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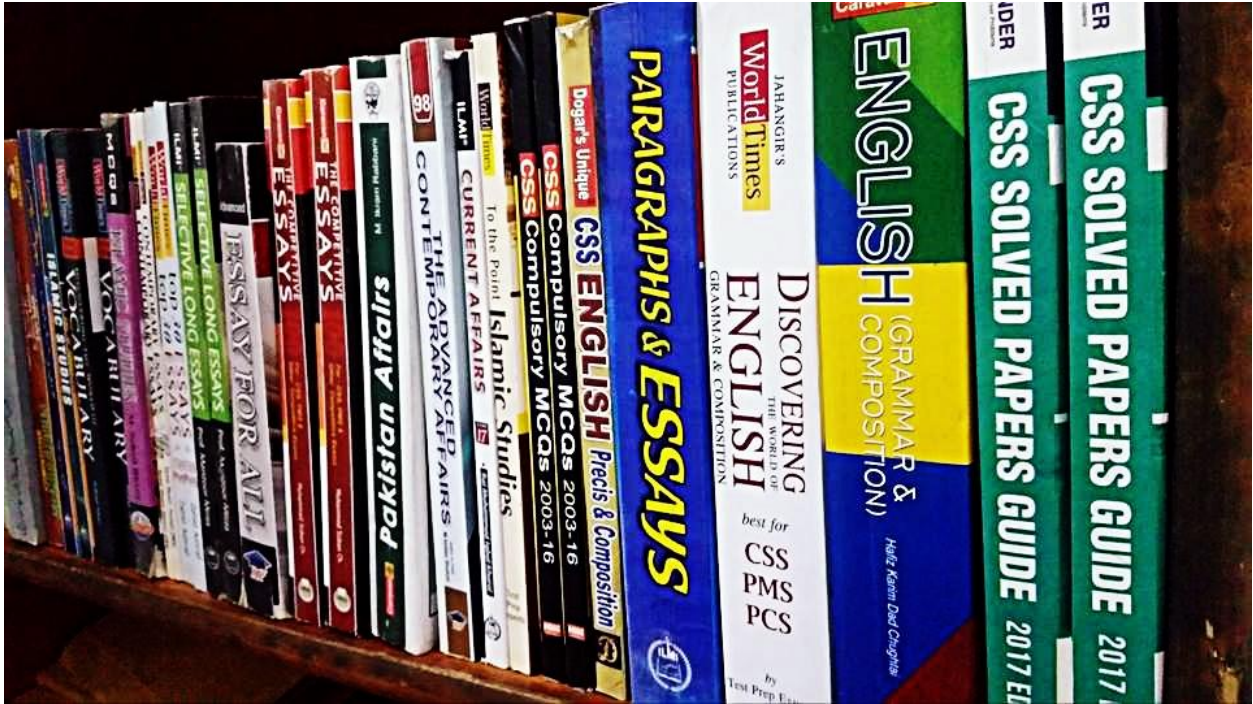
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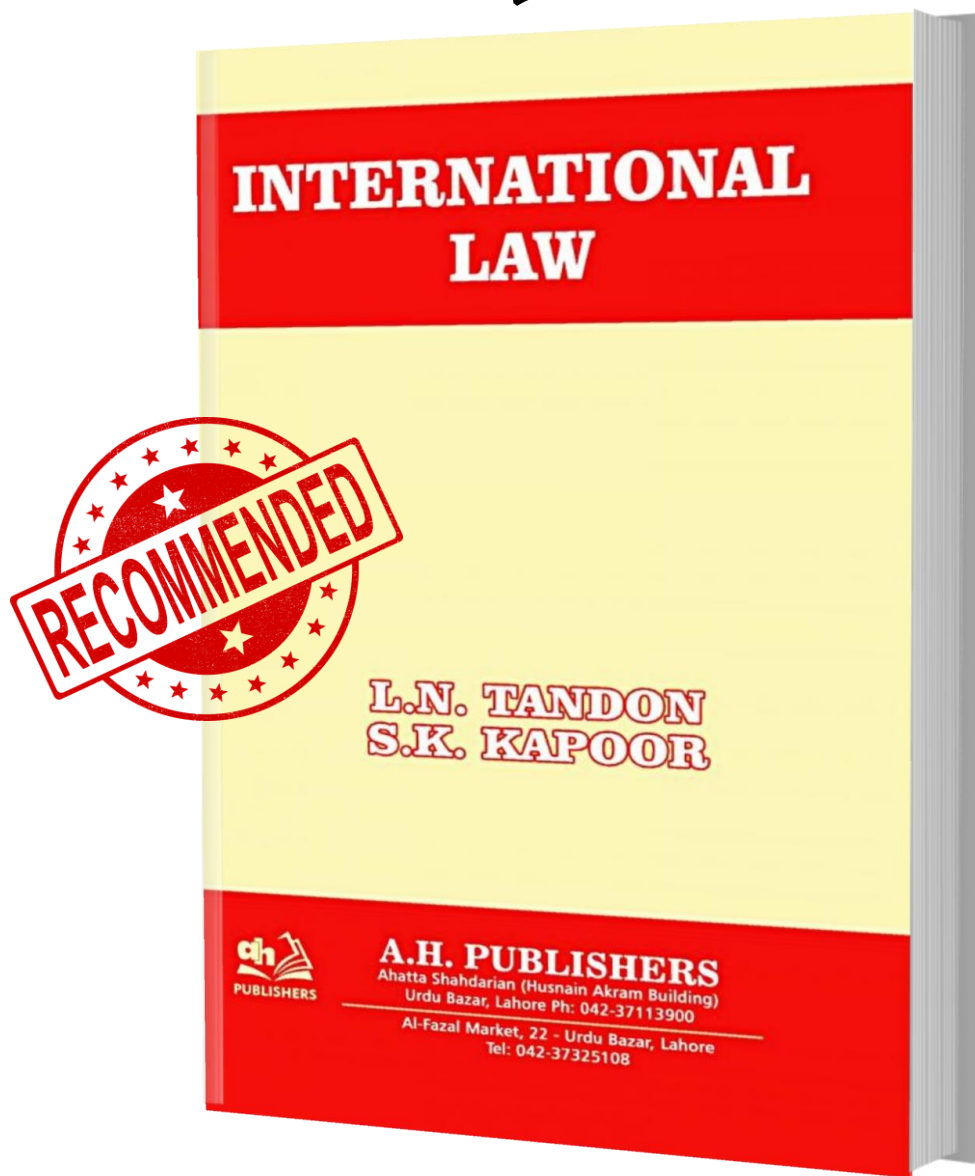
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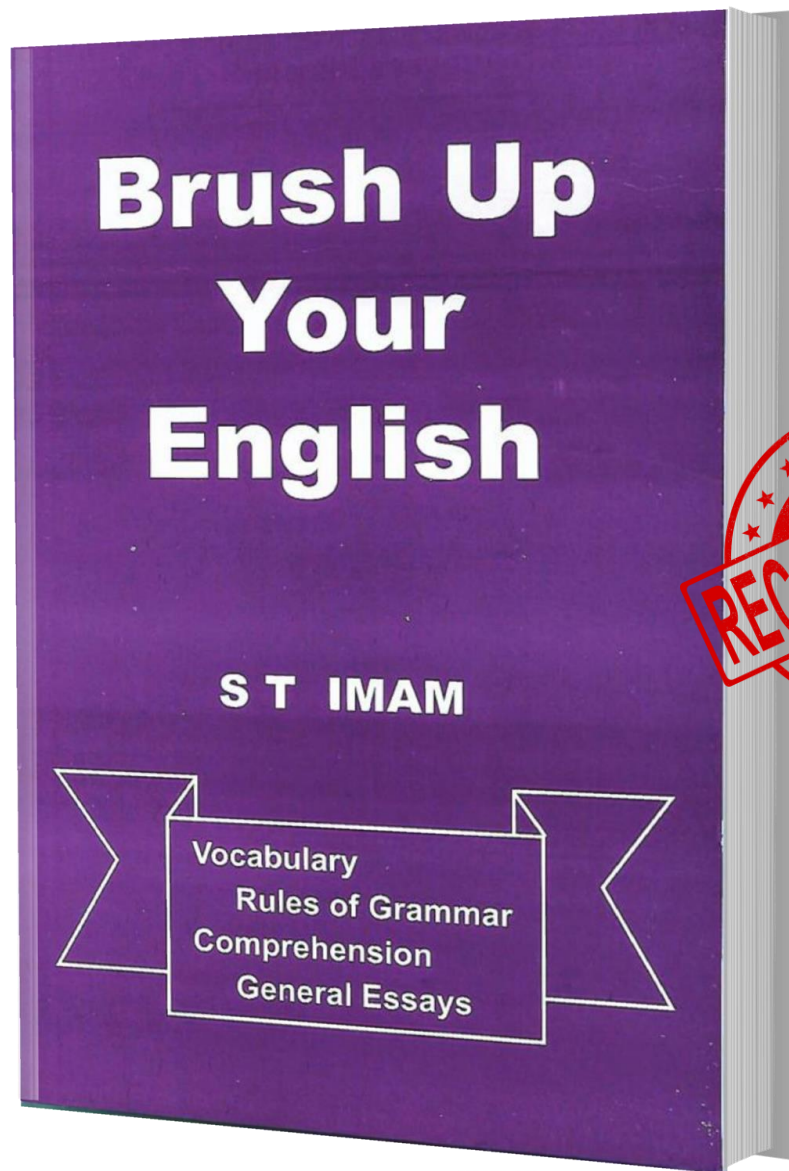


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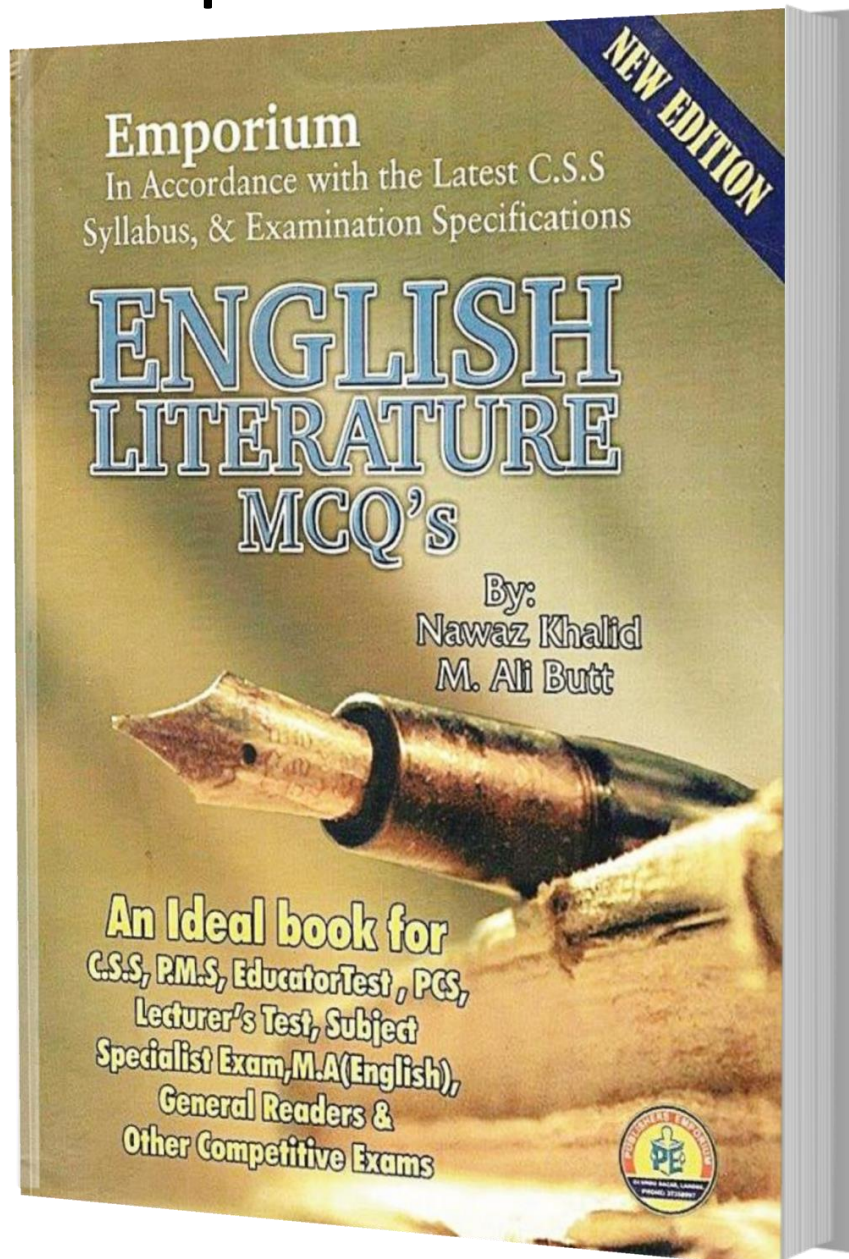
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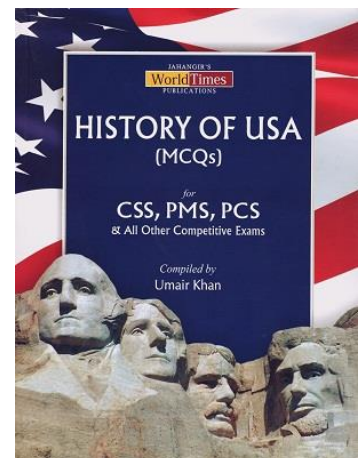
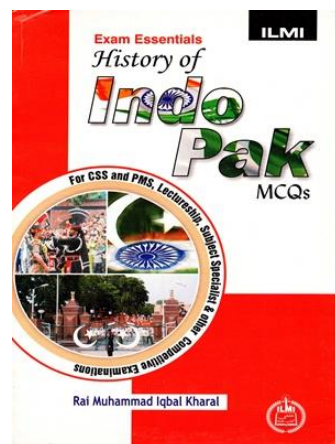
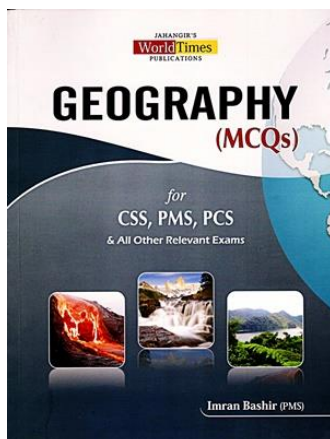
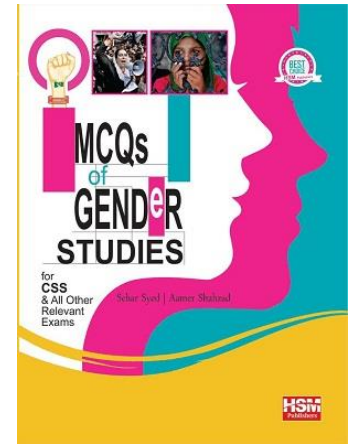
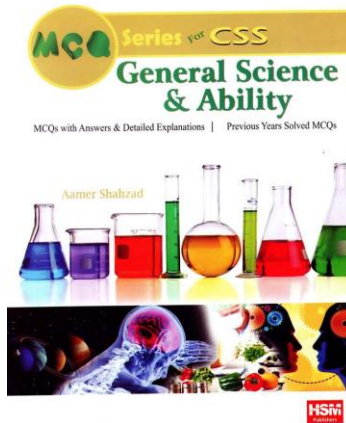
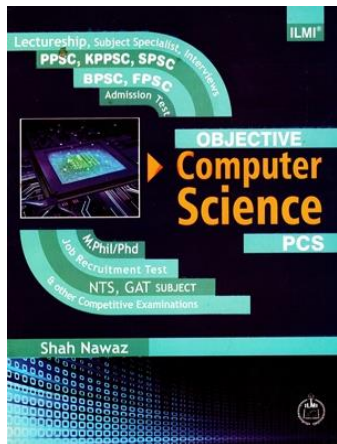
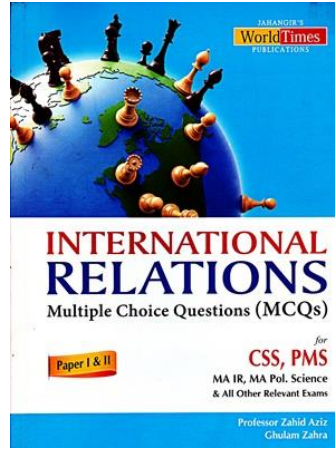
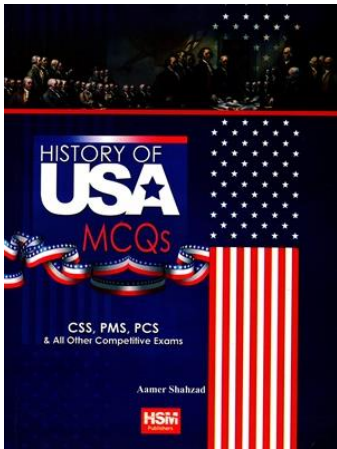
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Letters

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A Scoutlandish Story!

Morley Musick's story about the Border Patrol's youth program ["Meet the Boy Scouts of the Border Patrol," February 3] was the scariest article I have ever read in *The Nation*. The attempt to tie the training and mentoring of young people to catching undocumented immigrants, along with the brainwashing of these youths in Trumpian ideology, sends up red flags for anyone who knows history. It has the smell of the Hitler Youth program from the 1930s. Is that where this is headed?

If anyone is not aware of how dangerous Donald Trump, his administration, and his cult followers are, this should convince them. This effort to create an indoctrinated Trump Youth Scouts is reason enough to make sure we elect a Democratic Senate and a new president.

MIKE BOLAND
FISHERS, IND.

I was disturbed by your article "Meet the Boy Scouts of the Border Patrol." First off, the lovely cover illustration of the young Border Patrol Explorers poses them as little Nazis; *please* do not try to tell me that was not what you wished to imply.

Perhaps you would rather these kids get into drugs, smuggling, or other sorts of mischief. Instead, they are learning discipline, law enforcement, first aid, and other useful skills. The slant of your article is obvious and disgusting. You should be praising these kids as good examples, but your liberal agenda is to drag them down and make them look like they are minions of the Border Patrol.

Go ahead and laugh at them in a few years when they are making more than \$125,000 a year.

RAY HARRIS
LAS VEGAS

Love Supreme

I enjoyed Connie Schultz's piece "Love and Rockets" [February 3].

I so wish her husband, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, had run for president. He could have stood up to Donald Trump's lies, bullying, and lack of knowledge. I fear the current leaders in the race for the Democratic nomination do not have the stamina, determination, or ability to confront Trump or to appeal to a broad group of people.

DEBBIE CASSETARI
CHINO HILLS, CALIF.

No More War

Kudos for your editorial "Stop This War" [January 27]. The murder of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani was indeed a useless and dangerous escalation of our needless ongoing war with Iran. All the reasons given to support the attack are only the usual claptrap from jingoistic flag-wavers.

GEORGE BATTS
JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

Street Smarts

I want to express support for Jeet Heer's view that activism is essential to getting Congress and our other leaders to act ["Impeachment Needs to Move to the Streets," December 30/January 6]. Without it, there would have been no civil rights legislation. If not for three years of activism against the depredations of the Trump presidency, there would have been no impeachment effort. Yes, there is the rule of law, but it is only the action of citizens that prompts its enforcement, by informing elected representatives of their demands.

HENRY STEEN
AUSTIN, TEX.

Correction

"Australia Is Burning" by Daniel Judt [February 10] incorrectly states that the Australian Labor Party formed a coalition government with the Green Party after the 2007 elections. There was no coalition government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

letters@thenation.com

Iowa Was Just the Start

A few months ago I described President Trump as “unelectable.” I have enough faith in the American people to believe that a majority of voters find his open incitement of violent racism appalling and his almost ritualistic practice of cruelty to children sickening. In choosing the word

“unelectable,” though, I failed to take into account the likelihood that the Democratic Party establishment would blow it again.

Trump should never have been elected in the first place, but the Democratic leadership in 2016 settled on a candidate who was even more unelectable. Then, as the eminently impeachable president continued on his merry way, abusing the powers of his office with abandon, Democrats took the drastic step of using the House of Representatives’ impeachment powers on weak and opaque grounds.

Representative Al Green (D-TX) had proposed articles of impeachment that were strong, persuasive, and clear, but they were rejected by the House leadership. Speaker Nancy Pelosi finally decided to attempt to remove the president from office on the basis of a disputed phone call to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine—a country that most Americans would struggle to find on a map. The House opted for an impeachment proceeding that inadvertently raised the possibility that a former Democratic vice president (who is currently seeking the party’s presidential nomination) had his own corrupt dealings in Ukraine.

The proceedings have raised the question of whether the Democratic establishment, working with its close allies in the intelligence community, is fit to govern the country. Trump, in the meantime, plays to the public’s anti-interventionist sentiment with his customary lies, promising to bring troops home while sending even more of them abroad.

After a botched impeachment process that leaves Trump even more electable, we come to the disastrous and, for a grassroots Iowa Democrat, deeply humiliating failure of the state Democratic Party to properly count the votes in a set of caucuses that have never been more important.

The blame for this lies squarely with the leadership of the state party in Des Moines. It holds

itself accountable primarily to Iowa’s Democratic elected officials, who are almost unanimous in their willingness to endorse anybody but Bernie Sanders. The state party gave its contract for reporting the results to an untested start-up with close ties to the Democratic establishment. The one possible good that could come from the indefensible failure to deliver the results in a timely way is the replacement of the caucuses with a primary run by state election officials rather than stressed-out party volunteers.



As Hillary Clinton pointed out after her loss to Barack Obama and again days before this year’s Iowa contest, the caucuses disenfranchise working people, parents with young children, and the elderly. As they’ve become larger, the image of an idyllic Norman Rockwell-style town meeting where discussions occur among neighbors has become ridiculous. The caucus that I helped organize in Iowa City had well over 600 people pres-

ent and counted, but dozens left early after signing in, fed up with the wait. Others were deterred by interminable lines on the sidewalk outside and never registered.

This is not an argument against an early primary in a small state with an opportunity for retail politics, which is valuable if only to prevent oligarchs from buying the nomination by spending their billions on media. Proposals to rotate a first-in-the-nation primary among different states have merit. This is a problem that could be solved with strong and competent party leadership. The current Democratic establishment, though, will probably find yet another way to make things worse rather than better.

JEFFREY COX

Jeffrey Cox, who died suddenly on February 9, was a professor at the University of Iowa. With Dave Lesbtz, he edited The Prairie Progressive.

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VOLUME 310, NUMBER 7,
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The digital version of this issue is available to all subscribers February 18 at TheNation.com

The Standing of Trees

Richard Powers on expanding personhood beyond people.

“Wow! Look at that!” Richard Powers exclaims, pointing to a tree rising from the slope above us. Branches arch outward from its stout trunk, bark marbled in a greenish cast. The tree, which he identifies as a tulip poplar, looms over the slender young beeches that surround it. “That’s 20 feet at breast height in circumference,” he continues, amazed.

Powers, a novelist, has spent the last eight years studying and thinking about trees, an obsession that resulted in his 2018 novel *The Overstory*. The book—his 12th—is an expansive allegory about the relationships between trees and humans. The story weaves botany and dendrology together with mythology and the history of the timber wars of the 1990s, when logging interests and environmentalists on the West Coast of the United States fought sometimes violent battles over forests slated for harvesting.

The Overstory won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. It also reconfigured Powers’s life, uprooting him from Silicon Valley, where he lived when the book began to take shape. Up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, he encountered a patch of uncut primary redwood forest, which got him thinking about how changed most other forests are by human appetite. That feeling was accentuated by a brief research trip to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which still contains pockets of virgin forest. He says he thought he knew what an eastern forest looked like, but in the Smokies he realized he’d had no idea. Almost a year later he decided to move to the park’s Tennessee foothills, where he lives today.

Although Powers has lived in Tennessee for four years now, he still considers himself a “beginner” in the Smokies. He says he hopes to walk all of the park’s trails eventually. “Not in an imperialist, colonialist, toxic masculine mode,” he clarifies, laughing a bit, “but in an exploratory, humbled, and attentive mode.”

“Your expectations can start to impede your ability to observe and to be present.”

The trail we’re walking today, which follows a creek at the park’s northeastern edge, is new to him. Powers—tall, slender, wearing two long-sleeve T-shirts and round glasses—speaks in deliberate, full paragraphs and walks at a mellow pace, stopping often to marvel or puzzle over something growing or rotting along the way.

The first lesson he offers is that sometimes the best way to figure out what’s growing around you is to look down. Studying the leaves and needles and seedpods beneath our feet, he does a quick accounting: “There’s tulip poplar seeds, eastern white pine, hemlock, maples, oaks. Basically you could make a one-meter square here and get 15 species of trees.” He points out three kinds of pine cone, the longest spanning my palm, the smallest the size of my fingernail.

“If you can’t read a forest, it’s a blur. You’re just looking at a lot of green things,” Powers says. But knowing too much can be its

own kind of blindfold. “Your expectations can start to impede your ability to observe and to be present.... If you know what a hickory looks like and you walk by and you say, ‘That’s shagbark hickory,’ and you’re not present to it, you could miss something incredibly interesting about that particular shagbark hickory. It’s important to have sufficient expectation to make yourself present to something but not so much expectation that you blind yourself to what’s actually there.”

The Overstory is Powers’s attempt to get people to really see the forest, as well as how much is at stake as we destroy it. The book hums with tension between wonder at the complexity and splendor of the natural world and anguish for its destruction. It begins with a gutting account of the blight that wiped out the American chestnut across the Northeast in the early 20th century; later come fresh stumps oozing resin in a beloved city park and clear-cuts that look from above “like the shaved flank of a sick beast being readied for surgery.” Yet awe remains, in a solitary chestnut that survives the blight on a Midwestern farm or high up in the branches of Mimas, an ancient redwood where two of Powers’s characters spend a year, hoping to save it from the chain saw, or in an area of temperate rain forest in the western Cascades, thick with “the sheer mass of ever-dying life,” where a scientist makes discoveries that scramble the distinction between the human and nonhuman. “We found that trees could communicate, over the air and

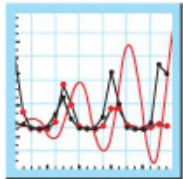
EDITORIAL



through their roots,” she explains. “That trees feed their young and synchronize their masts and bank resources and warn kin and send out signals to wasps to come and save them from attacks.”

Powers describes *The Overstory* as an experiment in attempting “to grant personhood, to grant character status, to grant subjectivity to the nonhuman.” While the book features plenty of human characters—including a gifted paralyzed computer coder, a psychology student studying environmental activists, a patent lawyer who spends most of his life defending private property, and a Vietnam veteran eking out a living by replanting clear-cut hillsides—all of them have relationships with distinct trees, which Powers treats as characters in their own right. (As for his favorite tree, he says he’s particularly fond of the pawpaw, an understory tree with a purple flower, leaves “like a 1970s necktie,” and fruit that tastes like butterscotch pudding.)

His interest in endowing nonhuman beings with agency was
(continued on page 8)



THE SCORE/BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

Welfare Chauvinism

Donald Trump has never hidden his disdain for people who need government assistance. As far back as the 1970s, he grumbled that the Department of Justice was forcing him and his father to rent to “welfare cases” after it sued the Trumps for racial discrimination. Decades later, he called Barack Obama “our Welfare & Food Stamp President.”

But one of his administration’s signature policies has laid bare the racial and class implications of this disdain. It’s not that Trump hates all welfare. He just hates it when it appears to be going to poor black people.

One of the few campaign promises that Trump has fulfilled is on trade. In an attempt to boost American industries, he has levied

The farm aid is far more than what Trump is trying to claw back from the poor.

billions in tariffs on foreign-made products, particularly on goods from China. American farmers have felt much of the pain, especially those who grow soybeans, whose sales began to dry up after China responded with its own tariffs. To soften the blow, the Trump administration started making direct payments to farmers.

The sum is huge. Trump’s farm aid is larger than the auto bailout during the Great Recession. The total package comes to \$28 billion; \$19 billion was paid out last year, with more to come in 2020.

That amount dwarfs the kinds of public programs that Trump rails against. We spend just \$17 billion each year on traditional cash welfare, known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Still, in his most recent budget proposal, the president called for slashing TANF by \$21 billion over the next decade.

Trump’s farm aid is also far more than what he’s trying to claw back from the poor. His administration will soon tighten the work requirements for people who rely on food stamps by curbing states’ ability to issue waivers for people without dependent children. “We need to encourage people by giving them

a helping hand but not allowing it to become an indefinitely giving hand,” said Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. The change will save just \$12.8 billion over the course of a decade, according to the White House’s own projections. The administration is also looking to end a more streamlined process for the destitute to enroll in the food stamp program; this would save a mere \$2.5 billion a year.

Even less money would be recouped by Trump’s crackdown on Social Security disability payments. The administration has proposed intensifying the periodic reviews disabled people must undergo to continue receiving benefits and requiring that they occur more frequently, all with the aim of pushing people off the rolls. While doing so would create an enormous burden for recipients, it would save just \$2.6 billion over a decade. The effort would cost an extra \$1.8 billion to administer, resulting in savings of only \$80 million annually.

For Trump, the people who need cash payments, food stamps, or disability checks are the wrong kind of welfare recipients. And while whites are the largest group receiving public assistance, most Americans believe that those who receive “welfare” are poor black people. The right kind of recipients, it seems, are white wealthy farmers. While agriculture is a diverse industry, as of last summer more than 99 percent of Trump’s agriculture bailout funds had gone to white operators, according to information obtained by *The Counter*, a nonprofit newsroom that investigates the food industry. A majority of aid has gone to the wealthiest 10 percent of farmers.

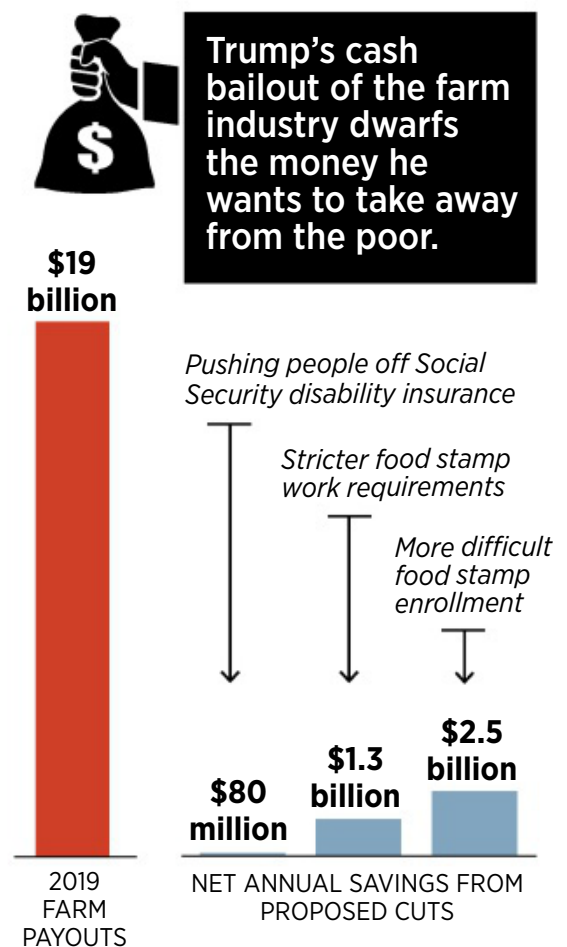
These farmers are now largely dependent on the money. Nearly 40 percent of projected farm profits last year came from trade aid and other government subsidies. And despite the Republicans’ constant fearmongering about welfare fraud, the farm money has flowed with seemingly little oversight or accountability. Thanks to overestimates of the damage from Trump’s trade war, farmers have been getting aid payments from the government greater than the losses they suffered, according to six studies. But that hasn’t stopped Trump from bragging about his farm bailout. At his first rally of 2020, in Toledo, Ohio, he

called the farm subsidies package “a big, beautiful monster.”

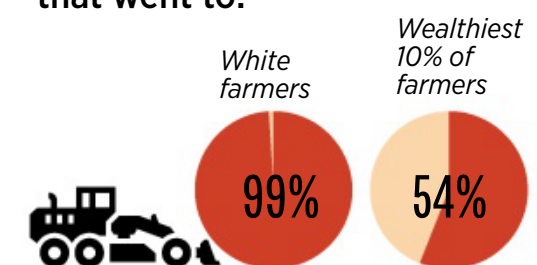
When Trump and his officials chastise the poor for allegedly failing to work hard and living large off government largesse, their indignation shouldn’t be taken at face value; it’s reserved specifically for poor black Americans. Meanwhile, wealthy white farmers are encouraged to collect government checks.

Bryce Covert

Who Deserves Government Help?



Portion of the bailout that went to:



Sources: NPR; The Counter; The Wall Street Journal; HuffPost; The Washington Post 2020 infographic: Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz

Eric Alterman



The GOP Is Built on Lies

In some ways Trump is more truthful than previous Republican presidents.

After the Senate's vote to keep Donald Trump from the Oval Office, House Judiciary Committee chair Jerrold Nadler told *The New Yorker*, "It never occurred to me that an American political party would degrade itself to an authoritarian political party where anything goes, no matter what.... I never thought an American political party could get as bad as now, where they completely don't care how bad the crimes are."

Nadler should have been paying more attention. Like him, many liberals, moderates, and of course, never-Trumpers continue to invest themselves in a narrative that posits that a once patriotic party dedicated to conservative principles and the rule of law was just recently corrupted by its fealty to the lies, lawlessness, and racism of its pathological president. Unfortunately, that's a fiction. Yes, Trump is the most openly dishonest person ever to occupy the White House. But as far as modern Republicans go, he is, in some ways, the most honest. He says and does in public what Republican presidents have been doing in secret for more than half a century.

Many of us are shocked by the brazenness with which Trump and company sought to enlist foreign powers—Russia in 2016, Ukraine this past summer—to undermine our democracy to help with his campaign. But this is basically what Richard Nixon did in 1968. Armed with Henry Kissinger's secret leaks from the Paris peace talks, Nixon urged South Vietnam, through surrogates, to refuse any peace offerings negotiated by Lyndon Johnson's administration because he would give the country a better deal if he was elected president. (He didn't.) Johnson knew this in real time but, like Barack Obama regarding Trump and the Russians, decided to keep quiet about it. And so Nixon won, and American soldiers and the Vietnamese paid the price.

Later, Nixon behaved with similar cynicism, putting on hold his plan to withdraw all US troops from Vietnam until 1972. Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser, had told him, "If any bad results follow, they will be too late to affect the election." The president needed, as Kissinger explained to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, "a fairly reasonable interval" between the United States pulling out its troops and the North Vietnamese marching into Saigon. As presidential biographer Robert Dallek noted, Kissinger "had nothing to say about the American lives that would be lost in the service of Nixon's reelection" or about the American prisoners of war who would continue their needless suffering if the administration prolonged the war. Nixon, meanwhile, bragged of the "brilliant game we are playing," as "Henry really bamboozled the bastards."

We still don't know for certain if Ronald Reagan carried out a similar scheme. There is considerable but not dispositive evidence, according to Gary Sick—a National Security Council staffer in the Ford, Carter, and (briefly) Reagan administrations and the author of a book on the Iran hostage crisis—that "individuals associated with the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1980 met secretly with Iranian officials to delay the release of the American hostages until after

the Presidential election. For this favor, Iran was rewarded with a substantial supply of arms from Israel."

George H.W. Bush is today remembered by many people as a man of honor who restored the Republicans' reputation for sanity and decency after the lies of the Iran-contra scandal. These folks forget not only that he lied about his (and Reagan's) role in the scandal but also that he passed out pardons to the likes of the genocide enabler Elliott Abrams and other officials under investigation by independent counsel Lawrence Walsh. When revelations in former defense secretary Caspar Weinberger's diaries appeared to implicate Bush, Weinberger received a pardon before a jury could decide on his guilt or innocence. This marked, as a furious Walsh later noted, "the first time a president ever pardoned someone in whose trial he might have been called as a witness." (It goes without saying that like Trump today, Reagan and Bush rarely told the truth about anything related to the scandal.)

Then there's the racism. Here again, Trump is operating within a time-honored Republican tradition—just doing so more openly. Nixon and Reagan merely hinted at their racism in public. In private, they gave voice to it with pride. For instance, after watching a UN vote in October 1971 in which a few African nations opposed the United States' preferred outcome, Reagan, then governor of California, called Nixon to

express his exasperation about having "to see those, those monkeys from those African countries." Reagan continued, "Damn them, they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes." Nixon was so impressed with the future president's cleverness that he later shared the "joke" with his secretary of state, William Rogers. Nixon explained that Reagan said he saw "these, uh, these cannibals on television last night, and he says, 'Christ, they weren't even wearing shoes.'" Two hours later, Nixon called Rogers again to repeat the story. The exchange, which didn't become public until 2019, provides "a stark reminder," said Timothy Naftali, a former director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, "of the racism that often lay behind the public rhetoric of American presidents." (He might have specified American *Republican* presidents.)

So when Republican Senator Lamar Alexander admitted that he and his colleagues decided to acquit Trump despite the "mountain of overwhelming evidence," that was predictable. (A congressional aide quoted in *The New Yorker* described the Republican inaction as "heartbreaking," because "it's, like, 'You're absolutely right, but I'm not going to do anything about it.'") For their part, Democrats would do well to remember philosopher George Santayana's adage about those who cannot remember the past being condemned to repeat it.



Trump says and does in public what Republican presidents have been doing in secret for more than half a century.



NATIVE AMERICAN VOICES

The Dakotas, Colorado, and New Mexico

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Join us as we travel to the Dakotas, Colorado, and New Mexico, where we will gain insight into important aspects of the Hidatsa, Mandan, Lakota, Ute, Navajo, Apache, and Kiowa nations. Our goal for this program is to listen and to learn: to hear directly from Native Americans without the questionable filters of history books, mainstream media representations, even well-intentioned progressive journalism. We reached out to tribal leaders and learned that many in their communities are eager to be heard, challenge misconceptions, and share their good work and promising programs.

We'll travel through dramatic Western landscapes peppered with rich historical sites as we meet with community and tribal leaders, storytellers, artists, musicians, and activists—with a focus on listening to what they want to tell us, understanding their hopes for the future, and facing the shameful legacy of a brutal US history of eradication and oppression. We hope to have the privilege of hearing singular voices that have been silenced for too long.

Accompanying us throughout the journey is Linda Baker, director of the Southern Ute Cultural Center.

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(continued from page 4)

inspired by the 1972 article “Should Trees Have Standing?” by University of Southern California law professor Christopher Stone, which advanced an argument for giving legal rights to the environment. “The history of civilization can in some ways be seen as the gradual expansion of who gets to be a person,” Powers says as we walk up the trail. “Why stop with 23 chromosomes?”

The light around us dims as we enter a tunnel of rhododendrons. “We grant personhood to companies...so why shouldn’t we be able to bring out a lawsuit on behalf of a river or a mountain or an ecosystem or a stand of trees?”

Beside the trail we see trees with roots like pillars, straddling the space left by logs that once provided nutrients and have since rotted clean away. Recalling dinner parties in Silicon Valley at which guests would discuss the possibility of the end of death, Powers points out that there are bristlecone pines that have been alive for 5,000 years and clonal colonies of aspens whose root systems are tens of thousands of years old. Developing “plant consciousness,” as he puts it, is a way to recognize that humans are not separate from this enduring system and its immense, cyclical timescale. “You kind of get less anxious about your own mortality,” he says.

We’re coming back down the trail now, out of the rhododendron tunnel and into the thin January sun. Powers picks up a seedpod from a sweet gum tree, a pocked globe sprouting spikes. “How does that shape come into being?” he asks, holding it in his palm. “Look at how byzantine it is, how complicated. Isn’t that great?” A few minutes later we encounter the massive tulip pop-

lar, which we overlooked on the walk uphill. He radiates quiet pleasure at the sight of it. “That’s some tree,” he says. “Wow. I am very happy.”

I ask Powers how he sustains that joy in the face of constant reminders of degradation—the cotton-white clusters he points out on the underside of hemlock needles, egg sacs from a pest that is killing old trees in the park; the fact that many streams in the Smokies are still poisoned by acid rain; the uncanny warmth. “That’s the question,” he responds. “Not only how does a person who feels that alternate kind of joy and that alternate kind of pleasure and excitement sustain it in the face of a human exceptionalist, individualist, capitalist commodity culture but how do you communicate it to a person who doesn’t yet feel it? And then the grand prize, how do you reach a critical threshold where sufficient people in the culture feel it and are therefore willing to change the infrastructure of society?”

How to upend conventional modes of thinking and behaving is a question that *The Overstory* asks without fully answering. “I hate activists,” the book’s psychology student says at one point. “Anyone who gets *righteous*... doesn’t understand.” But by the end, he has joined their ranks, at great personal cost. When I ask Powers if the research for the book radicalized him, he says, “It certainly made me more capable of empathizing with people who were going over lines that I would have been uncomfortable crossing at the time.” In the timber wars he saw a precursor to our current politics, its rigidity and “violent undertones.” “Let’s say that we actually took into our heads and our hearts the idea that the inter-

connected living world is coming apart because of our actions and we do not have a lot of time. And let’s say that the system of property and rights and privileges does not budge. What can and can’t you identify with in terms of [the actions of] people who would like to have a future? That’s the question of the book, really, in miniature, and the question that we’re all facing right now.”

At the end of the trail, we sit on a moss-furred rock and drink tea from a thermos. Powers is already working on his next book, which will expand on the preoccupations of *The Overstory*.

Each of Powers’s previous novels emerged from a specific fascination—with music, artificial intelligence, sandhill cranes—that he felt he’d satisfied by the time he finished writing. Trees are different: They still have a hold on him. “Once you catch the bug,” he says, “you don’t lose it.”

Zoë Carpenter is a contributing writer for The Nation.

“We grant personhood to companies...so why shouldn’t we be able to bring out a lawsuit on behalf of a river or an ecosystem or a stand of trees?”

COMIX NATION

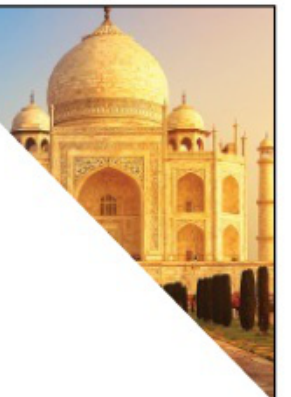
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AWARDS SEASON

Best in the Nation

The Nation is proud to announce that we've been nominated for a 2020 National Magazine Award in the category of essays and criticism for Arundhati Roy's extraordinary "India: Portents of an Ending" [January 13/20]. The article was adapted from her 2019 address for the Jonathan Schell Memorial Lecture Series on the Fate of the Earth, created by Type Media Center and the Gould Family Foundation. The nomination is the first under *The Nation's* new editor, D.D. Guttenplan.

In her essay, Roy warns of a class and caste war and the heightened persecution of Muslims by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Hindu far right. She describes an ethno-nationalist organization that no longer operates as a shadow state but instead has *become* the state. Discussing human rights and self-determination versus nationalism and authoritarianism, she details the chaos and suffering caused by the Indian government's unprecedented revocation in 2019 of Jammu and Kashmir's semiautonomous status—and what this means for the future.

One of the publishing industry's highest honors, the National Magazine Awards—known as the Ellies for the elephant-shaped trophy—recognize "print and digital publications that consistently demonstrate superior execution of editorial objectives, innovative techniques, noteworthy enterprise and imaginative design," according to their sponsor, the American Society of Magazine Editors.



The America We Want to Be

We shouldn't let Trump's war on immigrants deplete our capacity for compassion.

Laila Lalami



Three years ago, when President Donald Trump signed an executive order barring people from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States, he was met with immediate defiance, as thousands of protesters gathered at the nation's airports. Although the so-called travel ban was ultimately declared legal—the Supreme Court upheld a revised version in June 2018 that applied to five of the original countries along with North Korea and Venezuela—those protests helped to stake out a moral position on the issue. Yet when the president issued a more recent proclamation in February expanding the ban to six other countries, the news barely made a ripple. Many Americans seemed more preoccupied with the Senate's impeachment trial or the increasingly rancorous Democratic primary race. Trump, usually quick to brag about his policies, didn't even bother tweeting about it. Nor did he mention it during his State of the Union address, though he found the time to award the Medal of Freedom to a radio talk show host.

Though it's shrouded in silence, this new ban, like the old one, will destroy many lives. Starting on February 22, nationals of Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania will no longer be eligible for immigrant visas to the United States. In effect, a Nigerian who resides legally in this country—perhaps your coworker or neighbor—will not be able to bring her spouse or children to live with her. A Rohingya refugee, whose picture you might have seen on your news feed, will not be able to seek asylum here from the ongoing genocide against Muslims in Myanmar.

The expanded ban affects Africans the most. In fact, the four African countries on the list account for nearly a quarter of the continent's population. I can't think of an immigration prohibition this wide-ranging since the days of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which evolved into the Immigration Act of 1924 barring all Asians from immigrating. Slowly but surely, Trump has shaped immigration policy to favor "more people from Norway," as he famously put it, and fewer from everywhere else.

The same principle applies to the first ban,

which closed America's doors to immigrants from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. Many of Trump's surrogates have argued—and the Supreme Court agreed—that the policy was not aimed at Muslims because it also includes Venezuela and North Korea. But the only Venezuelans barred from entry are government officials, and North Korea rarely grants exit visas to its citizens in the first place.

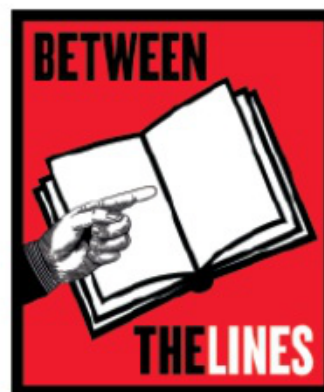
Taken together, the two bans demonstrate that the administration's immigration policies are not, as it claims, driven by concerns for the safety of Americans or by concerns about vetting standards and information sharing. For example, while it's true that Nigeria is home to Boko Haram, it is far from the only country with a homegrown terrorist problem. Not long ago, a Saudi aviation student killed three US service members and wounded eight others at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida—which Attorney General William Barr deemed "an act of terrorism."

Yet Saudi Arabia is not included in the ban.

And while Nigeria has a high rate of people overstaying their visas, it is, again, not the only country with this issue. In 2018 more Canadians overstayed their visas than any other foreign nationals. Canada is not listed, either.

Perhaps the biggest indicator that this new ban was not driven by urgent threats is its timing. It was issued on the last Friday in January on the third anniversary of the old ban, as though it were some kind of commemoration. It's clear that the president is celebrating his success on immigration, a central issue of his platform.

Aside from the bans, Trump has reshaped immigration policy in significant ways. In July his administration announced that it would deny asylum to refugees who did not apply for it in the countries they passed through on their way to the southwestern border of the United States. Under this rule, migrants from El Salvador,



I can't think of an immigration prohibition this wide-ranging since the days of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Guatemala, and Honduras are virtually barred from seeking asylum in this country. In August the administration established a wealth test for immigrants, which would deny green cards to those who have used public benefits or might use them at any point in the future—a determination that is made at the discretion of the immigration agent handling the application. The rule would disproportionately affect lower-income applicants. And just last month, Trump began to conceal immigration agency records. As *The Nation* reported, the administration quietly designated Customs and Border Protection a security agency, shielding many of its documents from public scrutiny.

Each time Trump changes immigration policy, civil rights groups like the ACLU raise legal challenges in the federal courts. But the Supreme Court regularly allows the president to implement his policies while

lower courts hear the challenges. It's clear that the executive and the judiciary are working together to reshape immigration and, by extension, to determine who gets to be American. Meanwhile, our legislators are watching idly.

The Trump administration's cruelties toward immigrants have grown so frequent that they seem to have depleted many Americans' capacity for compassion or action. Instead, we seem stuck in a cycle of denunciation. Every time immigrants are degraded, some people say, "This is not America."

Well, it is. It will continue to be, unless we muster the courage to do something about it. What is at stake right now is nothing less than the kind of country we want to have. Americans must make their voices heard, whether through public protests, civil disobedience, or the voting booth. ■

It's clear that the executive and the judiciary are working together to reshape immigration.

SNAPSHOT / JOHN MOORE

On Burrowed Time

A wildlife caregiver cradles a wombat at Native Wildlife Rescue in Robertson, Australia. Wombats have been accidental heroes during the wildfires that have killed an estimated 1 billion animals this season: Wallabies, skinks, and even little penguins can escape an inferno by seeking refuge inside a wombat burrow.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

THE REMOVAL OF LT. COL. VINDMAN (AND HIS BROTHER) FROM THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF

To White House employees the message is clear: For someone who wants to protect his career, Acceptance of alternate facts is required. And telling the truth can now get you fired.



Losing ground:
US farm output has more than doubled since the 1950s, but farmers like Ray Martinmaas in Orient, South Dakota, aren't benefiting.



A predatory financial sector has hollowed out the US countryside. But the

**RURAL AMERICA
HAVE TO STARVE TO**

LAST JUNE, *THE WASHINGTON POST* PUBLISHED an article featuring Ray Martinmaas, a farmer in Orient, South Dakota. He said family farmers were losing out in the trade fight with China and weren't benefiting enough from \$14.5 billion in recently promised direct federal aid. He and his wife, Becky Martinmaas, the article read, "share a commitment to hard work and family, a love of sport shooting and hunting, and a distaste for coastal elites." He voted for Donald Trump but now wasn't so sure. "We're the ones taking the brunt of it in all these negotiations," he said, "so they need to be kind of helping us out."

In the comments, Ray Martinmaas got hammered. Many were furious he voted for Trump, but others said farmers were welfare queens who "disdain the coastal elites who pay their bills," as one put it. "The sheer ignorance of thinking they feed us. When it's us feeding them." Another anonymous commenter put it more darkly, writing, "The flyover Red States farmers and ranchers [must] pay for their self-centered decades of whining and begging."

Such remarks reflect two popular narratives about agriculture. The first is that the (not always coastal) big money centers like New York and Chicago and the billionaires who work there are the real wealth creators, showering jobs and handouts on grasping Midwestern farmers. The second holds that the decline of many small farming communities is a result of the inevitable march of progress—tractors and machines replacing farm labor and other long-term trends. To save dying rural communities, this story goes, we'd need to return to a bucolic past of pitchforks and plow horses. "What we see, obviously, is economies of scale having happened in America," Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said approvingly last October. "Big get bigger, and small go out."

Yet both the narrative that subsidies flow from "coastal elites" to farmers and the fatalism about rural economic decline indicate a profound misunderstanding of what's actually going on. Farmers have as much reason to be angry, if not more, because of the larger, less visible financial flows heading in the other direction, sucked out of their pockets and funneled to the big money centers, often into offshore tax havens. This is part of a broader phenomenon affecting the entire economy, which I call the finance curse. The good news is that this can be decisively reversed without turning the clock back on progress—and with transformative economic and political results.

While traveling in Iowa in late 2018, I saw on television the science-fiction classic *Back to the Future*, in which the hero, Marty McFly, is transported to the town of Hill Valley in 1955. The film features a thriving town square with bustling shops, theaters, shiny convertibles, and testosterone-fueled teenagers—an idealized image that nevertheless reflects the real prosperity and genuine community spirit

Nick Shaxson is a journalist and author. He also works part-time for the Tax Justice Network.



RICKY CARIOTTI / THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

damage can be reversed.

NICK SHAXSON

DOESN'T DEATH

Crammed in:
On factory farms, massive concentrations of chickens or other livestock pollute the surrounding water and earth.



There's the paradox: Despite more farming wealth than ever, farming communities are poorer. Why?

found in many rural American communities in those days.

But something funny has since happened, a kind of paradox. Mechanization, clever genetic manipulation, information technology, and advanced management practices have multiplied the wealth creation from American farmland. The total output of the US farming sector is now roughly two and a half times what it was in Marty McFly's era. Yet large parts of rural America have been hollowed out. Suicide rates among farmers are high. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, median on-farm income (as opposed to off-farm income, from working other jobs) has averaged a negative \$1,569 per year from 1996 to 2017. More than half of farm households now lose money from farming. They keep going only because family members work other jobs.

There's the paradox: Despite more farming wealth than ever, farming communities are poorer. Why?

THIS PAST NOVEMBER, I WAS SHOWN AROUND Williams in central Iowa, a pretty, tree-filled four by 12 lattice of streets, with painted wooden houses set in neatly cut lawns and three churches—one Lutheran, one Catholic,

one Methodist—serving around 350 residents. Nick Schutt (pronounced *shoot*), a beefy, bearded corn and soybean farmer, took me down the road from his childhood home to the local meat locker, which closed two years earlier. The antiques and crafts store was also recently shuttered. The tavern, where he played pool, closed a few years ago. Williams once had

Dead zone: Runoff from factory farms flows down the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico and has depleted marine life in an area the size of New Jersey.



three grocery stores, three dealers in farm implements, and four gas stations, two on the highway and two in town, all competing for business. There was a creamery, a chicken hatchery, a doctor's office, a stockyard, and a buying station for livestock from the surrounding area—all gone. His father, Tom Schutt, reminisced: "They'd have a band in summertime, every Wednesday night. It would be so full of cars, you couldn't park. They had a big walk-in screen outdoors. You'd pay a dime for a movie." He paused. "Then the shops began to close down. One by one, they just closed." Another long pause. "The morals and values are gone, too." Williams is now a bedroom community of people who are retired or work elsewhere.

To understand where Williams's farming wealth went, drive a few minutes out of town. You can see them on Google's satellite view, dotted around the countryside: long buildings with shiny roofs, often side by side in twos, threes, or fours. These are CAFOs, or concentrated animal feeding operations, sometimes called factory farms. In each one, thousands of pigs (or tens of thousands of chickens) are packed tightly together in stinking ammonia-laden darkness, stuffed with antibiotics, their manure falling through slatted

floors, and coalescing in pits where it rots anaerobically into a toxic stew that is then spread on fields as fertilizer, raising a stinking haze that can send nearby residents fleeing indoors. This animal sewage also pollutes local water sources. Much of it ends up in the Gulf of Mexico, where the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration warned last June that it



contributed to a dead zone (an area devoid of marine life) about the size of New Jersey.

While this environmental damage is fairly well-known, the economic impact of CAFOs is less so. As they have spread, the number of hogs in Iowa has roughly doubled, from 15 million in the early 1980s to about 24 million today. (That paradox again: more pigs, poorer communities.)

The CAFOs inflict economic damage in stages. First they corrupt or destroy markets, the lifeblood of business. In 1993, nearly 90 percent of hogs were sold on competitive markets, according to the Open Markets Institute. Meat-packers “had to run around the countryside looking for pigs to keep their plant running,” said Iowa farmer Chris Petersen, one of the few independent pig farmers still operating. “Some days you got more money than others because they wanted those pigs real bad.” But today over 90 percent of American hog farming is controlled by large, vertically integrated meatpacking conglomerates. Farmers often must accept very low prices for their pigs.

Another problem is that while CAFOs can yield gushers of economic profit, the CAFO farmers themselves don’t usually see those returns. They are often just hog house janitors, as some call them, tied up by punitive contracts with the large firms, which, as Cedar Rapids lawyer Tom L. Fiegen put it, are “pages of things that shift the risk from the [agribusiness firm] to them.” There is “basically no choice” in the contracts. “Everything is dictated.” According to Fiegen, farmers typically take out large debts to finance the buildings, leaving them utterly dependent on the large firm to supply enough piglets to raise (then take away as grown pigs) at a per-animal price that the farmers must accept. The CAFO farmers’ constant anxiety about making the interest payments on their loans adds to the large firm’s leverage, enabling it to pare farmers’ income down to

Bloated operations: One of the massive DeCoster egg factories in Iowa. In 2010 salmonella traced to the company sickened hundreds of people.

Agribusinesses have the power to squeeze out most of the federal subsidies that farmers receive. Shareholders demand that they squeeze hard.

the lowest level they can survive on and remain on the farm. (The median farm income from hog farming was negative in 2018.)

Agribusinesses typically have the power to squeeze out for themselves some, most, or perhaps all of the federal agricultural subsidies that farmers receive. And financial shareholders constantly demand that the corporations squeeze hard. “People brag about the free market,” said John Ikerd, a professor emeritus at the University of Missouri and an expert in farm economics. “But we have central planning here—it’s just not by government. It’s by corporations.” Many people are eating into their farm’s equity simply to stay afloat, unwilling to be “the one who lost Grandpa’s farm.”

A third issue affects Williams even more directly. Decades ago, most agricultural wealth used to remain in Midwestern farming communities. Farmers bought seeds, implements, vehicles, and insurance from local suppliers and used local veterinary services, banks, shops, and restaurants. They wrangled agricultural wealth from soil, rain, and sunshine, and this wealth circulated in the community, supporting local prosperity. But then, especially since the 1980s, those local circulatory systems for money were systematically undermined. As anti-monopoly laws weakened from the Reagan era onward, big firms began to buy up and lock up the whole food chain—from pig semen all the way to your dinner plate. They took those farm services in-house, bypassing local providers. The big firms may, for example, replace community banks with bigger Wall Street players. “They probably don’t use a local lawyer. They may not need a local seed dealer. They may not need a local tractor dealer. And on and on and on,” explained Patty Lovera, formerly of the advocacy group Food & Water Watch. “Multiply that out,” and you get a “withering away of the economic ecosystem of real communities. Then maybe

the post office shuts down. Then the hospital closes, and then the school closes. Then young people don't want to stay there. And it's kind of this sad sequence of events."

THOSE LOCAL CIRCULATORY SYSTEMS FOR MONEY WERE REPLACED BY one-way conveyor belts shipping rural wealth out, typically to metropolitan centers like New York and Chicago (and even to cities like Des Moines, whose economy now relies heavily on finance and insurance).

We can widen this frame. It isn't just hogs; it's beef, poultry, dairy, and grains. It's the inputs: feed, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, even the genes, which are now often locked up under powerful patents controlled by a few merged giants. It's farm logistics: the derivatives brokers, commodity trading companies, supermarkets, pet food stores, even the restaurants you visit. Each is muscling its way to grab a bigger share of the money we all spend on food, constantly merging and all worrying about corporate giants like Amazon and Walmart. From the 1960s to the '80s, about a third of each dollar American shoppers spent on groceries went back to farmers; in 2016, according to the Farm Bureau, that has fallen to less than 13 cents per dollar. Given total US food spending of about \$1.7 trillion each year, that falling share suggests that the changes in the food system could be costing US farmers at least \$150 billion a year—certainly many times the \$18 billion in federal farm subsidies that were paid to them in 2018.

Where is all this hidden money going, and who benefits? To find answers, it helps to return to the finance curse that I mentioned earlier. This has two core elements. The first is another apparent paradox: that too much finance in an economy can make it poorer. This is related to the farming paradox I mentioned, and it can be explained via the second element, which goes as follows.

Finance isn't just another economic sector, separate from the rest of the economy—it's intimately plugged into it. Partly, this symbiotic relationship involves deposit taking, lending to real businesses, and other useful stuff. Another part involves wealth extraction, like what I've described in agriculture. Think of the wealth on Wall Street like the bag of a vacuum cleaner. The bigger the bag gets, the more profit has been sucked out of somewhere else. The rising fortunes and high share prices on the Street for

agribusiness firms are essentially the flip side of poverty in places like Williams. And these tides of extracted wealth flow not just to Wall Street; plenty flow overseas or into offshore tax havens. Two of the five biggest meatpacking companies in the United States are JBS, a Brazilian firm with a long record of corruption, and the Chinese-owned Smithfield Foods, which is substantially influenced by the Chinese government.

Mike Callicrate, a rancher and businessman who campaigns against the power of Big Agribusiness, called this a "tapeworm economy," which takes wealth and life from farming communities under "intense Wall Street/investor pressure." (He wrote an article for *The*

Washington Post in 2018 decrying "the boot of big agribusiness on your neck" and received dozens of angry comments, often based on the same misunderstandings as those about Martinmaas. "Right now," Callicrate told me wearily, "we're so darn easily divided.")

Crucially, this extraction doesn't just cut the pie unfairly but shrinks it overall. A range of studies by the International Monetary Fund and others in the past decade have made a novel discovery about finance. After examining the relationship between the size of the financial sector and long-term economic growth in countries around the world, they generated several versions of the same bow-shaped graph, rising to a peak and then falling sharply. These studies show that once a financial sector grows beyond an optimal point—the United States seems to have past it in the 1980s—further growth in finance tends to reduce overall economic growth. (I am British, and the very same thing is happening in my country.) According to a 2016 study by professors Gerald Epstein and Juan Antonio Montecino at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, an oversize financial sector will have cost the US economy \$13 trillion to \$23 trillion from 1990 to 2023, or \$100,000 to \$184,000 per family. That suggests how much richer America might have been had finance remained at its optimal smaller size, performing useful functions without its predation on agriculture and other sectors of the economy.

The rising fortunes of agribusiness firms are essentially the flip side of poverty in places like Williams, Iowa.

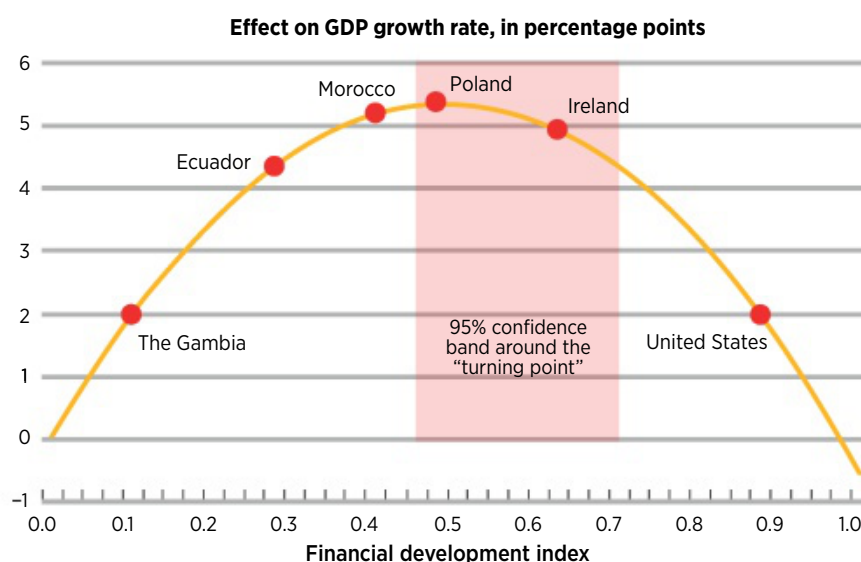
FINANCIAL EXTRACTION HAPPENS ACROSS THE economy, from farming to health care to retail to manufacturing and beyond. The tools include building monopolies, using tax havens to cheat on tax bills, firms channeling profits not into productive investment but into buying back shares to boost share price (and their CEOs' stock

options), private equity moguls buying healthy companies and then forcing them to borrow billions and pay the proceeds straight to them, and bankers profiting from taking large risks and then begging for bailouts when those risks lead to financial crisis. Imagine each tool as an invisible siphon jammed into our pockets, steadily sucking out coins and notes, channeling them into the big money centers and offshore tax havens. None of this boosts genuine productivity or entrepreneurship.

The financial sector doesn't just extract money. High pay also draws talented people out of other economic sectors and out of government, harming us all. As a

Too Much Finance?

Most advanced economies, including the United States, are past the point at which continued financial sector growth becomes harmful to the country's overall economic growth.



Source: Sahay and others (2015). Data updated in July 2019.



landmark global study by economists Stephen G. Cecchetti and Enisse Kharroubi put it, “Finance literally bids rocket scientists away from the satellite industry. The result is that erstwhile scientists, people who in another age dreamt of curing cancer or flying to Mars, today dream of becoming hedge fund managers.” Bring the costs of the global financial crisis into this bad equation, and you’ve got a powerful explanation for why oversize finance undermines prosperity.

How do we fix this? Surprisingly, that’s the good news. People fret that there’s a trade-off between popular policies, such as higher taxes on billionaires, and economic prosperity. Tax or regulate them too much, goes the worry, and these clever folk will stop investing. But once we reveal the wealth creators as financial parasites, the ugly trade-off disappears. We can bring back democracy, and America will be wealthier for it. Imagine directing those outward-moving conveyor belts of wealth back to farm country, pumping a big chunk of that lost \$150 billion into the shops, businesses, and wallets of rural Americans. This may not bring millions of farmworkers back to the countryside. But it would—if combined with modern high-tech farming methods—make sustainable family farming a vastly more viable proposition, reinvigorating rural communities.

This analysis should empower progressive politics. Grassroots groups like Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, which fights against CAFOs, can be viewed not as antibusiness troublemakers, as their

Desolation row:

The once bustling business district of downtown Williams, Iowa, is now barren.

“People brag about the free market. But we have central planning here. It’s just not by government. It’s by corporations.”

—John Ikerd, professor emeritus of agricultural economics, University of Missouri

opponents claim, but as promoters of economic (and environmental) prosperity. More promisingly, a thrilling anti-monopoly movement has recently emerged, spearheaded by groups such as the Open Markets Institute, which attacks wealth-extracting monopolization across the economy, and the Organization for Competitive Markets, which tackles agribusinesses. In politics, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have put forth powerful, detailed, and welcome proposals to curb Big Agribusiness, heralding a possible shift from half a century of US farm policy. Efforts to eliminate tax havens and other extractive financial tools must be similarly energized. Besides boosting American prosperity, such interventions could reduce political polarization.

To advance this progressive agenda, people must see that the coming economic battle is not between rural America and those “coastal elites.” Nor does it pit “whining and begging” farmers against consumers and taxpayers. In reality, those angry *Washington Post* commentators (unless they are very rich) stand alongside farmers like Ray and Becky Martinmaas in a shared struggle against oversize, globalized, monopolized, subsidized Big Finance and its many tools for extracting wealth from the food system. That’s where the really big handouts go. This fight can bring together people across the political spectrum, including many who voted for Trump or stayed home in 2016. It’s exciting that political candidates are now, finally, joining the battle on this terrain. ■



2020

FOREIGN POLICY IS ARGUABLY WHERE US PRESIDENTS ARE ABLE TO HAVE THE LARGEST IMPACT. YET PRESIDENTIAL candidates typically treat it as secondary to their domestic agenda. Elizabeth Warren is no exception; her main 2020 pitch is that she would take on the big banks and impose new regulations to save capitalism from itself. Still, while it has received less attention, she has rolled out a foreign policy vision that aligns with her domestic promises of “big, structural change.” It’s ambitious, bold, and progressive: It would end the “endless wars” since 9/11, prioritize fighting climate change, and aim to stamp out transnational corruption and kleptocracy. And like Warren’s entire platform, it’s the product of a team of wonks who believe deeply in their candidate, convened by an earnest expert who reports directly to Warren.

THE WOMAN BEHIND ELIZABETH WARREN’S FOREIGN POLICY

**The campaign has kept
Sasha Baker out of the
spotlight, but she wants to
shake up the consensus
from the inside.**

DAVID KLION

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR JUHASZ

When I pitched a profile of the senator’s lead foreign policy adviser, Sasha Baker, to *The Nation* last October, Warren was surging in the national polls. Her main rival in the progressive lane of the Democratic primary race, Bernie Sanders, had just suffered a heart attack, and it was unclear whether his campaign would be able to continue. But by the time I filed my first draft, having managed to secure two interviews with Baker, Warren’s fortunes had fallen. By the time the piece was in its final form, she had come in third in Iowa and was polling well behind Sanders in New Hampshire.

This delay in getting my article into print was largely the result of lengthy interactions with members of the Warren campaign’s communications team, which, while friendly and professional, dragged out the reporting process. Initially, they declined to let me interview Baker on the record. Eventually, they agreed to let me tape interviews with her as long as that information would be considered off the record by default, meaning I couldn’t quote anything without clearing it with them first. A communications staffer sat in on our phone interview in November and our in-person interview in January at a pub near the campaign’s headquarters outside Boston. Based on discussions I’ve had with other reporters, this did not reflect any personal animosity toward me; the Warren team is cagey and does not generally make policy advisers available for on-the-record interviews.

But Baker deserves more attention. The 37-year-old staffer, who joined Warren’s team after a rapid ascent through the Obama administration, is the figure most responsible for shaping the Massachusetts senator’s foreign policy agenda. In person, Baker is smart, funny, and thoughtful about the daunting challenges facing any president who wants to rein in the American war machine. She is also exceedingly cautious, at least in the constrained context of our interviews, which seems reflective of the culture of Warren’s campaign. Baker described herself as a “behind-the-scenes person,” and that’s how the campaign prefers its policy-makers. Jon Donenberg, Warren’s policy director, told me in a statement that Baker “shuns the spotlight” and praised her “groundbreaking work, both in government and on the campaign.” A rising star, Baker could end up playing a major role in the making of any Democratic administration’s foreign policy, but her career and her policy approach also shed light on the strengths and the weaknesses of Warren’s campaign.

Baker’s Twitter bio reads, “Policy for team @ewarren (we write the plans),” which is a reference to Warren’s ubiquitous slogan, “I’ve got a plan for that”—the implication being that Warren and the people around her have done their homework, worked out the kinks, and aren’t just preaching revolution. But a campaign running on plans might have offered more of a spotlight to the people who write them and the values, temperaments, and experiences they bring to bear. Allowing those staffers to come forward as more visible surrogates would have reflected a campaign that felt more

confident in its message and more willing to take risks in expressing it—one that might have been better positioned to channel a mobilized progressive base eager for a fundamental reassessment of America’s role in the world.

BORN ALEXANDRA ROGERS IN 1983, BAKER GREW UP IN THE SUBURBS OF northern New Jersey. Her mother, who is Russian Orthodox, was born to émigrés from the Soviet Union in a displaced persons camp in Germany after World War II and came to the United States as a refugee (a biographical detail she coincidentally shares with the father of Matt Duss, Sanders’s foreign policy adviser, whom I profiled for *The Nation* last year). Baker said that her family’s history gave her “a sense of how meaningful it is to be a citizen of this country and the obligation we have to give back.”

A product of public schools, Baker attended Dartmouth as an undergraduate, where she majored in government and was a freshman at the time of the 9/11 attacks. She opposed the Iraq War from the beginning and campaigned for then-Senator John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, in New Hampshire. After graduation, she had a brief stint at a consulting firm in Boston, which she said she “knew pretty early on was not the right fit for me.” After the Democrats won back control of the House in 2006, she moved to Washington and crashed on a friend’s couch until she found a job working for the House Armed Services Committee, which at the time was trying to impose oversight of President George W. Bush’s wars. During this period, she traveled frequently to military bases around the country as well as to Afghanistan and Iraq. “It was the height of the surge,” she said, referring to the Bush administration’s decision to double down on its counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq beginning in 2007. “There was a sense of, ‘At what point do we say this is not working?’ Even then, 12 years ago, you could really see the impact on the ground of decisions that were made back in DC.”

After two years at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, where she earned a master’s degree in public policy and was a fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Baker returned to Washington during the Obama administration to take part in the prestigious Presidential Management Fellowship Program. She joined the Office of Management and Budget, where she worked in the homeland security division, supervising the relief efforts for Hurricane

“We’re going to need people who know how the bureaucracy and the system works if we’re going to be able to change it.”

—Sasha Baker

Commended:

Then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter presents an award to Sasha Baker, who was his deputy chief of staff before she worked for Warren.

Sandy before moving to the national security division, where she oversaw counterterrorism projects. She was made special assistant to OMB Director Shaun Donovan and was then tapped by Obama’s secretary of defense Ash Carter to serve as his deputy chief of staff—her last job before she went to work for Warren in early 2017.

Baker considered leaving government after Obama’s second term, but Donald Trump’s victory, which she described as “personally devastating,” changed her mind. Shortly after Trump’s inauguration, she read in *The Washington Post* that Warren had joined the Senate Armed Services Committee, and soon Baker was interviewing for her current job. “It was the only Capitol Hill job I applied for,” she said. “I wanted to work for her because I’d seen how she was fearless in taking on entrenched power structures and challenging the status quo—and I saw a chance to bring that focus to bear on a national security complex that badly needs shaking up.”

Of Warren, Baker said, “She blew me away from the very first moment that I interacted with her.” Warren immediately asked her to summarize the debate about the impact of sequestration on defense readiness in plain English. “I really felt like we hit it off, and I never looked back.” Baker worked in Warren’s Capitol Hill office for two years before the presidential campaign heated up, after which she moved to Massachusetts with her husband, Sam Baker, who is the health care editor for the political news site *Axios*. “We don’t live that far from Senator Warren,” she said. “I keep looking to see Bailey,” Warren’s golden retriever and a social media star.

THE INFORMAL TEAM OF FOREIGN POLICY EXPERTS ON whom Baker relies speak of her in glowing terms. “She combines compassion and open-mindedness with ninja problem-solving and bureaucratic skills,” said Loren DeJonge Schulman, the deputy director of studies at the Center for a New American Security, a Democratic Party-aligned think tank. She is another Obama administration alum and part of the Warren foreign policy brain trust (which is not formally employed by the campaign). “Warren talks big structural change,” Schulman continued. “Sasha is one of many engineers to get it done.”

In terms of foreign policy, “big structural change” means rebuilding the State Department, which has been gutted under Trump, while scaling back the Defense Department’s role. “Today we have a Pentagon that is so large and so overdeveloped, relative to our other instruments of foreign policy, that the way we engage with the world is through the military, and that’s completely backwards,” Baker said. Warren’s plans—all of which Baker has had a hand in—call for closing the revolving door between corporate defense lobbyists and Pentagon staffers, fighting global financial corruption by shutting down tax shelters, and reducing the military’s enormous carbon footprint.

“I think Sasha is fantastic,” said Ilan Goldenberg, a former Obama Pentagon official and a Middle East expert. “Her ability to put this incredible team together has a lot to do with how easy she is to work with and how smart she is and her vision and her ability. I’m just consistently blown away by her ability to collect these people, respond



quickly in case of crisis, have a clear vision of what she wants to do, and be able to reflect the values and ideas of Senator Warren.” Other members of the team include former State Department official Jarrett Blanc, former Pentagon official Oona Hathaway, former US ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, and many other former Obama officials, most of whom have diplomatic or national security backgrounds relating to the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or China. Of the first 14 names provided

to me, seven are women—a level of parity unfortunately still rare in the national security field. Asked about her experience as a woman in national security, Baker acknowledged the disparity but said she hasn’t been held back.

“I’ve been very fortunate to have had a series of bosses who only cared whether or not you could do the job,” she said. “I’ve also had really great mentors, both men and women, who have encouraged me and who’ve never allowed me to think that my gender would be an impediment.”

Only a few members of the team have backgrounds in activism, such as the anti-war movement, or in media organizations antagonistic to US government policy. “I have enormous respect for my colleagues in the movement and the work they do to hold government accountable,” Baker said. “But I’ve also spent my career pushing for progressive change from the inside. And there’s a role for both in creating change. I think we’re going to need people who know how the bureaucracy and the system work if we’re going to be able to change it.” Her team, in other words, represents the progressive edge of the Washington foreign policy establishment—but it is still very much part of that establishment.

One name absent from the campaign’s list is Andrew Bacevich, the president of the newly founded Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, an organization dedicated to military restraint. While I was reporting on Quincy for *The Nation* last year, Bacevich, a conservative who lives in Massachusetts, told me he’d been over to Warren’s house to meet with her and her husband, Bruce Mann. Warren had read Bacevich’s 2016 book, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East*, which criticizes decades of failed interventionist policy in the region. “We had tea sitting in the kitchen, and she pelted me with questions for an hour,” he said. “I was exceedingly impressed with Senator Warren.” In late 2018 he wrote an open letter to her in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, offering unsolicited advice on how to frame her approach to foreign policy. In the final weeks before Iowa, she wrote an op-ed in *The Atlantic* calling for an end to endless wars—one very much in line with Quincy’s positions—and she praised Bacevich’s book in an interview with *Vice News*. But neither he nor anyone else at Quincy or a similar organization is part of the campaign’s declared circle of advisers.



Scrutiny: Warren attends a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in 2018. She joined the committee in 2016.

“We don’t live that far from Senator Warren. I keep looking to see Bailey [Warren’s golden retriever, a social media star].”

—Sasha Baker



Bailey.

Last year the Warren campaign hired Max Berger, a 34-year-old activist and co-founder of the left-wing Jewish group IfNotNow, which opposes Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, as well as a veteran of Occupy Wall Street and Justice Democrats. Berger, not surprisingly, was targeted by right-wing pro-Israel groups after his hire, and the campaign quickly clarified that he would be working on progressive partnerships, not Middle East policy. Because of this, the Warren campaign

would not allow me to speak with Berger for this piece—despite my argument that a figure with his activist background might offer a valuable perspective on the candidate’s Middle East policy.

THE SANDERS CAMPAIGN, MEANWHILE, DRAWS MANY of its most prominent and outspoken staffers from activism and the alternative media. Duss, Baker’s rough equivalent on the Sanders campaign, came out of progressive blogging and anti-war advocacy rather than the Pentagon or some other federal agency. In December, *Politico* ran an article contrasting Sanders and Warren on foreign policy and drawing the conclusion that Sanders has run to Warren’s left, “further afield of the establishment.” The article contrasts Duss’s more unorthodox background with Baker’s more traditional one. The Warren campaign declined to allow Baker’s comments regarding the *Politico* article to go on record, along with her comments on Sanders’s campaign or his foreign policy in general.

In the wake of several major international developments, a rough pattern has emerged in which the Sanders campaign puts out a straightforward, uncompromising statement against Trump administration policy within 24 hours, while the Warren campaign’s reaction is more carefully worded and equivocal; the next day, the Warren campaign pivots to Sanders’s position. After the killing of Iran’s Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani in January, Sanders began his statement by citing his opposition to the 2003 Iraq War and called the Suleimani strike “an assassination.” Warren, meanwhile, called the strike “reckless” in her initial statement but prefaced it by saying that he “was a murderer, responsible for the deaths of thousands,” which was similar to Joe Biden’s statement that “no American will mourn Qassim Suleimani’s passing.” (Goldenberg addressed this discrepancy directly, saying, “When you don’t even acknowledge that, then the immediate accusation that comes back at you from Republicans is to accuse you of all this silliness about how you support terrorism.”)

The following day, Warren put out a more forceful anti-war statement, tweeting, “We’re on the brink of yet another war in the Middle East—one that would be

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RADICAL FOR OKLAHOMA

REBECCA GRANT

Kendra Horn's centrism might not inspire voters nationwide—but it sure turned the tables at home.

Oklahoma City

ON THE DRIVE TO SANTA FE SOUTH HIGH School in Oklahoma City, I passed an oil-drilling rig by the side of the highway and a skyscraper with a cross projected on it in white lights. It wasn't exactly a scene that screamed "Democratic district," and yet a Democratic district it is, thanks to a fifth-generation Oklahoman (and, as she likes to point out, fourth-generation Girl Scout) named Kendra Horn.

Horn won her race for the state's Fifth Congressional District, which includes Oklahoma City, in 2018, part of a historic wave of first-time Democratic congresswomen. She became the first Democrat to hold the seat

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since 1974 and the first Democratic woman ever elected to federal office from Oklahoma. Her campaign, in a district that Donald Trump won by 14 points in 2016, was considered such a long shot that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee didn't even bother to monitor the results on Election Day. She was the only woman to flip a seat that wasn't listed anywhere as flip-able; with a 1.4 percentage point margin of victory, hers was a narrow but significant achievement.

The momentous nature of Horn's win seems in inverse proportion to the amount of recognition she has received outside Oklahoma, at least compared with other Democrats who swept the House in November

2018. This is partly because she doesn't court media attention and prefers to focus on the less flashy bread-and-butter issues facing her constituents. It's also because Oklahoma isn't generally a place that people look to for trends, particularly not of the Democratic politics variety.

After all, Oklahoma prides itself on being among the most conservative states in the country. In 2012, Republicans gained control of the state legislature, the governorship, and all seven of its seats in Congress. Democratic representation was whittled down to a mere sliver. From abortion and gun rulings to the 4,800-pound monument of the 10 Commandments that once existed at the statehouse, Oklahoma has passed right-wing legislation that would seem comically extreme if it weren't affecting people in real life. Trump carried Oklahoma by more than 36 points over Hillary Clinton in 2016; it was one of just two states where not a single county went for her. Yet in this fortress of deep red, Horn saw an opportunity where few others did.

"It was really heartbreaking to see that a whole community didn't have a voice," she told me. "I saw a pathway and the potential to change the conversation. People think that if they're in the minority, they might as well not show up, but a lot of really amazing things are happening here that get overlooked."

Horn ran as a centrist, and that's how she has functioned as a lawmaker. Once in office, she joined the fiscally conservative Blue Dog coalition. She's an advocate for military spending and has said the best approach to border security "may include some form of a physical barrier." She doesn't support Medicare for All or proposals to raise the marginal tax rate on people earning more than \$10 million a year.

Her approach doesn't work everywhere, and it would be unwise to universalize centrism's appeal. But Horn is meeting her voters where they are: in Oklahoma. And to them, how she won, why she won, and what it will take for her to keep her seat are questions that mean a great deal beyond their state's borders.

"The entire Republican narrative in the state is that the Democrats are aligned with Satan and if we allow them to be in charge of things, we are all going to hell," said Alyssa Fisher, the programs manager for Sally's List, an organization that trains progressive women to run for office in Oklahoma. "This intense partisanship America is dealing with today? That was developed, curated, fostered, birthed here in Oklahoma. Listening to leaders like Kendra is the only way to make momentum in a world where other people genuinely believe your side is evil."

WITH HER SHOULDER-LENGTH BLOND hair, earnest intensity, strong work ethic, and love of civics, Horn, 43, has an air of wonky sincerity. She's fascinated by anything that has to do with outer space and used to teach a yoga class, leading one constituent to mention her impressive ability to hold a squat "for like 30 minutes."

Horn attended college at the University of Tulsa and graduated from Southern Methodist University's Dedman School of Law in Dallas. She's had a varied career, including stints as a lawyer, leading communi-

cations for the Space Foundation, and managing political campaigns in the state. In 2015 she served as the executive director of Sally's List and helped found Women Lead Oklahoma, another organization dedicated to getting more women into politics. (In national rankings of women's participation, Oklahoma is toward the bottom.)

As Horn was recruiting women to run and telling them why it mattered, it occurred to her to take her own advice.

In the spring of 2017, Horn started reaching out to her network to let them know she was running. Her opponent was the incumbent Republican, Steve Russell, who was elected to the House seat in 2014 after serving as a state senator. Russell didn't put much energy into town halls or community outreach during his time in Congress. Just about everyone I spoke with described his time in office with some variation on "absent" and "lackluster." Still, he had some strong electoral advantages in Oklahoma: He was a man, a Republican, and a veteran.

Horn "told me what she was considering, and I told her right away that she had about a 10 percent chance of winning," said Ward Curtin, a political consultant and an old friend of Horn's. "To be honest, I was just trying to be nice. She had a much smaller chance than that."

Despite his doubts, Curtin agreed to manage her campaign. He started to feel slightly more optimistic after Horn's campaign kickoff in July, when 350 people attended, a huge number for that type of event, and most weren't from the usual roster of activists and political insiders. Drawing in people who were new to politics was essential, because there was no real progressive infrastructure in Oklahoma to plug into. Her campaign had to build a political organization and fundraising network practically from scratch without outside support. Before Election Day, he said, the most attention the race received was when her primary opponent was caught stealing Horn yard signs.

"We had all these establishment types kind of pat us on the head and say, 'Bless your heart,'" Curtin recalled. "They didn't buy in at the beginning, but Kendra is a force of nature. She got a lot of people on board."

The notion of Democrats winning in Oklahoma didn't always seem so far-fetched. For most of the state's history, they were the dominant political party, but that shifted noticeably in the late 1980s as "a product of the Christian

Right mobilization on behalf of the [GOP]," according to the Oklahoma Historical Society. The pendulum swung so far in the other direction that "Democrat" became a dirty word. Now in Oklahoma City, the pendulum might be swinging back.

"She represents a changing community," said Jonathan Curtis, a college student who volunteered with Horn's campaign. "People may doubt the Democrats in Oklahoma and think it's a backward state, but it's not. Oklahoma City is a magenta district, and people are willing to see change."

"The entire Republican narrative in the state is that the Democrats are aligned with Satan and if we allow them to be in charge...we are all going to hell."

—Alyssa Fisher

Long shot: Turning OK-05 blue was no sure thing in 2018. Horn was helped by a complacent rival and local frustration with partisan fighting.



Thanks to its greater population density and an influx of young people, Oklahoma City has become bluer, and its political representation is evolving accordingly. When I met Curtis over matcha lattes at a tea shop in Bricktown, he cited the crowd of thousands attending OKC Pride in 2018 and the election of James Cooper, the city's first openly gay councilman, as examples of leftward movement. In 2015, Cyndi Munson—a young, single, biracial, progressive woman—won a state House seat in a special election for a district that overlaps Horn's. Her campaign, too, was considered a long shot. In retrospect, Munson's win turned out to be a bellwether.

Demographic shifts, along with a dissatisfaction with Republican policies, have helped create an environment in which voters are receptive to someone running under a Democratic label. Oklahoma's huge teacher walkout two years ago, for instance, was a powerful catalyzing moment. Decades of tax cuts had gutted education funding, leading to four-day school weeks, crowded classrooms, and abysmal teacher pay. As a result of the low wages, Oklahoma struggled to recruit enough teachers, so it implemented an emergency certification program that allowed people to teach without formal training. Fed up with these policies and feeling ignored by politicians, 50,000 teachers from across the state swarmed the Capitol grounds in April 2018, causing schools to shut down for weeks.

"Voters knew that something was wrong with education," Curtin said. "When we hit a breaking point and had the teacher walkout, it was clear that something had to be done. People at the state Capitol resisted that to a certain degree, and they paid the price at the ballot box."

Horn participated in the walkout and earned the endorsement of the Oklahoma Education Association. Alicia Priest, the association's president, said there was no doubt that Horn's heart was with the public schools. After the walkout was over, teachers continued to flex their political muscle by mobilizing for Horn and other supportive candidates running in down-ballot races. They found voters receptive to what they had to say. The walkout led many people, including Republicans, to question the prevailing right-wing orthodoxy that says the lower the taxes, the better.

"The government's emphasis on corporate tax welfare and not on public infrastructure has caused all our social services to suffer," Priest continued. "[Horn's] win was an acknowledgment of all the decades of failed policies and shows that the policies she's running on are popular."

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, Horn's greatest political talent is finding common ground with people, even when they're yelling at her. On December 8, I attended a town hall—Horn's 11th of the year—in Santa Fe South's cafeteria. According to the *Oklahoma Free Press*, Horn has held more town halls than her predecessor and the state's two US senators held combined in the last 10 years.

The event was staffed by student volunteers. The walls were bright yellow, complementing

"Voters knew that something was wrong with education... when we hit a breaking point and had the teacher walkout."

—Ward Curtin

Constituent service:

Horn has built a reputation locally for listening to her district's concerns rather than courting media attention.

Horn's purple dress. A little over a week later, she would vote in favor of impeachment, but at the town hall, she said she hadn't made up her mind. She opened the event by discussing what she'd accomplished, such as introducing a bill to limit prescription drug costs and another to protect tenants' rights for military families.

Then she opened up the floor to questions—and the onslaught began.

A man named Phillip wanted to know whether what the media said was true, that Congress had no time for anything other than impeachment. Horn mentioned that her two House committees—Science, Space, and Technology and Armed Services—weren't focused on impeachment and reiterated the pieces of legislation she'd put forward. A woman in sneakers and American flag socks asked how she, a conservative Republican, was being represented by Horn when she "voted 96 percent of the time with the Pelosi agenda" and was trying to impeach a "duly elected president who has done nothing wrong." Horn responded by saying that many of those votes were procedural and that she'd pushed back against her party when she felt it was merited but that she also believes in Congress's oversight responsibilities.

When Horn got a question about student loan debt, she seemed glad to have the opportunity to talk about a bill that would expunge a person's adverse credit history related to federal student loans. When her questioners lobbed Fox News talking points at her, she stressed the importance of talking with people who don't have the same political beliefs. She consistently brought her answers around to her specific legislative achievements and thanked the attendees for their questions.

"I'm troubled by how we like to put people in boxes and give them labels," Horn said. "What has caused the biggest wedge is the idea that some places are beyond hope or help. We've got to stop writing people off and talk to each other."

The belief that slowing down, looking people in the eye, and having civil conversations could remedy the entrenched partisan environment we find ourselves in could seem naive and Pollyannaish in, say, Washington DC, but it definitely played a part in getting Horn elected. Of course, there are people in her district who would like her to be less cautious and more unabashedly progressive, but most of her constituents—even those who support more progressive positions—say that, electorally, that would have been a nonstarter.

Adrienne Elder, 42, works in public health. She is registered as a Democrat but describes herself as moderate and as someone who was never very much involved with politics. Early in the campaign, Elder attended a party for Horn and felt something click. Even Elder's friends who voted for Trump seemed



open to what Horn had to say. “She talked a lot about finding middle ground and working across the aisle and doing what’s right for our state and country,” Elder said. “Well, that’s what I obviously want to hear, and I want to support a candidate that will actually do that.”

From the beginning, Horn sensed that many voters in Oklahoma City were just fed up with partisan bickering and stalemate. So she stayed focused on health care and education and ran a well-organized campaign as a pragmatist and problem solver, someone committed to bipartisanship. It helped that her opponent had apparently grown complacent.

“I think she had a bit of a perfect storm,” said Michael Crespín, a professor of political science at the University of Oklahoma and the director of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. “It wasn’t a progressive campaign. She’s very much a moderate, centrist Democrat. Those folks tend to work on bread-and-butter issues, as opposed to ideological ones. I think that’s how you’re successful in her position.”

Horn’s philosophy and her success rest on the idea that the way to pick up more seats in the state, at all levels of government, is by recognizing that most voters espouse views closer to the middle. This idea rankles the country’s insurgent leftists, who, for their part, can hold up a powerful counterexample: At the time of this writing, Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, is leading many of the polls for the Democratic presidential primaries.

Horn attributes much of this energy to the media’s obsession with politicians like members of “the Squad”—Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib—who are more celebrated yet at the same time more polarizing. Horn contends that this split unfairly casts the middle as a road to nowhere but that, far from being a weak, indecisive position, it’s much harder to be a moderate today than to spread splashy mediagenic slogans such as “Abolish ICE.”

“I think there’s a misperception that if you’re not extreme, you’re not standing up for things,” she said. “The way that we consume [media] now, it drives these people who are the flamethrowers, who are going to say the most outlandish things, who can speak to one constituency.”

She added, “Most of us live somewhere a little left of center, a little right of center.”

HORN’S WIN IN 2018 WAS WIDELY HERALDED as a surprise and an upset; Russell and the rest of the state’s Republicans didn’t see her coming. That won’t be the case in 2020. According to Chad Alexander, a conservative radio host in Oklahoma, OK-05 is now one of the top seats in the country that Republicans are targeting to take back. Eleven Republicans have announced that they intend to challenge her, including a slew of qualified female candidates. Anti-Horn TV ads, funded by Republican PACs, are playing nonstop. Any advantage she has in running as an incumbent is tempered by the aggressive opposition she faces.

While Republicans are fired up, so are Democrats,



Middle ground: In Congress, Horn has supported increased military funding and fiscal responsibility and for a time even expressed uncertainty about impeachment.

who don’t want their hard-fought win reduced to a one-term fluke. In the third quarter of 2019, Horn raised \$524,733—far more than any of the Republicans vying for her seat. Democrats may be the minority in Oklahoma, but they finally have a toehold. The question remains whether they can keep it or even expand it. Horn has always known that her seat would never feel secure, that every election cycle would require tremendous effort, and that as soon as she stopped navigating her way through the slippery center, she’d lose.

“On election night, I told her the reelection would be harder than the first one,” Curtin said, referring to Horn’s upcoming campaign, “and that it would be the hardest in the nation. I’m not a real cheery guy, as you can tell.”

Horn’s win, on the one hand, was an exception because although her district is more conservative than most, she was able to win it with an effective moderate campaign. On the other, when it comes to individual congressional races, Horn could wind up being the rule. The toss-up states that Democrats need to win to take back the White House in 2020 are Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, according to an analysis from *US News & World Report*. Trump won all of those states in 2016, and not one is labeled leaning, likely, or safely Democratic this year. Michigan, which played an outsize role in the last presidential election, is currently leaning Democratic but looks far from a clear win. The Democrats who have flipped seats in those states—like Senator Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, Representative Conor Lamb of Pennsylvania, and Representative Elissa Slotkin of Michigan—all won by running as moderates and, in Arizona and Michigan, beating out more progressive rivals in their Democratic primaries.

It’s undeniable that ideas like Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, a wealth tax, and tuition-free public college have helped awaken a Democratic base that is engaged, excited, and willing to fight. Centristism may resonate with older voters in some districts, even though in the broader picture, progressive ideals are mobilizing people in a way that’s needed to defeat Trump. Horn and Oklahoma are not barometers for the country as a whole, but they do show that change can happen in the unlikeliest of places. ■

“She’s very much a moderate, centrist Democrat. Those folks tend to work on bread-and-butter issues, as opposed to ideological ones.”

—Michael Crespín

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devastating in terms of lives lost and resources wasted” and then referring to the strike as an “assassination,” as Sanders did. This pattern, of Sanders articulating the left’s response on Day 1 and Warren echoing him on Day 2, also played out in the wake of the recent coup against Bolivia’s president, Evo Morales, and in response to the news that Brazil’s government would prosecute journalist Glenn Greenwald for his antagonistic coverage of the country’s president, Jair Bolsonaro. (A Brazilian judge has dismissed the charges.)

In other words, the difference between Sanders and Warren isn’t always about substantive policy. Neither candidate would have targeted Suleimani, and both are committed to winding down the overseas deployments that led to the strike. Instead, it’s about tone, about approaching foreign policy confidently versus defensively. The Sanders and Warren campaigns have mostly similar ideas about how they want to engage with the world. But the campaign that has drawn more support from progressive voters is the one that more clearly communicates where it stands, without any need for hedging.

BYOND TAKING NOTE OF HER OFFICIAL PLANS, PARSING WARREN’S feelings about US foreign policy can be challenging. At times, she has aligned herself more with the establishment than with the left, such as when she earned the approval of *The Wall Street Journal’s* editorial board for calling Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro a dictator and dubbing his opponent Juan Guaidó the rightful president. (Sanders did neither.) Unlike Sanders, Warren does not have a long record in government or a history of anti-war activism, and her Senate career has included its share of hawkish votes, many but not all of which were prior to Baker’s hiring. I asked Baker about her own feelings, in hindsight, on a wide range of Obama-era international crises—Libya, Syria, Israel-Palestine, and more—but the Warren campaign did not allow me to share any of her thoughts on the record.

Baker is a liberal opposed to endless war, but she is wary of being defined by ideology or doctrine. Asked what she thinks of “the Blob”—the derisive phrase coined by Obama adviser Ben Rhodes for the permanent national security bureaucracy, which compulsively urges military intervention—she said she’s familiar with the term but doesn’t have much use for the concept, either. “Senator Warren values experience and expertise,” Baker said, “but it’s also important to be able to look at things with fresh eyes and to not get so wedded to the way we’ve done things in the past that we can’t imagine a different way of doing things in the future.”

Baker argued that framing Sanders’s agenda as more radical than Warren’s is unfair. “What she’s proposing makes a lot of people nervous, because it’s a big change from the status quo. And what she’s proposing as it relates to the military-industrial complex is beyond what any candidate out there has been proposing.” Much as Warren’s proposals have raised alarms on Wall Street, Baker continued, “that is also true of the defense community, where there is a dawning realization that what she’s proposing is actually quite radical and that she’s serious about it.”

The future of Warren’s campaign is still unclear. But no matter who wins the nomination, it remains an open question whether that candidate will be able to combine radicalism and pragmatism in the way Baker described. Baker represents a new generation within the defense establishment that is quietly growing in influence and questioning the sustainability of two decades of post-9/11 wars—a cohort that, with any luck, the next Democratic administration will see fit to empower. ■

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Books & the Arts



THE ACT OF RECOUNTING

Novelist Ricardo Piglia's struggle for freedom in 20th century Argentina

by JESSICA LOUDIS

In 2013, the Argentine novelist Ricardo Emilio Piglia Renzi was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, the degenerative disease that eventually killed him. He retired from a teaching position at Princeton two years earlier and had just returned to his native Buenos Aires, where he set about completing what he considered his life's work: editing the diaries he had been keeping since he was 16 (he was then 72)

Jessica Loudis contributes essays on literature and politics for The New Republic, n+1, and the London Review of Books.

into a series of publishable books. At that point, Piglia had written five novels, six short story collections, and five books of essays and criticism and was considered one of Argentina's foremost contemporary writers, although he was largely unknown outside Latin America and certain corners of New Jersey. The journals were to be the crowning achievement of a celebrated career.

As the disease progressed, Piglia came to rely on eye-tracking software and a team of five assistants to finish the project. When his health insurance refused to pay for an experimental medication,

nearly 125,000 people signed a petition that ultimately got him the treatment. After several years of 12-hour workdays, he finished collating and editing the diaries. He then released them in three volumes, with the final installment arriving in Spanish-language bookstores eight months after his death in 2017.

Before they were published, Piglia's journals had taken on an almost mythical status in the Spanish-speaking literary world. For decades he had hinted at their scope in interviews, and they became the subject of a 2015 documentary. But when they came out, they were hardly

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA VENTURA

recognizable as journals. A lifelong fan of police procedurals, he would often borrow terms from the genre to describe his own work, casting the critic as detective, the author as criminal, and the text as the crime. And he insisted that narratives, like an arson or a murder, require active investigation. His diaries inhabit this vision down to their attribution. Piglia published them as *The Diaries of Emilio Renzi* in three volumes: *Formative Years*, *The Happy Years*, and *A Day in the Life*. (Renzi is the name he gave his detective alter ego in his first book, the 1967 short story collection *The Invasion*.)

The Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa once described his *Book of Disquiet* as “a fact-less autobiography,” and Piglia might call his *Diaries* a fact-based work of fiction. While they are certainly derived from his life, this is only the starting point. After opening with autobiographical essays, each volume moves between stories and diary entries, punctuated by surreal encounters between Piglia the author and Renzi the character. (Whenever anybody walks into a bar, it is likely to be the author himself.) Inserting himself into an Argentine literary tradition pioneered by Macedonio Fernández and Jorge Luis Borges—who makes an early appearance in the journals—Piglia refuses to differentiate between genres, instead insisting, as he wrote in his book-length essay *The Last Reader*, that “everything can be read as fiction” and, in turn, used as fodder for it. Here is Piglia describing his alter ego, who is in the midst of a long autobiographical soliloquy that explains why he (and by extension, Piglia) became a writer:

Renzi paused a moment and looked at the street, almost empty that summer afternoon, and then went on talking with the same enthusiasm with which he had started to tell the story. If I became a writer, that is, if I made that decision that defined all of my life, it was also due to the stories that circulated in my family; it was there that I learned the fascination and power that hides in the act of recounting a life or an episode or an incident for a circle of familiar listeners.

The temptation to read Piglia’s books as straightforward journals—despite the author’s insistence on treating them as fiction—can occasionally be maddening, as if their readers have been unwittingly enlisted in a postmodern game. And indeed we have, though much more is at stake. As Piglia witnessed the dissolution of Argentine society under a series of repressive gov-

The Diaries of Emilio Renzi

Formative Years

By Ricardo Piglia

Translated by Robert Croll

Restless Books. 464 pp. \$21.99

The Happy Years

By Ricardo Piglia

Translated by Robert Croll

Restless Books. 512 pp. \$21.99

ernments, he sought new models of writing and representing reality. In metafiction, he found a means to subvert the conformity and censorship that flourished under these regimes. While he rejected the idea that fictional “coding” was possible only when living and writing under a restrictive government, he believed, as he told an interviewer, that “political contexts define ways of reading.” Through indirection and other literary techniques, Piglia revealed the frightening mechanisms of state power that had subjugated Argentina and the ways in which they might be resisted.

Born in 1940 into a lower-middle-class family, Piglia grew up in Adrogué, a once fashionable suburb of Buenos Aires. His early years were defined by the rise of the populist Juan Perón, whose presidency radically expanded the middle class and whose base included a shaky coalition of radical leftists and right-wing nationalists. But Piglia’s narrative does not begin there. Rather, he opens his first volume, *Formative Years*, in 1957, after Perón was ousted in a coup and Piglia’s father was jailed for defending the former leader. (Because any mention of Perón’s name was forbidden in public, the media took to calling him “the fugitive tyrant.”) To avoid harassment from the new regime, Piglia’s father relocated the family “half in secret” from Adrogué to the coastal city of Mar del Plata, where his son finished high school and started to develop his anti-Peronist views.

After enrolling in university, Piglia turned more strongly toward politics. He joined left-wing groups, studied Argentine history, and obsessed over the Italian communist poet Cesare Pavese, whose work inspired him to become a revolutionary and a writer. At the same time, he engaged in the traditional activities of self-serious literary men in their late teens: He agonized over philosophical questions, tried to entice women into bed, and grappled with his insecurities—all while paying for his studies by organizing the archive of his grandfather, a World War I veteran. “I vacillate between

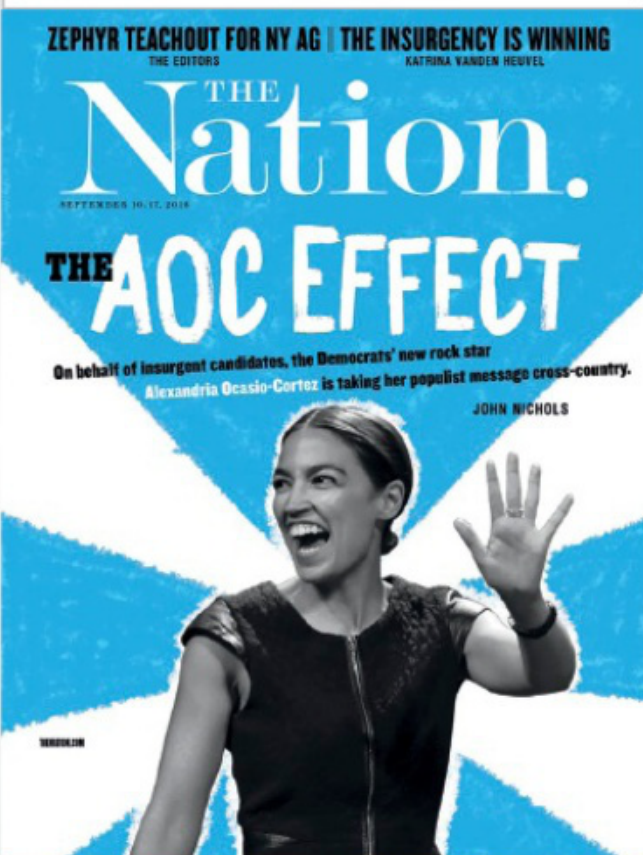
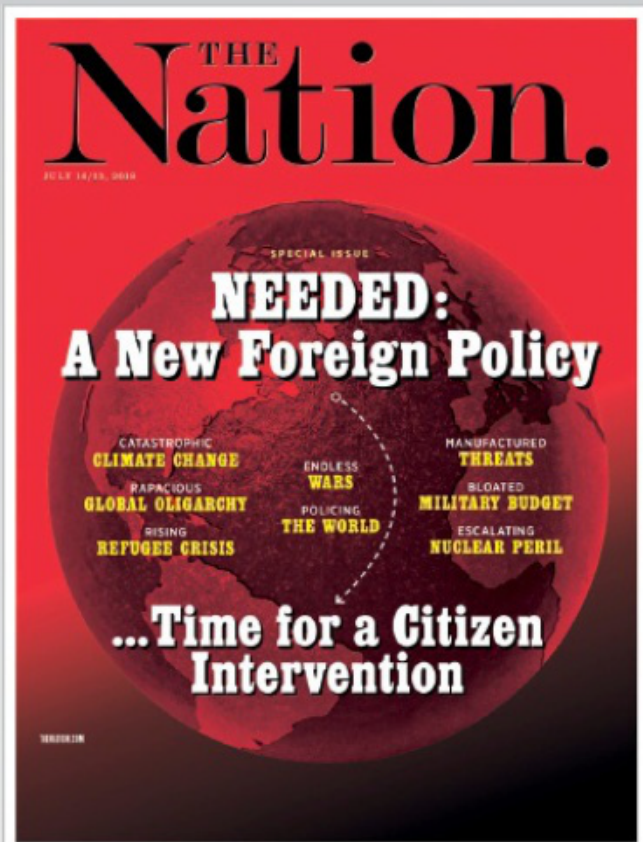
declaring myself a Platonist and a Hegelian,” Piglia writes at 18. “An empty, useless day,” reads another entry. “I did nothing.... Sitting in bars, I watch the girls go by.”

Sitting in bars, however, gave him a lot of time to write, and he began jotting down ideas for fiction, such as an account of a writer’s final hours before he commits suicide in a hotel room in Turin, a story about a couple’s breakup that consists only of the titles of the books they fight over, and “a short story beginning like this: ‘Later, my father killed himself.’” At 21, Piglia notes that “politics, literature, and toxic love affairs with other men’s wives have been the only truly persistent thing in my life.”

After graduating, he gave himself over almost entirely to the first two of these pursuits. He moved to Buenos Aires and founded a cultural magazine. He read constantly, taking a special interest in certain 20th century novelists—Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Malcolm Lowry. Piglia spent much of his 20s in corner bars and jazz clubs, accompanied by a rotating cast of girlfriends and colleagues. Bouts of depression were followed by bursts of intense productivity. “Entire days working without leaving the room, and when I lose the thread, I find a series of pages written passionately, which I can’t read again until a few days have passed,” he writes.

This vacillation between tedium and intellectual exhilaration takes up much of the first volume of the *Diaries* and eventually results in Piglia’s first book, *Invasion*, a short story collection full of literary pyrotechnics that would presage his later writing. One of the pieces, “Mata-Hari 55,” opens with this disclaimer: “The most uncomfortable aspect of this story is that it is true. Those who think that it is easier to tell a true story than to make up an anecdote, with all of its interrelations and laws, are wrong. Reality, we know, has...a logic that seems, at times, impossible to narrate.” The book was well received, its author hailed as a rising star. But life was about to change, for both Piglia and Argentina.

In the late ’60s, the cultural life of Buenos Aires was flourishing. A decade of Peronism had produced a stable and well-educated middle class, an explosion of publishing houses (160 by the start of the decade), and an unprecedented number of college-educated citizens. Intellectuals were out in bars arguing about their country’s future, and Piglia was usually among them. When he wasn’t working on fiction, he wrote impassioned editorials against the



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ideological dogmatism of “social literature” and on the need to find new aesthetic forms with which to render politics. In his mind, the two were inextricable.

These were “the happy years,” as Piglia titled the second volume of his journals. He was publishing regularly and living with his girlfriend in Buenos Aires. His income wasn’t stable, but the future looked bright.

Then, in 1972, the junta that ruled for the previous six years started to collapse. The economy floundered, and in response to the growing unrest, the government lashed out against suspected dissidents. One afternoon, Piglia returned to his building to learn that he had received some unexpected

visitors: “The doorman tells me that they came through, people from the army, asking about the young couple who lived on the sixth floor...and since we lived in that room, we gathered some things—my notebooks, my papers, the typewriter—and left, not meaning to return.” Piglia never learns why the soldiers were there, and as he and his girlfriend shuffle among temporary homes, their relationship disintegrates.

Up until this point, the diaries only indirectly chart the gathering political storm. There are allusions to student and worker strikes, debates about the resurgence of Peronism, concern over the shuttering of a magazine that Piglia calls “the voice of a

floating middle-class.” But by the early 1970s, politics were no longer as abstract. While less brutal than the junta that would later take power, the military generals running Argentina after Perón were far from benign. They banned opposition parties, ended the autonomy of universities, and imposed strict censorship on anything deemed a threat to “traditional” society (including miniskirts).

For years after the “people from the army” came looking for him, Piglia lived in a state of constant anxiety, moving from one location to the next, often taking very little with him but his notebooks. Not only was he worried about being targeted by the junta’s secret police, but his future as a writer also appeared to be in limbo. “It is clear,” he writes in this period, “that my project has always been to become a well-known writer who makes a living from his books. An absurd and impossible project in this country. And so the need to find another path, but which? Not journalism; perhaps I will end up dedicating myself to teaching, but for now I live off my work as an editor. The risk is always that of being so present in the media as to turn into someone ‘well-known,’ someone with a name but not work.”

During this time, Piglia made ends meet editing *Serie Negra*, a crime fiction line that introduced Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, David Goodis, James Cain, and other hard-boiled authors to Spanish-language audiences. (Detective stories had been popular in Argentina since the early 20th century, but in the 1940s Borges recast them as literature.) And it was through this work that Piglia began to come into his own as a writer. From Chandler, he took the idea of using a single “hero-narrator” in his books so they could “be read as a single, vast novel.” In genre fiction, Piglia found a means to develop his belief that every story must contain a subterranean element, a hidden narrative that is “constructed out of what is not said, out of implication and allusion.” Unlike earlier waves of detective fiction, in which law and order prevail over crime, this new generation of noir offered a grimmer outlook, presenting the world as a playground for malevolent, cynical forces. In this, Piglia found an atmosphere that increasingly reflected his own. “Many times,” he observed, “I’ve felt tempted to write the *Don Quixote* of police novels.”

Piglia’s work suited the moment while drawing on Argentine literary traditions. In an assessment that must have delighted him, the critic (and former colleague) Noé

The Nightmare Touches Its Forehead to My Lips

The sky feels like a k-pin
doused with some other shit that’ll kill you—
infectious harp.

::

The space between language—
shard of porcelain
from the dictator’s house.

::

Looking back—
so many lives like veils undressed
in the sullen dark.

::

Names etched on my heart.

::

Be grateful, the whole future isn’t a skull—
blue silk in the grey matter
like water from sand.

ANDRÉS CERPA

Jitrik described Piglia as an heir to Borges and Roberto Arlt, a novelist and journalist celebrated for his grotesque depictions of early 20th century Buenos Aires. Though often framed as representatives of different literary currents—Borges the avant-garde Europhile formalist, Arlt the abrasive realist—Piglia embraced aspects of both, merging the metaphysical experimentation of the former with the working-class orientation of the latter. (Piglia's 1975 collection *Assumed Name* even includes a novella he falsely attributed to Arlt, whom he describes in the *Diaries* as “a dyslexic, guttural stutterer.”) As the society around him became more constricted, Piglia began to develop a new style—“paranoid fiction,” which embraced noir conventions to mirror life under state surveillance. In this mode, “everyone is a suspect, everyone feels pursued,” and faith in the system has been thoroughly exhausted.

In 1973, while hemorrhaging support, the junta's leaders made a fatal mistake: They held a national election. Perón was forbidden to run, so his party put forward a proxy candidate and won an overwhelming majority. Weakened by years of infighting, the military leaders grudgingly stepped down. That summer, more than 3 million Argentines assembled at Buenos Aires's Ezeiza Airport to welcome Perón back from more than a decade of exile in Europe. While they waited, members of his party's right opened fire on the leftists, killing at least a dozen people.

Piglia had never liked Perón's taste for populism and authoritarianism, but the former leader was also the junta's most powerful adversary. Perón resumed the presidency soon after landing in Argentina, though his reign wouldn't last long. On July 1, 1974, less than nine months after taking office, he died of a heart attack. “Perón's death has erased all meaning,” Piglia wrote of the public's response. “The mourning is endless and stories proliferate.” Perón was replaced by his third wife, Isabel Perón, who held power for a year and a half before the struggle between the warring Peronist camps plunged the country back into chaos. In 1976, military officers (with US support) orchestrated yet another coup, the sixth in less than a century.

“The worst,” Piglia wrote in the days after the coup, “is the sinister feeling of normalcy; the buses are running, people are going to the movies, sitting in bars, leaving offices, going to restaurants, laughing, making jokes: everything seems to go on as

usual except you hear sirens and cars without license plates speed past carrying armed civilians.” That feeling of normality didn't last long. Under the pretext of uniting the country around “Western and Christian values,” the junta's leaders began targeting what they deemed the “subversive” elements of society, which included anybody who might disagree with their rule. Unlike many of his colleagues, Piglia chose to stay in Argentina during this period, which would come to be known as the Dirty War, and went into a kind of self-imposed exile. With the universities closed, he taught classes in secret. He cycled through girlfriends, self-medicated with amphetamines

(the proliferation of cocaine, he said, was “an effect of the end of politics”), and moved from apartment to apartment.

During its seven years in power, the junta conducted thousands of extrajudicial killings, ran clandestine detention centers across the country, censored the press, and gave the infant children of the “disappeared” to junta loyalists. While the government never publicly acknowledged what was going on, it was following a strategy. As Buenos Aires Governor Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean told colleagues during a state dinner in 1977, “First we'll kill all the subversives, then we'll kill their collaborators, then their sympathizers, and after them

A Smiling Understanding

There is an understanding,
a smiling understanding,
between orchards and orchestras.
Jazz and Bach are fertilizers,
something extra. Trees are much older than music
and poetry, were gods for good reasons.
They have bodies and souls. Trees are choirs,
mezzo sopranos, coloraturas,
tenors and baritones, castrati.
I live with music and trees, orchards of music,
woodwinds and sextets. I sing
the “I don't lie to myself” blues.
I learn from my suffering to understand
the suffering of others. I climb musical scales.
Trees have an embouchure. I'm a sapling.
Breath and wind blow through me.
This winter is a coda of falling leaves,
sequoias and magnolias Louis Armstrong
Coltrane willows, citrus, and evergreens.
I have a band of tree brothers and sisters,
we are not melancholy babies.
I age like a rock, not a rocking chair.
A rock does not wear spectacles,
have a heart with winter in it,
or use a walking stick. It is dangerous
for anyone to call me “young fellow.”

STANLEY MOSS



Artistic Dispatches From the Front Lines of Resistance



^ **Phantoms** / Edel Rodriguez



^ **Trumpworld Map** / Peter Kuper



^ **Hit Parade** / Tim Robinson

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those who remain indifferent, and finally, we'll kill the timid." By the end of the Dirty War, as many as 30,000 people had been murdered, and Argentina found itself with \$45 billion in foreign debt. As these events unfolded, Piglia began to fantasize about killing himself. "When the catastrophe" came, he writes, it was "worse than he could have imagined."

In 1980, in the midst of all this, Piglia published *Artificial Respiration*, a nesting doll of a novel that implicitly critiqued the dictatorship through its account of the 19th century autocrat Juan Manuel de Rosas. Narrated by Piglia's alter ego, Emilio Renzi, the novel tells the story of his correspondence with his estranged uncle, who is researching the archives of Rosas's eccentric former secretary. Written during a time when thousands of people were disappearing, the novel never addresses the Dirty War directly. Instead, Piglia indicates his intent with an epigraph by T.S. Eliot: "We had the experience but missed the meaning, an approach to the meaning restores the experience." In drawing a line between Rosas and the dictatorship, Piglia sought to tacitly depict the horrors of life under the junta.

The parallel was not lost on readers. In his introduction to the English edition of the book, translator Daniel Balderston writes that immediately after its publication, the novel was taken up as "a strange sort of best seller: despite the considerable difficulty of the text, it became an essential reference point for readers hungry after years of violence and repression and lies." As violent governments terrorized people across Latin America, *Artificial Respiration* became a cult hit throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

Piglia opens the final volume of his *Diaries, A Day in the Life* (the English translation of which will be out this fall), with his struggle to write *Artificial Respiration*. Here again we find the novelist agonizing over form and structure as much as style and character. Progress was slow; Piglia spent months figuring out how to render the violence happening in the background. *A Day in the Life* seems to echo this anguish. It begins just before the 1976 coup and ends in 1982, several months after Argentina abandoned its ill-fated war with Britain over the Falkland Islands, which led to the junta's downfall the following year. But this takes us only halfway through the final volume. At that point the young man suddenly disappears, and the book transi-

tions to a very different mode.

What follows is an assemblage of fragments written much later. There is an 84-page essay that portrays, with a Joycean attention to detail, a single day in the life of the younger Renzi. There are chunks of Piglia's previously published fiction. There is an impressionistic section titled "Days Without Dates," reflecting the author's desire to structure his journal entries around themes—long evenings in bars, relationships with women, literary projects. There are melancholy musings about the end of life. In this, his final journal, all the Pignias are present at once: the young literary firebrand, the silenced public citizen, the reflective older writer.

Piglia was never interested in taking a chronological approach to the past, and this comes through most clearly in what he leaves out. From the 1980s to the 2010s, Piglia published four other novels (including the acclaimed *Burnt Money* and *The Absent City*), became a respected critic, and taught at the University of Buenos Aires and then at Princeton, where he spent the final years of his career before returning to Argentina. He won awards, wrote film scripts, published short story collections and critical essays, and consulted on theatrical adaptations of his works. These were arguably the most prolific years of his life, yet very little of them is documented here. As to why this might be the case, a line from Piglia's afterword to his 1988 collection *Perpetual Prison* provides a clue. "Writing a diary," he observes, "helps us forget the illusion that we have a private life."

As a lifework, *The Diaries of Emilio Renzi* do not compare with, say, those of Witold Gombrowicz, whose decades of exile in Argentina overlapped with Piglia's youth. They are a bit too fragmentary and ponderous, with much of the real activity—revolution, sexual affairs—happening outside the frame. As a novel, they often withhold the pleasures of fiction. Yet as an all-encompassing exercise, an effort not to fold life into literature but to find a way to make literature life, they are unparalleled. They are also an invaluable intellectual account of a difficult and deadly era in Argentina's history and the insidious ways in which politics can seep into the corners of one's life and mind. Early on in *Diaries*, Renzi asks, "How could one write about Argentina?" These journals provide an answer, affirming Borges's observation, "Only new countries have pasts, which is to say, they're remembered autobiographically." ■



DE GAULLE'S LONG SHADOW

The making and unmaking of France's Fifth Republic

by HUGO DROCHON

On May 8, 1789, at the onset of the French Revolution, the deputies of the Third Estate, one of the three “estates of the realm” under the ancien régime, were asked to vote on how to bring together the country’s three orders (the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners) by filing to either the left or the right of the president of the session. Having done so, they sat down as they had voted, and the left/right division of politics was born—a division that would play a decisive role in the subsequent course of events, notably during the debates about what to do with the deposed king. (The left wanted to send him to the guillotine, the right did not.)

Ever since, we have tended to tell the history of France through that opposi-

tion, and for good reason: Until recently, French politics has usually opposed a left-wing president (Mitterrand, Hollande) to a right-wing one (Chirac, Sarkozy). But it would be a mistake to think that this was the only opposition in existence at the time or, indeed, that it has been the only opposition since. Although Robespierre and the Jacobins were to the “left” of the Girondins, the dynamics of *La Terreur*, for instance, seemed more to oppose a centralized, revolutionary Parisian government to opposition in the provinces. Instead of left versus right, what existed in this case was a conflict between a top and a bottom—between elite designs and popular demands. The same might be said of the country after World War II, when what was at stake was less whether left or right visions of France would win out than the existence of tensions between two competing visions of modernization: one centered on a top-down, elite-run, state-driven program and

the other a bottom-up demand for democratic participation and popular control. In short, much like the situation during the Terror, the struggle in France’s postwar reconstruction was less left versus right than elites versus the people.

This, at least, is the central claim that Herrick Chapman, a professor of history at New York University, makes in his new book, *France’s Long Reconstruction: In Search of the Modern Republic*, a history of France from the end of World War II to the Algerian War of Independence. Chapman focuses on the social, economic, and political dynamics of the reconstruction effort, and in closing his book in 1962 rather than in 1958, with the end of the Fourth Republic and the founding of the Fifth, he follows a trend in French historiography that aims to integrate colonial Algeria into the history of France. He does this not simply to underline how France’s domestic recovery was deeply entwined with two full-scale

colonial wars, in Algeria and Indochina, but also because the referendum of Charles de Gaulle that brought the Algerian conflict to an end marked what has often been dubbed the “second founding” of the Fifth Republic. This was the moment when the “presidentialism” of the French political system came into being, and de Gaulle carved out for himself and future presidents certain *domaines réservés*—notably in foreign policy, military affairs, and national security—that established the president as the lead actor in French political life.

It is hard to overstate the challenges France faced after World War II. Fighting during the first war was concentrated in the northeast, but in the second, 74 of the 90 French *départements* were touched by combat. A total of 1 million families were homeless; 2 million people were former prisoners of war. Thanks in part to the successful work of the French Resistance, only 45 percent of the country’s rail lines were serviceable—and really only in unconnected sections, with just one in six locomotives working—making communication between Paris and the rest of the country virtually impossible. There were massive labor shortages and even less trust among French citizens in a country torn apart by what had essentially been a civil war between Vichy collaborators and the Resistance at the end of the occupation. France also needed to regain its international standing and independence vis-à-vis the Allied forces after the war.

Returning to France from London, where he had led a government in exile and established himself as the undisputed leader of the French Resistance after his “Appeal of 18 June” was broadcast by the BBC in 1940, de Gaulle quickly turned to solidifying his authority in his own country. He did so by victoriously parading around town centers after liberation to the acclaim of the local people. These “street processions,” as Chapman calls them, helped de Gaulle unite the country around him and cement his legitimacy as the leader of the French people. At 6 foot 5, he had a stature that conferred a natural authority. This was reinforced during the victory parade in Paris on August 26, 1944, when enemy snipers took potshots at him but he refused to back down. But if de Gaulle’s method was to restore state authority from above, he moved to integrate the former Resistance from below as well, notably by recruiting its members into the new CRS (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité), best known to-

France’s Long Reconstruction

In Search of the Modern Republic

By Herrick Chapman

Harvard University Press. 416 pp. \$46.50

day as the feared anti-riot police.

De Gaulle also worked to erode old left/right divisions. As head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, he formed a government of “national unity” after the liberation of Paris that was composed of all the political actors in the Resistance: Communists, Socialists, left-wing Catholics, as well as the conservatives closer to de Gaulle. All parties agreed that the modernization of France should occur through a two-pronged process: The state should take the lead in postwar reconstruction, while democracy was revived at the grassroots. This began the process of reorienting politics away from older divisions and creating others. At the state level, for instance, the Communists were keen to present themselves as a “party of government,” following Stalin’s diktat from Moscow that the European Communist parties should participate in postwar rebuilding efforts. Yet the party’s rank and file, continuing a Resistance tradition of self-government, persisted in calls for new forms of democratic participation and helped organize the nationalization of the automaker Renault. Although he was less open to exploring ideas of economic democracy, de Gaulle declared his desire to “remain faithful to the democratic principles that our ancestors drew from the genius of our race and that are the very stakes of this life-and-death war” in his 1941 address at London’s Royal Albert Hall.

Chapman follows these competing impulses in the postwar years through the prism of four policy domains: labor and immigration, tax reform and the regulation of small enterprise, family and the welfare state, and the nationalization of industry. On the family, for instance, Chapman shows that a pro-natalist policy, although it echoed Vichy’s slogan of “*Travail, famille, patrie*,” was widely consensual, with de Gaulle calling for 12 million “*beaux bébés*”; soon France’s baby boom started in earnest. Family allowances even managed for a while to reconcile the Parisian high civil service with local associations, as the *caisses* that administered the funds were decentralized and run by citizen boards. Although to this day France is the country that invests the most of its national income

in family support, that consensus soon cracked under the bottom-up pressures of second-wave feminism, leading to clashes with administrators over marriage law reform and contraceptive rights, among the many fissures between the country’s ruling elite and those resisting them from below. Those clashes made their way back into national politics, with Communists posing the question of women and work in opposition to the more traditionalist, child-centered Catholic approach. When François Mitterrand, the future Socialist president, challenged de Gaulle for the presidency in 1965, the debate no longer concerned family policy but women’s rights—and here, too, the arguments were about the level of popular participation in state decisions.

These top versus bottom tensions could be seen in postwar economic policy, too. France was the only country in Western Europe that took on all three of the innovations available at the time: nationalizations, work committees, and planning. Top-down dirigisme, best incarnated by the Monnet Plan of 1946–52—which sought to modernize electricity, gas, coal, rail lines, cement, and tractors—was highly successful, with France going through an unprecedented 30-year economic boom, known as *Les Trente Glorieuses*. Again, while everyone from conservatives to Communists and the trade unions was on board, the strains between economic recovery and democratic renewal played out in the conflict between centralized parliamentary oversight of economic policy on the one hand and workplace democracy on the other. The distinguished civil servant Jean Monnet, with Robert Schuman, the French minister of foreign affairs, was at the heart of the subsequent project to establish the European Coal and Steel Community, for which his plan—with all the advantages of postwar industrial recovery—served as a model but which precipitated the growing “democratic deficit” that is still playing out in France and across the European Union.

Chapman also documents how the growth of the French security services emerged as the state expanded its social security programs and as immigration from the colonies increased. Desperate to attract foreign workers to help in the reconstruction effort, the French state turned its eyes to its colonies, especially Algeria, to recruit them. It invested massively in training, providing these workers with accommodations and education. Compared with their fellow French, they remained very

much second-class citizens, but such an investment came at another price, too—namely that access to social welfare was a way for the security services to keep tabs on the pro-independence unrest that was already fomenting in Paris and Algiers. The link between the top-down surveillance of French Algerians and the social security programs only deepened with the bottom-up protests in Paris for Algerian independence that began in the 1950s and '60s, leading to the militarization of the police force under the dreaded Maurice Papon (later inculpated in the deportation of 1,690 French Jews to the Drancy internment camp during World War II), blurring the long-standing lines of demarcation between the French Army and the police and leading to further centralization in the final years of the Fourth Republic.

Although much work has been done on the history of France since the war, Chapman's focus on policy offers new insights on familiar terrain. In focusing on the tensions between top-down technocratic reform and bottom-up democratic reform, he has radically changed the paradigm through which we see this history. After Chapman's *France's Long Reconstruction*, we will never look at French history in the same way again.

One of the interesting episodes in which the dueling dynamics of modernization can be seen is the tax revolts of the 1950s, which gave rise to what came to be known as the Poujadist movement, named after its leader, Pierre Poujade. Although he presented himself as a “modest local boy,” he had links to the French far right, having been active in Jacques Doriot's fascist Parti Populaire Français in his teenage years and collaborating with the youth wing of the Vichy regime. Many former collaborators and Pétainists, who served in the Vichy regime, found his movement to be a congenial home.

During the occupation nearly 100,000 small neighborhood shops opened, providing groceries, clothing, and other small household items, some of which were procured on the black market. In the context of rationing, shopkeepers gained a standing in small communities, but at the end of the war de Gaulle's government wanted to take back control of commerce. This was done both to regulate it and to modernize it—introducing supermarkets on the outskirts of towns, developing new industrial centers of production, and bringing into

being a sales tax, *taxe sur la valeur ajoutée* (value-added tax, or VAT).

Keen to regain control of its finances, the central government sent tax officials throughout the country to ensure that shopkeepers were complying with the new laws. This upset the fragile ecosystem that had been built up locally to survive the end of the war and immediately touched off a wave of protests. Drawing on previously untapped archival material, Chapman reveals that this began as early as 1947, when 7,000 people protested in La Roche-sur-Yon in the department of Vendée. But by the summer of 1953, a movement appeared to be on the rise: When Poujade and a group of 300 men prevented some *contrôleurs* from carrying out a verification in a town in the department of Lot in the south of France, protests spread across the country, leading to a number of similar, more or less violent actions.

The wave of protests led to the formation of a Poujadist party, the Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans, in 1953, which had some electoral success during the final years of the Fourth Republic—especially in 1956, when the party surprised even itself by winning 2.5 million votes, thereby sending a number of deputies to the National Assembly. In Paris, however, Poujade and his fellow deputies soon proved politically incompetent and fell into infighting, and Poujadism absorbed into what Chapman calls “the rising tide of Gaullism” and the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

But Poujadism's anti-Paris and anti-centralization politics left its mark on the political landscape. A young Jean-Marie Le Pen cut his teeth in the movement and went on to found the Front National, which garnered the support of disgruntled *pieds-noirs* (European white settlers) who were forced out of Algeria after independence in 1962. (Poujade's wife, Yvette Seva, was a *pieds-noir*.) Most of their ire was directed toward de Gaulle, who was appointed in 1958 to resolve the deepening crisis. His first action was to announce to the gathered crowd in Algiers, “*Je vous ai compris*,” which seemed to signal his support for French Algeria. The *pieds-noirs* thus felt betrayed when he granted Algeria independence four years later. De Gaulle used the crisis to usher in the Fifth Republic, which reinforced the presidential power he had dreamed of since the end of World War II.

Although Chapman closes his study in 1962, he is clear that the foundations of the Fifth Republic shape the dynamics of French politics today. Indeed, his whole point is that a regime born in crisis will engender only further crisis from within. That de Gaulle embedded in the foundations of the new regime the top-down centralizing tendency, to the detriment of the bottom-up democratizing demands, means that the modernizing tensions that characterized France's reconstruction after World War II would inevitably spill into the streets.

The recent *gilet jaune* (yellow vest) protests can be seen in this light. Like Poujadism before it, the unrest is a struggle between elite modernizers and popular demands. Like the Poujadists, the *gilets jaunes* are mostly white, lower-middle-class French people, primarily based in smaller towns, who felt that they were losing out as a result of globalization; neither movement was a revolt of the more diverse banlieues, the immigrant ghettos on the outskirts of cities, or principally about unemployment. This was the provinces coming to Paris.

The anti-Paris sentiment is key, as is the anger toward France's centralized government. Anti-Semitism also reared its ugly head in both movements: The Poujadists targeted the center-left politician Pierre Mendès France, and the verbal abuse directed by yellow vest protesters against the public intellectual Alain Finkielkraut is a more recent example. Both movements had an international dimension, too. The pressure for tax reform in postwar France came from America's Marshall Plan; today it comes from the EU. Finally, Poujade's anti-parliamentarism (he called the National Assembly the “biggest brothel in Paris”) was expressed through the *gilets jaunes*' demand for direct rule through citizens' referenda.

In both cases, the French state's response was the same: a combination of heavy-handed repression and concession. During the Poujadist rebellion, shopkeepers were given special VAT exemptions, and in December of 2018, Macron made a number of concessions, including abrogating the fuel tax. (Tellingly, both protests concerned the VAT.) Like the Poujadists, the yellow vest movement turned to electoral politics, putting up candidates on two lists for the European elections; also like the Poujadists, these electoral efforts were complete flops. Together, the two yellow vest lists garnered



less than 1 percent of the total vote. In the end, it seems that up to 44 percent of the *gilets jaunes* voted for Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, leading his party, since rebaptized the National Rally.

From Chapman's perspective, this alignment of political forces makes perfect sense. Macron has captured the state and the political center, and the forces arrayed against him have been pushed down and out onto the streets. Yet much as Poujadism led to concessions, the yellow vests' protests have forced the government to engage in one of the biggest democratic experiments France has known since the war, namely the *Grand Débat*, and of course the point of meeting every Saturday on roundabouts was precisely to experiment with new forms of participation. While Macron reduced the movement's momentum by granting it many concessions, he has also shown openness to some of its farther-reaching demands, and notably the creation of a national citizens' assembly to discuss the transition to a green economy. If the tension between top-down reforms and bottom-up demands remains the template of French politics, it appears that tension can sometimes be productive, too.

Like many presidents before him (Giscard, Chirac, Hollande), Macron is a perfect example of the type of leader the French reconstruction sought to produce: a graduate of the *grandes écoles* Sciences Po and the ENA (École Nationale d'Administration), which were established after the war to train France's bureaucratic elite. He is a so-called politician-expert not unlike Michel Debré, de Gaulle's right-hand man and first prime minister under the Fifth Republic. Moreover, as a former Rothschild banker and minister of finance, Macron embodies precisely the type of figure that Poujade detested (and one of the rallying cries of the *gilets jaunes* was "*Macron, démission!*"—Macron, resign!)

With the death of Jacques Chirac, the last true Gaullist, a chapter of French history seems to have drawn to a close. But what Chapman's book most powerfully shows is how the tensions between top-down reforms and bottom-up demands are still the story of French politics. Along with setting up a committee to evaluate his much-hated suppression of the ISF, France's wealth tax—often described as his "original sin"—Macron has pledged to abolish the ENA. Whatever emerges to take its place, however, is likely to be another ENA in all but name. *Plus ça change...* Though the war is over, France's long reconstruction has only just begun. ■



TO THE MOON

070 Shake's cosmic rap

by **STEPHEN KEARSE**

On the cover of her debut album, *Modus Vivendi*, New Jersey rapper 070 Shake strikes a fascinating pose. She's styled to look like an android; her body, save for her face, is encased in glinting metal. Her skin is smooth and vibrant, and "070," the name of her rap crew and the first three digits of her hometown zip code, is printed above one of her cheekbones in neat black ink. Metal tubes jut from her head and torso, stretching into an orange band that glows like a hot flame.

Stephen Kearse writes frequently for The Nation on books, music, and culture.

They have the look of constraints and imply danger, but Shake appears unbothered, as if everything is going according to plan.

On *Modus Vivendi*, that mix of coolness, vulnerability, and ambiguity characterizes Shake's work. A bit of a stargazer, she's constantly turning to the cosmos for answers, finding purpose in the mysteries of the universe. Her music has an expansive, exploratory feel, as though she were simultaneously mapping the stars by observing them from afar and visiting them in person. Bridging rap, R&B, emo, and synth pop, Shake follows her instincts rather than a rubric, resulting in songs that feel both

unmoored and dynamic.

She began making music in 2015, uploading broody R&B songs to SoundCloud and falling in with the 070 collective, a loose cohort of Garden State producers and vocalists. The next year, on the strength of her song “Proud” and some serendipitous industry connections, she was signed by Kanye West’s G.O.O.D. Music label. It had been barely a year since she’d penned her first song. She lay dormant until the infamous 2018 Wyoming sessions that produced Pusha T’s album *Daytona*, Kanye West’s *ye*, and Kanye and Kid Cudi’s *Kids See Ghosts*. Her breakout moment, a spotlight-stealing refrain on Kanye’s song “Ghost Town,” endeared her as a balladeer and a dramatist. “And nothing hurts anymore, I feel kinda free / We’re still the kids we used to be / I put my hand on a stove / To see if I still bleed,” she sings, turning pain and anguish into liberation.

Shake’s voice is smooth and powerful yet husky and raw, allowing her to belt big, schmaltzy notes that are emotive without sounding sappy. These qualities are well suited to the modern rap landscape, which over the past decade has tweaked rawness to connote texture and temperature as much as emotional authenticity. Even though their music is awash in vocal effects that superficially sound synthetic and corroded, today’s rappers like to see themselves as unvarnished and genuine because software like Auto-Tune helps them to articulate their inner voice. During the mixing of *Modus Vivendi*, Shake told *Pitchfork*, “I need to distort some vocals, make it more real. I don’t want to make it better, I want to make it *worse*.” This comment clearly marks Shake as a child of the current druggy, robo-soul era of rap (and a close student of Kanye, a notorious tinkerer and perfectionist), but she’s also a bit of a maverick.

Throughout *Modus Vivendi*, her inner voice is fluctuating and chimeric, defined less by a stable persona and more by constant curiosity and flux. On “Rocketship” she ascends, addicted to the high of a new love. “I’m in need for that rush / Like a tree need the sun,” she sings, her voice fizzing apart on the last word. On “Divorce” the high mood smolders into a dreamy clarity; Shake’s voice is feathery and svelte as she narrates a breakup over streaks of electric guitar and a pitter-patter of drums. “Bones and soil / Fertilize / Face your fear / And face the truth,” she warbles.

Celestial and earth-centered imagery appears often, giving her music a mystical bent. “The Pines,” her take on the folk-standard murder ballad “In the Pines,” plays like a love story. While many renditions of the song, most famously Nirvana’s and Lead Belly’s, liken the wilderness and the song’s female protagonist to darkness and danger, Shake casts her as a seductive bad girl. “Yes, I’m young, but I know just what I like,” she raps defensively, trekking deeper into the woods.

Shake is particularly fond of the moon, which represents something different every time she mentions it. When she’s in love, moonlight feels better than sunlight (“Rocketship”), whereas when she’s in lust (“Under the Moon”), what happens under the moon goes unsaid. On the downswing (“Guilty Conscience”) the morning moon, described as “jaded, faded, almost gone,” symbolizes love in remission. The lunar imagery may be overused, but it’s effective: Shake seems to mention it more out of fascination than reflex, as if she’s awed that there is a natural precedent for her penchant for change.

This attention to scenery and setting is aided by Shake’s producers, who provide lush, strobing backdrops that twinkle and shimmer beneath her quicksilver vocals. The main architects are Dave Hamelin, a Canadian indie rocker, and Mike Dean, a mainstay in the G.O.O.D. Music producer corps, who mixed every song on the album. Together they fill the record with liquid synths, psychedelic keys, and fluid drum sequences that diffuse through Shake’s voice like light through water. The result is a record that is dense, teeming, and airy all at once, as on the frenzied outros to “Microdosing” and “The Pines,” which flare like light shows. For Shake, that pursuit of a “worse” sound doesn’t preclude beauty.

Ultimately, it feels telling that Shake doesn’t recruit any big-name guests for the record. From start to finish, *Modus Vivendi* is rooted in her voice and vision. Though her writing can be lackluster and her mysticism vague, her confidence and restlessness are disarming. With her wonder alone, she makes the world feel magical and mysterious. Compared with where other Kanye protégés like Travis Scott, Big Sean, and Chance the Rapper were at this stage in their careers, Shake is both miles ahead and plotting a different journey altogether. Perhaps that’s why she seems so unfazed on the album cover. This is only phase one for her. ■

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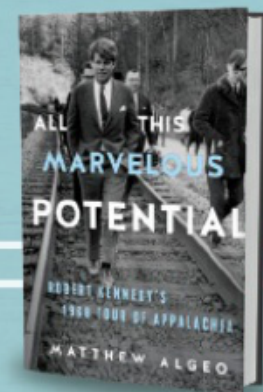
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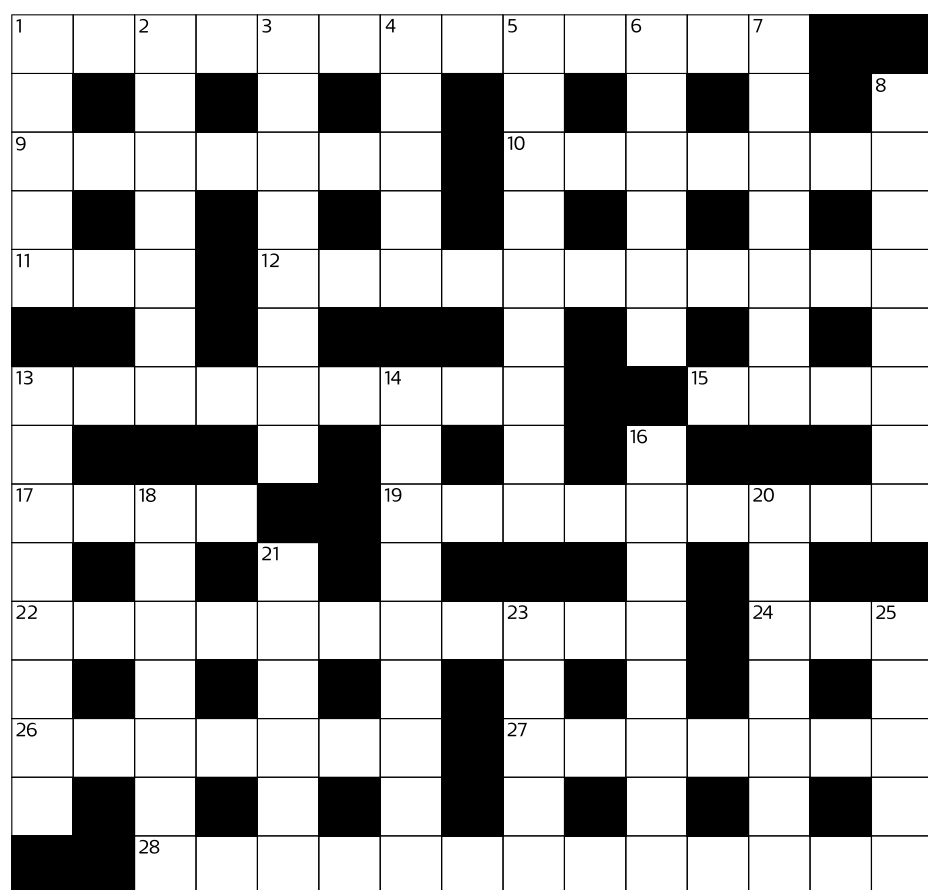
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Puzzle No. 3525

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Musical chairs, ultimately, amid sprinkles at mid-month (May, for instance) (4,4,5)
 9 Llama's cousin kept by Nicaraguan acolyte (7)
 10 Hotel in the red, or solvent? (7)
 11 and 24 Howard Franco's two musical works (6)
 12 Patrol leaders placed in suitable position (11)
 13 Forward-thinking staff almost captures Benedict Arnold, for example (9)
 15 Biblical character is into the sauce (4)
 17 Starts to organize before expanding your mind (4)
 19 Pay no heed to translation of a verse bio (4,5)
 22 Reconstruct a pretty cold ancient beast (11)
 24 See 11
 26 Destroy tree that's home to the first throwback (7)
 27 Relevant biological inheritance involves broken arm (7)
 28 Novelist's fragments seen multiple times in a home display (10,3)

DOWN

- 1 Composer loses no bet (5)
 2 A captain, once, has mishandled mounting monthly payment (7)
 3 They keep fluids in marine mammal and insects (8)
 4 Drive up substandard slump (5)
 5 Certain compositions or tennis games? (3,6)
 6 Following operation, I ingested a drug (6)
 7 Some athletes look for opposing vote after a turnover (7)
 8 Beginning to process decay on coarse bulge (8)
 13 Vegetables currently eaten by passé nuts (4,4)
 14 J.S. interrupts former vice president over victory for former president (9)
 16 Marsupial in part of a house and a reduced part of a house (8)
 18 M_k_ u_i_o_m? (4,3)
 20 Resold a convertible with difficulties (7)
 21 Cheerful little woman with a small container (6)
 23 Items in which to party and to talk at length (5)
 25 Silos initially hide grain (5)

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ACROSS 1 M + A CAD + AM I A
 6 GA + MUT[t] 9 anag. 10 S(PL)URGE
 11 S(LOVE + N)LY 12 CAVE + RN
 14 DEN + Y 15 BIRDHO (anag.) + USE
 17 CHIN + AT + OWN 19 BAN (rev.) + K
 21 B + IS + ECT (anag.)
 22 O + P(UL)ENCE 24 AX + O + LOT + L
 25 AIR'S + HIP 26 DU + SKY
 27 B + LOSS + OMED (rev.)

DOWN 1 "moose"
 2 CAR BONE MISSIONS 3 D(TT + HE)RY
 4 MID + DL(EB)ROW (rev.) 5 [I]APSE
 6 GO(LIA)TH (*Ali* anag.) 7 MERC[y] + E + CUNNING + HAM 8 anag.
 13 GRANDP(I)A + NO 16 SCAB BARD
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