**MC:** Two points. First, the Hillary campaign really tries to have it both ways. In one sense, Hillary is trying to set up some political space for herself as a distinct individual. In another, she is running her campaign based on the record of the first Clinton Administration. But you can’t have both, even though the media would like to think that we have the capacity to believe

this confusing set of self-contradictory things. Next, the Clintons are not only consistent in a neoliberal political ideology that you could call “Clintonism,” they are also consistent in the way that they *do* politics. One thing that both Bill and Hillary have is this kind of changeability in their political perspectives. They’ll believe one thing, say about criminal justice reform decades ago, and now they believe something else. And they both seem to think that they can just give lip service to an issue and then go on and legislate policy however they want.

**YN:** We have statements to prove that they saw themselves as a team. I remember Hillary Clinton’s famous quote, “I’m not staying home baking cookies.” Then the Republicans said she was insulting housewives and she had to walk it back by bringing in a sheet of cookies and doing a photo op with them. But we have documented evidence that they operated as a team. They said it. “Eight years of Bill, eight years of Hill,” that was their slogan. In my chapter, I write about Hillary showing up at the Beijing women’s conference and making a speech about how women’s rights are human rights. And even though we’ve forgotten, that was a pivotal moment in the history of UN,



NGO, human rights discourse. Hillary Clinton wasn't there as "the wife," she was there as "first feminist."

**CA:** *The book frequently makes the point that not only does the rise of Hillary Clinton not represent an advance for women, but it actually hurts them. You go through multiple specific realms, Margaret talking about the criminalization of sex work and Yasmin talking about carceral feminism, and argue not just that the symbolism is empty, but that actual women who are marginalized and poor are affirmatively hurt by Clinton's policies.*

**MC:** The point about the symbols not being empty is really important. If the symbols were empty, we could say "Yeah, actually Hillary is not so great, but go ahead and vote for her and here's some other ideas." But her symbolic politics actually crowds out actual liberatory politics. Sex work and human trafficking is actually a really good example. There was a speech last night at the DNC by a woman named Ima Matul who is a campaigner against what they call trafficking or modern slavery. And when they were billing the speakers, they talked about Ima Matul as a sex trafficking survivor. But she wasn't actually a sex trafficking survivor. She experienced forced domestic labor. But the fact that they characterized her as a "sex trafficking" survivor really shows how the DNC and Hillary use the notion of trafficking as a tool to give themselves some feminist credibility. Hillary Clinton has long been an opponent of the full decriminalization of sex work, which sex workers are actually advocating for. When she was Secretary of State she actually used international aid and development money as a tool against it. They wouldn't give money to countries unless they signed onto a pledge that they would illegalize sex work in their countries and crack down on it. So she's trying to look like a really good feminist and say look we're going to liberate women who are enslaved. But if Hillary wanted to actually deal with issues of bad working conditions for people who migrate for work in any industry, she would advocate full amnesty for all undocumented immigrants. She would loosen border controls and make sure that people who are migrating for work don't feel criminalized and that they can go to authorities if there's a problem.

**CA:** *In your piece, you are very critical of the idea of rescuing women from sex trafficking. But to a lot of people that seems like the most unobjectionable idea in the world. Why are you so critical of something that is so universally embraced?*

**MC:** Because they're being really sneaky about it. There's something called the rescue industry, Laura Augustine and Melissa Gira Grant have written about it. There's a multimillion dollar international industry based on "rescuing" victims of trafficking. And it's a real good instant feel-good idea for people. But what it's really doing is reifying, strengthening, concepts of us and them. Consider the fishing industry. People who are in fishing are in an incredibly dangerous industry, there's lots of bad working conditions there's lots of risk of injury and death. But nobody is going around talking about making fishing boats illegal. Nobody is doing that. From a socialist perspective, we say that these people need workers' rights. They need to organize and bargain over their working conditions and have control over their working life. But this idea of "rescuing" people ignores the fact that *every* job is a negotiated network of subtle consents and coercions. We all have to work for a living. But people talk about migrated sex work as automatically being trafficking, even though they don't talk that way about other types of work. And instead of improving their working conditions you're going to "save" them from their work without actually giving them an alternative. Instead, the answer is to lock people up to jail and deport people. But if they actually wanted to fix exploitation, they wouldn't place new power in the hands of a carceral, criminological state. Instead, the agency would be given to the women themselves, those people who are traveling for all kinds of work.

**CA:** *Perhaps that's a good transition to Yasmin's piece on "carceral feminism." Could you tell us what you mean by that term, Yasmin, and why you think it's important?*

**YN:** Well, to give a very broad definition, "carceral feminism" is simply the form of feminism that thinks that the apparatus of the state is the best way to end women's oppression and enable women's freedom. The underlying log-

ic is that those who oppress women are guilty of criminal acts, and must be put in jail in larger numbers. So that logic has no problem expanding what we call the "prison industrial complex," if it's being done for the sake of women. As Margaret indicates, in the example of sex trafficking, you have mostly white liberal feminists demanding that traffickers must be put in jail. But what they ignore is that the system is set up in such a way that it is often the women themselves who end up in prison and are then deported back to the horrendous conditions they may have fled. So, for example, under sex trafficking laws, if a woman who is caught up in the dragnet of sex trafficking raids does not point to someone as her trafficker and label them a criminal, she will frequently be deported. Yet in many cases, those who they are compelled to point to as "traffickers" are in fact community members or people who have even tried to harbor or help them. So, for instance, if I were to give housing or shelter to a woman who is an immigrant and a sex worker, I could be considered a "sex trafficker" under the current law.

So "carceral feminism" takes feminist principles and then ends up increasing criminalization, sees the prison industrial complex as a solution to social problems. Now, there's a history here, and a reason why feminists turned to this approach. The fight against rape has had little support, and marital rape only became illegal in all 50 states in 1993. So using the law is in some ways understandable. But you end up seeing prison as a cure-all solution, even though prison is just another problem.

In terms of the Clintons, Hillary Clinton has recently been talking about her opposition to mass incarceration. We have to call bullshit on that. First, obviously, in the 1990s she lent public support to the crime control efforts that grew the prison population more than any other administration. Second, it was the first Clinton Administration that introduced the ten-year ban on undocumented immigrants, which means that if you have been the country without papers and you leave the U.S. and try to re-enter, you are subjected to a ten-year ban from entering. And that ban made people terrified to leave the U.S., their lives are criminalized.

**LF:** These are perfect examples of how Hillary Clinton is not just an empty symbol as a woman and feminist, but

her femaleness and her status as a prominent feminist are actually something that can be used to pursue oppressive policies. That is incredibly important.

**CA:** *If Hillary's type of feminism is oppressive, then, what type of feminism do you advocate? False Choices seems to be about more than just Hillary Clinton, in that it's trying to forge a different approach in how to think about feminist issues. It seems to not just be about criticizing her, but advocating a new type of critical, socialist-inspired feminism. And that it wants to get rid of something we might call, I hate using the word "bourgeois," but bourgeois feminism.*

**YN:** I often speak about the problems with "white liberal feminism." But you can be a "white liberal feminist" and not actually be white. I have no doubt that under the regime of Hillary Clinton we will get a diverse bunch of capitalists. First the women are allowed in, then the black people then the brown people, so I'm sure the board rooms will be very diverse. But the class structure remains in place. This type of feminism really doesn't think about an alternative to capitalism but instead thinks about ways to make capitalism more palatable and more diverse and more woman-friendly. So let's put changing tables in all the bathrooms and that will solve all of our problems. Not that di-

**LF:** The recent developments on the abortion issue are really particularly flabbergasting to me. Mo Tkacik writes really well in *False Choices* about how abortion has become the Democratic Party's sole selling point to women. But as Yasmin just pointed out, it's a pretty good one, since abortion rights are foundational to women's autonomy. What's amazing, though, is how weak Hillary is on that issue alone. She's spent a lot of time talking about overturning the Hyde Amendment, but then she picked Tim Kaine, a man who describes himself as a long term supporter of the Hyde Amendment. It's an amazing slap in the face to all of those women's organizations who have been,

## “WE CAN'T WAIT FOR FEMINIST POLICIES TO BE BESTOWED UPON US FROM ABOVE BY A WHITE KNIGHT LIKE HILLARY CLINTON...”

**LF:** We do kind of sound like old Marxists when we use the term bourgeois. But it's an important descriptor of a politics that's about the elite and protecting elite interests. This is exactly why we did this book, we do want to advance a type of left feminism that is not Hillaryism. And we see left feminist writers and thinkers who are so smart, so committed to the way feminism and the material world are actually deeply intertwined. And we want to advance that way of thinking. We aren't simply haters who hate Hillary Clinton, although... good Lord. The feminism I would like to see replacing Hillaryism in the long run would be one that is deeply committed to the advancement of *all* women, not just the 1%, or in Hillary's case, one woman. I'd like to see a feminism that is deeply committed to redistribution of wealth. It's been amply demonstrated that that is the only thing that actually helps women advance toward anything like parity to men: universal programs like socialized medicine, socialized day care, quality public schools, free higher education. These are the kinds of things that actually *do* help women. And when we see feminism and socialism coming together that's a lot more promising for both agendas.

aper changing tables aren't important. But they don't address the fundamental issues facing poor women, like brutal employment conditions.

The class element is implicated in abortion too, which Hillary Clinton supposedly cares about. We had that case of Purvi Patel in Indiana, who was given 10 years sentence for inducing an abortion. These are always poor women, wealthy women are not sent to jail for feticide, because of the class structure. But even though Democrats want us to worry about Donald Trump and what might happen to the Supreme Court, Clinton has as her Vice Presidential nominee a man who has a record of being very anti-abortion. That worries me far more than Donald Trump, who if he gets elected would resign in 3 weeks taking the best china with him, and just wants to turn the White house into some kind of glitzy Trumpian fount of wealth. Until you are unwaveringly in favor of abortion rights, you are never against inequality. Until women can control their bodies, there is no ending inequality, because what prevents women from moving forward in any realm is their inability to control contraception and control whether they want to have children or not.

the unkind way to say it is shilling for her, but have been supporting her. It's really telling to see how superficial her support is for something that most liberal feminists actually regard as an absolute cornerstone of women's rights.

**MC:** That's why we can't wait for feminist policies to be bestowed upon us from above by a white knight like Hillary Clinton, who is really just mouthing these words to get people to vote for her. In order to force through really feminist and socialist policy in the US we need a movement of women, led by women, particularly women of color, who actually disrupt the social order to get people to sit up and pay attention. The feminists who really inspire me are in groups like Black Lives Matter, which is pretty much mostly lead by black queer women. They are in leadership, they are at the head of the table. But it's not a boardroom table or an oval office table, it's a table where they're plotting how to shut down highways to protest the killings of black men and women by police. So my hope for the future of feminism is in movements like this. Not in political parties or Hillary Clinton. ♦



# TO THE CHINESE LABOR MOVEMENT



WE ALL DEPEND ON YOU

# DOES STUDENT DEBT MATTER?

by K.M. Lautrec

Beth Akers and Matthew M. Chingos, **Game of Loans: The Rhetoric and Reality of Student Debt**, Princeton University Press, \$26.95.

**I**N GAME OF LOANS, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION AND THE Urban Institute team up to debunk the entire idea of a student loan crisis. Rejecting media and activist “rhetoric” about a generation of indebted college grads, Akers and Chingos argue straightforwardly that “there is no systemic student loan crisis.” The contention, if correct, undercuts some of the main narratives surrounding student debt. One should therefore take it seriously, especially since parts of it may even be correct.

The argument here is that we tend to be misled about the general trend by focusing too much on unrepresentative cases. News stories about student loans almost exclusively feature borrowers with very high debt levels. But these borrowers are atypical. In fact, say Akers and Chingos, not *that* many students actually take out loans (one third of dependent undergrads leave school with no debt, along with one quarter of independent undergrads), and loan balances are not *that* high (58% of dependent undergrads leave with less than \$20,000 in debt, the number for independent undergrads is around 20%). Graduate students tend to push up overall averages because there are no limits on federal borrowing toward graduate degrees, but those with high grad school debt loads tend to have the highest incomes. Lawyers pay a lot to go to law school, but lawyers are still filthy rich compared to everyone else and can generally afford their loan payments.

Akers and Chingos’ strongest argument for the no-crisis theory is this: for most people, going to college is still a good investment. Most student loan borrowers reap a sufficiently large financial benefit from going to college to make up for their loan burdens. In the terminology of the housing crisis, most students are not “underwater” on their student loans, since the income gains of a college degree more than cover the debt payments. Because most students will pay back their loans, say Akers and Chingos, there is no such thing as a “crisis.”

And that *is* reassuring. For anyone fretting about student loans leading to a sudden economy-wide catastrophe on the order of 2008, a read of this book can put their worries to bed. (At least, for the moment: even if college remains a good deal right now, this could change at any moment, and given data gathering and reporting practices by the Department of Education, we might not realize things have changed until it’s too late.)

But when it comes to student loans, economic collapse was never what people should have been fretting about in the first place. The problem with the system is *not* that it’s unsustainable, but that it’s terribly racist, and causes enormous suffering to the most vulnerable student borrowers. Crises can come in many forms, and one can be urgently concerned about student debt without fearing that it is about to send the economy tumbling.

In fact, Akers and Chingos do recognize the existence of problems beyond collapse. Their last two chapters are dedicated to “The Real Problems in Student Lending” and “Solving the Real Problems.” But the issues are given an economist’s birds-eye treatment, and treated as





wrinkles rather than, well, crises. Their modest solutions aim at making the student lending system “fairer, better targeted, less risky, and more efficient.” (If that framing makes you want to stop reading this article, by all means do not read the book.)

As presented by Akers and Chingos, the *actual* problems with student loans are as follows: while debt remains great for most people, lots of students (and their parents) are making *bad* investments in education and ending up underwater on their student loans. Lots of *those* students end up in default, usually unnecessarily since they could be on income-driven repayment plans. Many of the students in default have comparatively small loan balances, but have very few economic prospects to dig their way out from even these small debts. They largely attended for-profit colleges or community colleges and either didn’t complete their degrees, or completed them only to find they are essentially worthless.

Those are indeed some real problems. Akers and Chingos rightly turn attention away from the NYU graduate student with \$200,000 in debt and toward the first generation college student IIT Tech grad in default on less than \$10,000 of federal debt. It’s natural that elite media outlets might focus their human interest stories on the travails and misfortunes of elites, but the deepest economic pain is elsewhere.

**B**UT AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ASPECT, ONE Akers and Chingos barely pay attention to, is that student loan hardship varies disproportionately by race. Compared to white students, students of color are verifiably more likely to take out student loans, more likely to take out *more* student loans, more likely to attend for-profit schools, and more likely to drop out before getting a degree. They also have less family wealth and resources to draw on for help and struggle more in the labor market. Though you wouldn’t know it from this book, student loan issues are racial justice issues.

That makes it inexcusable to conclude that there is “no crisis.” We can see this clearly if we apply the same logic to the housing crisis. Imagine for a moment that the housing collapse had remained (as it was in the beginning) confined solely to subprime mortgages, and it turned out that only the very riskiest of the loans were a problem. Imagine that the defaults, the unemployment, and the foreclosures were geographically contained in the areas with the most subprime loans, neighborhoods with primarily black and Latino residents. (Areas, remember, where lenders and brokers pushed the worst loans on borrowers who qualified for better, driven by investment bank demand for risk and profit.) In the midst of this hypothetical subprime housing crisis, Brookings Institute economists might release books analyzing whether we were dealing with a “systemic” problem, and whether there was a “crisis.” They might fret about whether the problem would spread to the rest of the economy. And were those economists to find that most people have safe, affordable mortgages, and that most homes are not underwater, they might conclude, like Akers and Chingos, that there’s no “systemic” problem. By this, they would mean that the misery created by the system will likely be geographically and demographically contained to the intended victims. It won’t creep through those bold red lines on the lenders’ maps.

Note, then, what the logic deployed by *Game of Loans* does: it views the question “Is there a crisis?” as synonymous with “Are people suffering who are not poor and/or Black and Latino?” Something becomes a crisis when it affects non-minorities; until then, the problems are “unrepresentative” and atypical. And so long as it remains that way, then no matter how *bad* it may be for those affected, it remains a mere “problem,” one that should be dealt with through moderate incremental policy reforms.

This kind of reasoning ought to be morally unacceptable. The fact that only the people pushed into predatory loans are suffering the consequences shouldn’t let anyone sleep easy. Taken seriously, this approach would allow any problem affecting black people to be treated as non-systemic, and therefore relatively non-problematic.

What *do* Akers and Chingos think the problems with student loans are? Their main concern is that some (but not most) students are making bad investments in their education. They end up in debt trying to get degrees that aren’t worth as much as they cost. This is because they unwisely choose bad schools, and end up underwater. Or they do choose

schools wisely, but simply get unlucky in the economy and end up underwater nevertheless. Impossible debt burdens, then, do exist. But they come about through a mixture of bad decision-making and bad luck.

The bad luck component is unfixable, but Akers and Chingos believe that bad decision-making can be discouraged. Students could make better decisions about their education if the federal government gave them more information about the returns they can expect on their investments by choosing different schools and programs. One can imagine something like the information boxes on credit card or loan applications required by the Truth In Lending Act (TILA). In your college application packet would be some numbers representing the graduation rate, average income, and perhaps the loan repayment rate of graduates of that school or program. Those numbers could even be bold and in really big font.

All of which is good. Telling students more about what to expect is obviously better than telling them nothing. Imagining, however, that it will make a difference in student outcomes is an economist’s pipe dream (in fact, the sort of solution that *only* an economist could ever think would be helpful). The problem is the same as with all consumer disclosures: they don’t really work. People don’t read them. Or people read them and don’t understand them. Or people read them and do understand them, but still have an unrealistically rosy picture of how the future will go for them (everyone thinks they’re the exception, nobody imagines they’re average). People routinely sign contracts for auto loans with big, clear, bold disclosures indicating that they will end up paying more than the price of the car in interest and finance charges alone. In fact, probably everyone reading this article has signed several contracts with big, bold, clear TILA disclosures on them. Anyone remember spending a lot of time thinking about them? Anyone use them to shop around? People see the warnings, they sign on the dotted line anyway.

The informational solution also ignores the effect of marketing. The schools with the worst statistics already spend enormous amounts of money on extremely effective advertising campaigns, which draw prospective students’ attention away from their well-known abysmal records (or from the fact that they’re under investigation by the federal government). The ad dollars are well-spent. Until the feds shut down the the Corinthian college network in 2015, any student at one of the member Heald Colleges could tell you their slogan: “Get in. Get out. Get ahead.” Art Institutes uses “The hardest thing you’ll ever love.” The University of Phoenix broadcasts truly inspiring commercials showing extremely dedicated students working late to do school work on top of their family and job responsibilities, fading to black with their new catchphrase: “We rise.” It’s legitimately powerful—much more so than some dry graduate income statistics slipped into a registration folder could ever be.

Akers and Chingos’ other solutions suffer from the same basic defect—they see the problem as market imbalance and resulting inefficiency. Because economists fixate on *information*, the proposals frequently focus on making the system less *confusing* rather than less *vicious*. They want to streamline federal lending to make it less complicated, and make repayment options clearer so that it’s easier for borrowers to enroll in income-driven repayment.

One of their suggestions is to automatically enroll graduates in income-driven repayment plans. But heinously, and bafflingly, they suggest getting rid of the government loan forgiveness programs on the grounds that colleges might be incentivized to raise prices if borrowers will be less worried about affording monthly payments. In doing so, they accept (but do not acknowledge that they accept) a world in which a lot of people die with massive student debt balances that have started small and grown from interest over decades, with no possibility of their ever being forgiven. (They do discuss making public college free or enacting income-sharing plans, but conclude that there’s not enough evidence to know what the consequences would be. For the economists, it’s fine to speculate without evidence on the positive effects of eliminating loan forgiveness, but not on the effects of free college.)

But enough critique. How could one better approach the student debt question? Well, any actual attempt to address the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are suffering over student loans should start by talking to people who are suffering, in order to identify what *they* are most seriously concerned with. Akers and Chingos criti-

# THE SCHOOLS WITH THE WORST STATISTICS SPEND ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF MONEY ON EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS...

cize the media for focusing on the unlikely high-debt-load borrowers, but they don't spend any time on the actual experiences of more representative borrowers. Over the last several years, as an attorney working on debt issues, I have had the opportunity to speak with a number of borrowers suffering with student debt. Let me present a few snapshots and observations, and suggest what they might tell us about the nature of the "crisis" and its solutions.

**P**EOPLE ONLY FIND OUT CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT STUDENT loans when they first fall into default. First, many are surprised to discover that the federal government can take money out of their paycheck. When private lenders do this, they usually have to take you to court first. Not so for federal student loans. One day you can get a Notice of Administrative Wage Garnishment in the mail, and a few weeks later 25% of your check will be going to your student loans whether you like it or not. No judicial review, no time to figure out what to do, just a siphon placed directly into your paycheck.

The psychological effects of this can be extreme. I have talked to several borrowers who were completely caught off guard by the garnishment. They had stopped making student loan payments because they couldn't afford them on their meager wages, only to suddenly be garnished and discover that they now couldn't afford rent. One woman told me she quit her job and moved back in with her parents because she couldn't handle the garnishment, which was stressful and humiliating. She was driving for a rideshare company in an attempt to keep as much of her wages as possible. (Although she still needs to worry about the federal government taking money out of her bank account.)

Second, people are also surprised when they learn that the federal government can take money out of your federal benefits. Private lenders are prohibited by law from taking your Social Security money, your disability money, or your veterans benefits. This makes sense, since federal benefits are meant to help people maintain a minimum standard of living, and many would be repulsed at the sight of a debt collector depriving a disabled veteran of her VA benefits over an old credit card debt. Yet the Department of Education has no problem taking from that disabled veteran's benefit. Again, no court order required. You get a letter, and then a chunk of your benefit is gone.

Once again, the effects are devastating. A friend of mine received federal disability benefits for mental health issues that made her unable to work. When a debt collector called threatening to garnish her benefits if she did not make (impossibly high) payments on her federal student loans, she had a meltdown and had to call a suicide helpline. Her benefits were garnished anyway.

Third, collection of federal student debts has no statute of limitations. Most debt can only be collected for so long. In California, for example, most debt can only be collected for four years after your last payment. If your lender (or subsequent debt collector) doesn't sue you within four years, you are no longer legally obligated to pay. Not so with federal student debt, for which you can be pursued for eternity. I once spoke to a student borrower who had attended a for-profit school in the 1980s for less than two years. He spent a long time homeless and didn't hear a word about his student debt for more than a decade. But as soon as he had gotten back on his feet, gotten stable housing and found a job, the wage garnishments started right up.

Fourth, the federal government doesn't really monitor whether schools are scams or not before giving out loans, and will sign off on loans to attend schools offering essentially Trump University-caliber educations. Even if the federal government later shuts down a school for defrauding students, they will continue to pursue the ex-attendees of the defunct school. That's what happened in the case of Corinthian Colleges. After closing the program for being transparently fraudulent, the Department of Education promised former students some kind of forgiveness program. Yet the program still hasn't been set up, and the Department is sitting on thousands of applications for relief. More than a year and a half after the schools were shut down, the Department is still pursuing the victims of the colleges' fraud.

It's important to realize that "victims" is precisely how we should view people who are defrauded out of money. It shouldn't matter whether we're talking about a Nigerian email scam or an online diploma mill. Once you meet people who have been swindled by these institutions, the "bad decisions" label becomes more difficult to apply. Many of the students have had little contact with the U.S. education system, and have limited context for evaluating it and determining which schools are good. They also often assume that the federal government wouldn't give out loans to go to bad schools. I have heard this from a number of students, especially those who immigrated from other countries. They see federal loans as vouching for the legitimacy of a school. In fact, that's hardly an unreasonable conclusion. After all, they think, why would the federal government affirmatively help students go into debt to go to sham schools? Why indeed.

The schools themselves take full advantage of this impression. You may not see many posters advertising the easy availability of federal student aid at Harvard, but you'll see a lot at for-profits. Walk past any storefront cosmetology school or culinary school and you'll find FAFSA posters filling the windows and walls. It's infuriating that people like Akers and Chingos aren't really talking about these issues, and are instead reducing their seriousness. The student loan problems noted in *Game of Loans*—those of borrowers being duped into going into debt to attend terrible for-profit schools and then not being able to afford to pay back their relatively small loan balances—are not minor. They affect large numbers of people, and are the result of some vicious economic actors targeting vulnerable students. Students who could go to decent, affordable colleges are being lied to and enrolled in terrible schools that saddle them with lifetimes of debt. The federal government is watching and doing little about it. Yet Akers and Chingos spend their energy insisting that this isn't a "systemic" crisis, because plenty of other people are fine and the economy isn't threatened.



## CAN YOU GET YOURSELF OUT OF DEBT? RULES

1. You'll need a die, and a pencil and paper for accounting purposes.
2. Start on "Go" with \$40,000 in student debt.
3. Roll once to determine your starting monthly income. 1 = \$500 per month, 2 = \$1000 per month, 3-5 = \$1500, 6 = \$4000
4. Whenever you pass go, total your income, then subtract your loan payments and any other expenses. The rest becomes your "savings." If your savings don't cover your expenses, the balance becomes new interest-accruing debt.
5. When you pass GO, you may choose to pay more than your required payment if you have available savings.
6. Don't forget to calculate interest. 10% of your loan balance is a federal loan at 5.2% interest per year, compounded daily. 25% of your loan balance is a federal loan at 7.2%, also compounded daily. And the remaining 65% is a private loan at 8% annual interest. Compounded daily, of course. Make sure your interest calculations are factored in exactly.
7. The aim of the game is to pay off your debt before you die! You die after 720 circuits, i.e. 60 years.

It's even more frustrating because these issues are so easy to solve. Many of the worst practices are directly perpetrated or enabled by the federal government itself, and the Department of Education could easily cease to do many harmful things. It could stop garnishing wages. (Or, even if it didn't stop altogether, it could stop garnishing wages below a certain threshold.) It could stop garnishing federal benefits. It could stop collection on debt past a certain age. It could more actively monitor schools and pull support from the scammy ones. It could offer group forgiveness to students with debt from the particular schools that defrauded students. It could automatically enroll students in income-driven repayment plans so no one is in default (credit where due—Akers and Chingos do endorse this). Most of these ideas wouldn't even require new legislation or rules. The Department of Education could just start doing them, if it so chose.

THE STUDENT LOAN SYSTEM AS IT currently exists is a regressive tax: those who can't afford college up front end up paying more over time to the federal government. Most people who go to college may benefit from it. But the people who *don't* benefit are disproportionately black and Latino students preyed upon by terrible for-profit schools that offer worthless degrees and saddle their students with unmanageable debt. Akers and Chingos, after minimizing the issue for the first 110 pages out of 144, begin to get at these facts. But because they are convinced it doesn't constitute a crisis, they offer only minor band-aids. People are suffering, though. They are suffering as a result of a racist system that ensnares them in lifelong debt traps. The Department of Education could do a lot about this, chooses not to. Calling this state of affairs anything other than a systemic crisis is perverse. We should be very, very angry. ♦



## BREAKFAST

(Served from 7 AM - 10:30 AM)

AMERICAN BREAKFAST  
PLATTER

\$5.50

HAM & CHEESE OMELETTE

\$6.00

BLT

\$4.25

CHEESE OMELETTE

\$5.00

WESTERN OMELETTE

\$5.75

MANGU, CON, SALAMI,  
QUESO, Y HUEVO

\$7.00

SIDE ORDER OF BACON, HAM,  
TURKEY OR SAUSAGE (EACH)

\$1.00

CREAMY LATIN STYLE OATMEAL

SM - \$2.50 MED - \$4.00 LG -

\$8.00

COFFEE CUBAN \$3.00 REGULAR

\$1.50

ESPRESSO - \$2.00 CORTADITO

\$2.25

DOUBLE CAFE CON LECHE

\$4.75

DOUBLE EXPRESSO

\$3.75

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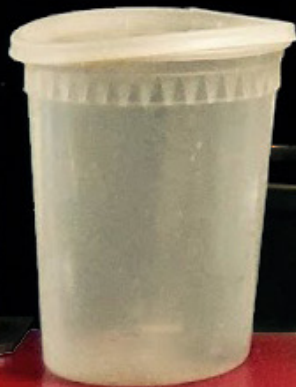
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# NA CKPACK

## AMBER A'LEE FROST ATTEMPTS TO FIND DECENT FOOD IN TIMES SQUARE...

I HATE TOURISTS BECAUSE THEY WEAR BACKPACKS.

It's an undignified way for an adult human being to carry their belongings. Take a cue from the locals and carry a purse (or—I'm sorry—"messenger bag," if you're really that insecure), but have some self-respect and get a grown-up bag. Moreover, wearing a backpack so guilelessly identifies one as an easy mark. Oh, you've decided to identify yourself as a hapless out-of-towner by strapping your personal effects behind you, outside of your line of vision, where I could simply unzip and snag the contents without you even noticing? I should rob you just to teach you a lesson.

Most of all though, backpacks are entirely unnecessary for sightseeing in New York.

It annoys me to see my adopted city treated as a wilderness, requiring "gear" more suited to camping. The backpacks are always bulging too—what is even in them? Water? We have that here—more water than you could ever drink, some of it with bubbles and flavors. Are you schlepping snacks? You're in snacktown, my friend. An extra three sweaters? Embrace the randomness of life and know that you can never truly plan for the weather. You're in a massive urban center, and there is absolutely no need load up on supplies like a sherpa dragging rich white idiots up Everest.

Of course, some tourists are indistinguishable from locals, but still others combine their backpacks with even more vulgar affectations, as if reveling in their conspicuousness.

Germans, for example, are particularly bad at matching pace with a crowd, which is unfortunate when you get stuck behind them as they often travel in impenetrable blocs of four or five. In touristy areas it's easy to get stuck behind them, as they lumber teutonically, impenetrable and oblivious, the elderly and women with strollers whizzing by and through them as soon as they see a passable breach.





I single out the Germans here not because my cultural chauvinism does not extend to other groups, but because Germans are the group I can single out without getting yelled at—not even by Germans. This is because of the Holocaust.

**B**UT WE'RE GETTING OFF TRACK.

It goes without saying that I hate Times Square, the Mecca for backpack-wearing tourists. It's not at all an uncommon opinion, of course, but it's worth seeing in print. There is some dispute as to whether former Mayor Rudy Giuliani or his predecessor David Dinkins had a bigger hand in "cleaning up" Times Square, but it was a joint effort with the city and the Disney company that pushed out the old porn shops and dives to make way for the sea of chain restaurants, high end hotels and corporate offices that now blight the area. It is the most visited place in the world, attracting 360,000 pedestrians a day; I'm not sure how many are wearing backpacks, but it is a lot.

I went to Times Square to eat at Margon, the last real diner from before the Disney "cleansing"—at least that's what everyone says, and my research turned up no others. Margon is a Cuban restaurant, currently staffed and managed entirely by 17 members of the Rivas family. It has occupied its current location since 1987, when a former dishwasher and Dominican immigrant, Rivas senior, took over the restaurant. Before that the space was a go-go bar.

I made my roommate Nick come with me because he is competent and thoughtful and hungry. I believe that while food is not necessarily best experienced socially, it certainly is best evaluated in the company of others. Also I didn't want to brave the maddening crowds alone.

We actually wove through the throngs with relative ease, down 46th street and over 7th Avenue, past the McDonald's and the Actor's Equity building and suddenly, like a mirage, a massive lateral neon sign—a palm tree and flashy letters reading "Havana Central." It appears a massive Cuban chain restaurant operates directly across the street from Margon. There are four Havana Centrals in total—Times Square, Yonkers, Edison (New Jersey), and The Roosevelt Field Mall in Garden City, New York (near the JC Penney). It's essentially a theme restaurant, with decently priced goods and retro decor modeled after Cuba's "Golden Era," which their website describes vaguely as "the 1950s."

Cuban food is chic now, and not just for the suburbanites of Edison and the tourists in Times Square. A delicious place called Pilar opened up a few blocks away from my own apartment, past the retirement housing on my block, past the family neighborhoods and the larger projects, right on the cusp of "cool" Brooklyn. It attracts deep-rooted members of the neighborhood, but it also younger crowds and recent transplants. It is "hip" without being toidy or elite.

Passing the behemoth Havana Central, we spotted the easy-to-miss entrance to Margon. Once inside it became clear how the Rivas family has been able to hold on to the property. The restaurant is incredibly narrow, with barely enough space for the cafeteria-style steam tables and fryers that kept the food hot behind spotless sneeze-guards. Tables are lined up single file against the wall, with a few larger





ones in back. The ceiling is also claustrophobically low, and it's difficult to imagine the go-go dancers once shimmying in such a cramped space.

Despite the confinement of the room and the rows and rows of steaming food, the air was cool and the atmosphere pleasant. Pitbull played on the radio—though not too loudly—and a woman with an easy smile took our order, pouring a beef stew over a massive pile of beans for me. Nick ordered beef as well, something sautéed with peppers, also served with beans and rice. The portions were massive, but we were ambitious.

I also ordered the octopus salad—which Margon is famous for. It had a piecey texture and a subtle flavor—had you not seen the suckers you might think it was light meat turkey in a light vinegar sauce. The rest of the food was uncomplex and perfectly homey—the thick gravy of my stew was so rich I scraped everything that was left onto my beans and rice to ration it. Nick's dish was every bit of magic you can do with cheap steak—all robust flavor. It was everything you want out of New York "Spanish style" comfort food, with none of the familiar pitfalls. The rice was not dry and the beans were not starchy. The meat was not gristled and the peppers weren't slimy.

It was a particularly masculine crowd, and Nick blended in more than I thought he would with his Milwaukee electric tool hat and his glasses on the end of a sport-strap. I think I saw one other woman dining. And while Pilar isn't as lilywhite as your average cidre-serving restaurant ("Would you like to see our SEE-druh menu?"), the diners at Margon were nearly all black or brown. At a large table in the back, men in work vests laughed over their food. A white guy with a handle-bar mustache and a Tommy Bahama t-shirt sat a few tables behind us. A pregnant woman ordered in Spanish, speaking with familiarity to the woman spooning her food. We left very full, and I was far calmer than I had expected to be after a trip to Times Square.

A few days earlier, JetBlue had sent its first commercial flight from the US to Cuba in nearly 50 years, and it seems as if both the urbanites and the suburbanites have their own Cuban fantasies again, whether nostalgic, chic or bohemian. Margon caters to no fantasy at all. It is a place to eat, to eat comfortably and well, and a place to take refuge from the crowds. It was small enough to escape Disney, and it is too small for backpacks. ❖



# IS DEMOCRACY BECOMING UNFASHIONABLE?

Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Princeton University Press, \$29.95  
Don Watkins and Yaron Brook, *Equal is Unfair: America's Misguided Fight Against Income Inequality*, St. Martin's Press, \$26.99

SO AT LAST THEY TELL US HOW THEY really feel! Usually, with free-market libertarians, there's a bit of a pretense: of course they're committed to the values of decency, democracy, and goodwill among human beings. They just think the best way to attain those things is to allow capitalism to freely have its way with us, and to let the benevolent guiding hand of the free market carry us toward utopia. One has always suspected that this is a bit of a lie, and that people really become libertarians because think they should be entitled to vast wealth, and believe the poor are dumb. It is refreshing, then, to see two new books by libertarian scholars openly admitting that their political philosophy does indeed amount to: "Sucks to you, I've got mine." Jason Brennan, in *Against Democracy*, suggests that only smart people (people like Brennan) should be allowed to vote, since everyone else simply Doesn't Know What's Good For Them. Don Watkins and Yaron Brook, in *Equal is Unfair*, argue that focusing on addressing inequality ignores the plight of rich people, and it would be very unfair to punish them for their success.

Brennan details a long list of the problems with the ideals of democracy and mass participation. First, the more participation there is, the more polarized, ineffective, and self-destructive a political system is. Second, most people don't need to participate anyway; they would be far better off staying home and not getting involved in politics. Third, democratically-made policies undermine our "right to competent government." Brennan asks us to reconsider the pro-democratic question "Why should some people be entitled to govern and others not?" Instead, Brennan says, we should ask "Why should the majority get to impose its incompetent governance on a minority?" Universal suffrage, Brennan says, stands in violation of the "competence principle." Brennan therefore suggests a "rule of the knowers" ("epistocracy") and reinstituting voting tests. There should be no more "right" to vote. Rather, voting should be a privilege that comes with having adequate knowledge and preparation for governance.

Unraveling Brennan's argument is as simple as

recalling the old saying "democracy is the worst system of government, except for all the others." Brennan pulls a trick here. He says he is putting democracy alongside "epistocracy," and that epistocracy comes out ahead. In fact, he compares *actually-existing* democracy with *hypothetical* epistocracy. Thus he doesn't answer a single one of the major questions around restricted suffrage: in practice, wouldn't voting tests probably be used (as they have for their entire history) to disenfranchise the socially powerless? Wouldn't such a system inevitably be abused, and wouldn't "knowledge" just become a stand-in for "things powerful people believe"? (Brennan admits that wealthy white men will probably be considered the most "knowledgeable," but does not appear to have a problem with this.) By presenting democracy with all its warts, but giving no thought to how "epistocracies" work in practice, Brennan avoids confronting the difficult fact that his preferred system of government, if adopted, will almost certainly reinstate Jim Crow.

It therefore goes without saying that Brennan's book is morally disgusting, since it's a manifesto in favor of seizing a right from African Americans that took them centuries of bloodshed to win. People died for that right, but to the Princeton University Press it's apparently an interesting matter for academic debate. Brennan believes that most black people are probably too dumb to vote, and that we should return to one of the darkest eras in our politics. He does not have the guts to contemplate what his proposals would look like if implemented, since this would involve having to make difficult arguments. But at least this book is honest in one way, since it exposes the libertarian project as fundamentally opposed to the basic rights of human beings, its grand paeans to liberty being thin cover for taking the vote away from poor people.

BRENNAN SHOWS THAT LIBERTARIAN "liberty" means oligarchical injustice in the political realm. Watkins and Brook apply the corresponding principle to the economic realm. They are perturbed, deeply so, by recent Pikettyish rumblings among the plebians, who seem to believe that gross excesses of wealth are inexcusable in a

time of deep suffering. Watkins and Brook want to prove that attempts to reduce inequality are violations of people's rights. They believe that all redistribution of wealth, including every social welfare program, is an unfair "punishment of success" and directly advocate abolishing Social Security, Medicare, all public schools, inheritance taxes, and the minimum wage.

Again, it is refreshingly honest. Because they believe that personal property is an extension of the self and that all property is "earned," they believe that any infringement on property rights is unjustified. Thus, there is not only no government obligation to relieve poverty, but any attempt to do so is actively immoral.

As for all libertarians, the case collapses because it is based on mysticism rather than reason. Property rights are not given by God but are defined by legal institutions; it is unclear why there should be some eternal natural entitlement to something created statutorily. Watkins and Brook believe that all financial gain is reward for individual "work" and "effort," even though a capitalist can literally make bundles of money sitting in an easy chair watching people pick fruit for him for 20 cents an hour. Watkins and Brook believe that "wealth is created by, and morally belongs to, the individual creator." But this can't hold up to scrutiny; no one person can "create" wealth by themselves, and it is unclear where such a "moral" right would come from.

Watkins and Brook legitimately believe that opposition to inequality is about "envy," a desire to cut down people who have more than us. But they do not consider a different explanation: that when one sees a hotel maid working 14-hour-days breaking her back for minimum wage, and one sees the Trump children, one can no longer hold the position that wealth accrues in accordance with "desert."

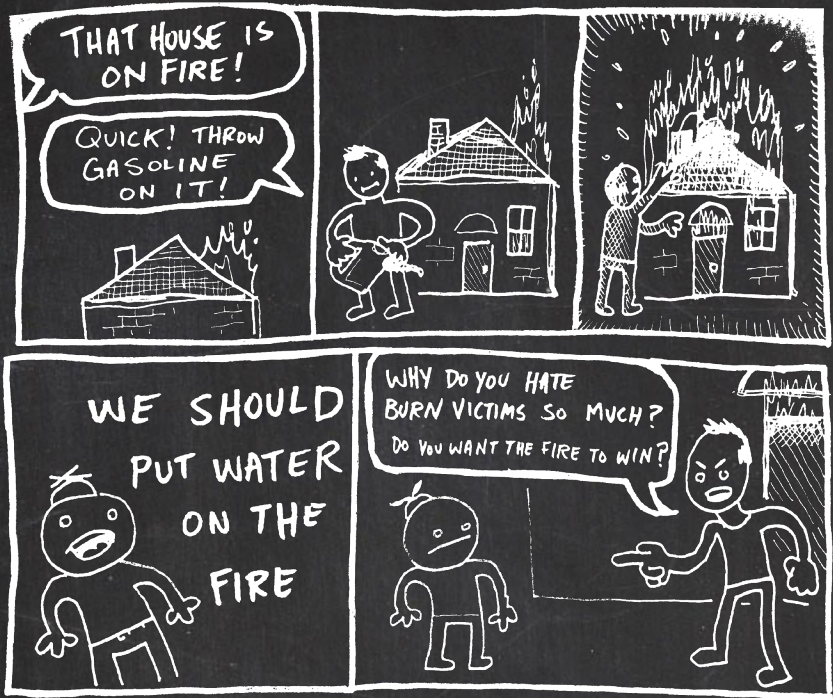
Watkins and Brook favorably quote Bono, who contrasts the American attitude to "success" with the Irish attitude. In America, people look up at the mansion on the hill and say "One day that could be me." In Ireland, they look up at the mansion and say "One day I'm gonna get that bastard." If you ask us, the Irish are onto something. ♦



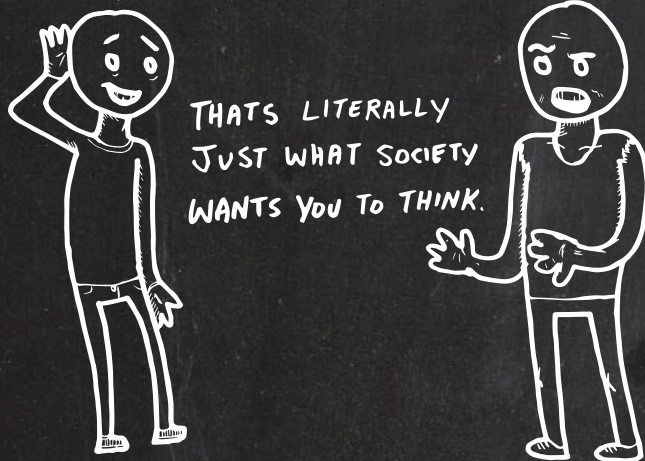


# RUDE & PATRONIZING COMICS!

BY SHON



I ALWAYS FIND VAGUE APPEALS TO WHAT "SOCIETY" THINKS OR WANTS UNCONVINCING BECAUSE OUR IDIOCULTURAL SPHERE IS INHERENTLY PLURALISTIC.



I'M A SAPIOSEXUAL...



I'VE GOT IT!

MAYBE IF THINGS GOT WORSE INSTEAD OF BETTER, IT WOULD BE A CATALYST FOR REVOLUTION!



SLEEP DEPRIVED MALNOURISHED CHRONICALLY SICK PEOPLE WORKING MULTIPLE JOBS IN POOR LABOR CONDITIONS

ARE THE BEST POUTICAL ORGANIZERS!

# FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEW

The visual side of things has previously eluded Current Affairs. "Why should it matter how things look?" thundered the editor in board meetings. "What's important is how things ARE." Fortunately, a sailor's slew of irate reader correspondence has convinced us the prior approach was folly. With much reluctance, we therefore introduce a "Film & Television" section, so that it may never be said that Current Affairs has few opinions on the visual and televisual arts. In this section, which shall be published irregularly, we will host conversations about the latest hit pictures, as well as commentary on the propagandistic nature of all art.

FROST/  
CHRISTMAN  
TRANSCRIBED BY MICHAEL FANTAUZZO

We present a film discussion between Amber Frost and Matthew Christman, adapted from the title podcast. Frost/Christman examines the political implications of both contemporary and classic cinema. We join our hosts mid-conversation...

**AF: ...It seems to me that a lot of the podcast success that I've experienced is really just people grasping for any bit of driftwood in the horrifying and continual slow sink of America into the burning oceans of death. Culturally speaking, we are just taking advantage of a fire sale. We're cleaning up in the ruins, the ever-growing ruins of America.**

MC: And today we're talking about another time in American history that was dominated by a sense of almost universal distrust in American political institutions, a time when everyone in America was basically on the same page that the people in charge were actively malicious, had no interest in the general good, and were covering up a host of unspeakable crimes. I am, of course, talking about the period directly after the Watergate scandal in the 1970s; a time that spawned an entire genre of films you can kind of call, loosely, conspiracy or para-



noia thrillers. We're going to talk about two films directed by the great Alan J. Pakula, who made a loose trilogy of films in the early 70's known as the "Paranoia Trilogy." The two we're discussing today, *Parallax View* from 1974 and *All the President's Men* from the bicentennial year of 1976, are among the most interesting of the "paranoia thriller" genre. We're going to start with *All the President's Men* because as we've

I knew it was a break-in, but I didn't know that it led to the exposure of a lot more coordinated corruption at the highest level. So it made this massive impression on me, but in a very high school way where I just ended up saying "freedom of the press is the cornerstone of our democracy." Just this very immature interpretation of it because it's just a cool movie.

MC: It's very much an attempt to make heroes out of newsmen. It recapitulated noir but the hero is no longer a cop or a private detective, he's a reporter. The reporters are the story even more than



said, Watergate is the primal scene here. It's the event that spawned all of these other movies, spawned this generalized sense in American culture of suspicion and paranoia about government.

**AF:** Speaking of formative, I actually saw this for the first time in high school. I think my history teacher was hung over and popped in *All the President's Men*. And I remember thinking it was so good, but for all the dumb high school reasons that you think a movie is good. First of all, it's almost put together like noir. The shots of Deep Throat, they could be German Expressionist. There's this hint of blue light across his eyes, and the dialogue at times can be really choppy. It's more conversational than an actual noir, but for a nonfiction film, especially of that period, it's extremely stylized. And I thought it was so cool, even though I really didn't understand Watergate.

**AF:** There was so much classically romantic treatment. They wanted it to look documentarian, but with these cool noir-y stylized things. It was so invested in creating these heroes, these great truth tellers. In fact, one of the big complaints by historians about the film is that it eliminated all of the other people who were involved. It has Ben Bradlee in it, but there was a team of people at the Post ensuring that this information came to light and supporting this highly controversial investigative work.

MC: And not just people from the Post, but other newspapers. There's an interesting subplot in the movie about them

TV

**Review: Designated Survivor,**  
ABC, Wednesdays, 10pm  
by David Fonseca

It was recently reported that the case of Aaron Sorkin's "The West Wing" would re-unite on the campaign in support of Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacy. The announcement was met with derision both by the conspiratorial right (who believe Clinton to be a dark-arts practicing crypto-Marxist who has personally slaughtered a handful of grown men despite being afflicted with typhoid fever) and by the hard left, who remain appalled by her campaign's seemingly intentional embrace of every one of the most off-putting clichés of what we might call Borowitz Report Liberalism.

But there is at least one constituency that Clinton could reach by enlisting the West Wing cast. It's the small faction of policy fetishists who were raised on Sorkin's White House drama. They are the people who change their Twitter display names to "Bartlet 2016," and believe the unsatisfying outcomes produced by America's political system aren't the product of naturally occurring ideological clashes inherent in a representative democracy, but are due to a deficit of Dartmouth-educated economics professors in positions of executive authority.

ABC's "Designated Survivor," a deeply stupid show about a Secretary of Housing and Urban Development named Tom Kirkman who gets to be president after all of Congress is murdered by terrorists, is for those people.

Kirkman has little in common with the alpha-operator Jack Bauer, the character that made leading Sutherland a mainstay on America's TV sets. His wife won't screw him, his son hates his dumb dad jokes, and his daughter mocks the flaccid pancakes he cooks for breakfast. And though he's presented as a competent civil servant with a knack for compromise, he's about to lose his post as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and be jettisoned to Montreal for an ambassadorship to something called the Civil Aviation Association.

But these details of Kirkman's life are presented to us in flashback, for Kirkman has just caught his big break: a terrorist attack on the U.S. Capitol that kills everyone inside, including the President. Kirkman was watching from an undisclosed location, because as the show's title and several months of promotional material remind us, he's the Designated Survivor. If you missed

being pissed that they didn't get a particular scoop, and going to Miami to get it back. where you get the impression that what's really driving them is much less some sort of abstract desire for the truth, but a competition with the New York Times.

**AF: Also horniness. They're very horny. It is such a high-T film. They're highly competitive guys. At least Dustin Hoffman in it portrays Bernstein as kind of a poon hound. It's a very dudely movie, a cool-guy movie.**

MC: Their T is almost as high as their pants.

**AF: I love the high pants, love the thick ties.**

MC: There's some good 70's fashion in this movie.

**AF: The ties are like canoes. Aesthetically it's amazing. The fashion's great, the cars in it are great.**

MC: Massive boats. Big cars, big pants... What has happened to America? Driving around in Smart Cars wearing skinny jeans.

**AF: And there's Bernstein's cool-ass apartment, with just weird glass vases everywhere. I've been to journalists' apartments. They don't look like that. Journalists do not have an eye for bohemian design.**

MC: I remember thinking Bernstein's place looked baller.

**AF: It looked like a bachelor pad.**

MC: A place you'd bring a girl for fondue. And you know she starts unbuttoning the blouse half an hour into it. It's like, "Damn, Bernstein, that's how you bagged Nora Ephron..."

**AF: Anyway, let's talk a little bit about ratfucking.**

MC: Ratfucking. That's a practice described in the film. In intelligence terms, it's "black propaganda." You make fake documents ascribed to your opponent in order to undermine their credibility. When Woodward and Bernstein meet and interview one of the CREEP operatives, Donald Segretti, they talk about the 1972 ratfucking campaign. It included, most famously and probably most effec-

tively, the "Canuck letter," in which someone wrote to a New Hampshire newspaper claiming to have heard frontrunner Edmund Muskie making a disparaging comment about French Canadians. That was very damaging in heavily French Canadian New Hampshire, and led to a snowballing effect, with accusations about Muskie's wife being an alcoholic...

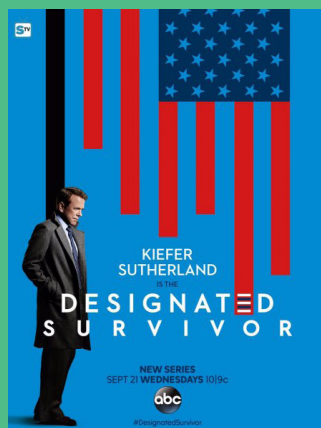
**AF: Well, they didn't just put out these rumors, they stole his stationery. They would have people volunteer for the campaigns, then when they were in the campaign offices grab the stationery so that they would have a template to send out. So on Muskie's stationery, they apparently accused a senator of having like an illegitimate child.**

MC: And it all culminated in Muskie doing a press conference outdoors in the winter in New Hampshire where he defended his wife's honor and it looked like he cried. There's still dispute to this day about whether he did cry or whether it was the snow. Either way, it destroyed him. He was done. And the only guy who didn't get ratfucked was the guy Nixon wanted to face, George McGovern, whom Nix-

# DESIGNATED SURVIVOR

those promos, here's what you need to know: Kirkman was randomly selected to sit out the State of the Union on the off-chance that every elected U.S. representative is x-ed out on the one night of the year they all gather in the same spot. The doomsday scenario actually happens, and Kirkman is thrust from his station as a D.C. ham-and-egger to leader of the free world.

It's all pretty predictable from there. He questions whether or not he's really up to the job (though probably not quite enough for a guy who got the commander-in-chief gig thanks to a confluence of dumb luck and pyrotechnics). Straight away, however, Kirkman starts bringing a level of decency, integrity and stone cold savvy that only true policy wonks possess. For starters, he stares down a war-ready general who wants to use the capitol bombing as an excuse to attack a fleet of Iranian ships in the Strait of Hormuz. He not only bests the red-assed general using his superior knowledge of Iranian oil shipping lanes, but he sends a stern



message to a devilish (aren't they always) Iranian ambassador: "dock your ships within three hours or I'll bomb Tehran." Not bad for a guy whose wife thinks about Lin-Manuel Miranda while she blows him (probably).

Designated Survivor is treacly wish-fulfillment for every under-appre-

ciated middle manager who'd like to believe he's got what it takes to do the boss' job, though he'd never say such a thing out loud. But it's the show's obsession with the nobility of regular people that makes it truly repellent. The problem with American politics, it argues, is that too many bad people are engaged in the process, which prevents us from reaching the consensus that every American craves deep down. If only our democratically elected government were handed over to a council of benevolent, Ivy-educated wonks, we'd get the sort of tax credits, charter school voucher programs, and sensible Middle Eastern ground wars that we all truly agree on. Unfortunately, the partisans are too busy grousing about Wall Street or trans-bathrooms to deliver. It's perhaps fitting that Kirkman's predecessor is obliterated just moments after acknowledging the obscene wealth accumulation enjoyed by "the 1-percent."

One can feel the legacy of Sorkin's Bartlet here. In the Sorkinian world-

view, there are no class interests, no ineradicable conflicts. We simply fail to choose leaders with the proper combination of hokey Ordinary Folk Common Sense and expensive graduate education. It's this same attitude that leads Clinton supporters to lament America's collective indifference toward her résumé and professed love of policy minutiae.

It's significant that this pilot episode spends very little time mourning the tremendous human cost of the capitol bombing. Perhaps there'll be a memorial service in future episodes in which Kirkman is challenged to present his plainspoken decency to America. But in truth, the creators of Designated Survivor don't really see tragedy in the mass slaughter of Washington's elected body. They see opportunity. And perhaps it would be opportune. But it's hard to imagine a less exciting way of capitalizing on the moment than replacing all the dead people with a guy who still he wears his Cornell zip-up and probably reads vox.com. ♦



on then dutifully did face and destroy.

But there's a funny background to the film, because as they keep finding out about all of this ratfucking, and about Watergate, you realize it's totally superfluous, because you keep hearing about things like the Eagleton disaster. That's where it was discovered that Thomas Eagleton, McGovern's vice presidential nominee, had had electroshock therapy, and they had to kick him off the ticket. And so McGovern's campaign is totally fucked, and Nixon's going to cruise to reelection. Yet Nixon still does this unnecessary thing that will ultimately doom him, which makes a kind of ironic counterpoint to everything that's going on.

Regarding ratfucking, though, we can talk about contemporary parallels. Trump's former campaign manager Roger Stone has been in the news lately. He's acting as sort of the thug voice of unbridled Trumpism, vowing to put people in the streets to fight back if Hillary wins, on the assumption that any Hillary victory would be through electoral fraud. (Although I would honestly advise him to check in on what the BMI of the average Trump supporter is before vowing that he's going to have these guys fighting in the streets.) But Stone got his start in 1972 as one of Nixon's ratfuckers. He was there on the ground floor. And, as the funniest story from that, on one of his earliest missions he was supposed to donate to the Muskie Campaign on behalf of the "Homosexual Alliance" or some group like that. He was going to write a check in that name, so that they could go "Look who's donating to Muskie." But Stone worried that people would think he was gay, so he changed it to the "Young Communists League" or something.

**AF: No homo.**

MC: Yeah, Roger Stone no homo. He might like orgies, but not gay ones. He looks away from the dick and balls when the orgies are happening. He wants you to know that.

**AF: I think we were hoping for the most horrifying type of ratfucking from the DNC email leak, but a lot of what came out of it was incredibly inept and weird. But one of**

**the things that stuck out to me was that they considered a contemporary kind of anti-Semitism against Sanders. Not like "Well, you know he killed our lord." But one of the emails from the CFO of the DNC, Brad Marshall, said "it might make no difference, but for Kentucky and West Virginia, can we get someone to ask his belief." Astroturfing organic comments from the crowd is a huge ratfucking thing. And he said, "does he believe in a God? He had skated on saying he has 'Jewish heritage.' I think I read he's an atheist." This could make several points difference with my peeps. My southern Baptist peeps would draw big difference between a Jew and an atheist." My peeps!**

MC: Yeah that's just that's how far we've fallen...

**AF: I know it's almost like they're just such failures now.**

MC: Yeah, they're just, they're low-T fucking lanyard dorks.

**AF: It's because they're Democrats.**

MC: They've never had the gut instinct.

**AF: They didn't have a taste for the jugular, as they said in *All the President's Men*.**

MC: A lot of that is because these Republican guys have been forging this ruthlessness in College Republican politics for 40 years now. That's where the guys who got Goldwater the nomination learned their trade, that's where Karl Rove learned his trade. I was not a College Democrat but I have a feeling that their blood runs a little weaker than the College Republicans.

**AF: I was a college Democratic Socialist, and we're a disparate**

"Regarding ratfucking, we can talk about contemporary parallels..."

**bunch, but we thought the college Democrats were bitches. That was our impression of them, as ineffectual as we were.**

MC: That sounds about right.

**AF: That's the weird thing about this movie, though. It's viewed as a triumph of "non-fiction fictionalization" or whatever. But it's not the most informative view of the Watergate scandal. It's good because it doesn't reduce it to "oh, there was a break-in in a hotel." But you're not going to get the best overview of the mass corruption at the highest level.**

MC: It's an incredible amount of detail, but it's very, very narrowly focused on the specific stories that Woodward and Bernstein were writing in the immediate aftermath of the break-in. And I think part of that is because the audience knew the broad outlines of the story by that point. They were familiar with it, so it really was a question of "what story are we going to tell?" to an audience that knows the whole thing. We're not going to have Sam Ervin up there yelling from the Judiciary Committee chair. They saw that on TV. We got to give them something they haven't seen before. What they hadn't seen, and what nobody had seen, was the heroic narrative of Watergate.

**AF: Not just heroic! Cool. Like Ben Bradlee with his fucking shoes on the desk.**

MC: Oh God, Robards is so cool.

**AF: He's the coolest guy in the movie. He's got that voice.**

MC: I would say Jason Robards's Ben Bradlee is one of the coolest dudes in any movie ever. But it gives you someone to root for, it gives you a narrative of heroism and cool in a situation that did not really have any of that.

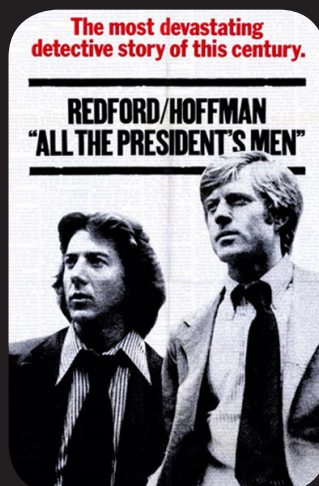
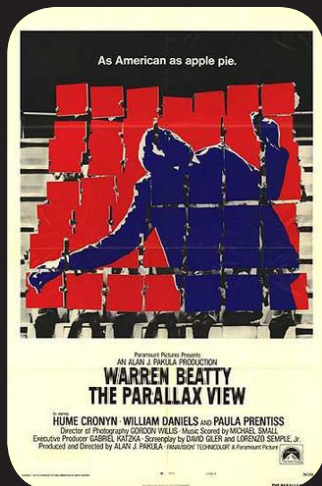
The thing that stuck with me is that last shot. In the lead up to the last shot, they've just been dealt a massive setback. A guy who they had used as a source in the story has repudiated what he told them, and that left them with egg on their face, and there's a lot of pressure on the Post to pull the stories or fire them. Then it's this shot of a television showing Nixon's second inaugural, and in the background are Woodward and Bernstein on their typewriters, and the sound is those clattering typewriters. And the idea you get in your head watching this is "They're going to win. They're going to get this guy. He thinks he got away with it, but they're back there and they're just slowly sharpening their knives and they're going to cut his heart out." It is a way to offer this triumph. And that's interesting, because one thing that the rest of the post-Watergate movies had in common is they're very grim and they're very pessimistic about America. They're contemptuous about the idea of heroism, the idea of defeating the negative forces that control our lives. And one of them is the film Pakula made two years before *All the President's Men*, called *Parallax View*. You have a great pithy description of what *Parallax View* is.

**AF: I was watching this with a friend because I hadn't seen it before, and he told me "this is like if *All the President's Men* were a *Dukes of Hazzard* episode."**

MC: That's 100 percent correct.

**AF: It is! It's "ah, journalist got himself in a sticky situation again. How's he going to get out of this one?"**

MC: There's even a car chase. War-



ren Beatty, who's the hero, is trying to escape this Bubba of a rural deputy. The cars get covered in mud and one of them crashes through a general store. It's incredibly *Dukes of Hazzard*.

**AF: There's so much activity in this movie. There are no periods of tense dialogue or anything. Do you want to give people a synopsis?**

MC: *Parallax View* starts with the assassination of a sort of maverick left-wing senator as he's addressing a party at the top of the Space Needle in Seattle.

**AF: He's saying "I'm not beholden to anyone I'm so independent." You're very optimistic, you like him immediately.**

MC: His last words are literally something like "some people think I'm too independent." And then he gets ridled with bullets.

**AF: It's a shock, too. I didn't see it coming. It's beautifully shot.**

MC: You're watching it behind the glass and you see his back, then the glass gets covered in blood. It's very upsetting and abrupt. Then one of the waiters has a hilarious *Keystone*

Kops race to get to the top of the Space Needle and he ends up falling off of it and dying. And he's the guy who's fingered as the assassin, but we see that there was another gunman, who puts a gun away and escapes.

**AF: The Kennedy assassination parallels here are kind of obvious. There was all of this promise, and then there's this sudden, very public insane violence.**

MC: Then we get a commission behind desks who intone the results of their inquiry, that the assassination was by one lone gunman and there was no evidence of a conspiracy. That sets the situation up. But then we focus on Warren Beatty, the star of the film, playing (like a lot of these movies) the journalist who is visited by his next girlfriend who was a witness to the assassination and claims—

**AF: She's a hysterical woman. This is another very high-T film.**

MC: She's essentially the only female character in this. I'm surprised he didn't do the old "slap her in the face to get her to stop being hysterical" moment.

**AF: I think that was probably considered. I don't just want to joke about these being high-T films, though. They are incredibly sexist. But I'm just not that kind of moralizing feminist. I think we can accept that they're sexist and move on.**

MC: We sort of have to assume that any movie about a badass taking on the power in the 60s and 70s is not going to be very considerate of gender equity.

**AF: It's just a lot of pussy hounds with shaggy hair and a take-no-prisoners attitude.**

MC: Speaking of that, they have to try to get information out of like half a dozen hysterical broads in *All the President's Men*. There are all of these women who work at CREEP who they



# FILMS OF 9/11

BY FELIX BIEDERMAN

Everyone has a story about what they were doing on September 11, 2001. Most of these stories are false. Sure, the fundamentals are correct; where we were, who we were with. But in the retellings, people always seem to have had more profundity and understanding than they actually did. Most people spent 9/11 open-mouthed and baffled, unsure of what to do, though they knew everything was horrible. But when people talk about it, they pretend they understood, that their feelings were deep, their questions wise. Younger people will tell you that they were in social studies, and that after the TV had been wheeled in, they asked the teacher some piercing question, like "Will more people die now?" Older people will tell you about some grave musing, possibly a nearby World War II veteran observing "This is going to be very bad." or will talk about how some interoffice grudge evaporated instantaneously, the aggrieved parties tearfully hugging one another while people were being cooked alive in the World Trade Center. It's not that none of these things happened. It's that their significance is applied retroactively, and the feelings of chaos and shell shock we actually experienced on the day are supplanted by orderly and meaningful narratives.

Only a handful of films have been made about the attacks in the fifteen years since they happened. But the fog that afflicts our collective memories similarly affects the fictionalizations. Just as autobiographies consist of what authors choose to remember, representations of 9/11 display what we wish we had in place of our actual memories. Some precocious youngsters did probably say some profound things. But there were also plenty of people hunkered into their basements with assault rifles be-

cause they thought World War III was about to start immediately. And there were others who saw the attacks as an opportunity to commit hate crimes against Sikhs, on the logic that you can upend terror plots by assaulting every stranger in a turban. Not to mention our other post 9/11 indiscretion, when we gave the state free reign to roll back civil liberties while doing to Central Asia and the Middle East precisely what was done unto us in Manhattan (i.e. burning large numbers of people to a crisp).

We look at this behavior now as if recovering from a severe hangover. We speak like a guy apologizing for how he got drunk and did something either racist, horny, or both. That wasn't the real us, we rationalize. The real us was not the still-raging civil war in Iraq, or the ongoing hate crimes against Muslim Americans. It was cute questions to our parents or the hug we gave to a detested coworker.

Our films are here to reassure us that we are right.

The first 9/11 blockbuster was *United 93*, a 2006 drama directed by Englishman and ex-journalist Paul Greengrass (now better known for his contributions to the Bourne franchise). Either despite or because of its proximity to the actual events of 9/11, *United 93* stays impressively far away from saccharine emotionality or crazed bloodlust. It attempts a claustrophobic realism, mostly taking place in the cabin of the Boeing 757 as four terrorists attempt to crash the plane into the U.S. Capitol Building.

The film features no major stars. Even Jeremy Glick (the passenger whose supposed mid-flight battle cry of "let's roll!" became a slogan for pissed off suburban war dads who wanted to drop Agent Orange on Mecca) is played by the little-known Pe-

ter Hermann. The cast of experienced character actors brings competence and gravity to the film, an effect that could easily have been ruined by the addition of the expected maudlin scenery chewing from a top-tier leading man or woman. The creative risks Greengrass took with *United 93* make it a nerve-racking, evocative experience. It uses steadicam to great effect in the tight, panic-inducing spaces of the plane and air traffic control booth. Cinematically, the film is superb, and it deserves the acclaim it won from critics.

The film is obviously forced to take some liberties; it is, after all, difficult to reconstruct the precise goings-on of a flight with no survivors. Nevertheless, some story choices are blatant propaganda. A German passenger named Christian Adams (a real victim of the real Flight 93, played by Erich Redman) is portrayed as trying to appease the hijackers, a hyponym for the weak Euros who dared to second-guess us on Iraq. Adams is shown to be simpering and unrealistic in the face of pure evil, even though neither the filmmakers nor anyone else could possibly have known about the real man or events on board.

But in its general tone, the film accurately portrays how people act in situations of crisis. They don't burst into spontaneous displays of unity. They don't understand the geopolitical consequences of the horrors unfolding in front of them. They are alternately confused, terrified, and enraged. The air traffic controllers, whom we follow for much of the film are apoplectic, constantly cursing how little they know and making wild guesses as to what could possibly be happening.

The next major movie that directly confronted 9/11 was in many ways, *United 93's* opposite

CONTINUED ON P. 38

# "WATERGATE MADE IT **ACCEPTABLE** TO CHALLENGE GOVERNMENT AT A **BASIC LEVEL**, IN TERMS OF ITS BENEVOLENCE AND THE NOTION THAT IT HAS **NO INTEREST IN DEMOCRACY.**"

try to get stuff out of, and they're all just on the verge of tears at all times. They have to apply their machismo on them to get to admit what happened.

**AF:** The first major tip they got was just some girl on the Hill. And it's Dustin Hoffman chain-smoking doing the "you're very attractive." And I guess he sells it.

**MC:** So in *The Parallax View*, this hysterical female claims that someone wants to kill her, that all these other witnesses have died. He gives her the high hat, but next shot is her on a slab in the morgue. And even though she just warned him she was next, that she was going to be killed, they tell him "oh she OD'd on barbiturates behind the wheel of a car." But now he thinks "OK, this is bullshit." And he takes a journey around the country. He ends up discovering that there's this organization called the Parallax Corporation whose job it is to cultivate and then rent out lone gunmen for anybody who can pay for them. And what's interesting about this is that the conspiracy here is very nebulous. We never really get any idea of the motives of the people who hire the Parallax Corporation.

**AF:** Or why they require weird brainwashing, or why this is the most productive way to get gunmen for hire. It's kind of a plot hole there: you could just find a psycho who has good aim.

**MC:** But what it's trying to do is evoke

the sense that there is a hidden force basically acting against democracy. The idea that if anything pushes too far against the restraints of the American two-party system, it will be brought down by some force or another that can pay these guys, these lone gunmen to do it. In 1974 that had to have been how everybody felt.

**AF:** At that point, it was seven years past the *Summer of Love*. Some of the idealism had disappeared but it was still a highly political time. People think of the 60's as the time when everyone was in the streets, but there were tons of people in the streets in the mid-70's. It just didn't have the utopianism anymore.

**MC:** It didn't have the hippy edge. It was sliding into cynicism and anger. That was the time when the Weathermen broke off from SDS and started blowing up bathrooms.

**AF:** And themselves, sometimes.

**MC:** Yes, hilariously. Pervasive frustration. "Shit, there's really no way to get through this." And that's what these movies really represent, a breathtaking paralysis when you look upon the political system you live in and realize that there is no changing it. There's too much concentrated wealth and influence at the top. These things are really just dramatizations of that feeling.

**AF:** There's an anxious fantasy about it too, in the very Freudian

sense. *Parallax View* isn't just *All the President's Men* if it were a *Dukes of Hazzard* episode. There's also a nice sprinkling of *Manchurian Candidate* in there. Because they didn't know what the corruption actually looked like, so they imagined the process.

**MC:** The Parallax Corporation don't just get guys off the street and say "Hey, you shoot this guy." It's a multistage recruitment process. There's a questionnaire you have to fill out.

**AF:** Figure out if you're a psycho.

**MC:** And if you score psycho enough on the test, then you can go to the next stage. This is something the *Parallax View* is most remembered for, I think it's the highlight of the film. It comes halfway through: Warren Beatty has taken on an assumed identity and has gotten the test taken on his behalf by a murderous mental patient. And the basis of his high score on the test, he's been given the next round. And in the next round, he goes to the Parallax headquarters and they strap him into a chair. And they show him this 6-minute montage film that's deeply unsettling.

It starts off very slow paced. It gives you prompt words like "home," "mother," "father." Along with them, you get images that are meant to evoke those things, like a family around the dinner table. Norman Rockwell, a picket-fenced house, that kind of stuff. Then you get things like "God" and you get a Congre-



gationalist church with a nice white steeple. Then you get "enemy" and there's Hitler and Nazis. Then you get "God" again, and it starts to go faster and faster and it starts, most crucially, to start mingling everything together before every prompt. And one of the prompts is "me" and it shows images of a child in various stages of distress. A child running away from a guy who looks like he's going to beat him up. A child huddled up in a dark room.

**AF: Again a sort of crude fantasy Freudianism of The Manchurian Candidate. Inner child talk.**

MC: Then it starts getting really jumbled up; the pace of the editing is faster and faster. It includes lots of images of sex, both homoerotic and heterosexual. Then you get

dead people. You get bullets. You get blood. You've got General MacArthur screaming. And then the most interesting thing is, in the midst of this maelstrom of images of violence, you get this repeated shot of Thor from the Marvel comics just standing. It keeps repeating Thor with the phrase "me." And it feels like the whole montage is designed invoke these feelings of confusion and aggression and then posit violence as the answer to this stirred-up emotional state. Because once it reaches the climax, it then goes back to the soothing rhythms that it had before, implying that this powerful wave of threat and anxiety has been pacified by the embodied man exercising violence on his own behalf.

But what's most interesting is that a lot of the images are things that were in advertising. The kind of one-to-one representations of American ideals that you saw in ads, both print

and television, in the 60s and 70s.

**AF: There was a lot of paranoia at the time about subliminal messaging in advertising too.**

MC: It totally feeds into that. It feels like the commentary is that the culture we live in is giving these messages, because there were all these guys shooting presidents and senators during this time period, almost at random. If you're not positing that it's the government, you're still left to answer for why these guys are doing this. And the montage has the purpose of showing that even if there isn't some conspiracy to manufacture these people, our culture is manufacturing them.

**AF: There was an anti-consumerist bent to all of this as well. People had kind of a vague anti-industrial, misplaced mistrust of what I might say is "capital," though they wouldn't necessarily articulate it in those words.**

MC: Anyway, at the end of Parallax View, Warren Beatty is able to infiltrate this organization, they give him a job, and he goes to a rally for this rightwing presidential candidate, who I think is there to represent George Wallace. The idea is that anybody, regardless of their ideology, who pressed

against the status quo was going to get smacked down. And the senator gets shot, and Warren Beatty realizes he's getting set up. And he's running around on a catwalk, trying to escape, people pointing at him saying, "there he is, there he is." And finally, there's an open door at the end of the catwalk, and he's running to-

wards it at full speed, and a dude just steps out and blows him away. The next scene we're back to behind the same desk from the committee at the beginning of the movie reading another statement saying that this assassination was carried out by Warren Beatty, there's no conspiracy, and everyone needs to move on.

**AF: By the way, I hate to keep bringing this up, but Manchurian Candidate also ends with assassination on the catwalk.**

MC: That's true, but that's the crucial difference, though, isn't it? In Manchurian Candidate, Lawrence Harvey breaks his conditioning and shoots his asshole stepfather and his evil mom.

**AF: He gets through, and then he shoots himself, and it's violent and gory and tragic and meaningless. But in a different way.**

MC: It's kind of a bummer, but democracy has been preserved.

**AF: I honestly think like Kennedy's assassination was such a startling event that it became visually inescapable for a lot of filmmakers afterward.**

MC: Absolutely. But what's interesting is it that it didn't really manifest in film too much until after Watergate. Because even if people had questions about the Kennedy assassination, the idea of publically expressing them was something that didn't really become possible until then. Watergate made it acceptable to challenge government at a basic level, in terms of its benevolence and the notion that it has no interest in democracy. Those sort of thoughts were still largely unspeakable, even with Vietnam and everything, and it really took Watergate to break that psychic barrier—at least when it came to Hollywood and films. ♦

## "9/11," FROM PAGE 36

in that it has zero reluctance to engage in histrionics and melodrama. Mike Binder's 2007 *Reign Over Me* is a confounding treatise on family life, mental illness, and of course, 9/11. Adam Sandler plays Charlie Fineman, a man whose entire family (including the dog) perished that Tuesday morning. Sandler portrays the grieving Fineman as a kind of horror-stricken manchild who responds to reminders of his former family with explosive meltdowns. Putting Adam Sandler in a drama about terrorism and mental illness seems like sketch material to begin with. But even worse, the "angry manchild" persona is precisely the same as Sandler's stock comedy character, and thus we are treated to a bizarre alternate world in which Billy Madison is a devastated 9/11 widower. (One keeps expecting Rob Schneider to show up playing some catchphrase-spewing ethnic stereotype.)

Whenever the film is not pursuing a bizarre subplot about friend Alan Johnson's (Don Cheadle) sexless marriage, it delivers little but overwrought emotional manipulation, culminating in a final courtroom scene where Sandler in full Billy Madison voice saying things like "my famiwy died that daywuh." After this, it is implied he overcomes his grief and has sex with an insane woman.

*Reign Over Me* is the most cynical type of tragedy pornography. Yet people love it. To this day, YouTube uploads of the most saccharine scenes are filled with comments about how Sandler is a brilliant dramatic actor and how nuanced the film is. Adam Sandler hollering to Don Cheadle that "my fweakin famiwy died in dah towahs" can be described using many adjectives, but "nuanced" is not among them.

Yet *Reign Over Me* accurately displays the attitude we had right after 9/11. If *United 93* is the horrified confusion in the moment of the attacks, *Reign Over Me* is what we chose to remember. It gives the illusion of profundity to

the ridiculous and tragic. It is fake emotion, ascribing depth to every banal and confused word we said in the aftermath of an event that couldn't and shouldn't have been interpreted.

Our most recent cinematic confrontation with 9/11, and the one most representative of our worst impulses, is *Zero Dark Thirty*, Kathryn Bigelow's fictionalized account of the hunt for (and death of) Osama bin Laden.

*Zero Dark Thirty*, like most defense industry projects, is bloated, overfunded, and barely works. As a viewing experience it is an absolute slog. As a moral narrative it is appalling, an ode to torture, extraordinary renditions, and permanent war as an institution. It is repulsive in its message, and almost courageous in its boringness. It is impossible to invest in any of the characters, who are single minded, expressionless automatons. We first meet them as they torture some guy who apparently might know some piece of important information, and they spend the rest of their time switching between bloodlust and bureaucratic smugness.

I should take a moment to note that I am almost alone in this opinion. The film was a smash hit, received five Academy Award nominations, and appeared on everyone's "top ten" lists for 2012. I saw the film with friends who had "national security" concentrations in college ("national security" being perhaps the most made-up academic discipline besides "economics"). They were thrilled with every interminable scene of people hissing military acronyms at each other in office buildings and doughy CIA contractors torturing people.

Some of that enchantment is understandable—Kathryn Bigelow is in many ways brilliant in a technical sense, and her mastery of shadow and light means that most shots and scenes are beautifully done. But the popularity of *Zero Dark Thirty* is not a product of the viewing public's discerning eye for chiaroscuro. It's the message of *Zero Dark*

*Thirty* that resonates. The film is a security blanket, a boost of confidence. Characters are sleek and stoic. They're doers, not talkers. They're always on the exact right path to catch the people who knocked down the towers.

It is, in other words, a testament to how good it was to put full faith into our political and national security elites right after 9/11. It reassures us that we made the right choice because we put the right people on the job. It tells us that torture is necessary, and that we finally chased all the phantoms out of our head after the final bullet perforated Osama bin Laden, as we see when our hero Maya (Jessica Chastain) bursts into tears at the very end.

*Zero Dark Thirty* therefore exonerates the dark part of our reaction to 9/11, the part where we were scared so shitless that we tacitly or overtly told our government to do whatever they thought was right, regardless of how many people would die or have electrodes attached to their testicles. No one likes to talk about their insane mixture of rage, confusion, and fear, the way we felt mortal terror while becoming fully erect at the possibility of bloody revenge. It's too shameful to admit that we craved some form of domination, both of ourselves and others.

It's been 15 years since a group of sexually neurotic middle-class Saudis brought down the World Trade Center. The world is smoldering with ruins created as a result of our fear. That fear is the thing we chose to remember least about 9/11. Our films tell us stories about emotional closure, whether it's Adam Sandler finally getting laid or Jessica Chastain weeping cathartically after we killed the big bad guy. Now, nativism rages in the country we declared "united" 15 years ago, and three civil wars take place in the part of the world we said we would democratize. Films will tell you the story you want to hear, but it helps if you've been lying to yourself the whole time. ♦



"All the news  
that's fit to print  
and then some."

# The New York Times

## Local Forecast

Largely predictable;  
general dreariness,  
expect impenetrable  
fog and lots of wind

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016

\$2.50

## At Goldman Sachs, Diversity Changes a Culture

By NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

MANHATTAN — When Josh Perez began at Goldman Sachs nine months ago, he was worried. "I knew it had a certain reputation for elitism," he says. "And since I'm half Hispanic, I was worried that my arrival would make waves." But Perez, whose mother is the daughter of the Colombian treasury secretary, found his Goldman bosses surprisingly enthusiastic about his ethnic background. "The only color here that matters is green," Perez says a partner told him.

Goldman, a venerable and ancient house of finance, has sometimes struggled to have its office culture keep pace with contemporary mores. But today's partners are eager to change that. "We're a welcoming place," says Goldman's managing director, J. Peter Thorndike. "We have LGBT Harvard grads, a black woman from Cornell. Every demographic group you could think of is represented on our staff." Goldman Sachs has been controversial for its lack of diversity. But with a new class of savvy young bankers from an array of backgrounds, the company hopes to restore its reputation among young people.

Similar diversity initiatives at Monsanto, Lockheed Martin, BP, Blackwater, and Halliburton have attracted praise from industry observers. "I'm glad to see the business world finally making the rhetoric of opportunity into a reality," said Neera Tanden of the Center for American Progress. "It's important for these companies to be fair and enact progressive values." Lockheed Martin's Timothy Christopher, who is gay and heads up a new torpedo program, says he is proud to work at an inclusive workplace. "It's gratifying not to have to be ashamed of where I work."

## IN GAZA, A CAFE RECEIVES AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR



By JODI RUDOREN

GAZA — Things seem different at this popular cafe in the heart of the city. Usually, men will be watching soccer on a small television set, or chatting about politics by the window. Yet thanks to the intrusion of an unexpected visitor, the usual activities have been suspended. The daily consumption of sumaghiyyeh and lemonade has been halted, in favor of picking through twisted concrete in search of corpses. Thanks to the visitor's explosive nature, it was unclear when the cafe would reopen. The government of Israel expressed its sympathy for the cafe's unexpected closure.

## In the Philippines, a President Makes a Name for Himself

By JANE PERLEZ

MANILA — Rodrigo Duterte is a straight talker. "I don't give a shit about human rights," he declares, with the unvarnished rusticchutzpah that has made him a hit in his own country. "No, really, I don't. I will massacre every last one of my opponents." Duterte's unique approach to political speechmaking has earned him plaudits among those who admire his refreshing honesty. But it has also brought its fair share of controversy. Duterte's declaration that "blood will fill the streets" was hastily critiqued by international observers, who caution that the new president's methods risk compromising important policy gains. Last month, when a presidential address concluded "I will literally cut off people's heads and rape the corpses," the U.S. State Department moved to distance itself from Duterte's more brusque remarks. "We continue to have a productive long-term partnership with President Duterte," said a Department spokesperson. "While his speech is blunt, and in some cases departs from our own interpretation of policy, we continue to value the special relationship between our two countries, and believe President Duterte recognizes our shared values." Duterte's frankness has distinguished him from previous heads of state. "I have had thousands shot," he said in a Thursday press conference. "This is just the beginning." While the substance of his remarks has attracted comment, few disagree that Duterte has set himself apart.

President Duterte's Most Contentious Remarks  
PAGE A12

## KISSINGER'S STRUGGLE

There was a time when Henry Kissinger refrained from lunching at the Four Seasons. In the 70s, when he was serving as Secretary of State, Kissinger was frequently the target of protests over the bombings of Cambodia and Laos. These days, however, Kissinger is the confidante of Democrats and Republicans alike, and can finally get on with his lunch. He's on a diet now, and so when he comes to the Four Seasons, he restricts himself

to vegetarian fare. Today it's the artichoke salad, with shaved carrots and radish, fiddlehead ferns, burrata, basil pesto. "I still have the taste for blood, though," he laughs. Diet or not, he cannot resist the dessert menu, and follows up any meal with the restaurant's Grand Marnier Souffle. As he finishes the souffle, two passing tourists ask Kissinger for a photo. He obliges with the gentle smile of a man who has struggled for his lunch.

## AMONG DRONE OPERATORS, OCCASIONAL MISGIVINGS

LANGLEY — Corp. Virgil "Bruno" Tilletson is no pacifist. "After 9/11, I knew we had to kill some people," he muses, with the stiff, statesmanlike weariness of a man whose conscience weighs heavily. "I enlisted because I knew there were people to kill," he says with what seems like a contemplative sigh. When Corp. Tilletson was offered the job of second-in-command of drone operations at Langley Air Force base, he jumped at the chance. "It would mean more killing," says the officer, with an air of deep reflection.

Having to take lives via remote control has not been easy for Tilletson. "When I go home," he says, "I'm exhausted. The hours are long. You have to squint to determine whether the splotches on the screen are people, and my doctor tells me my eyesight is getting worse." Tilletson's moral conflict reveals some of the paradoxes of the age of technological warfare. It may be the pilots of the drones who are hurt most of all.

## A President Looks Back, With Wistfulness and Pride

CRAWFORD — These days, George W. Bush considers himself more painter than ex-President. Spending his days in his barnyard studio, Mr. Bush often finds himself spattered in pastels by the end of the day, to the consternation of his wife, former First Lady Laura Bush. Mrs. Bush always makes him scrub up before dinner. "Blood washes off your hands easy, but I can never seem to get rid of paint," Mr. Bush says with a grin. Starting with simple pictures of dogs, Mr. Bush has gradually built up a considerable artistic portfolio, and multi-

ple galleries have displayed his work. Mr. Bush's new book, *Portraits of Valiance*, is a collection of depictions of American soldiers. "I wanted to give something back," he says. "Soldiers never have it easy." Mr. Bush says he deliberately chose to paint living soldiers, rather than deceased ones, out of a concern for the book's message. "I find all that PTSD stuff depressing," he says. "A book about heroes should have a heroic tone." It remains to be seen whether historians will see Bush primarily as dedicated artist or compassionate statesman.

## At Raytheon's Dubai Retreat, Teamwork Is The Strongest Weapon Of All

PAGE A4

### CULTURE

## In Brooklyn, the 16th Century Makes an Unexpected Comeback

The neck ruff, a staple of Elizabethan dress, is an increasingly common among those seeking an authentic vintage look. PAGE B1



### BUSINESS

## An African Nation Joins the Uber Generation

The Democratic Republic of Congo has spent nearly two decades mired in strife. Could a rideshare app be just what it needs? PAGE B5

### INTERNATIONAL

## The Modernizer

King Salman of Saudi Arabia has attracted controversy for a willingness to bomb Yemeni funerals, and a penchant for beheading. But can he catalyze economic growth? PAGE C3

### TRAVEL

## Havana After Communism

Fine dining in a new era of commercial tourism

### THEATER

## Is Broadway Ready for Change?

A new show is upending modern dance. Will its revolutionary approach find a welcome? PAGE B1



CONGRATULATIONS TO NIEL JACOBY, WINNER OF THE CURRENT AFFAIRS 'NYT HEADLINE CHALLENGE'

ROSS DOUTHAT

## A Dip to Remember

There was one great perk to being a National Review intern, which was the chance to meet William F. Buckley, Jr., the great man, the right's godfather, the urbane and wicked prince of the conservatives. The current editors, his chosen heirs, dined with him every second Monday, and as a special treat I was asked to dinner on my first day, along with my fellow intern, Jaime Snider, a Columbia conservative. I had only just met Jaime, but he and I sealed our friendship that night, gawking together at Buckley's fantastic uptown lair—the gimlet-eyed butler; the cooks and maids murmuring, in Spanish, the dinner table with glasses of cigarettes by each place setting; the luxurious sitting room with its lush tapestries and lacquered tables. We gawked, too, at Buckley himself, who swept down to greet us, his eyes bright and curious, his wit languid but mischievous, and his flesh slacking a bit with age but still held together by a lurking energy, a sense of coiled potency.

After dessert had been set aside and Ben had gone to clean up, Buckley gathered himself up from his seat and peered down at us. "I generally take a swim after eating," he said. "You're all welcome to swim as well, of course."

Now that he mentioned it, a swim seemed just the thing. But then I considered the matter more deeply and heaved a deep and regretful sigh.

"I'd swim, sir," I said. "I would swim, I really would like to. But I'm afraid I didn't bring a bathing suit."

It had taken me so long to reach this conclusion that Buckley had already begun to climb the ladder, and now he regarded me with unconcealed amusement. "Well, neither did I. After all, it's quite dark out there. And we're all men here, you know."

When he was gone, Jaime and I sat for a moment in silence, the dinner settling in our stomachs and the wine rising to our eyes. We downed the dregs of our wine and went topside, where Buckley was just leaping from the bow, a flash of plummeting white flesh in the darkness. Jaime and I undressed quickly, then shouted and leaped in after him.

Ellis Porterhouse,  
Margot Crispin



Ellis Porterhouse and Margot Crispin were married Thursday at a rooftop event space in Chelsea. Ms. Crispin is keeping her name.

Mr. Porterhouse is the son of F. Murray Porterhouse of Newton, MA. He is a graduate of The Hill School and Princeton University, and holds an M.B.A. from Wharton. Ms. Crispin is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley.

NICHOLAS KRISTOF

## Out of Slavery, Into Sweatshops

Abhilasha Chandrasekar is a 9-year old Bangladeshi girl whom I have not invented. As I sat with her in her village last week, she had one message she wanted me to convey to the world: send more sweatshops.

I know what you're thinking. "Whoah, Nick, aren't sweatshops bad?" And as a good liberal New Yorker, it's easy for you to think that. But you try telling that to Abhilasha.

As a human rights journalist, I go all over the world rescuing women like Abhilasha, or at least writing about them. All of them are enslaved. But what they need most is not compassion. They need jobs.

Readers get upset when I defend the bombing of Hiroshima, or point out that poor people in Kentucky are committing welfare fraud. But I bet they couldn't look Abhilasha in the eye and say those things.

Nobody truly opposes slavery until they embrace sweatshops. That's because making sneakers is better than the alternative. Cutting off hands isn't pretty, but neither is economics.

I hear what you're saying: what about collapsing factories and deadly fires? Is child labor really so great, if the children frequently die? But tell Abhilasha that you want to take her job away. Tell her. See what it will do to her pride.

Factory collapses are part of a process of economic growth. Take them away, you take away the growth. Take away the growth, look what happens to



GDP. Do you think Abhilasha doesn't care about GDP? Of course she does. That's the other thing she regularly tells me. "Mr. Kristof," she tells me (only my wife Sheryl calls me Nick), "tell them about GDP. Tell them how important it is." And

so I'm telling you. Because of Abhilasha. Because I care about her. Because she belongs in a sweatshop. It's what she wants. And to those who would take it away from her I say: would you dare make a little girl cry? What kind of monster are you?

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

## Dubai's Putin Gambit

If there's one thing that's true about globalization, it's that it doesn't make anyone late. At least, that's what AeonCorp is betting. Their new hotel in Dubai won't touch the ground—literally. It's a floating skyscraper. But get this, and here's where green energy really matters: all of the builders use smartwatches. That's right, it's a smart building, LEED-certified and ready for international occupancy.

Munjid, my taxi driver, told me that business comes here when

it needs to get down to business. That makes sense. After all, the first rule of revolution is that you don't play the cards you have, you play the cards you need.

That's where Putin comes in. Russia is not in the Middle East, but today it might as well be. It's a long way from Jerusalem to Novosibirsk. But that doesn't mean you can't get there, especially online. Skyping is half the battle.

I met two Iranian startup founders on my way across town. If

President Obama could meet them, they would tell him more about himself than he can tell about his own self. An app is not the Arab Spring, but it sure does help.

The olive trees were in blossom when I left. You can tell a lot about the global economy from an olive tree. It's important to know the right way to look, though. Perhaps if Bear Stearns had visited this courtyard, she'd still be alive today.

New Delhi doesn't need to go hunting for innovation. Rather,

PAUL KRUGMAN

## Republicans Are Less Smart Than I

You may have thought I would have said all I had to say about BernieBros in the spring. Not so. For we now face what I call the "BernieBroing of America." (It's not quite so catchy as "Trumped-up trickle-down economics," perhaps, but I am hoping it catches on.) Everywhere you look, there are more BernieBros. Julian Assange, Vladimir Putin, Paul Ryan, to name just three. And Trump's lewd behavior (which, ladies, I can assure you does NOT go on in the locker rooms of the Princeton University Economics Department) makes him the bro-iest Bernie Bro of all. Assange, another accused rapist, is currently attacking Hillary Clinton. Coincidence? It's no wonder that those who would violate a woman's body are equally content violating her privacy.

I have not heard a single criticism of Hillary Clinton that isn't sexist. Given who her opponent is, is this surprising?

Deplorables do not understand data. They somehow think the Clinton Foundation is nefarious, which is as close to an endorsement of Putin as can be uttered without speaking his name. Speaking of Putin, a certain class of pundits to my left seems determined to exonerate each one of Putin's crimes, or to attribute them to Hillary Clinton.

There is nothing wrong with wealth per se. The problem is with being wealthy and Republican. Progressive values are the true American values, and if Lincoln were alive today he would head the Clinton Global Initiative. It's just basic economics.

*Paul Krugman is a former consultant to Enron, who is currently paid hundreds of thousands of dollars per year by a cash-strapped public university to study inequality.*

innovation should take a cue from New Delhi. I was at a conference recently. One executive told me after breakfast: "Tom, you don't know where the money is, because you're still reading magazines." We're a smartphone world on a magazine diet.

Eleven. That's the number of women on the AeonCorp board. Does this tell us something about the future? I'd venture that it does. Those that don't get left behind are the first ones to do so.

## WEDDINGS

### Jennifer Downing, Christopher Labosky

Ms. Jennifer Downing and Mr. Christopher Labosky were married September 10th in the Vermont countryside. Ms. Downing is the daughter of Richard and Jacqueline Downing of Stow, MA, and Mr. Labosky is the son of Thomas and Monica Labosky of Tallmadge, OH.

Mr. Labosky's favorite animal is the pufferfish. Ms. Downing is partial to the elephant mouse, or sengi. The elephant mouse is one of the fastest small mammals on earth, capable of speeds up to 28 km per hour, despite being so small



as to be easily stored in a coin purse or teacup.

They have already substantially improved one another's lives in a thousand small ways. For example, Mr. Labosky did not realize that falafel was made of chickpeas until Ms. Downing explained it to him.

In full seriousness, Ms. Downing and Mr. Labosky are both longtime subscribers of Current Affairs and treasured friends of the magazine. They are charming and brilliant people. Current Affairs wishes them boundless happiness in their lives together!



# where are you coming from?

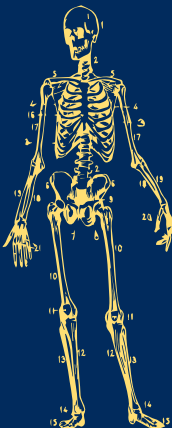
## A SURVEY OF PRECONCEPTION AND DISPOSITION

If we are truly to understand one another, it is vital that each person know where the other is coming from. Discussion is impossible between persons with no appreciation of one another's worldviews, desires, self-conceptions, politics, knowledge bases, or histories. Communication will remain difficult so long as we have access to only tiny fragments of other people's identities, and know little about what their minds look like from the inside. This, the Current Affairs "Where Are You Coming From" survey, constitutes the basic questions we should ask one another before attempting to engage in any form of conversation.

DO YOU HAVE AN "IDENTITY"? WHAT IS IT?  
WHAT ASPECTS OF IT MAKE IT YOUR "IDENTITY"?

DO YOU THINK LIFE IS MANAGEABLE?  
DO YOU THINK THE WORLD IS COMPREHENSIBLE?

Is it difficult for you to believe that history actually happened? Is it difficult for you to believe that Socrates existed, and that he possessed an asshole? Is there a difference in the degree to which you believe the President has an asshole and the degree to which you are convinced that you have one?



How often do you think about the fact that underneath your skin, you are a skeleton? When you see other people, do you think about the fact that they, too, are skeletons?

- What are your fundamental political principles?
- Do you think you act consistently with them?
- In what way do you act consistently?
- Why is it necessary to be consistent?
- Should conclusions follow from premises?

What do you understand as the central insight of existentialism? Do you buy it? Please explain.

WHAT IS BULLSHIT?  
DO YOU BULLSHIT?

WHERE DO RIGHTS COME FROM? ARE THEY ETERNAL?

WHAT, OF THE THINGS YOU BELIEVE, ARE YOU MOST CERTAIN OF? WHAT ARE YOU LEAST CERTAIN OF? WHAT IS BELIEF?

DO YOU THINK "FREE WILL" IS A MEANINGFUL CONCEPT?  
DO YOU THINK GOD IS A MEANINGFUL CONCEPT?



Is it presumptuous to tell another person about one's life unprompted? Would you ever go up to a person in a coffee shop and start talking to them? Under what circumstances is this appropriate? Should poetry be criminalized? Should executions be televised?



Do you shop for pleasure? Why? Why does buying things give you pleasure? Are you uncomfortable in malls? When you see, say, millions of products on sale in a Target, do you think about what made those products and where they will go in the future? Are you horrified by civilization?



Why do you like the music you like rather than some other music? Do you think your tastes in music are other than arbitrary? Can some music be "better" than other music, and if so what is the source of that value? What is the saddest song you know? What is the function of music in a just society?



If you are religious, what exactly do you believe about people of other faiths or no faith? Do you believe they are wrong? Do you believe you should try to convince them of your views? Do you believe religious feeling is the type of feeling which one can acquire through persuasion?

Do you feel the pain of others? Whose pain do you feel, and why? Do you feel the pain of people in your time more than people in a different time? Why? How often do you think about the victims of the Holocaust? Are there certain truths you avoid thinking about?



PLEASE DESCRIBE THE LOWEST POINT YOU HAVE EVER FELT. WHAT ARE YOU STRIVING FOR, AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT WILL MAKE YOU HAPPY? DO YOU FEEL THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND EVERYONE ELSE? IF SO, WHAT IS THAT DIFFERENCE? DO YOU THINK IT IS REAL, OR A DELUSION? DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE ANY DELUSIONS GENERALLY?

HOW SHOULD RAPE PROSECUTIONS BE CONDUCTED?

How much difference do you think there is between the way you see yourself and the way others see you?

When did you last change your mind about something, and what made you do it?

What factors about yourself do you think give people the most mistaken impressions about you?

How do you keep yourself from ignoring or downplaying evidence that contradicts your preconceptions?

Why do you care what other people think?

If you answer that you do not care what other people think, why do you think you are lying?

Why should anyone care about the fucking Constitution? If our Constitution were different, should we care about that one just as much?

IS IT ACTUALLY IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD?

Why exactly is that? Do you think one should know the names of the heads of state of foreign countries? Do you think one should be able to put countries on a map? Can you name lots of heads of state and put lots of countries on maps? Can you name the population of Romania to within 100,000 people? If you can't, does this trouble you? If you can, why is this necessary? Should knowledge be useful? If I can't change something, is it okay for me not to learn about it?



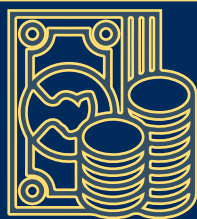
IS THE WORD "DIALECTICS" MEANINGFUL TO YOU? IF SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Do you worry about the percentage of outcomes in your life that are determined by mere chance?

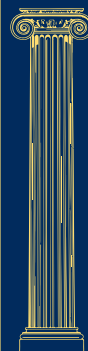
Does it concern you that you may have failed to meet the love of your life by failing to step in a certain puddle on a certain day?

Being as specific as possible, what would you do given absolute power?

What does Utopia look like? Is government a necessary evil or a positive good? Should we think about utopias?



Do you think there is any disjunction between what is produced as the result of the operations of a free market and what ought to be produced? Is there any use whatsoever in markets? Do you think it is acceptable that in a market, a person with more resources has more power than a person with fewer resources? How is this different from one person having more votes in an election than another? Do you think people deserve whatever they are paid? What does it mean to "deserve" something?



Are some buildings too ugly to live?

IS IT ACCEPTABLE NOT TO THINK ABOUT WHERE THEY ARE COMING FROM?

# KILLING YOU SOFTLY WITH HER DREAMS

ARIANNA

HUFFINGTON'S

WAR ON SLEEP...

*by Yasmin Nair*

**A**RIANNA HUFFINGTON WANTS TO PUT YOU TO SLEEP. In her new book, *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time*, Huffington dramatically announces that we are in the middle of an unacknowledged *sleep crisis*. There is a problem in our society, Huffington tells us: we have forgotten how to sleep. Fortunately, sleepless readers need not fear: Huffington's handy little book is here to show you how to combat sleeplessness.

*Sleep Revolution* is written in classic Huffington style: part Deepak Chopra, part Oprah, and strung together with quotes from everyone from Persian poet Rumi to art critic Jonathan Crary to even (bafflingly for a self-described progressive), the anti-immigrant, Brexit-enabling, racist former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

The writing, it should go without saying, is bad. A chapter begins:

"From the beginning of time, people have struggled with sleep." In fact, from the beginning of time, sophomore English teachers have been taking red pen to any essay that starts with "from the beginning of time." Her phrasing is often corny and uses too many exclamation points.

*Sleep Revolution* is less a book than a business plan, a typical product of the can-do inspiration industry made popular by the likes of Andrew Weil and Suzie Orman, the snake oil salespeople of the 21st century. Like them, Huffington first tells you that you have a problem, one you were unaware you had. She then generously reveals the many products that can help alleviate your symptoms, suggesting plenty of expensive solutions. Huffington has learned her trade from the best hucksters. She absorbs the techniques of assorted rich people's gurus, like cult leaders Bhagwan Rajneesh and John-





Illustrations by Chris Matthews

Roger, combining new age verbiage with sly admonitions to give up one's material wealth (into their outstretched hands, of course).

Huffington undoubtedly possesses a kind of brilliance. It lies not in the quality of her thought or writing, but in her ability to understand and exploit the zeitgeist. The ideas in *Sleep Revolution*, such as they are, are mostly bits and pieces about sleep deprivation and the problems thereof cribbed and culled from a range of sources (likely the product of several intensive hours of Googling). To be sure, they are banal. And yet Huffington's book is perfect for our moment in time: it arrives just as capitalism is making many of us more sleepless than ever.

Huffington is never so impolite as to mention that capitalism, which has done well by her and made her a multimillionaire, may be to blame for keeping people working long, sleepless hours. She

prefers proposing solutions to diagnosing causes. She tells you to leave your smartphone outside your bedroom, to have warm baths, to disengage. Don't tackle work emails after a certain time.

Her solutions have the convenient consequence of making you a better worker for your employers, without actually raising your material standard of living. After all, she writes, "it would actually be better for business if employees called in tired, got a little more sleep, and then came in a bit late, rather than call in sick a few days later or, worse, show up sick, dragging themselves through the day while infecting others." Her advice to her fellow bosses is purely expedient: if the worker drones rest, more labor can be wrung out of them.

This approach to sleep is common in the discourse of "self-care," in which people are constantly admonished to heal themselves with

# WELLS FARGO

We've always been committed to "social justice." That's why we're expanding our range of payday loans and adjustable rate mortgages. But you don't have to take our word for it. Just ask our new spokesman, Deray McKesson.

## BANKS' LIVES MATTER



candles, self-affirmation, and long baths but not told that they can actually revolt against the systems that create their exhaustion in the first place. According to a massive amount of sleep literature, the worst thing we do is not sleep enough, yet that same literature never bothers to wonder what might be keeping us up at night.

Yet many people know full well why they can't sleep. Many of us juggle multiple jobs to cobble together our livings, and the problem of sleeplessness cuts across class barriers. While those with little or no money battle exhaustion as they travel from job to

the lack of good transit systems can effectively ruin your chances of a good night's sleep. In Chicago, where I live, and where the city's segregation is enforced through its transit system, it can take two hours or more to get from the mostly white north side to the mostly black and brown south and west sides, and the trip usually involves multiple buses and trains. That's a commute performed daily by many poorly-paid workers.

And that's Chicago, a place with relatively good-infrastructure. The situation is much worse for those living in cities and towns with little or no public transit (which is most of

“HUFFINGTON IS NEVER SO IMPOLITE AS TO MENTION THAT **CAPITALISM** MAY BE TO BLAME FOR KEEPING PEOPLE WORKING LONG, SLEEPLESS HOURS...”

job, even wealthier people are frequently like hamsters in their wheels, constantly working against the clock to hold on to and add to their fortunes. No matter who you are, under competitive capitalism the rule is the same: You sleep, you lose. Marx once pointed out that capital is vampire-like and feeds on dead labor. But that's somewhat unfair to vampires. After all, unlike vampires, capital never sleeps.

Capitalism has never slept much, and has always relied on the lack of sleep of millions of workers to be as efficient as possible. In fact, until the invention of the eight-hour day and the weekend (both startlingly new ideas, for which workers had to fight hard) “work” as such simply carried on day by draining day. Even the idea of a legally mandated lunch break is astonishingly recent.

Among all of the Huffingtonian pro-sleep, self-help guidance, there is no discussion of the fact that people are *compelled* to walk around like zombies, without sleep. Take, for instance, the website *Everyday Health* which poses the question: “Why Don't Americans Sleep Enough?” The answer: “Reasons why we're not getting enough sleep abound, but one of the biggest changes behind the sleep decline is the availability of electricity and technological advances that allow us to work and play 24/7.” Note the phrasing: *allow* us to work 24/7! Yet most people don't actually have a choice.

Consider that even something as simple as

the United States). Researchers point to the economic consequences of rough commutes, but there are also substantial health costs involved when people spend so much of their lives traveling to and from their jobs and have little energy or time left to recharge or fully rest before the next day's work. The sheer stress of getting to work can, in the long run, literally kill you. But work we must if we are to survive, and those on the bottom rungs run themselves ragged even before they start their workday.

Huffington is willfully oblivious to all of this, evading questions about workplace conditions even when they are most obvious. She writes that a “2015 Stanford University study of Chinese workers found that those who worked from home saw their productivity go up by 13 percent.” Only Arianna Huffington could so blithely use the words “Chinese workers” and “productivity” together and not even offer the slightest hint that, perhaps, the rise in productivity is due to factors like the grinding exploitation they are likely to experience. Examples of such obtuseness about the exploitation of capitalism abound in the book, including her glowing praise for Goldman Sachs banning summer interns from staying overnight. *Quartz's* sarcastic response to the news puts it best: “A rule that may be obvious to those of us in normal people jobs, this apparently was not clear enough to the aspiring bankers



entering the intense Wall Street working environment for the first time." Praise for such global and rapacious corporations makes it clear that success for Huffington is defined at astronomical levels; it's not at all about ordinary workers, whose only job is to buy the products she and her friends sell.

Instead of discussing the larger context surrounding sleeplessness, Huffington wants, instead, to remind you of different consequences. Wrinkles, for instance. She cites a UK experiment that showed that a lack of sleep resulted in a 45 percent increase in fine lines and wrinkles in women, and a rise in blemishes by 13 percent. She is also concerned that sleeplessness can cause "bad decisions," and explains away Bill Clinton's most indefensible presidential decisions as a possible result of a lack of sleep, for example "his inept handling of the issues of gays in the military — now widely considered to be one of the low points of his two-term presidency." Here, as everywhere in the book, she simply ignores political ideology in favor of a diagnosis that locates acts and consequences entirely on the plane of personal problems.

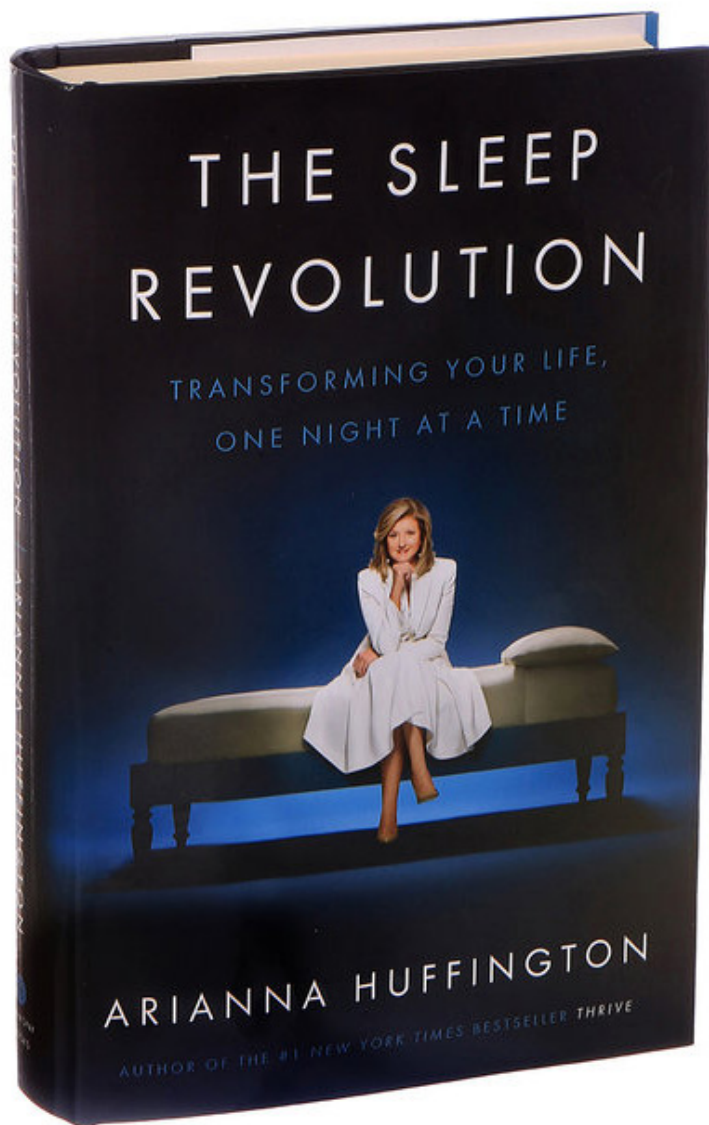
Huffington is an inveterate name-dropper, and that's no surprise given that her biggest project so far, *Huffington Post*, relies on the appearance of many of her celebrity "friends" to supply free labor. "My friend Nora Ephron" makes an appearance, and she describes how "at a lunch for Jennifer Aniston, her manager took me aside," and the time "when I interviewed [the Dalai Lama]," Oh, and we must not forget the time when "for my Thrive e-course on Oprah.com, I invited basketball great Kobe Bryant..." (That last one is a small masterpiece of economy, rolling her business enterprise, the planet's most famous woman after the Queen of England, and a sports legend all into the same sentence.) Huffington's desire to suck up (there is no elegant way to put this) to powerful and famous people requires her to be spectacularly clueless at times. Following up on the wrinkles theme, she writes effusively that "Jane Fonda credits her age-defying looks to sleep." In fact, Fonda has gone on record as having had plastic surgery, a fact confirmed by no fewer than three aggregated stories on the *Huffington Post* itself.

Ultimately, *Sleep Revolution* tells us very little about what we need to know to get more sleep. Huffington's slender thesis ("Sleep more so you can make more money") is covered fully in her 4-minute TED talk on the subject, and solutions to sleeplessness are available in innumerable resources on the internet. The book is less important for what it says and more for what it reveals about Huffington's place in enabling a particularly rapacious form of capitalism, one which first deprives people of sleep and then sells them the methods by which they might regain some of it.

## THE PERFECT KILLING MACHINE

**A**RIANNA HUFFINGTON LIKES TO TELL HER LIFE STORY AS follows: once, a middle-class 16-year-old Greek girl saw a picture of Cambridge University and decided to study there. Against all odds, and with the help of a determined mother, she entered the august institution and quickly made a name for herself, even becoming only the third female president of the 200-year-old Cambridge Union. She became a well-known conservative author and public figure in England, and eventually left for America where she gained spectacular amounts of both wealth and fame.

But the story's reality is somewhat more complex, and reflects her alliances with two particular powerful men. At the age of 21, Huffington, whose maiden name was Stassinopoulos, met the famed and influential British intellectual Bernard Levin, 22 years her senior, on a game show. Huffington wrote books in which she insisted that feminism could only appeal to "women with strong lesbian tendencies."



Not surprisingly, it was in England, still replete with class snobbery, that she earned her most infamous put-downs, being labeled "the most upwardly mobile Greek since Icarus," as well as "the Edmund Hillary of social climbing." They're good lines, though they're also sexist. No one calls Bill Gates a social climber, and women seem to be the only ones subjected to such snide comments as they make their way upwards. That said, it's true that large parts of Huffington's social and financial capital have come about because she was the consort of two powerful men, and she does make much of her immense network of famous friends.

Huffington remained with Levin till she was 30, and then embarked on the next step of her journey, to New York. Only six years after her arrival in America, having ensconced herself in a social circle that included Barbara Walters and Henry Kissinger, she married the oil billionaire Michael Huffington. Levin had given her access to enormous intellectual and cultural capital; Huffington provided her with massive amounts of financial capital.

They divorced in 1997, when their two daughters were 8 and 6. She would go on to tell an interviewer that she doesn't believe in marriage, just very good divorces. (Her settlement reportedly gained her \$25 million.) Soon after, Michael Huffington came out as bisexual, and Arianna turned into a blazing liberal (whether or not those two facts are connected were the subject of speculation). She began working with Al Franken on Air America (remember Air America?) Explaining her sudden right-left shift, Huffington insists



that she had always been socially liberal, and simply saw the light. A different hypothesis can be found in a friend's observation that in famously liberal Los Angeles, to which Huffington returned after her divorce, her conservatism "would not have gotten [her] invited to a lot of parties."

Huffington's rapid geographic and ideological shape-shifting also meant additional scrutiny of the contradiction between her politics and her lifestyle. In 2003, the same year she ran unsuccessfully against Arnold Schwarzenegger in a gubernatorial campaign, she launched an incendiary ad campaign linking SUV owners to terrorists, despite having driven a Lincoln Navigator until the previous year. Huffington has complained about big money corroding democracy, but was a pivotal part of her husband's unsuccessful campaign against Dianne Feinstein, in which he spent a then-unprecedented \$30 million of his personal wealth. Whenever she has been challenged on these inconsistencies, Huffington has simply claimed to have subsequently seen the light.

In a 1995 *Mother Jones* piece designed as a Guide to Republicans, the comedian Paula Poundstone wrote, "It's hard to pin down Arianna's species. If only her ears drooped forward." It's a sharp assessment of Huffington's innate tendency to switch positions. Poundstone also described what was then the celebrity's fourth book, *The Fourth Instinct*: "[S]he says we should be nice. She says it in 248 pages, using her own nice thoughts as a standard toward which we all should strive." Clearly, the ability to expand a few scant phrases into hundreds of pages has not left Huffington.

But when it comes to discerning what species of political animal Huffington represents, the most striking and truthful description one may come from an anonymous source quoted by *Washington Post*, speaking about her then-husband's disastrous second campaign:

*[O]ne person who knows the couple makes a particularly unflattering analogy. It is to the movie a while ago in which a creature would suddenly spring out of a human's chest.*



"I think of that thing in John Hurt in 'Alien,' " he says, "but with better hair."

"In Michael," he says, "she's found a host."

In the mythology of the *Alien* films, the central figure (the aforementioned "thing") is a vicious space species that exists purely to breed and take over every terrain it encounters, whether a ship or an entire planet. Its method of self-propagation, enabled by a gigantic queen, is to implant eggs in any available host. The egg eventually and quickly gestates and finally emerges as a fast-developing creature, mutating in the process and eventually becoming more human-

like. By the fourth film in the series, *Alien: Resurrection*, the creature has developed a womb and gives live birth to its progeny, which proceeds to eat its mother alive.

In the films, alongside the titular rapacious and monstrous being, there exists another equally deadly force: the ubiquitous Weyland Corporation. All through the series, it becomes clear that Weyland is, if not the only one left, at least one of the biggest corporations in the known universe. Its interests extend from the petty junk-harvesting of space debris and old ships to dreams of universal domination. Its intense desire to harness the

biological weapon. The alien is a perfect killing machine, with acid for blood, blood so toxic it can melt thick steel and spurts out at even the slightest injury, causing massive harm to its adversaries. In the first film, the robot Ash describes the creature with admiration as a "[p]erfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility....I admire its purity. A survivor... unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality."

It is no wonder, then, that the *Washington Post's* source should be reminded of the *Alien* franchise when asked to analyze Huffington.

Yet the *Alien* comparisons are striking not only for their insight into Huffington personally, but as a means by which to understand her enterprise and the larger formations of capitalism that she has helped to create and cement.

In August 2016, Huffington announced that she was leaving the *Huffington Post* to focus on her new startup, Thrive Global. The venture, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, will "work with companies to improve the well-being of their employees." Set to launch in November, Thrive describes itself as a "corporate and consumer wellbeing and productivity platform." At Thriveglobal.com, the visitor is led to understand that "By reducing stress and exhaustion, we can improve people's health and increase productivity for both companies and individuals around the world," and that "Thrive Global is a corporate and consumer wellbeing and productivity platform."

The point of such an enterprise, wrapped in such transparently vacuous new age verbiage, remains a mystery. For all their pretense otherwise, it's clear that Huffington and her commercial partners care very little about the effects of sleeplessness on those who are not

their target audience. In April 2016 a sleep-deprived Uber driver, too tired to continue driving, asked his passenger to take over, and woke up to find the car embroiled in a high-speech chase with police. A *Huffington Post* reporter, Sarah Digulio, was prevented from "writing" about the story. (At the *HuffPo*, "writing" means "linking to.") *Post* senior editor Gregory Byer told Digulio that they wouldn't be linking to it because *Huffington Post* was currently "partnering with Uber on our drowsy driving campaign." In other words, Huffington's policy was to ignore or actively censor any story that actually proved that sleeplessness is a function of capitalism, and to protect her financial partner from being implicated in any resulting damage. In response to the story, Uber suspended the driver, then issued a statement about the dangers of sleeplessness (which predictably cited the company's link up with the *HuffPo* and Toyota "to raise awareness of the issue and help save lives.")

## "I CRIED TO DREAM AGAIN," —CALIBAN, THE TEMPEST

THE GREAT IRONY OF HUFFINGTON'S NEW ENTERPRISES, which promise both sleep and thriving, is that the *Huffington Post* itself feeds off the sleeplessness of its writers, people who are compelled to stay up all night in order to read and repost pieces about how sleeplessness is ruining their lives. The *Huffington Post* is notorious for paying *not a single cent* for most of its contributions, paying writers solely in illusory "publicity." By building a hugely popular website on unpaid labor, *HuffPo* played a major role in establishing the pitiful compensation structure currently faced by online writers. If writers can't sleep, it's because they make *HuffPo* rates, i.e. nothing.

*The Sleep Revolution* is therefore a work of extraordinary gall. There is no consideration of the structural problems with sleeplessness, no critique of the systems which drive people from their beds toward jobs where they nod off to sleep in exhaustion. Arianna Huffington did not invent the web, but she is among those who created the news that never sleeps, in turn created by aggregators working around the clock, so that you might wake up at midnight or 3 or 4 in the morning, entertained by yet another set of links about Kate Middleton in a red dress or a hammock for your head so you can sleep on the train on the way to work.

In the *Alien* films, the Weyland Corporation sends its workers across the universe, millions of light years away in search of material and profits. But travel across the cosmos is time-consuming; workers would inevitably age along the journey, dulling their efficiency. Weyland's solution is simple: Sleep pods that hold the bodies in suspended animation. Here all natural bodily functions cease, and the workers are reduced to nothing more than bodies. Once at their destination, the ship, a machine that possesses complete control over them, wakes them up and they continue their work. Everyone is a freelancer; everyone is put to sleep till their next gig. In the first film, when Captain Dallas hacks into the ship's computer to discover the mission's operating mandate, he discovers a chilling command stating that capturing the alien is the first and only priority. "Crew expendable," it reads.

On her Twitter feed, Huffington retweets yet another famous billionaire, Melinda Gates, wife of Bill Gates: "Make sure to be gentle to yourself. Take time for yourself. Make sure that you're taking care of yourself in order to be the best person and do your best job." Ultimately, that's all that matters to Huffington and her ilk, that the workers remain at their most fit, churning out content when awake, then suspended in pods until their labor is next required. And should these freelancers prove too costly, well, "crew expendable." In space, no one can hear you cry in your dreams. ♦

ON ITS WAY FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO YOU,  
THE INFORMATION MUST TRAVEL THROUGH

# THE LABYRINTH

OF

# CABLE NEWS

CAN YOU MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE  
THICKET OF PUNDITRY AND ERROR?





# THE ISIS HYSTERIA INDUSTRY

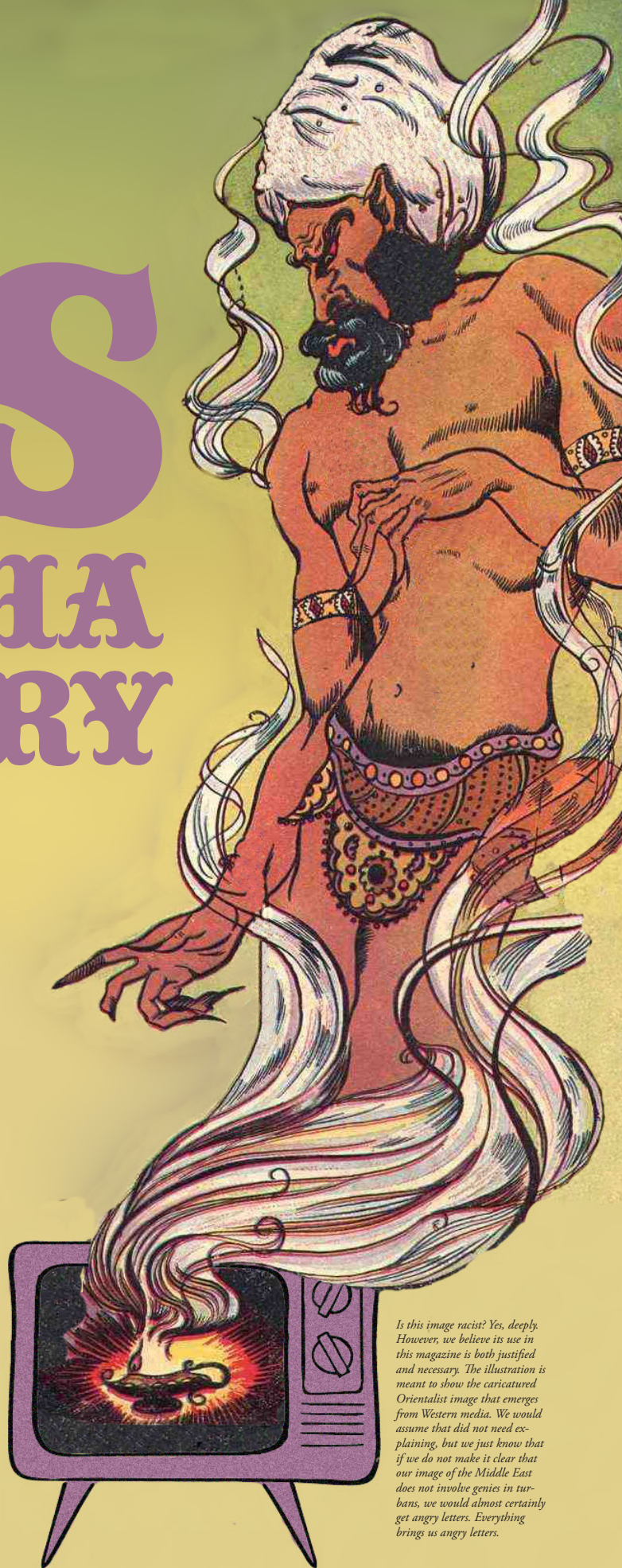
by Adam Patterson

**T**HERE ARE FEW CONCEIVABLE GAPS LARGER THAN that which exists between ISIS as an actual real-world insurgency and ISIS as a media phenomenon. While the bungling jihadis have persistently floundered and self-destructed in the upper Levant, they've managed to find spectacular success convincing credulous western audiences of their vast and formidable power.

The overrating of ISIS as a military force and geopolitical power was as vexing as it was grimly unsurprising. That level of dumbfounded fear is exactly what they wanted, with the group's constant attempts at media manipulation betraying its obsessive attention to self-marketing and public posturing. In so few words, ISIS desperately cares what you think. And the Western press has happily indulged them.

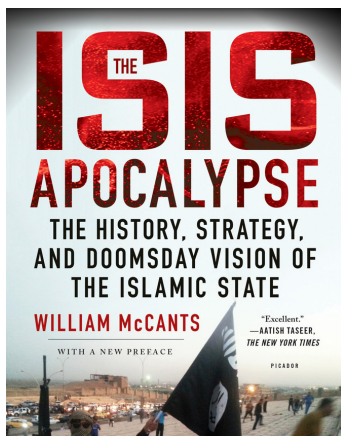
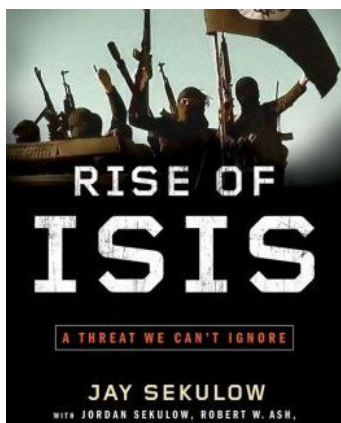
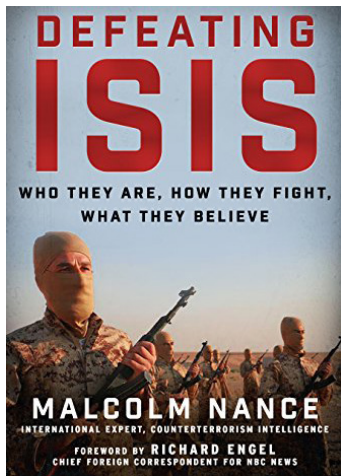
ISIS has lost greater than an aggregate 50% of their peak territory in Syria and 20% in Iraq. Leaked documents reveal the group is overrun with internal discontent, managerial incompetence, and low morale. Reports from inside the caliphate can sound like Monty Python sketches; British expats who join the Islamic State write home complaining that their fellow jihadis seem incapable of forming an orderly queue, and frequently steal shoes or unplug cell phone chargers without permission. ("I knew you chaps were barbaric, but this is ridiculous!")

Militarily, they suffer excruciating fatality rates against more organized forces, and lack the resources and manpower necessary to hold key supply lines. Key figures within the ISIS leadership apparatus are dying like flies. Despite the



*Is this image racist? Yes, deeply. However, we believe its use in this magazine is both justified and necessary. The illustration is meant to show the caricatured Orientalist image that emerges from Western media. We would assume that did not need explaining, but we just know that if we do not make it clear that our image of the Middle East does not involve genies in turbans, we would almost certainly get angry letters. Everything brings us angry letters.*





yammering bravado of their earlier propaganda, ISIS' official media apparatus is beginning to release statements conceding that their project in the upper Levant is not long for this world. Even the most cursory analysis reveals that the self-declared Caliphate is doomed.

And they've always been doomed. Even at their peak, ISIS was confined harshly by limited territorial reach and military resources. The respective civil wars in Iraq and Syria led to the rapid disintegration of both states. As is typical with national dissolution in deeply sectarian regions, militias and de facto territorial divides form along the most logical sectarian and ethnic demarcations. ISIS is a middling Sunni sectarian militia who emerged in the midst of Syria and Iraq's parabolic apex of chaos and disintegration. What we witnessed throughout 2013 and 2014 wasn't an act of astounding power or military genius, but merely a group of reckless scavengers staging a low-rent desert blitzkrieg throughout the upper Levant's sparsely populated, neglected flatlands. ISIS' ostensible rise to geographic prominence was little more than a frenetic smash-and-grab campaign enabled by a lack of cohesive opposition. Their rapid, humiliating collapse as a military presence is as unsurprising as their emergence from Iraq's long-simmering sectarian tempest.

**T**HE ONE DOMAIN IN WHICH ISIS was an unprecedented success was in manipulating the Western media, especially through stoking the fires of paranoia and hype. Examining their various propaganda videos, one is struck by the meticulous attention to production quality. You weren't looking at grainy, amateur output. Their releases betrayed a calculated and pre-planned intent to reach a mass audience. ISIS' various beheading videos combined the deliberate horror of staged murder along with fantastical braggadocio. Jihadi John, the nickname of the (now deceased) ISIS theater kid who starred in many of their more notorious videos, declared "Let the nightmare for Japan begin!" in the clip featuring the beheading of Japanese war journalist Kenji Goto. It also goes without saying that this aforementioned cataclysm against Japan and its people never actually materialized.

In a sick sense, ISIS had a rather astute grasp of media and internet virality. One of their more notorious early stunts involved using a hashtag associated with the 2014 World Cup to broadcast Twitter posts showing decapitations. Not only was this

a typically self-aggrandizing and dramatic move, but it also allowed them to psychically interject themselves into an event that had nothing to do with the Syrian insurgency whatsoever. It was another telling and revealing moment that condensed the core goals of their media apparatus into a single Twitter gambit.

There's a lot to be gained by posing as the most ruthless clique in the jihadi game. Militias with subpar organization, training, and overall firepower often fall back on invoking fear to compensate against their various deficits. Which certainly worked back in 2014 when ISIS was ousting the demoralized Iraqi National Army from posts in Sunni-dominant western Iraq. The Iraqi National Army consistent overwhelmingly of scared Shia boys who had no vested interest in defending Sunni territory, and oftentimes fled before ISIS even fired a shot.

ISIS' malevolent posturing served as an essential recruitment tactic. To a whole swath of clueless Sunni kids throughout the Muslim world, ISIS had succeeded fantastically in appearing tough and menacing. They looked like the winning team, one consisting of fierce jihadi badasses who had a knife in one hand and a Qu'ran in the other.

This might sound like a superficial explanation, but it's one that neatly underscores a particular reason for the group's obsessive self-broadcasting. Regardless of time or place, a region's irregular militias consist overwhelmingly of very young men - it is effectively impossible to overestimate both the recklessness and misplaced, angry romanticism of guys in their early 20s who dream of dying for a cause. And on a practical level, untrained yet over-eager soldiers make excellent suicide soldiers and cannon fodder. ISIS had succeeded in using the mass media to brand themselves as the Great Jihadi Hope, irrespective of whether or not their tinpot caliphate was actually sustainable. Their media apparatus was never more noisy and self-aggrandizing than in the wake of capturing new territory or staging a civilian massacre.

ISIS desperately wanted to be seen as both omnipresent and omnipotent, an infinitely capable and ruthless band of invincible jihadis who were only one step away from barreling into your hometown.

Which brings us to the frankly embarrassing ways many western news organizations have portrayed the jihadi insurgency. When ISIS began capturing territory, American broadcasters had an arms race to see who could cover their rise in the most breathless, hysterical manner possible. The western media and various pundits rap-



idly formed a weird, unintentional symbiosis with ISIS's propaganda wing. The jihadis depended on broadcasting networks for amplification and exposure, while those same networks leaned on ISIS to fuel the sensationalism-as-ratings model of newscasting to which our networks are so hopelessly addicted. Luckily for them, the western (especially American) media was all too happy to indulge this. The consequence is that the public was ruthlessly bombarded with months of overwrought scare stories and dumb hysteria at the expense of accurate, cogent analysis.

The persistent, and persistently obnoxious, refrain across network news outlets during this earlier period was that "ISIS now controls a span of territory larger than Great Britain". It was the perfect condensation of that attitude - hyperbolic, ignorant of situational realities, and shot through with

Lindsey Graham exactly how ISIS would manage to invade a nation containing both 300 million people and the world's most sophisticated military infrastructure.

From this odd, codependent relationship emerged a small cottage industry in ISIS-related literature. Seeking to capitalize upon this newfound fascination with an insurgency that was (erroneously) perceived to have emerged abruptly and without precedent, publishers churned out tomes both brief and voluminous for a hungry and frightened public. Some of those were intelligent and insightful, others were dishonest or crafted to further indulge this cowed sense of terror. For much of the American public, "ISIS" seemed little more than a Rorschach test to gauge one's predetermined fear over a faceless Muslim horde somehow overrunning America or otherwise engaging in the act of evil one dreaded most. At

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*“There’s a lot to be gained by posing as the most ruthless clique in the jihadi game.”*

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fear-mongering innuendo. Never mind that a majority of the territory ISIS claimed to control was uninhabited desert wasteland. Comparing their territorial reach with the U.K. was the exact right note to strike with viewers convinced ISIS was only one victory away from rolling right into England herself. ISIS was of course happy to indulge this fantasy, with the group routinely screaming about their alleged plans to conquer parts of Europe - including the Vatican, of all places. This too was repeated with breathless sensationalism across various news outlets, exponentially amplifying the perceived menace of a localized desert militia who had little more than anarchy and national fracture to thank for their fragile moment of prominence.

This fear-mongering wasn't restricted to media outlets either, with various American politicians ranting about the threat a middling insurgent group like ISIS posed to history's single greatest martial power. Former presidential candidate and North Carolina senator Lindsey Graham once declaimed on Fox News that "[ISIS] is intending to come here" and that "the President needs to rise to the occasion before we all get killed back here at home". Which might have been the definitive nadir had Marco Rubio not later stated his opposition to gun control on the grounds that, "God forbid ISIS pays a visit to you, to our community, the last thing standing between them and our families may be the ability to protect ourselves with our guns". For a considerable stretch of time, ISIS' media apparatus found dedicated allies among America's more hysterical politicians. And despite the persistence of these assertions, it seemed no one dared ask the likes of

their best, these various books serve as a sober analysis of a complex issue. At their worst, they seem indistinguishable from ISIS' own public relations apparatus.

ONE OF THE MORE INTELLIGENT, INCISIVE MASS-MARKET books on ISIS has been penned by intelligence operative Malcolm Nance. A refreshingly sober voice, Nance has given various interviews in the past two years that stand out for their depth of analysis knowledge. Thank goodness he has written *Defeating ISIS*, since it can serve as an antidote to the unhelpful hysteria that has cropped up in the wake of ISIS' emergence from the backwoods of western Iraq.

*Defeating ISIS* starts with the mordant observation that "Apparently in the eyes of many in the news media, political world, and academia... a new group, far more powerful and capable than al-Qaeda, had mysteriously descended from thin air." This implicit conviction that ISIS somehow emerged spontaneously and without warning seemed to only fuel the subsequent belief that the jihadis could do the same outside of Iraq as well.

Nance rapidly dispels the illusion, subjecting it to the clarifying light of the upper Levant's recent military and political history. He dedicates the earlier portions of his book to outlining the legacy of local disintegration and militant Salafism that preceded ISIS, carefully analyzing the various catalysts that made the jihadi insurgency possible. History is driven by the logic of motive and precedent, something to which Nance is highly attuned and applies rigorously to the emergence of ISIS in Iraq. He notes that the various conditions that enabled ISIS

had been brewing for some time, and that experts and intelligence operatives had been well aware of an increasingly active insurgency in western Iraq. ISIS' emergence amounted to a local insurgency reaching critical mass, and using a window of opportunity to burst forth from its confines and overrun easily captured terrain.

The remainder of his book stands as a proscription for how to contain and wither what will likely be a militia with limited geographic endurance. The central value of Nance's work is ultimately written into its title. *Defeating ISIS* outlines that

UNFORTUNATELY, OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN ON THE jihadi insurgency fall into the precise "Rorschach test" habit that Nance's work aims to counteract. They often have a predetermined audience, one for which focus on ISIS mainly serves as an excuse to restate some preexisting ideological theme.

*Defying ISIS*, written by Johnny Moore and released by the Christian Publishing division of HarperCollins, falls under the long tradition of Christian apologetics. It opens with a definition of martyrdom as understood in traditional Christian

# What ISIS is attempting to instill as a foremost objective is a vague, generalized sense of fear.

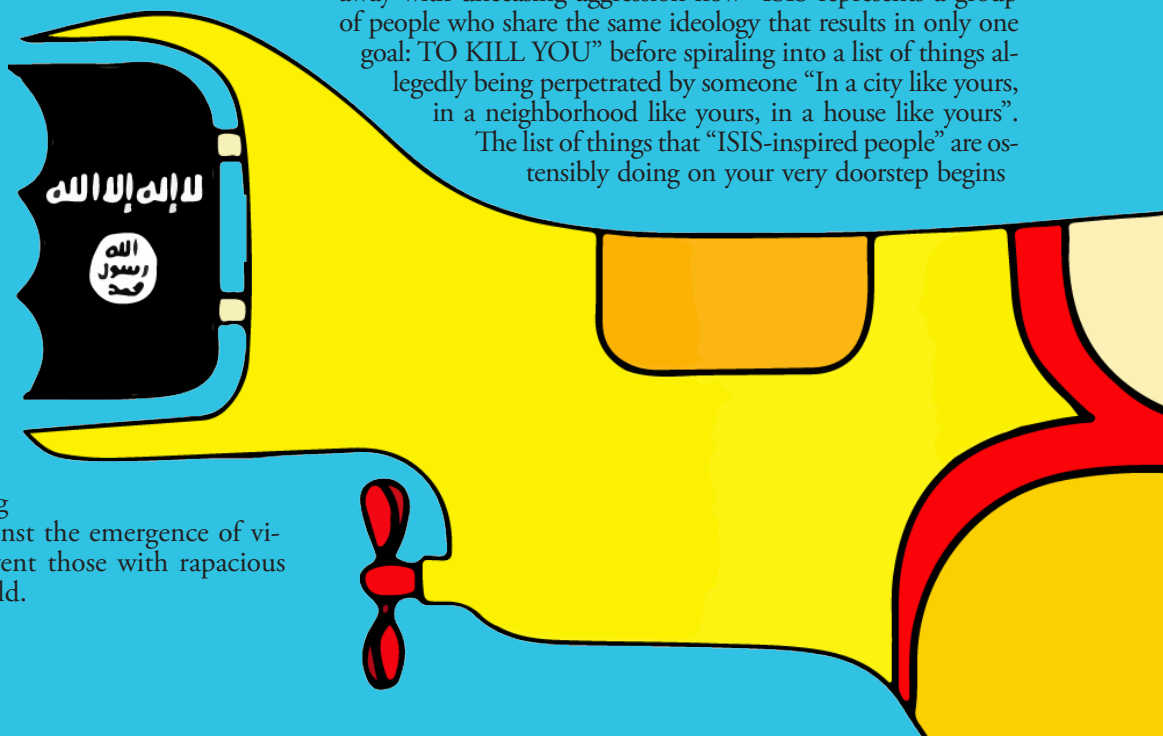
the jihadi group can, with intelligent application of diplomatic and counterinsurgency methods, be eventually defeated. It's a practical counterpoint to the useless doomsaying we saw from far too many pundits and politicians. Contrary to the voices who declaimed that ISIS was nigh-unstoppable and strategically omnipresent, Nance outlines the limitations of ISIS' reach and tactical capacities and how these can be turned against them.

Nance is sensitive to both the cruelty that ISIS has inflicted on innocent civilians as well as the group's inherent weaknesses. He's keen to note the sheer fragility of ISIS' financial infrastructure, and recommends comprehensively severing their sources of funding. He also outlines the paramount importance of unified military opposition and training local forces in counterinsurgency tactics. Beyond this, he outlines that geopolitical fracture remains one of ISIS' greatest assets. Nance rounds out his analysis with a vision of a Marshall Plan-style project to help stabilize and reconstruct Iraq and Syria in the wake of their respective wars. He notes that in the long run, deescalating local hostility and rebuilding infrastructure will safeguard against the emergence of violent insurgent groups and prevent those with rapacious intentions from gaining a foothold.

theology, before going on to associate that with the horror experienced by Iraq and Syria's Christian populations in the wake of the jihadi insurgency. As a thematic centerpiece, *Defying ISIS* emphasizes the suffering of the faithful, and the book's more compassionate passages do evince genuine sorrow for the suffering endured by all religious and ethnic minorities living throughout the upper Levant.

But Moore intertwines this with boilerplate post-9/11 hysteria about the omnipresence of menacing terrorists, and dives into some pretty odious fear-mongering, including a remarkably deranged chapter titled "ISIS is in Your Backyard" that hammers away with unceasing aggression how "ISIS represents a group of people who share the same ideology that results in only one goal: TO KILL YOU" before spiraling into a list of things allegedly being perpetrated by someone "In a city like yours, in a neighborhood like yours, in a house like yours".

The list of things that "ISIS-inspired people" are ostensibly doing on your very doorstep begins





with: "Right now, someone is listening to a hate-filled sermon in *English* by Anwar al-Awlaki." And ends with:

"Right now, someone near you is reading about how to make a bomb or blow up an airplane."

Ignoring the fact that the likelihood of Everytown, USA being hit by a jihadi-planned mass-casualty attack is infinitesimally small, *Defying ISIS*' repeated assertion that this alleged ISIS operative who personally intends to kill you "may live next door" somehow manages to exceed even the most fear-mongering news broadcast in terms of sheer unhinged paranoia.

The book also serves as an unintended microphone for ISIS' rather noisy propaganda apparatus. ISIS has long made a business of spewing threats at anyone and everything in an attempt to seem more powerful and menacing than they truly are. Moore sounds like ISIS themselves, who have threatened mass-casualty attacks against a laundry list of over 60 countries (almost none of which materialized). The back of the book

claims that "the ultimate aim of ISIS is to eradicate the world of Christianity," though ISIS' core goal centers more on the creation of a pan-Islamic caliphate, and its greatest aggression is often directed at other Muslims. *Defying ISIS* accepts the group's most fantastical boasts with absolute credulity, accepting ISIS' theatrical assertion that a mid-sized desert militia and its idiot sympathizers will somehow eradicate a religion practiced by over 2 billion human beings. (*Defying ISIS* also features a salutary

## "What they are doing out there is against everything The Beatles stood for."

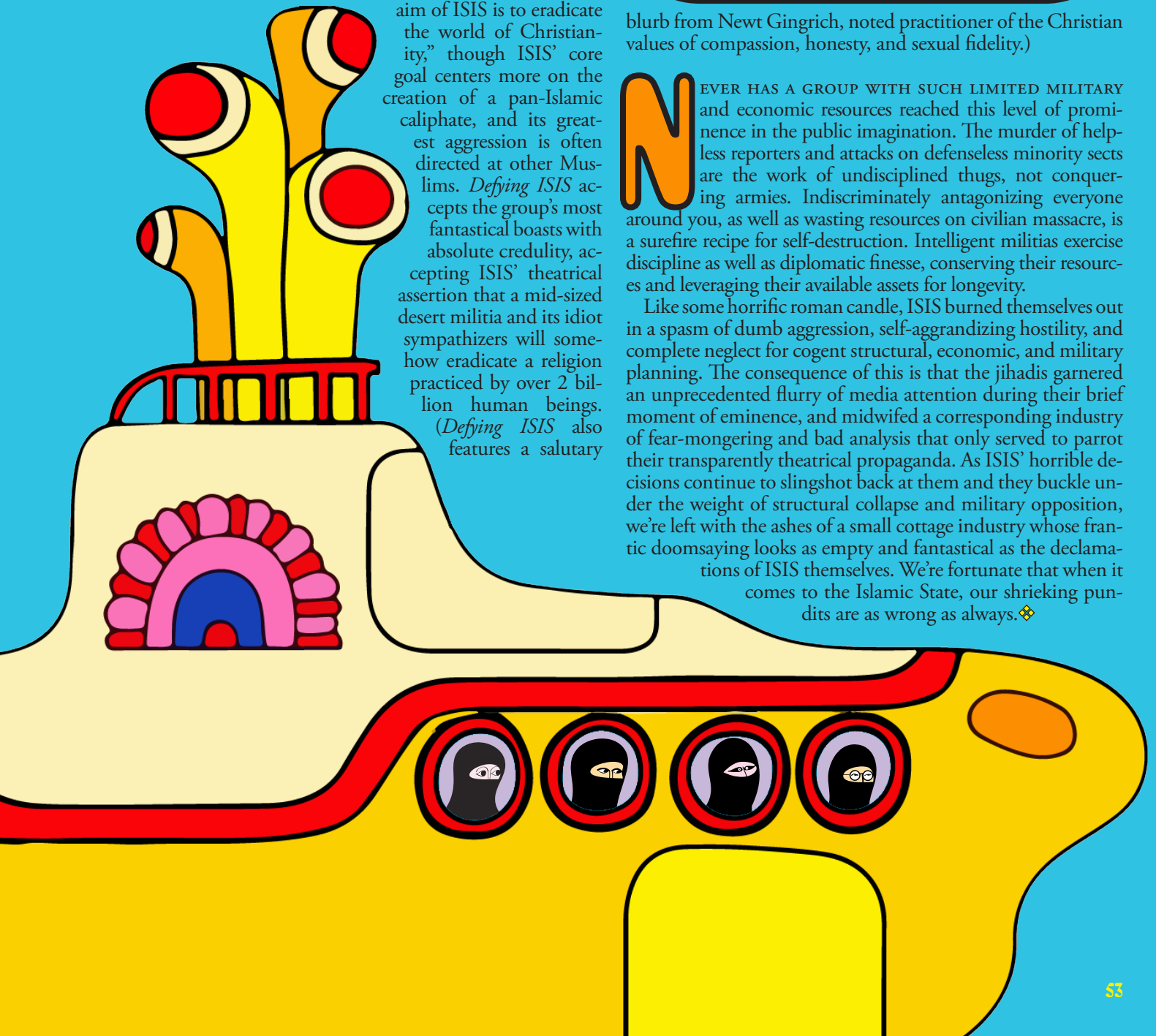
- Ringo Starr on ISIS

One cannot hope to understand ISIS without understanding The Beatles. Not the popular 20th century Liverpoolian singing group. The terror cell. Of course, it's understandable that you might confuse the two. It's gotten so that Wikipedia has to include a disambiguation: "The Beatles" and "The Beatles (terrorist cell)." ISIS's Beatles are also named John, Paul, George, and Ringo. John is Jihadi John, Daesh's (now deceased) chief beheader. Goodness knows why the press decided to affix these labels, but it caught on to such a point that Ringo Starr himself was forced to disown the ISIS Beatles. Is it somewhat sick that the media decided it would be amusing to give ISIS commanders whimsical Flower Power era nicknames? It sure is. Does that make it any less amusing to picture the ISIS Beatles aboard a yellow submarine, or come up with ISIS-themed parody Beatles songs? It does not.

blurb from Newt Gingrich, noted practitioner of the Christian values of compassion, honesty, and sexual fidelity.)

**N**EVER HAS A GROUP WITH SUCH LIMITED MILITARY and economic resources reached this level of prominence in the public imagination. The murder of helpless reporters and attacks on defenseless minority sects are the work of undisciplined thugs, not conquering armies. Indiscriminately antagonizing everyone around you, as well as wasting resources on civilian massacre, is a surefire recipe for self-destruction. Intelligent militias exercise discipline as well as diplomatic finesse, conserving their resources and leveraging their available assets for longevity.

Like some horrific roman candle, ISIS burned themselves out in a spasm of dumb aggression, self-aggrandizing hostility, and complete neglect for cogent structural, economic, and military planning. The consequence of this is that the jihadis garnered an unprecedented flurry of media attention during their brief moment of eminence, and midwived a corresponding industry of fear-mongering and bad analysis that only served to parrot their transparently theatrical propaganda. As ISIS' horrible decisions continue to slingshot back at them and they buckle under the weight of structural collapse and military opposition, we're left with the ashes of a small cottage industry whose frantic doomsaying looks as empty and fantastical as the declamations of ISIS themselves. We're fortunate that when it comes to the Islamic State, our shrieking pundits are as wrong as always. ♦







A



# THE NEW ALTERNATIVE RIGHT

...AND HOW  
TO GET RID OF  
THEM QUICKLY.

*by Brianna Rennix*

WITH ATTENTION-SEEKING PESTS, it is often unclear whether the wisest course is to ignore them or confront them. By ignoring them, one does nothing to stop them festering and multiplying. By confronting them, one gives them precisely what they want, and possibly makes them grow even faster than they otherwise would have.

This dilemma has become acute with the rise of the “alternative right,” the catch-all name for a bizarre new trend in American conservatism, one that everyone seems to agree exists but nobody seems to know quite how to define. This “movement,” such as it is, appears to have



the current affairs analytics team and the university of chicago present:

# UNDERSTANDING THE ALT RIGHT

using Big Data and other equally insightful statistical terminology

*Nate Silver may believe he has a monopoly on the use of numbers in politics. He does not. Current Affairs is no stranger to the prognosticatory and predictable. Unlike Mr. Silver, we correctly forecasted that the Michigan Democratic Primary would be won by Bernie Sanders. (However, we also predicted that every other state's Democratic Primary would be won by Bernie Sanders.) We were also among the first to confidently declare the inevitability of a Trump Presidency, a prediction that is made no less gutsy by its colossal erroneousness. Correspondence from our readers has indicated that "informative charts and graphs" are among the most-craved features among dissatisfied subscribers. We therefore hereby present some maps.*

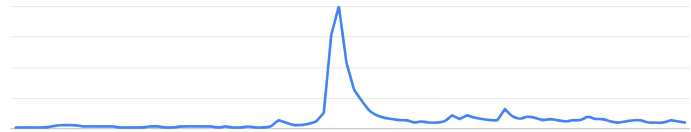
arisen as a sort of filmy spume atop the wave of the Donald Trump presidential campaign, which brought previously fringe far-right voices into the relative mainstream.

One of the difficulties in analyzing the alt-right is the fuzziness of its boundaries. Nearly every broad generalization you can offer about it alt-right is not quite correct. In fact, even classifying the alt-right as a "movement" is somewhat of a misnomer. It is highly decentralized, and its membership has hitherto been active almost exclusively in internet communities, not in political circles or in grassroots organizing.

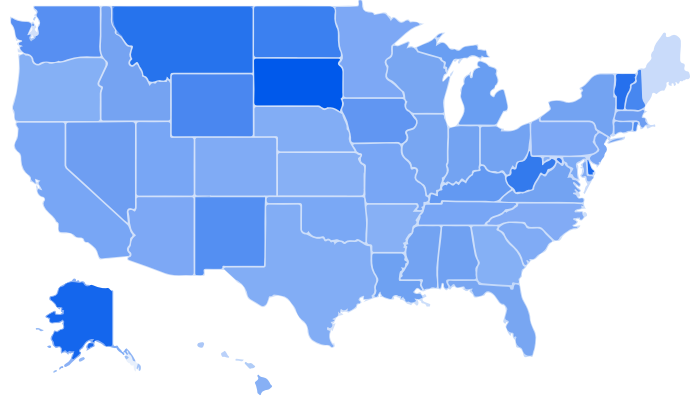
Certain observations can be made, though. It appears to be an overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) male, overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) white collective of gamers, gym rats, tech enthusiasts, climate change skeptics, anti-vaxxers, anti-feminists, men's rights advocates, white supremacists, sci-fi geeks, so-called "pick-up artists," and various species of troll. Though they are a disorganized bunch, and despite a certain predictable level of infighting, their worldview has a fairly high level of consistency across their many platforms.

We can divide them roughly into two general groups, though there is overlap between them. Some alt-righters are "futurists," the kind of Silicon Valleyites that Corey Pein has aptly described as "mouthbreathing Machiavellis." They believe that a society governed by computer code would be preferable to the vagaries of popular democracy, and frequently discuss their desire to establish autonomous island kingdoms where entrepreneurs can conduct social experiments outside the jurisdiction of United States law. This worldview has found support in Trump-loving Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel, who believes that America has been in decline since women got the vote.

But the more numerous and perhaps more influential group of alt-righters are those sometimes labeled "natural conservatives," who feel strongly about traditional gender roles and race-based nationalism. They believe that "Western



Rate of Google queries for "alt right" over the past 30 days



## Analysis & Interpretation

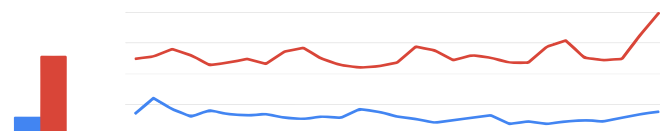
Vermont definitely a swing state in November.

values" must be preserved against outside contaminants. If you think that sounds rather like a throwback to the '50s, you'd be correct. Of course, the vocabulary is different: alt-righters profess to believe in something they call "human biodiversity" or "race realism," meaning that there are biological differences between races, and irreconcilable differences between cultures produced by different races. The prominent "race realist" website American Renaissance is quite direct in its statement of purpose: "It is entirely normal for whites (or for people of any other race) to want to be the majority race in their own homeland. If whites permit themselves to become a minority population, they will lose their civilization, their heritage, and even their existence as a distinct people."

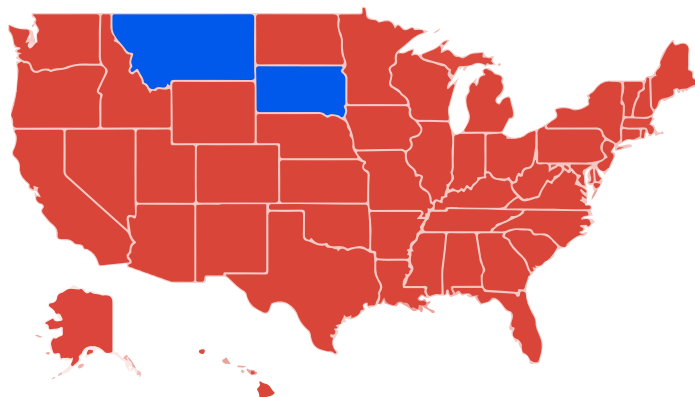
Online, this mutated form of white pride manifests itself in often inscrutable ways. Pro-Nazi memes proliferate across rancid corners of the internet. A cartoon frog named Pepe (since designated a hate symbol by the Anti-Defamation League) has become the unofficial mascot of anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Entire blogs and forums are given over to obsessive litanies of disgust against women who sleep with men outside their race, or against white couples who adopt non-white children. On these websites, thousands of men complain about "the feminization of society," which they view as closely connected to racial and cultural adulteration, and confer with each other about effective strategies for keeping women in their place.

**W**ell, that all sounds thoroughly demented, you may be thinking. *Why would anyone want to associate themselves with these people?* Perhaps it's because the alt-right is a new and exciting flavor of right-wing conservatism, which presents itself not as the steady hand at the wheel in turbulent times, but as an edgy, transgressive,





Rate of Google queries for "alt right" over the past 30 days, as compared to "falling in love"



#### Analysis & Interpretation

Out of all 50 states, only Montana and South Dakota are more concerned about the moral future of this country than their selfish urge to propagate their own genes.

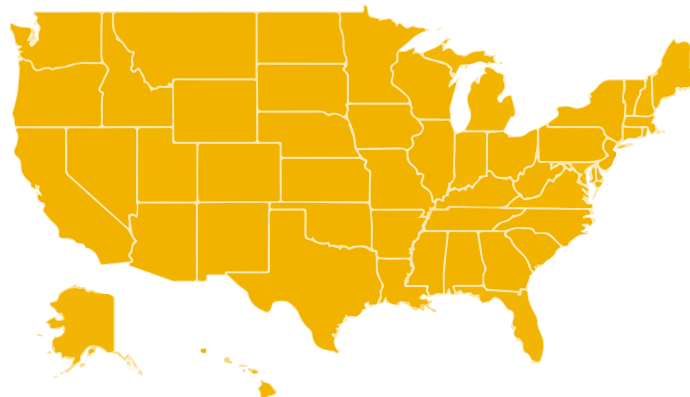
youthful, fun-loving force in a repressive world: a world where, supposedly, all meaningful discussion has been stifled by cultural shibboleths about gender and race. It is "liberals" now, not "conservatives," who are overly attached to received ideas, to unquestionable mantras, to behavioral protocols; liberals who are humorless, inflexible, and easily scandalized; liberals who selectively punish and censor ideas they consider dangerous, or even merely distasteful. In this context, the alt-right paint themselves as countercultural. They encourage people to express the primal urges and instinctive beliefs that The Man has been telling them to repress for most of their lives.

There are many ways to approach the voice that lives inside your head, whispering unkind assumptions about others—you can think of it as a kind of original sin, as a vestige of some rejected part of your upbringing, as some automatic cognitive process that you choose to separate from your volitional identity. Or you can see it as *the voice of truth*, which other people are trying to program out of you for their own self-interested reasons. If a particular racist thought occurs to you often, says the alt-right, it's because *deep down, you know it's true*. You can stop wasting so much mental energy fighting your inclination to favor people who resemble you, because *favoring people who resemble you is the natural order of things*. As the left insists at increasing volumes that everyone—especially white people, and even more especially white men—must engage in constant soul-searching, in exhausting self-interrogation, the alt-right tells you that you can simply *trust yourself*.

It's all the more rewarding to have this kind of self-congratulatory inner faith dressed up as a form of hard, uncompromising realism. The alt-right, in the classic mode of conspiracy theorists, is extremely fond of claiming that *it alone* is willing to accept truths that the rest of the world is determined to ignore. Being an alt-righter is also intellectually easy, in the sense that its ideas are few and simple and make no



Rate of Google queries for "alt right" and "falling in love" over the past 30 days, as compared to "cheese"



#### Analysis & Interpretation

Electorate remains united on certain key values.

moral demand upon those who hold them. The day-to-day life of your average alt-righter seems to consist of savaging people on Twitter and then, possibly, going to the gym. (When writing about their work-out routines, the alt-right's rhetoric switches from a vicious racist screed to the drippiest self-pitying sentimentalism, such as this tragic bit from blogger Mike Cernovich: "*We all hit the gym for one of two reasons. We were too skinny or too fat. That is, we were inadequate or scarce rather than full and abundant. We grind away that old body. Fat peels off and muscles surface. We start to look great, in some cases super human. Yet we don't feel that way. We stay home alone, or we date women who aren't hot enough for us, as we believe a hot woman would cheat. The man looking at us in the mirror is one we don't recognize. But what about the man we can't see? What about our souls? Have our souls experienced the same changes as our bodies?*")

Though they are vocal about the things they despise—immigration, any celebration or deliberate inculcation of racial diversity, women entering previously male-dominated spaces and professions, restrictions on free speech—the alt-right has few positive policy positions, which doubtless saves them a lot of mental effort.

The difficult question is how much anyone should care about the "rise" of such people. White supremacists are frightening, but *online* white supremacists are mostly just pitiful. But what if their rhetoric and their pet theories begin to migrate into mainstream discourse? Right now, the alt-right is like the creepy guy whom you've suddenly noticed following you as you walk home alone late one night. What do you do now? Should you confront him? Maybe he's just messing around, and if you ignore him, he'll go away. But what he *was* just playing around, but then when you confront him, he suddenly changes his mind and decides to murder you? But what if you're overreacting, and then the interaction

is just a huge embarrassment? *But then what if he murders you?*

In other words, it's hard to know how to feel about these people. One loathes what they stand for, obviously, but should one actively fear them? Their real-world political influence may be limited by the fact that white males do not by themselves have an electoral majority. But the alt-right could still use its disruptive influence to foster racial divisiveness in ways that could be frustrating, if not fatal, to progressivism.

The left has been talking a great deal lately about the inadequacy of the concept of colorblindness, which was the paradigm within which many millennials were brought up to understand race. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and police shootings of unarmed black people, article upon article has carried headlines like "Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism," "Why Color-Blindness Is A Counterproductive Ideology," and "Why It's Racist To Be Colorblind." Within the space of a couple years, young people have been instructed to completely discard a worldview that was transmitted to them as gospel through textbooks and after-school specials throughout most of their lives. Colorblindness was once understood to be synonymous with racial inclusiveness, but now it is yet another way to be a racist. Not only is contemporary America far from being colorblind, so the argument goes, but colorblindness itself is a "racial utopic vision," fundamentally unachievable and thus pointless even to strive for.

The backlash to colorblindness is understandable. After all, it has been disturbing to watch conservatives seize the language of Martin Luther King in order to justify policies King himself would have recoiled at, such as dismantling affirmative action and making voting more difficult. But left-wing arguments for recognizing the importance of race carry a perverse consequence: by reinforcing racial categories, they encourage white people to preserve their white identity. This is a strange tension that many on the left seem to find it difficult to talk about. Progressives accept the existence of minority affinity groups as self-evidently worthwhile and necessary, but it is important to nail down in very precise and comprehensible terms how the left's views on race as a category differ from the "racial realist" framework embraced by the alt-right. Demographic changes will only continue to make this question more complicated. As the racial makeup of the U.S. changes, and parts of the U.S. become increasingly minority-majority, will it be socially acceptable for white



**The Alt-Right:**  
A New Name for Some Very Familiar Ideas



people to have some form of explicitly-stated group identity that is racially-defined without being "racist"? If we wish to build a society that is both multiracial and truly egalitarian, we are going to have to revisit this question, and we would do well to make sure the alt-right or its successor is not the only group with a ready script when we do.

This may mean introducing some additional considerations into the way we presently discuss race relations. For example, the recent fad of professing to hate "white men"—however amusing and cathartic it might be—is clearly counterproductive, as it lets racist white men feel themselves justified in throwing around accusations of "reverse racism," and encourages them to form a group identity based around the notion that they are despised and embattled. Ultimately, things like the #KillAllWhiteMen hashtag

are not worth the amount of energy they take to explain, and make it harder to have good-faith discussions about other nuances of inter-race and cross-cultural communication. The left should stop this kind of talk.

**B**UT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN FORMS OF speech are matters of substantive policy that affect individual people's lives. Here the alt-right could cause serious trouble. If the Republican party is driven toward its racist fringe, we can expect the mainstream left to move rightward as well, as it seeks to cadge votes from alienated party moderates. Cleverer members of the alt-right have tried to cast their movement as a localist, populist antidote to a creeping globalization puppeteered by out-of-touch elites: this was the narrative that was woven around the Brexit vote, and such a narrative might well gain similar traction in the U.S. A new political paradigm where one is asked to choose between an isolationist, anti-immigration, explicitly racist "right," and a "left" that defends global capitalism by making emotional appeals to the virtuousness of superficial diversity, would be extremely difficult terrain for those interested in real economic justice.

The left has always had a difficult balance to strike between localism and globalism: On the localist side, the left generally supports policies like food sovereignty and environmental preservation against the depredations of multinational corporations. Yet lefties are also globalists, who believe



# MANATEE FACTS PODCAST



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that individuals worldwide have the right to migrate freely, and who should be wary of protectionist economic arguments that demonize companies for employing foreign workers rather than demonizing companies for paying those foreign workers pitiful wages. Allowing the alt-right to take proprietary

control over anti-globalization rhetoric, and thus force the left into a false choice between defending globalization or defending racism, would be a terrible mistake.

The left's failure to offer a compelling alternative may be partly responsible for the alt-right's success. Certainly, this is the claim made by movement provocateur and spokesman Milo Yiannopoulos. Yiannopoulos is known primarily for going around college campuses giving lectures with titles like "Why Do Lesbians Fake So Many Hate Crimes?", inevitably sparking protests, which in turn increase his infamy. (Yiannopoulos also splashily debuted a "privilege grant" college scholarship for white men, raising \$100,000 online through a nonexistent charity and then proceeding to deposit the money directly into his own bank account.) Yiannopoulos argues in a co-written essay that the alt-right's ugliness has been spurred by the left's retreat into some kind of dreary, preachy totalitarianism:

*Had [the political establishment] been serious about defending humanism, liberalism and universalism, the rise of the alternative right might have been arrested. All they had to do was argue for common humanity in the face of black and feminist identity politics, for free speech in the face of the regressive Left's censorship sprees, and for universal values in the face of left-wing moral relativism... Young people perhaps aren't primarily attracted to the alt-right because they're instinctively drawn*

*to its ideology: they're drawn to it because it seems fresh, daring and funny, while the doctrines of their parents and grandparents seem unexciting, overly-controlling and overly-serious.*

Much of this is idiocy. One need only look at the statistics on black wealth, or on female representation in Congress, to see the continuing necessity of "black and feminist identity

politics." The white men who write off these movements as mere irrational ideology have spent very little time trying to understand the lives of people different from themselves.

Still, one should accept a certain part of the caution. It's true that the left too often lacks (1) good arguments and (2) wit. It's very easy, when one is convinced of one's own moral correctness, to denounce one's enemies as evil and keep them from speaking. In doing so, one can indeed take on the very kind of bullying, close-minded disposition that the left is supposed to detest. The left should be empathetic and curious, and should never be seen as opposed to "universal values" or "freedom of speech," both of which are foundational to its historical struggles.

It's also worth confronting the alt-right's actual arguments head on, rather than simply closing one's ears and denouncing them. Yiannopoulos and others insist that feminists and progressives are afraid to debate Actual Facts, because the left is ideological rather than rational. Leftists then reinforce this perception by merely scoffing and dismissing Yiannopoulos and his ilk as racists, and attempting to have them kicked off college campuses. This is unfortunate, because it allows the alt-right to feel as if their arguments are indeed so strong that their enemies are terrified of having to deal with them.

Nobody need be terrified, however. Underneath all the rhetoric, the alt-right have few actual arguments. Their most convincing points are their attacks on left-wing hypocrisy and self-contradiction (the silencing of dissent in the name of dissent, simultaneously trying to dismantle and reinforce racial and gender identities, a failure to apply consistent moral standards). Once those critiques are taken seriously and addressed, the alt-right has nothing else to offer beyond mystical blood-purity theories and Nazi frog memes.

IT'S NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER THE ALT-RIGHT will be influential in the long run. Seen one way, its rise is encouraging news for progressives. After all, it is fueled by the success of progressive ideas; the alt-right is a *backlash* to advances in racial equality. Perhaps the clownish Trump campaign, and all of the racist memes, are the last gasp of a doomed demographic. It's hard to know if this lunacy is merely the theatrical death-throes of a Republican Party whose time is passed, or if it's the birth of a terrifying new right-wing ideology that threatens to define America's future political life.

But nobody should wait to find out the direction of the movement. Neo-Nazism is also nothing to kid around about, and the percentage of the country who embraced Trump is truly alarming. We should take advantage of the present upheaval in our national debate and begin organizing around a morally coherent alternative. The causes of this new movement need to be identified, its ideas countered and extinguished. The alt-right are hideous, and it is not enough to take note of them. They must be gleefully squashed. ♦

## THE CURRENT AFFAIRS SEVEN POINT PLAN FOR DEFEATING THE ALT-RIGHT

1.

Full steam ahead with current demographic trends.

2.

Don't ever read comments sections or look at memes of any kind, ever.

3.

Engage the alt-right's terrible arguments on race and gender.

4.

Improve our own arguments on race and gender.

5.

Actually make up our minds how we feel about group identity generally.

6.

Seize the moral high ground in the conversation around globalization.

7.

Successfully construct a peaceful, technologically advanced, ecologically integrated society, and then laugh about it.



THE 21ST CENTURY IS NO PLACE FOR A  
**DANDY**



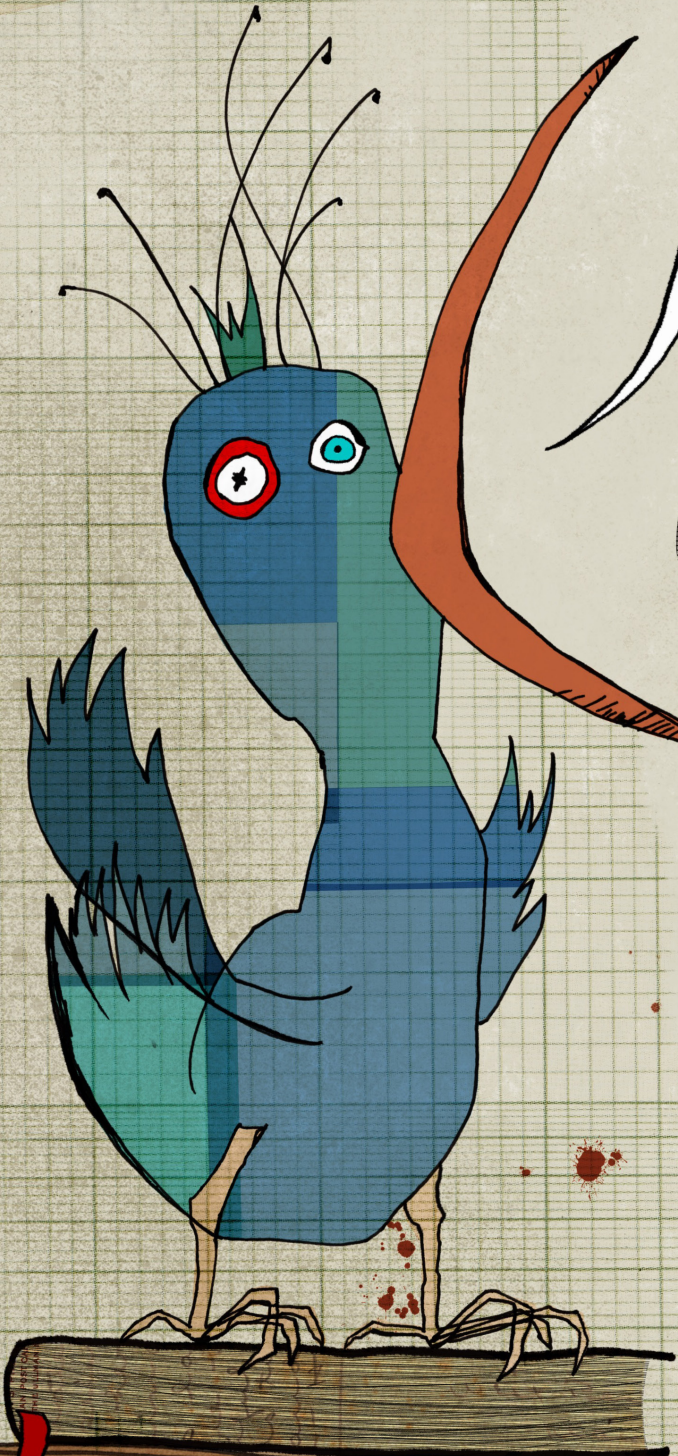
but you have a  
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tweet  
TWEET





# WHY THE PRESS LOVES twitter

by Emily Robinson

JOURNALISTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LAZY. ANYONE who pines for a Golden Age of diligent reportage, when a writer would pound the pavement in search of a good lead, or phone source after source demanding the truth, has never actually picked up an old newspaper or magazine and examined its contents. Then, as now, most writing was swill: thinly-sourced, trivial in subject matter, and slobberingly deferential to power. The *All the President's Men* era of American journalism lasted exactly the duration of the film *All the President's Men*. Do crack investigative reporters exist? Yes. Do they mostly end up fired, or at least in constant conflict with authority? They do. Meanwhile, most of the press remains, as ever, a content mill.

Given that much of the media consists of content-for-the-sake-of-content, the introduction of Twitter came as something of a godsend to journalists. With 500 million new Tweets rolling in every day, and nearly 310 million active monthly users, Twitter offers a sprawling bank of quotable sources. Tweets from all lands are ripe for plucking and republishing.

Hashtags, then, have become something of a goldmine for online publications. Sites like *BuzzFeed* have made a name for themselves in co-opting tweets from teenagers to pad out their pages with such heady articles as “Just 28 Really Real Tweets About Gymnastics” and “19 Tweets Anyone Addicted To Diet Coke Will Completely Relate To.” But it’s also increasingly common to see tweets quoted as sources in articles from *CNN* or *The New York Times*, who can produce the appearance of doing man-on-the-street reporting even as they sit at their desks trawling through Twitter. With millions of members of the public jabbering

at one another at all times, Twitter is a vast ever-refreshing quote bank, an extraordinary tool for the writer in an age of 24-hour demands for fresh content.

There’s a basic ethical problem to the *BuzzFeed*-style practice of culling and republishing tweets. This model of article, which simply repackages memes, quips, and observations created by Twitter users, profits from people’s writing without compensating them for it (and in many cases, without properly crediting them). This constitutes a kind of low-level theft (somewhat like bullying a nerd to do your math homework, if the nerd was a preteen with 100 Twitter followers and you were a multimillion dollar publishing house), and there’s something disquieting about seeing people’s wit being resold for profit without their permission.

But Twitter-based journalism is disturbing for reasons that go far beyond questions of intellectual property and attribution. Using Twitter as a prism through which to examine and report the world creates a narrow and distorted impression of reality. And with journalists already prone to clubby insularity, Twitter provides new ways for them to confirm their preexisting worldviews, and further wall themselves off from ordinary experience. As a consequence, the world reported in the press is the world that exists on Twitter, not the world as it actually exists.

Twitter is not a normal place, though its users are ostensibly normal people. Like a Petri dish forgotten in a warm, moist cabinet, it has developed some truly curious cultures. Facilitated by its ease of use and offer of anonymity, Twitter has borne a plethora of unique subgroups with names as terrifying as “ISIS

twitter” (self-explanatory), “Woke Twitter” (tweeters who focus on social justice issues, often to the point of self parody), and “Irony Twitter” (tweeters who communicate only in irony and sarcasm). Each of these groups has developed their own vernacular, traditions, and jokes, much like one would expect of high school cliques, or minor league gangs. Far from being some kind of lofty online manifestation of the “public square,” Twitter has become the digital equivalent of a stall wall in a public high school bathroom, one in which Neo-Nazis and Communists compete with one another for the most obnoxious Sharpie doodles

Thus presenting tweets as evidence of some national or global trend (rather than as a trend on a social media platform) is several shades of problematic. Inevitably, if we take trending hashtags for actual trends, we will be dealing with a biased sample: we are looking at what is popular *among people who spend time on Twitter* rather than among people more broadly. Forgetting the Internet’s biases creates delusion. We may treat the artisanal cupcake blogs we follow on Tumblr as representative of every cupcake in the world, but frozen, flavor-free grocery-store cupcakes are destined to remain the norm in most of real life.

When it comes to political journalism, treating the Internet as representative of reality can heavily bias coverage. It’s because the press gets its worldview from Twitter that it was stunned by the persistence of support for Donald Trump. After all, subsequent to every new vulgar eruption from Trump’s mouth during the campaign, a torrent of outrage poured forth on Twitter, leading pundits to repeatedly declare that Trump’s campaign was finally dead (*The Onion* captured this kind of wishful insistence nicely with the headline: “‘This Will Be The End Of Trump’s Campaign,’ Says Increasingly Nervous Man For Seventh Time This Year”). Yet Trump maintained support from nearly half the electorate. It was almost as if the online world was a poor representation of the world at large. One is reminded here of Pauline Kael’s frequently misconstrued remark on the 1972 election, in which she observed how closed-off her New York social life made her: “I live in a rather special world. I only know one person who voted for Nixon. Where they are I don’t know. They’re outside my ken.” Kael’s remark was frequently spun as comically ignorant (it was misquoted as “I don’t know how Nixon could have won; nobody I know voted for him”), but it actually showed an impressive self-awareness about the detachment of the media from the public, one that most of today’s political pundits couldn’t achieve even if they set their best unpaid interns on it.

For writers, Twitter provides a way of deepening one’s obliviousness and caressing one’s ego. Twitter allows commentators

to follow only those whose opinions they wish to consume, and to receive instantaneous praise from their own followers. Thus Twitter provides a streamlined platform from which to shamelessly pimp out your writing to a self-selected group of people who are likely to read it. It’s a wonderful place to reaffirm your beliefs, and it’s so easy to do so on a platform

designed to allow you to tailor the information you receive to what you want to hear, or what you know you’ll agree with.

Twitter does have its egalitarian component, however. At its best it is firmly *anti-elitist*, giving a platform to those who would previously have gone unheard. Some of these people (e.g. the neo-Nazis) had been pushed to the fringes for good reason, but others were excluded from mainstream discourse simply because mainstream discourse has a tendency to be snobby, corporate-driven, and exclusive. And where once one would have had to penetrate the Manhattan gala-and-book-talk scene in order to hurl abuse at a *New York Times* opinion columnist, now anyone

with an internet connection can politely explain to Nicholas Kristof precisely why he is utterly and completely full of shit (an opportunity that the *Current Affairs* editorial staff takes regular advantage of). The platform thus allows for an unprecedented level of contact between the unwashed public and our patrician overlords.

But one should not overstate the case, and risk painting Twitter as some sort of classless comradely paradise. Pundits can easily filter out dissenting voices from the public, and sometimes take on the appearance of kings and queens holding court before an audience of adoring Followers. And while Twitter amplifies new voices, it does not seem to expand worldviews. For pundits, the general effect seems to be a winnowing down of their informational intake, to the point where it consists almost entirely of the words of other pundits.

TO SEE THE CONSEQUENCES OF TWITTER-CENTRIC journalism, one can examine one of the most repeated stories of the Democratic primary: the so-called rise of the “BernieBro.” In October of 2015, Robinson Meyer of *The Atlantic* published a brief article titled “Here Comes the Berniebro.” Meyer, a largely Twitter-dwelling journalist (having 39,700 tweets to his name, plus 40,500 “likes” of other people’s tweets), suggested that a new phenomenon had arisen in American politics. The Bernie Sanders campaign was attracting a noxious wave of supporters, whom Meyer christened the “BernieBros.” This group was “very male, [...]

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# LIBROS



"CADA LIBRO ES SU  
PROPIO OCÉANO..."

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white; well-educated; middle-class (or, delicately, “upper middle-class”) and “aware of NPR podcasts and jangly bearded bands.” He described these supporters as obstinate and aggressive in their online presence, prone to “performative” appraisals of feminism, and (perhaps worst of all) firm in their belief that Sanders “really could win.” Meyer, himself a white man, castigated these white, male Sanders voters for supporting the sins of “free college for all and a \$15 minimum wage” and for falling for “Sanders’s rhetoric that America is trapped in a number of deep, unprecedented crises.”

But aside from Meyer’s bizarre contempt for Sanders voters’ idealism, the article suffered from a simple problem: there was no evidence whatsoever that some kind of “BernieBro” trend actually existed. The theory that there was something distinctly “bro-ish” about Sanders supporters was in direct conflict with the actual demographic facts (a concession Meyer even made in the article, noting that “Sanders’s support skews young, but not particularly male”). Aside from a few dozen isolated tweets, largely by anonymous and unpopular users, nobody could seem to locate the whereabouts of these storied “bros.” To be sure, one could find occasional nasty remarks about Hillary Clinton made in comment sections (although when Glenn Greenwald investigated the examples being cited, he found some of the “BernieBros” turned out to be conservatives or women). People of all stripes are assholes on the internet, though, and no effort was made to answer the real questions, which was how many of these “bros” actually existed.

IN A SENSIBLE WORLD, THEN, MEYER’S ARTICLE SHOULD not have even been a footnote in the history of the election. It should have been laughed off as shockingly obtuse. Yet somehow, a flimsy story based on a sample of Robinson Meyer’s Facebook newsfeed ended up — miserably — setting the tone for much of the remainder of the online primary. Instead, the political media in residence on Twitter took the specter of Bernie Bros and went hog wild. Soon everyone from Jamil Smith at *The New Republic* to Amanda Marcotte of *Salon* had latched onto the fantasy of an army of evil white men who supported socialist policies as a means of furthering racism and sexism. Smith wrote that unless Sanders could somehow contain the “bros,” they would damage his political prospects. *The New Yorker* published a cringingly unfunny and cruel “BernieBro Code” containing the “rules” such creatures live by (e.g. “A Bernie Bro is legitimately glad that his uninformed, mainstreamer aunt is part of a generation that is going to be dead soon.”) Paul Krugman, dissatisfied with Sanders’ economic proposals, went so far as to declare that Bernie himself “is becoming a Bernie Bro.” The Sanders campaign was forced to apologize for the BernieBros, despite there being scant evidence of their actual existence.

The explosion of the fake BernieBro trend was both fascinating and appalling. The narrative ruled media Twitter for months, and despite demographic data continually debunking it, pundits clung to it like a safety blanket. It became a convenient way to dismiss all criticisms of Hillary Clinton that didn’t come from someone with a byline in a major publication or a degree from an Ivy League school. In fact, Olivia Nuzzi of *The Daily Beast* reported in June that she was skeptical of the BernieBros idea, for the simple reason that the Clinton campaign had tried to pitch her a story about the phenomenon. The BernieBros line proved convenient for the Clinton camp, as it shifted press coverage to questions

like “How will Sanders stop the BernieBros?” and away from substantive policy.

The BernieBros story showed how news can be manufactured in an age of Twitter punditry: a writer grabs a few stray tweets and produces an article declaring them a nationwide event. Other writers, sharing both the first writer’s political persuasion and constant need to emit content, issue commentaries on the phenomenon, citing the first writer’s article as their source. Pundits quote pundits who quote tweets. Then there are more tweets, then additional punditry. At no point is the story checked against the real world: it is solely a dialogue between *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and Twitter.

THIS THERE ARE REAL-WORLD POLITICAL consequences to this type of shoddy reporting; we at least know that it can filter into a presidential primary. There’s a feedback loop between the media and political elite, and Twitter provides a convenient means of fabricating stories to further particular interests. One can create the news entirely to fit one’s agenda and worldview, since there are always Twitter subcommunities where a certain thing is true, even if it is nonexistent in the wider world.

It can be harder to ascertain motive when all of this back-and-forth occurs online. With conventional network political coverage, sycophancy is easily detected. One could simply turn on *Meet The Press*, and witness Chuck Todd’s eyeballs morph gruesomely into hearts whenever he was seated across from John McCain or Chuck Schumer. On Twitter, with its veneer of equality, it can be difficult to determine who is doing what for which reasons.

Multiple kinds of journalistic dysfunction are enabled by Twitter. One can draw a distinction between the purely profit-driven lazy journalism of *BuzzFeed* and the brown-nosing and status-driven journalism of *New York* magazine or *The New Republic*. The former is simply unfortunate, in that it gradually turns everyone stupid. The latter, however, is actively pernicious. Through the magic of Twitter, political journalists form incestuous cliques that reaffirm their prejudices, then their own publications treat those cliques as the boundaries of the social world. Twitter helps make politicians our friends, and makes journalists friends with politicians. We have developed an online political culture that is a-okay with calling Dianne Feinstein their “queen” or 83-year-old Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg their “mom.” That is not something a healthy society does.

Perhaps it doesn’t matter too much, though. Most of the world happily gets along without ever thinking about what *The Atlantic* has to say about anything. In writing about Twitter punditry, one runs the risk of reinforcing the very problem one is diagnosing, and attributing an outsized real-world significance to inconsequential commentators. But it remains true that political media sets agendas, and if a presidential candidate is forced to spend time responding to empty rubbish spread by pundits, this is time that cannot be spent campaigning. While the inhabitants of Twitter may constitute a comparatively small fraction of the American public, they make a comparatively large fraction of the country’s noise. To the extent that it escapes the Internet and poisons us all, their obsession with the insignificant could very well be significant. ❖



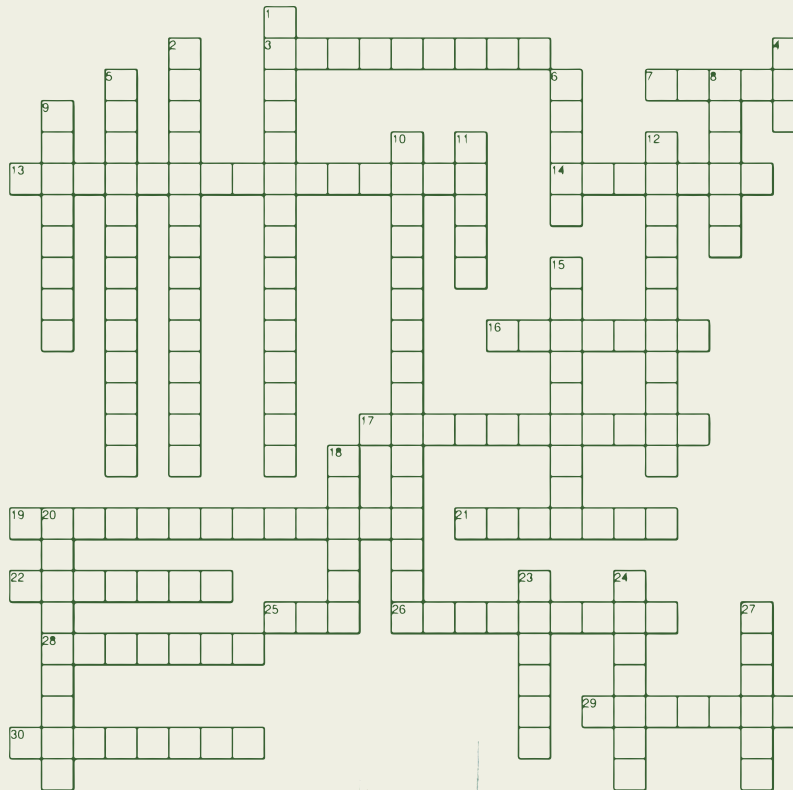
# Concerning the Coniferous

## A CROSSED WORD PUZZLE

### Horizontals

3. Scientific Division
7. This fir, also called the red fir, is one of the most popular species of Christmas trees
13. The Japanese Umbrella-Pine is the sole surviving member of this family
14. This Conifer family derives its name from the Greek word kyparissos
16. Although named after David Douglas, the Douglas-fir's scientific name comes from his lifelong rival, botanist Archibald
17. Common name for ancient Coniferous family prominent in the Jurassic and Cretaceous Periods
19. Genus containing the world's smallest conifer, the Pygmy Pine (Mature height less than 30 cm)
21. Order formally known as Coniferales
22. Common name for tallest coniferous tree (Maximum confirmed height 115.55 meters)
25. The International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants
26. Extinct pine with largest needles ever recorded
28. The Dutch word for Juniper that inspired the name for the popular liquor Gin
29. Name of the pine with the largest cone
30. The inventor of the Cherokee syllabary and the Eponym for the Sequoiadendron Giganteum (Giant Sequoia)

Complete the crossword below using your knowledge of Conifers.  
(Answers on p. 2.)



### Verticals

1. Operation name of the 1953 nuclear test in which 145 Ponderosa Pines were transported to Area 5 and subjected to a nuclear blast (answer includes hyphen)
2. The structure in the 'Male Cone' that produces yellowish pollen through meiosis
4. Common name for the Taxaceae Family
5. Scientific name for the 'Female Cone'
6. And now... NO.1 The \_\_\_\_\_
8. The resin from this tree is traditionally used as a cold remedy and as a glue for glasses and optical instrument components
9. Last name of the Botanist, who, in 1939, proposed 'the generic segregation of the Sequoias'
10. From an evolutionary standpoint Conifers benefited from this mass extinction (answer includes hyphen)
11. Conifer is a Latin word, a compound of 'Conus' (cone) and \_\_\_\_\_ (to bear)
12. Longest living pines known to man, many of which are known to live to be 4,000 years old
15. Formally named in 1836 by Scottish nurseryman Charles Lawson, this pine is the official state tree of Montana
18. Most commonly commercially harvested Pine Nut tree in North America
20. Term for a plant whose leaves are 'sempervirens'
23. Common name for the tree that grew from the north-east corner of the funeral pyre of Bala Veerayya after his wife Thimmamma committed Sati.
24. Common name for the genus Tsuga, which, due to a similarity in smell, shares its name with a notable poison, but Tsuga species are not toxic and their leaves can even be boiled into teas
27. Largest Coniferous forest on Earth





