ARE THINK TANKS FADING? JEET HEER | THE TRIAL OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV JENNIFER WILSON

THE Nation.

SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

WHITEWASHING HISTORY?

ROBIN D.G. KELLEY

Are these murals degrading and triggering? An exposé of American racism? Or something else entirely?

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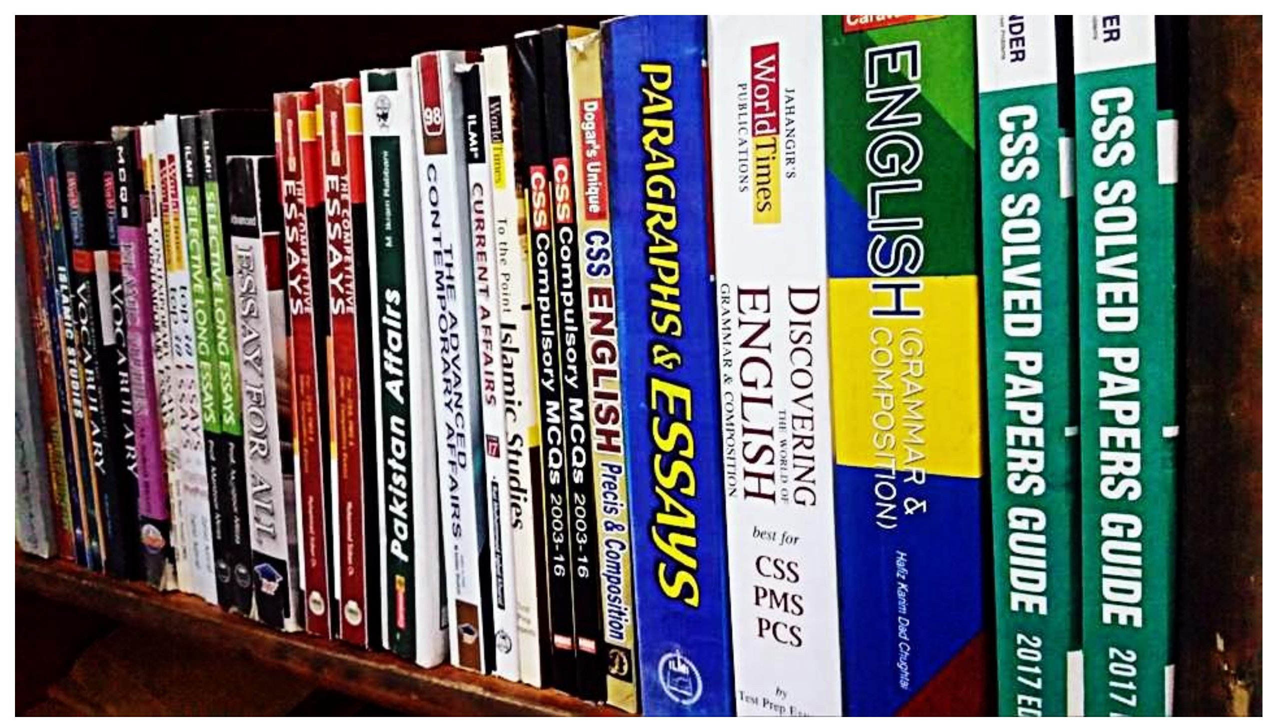

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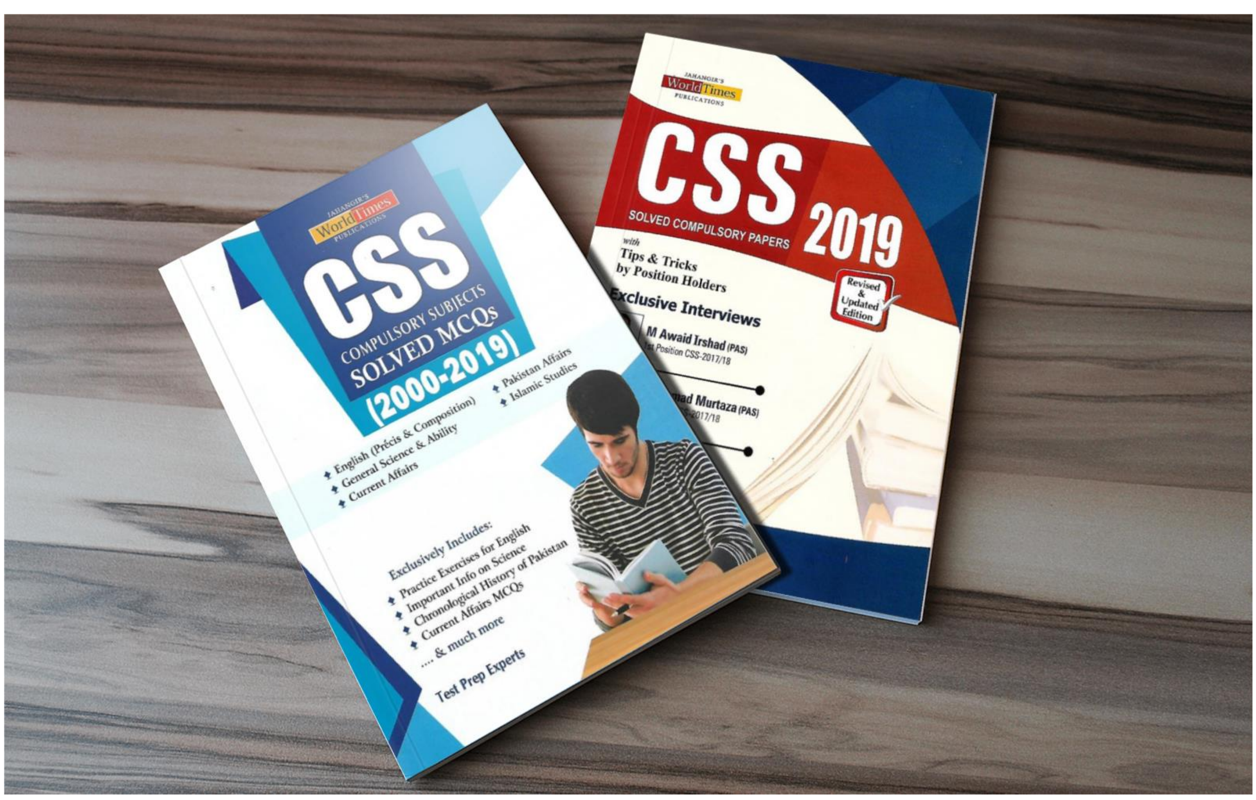

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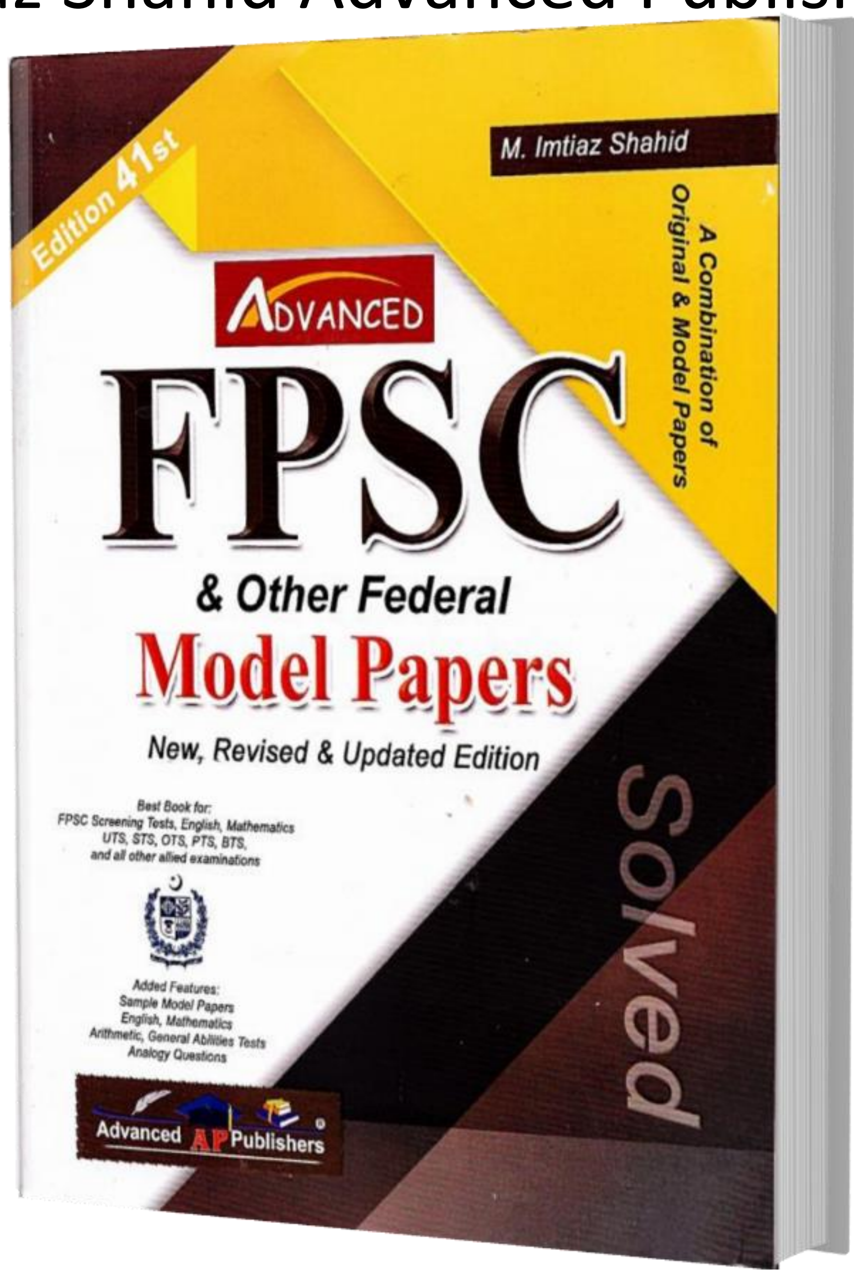

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—Hosted by **Jon Wiener**

Attention Must Be Paid

I was very pleased to see that *The Nation* carried a cover story in its Aug. 26/Sept. 2 issue ["Peace Now?" by Jonathan Levi and Marta Orrantia] on the situation in Colombia. The article appropriately focused on the integration of former FARC guerrillas into civilian life after surrendering their firearms to United Nations monitors as part of the peace accords entered into with the government of President Juan Manuel Santos. The authors are correct to note that the successor administration of President Iván Duque has failed in several respects to fulfill the requirements that the peace agreement established. As the article points out, the government has not provided the resources needed to develop farm-to-market roads, educational facilities, and health clinics in rural areas.

One matter of importance that the article does not mention is that there are municipal elections throughout Colombia set for October 27. All of the mayors and municipal councils will be up for election on that date. What happens in these elections will have a profound effect on the success or failure of the peace agreement and, by extension, on future violence in much of the country. These elections occur at a moment when Duque's public approval rating is below 40 percent, according to several recent polls.

Again, thank you for focusing on Colombia. It is enormously important for people in the United States to pay attention to developments in that country.

John I. Laun
Cofounder and program director
Colombia Support Network
madison, wis.

Not Our Man

Thank you for David Klion's fine review of George Packer's *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century* ["The Unwinding," Aug. 26/Sept. 2], which spares me from having to read the book because, as Klion writes, it might not be of much interest to those who do not find the stories of white, male, liberal boomers particularly interesting.

Additionally, I want to thank him for this sentence: "[These liberals] also helped birth disasters—the Iraq War and the 2008 financial crisis, to name the most obvious examples—on a scale that Trump has yet to match." In our hyperpartisan era, plain statements of truth like this are brave and worth reminding those of us in the liberal bubble of their reality.

Robert Borneman

Yes, Scientists Are Human, Too

In her column "Sleazy Science" [Aug. 26/Sept. 2], Katha Pollitt asks, "Am I wrong to expect more of those we rely on to combat all of the nonsense swirling around us?" Yes, you are. Unfortunately, scientists are very prone to allowing emotions to distort their judgment, even as they toil in a realm best suited to logic. My wife is a scientist, and she has worked with many scientists who dismissed areas of inquiry for irrational reasons, falsified data, demonized or belittled their competitors, and so on. They are just people. Our collective ability to be rational and logical is really limited, including at the level of elite science.

Roger Felix

Correction

"Peace Now?" by Jonathan Levi and Marta Orrantia [Aug. 26/Sept. 2] mistakenly states that Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was running for the Colombian presidency when he was assassinated in 1948. Though he ran for president in 1946, at the time of his death, he had not formally announced his candidacy in the next presidential race.

Comments drawn from our website
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Cover: GWHS Alumni Association / Tammy Aramian

Strike!

EDITORIAL

On August 24, at midnight, 20,000 AT&T workers walked off the job. Big strikes are surprising enough in the post-Reagan era, but this one spanned nine of the 13 states that once made up the Confederacy. Although slavery officially ended in 1865, the political elite in the South never let go of the idea. The legal structures that endorsed first slavery and then Jim Crow finally settled on right-to-work laws. The AT&T strike, which lasted four days, began over basic demands for human freedom and dignity.

Christopher Walterson is the president of the Communication Workers of America Local 3122 in Miami. According to him, as contract negotiations got underway, workers began showing their solidarity by wearing union insignia:

> The wire technicians put on an SPF-rated UV protection arm sleeve, a layer you see on TV all the time on ESPN commentators and golfers in major tournaments. In addition to cancer protection, they are made of wicking material, which is cooler than wearing 100 percent cotton. They are also key to avoiding the endless scratches and scrapes the technicians get crawling under people's houses.... They have various logos and say different things, but when the guys put on red-colored ones with the words "I pledge" in South Miami, the management team suspended seven of them and sent them home.

Walterson called an emergency union meeting, expecting the usual handful of workers to attend. But as news of the suspensions spread, more than 300 showed up. And after discussing management behavior, the union members voted unanimously to strike.

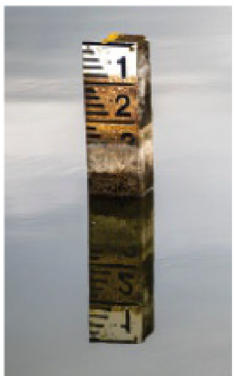
Since the winter of 2018, when 35,000 educators in West Virginia walked off the job, workers in the United States have been reviving the strike, labor's most powerful tool. These recent strikes are raising expectations that American workers will fight to regain ground lost to decades of defeats. And each time workers walk off the job and win, today's rampant inequality—the direct result of a 50-year assault on unions—gets more attention. A bevy of new policy proposals have been floated on how to rebuild worker power. But that rebuilding is happening precisely because workers themselves are doing it, not because national union leaders, labor think tanks, or presidential candidates have newfangled ideas about solving the crisis of inequality.

Besides, many of today's new ideas on inequality aren't new and drastically overcomplicate the issue. The real solution is simple: Repeal the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and end the historic racist and sexist exclusions under the original National Labor Relations Act by including domestic and agricultural workers (who are primarily women and people of color) and workers in today's contract, part-time, and platform labor force.

To achieve a full restoration of worker freedom in America today will require exactly what it took to first pass the NLRA in 1935: massive strikes, lots of them, in strategic industries and politically strategic states. What clearly won't work are more endless debates about legislative policy. Because, given the current power structure of the United States, no piece of legislation will do the job. Forcing corporations and the political elite to the negotiating table to reverse income inequality instead requires workers—and their families, friends, and communities—to create a crisis for capital serious enough to end in a labor win.

It's not rocket science—but it is hard and involves risk. The risk that AT&T workers took last week and that educators, Stop & Shop grocery workers, Marriott hotel workers, and thousands of others have taken in the past two years. It's the same risk civil rights activists took in the 1950s and '60s, the same risk taken by workers in the 1930s who, emboldened by Franklin D. Roosevelt's election, walked off the job.

When most people recall the New Deal, they think of auto-plant sit-down strikes, which won



Sea Change

21
Years until the sea level is projected to rise by 12 inches in Florida's Miami-Dade County

20%
Area of Miami that will be underwater if the sea level rises by 12 inches

380
Estimated number of tidal floods that Miami-Dade County will experience every year with a 15-inch rise

$1.7T
Property value at risk of being wiped out by a sea-level rise in South Florida by 2030

2.4M
Number of people who live less than four feet from the current high tide in Florida

$3.2B
Amount needed to build barriers to shield just Miami-Dade County from sea-level rise

—Molly Minta

huge gains for the whole of the working class. But those came in 1936 and 1937, after the NLRA. The strikes that mattered most, in 1933 and 1934, are too often overlooked—collective actions that challenged brutal repression in Seattle, Minneapolis, and other cities. Those strikes, like the Selma, Alabama, march during the civil rights movement, created the context for legislative victory. The proposals being debated today (placing workers on corporate boards, raising the minimum wage, establishing a universal basic income, and the current favorite, sectoral bargaining) aren't bad ideas. But they are a distraction from what workers need most: power.

The best examples of how to win today—the Los Angeles teachers', Marriott hotel workers', and AT&T strikes—show what can happen when workers build strong unions and develop strategic support within their broader communities. The Los Angeles teachers took on the political elite of Silicon Valley and the Wall Street faction of the Democratic Party. Marriott's low-wage, largely immigrant workers did what academics have long declared impossible: challenged a multinational corporation and won.

That required building consensus and strength across tens of thousands of workers with as many political and cultural ideas as exist in the nation at large. Supermajority strikes are so important because when we do them well, we build something America is desperate for: unbreakable human solidarity.

With Donald Trump, we have a union-busting boss in the White House. As in the early 1930s, the last time the corporate class nearly destroyed the country, the workforce (even a minority of the workforce) waging large, strategic, successful strikes is the only viable progressive response to the Republican-skewed rule of the Electoral College, state-based rigged election rules, and a reactionary Supreme Court. To win, to save America from its worst self, we need more massive strikes—before, during, and after the 2020 election.

JANE McALEVEY FOR *THE NATION*

Missile Mania

The death of the INF Treaty has escalated the arms race.

On August 2, in a brazen attack on the arms control architecture forged by US and Soviet leaders during the Cold War, the United States formally withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The 1987 accord banned the possession of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers—weapons intended for nuclear or conventional combat on a regional battlefield, such as Europe, but not for intercontinental strikes.

Less than three weeks later, on August 18, the Defense Department test-fired a cruise missile that would have violated the treaty, were the United States still in compliance. That test was intended less as a technology assessment than as a political statement—to demonstrate the Pentagon's determination to rapidly field an array of treaty-noncompliant weapons and put China and Russia on the defensive. Unless halted by Congress, this drive will almost certainly spark an arms race in intermediate-range missiles and increase the risk that conflicts will escalate from conventional to nuclear warfare.

To appreciate just how dangerous this is, it is essential to grasp the distinctive nature of the INF Treaty. Unlike strategic arms reduction and limitation treaties, which restrain the intercontinental nuclear arsenals of the major powers, the INF accord completely eliminated an entire class of weapons—specifically, those intended for regional use. At the time, analysts feared such weapons might be used early in a major East-West confrontation, thereby triggering the onset of full-scale thermonuclear war. With the elimination of such missiles—by the treaty's 1991 deadline, 2,692 had been destroyed—the risk of rapid escalation from conventional to nuclear war was substantially diminished.

The end of the Cold War greatly reduced the prospect of nuclear escalation. However, as tensions between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing have heated up, those concerns have surfaced again, which brings us back to the INF Treaty. In recent years, Russia (which assumed the USSR's treaty obligations) and the United States have accused each other of violating the accord. In the run-up to the US withdrawal, the Trump administration spoke a lot about Russian violations, but the August 18 missile test revealed another motivation: The Defense Department wants to deploy an array of treaty-noncompliant weapons of its own—including, eventually, thousands of conventionally armed ground-based missiles that could be fired at critical targets in Russia and China. The Pentagon requested $96 million for the development of these systems in its fiscal year 2020 budget proposal.

The Pentagon says these missiles will be armed only with conventional warheads, though they could be modified to carry nuclear ones if a decision were made to do so. And given the secrecy surrounding the purpose of these missiles, it is entirely possible that some future US missile attack on critical command facilities in China or Russia—even if conducted with conventional weapons—might be interpreted as the predecessor to a nuclear first strike. Once those missiles are launched, it will be nearly impossible for Chinese or Russian radar to determine what sort of warhead they carry, and the short flight duration will give the target country little time to decide what sort of countermeasures to take. Fearing the worst, China or Russia might opt for a prompt nuclear response—which is precisely the scenario that the INF Treaty was intended to prevent.

COMMENT

There are serious questions about possible violations of the treaty by Russia as well as a continuing missile buildup by China (which is not a signatory to the treaty), but these issues are best resolved through negotiations. Fortunately, a majority in the House of Representatives agreed and voted to exclude funding of the new US missiles in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. The Republican-controlled Senate, however, has shown no such reluctance. It is essential that Senate Democrats stand by their House colleagues and keep the missile exclusion intact when the two chambers meet to resolve their differences in the authorization bill.

MICHAEL T. KLARE

Asking for a Friend

Are Gratuities Ever Gratuitous?

Dear Liza,

I am hoping that you can help resolve a disagreement between my partner and me about tipping in shops with counter service. She thinks that it is appropriate to tip—and tip generously—whenever there is a tip jar out. I feel that a tip is merited when you are getting food brought to your table or occasionally if someone makes you a fancy coffee. An important note is that she grew up in the US, whereas I am from the UK. So many places now have tip jars. I sometimes tip in the supermarket if they bag my groceries. But should we tip at the local bakery when they slice the bread for us? What about in the local bodega where I serve myself soup? We both have professional jobs and disposable income, and we both identify as democratic socialists. I am all in favor of the redistribution of wealth, although by nature I am frugal. I am also concerned that employers might use the tips as an excuse to pay workers less. Can you please help resolve this domestic quandary?

—Parsimonious Brit

Dear Parsimonious,

You're both right. In the United States, tipping is essential when someone provides a service that is prolonged and personalized: bringing food to your table throughout a meal, cutting your hair (if the stylist doesn't own the salon), doing your nails, delivering pizza to your door. For these jobs, the wage is low, and the level of service you receive is intense. In cafés and supermarkets, even where a tip jar is provided, tipping is optional because, as you note, the level of personal service you receive is minimal. However, the worker's wage in such places is equally low. Your partner is right to feel that, for people getting by in reasonable comfort, it is both friendly and redistributive to tip even in these ambiguous settings—and I, for one, always do.

I share your objections to this system, Parsimonious. I believe, as you do, that people should be well compensated by their employers and not have to hustle the public every minute to make ends meet. A person just trying to buy a cup of coffee and get through her day should not be penalized for the institutionalized Scrooginess of the employer class. But by refusing to tip, we don't pressure employers to pay their workers better.

You and your partner could simply agree to do whatever each of you is most comfortable doing, since neither of you is wrong. That might be the easiest way to resolve the practical side of this dispute. But if you share finances, it may feel more pressing to reach an agreement. Perhaps you can work out a policy that satisfies you both—for example, never tipping in the supermarket or for a simple croissant handoff but always when a barista or bodega worker has made coffee or a sandwich for you. Some concrete guidelines could help you avoid annoyance with each other, especially when you happen to be standing together at the bakery cash register.

Dear Liza,

I am confused about the boundaries of cultural appropriation for teens. I am a white female who lives in the conservative Deep South and attends a private school in a Protestant environment. Very few people of color attend the school. At our last class period, we had to turn in our textbooks, and a few of the guys (but especially one) tied their textbook covers into do-rags, pretended to shoot people, threw gang signs, and tried to Crip-walk. I became upset and talked to them about it, but they said I was the one in the wrong because I interpreted their actions in a racist way. The teacher, who is white, condoned their behavior. She said, "Boys do that sometimes." Now I think that I might have overreacted. What would be the best response to their behavior?

—Woke Southern Belle

Questions? Ask Liza at TheNation.com/article/asking-for-a-friend

Dear Woke Belle,

For some white boys, the most stereotypical and violent expressions of black masculinity have outlaw cachet. And thanks to the cultural moment we're in—a battle between liberal norms and presidentially endorsed white supremacy—so does racism. But it's unlikely that your classmates would have acted

(continued on page 8)

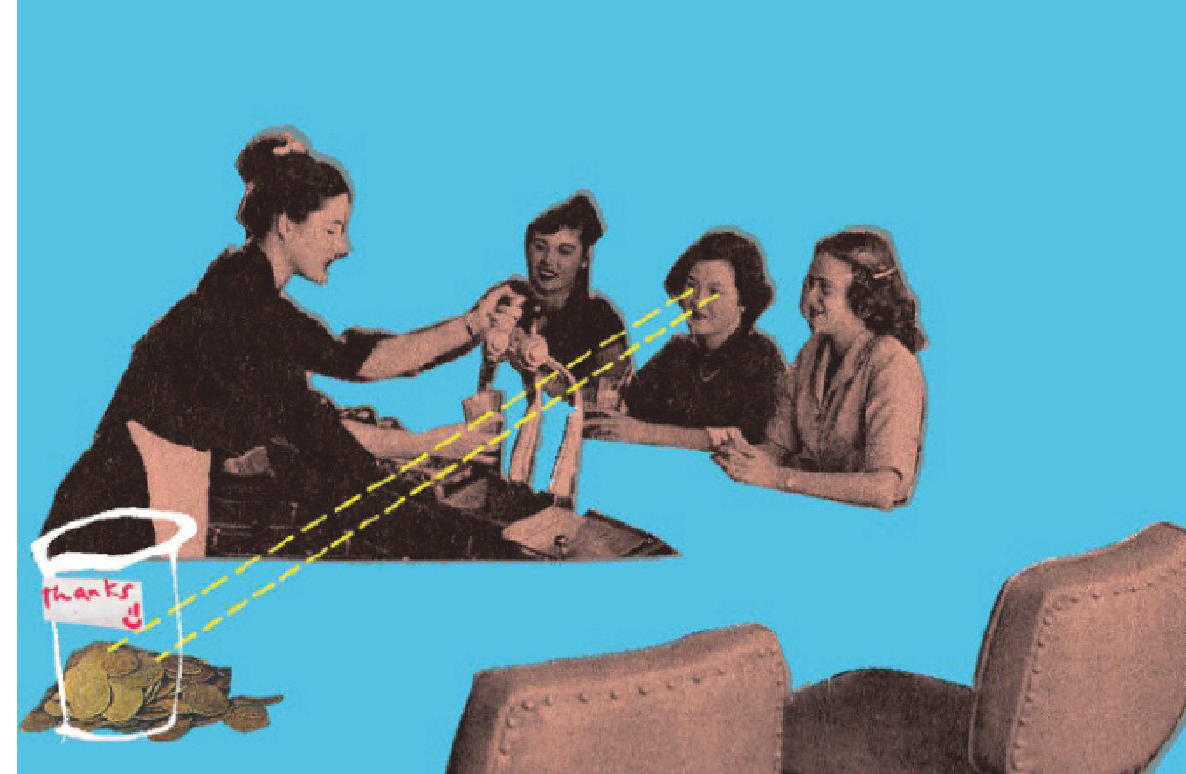


ILLUSTRATION BY **JOANNA NEBORSKY**

BIG WIRELESS

Called It!

Last year *The Nation* published "How Big Wireless Made Us Think That Cell Phones Are Safe," an investigation by Mark Hertsgaard and Mark Dowie into the decades-long campaign to manipulate media coverage and persuade government officials (as well as the public) that cell phones are safer than the independent science suggests. The authors showed the industry's own researchers privately warned that there were "serious questions" about wireless radiation's links to cancer and genetic damage.

In August the *Chicago Tribune* published its own research, which measured how much radiation simulated body tissue absorbed from 11 cell phone models. The tests found that some phones were over the legal exposure limit.

Now Apple and Samsung have been hit with a class-action lawsuit alleging that the companies "intentionally misrepresented" the safety of their devices. The suit seeks damages and medical monitoring for anyone who bought one of six named models.

There's a catch: Lawsuits going back to the early 2000s have languished as cell phone companies fought the extent to which wireless radiation can be linked to cancer. But the lawyers in this new suit hope that a narrower approach might succeed in holding the industry accountable.

"We're not trying to prove any one individual's cancer or ill effects are from the phone," Elizabeth Fegan, one of the lawyers who brought the suit, told the *Tribune*. "We're saying manufacturers, under consumer fraud laws, have a duty to tell the truth." —Molly Minta

Katha Pollitt

Break's Over

Just tuning back in? Here's (almost) everything bad that Trump did this summer.

Welcome back from your summer vacation, which I hope you spent immersed in long Russian novels or underwater, anywhere out of reach of the news from Trumplandia. To bring you up to speed, *Nation* intern Molly Minta and I have prepared this handy list of awful things done or said by Donald Trump and his administration—which unfortunately is not inclusive because he's been very busy and I have space for only 1,000 words.

May 30: The Trump administration imposes a tax on Mexican goods to pressure Mexico to keep Central American asylum seekers from entering the US.

June 3: Trump calls London Mayor Sadiq Khan a "stone cold loser."

June 17: The US government announces it will withhold millions of dollars in aid to Central American nations until they step up their efforts to discourage migration.

June 20: Federal appeals court judges OK a gag rule making clinics ineligible for Title X funds if they provide abortions or abortion-service referrals to women, in effect cutting about $60 million to Planned Parenthood.

July 14: Trump tweets that Democratic Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib should "go back" to the "crime infested places from which they came."

July 17: At a rally in Greenville, North Carolina, Trump doubles down on his attack on the congresswomen: "They don't love our country. I think, in some cases, they hate our country. You know what? If they don't love it, tell them to leave it." His remarks are met with chants of "Send her back!"

July 18: The Environmental Protection Agency announces that it will not ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos, despite its connection to numerous disorders in infants and older children.

July 22: The Trump administration announces new rules permitting undocumented immigrants to be deported without a court hearing if they are unable to show that they have been in the United States for at least two years.

July 23: The Trump administration proposes a new rule that would take food stamps away from more than 3 million people.

July 27: Trump calls the Baltimore district of his persistent critic Representative Elijah Cummings a "disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess" and tweets that conditions there are "FAR WORSE and more dangerous" than at the border.

July 31: The Senate confirms Kelly Craft as the next envoy to the United Nations. Together with her husband, the CEO of one of the nation's biggest coal companies, Craft has given millions to Republican politicians, including $2 million to Trump. In 2017 she said she believes in "both sides of the science" on climate change.

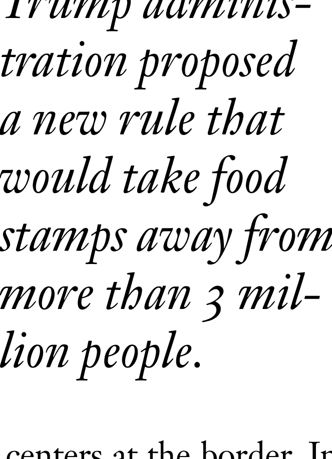
August 7: US Citizenship and Immigration Services ends protections for migrants who are here for lifesaving medical treatment. After backlash, the agency said it is reconsidering the decision.

August 11: At seven Mississippi food-processing plants, 680 workers are arrested in immigration raids. It's the largest such operation in a decade.

August 12: The Trump administration publishes a new rule that makes obtaining a green card more difficult for any immigrant who has received public benefits for more than 12 out of any 36 months.

August 16: The Justice Department files a brief in a Supreme Court case arguing that transgender workers are not protected by a ban on workplace discrimination.

August 20: Trump says Jews who vote for Democrats show "a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty."



This summer the Trump administration proposed a new rule that would take food stamps away from more than 3 million people.

August 20: Trump cancels a trip to Denmark because the "not nice" and "nasty" prime minister (a woman, obviously) wouldn't sell Greenland to the US.

August 21: The administration says that it will end the 1997 Flores agreement limiting how long children may be kept in detention centers at the border. In effect, that could mean the indefinite detention of immigrant families.

Definitely bad for the Jews: Speaking to reporters about the trade war with China, Trump calls himself "the chosen one," threatens to release ISIS fighters in Germany and France "if Europe doesn't take them," seems to seriously float the possibility of serving more than two terms, and says Russia

TOP RIGHT: ANDY FRIEDMAN

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"outsmarted" Obama when it annexed Crimea.

August 23: Trump says he was being sarcastic when he called himself "the chosen one." On Twitter, he orders US businesses to find "an alternative to China, including bringing your companies HOME."

August 25: As the Iranian foreign minister makes a surprise appearance at the G-7 conference in Biarritz, France, Trump tweets to TV host Regis Philbin, "Happy Birthday Regis, a truly special man!" Trump suggests that his Doral resort in Florida is an ideal venue for the next G-7 meeting and insists it does not have bedbugs.

Axios reports that Trump suggested using nuclear bombs to keep hurricanes from hitting the United States.

August 27: *The Washington Post* reports that in order to complete the border wall before he's up for reelection, Trump instructed aides to approve billions of dollars in construction contracts, use eminent domain, and eschew environmental review. He has told them that he will pardon them if they break any laws.

August 28: Trump rages at Fox News after daytime anchor Sandra Smith interviewed Democratic National Committee official Xochitl Hinojosa, tweeting, "We have to start looking for a new News Outlet. Fox isn't working for us anymore!"

As Puerto Rico braces for a possible hit by Hurricane Dorian, Trump tweets, "Puerto Rico is one of the most corrupt places on earth" and "I'm the best thing that's ever happened to Puerto Rico!"

As Puerto Rico braces for a possible hit by Hurricane Dorian, Trump tweets, "I'm the best thing that's ever happened to Puerto Rico!"

Trump nominates 12 federal judges, bringing his total to 209, with 146 confirmed to date.

August 29: The EPA proposes rolling back curbs on methane emissions, a major contributor to climate change.

September 1: Trump hikes tariffs on Chinese goods, from 10 to 15 percent.

None of this has significantly damaged Trump's popularity, which remains just above 40 percent. Happy fall! ■

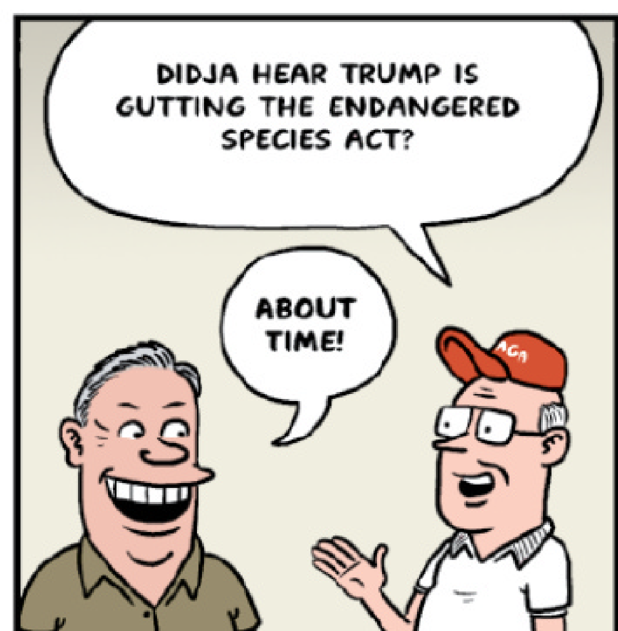
(continued from page 5)
this way in a school attended by significant numbers of black kids; in such an environment, the white boys likely would have known that their behavior was racist. At the very least, they probably would also have feared (correctly) that such wannabe antics would reveal them to be the white nerds that they actually are.

In a school setting without the possibility of such social consequences, it was up to the teacher to set limits. Saying, in effect, that boys will be boys was a "complete missed opportunity," says Alexandre Jallot, a high school teacher in New York City. Not only was your teacher the only person with any authority in the room; Jallot, who is black, points out that it would have been powerful for the boys to hear that what they were doing was wrong from "someone who looks like them." The teacher should have stopped them during their performance with the textbooks, told them that their shenanigans were not acceptable, and arranged to have a longer talk with them later on about why.

You're the only person in this situation who did the right thing, Woke Belle. And paradoxically, you're probably the only one who feels bad about it!

For the future, Jallot says, you might suggest to the administration that they convene a schoolwide assembly on racism or incorporate some more thinking about race into the curriculum. The fact that these white kids don't attend school with many people of color allows their behavior to go unchecked, but someday (one hopes) they will have to live or work in a more diverse environment. For the sake of the rest of the world—and for their own good—it's urgently in their interest to develop better social intelligence. Your experience illustrates just one of many reasons segregated schooling is bad for everyone. ■

COMIX NATION



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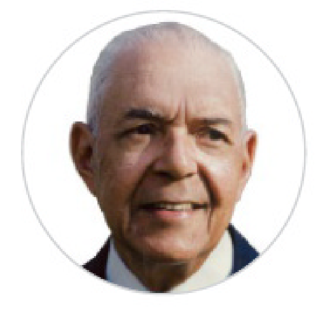
JOAN WALSH


WILLIAM "FERGIE" REID

NationCruise.com

HURRICANE SEASON

A Hard Rain

"Man Suggests We Stop Hurricanes by Nuking Them" sounds like a headline in a satirical college newspaper, but the suggestion allegedly came from the president of the United States. Donald Trump reportedly told Homeland Security and other national security officials multiple times that the US should "disrupt" hurricanes by dropping atomic bombs on them. But Trump's unusual idea for fighting storms distracted from another, even more shocking piece of hurricane news: Homeland Security announced in August that at least $155 million of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief fund would be transferred to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement to pay for detention beds and other costs associated with holding, transporting, and deporting undocumented immigrants. This, apparently, is the Trump administration's answer to how it will pay to detain migrant families indefinitely: by making FEMA even less equipped to deal with a violent hurricane season.

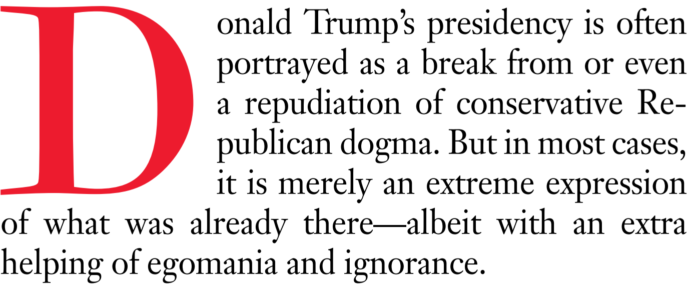
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates that the 2019 season will see two to four major hurricanes, each of which could make a catastrophic landfall. Appropriating funds meant for disaster relief to detain refugee families is morally bankrupt, potentially deadly, and perhaps something more: If the administration paints government agencies like FEMA as ineffectual by denying them the funds they need to function, this can be read as a move to discredit government services in general.

—Alice Markham-Cantor

Eric Alterman

Likud's Cheerleader in Chief

Trump's comments on the "disloyalty" of Jews have a long, sordid history.



Donald Trump's presidency is often portrayed as a break from or even a repudiation of conservative Republican dogma. But in most cases, it is merely an extreme expression of what was already there—albeit with an extra helping of egomania and ignorance.

This is nowhere truer than on matters relating to Jews and Israel. Trump has coddled Israel's most recidivist elements and asked for nothing in return. He has consistently allowed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to immiserate and humiliate Palestinians and to erase any vestiges of the peace process. In the past, some Republicans at least pretended to care about peace in the region. Today, not so much.

The ideological transformation of the Republican Party into a Likud cheerleading squad was the joint project of neoconservative intellectuals and evangelical Christians, with a few right-wing pro-Israel donors happy to foot the bill. The neocons pretended to speak for American Jews but took positions at odds with those actually held by most American Jews. They found funders in Sheldon Adelson, Rupert Murdoch, Paul Singer, and others, and foot soldiers in the evangelical churches and in groups like John Hagee's Christians United for Israel. Sure, the conservative Christian groups were sometimes peopled with anti-Semites, whose geopolitical analysis tended to blame Jewish billionaire cabals for all the world's ills. And while not so enthused about everyday Jews, many were willing to set aside those concerns because of their admiration for Israeli military might, racism toward Arabs, and a widely held belief that God gave Israel to the Jews as part of His plan for the end of days.

Ever since 1967, the writers and editors at *Commentary* magazine, the Torah of neocon belligerence, have been trying to talk Jews out of their liberalism. It began with an article by Milton Himmelfarb, an American Jewish Committee researcher, and the baton was soon picked up by his brother-in-law, Irving Kristol. (*Commentary* has always been a family-run business. Kristol and his widow, *Commentary* contributor Gertrude Himmelfarb, are the parents of right-wing operator turned never-Trumper William Kristol. Former editor Norman Podhoretz—who was invited to write for the magazine in 1951, owing to a letter he wrote calling Israeli Jews "unattractive," "gratuitously surly and boorish," "arrogant," and "anxious"—is the husband of *Commentary* writer Midge Decter, the father of current editor John Podhoretz, and the father-in-law of *Commentary* contributor and Guatemala genocide enabler Elliott Abrams.)

The neocons believed that a little bit of evangelical anti-Semitism in exchange for bedrock support for Israel was a bargain worth making, but America's Jews consistently replied, "Feh." You can measure their frustration by the progression of Irving Kristol's articles on the subject, beginning in 1984 with "The Political Dilemma of American Jews" and ending with "On the Political Stupidity of the Jews" 15 years later. For the past four decades, neocon pundits and provocateurs based at *Commentary*, *The New Republic* under Marty Peretz, and the now-defunct *Weekly Standard* under William Kristol have smeared liberal Jewish writers as self-hating—and therefore disloyal—merely for giving voice to the views of mainstream Jews regarding Israel and the Palestinians.

Irritated by American Jews' stalwart commitment to liberalism, Milton Himmelfarb is said to have quipped in 1973 that Jews "earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans." But of course, American Jews vote like what they are—the country's best-educated religious group, according to Gallup—and mostly live in cities in the Northeast. Jews are more than twice as likely as other Americans to have completed college, and their postgraduate education is off the charts. Moreover, they cluster in blue states, where they are overrepresented in the population and in terms of their extremely high voting rate. Metropolitan-based Northeasterners remain a bedrock of American liberalism just as rural, religious Southerners contribute to Trump's base.

> *Trump has taken this moment to flip the script and accuse Jews of being insufficiently loyal—not to America but to Israel.*

The question of Jewish loyalty to America and to the other nation-states where the diaspora has been prominent is another, much longer story. For more than a century, the leaders of American

LEFT: REUTERS / JOSHUA ROBERTS; TOP RIGHT: ANDY FRIEDMAN

Jewry feared accusations of being more loyal to other Jews—eventually represented by Israel—than to their home country. Many American Jews opposed Zionism until they learned of the Holocaust and remained cool to Israel after its 1948 founding right up until the Six-Day War, at which point it became the central component of their ethnic and religious identity. Today nearly half of American Jews say Trump favors Israel "too much"—far more than Protestants or Catholics. As Israel becomes more like the apartheid state its enemies have accused it of always having been, more and more American Jews—especially the young—are turning away from it and looking for new ways to express their Jewish identities.

Trump has taken this moment to flip the script and accuse Jews of being insufficiently loyal—not to America but to Israel—by remaining Democrats. The accusation has an anti-Semitic implication when Trump and his fellow right-wing gentiles level it, as it implies that Jews are not Americans first and hence cannot be trusted to put their home country's interests ahead of those of a foreign nation. And yes, Trump is really catering to his evangelical base, not to Jews. And yes again, he is doing it in his own ridiculous way, retweeting an anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist. But it is not so different from what the Podhoretzes, the Kristols, Peretz, and company have been peddling all these years.

The neocon scolds were never willing to face up to the possibility that Israel's interests were not always those of the United States and vice versa. Trump, naturally, has confused the question with his unique combination of stupidity and cupidity. But the truth is, to oppose both Trump and Netanyahu has no bearing on whether one is a good Jew. It means only that one is a decent human being. ■

The neocon scolds were never willing to face up to the possibility that Israel's interests were not always those of the United States.

SNAPSHOT / TYRONE SIU

Back to School

Students boycott their classes as they take part in a pro-democracy protest at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on September 2. Organizers predicted that approximately 10,000 pupils from more than 200 secondary schools and universities would not attend class on the first day of the school year.

REUTERS

Politicians Respond to Mass Shootings

The pols all offer thoughts and prayers
To comfort those still living.
Their thoughts concern the NRA,
Their prayers that it keeps giving.

DON'T LOOK NOW!

These murals have been called degrading and triggering. Defenders say they're an exposé of America's racist past. Both sides miss the point.

ROBIN D.G. KELLEY

Donald Trump's outrageous, xenophobic, racist, and red-baiting rhetoric has become an American obsession. His vitriol has targeted members of Congress, migrants, refugees, and Latinx, Muslim, and black people. It has fanned the flames of racist violence and inspired acts of domestic terrorism. We've seen the devastating consequences in El Paso; in Gilroy and Poway, California; in Tallahassee, Florida; in Pittsburgh; and, of course, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Liberal pundits insist that Trump and the violence his rhetoric inspires are inconsistent with America's founding creed. It is a common refrain among liberals—taken up most recently by former vice president Joe Biden, who said, "This is not who we are"—that the Muslim travel ban, the inhumane detention of asylum seekers and separation of their families, Trump's white nationalist sympathies, and so on "do not reflect American values." Put another way, Trump and his ilk are the exception to American exceptionalism.

In the wake of Charlottesville and El Paso, Joe Biden said, "This is not who we are." But for many Americans, this is exactly who we are.

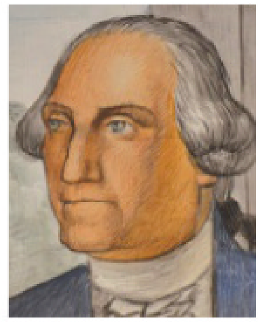
Yet for communities that have long been subject to state violence, dispossession, massacre, mass imprisonment, and racial profiling, this is who we are. Trumpism is less an aberration than a more flagrant expression of long-standing US policy and practice. A democracy born of a settler-colonial society founded on indigenous dispossession and racial slavery, America isn't so exceptional. Indeed, as the political theorist Michael Hanchard reminds us, all modern democracies were founded as ethnonational or racial states.

So who are we, really? The answer rests on our interpretation of history and on how we determine the circle of "we." When confronting the violence of contemporary white supremacists, the "we" is unambiguous, with the history of white supremacy firmly outside the circle. But in the liberal land of San Francisco, where a left-wing artist created a public work that links America's white supremacist and democratic traditions, things are a bit more complicated.

On June 25, the San Francisco School Board voted to

destroy Victor Arnautoff's Depression-era mural series *Life of Washington* at George Washington High School because it was deemed racist and demeaning. Some students and educators—as well as school board officials, indigenous groups, and various black and Latinx leaders—have singled out two of the murals, which show enslaved Africans and a disturbing image of a dead Indian. The work's critics argue not only that it depicts history from the colonizers' perspective but also that such violent images are triggering. The school board's decision provoked a national campaign in defense of Arnautoff's work, with proponents citing First Amendment issues, the importance of historical memory, the failure to grasp the radical intent behind the mural series, and the absurdity of spending $600,000 that could have gone to fund arts education to destroy a work of art.

After dozens of editorials, blog posts, petitions, and weeks of rancorous debate, the school board recently struck a compromise that would preserve and digitize the murals but also shroud them behind removable covers. This eminently reasonable solution, however, should not mark the end of what is potentially a fruitful debate over how we interpret the past, who has the authority to do so, and how liberal multiculturalism has shifted our response to historical violence and exploitation. Unfortunately, few on either side of this debate have taken stock of earlier contestations over the murals' meaning, which bear little resemblance to the current controversy. Looking back at the long fight over *Life of Washington* exposes a gaping deficit in historical thinking—one that has infected contemporary political discourse and impoverished our capacity to think beyond spectacle.



CULTURE WARS MAKE FOR STRANGE BEDFELLOWS. Conservative *New York Times* columnist Bari Weiss joined with progressives like Aijaz Ahmad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and Adolph Reed in defending Arnautoff's work. The right sees the attack on *Life of Washington* as the latest skirmish in the left's war on America and its symbols and traditions. Victor Davis Hanson, a historian affiliated with the right-wing Hoover Institution at Stanford University, penned an op-ed for the *Chicago Tribune* that linked the murals' impending erasure to several attacks on America by liberals, from comments by Representative Ilhan Omar and soccer star Megan Rapinoe to the toppling of Confederate statues. He warned, "If progressives and socialists can at last convince the American public that their country was always hopelessly flawed, they can gain power to remake it based on their own interests.... We've seen something like this fight before, in 1861—and it didn't end well."

Unfortunately, few on either side have taken stock of earlier arguments over the murals' meaning.

The Civil War didn't end well?! The abolition of formal chattel slavery? The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution and the boldest attempt to extend democracy to all Americans before the 1960s? True, Reconstruction certainly did not end well, with the planter class and New South industrialists regaining power and installing the Jim Crow racial regime. But it took over three decades of white terrorism, political assassination, lynching, disfranchisement, and federal complicity to crush what W.E.B. Du Bois called "the abolition democracy." For landlords and capitalists, that ended pretty well. They celebrated by erecting monuments to Confederate war heroes and promoting D.W. Griffith's cinematic adoration of the Ku Klux Klan, *Birth of a Nation*. They employed art to invent myths, turning terrorists and slaveholders into saviors and obliterating traces of black struggles for social democracy.

Of course, Confederate monuments were not exactly art. More often than not, they were mass-produced statues installed for the purpose of erasing history and declaring the rule of white supremacy. But it is also a mistake to consider Arnautoff's depiction of Washington as the true and authentic history that students can read as a counternarrative to the dominant story. Arnautoff did not paint these murals so that future generations would not forget the terrible parts of the past. While contemporary structural racism is rooted in the colonial era, the link between past and present is not self-evident in the murals—nor should it be. It is the responsibility of educators to make these connections, though judging from arguments leveled on both sides of the debate, we're not doing a very good job. In a frequently quoted passage defending the work, one George Washington High School student wrote, "The fresco is a warning and reminder of the fallibility of our hallowed leaders."

Preservationists love this quote. The problem is that it rests on the liberal claim that America created the perfect union, but for a few flaws reflecting the founders' human fallibility. That 41 slaveholders signed the Declaration of Independence is an unfortunate fact but doesn't sully that noble document. Recall a few years ago when Democrats criticized Republicans for holding public readings of the Constitution and skipping over the "arcane" parts sanctioning slavery as a property right and a basis for congressional representation and taxation. Critics insisted that these politically uncomfortable passages should not be buried but acknowledged as evidence of the greatness of the Constitution for rising above the fallibility of its authors.

But slavery and dispossession were not errors or anachronisms; they were the foundation upon which American liberty was built. Kanye West had a point (almost): Slavery was a choice. Not for the kidnapped Africans but for the nation's white settler class, the rulers who in their quest for wealth accumulation faithfully read their Plato and Aristotle for models of a slave owners' republic; treated their own mixed-race offspring as property to be exploited, sold, or mortgaged; and drove enslaved people to build their shining city on a hill on the land and bodies of indigenous people. Lest we forget, British prohibitions against colonists moving into Indian territory west of the Appalachian Mountains was one of the catalysts for independence.

Washington led a war and a nation with the goal of securing liberty and equality for white men not because they harbored some natural or irrational hatred for Africans and Indians but because it was the only way to maintain racial slavery and legally sanction dispossession in a settler society based on liberal principles. Colonial landholders had to manage kidnapped African labor, unruly indentured white labor, and relations with sovereign and often powerful indigenous communities. The planters' inability to police their workers and the frontier meant that white servants and African slaves often escaped, sometimes together, finding refuge in swamps, hills, and among Native peoples. Staving off the threat of what historian Peter

Robin D.G. Kelley teaches history at UCLA and is completing a book on the journalist Grace Halsell.

GWHS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION / TAMMY ARAMIAN (3)

Linebaugh calls "commoning"—the practice of living and working communally based on common ownership and mutual responsibility rather than private property and individualism—required freeing white servants and turning them into property owners, slave patrollers, or proletarian citizens invested in the white republic and the dream of attaining wealth and power.

The Constitution reinforced this arrangement by protecting slavery and empowering slaveholders. The three-fifths compromise apportioning congressional representation in the slave states by counting the white population along with 60 percent of enslaved people strengthened Southern power over the federal government. It was not a plot to reduce black people to three-fifths of a person as a symbolic act of dehumanization; enslavement and disfranchisement had already done that. And yet this utterly confusing metaphor is being peddled in schools to this day.

Life of Washington may not address all of this history, but it certainly opens the door for a deeper interrogation—so long as we move beyond the idea that the work is little more than a well-intentioned effort to represent racial violence or the fallibilities of a founding father.

"I wanted not only to show Washington's life—that was half the idea—but also to show his beauty of soul, the greatness of his dedication."
—Victor Arnautoff

Washington wasn't just any white man, nor was Arnautoff. Born in southern Ukraine in 1896, he longed to be an artist but began his adult life as a career soldier, becoming a cavalry officer in World War I, then an officer in the White Army during the Russian Civil War. After the Bolshevik victory, he fled to China, where he studied art briefly before joining the cavalry of a Manchurian warlord. In 1925 he enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco and in 1929 studied mural painting in Mexico under the tutelage of Diego Rivera. Returning to San Francisco in 1931, Arnautoff soon became one of the city's leading muralists. His 1934 mural *City Life* in Coit Tower attracted controversy for its left-wing imagery. As a student of Rivera's and a supporter of the city's 1934 general strike, Arnautoff was drawn to the orbit of the Popular Front. (He joined the Communist Party in 1938.) By 1935, when the city asked him to create a massive fresco for the newly constructed George Washington High School, he was already a well-known figure on the left.

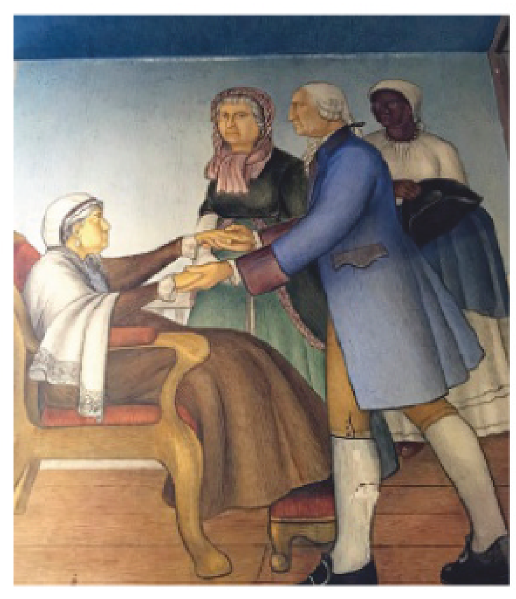
Aware of his limited knowledge of US history, the émigré thoroughly researched Washington's life and times as well as the early history of the republic. As he recalled in his memoir, "First I endeavored to study the life and work of this famous man, a committed defender of freedom. I got books and materials relating to him.… I wanted not only to show Washington's life—that was half the idea—but also to show his beauty of soul, the greatness of his dedication.… I tried my best to convey the spirit of Washington's time." Arnautoff also wanted to bring to the surface the spirit and dignity of labor, free and unfree, and expose the tensions of liberty. In 1935 he told one interviewer, "The artist is a critic of society.… I wish to deal with people, to explain to them things and ideas they may not have seen or understood."

For artists in the American Communist Party's orbit, the Popular Front was a broad-based response to fascism and an injunction to rethink American culture, art, and the circle of "we." Communists promoted racial and ethnic diversity, identifying black art and artists as both inherently progressive and profoundly American. Arnautoff witnessed interracial movements among workers and the unemployed in San Francisco and was also painfully aware of the state's policy of repatriating Mexican workers to solve the problem of white unemployment. A regular reader of the *Western Worker*, he was doubtless familiar with the activities of Bay Area Native American communists such as Joe Manzanares and might even have come across a letter by Vincent Spotted Eagle published by the paper in 1934, explaining that before the European invasion Indians created a cooperative economy free of exploitation. "This is Communism, which is true Americanism. And this is why I joined the Communist Party," Spotted Eagle wrote.

Go forth and conquer: At Washington's direction, the spectral procession of future pioneers moves west.

Two years later, Communist Party USA chairman Earl Browder declared "Communism is 20th century Americanism" as the new slogan of the People's Front. However, his Americanism derived not from indigenous traditions but from a reinterpretation of republicanism. In a 1937 essay he hailed the great triumvirate of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Washington, calling Washington "the popular symbol of national independence" and the central figure in the consolidation of the nation and the Constitution that binds it. "The honorary title of 'Father of his Country' given him by history is solidly based on historic fact."

Arnautoff fused all of this—the recasting of American culture as multiracial, a resolute opposition to fascism, the reclamation of the so-called founding fathers for the American left—and his fascination with military history to create *Life of Washington*. These influences become clearer once we extend our gaze from the contested murals to the entire work. The two largest murals flank a staircase. One captures Washington's early life as a surveyor (the principal technicians of enclosure), a military leader, and the master of his Mount Vernon plantation. A panel on the French-Indian War centers on two armed Native Americans backed by French soldiers after a successful ambush. The scene shows the surrender of three colonial soldiers and another lying dead on the ground. On the opposite side are iconic images of the Boston Tea Party, the Stamp Act protests, and the Boston Massacre. The center of the panel consists of five revolutionaries from the plebeian ranks raising the flag declaring the new nation.



Taking leave: Washington bids goodbye to his mother before becoming president.

Arnautoff never spoke publicly about the nature of his mural series' counternarratives. His biographer Robert W. Cherny argues that the compositional placement of enslaved Africans, indigenous people, and working-class revolutionaries highlights "the incongruity that Washington and others among the nation's founders subscribed to the declaration that 'all men are created equal' and yet owned other human beings as chattel. Arnautoff's mural makes clear that slave labor provided the plantation's economic basis. On the facing wall, [he] was even more direct: The procession of spectral future pioneers move west over the body of a dead Indian, challenging the prevailing narrative that westward expansion had been into largely vacant territory waiting for white pioneers to develop its full potential."

Although some of his current defenders on the left see the mural series as a Trojan horse smuggling in a withering critique of Washington as a slaveholder and architect of manifest destiny, Arnautoff saw it as a paean to a great patriot and "committed defender of freedom." This was no cynical ploy to appease the Works Progress Administration and the city or stave off possible criticism or even evidence of his ideological ambivalence.

As black migration, immigration, and the radical insurgencies of the 1960s transformed the Bay Area, the murals became a focus of contention.

The unveiling of *Life of Washington* in 1936 was met with critical acclaim but with no mention of Arnautoff's subtle indictments of slavery and dispossession. It's also not clear what the predominantly white student body thought about the work in those early years. But as black migration and immigration from Latin America and Asia—and the radical insurgencies of the 1960s—transformed the Bay Area's politics and demographics, the murals became a focus of contention. In the spring of 1968, during a schoolwide discussion of racial tensions at Washington High, a group of black students expressed resentment over the work's representation of African Americans. They did not object to Arnautoff's depiction of slavery itself but rather the "one-sidedness of the presentation." Daryl Thomas, the president of the school's Afro-American Club, called for the inclusion of artworks depicting "the contributions of black people to the sciences and industry" and proposed hanging "photographs of Negroes who have made important contributions." At the time, no one complained about the dead Indian.

The students met with members of the school administration and San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto, all of whom agreed that something should be done to address their concerns. But when the fall term began and no action was taken, tensions over the murals flared again. Led by the Black Student Union (which replaced the Afro-American Club), more than 80 black students assembled to demand that the work be destroyed or altered. The BSU's president, Roosevelt Thomas, complained, "The blacks did more than just pick cotton. During the Revolution, more than 5,000 blacks fought for this nation's independence." Arnautoff's sons and a few other artists were on hand to defend the work, saying that his decision to include Washington's slaves was a bold effort to expose an injustice rarely acknowledged in the 1930s. Principal Ruth Adams presented a poll finding that 61 percent of the student body preferred to supplement rather than destroy the murals.

The debate persuaded the BSU to withdraw its demand for the fresco's destruction, conceding that it is "historically sound and should remain on view." Instead, the group proposed placing plaques alongside the panels to "explain their 'deficiencies'" and commissioning an additional mural as a corrective. Ironically, several of the suggestions would have further ennobled Washington and the War of Independence without ever confronting Arnautoff's implicit critique of slavery and dispossession. For example, the BSU called for the inclusion of Crispus Attucks as the first (patriot) casualty of the Boston Massacre as well as the black men who served in Washington's army (an idea floated more recently by Stevon Cook, the president of the San Francisco Board of Education and the murals' fiercest critic). No one spoke up for the thousands of fugitive slaves who joined British loyalist forces and won their freedom—but became exiles. The students did not protest the murals' depictions of violence and brutality; rather, they wanted inclusion in the citizenry of the white republic. And once again, no one complained about the dead Indian.

The overwhelming consensus in the BSU was to commission a black artist for a new mural. But before that plan could move forward, the struggle ratcheted up another notch. In February 1969, BSU members hung a poster on campus of Bobby Hutton, a member of the Black Panther Party, with the words "Murdered by Oakland pigs." Several months earlier, the 17-year-old Hutton had been

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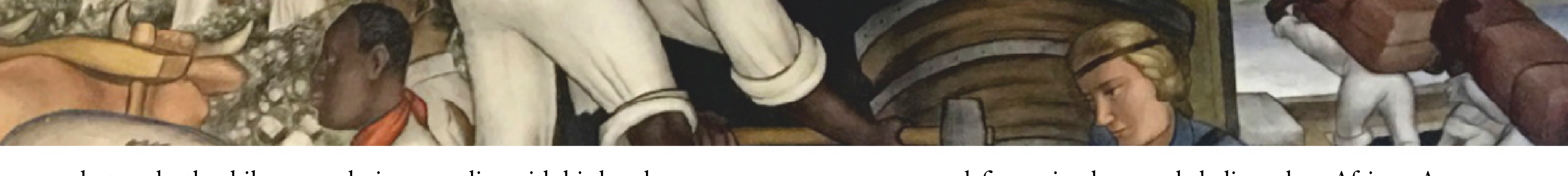


shot to death while surrendering to police with his hands in the air. When four white students complained that the poster was offensive, the administration promptly had it removed. The decision provoked outrage from black students who argued that the killing of Hutton represented their history, "as did the murals at Washington portraying black slavery." They called out the administration for employing a racist double standard.

The black students, however, did not complain of psychological harm or traumatizing violent images. If anything, they preferred more violence in the mural—the violence of armed rebellion, slave revolts, and anti-colonial resistance. They objected to portraying the enslaved and colonized as victims, working faithfully, lying prostrate, dead. So they sought out a black artist of their generation, someone familiar with the politics of black power, brown power, yellow power, and red power. They chose Dewey Crumpler, an activist and a graduate of San Francisco's Balboa High School studying at the San Francisco Art Institute. When the commission was finally approved in 1970, Crumpler was just 22, though he had an impressive résumé. Upon receiving the commission he went to Mexico to study with muralists—including Pablo O'Higgins and David Alfaro Siqueiros, whom he met through Elizabeth Catlett, a brilliant African American artist living in exile in Cuernavaca. A veteran of the left, she too was influenced by Rivera.

Black students in 1968 didn't complain about traumatizing images. If anything, they wanted more violence: armed rebellion, slave revolts.

Crumpler took time to study Arnautoff's murals and came to appreciate their value as art and as a social statement. He informed the students that he was interested not in replacing *Life of Washington* but in creating a work in dialogue with Arnautoff's work—and with them. Completed in 1974, Crumpler's dynamic *Multi-Ethnic Heritage* celebrated the cultural, political, and intellectual histories of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and indigenous peoples. Incorporating portraits of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Simón Bolívar, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta (among others), the mural's three panels are linked by a motif of chains breaking. The central figure in the panel dedicated to African American heritage is a black woman, issuing from a broken chain like a phoenix rising above a flame. For the Native American panel, Crumpler explained, he painted an Indian "holding up Turtle Island, which was Alcatraz. That Native American would be an archetype, with his body stretched out into the sky, not dead but fully alive. And articulated as the blood of the earth, with the red soil, the energy of the earth."

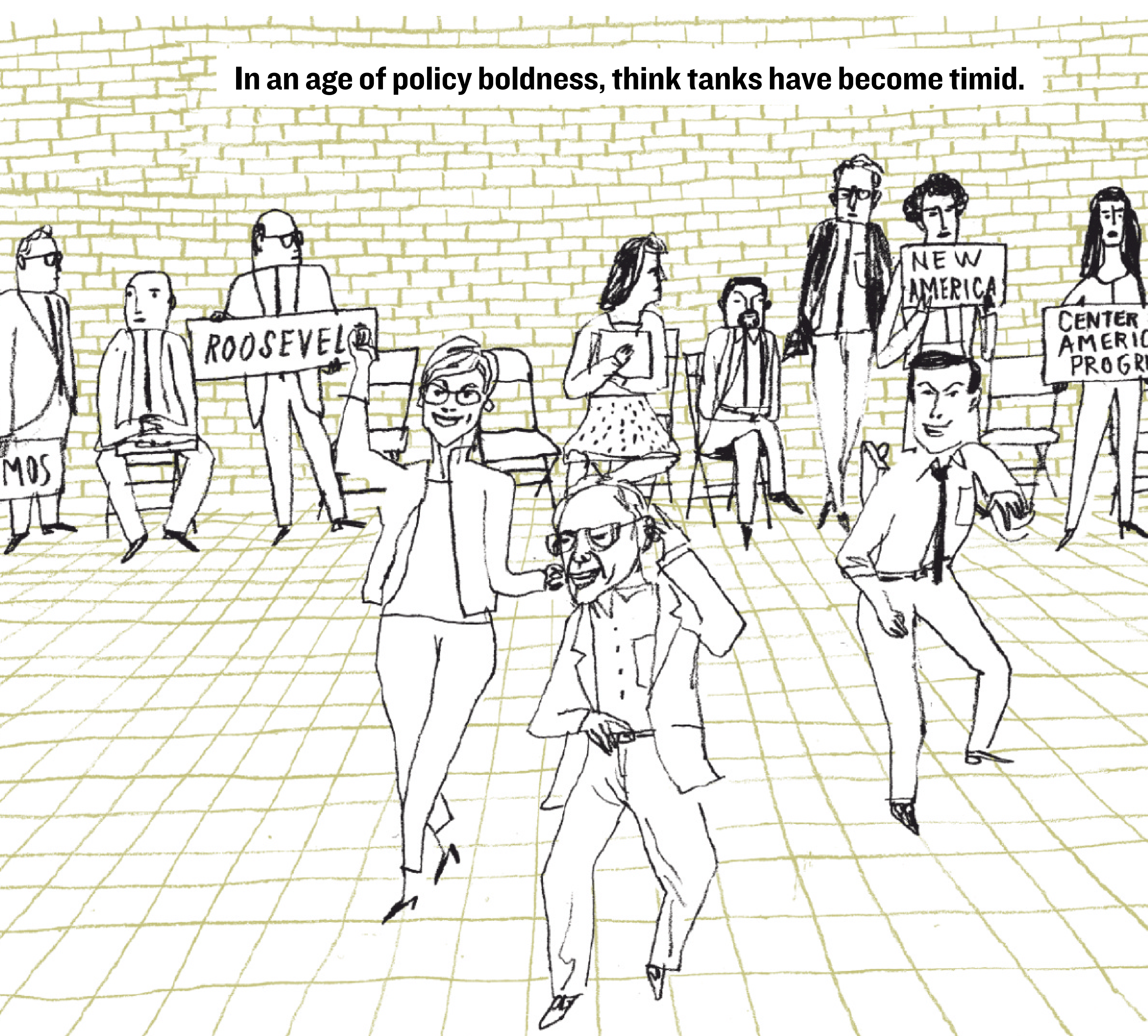
Today Crumpler is among the most outspoken and authoritative defenders of *Life of Washington*. He has said on countless occasions, "My mural is part of the Arnautoff mural, part of its meaning, and its meaning is part of mine. If you destroy his work of art, you are destroying mine as well." He devoted years to creating the work in conversation with a generation of Washington High students whose struggles for dignity, knowledge, and power convinced them of the value of art—even art we don't immediately understand or that challenges our common sense.

I find it ironic that Mark Sanchez, the vice president of the school board, used the word "reparations" to describe the $600,000 cost of the Arnautoff murals' erasure. In doing so, he not only perverts the concept of reparations but also fails to see that precious funds that could have been invested in arts education or an anti-racist curriculum will be used to cover up a work that actually makes a powerful case for reparations by revealing how white liberty and the wealth of the new nation were built on slavery, colonialism, dispossession, and genocide. Certainly, students can learn this in their classrooms, and they can see it in the streets of San Francisco as rising rents and corporate land grabs continue to displace poor black and brown people in the city. I hope that future generations will possess the courage and the curiosity to rediscover Arnautoff's murals and the world in which they were created. For by revisiting the era of labor insurgency, anti-fascism, and anti-eviction campaigns, students might learn the most valuable lessons of all. ■

Call and response: Dewey Crumpler's three-panel mural, commissioned in response to student demands, celebrated the diversity of the school's community.

THE WALLFLOWE *AT THE* DANCE

In an age of policy boldness, think tanks have become timid.



RS

JEET HEER

BY NOW, THE SHAPE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY IS CLEAR: Joe Biden remains the front-runner, but his lead is narrowing as his campaign runs on the fumes of nostalgia while Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren nip at his heels. Biden's campaign is idiosyncratically personal, emphasizing the former vice president's friendship with Barack Obama. Sanders and Warren, by contrast, have been running the most ideas-fueled campaigns in living memory.

Whoever wins the nomination, Sanders and Warren are now undeniably the pacesetters for the party. Responding to a Democratic electorate that has been radicalized by Donald Trump and is still smarting from the 2008 recession, Warren and Sanders have yanked the conversation—and the party—sharply to the left. The upshot has been a Democratic Party that is more willing to argue over radical ideas than any other time since the days of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Nor are Sanders and Warren alone. Politicians often deemed moderate such as Pete Buttigieg and Kamala Harris have joined the policy arms race, with candidates trying to top one another with their competing plans to remake America. Suddenly the political conversation is dominated by ideas like Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, student debt relief, free public college, statehood for DC and Puerto Rico, and even Supreme Court expansion. It's telling that Warren has become a leading contender with the catchphrase "I have a plan for that." Democratic voters seem positively hungry for plans.

Yet the new hunger for policies hasn't been a boon to the outfits that traditionally provide Democratic candidates with their ideas. With a few exceptions, liberal and centrist think tanks such as the Center for American Progress (CAP), New America, the Brookings Institution, Demos, and the Roosevelt Institute have had little impact on the campaign season. And when these influential think tanks have made nods at the big policy debates within the Democratic Party, they've often done so in the spirit of hold-your-horses caution, with quibbles about feasibility, or by struggling to play catch-up with campaign proposals.

If the 2019 Democratic Party has become caught up in a dizzying profusion of new ideas and possibilities, the think tanks have remained the wallflowers at the dance, grumpily standing in the corner, staring at their feet.

"Is the Green New Deal biting off too much?" asked a Brookings podcast. CAP's Medicare Extra plan is clearly meant to be a moderate alternative to Sanders's Medicare for All bill. Meanwhile, Demos warned that canceling all student debt "would increase the wealth gap between white and black households."

Marshall Steinbaum, an economist who teaches at the University of Utah and was previously employed by the Roosevelt Institute, has written a paper that directly refutes this claim. He found that student debt relief was not racially or economically regressive and actually reduced racial wealth inequality. Beyond his specific critique of one bit of policy, he has a larger quarrel with what he sees as the timidity of contemporary think tanks at a time when policy boldness is urgently needed.

"On the one hand, you have robust policy debate as part of the 2020 Democratic primary nomination campaign. [Yet] there is almost total disjunction between those things and the…progressive policy-making apparatus that you…imagine would staff a Democratic presidential administration," Steinbaum told me.

Mark Schmitt, the director of the political reform program at New America, is more muted but acknowledged that the big think tanks haven't kept pace with the political conversation. "There's a lot of think-tanky gentle criticism of the free college and student loan forgiveness ideas. Some of the think tanks have aligned on Medicare for Everyone Who Wants It rather than Medicare for All," he observed. "The think tanks aren't out ahead of the candidates in the way you'd expect them to be."

"Think tanks want to be ahead of the curve, thinking about what we should be doing. Funding often makes it difficult to do that."

—Mark Schmitt, New America

Matt Bruenig runs a crowdfunded democratic socialist think tank called the People's Policy Project, which Steinbaum and Schmitt praise for its innovative proposals—some of which appear to have been picked up by the Sanders campaign. A cornerstone of Sanders's version of the Green New Deal is using existing government companies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Power Marketing Administrations to produce renewable energy, an idea supported by the PPP.

Like Steinbaum and Schmitt, Bruenig said the big think tanks are mostly sitting out the far-reaching policy debates of the moment. "If there is a new thing coming, it's got legs, and it's popular, usually you try and get your stuff under that heading," Bruenig said. "You haven't really seen that. It's a little bit strange."

The Tax Policy Center has praised proposals from Cory Booker and Harris. The Roosevelt Institute backed Warren's Accountable Capitalism Act, which would bring workers into corporate boardrooms, including the idea of reserving 40 percent of corporate board seats for workers. (In Europe, where codetermination has a longer history, workers usually get half the seats at the table.) The Roosevelt Institute also

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC HANSON

houses the Great Democracy Initiative, which can be seen as a storehouse of Warren-friendly ideas. Sanders gets some of his sharpest talking points about inequality from the Institute for Policy Studies, a more radical outfit that is usually ignored by the mainstream of the Democratic Party.

Still, none of these candidates are as close to big think tanks as Obama and Hillary Clinton were. When it seemed Clinton was heading to victory in 2016, it was common to speak of CAP's Neera Tanden as the next White House chief of staff. It's unclear that Tanden—or any other think tank head—has the ear of candidates in 2019 in quite the same way.

"CAP was the Democratic Party's brain from its founding in 2003 until 2016," said Matt Stoller, a fellow at the Open Markets Institute. "If you wanted to get something heard on the Hill or you wanted to get it heard in the Obama White House, you would do it through CAP." Those organizations no longer play so central a role. "What has happened is that it's fragmented. You've seen this breakdown of a kind of a consensus."

"If there is a new thing coming, it's got legs, and it's popular, usually you try and get your stuff under that heading. You haven't really seen that."

—Matt Bruenig, People's Policy Project

The disconnect between the most adventurous candidates for the Democratic nomination and the think tank world could pose a real problem if, as seems quite possible, Sanders or Warren becomes president. Although think tanks are nongovernmental organizations, they've been integral to the running of the American state since at least Woodrow Wilson's administration. Think tanks provided essential road maps for almost all modern presidents with a transformative legacy, be it Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Johnson, Ronald Reagan, or Obama. These leaders not only took policy ideas from think tanks; they also recruited key staffers.

If Democratic think tanks remain out of sync with the nominee's policy preferences, this could hobble a future administration. The current disconnect also raises some pressing questions: Why are think tanks keeping their distance from the rambunctious debates in the run-up to the Democratic primaries? Is the reliance on big donors keeping think tanks from moving left?

Like the Democratic party as a whole, the major think tanks remain haunted by the divisive 2016 primary battle between Clinton and Sanders. Steinbaum said he believes that these think tanks came to regret their closeness to Clinton, since it fed divisions in their organizations and in the Democratic Party. "Think tanks were on Team Clinton in 2016 and in retrospect think that was a big problem," he told me.

Game plans: Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have looked outside traditional liberal think tanks to develop their policy platforms.

AP / PAUL SANCYA

"The reaction to that has been 'In 2020 we will not pick sides, no matter what.'"

Schmitt suggested that simply for pragmatic reasons, the high-profile think tanks don't want to align themselves with any candidate as closely as they did with Clinton. "Whoever is going to be the president, you need to keep that open line that you don't have if you stake yourself out," he said.

This political timidity goes hand in hand with the caution that Schmitt sees among funders, notably big foundations. "Think tanks want to be ahead of the curve, thinking about what's the next issue, what we should be doing," he told me. "Funding often makes it difficult to do that.... Decent, well-meaning foundations are slow-moving." His adage is that "foundations are two years behind, so the funding tends to be two years behind an issue." Foundations, according to him, started paying for research into financialization and Wall Street regulations only in 2010, two years after the crash of 2008—and four years after the policies would have done the most good.

A more cynical interpretation is that big donors aren't just slow but actively block good policy.

Though the phrase "think tank" was coined in 1958 and took its current connotation in the 1960s, the institutions it describes date back to the early 20th century, a period when, as now, America was grappling with runaway inequality and a ruthless, unchecked capitalism. Early think tanks (such as Brookings, which traces its roots to 1916) were geared toward overcoming partisan and class divides by offering putatively disinterested expert analysis.

This ideal of think tanks as unbiased institutions never described reality—and became especially far from the mark during the 1970s, when the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Heritage Foundation became the shock troops of the American right, laying the groundwork for the Reagan revolution. The liberal think tanks that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s (CAP, New America, Demos) modeled themselves in part on the ideological think tanks of the right, hoping to fill the same agenda-setting role for Democrats that AEI and Heritage have for Republicans.

But as happens so often in America, the left only imperfectly mirrored the right: The wealthy funders on the right were all aboard for an extremist agenda, happy to fund nonsensical nostrums like supply-side economics, Star Wars missile defense, and climate change denial. By contrast, liberal donors have been closer to the political center and prefer to fund think tanks that work toward producing consensus. In that sense, liberal think tanks still adhere to the spirit of the original think tanks—wary of partisanship and eager for policies that can win bipartisan support.

"In order to qualify yourself for that kind of foundation money, you have to not ruffle feathers," Steinbaum said. He cited the Economic Security Project, co-chaired by Facebook founder Chris Hughes. According to Steinbaum, that initiative has gotten think tanks talking about the caretaker earned income tax credit, which he describes as "total wonkish meaninglessness." He said he

fears that think tanks, reliant on donor dollars, are too prone to esoteric schemes that please the superrich but have no political constituency.

Think tanks "have this delicate balance they have to play between donors, stakeholders, and electeds," Bruenig said. "That tends to make it hard for them to go too far out on a limb." That's also, he argued, why they are wary of "anything that requires a significant tax. Donors like that."

Stoller bumped up against the limits of donor tolerance in 2017 at Open Markets, which at that time was under the umbrella of New America. But when Barry Lynn, who started Open Markets, praised the European Union for penalizing Google, New America—which had received more than $21 million from Google executive Eric Schmidt—cut its ties to the project. According to *The New York Times*, Lynn was told that "the time has come for Open Markets and New America to part ways." Open Markets now operates as an independent entity and has helped shape the anti-monopoly tech policies of Warren and other candidates.

Newt's cuts: When Newt Gingrich became speaker of the House in 1995, he gutted congressional staffing, forcing representatives to rely more on think tanks.

CQ ROLL CALL VIA AP / MAUREEN KEATING

But if donors veto ambitious new programs, will that hamper a future Democratic president, especially Sanders or Warren? These institutions have become even more important since the 1990s, when Newt Gingrich gutted congressional staffing. As Bruce Bartlett, a policy adviser for Reagan and George H.W. Bush, wrote for *The New York Times* in 2011, "Mr. Gingrich did everything in his power to dismantle Congressional institutions that employed people with the knowledge, training and experience to know a harebrained idea when they saw it. When he became speaker in 1995, Mr. Gingrich moved quickly to slash the budgets and staff of the House committees, which employed thousands of professionals with long and deep institutional memories." A consequence of his slash-and-burn policies was that politicians of both parties had to rely ever more on the expertise of think tanks.

"One of the key choices that [Nancy] Pelosi made in 2006 when [Democrats] won the House again is she did not [restore] that institutional structure, she did not staff up the committees, she did not build out internal think tanks," Stoller said. "Instead she mimicked the Gingrich model in having these external think tanks funded by foundations, philanthropy, and corporate interests. One of the reasons why Congress is so weak is that they don't have any internal thinking capacity."

What's true of Congress is also true of the presidency: George W. Bush and Obama both leaned on think tanks to staff their White Houses. The Iraq War was in many ways the brainchild of AEI. Trump, by contrast, had some insiders worried his administration could cause the death of think tanks, though he has since garnered the support of the Heritage Foundation. He has had to let key positions go unfilled—or rely on a staff that disagrees with him.

> **"[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] and Katie Porter and a couple of the others look at politics and say the point is to implement policy."**
>
> —Matt Stoller, Open Markets Institute

Might Warren or Sanders face similar obstacles? "If Warren entered the Oval Office and proposed whatever agenda that she proposed on the campaign trail and was not able to enact it, that would not be any skin off the backs of those organizations because they're not bought into that agenda," Steinbaum speculated. "That's very dangerous, I would say."

Schmitt said he is less worried, since none of the likely Democratic nominees share Trump's contempt for policy-making. But Schmitt wondered if large think tanks have outlived their usefulness. "I think it's a real question whether that large, adaptable institutional structure modeled on AEI or Brookings is actually the best way to get the best work out of people," he said. It could be that large think tanks are not nimble enough to respond to current politics.

Many politicians are aware of the problem and are searching for alternatives.

Warren, a former professor who is arguably the most intellectually adventurous of the candidates, forages ideas from academic sources well outside the brand-name think tanks. As *Politico* noted in June, "Leafing through Warren's plans posted on Medium, voters will find links to obscure academic literature from places like the Düsseldorf Institute for Competition Economics, the Upjohn Institute, the Journal of Applied Business and Economics, and the American Journal of Sociology." These heterodox sources speak not just to her voracious curiosity and wide network in academia but also to the fact that the usual suspects weren't able to supply her with the far-reaching plans she needs. As Obama adviser Austan Goolsbee told *Politico*, Warren's team has "reached out for advice from some important academics that are not really from the standard DC policy circuit."

"It's not just a story of think tanks holding back or being limited," Schmitt said. It's really a story—probably driven as much by Warren as by anybody—of candidates being much more ambitious about policy than I've ever seen."

As Stoller pointed out, new members of Congress like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Katie Porter have shown a similar magpie willingness to build their own nest of ideas from unconventional sources. "What's interesting about AOC and Katie Porter and a couple of the others is that they look at politics and say the point of politics is to implement policy," he said. "And to do that, we have to have knowledge and credibility. They look at politics as a contest over power but also as a contest to implement and learn empirically driven policy choices. They are not afraid to develop those policies from inside government."

If Warren or Sanders becomes the Democratic presidential nominee and possibly the president, the traditional left-of-center think tanks will face an existential choice. They can either embrace irrelevance, or they can shift to accommodate the new direction of the party. If the big think tanks remain committed to becoming irrelevant, then politicians have no choice but to become their own think tanks. ■

LEAPS OF FAITHS

Parents in Northern Ireland are taking school desegregation into their own hands.

ADAM McGIBBON

NORTHERN IRELAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLACE APART, radically different from the rest of the United Kingdom. Recent developments have only made this divide starker.

For the past two years, the province has had no functioning government, with the power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive collapsing after alleged corruption in a government energy scheme. The two main parties on both sides of the divide, Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party, have been unable to reach a deal

Hard-won unity: Parents, pupils, and staff take a celebratory walk from the province's first planned integrated school.

to restore government. In the absence of a provincial government, the national government in London makes decisions. This situation is complicated by the Conservative Party's reliance on the Democratic Unionist Party to remain in power, removing the British government's ability to tackle difficult issues with anything even approaching impartiality.

Optimism is scarce. The killing in April of a young journalist by a group calling itself the New IRA provoked shock and anger. The confusion caused by the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union—and what that means for the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland—only deepens the sense of crisis and despair for many. This is amplified by the glaring inequality and suffering created by nearly a decade of austerity cuts from the London government.

However, there is hope out there; it just isn't coming from the North's established political leaders. A grassroots movement to desegregate Northern Ireland's education system is gaining traction, led by parents and teachers.

Segregation in education is one of the biggest and most enduring legacies of Northern Ireland's troubled past. According to the most recent public data, 93 percent of the province's children attend segregated schools—that is, schools that overwhelmingly educate children from only a Catholic or a Protestant background.

The damage this does is incalculable. It is possible for children to reach age 18 without having friendships or any real interaction with someone from the other community. In a deeply divided society emerging from 40 years of violent conflict, reinforcing the divisions of the past forestalls peace and reconciliation. Twenty years on from the Good Friday Agreement—the keystone of Northern Ireland's peace process—51 percent of people in Northern Ireland, according to a recent poll, reported having few or no friends from the other side of the religious divide. Among 18-to-34-year-olds, the figure was even more worryingly high, at 58 percent. Academic research proves the obvious: Integrated education reduces prejudice, increases children's understanding of diversity, and helps nurture and improve community relations.

The damaging effects of segregated education are not limited to the interpersonal realm. The state spends hundreds of millions of pounds administering what are effectively two parallel education systems, one Catholic, the other Protestant. This means separate teacher training colleges, separate education authorities, separate school board governor associations, and so on.

The movement for integrated education has been fighting for change since the darkest days of the Troubles.

Troubled legacy: Children taunt a British soldier in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, after an explosion in 1972.

It is possible for children to reach age 18 without having any real interaction with someone from the other community.

In 1981, amid the sectarian violence between Protestant unionists and the Catholic nationalist minority—and in the face of complete government inaction—some brave parents took matters into their own hands. They collectively founded the Lagan College secondary school, the province's first planned religiously integrated school. Starting on the outskirts of Belfast with just 28 pupils, no money, no permanent building, and an armed police guard on the first day, Lagan College nevertheless managed to flourish. It's now a thriving school, and many others have followed.

Integrated schools not only maintain a balance of Catholic and Protestant pupils on their rolls but also do the difficult work of fostering mutual understanding in a diverse environment. As a pupil at a planned integrated school in the 1990s, I received an extensive education in conflict resolution. Students frequently attended assemblies with invited victims of the Troubles who espoused the need for forgiveness.

But today, only 7 percent of Northern Ireland's school-age children attend integrated schools. The state provides financial support for such schools via grants from the Education Authority but has yet to establish a single one itself, leaving the movement to be spearheaded by groups of parents and nonprofit organizations. This is despite integration's incredible popularity. Integrated schools are oversubscribed, and polling consistently shows significant support for them.

Two years ago, observing the continued lack of progress, the Integrated Education Fund, one of the main organizations fighting for desegregation, launched the Integrate My School campaign. A little-used 1978 law, the Dunleath Act, allows existing schools to transform themselves from segregated to integrated. Few have used the opportunity, so the IEF started a campaign to work with parents and teachers to transform their schools through parental ballots.

The IEF set up a website where parents could register their support for integration at their children's school. "It's about confidence building, to show that you're not alone, that other people feel the same way," says Paul Caskey, the IEF's campaign director. "We talk to a lot of parents who are supportive of integrated education—but do they want to put their head above the parapet? Do they want to knock on the principal's door? Your average parent might not want to do that on their own. On the website, you can register your support anonymously. Once we get up to 20 to 25 percent of parents in favor at a given school, then we can work with them to go public and move to the next stage." That next step involves starting conversations in the community and gathering

Adam McGibbon is a writer and campaigner from Northern Ireland. He has been published in The Guardian, *the* New Statesman, *and* The New Republic, *among other publications.*

LEFT: DECLAN ROUGHAN; RIGHT: AP / MICHEL LIPCHITZ

the minimum 20 percent of signatures needed to trigger a parental vote on integrating the school.

This parent-led movement is picking up speed. So far this year, six schools across Northern Ireland voted to integrate via parental ballots, with huge majorities in favor.

One of these is Carrickfergus Central Primary, a Protestant school in a predominantly Protestant town just north of Belfast. Nuala Hall, the principal, arrived at Carrickfergus Central in 2015, after 19 years of working at an integrated school.

Shortly after she took the job at Carrickfergus Central, she was driving near the school with her husband. They saw the telltale red, white, and blue bunting of the UK flag. In Northern Ireland, territory marking is common, and any native instantly recognizes that such bunting marks an area as overwhelmingly Protestant. "My husband joked, 'Well, there won't be an integrated school here anytime soon,'" Hall recalls. "At that point, I agreed with him." Yet in February of this year, parents at Carrickfergus Central voted 86 percent in favor of integration.

Hall didn't arrive with the intention of integrating Carrickfergus Central. That started when the IEF sent the board of governors a flyer asking if the school was interested. A flurry of conversations among parents, teachers, and school board members ensued. The school invited representatives from the IEF and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education to discuss what such a change would mean. A parental ballot was scheduled, and the transformation commenced.

Reminders of long-standing division and violent conflict plague Northern Ireland's educational integration efforts.

Reflecting on the vote, Hall says, "It was overwhelming. It showed huge support for transforming the school. Times are changing, people are fed up with the past, and the way to get out of the past is to educate children together." The school must now work with educational authorities to prepare a transformation plan, and signs for the future are good. After the vote, next year's new pupil intake was projected to increase.

On the other side of the divide, Seaview Primary, a small Catholic school in the northern coastal town of Glenarm, recently voted on integration as well. Parents and teachers worked together to start the process, assisted by the IEF. On June 28, Barry Corr, the school's principal, announced the ballot results to more than 100 parents, grandparents, and children gathered on the school playground. In front of a live TV camera, he declared that 95 percent of parents had voted to integrate.

Joanne Matthews, a school board chair with 6-year-old twins at Seaview, says, "It was a whole community that came together, and that was exciting and refreshing. It was great. It makes me very happy to say my children are going to attend an integrated school."

By themselves, the stories of Carrickfergus Central and Seaview are inspiring but small in scale. The IEF is talking to about 40 other schools in Northern Ireland that are interested in transforming. There has been huge enthusiasm from parents. "In one area, a parent found out about Integrate My School and shared it with her

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friends on Facebook. Overnight, the amount of parents at the local school registering their support on our website passed the 20 percent threshold," Caskey says.

But there are headwinds, too. There is still political and religious opposition. Despite support from individual church officials, the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations continue to have a chilly attitude toward integrated education.

A 2014 dispute over Clintyclay Primary School in the western county of Tyrone demonstrates the resilience of old prejudices. Although parents voted to integrate Clintyclay, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the education authority for Northern Ireland's Catholic schools, decided almost simultaneously to close it. Some IEF members suspect that the council did so out of fear that Clintyclay would create a domino effect, with more and more Catholic schools voting to integrate. The council had previously lobbied for an end to the Department of Education's legal duty to promote integrated education. Sources in the integrated education movement say there is similar opposition in Protestant churches.

Government apathy remains, as well. The IEF supported an integrated school that successfully sued the Department of Education in 2014, claiming that by refusing to allow the school to expand to meet increased demand, the department was not supporting integrated education. While there are integrated education proponents in all of Northern Ireland's political parties, approval for the movement is not universal.

Reminders of long-standing division and conflict plague educational integration efforts. This past June, Harding Memorial, an elementary school, voted to become the first integrated school in predominantly Protestant East Belfast, with 87 percent in favor. The next day, in a threatening gesture, someone placed a British flag at the entrance of St. Joseph's Primary, a Catholic school two miles away. This act of territory marking and intimidation, while minor, carries deeply sinister overtones, given the history of vandalism at the school and the sectarian abuse hurled at its students. (I experienced it when I attended St. Joseph's as a child.) It is a sign that there is still much work to do.

A restored Northern Ireland government, if it had the political will, could make integration happen much faster. Asked how a restored Northern Ireland Executive would help, Caskey replies, "We need a commitment in the Programme for Government to drive integrated education forward. We can do a lot with our campaign—but it's going to take a much longer period of time unless we can get government support."

But the optimism and enthusiasm generated by parents and teachers who have voted in favor of transformation is proving infectious and could help build the widespread political support needed for total desegregation. All six schools that voted to integrate in 2019 did so with landslide elections, giving the IEF confidence that it will see similar results in the dozens of other schools it is talking to. Despite government inertia—and sometimes outright hostility—this parent-led, bottom-up movement is making inroads into the problem of Northern Ireland's perpetual division. Building mass political support for integrated education might also help break up the logjam on other difficult issues, such as the similar segregation in public housing.

If there is hope, it comes from parents like Joanne Matthews. "It's our children that will dictate what kind of future Northern Ireland has," she says. "If we teach them that diversity is a brilliant thing, it's going to be a happier and brighter future." ■

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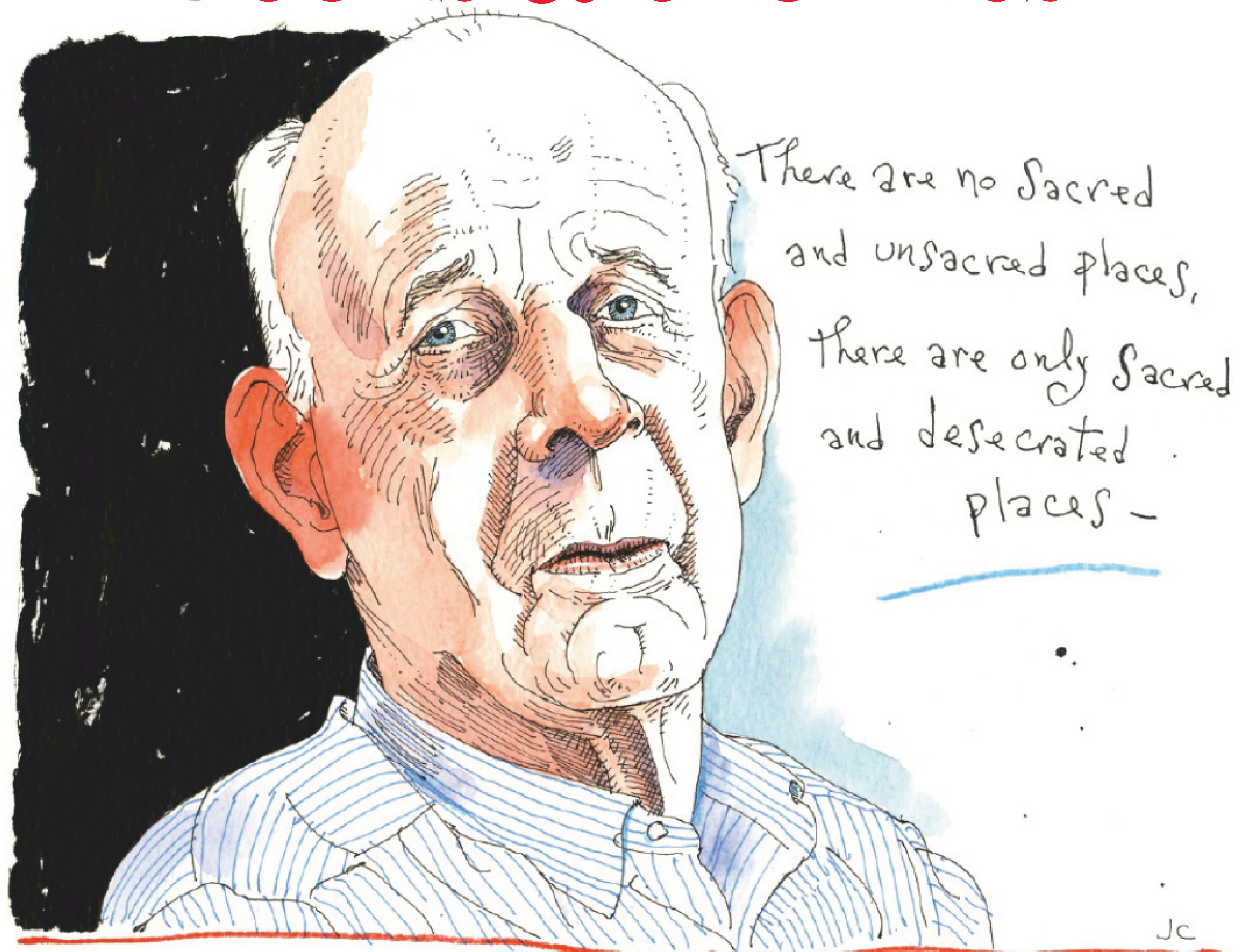

A SHARED PLACE

Wendell Berry's lifelong dissent

by JEDEDIAH BRITTON-PURDY

At a time when political conflict runs deep and erects high walls, the Kentucky essayist, novelist, and poet Wendell Berry maintains an arresting mix of admirers. Barack Obama awarded him the National Humanities Medal in 2011. The following year, the socialist-feminist writer and editor Sarah Leonard published a friendly interview with him in *Dissent*. Yet he also gets respectful attention in the pages of *The American Conservative* and *First Things*, a right-leaning, traditionalist Christian journal.

More recently, *The New Yorker* ran an introduction to Berry's thought distilled from a series of conversations, stretching over several years, with the critic Amanda Petrusich. In these conversations, Berry patiently explains why he doesn't call himself a socialist or a conservative and recounts the mostly unchanged creed underlying his nearly six decades of writing and activism. Over the years, he has called himself an agrarian, a pacifist, and a Christian—albeit of an eccentric kind. He has written against all forms of violence and destruction—of land, communities, and human beings—and argued that the modern American way of life is a skein of violence. He is an anti-capitalist moralist and a writer of praise for what he admires: the quiet, mostly uncelebrated labor and affection that keep the world whole and might still redeem it. He is also an acerbic critic of what he dislikes, particularly modern individualism, and his emphasis on family and marriage and his ambivalence toward abortion mark him as an outsider to the left.

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ILLUSTRATION BY **JOE CIARDIELLO**

Berry's writing is hard to imagine separated from his life as a farmer in a determinedly traditional style, who works the land where his family has lived for many generations using draft horses and hand labor instead of tractors and mechanical harvesters. But the life, like the ideas, crisscrosses worlds without belonging neatly to any of them. Born in 1934 in Henry County, Kentucky, Berry was but the son of a prominent local lawyer and farmer. He spent much of his childhood in the company of people from an older generation who worked the soil: his grandfather, a landowner, and the laborers who worked the family land. His early adulthood was relatively cosmopolitan. After graduating from the University of Kentucky with literary ambitions, he went to Stanford to study under the novelist Wallace Stegner at a time when Ken Kesey, Robert Stone, and Larry McMurtry were also students there. Berry went to Italy and France on a Guggenheim fellowship, then lived in New York, teaching at NYU's Bronx campus. As he entered his 30s, he returned to Kentucky, setting up a farm in 1965 at Lane's Landing on the Kentucky River. Although he was a member of the University of Kentucky's faculty for nearly 20 years over two stints, ending in 1993, his identity has been indelibly that of a writer-farmer dug into his place, someone who has become nationally famous for being local, and developed the image of a timeless sage while joining, sometimes fiercely, in fights against the Vietnam War and the coal industry's domination of his region.

Now the essays and polemics in which Berry has made his arguments clearest over the last five decades are gathered in two volumes from the Library of America, totaling 1,700 tightly set pages. Seeing his arc in one place highlights both his complexity and his consistency: The voice and preoccupations really do not change, even as the world around him does. But he is also the product of a specific historical moment, the triple disenchantment of liberal white Americans in the 1960s over the country's racism, militarism, and ecological devastation. In the 50 years since, Berry has sifted and resifted his memory and attachment to the land, looking for resources to support an alternative America—"to affirm," as he wrote in 1981, "my own life as a thing decent in possibility." He has concluded that this self-affirmation is not possible in isolation or even on the scale of one's lifetime, and he has therefore made his writing a vehicle for a reckoning with history and an ethics of social and ecological interdependence.

Wendell Berry
Essays, 1969–1990
Essays, 1993–2017
Edited by Jack Shoemaker
Library of America. 841 pp. and 859 pp. (respectively). $37.50 each

Berry defined his themes in the years when environmentalism grew into a mass mobilization of dissent, the civil rights movement confronted white Americans afresh with the country's racial hierarchy and violence, and the Vietnam War joined uncritical patriotism to technocratic destruction—and stirred an anti-war movement against both. He was part of a generation in which many people confronted, as young adults, the ways that comfort and seeming safety in one place could be linked, by a thousand threads and currents, to harm elsewhere—the warm glow of electric lights to strip mining, the deed of a family farm to colonial expropriation and enslavement, the familiar sight of the Stars and Stripes to white supremacy and empire.

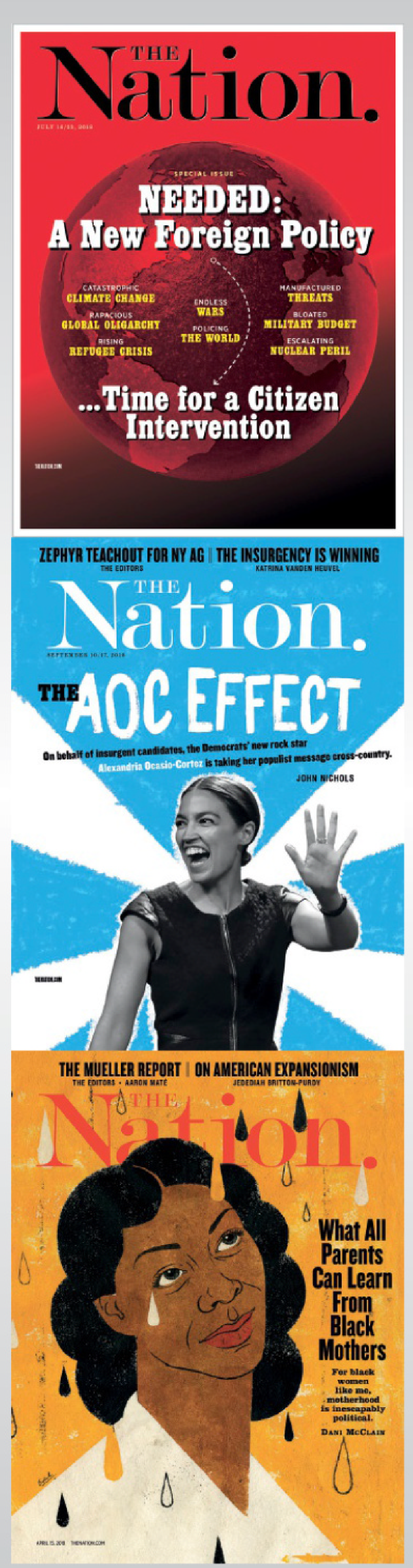
Such destructive interconnections became the master theme in his criticism, which portrays American life as a network of violence and exploitation, sometimes openly celebrated but more often concealed. For Berry, as for Thoreau, the work of the critic is to locate where the poisons are dumped and then turn back on oneself and ask: What is my place in all this? Is it possible to live life differently? And if so, how can I begin?

Berry's most enduring work of nonfiction is *The Unsettling of America*, published in 1977. There he puts farming at the center of his critique of American life. If you want to ask how people live, he proposes, you should ask how they get their food. This is at once the most ordinary ecological exchange and the most important. It shapes everything from the land to our bodies. It is the place where the land becomes our bodies, and the other way around. And by this measure, Berry continues, American agriculture has proved a disaster. A good farm should renew its soil with diverse cropping and manure, providing fertility for the future. Instead, American farming has become a hybrid of factory production and mining. It strips the soil of its organic fertility and replaces it with synthetic fertilizers, either literally mined (phosphorus) or produced with considerable amounts of fossil fuels (nitrogen). Its waste becomes a pollutant—the manure from industrial-scale animal operations and the fertilizer runoff from corn and soybean monocrops, which poison waterways and aquifers. When farms are turned into dirt-based factories, they lose their power to absorb and store carbon and begin to contribute, like other factories, to climate change.

What does this disaster say about the people who create it? For Berry, American agriculture showed the country's devotion to a mistaken standard of economic efficiency, which in practice tended to mean corporate profit. Both the market and the federal government confronted farmers with a stark choice: "Get big or get out," in the words of Earl Butz, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford's secretary of agriculture and a villain in *The Unsettling of America*. Success meant squeezing more and more out of the bottom line, no matter how it affected farming communities or the land. It also meant embracing a new scale and pace, with mechanical harvesters, industrial barns, and synthetic chemicals greatly reducing the need for human labor. In 1870, nearly half of American workers were farmers; in 1920, 27 percent were; today, it's less than 1 percent. Not so long ago, working the land was the major form of life in many communities. Today, it is mostly a branch of industrial management for landowners and a grueling form of labor for seasonal and migrant workers. Far from economic progress, Berry concludes, the unsettling of America produced a cultural and ecological catastrophe. Whole forms of life, whole swaths of ecological diversity, are disappearing.

He goes even further in *The Unsettling of America*. The destructive transformation of land, culture, and commerce is nothing new; it is merely the latest chapter in the American story—the exploitation and elimination of settled forms of life to make room for new kinds of profit-making. Looking back to the first soldiers and colonists who drove out Native Americans, Berry writes, "These conquerors have fragmented and demolished traditional communities.... They have always said that what they destroyed was outdated, provincial, and contemptible." The conquest never ended, only changed its targets. It has always maintained a doubly exploitative attitude, toward land as a thing to be seized and mined for profit and toward human labor as a thing to be used up and discarded.

Reviewing *The Unsettling of America* in *The New York Times*, the poet Donald Hall called Berry "a prophet of our healing, a utopian poet-legislator like William Blake." But the poetic utopia was fading fast, and the healing had come too late. Soon Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan would establish



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themselves as the poet-legislators of the age. Thatcher's claim that "there is no such thing as society" and Reagan's praise of "an America in which people can still get rich" were the antithesis of Berry's thought. In those decades, back-to-the-landers who followed his example in the early 1970s were giving up and returning to city jobs or slipping into a weird rural libertarianism or becoming entrepreneurs who converted agrarian counterculture into the kinds of lifestyle goods and status symbols that end up on display at Whole Foods. The environmental movement was beaten back in Appalachia in the 1970s when the coal industry defeated a campaign to end strip mining, which Berry had thrown himself into wholeheartedly. The defeat set the stage for the destruction of much of the region by mountaintop-removal mining in the decades that followed while inequality grew, young people continued to flee rural counties, and the American economy financialized and globalized on archcapitalist terms.

Since *The Unsettling of America* appeared, Berry has been straightforwardly and unyieldingly anti-capitalist. He shares a mood with Romantic English socialists like William Morris, who did not assume that all growth is good and who aspired to build an egalitarian future that in some ways looked back to a precapitalist past. These affinities bring many of Berry's ideas within shouting distance of nostalgia—which, in the American South, has always been a mistake at best and more often a crime.

But the core of his work—both writing and activism—has always been after something else: a reckoning with the wrongs of history and identity. He does not want to celebrate an earlier age; instead, like Morris and his peers, Berry wants to come to terms with it in the service of a clear-eyed present and a changed future. "I am forced, against all my hopes and inclinations," he writes in "A Native Hill," a 1969 essay, "to regard the history of my people here as the progress of the doom of what I value most in the world: the life and health of the earth, the peacefulness of human communities and households." Centered on a walk across a slope where Berry's ancestors and others like them drove out the original inhabitants, the essay confronts how his people worked the land, sometimes with enslaved labor, and left behind a denuded hillside that has shed topsoil into the Kentucky and Ohio rivers. "And so here, in the place I love more than any other," he observes, "and where I have chosen among all other places to live my life, I am more painfully divided within myself than I could be in any other place."

From the beginning, Berry has written the land's history alongside the history of those who have worked it or been worked on it. When he returned to Kentucky in the mid-1960s, he was already reflecting on how much of the region's—and his family's—history was entangled with racial domination. In 1970, he concluded that "the crisis of racial awareness" that had broken into his consciousness was "fated to be the continuing crisis of my life" and that "the reflexes of racism…are embedded in my mind as deeply at least as the language I speak." Berry argues that the mind could not be changed by will alone but only in relation to the world whose wrongs had distorted it. A writer must respond by engaging with "the destructive forces in his history," by admitting and addressing the fact that "my people's errors have become the features of my country."

Even as Berry made himself a student of the flaws of local life, he sought to refashion its patterns of community and culture into something that might repair them. For him, narrowing the horizons of one's life is the only responsible way of living, since it is how we might actually heal old wounds, clean up our own mess, and give an honest account of ourselves. Throughout his essays, he makes this case for ecological reasons but also for moral ones. Farming on a local scale, he argues, can respond to the nuances of soil and landscape and can rebuild the fertility cycle of dirt to plant to manure to dirt. Ethics also has its limits of scale. "We are trustworthy only so far as we can see," he insists. The patterns of care that give ethics life also require a specific space. To hold ourselves accountable, we need a palpable sense of what is sustaining us and what good or harm we are doing in return. Community depends on the sympathy and moral imagination that "thrives on contact, on tangible connection."

Berry's judgment that localism is an ecological and moral value links his life and activism with his thought, but over the years his localism has also fostered an anti-political streak in his thinking that recasts global and collective problems as matters of community judgment and personal ethics. He laces his writings with asides dismissing "national schemes of medical aid" and "empty laws" for environmental protection. But local activity can do only so much to stop mountaintop-removal mining or industrial-scale farming. A student of material interdependence cannot ignore that the systems driving these forms of ecological devastation are just as real as the topsoil that Berry lays down on his farm at Lane's Landing and just as powerful as the floodwaters from the Kentucky River. Politics and collective action—often through local and federal laws—are necessary, however alienating he finds them.

Some of Berry's wariness of politics comes from his temperament. He is chiefly a moralist and a storyteller. Although he cares intensely about the effects of the economic and political orders that he criticizes, they are not the home ground of his mind in the way a local farm and community are. His wariness regarding politics also reflects something that is easily missed on account of his agrarian persona and perennially untimely style: his debt to the New Left radicalism of the late 1960s. His writing from that time reflects the New Left idea that participatory democracy is the only real democracy. "The time is past when it was enough merely to elect our officials," he argued in 1972 concerning the fight against strip mining. "We will have to elect them and then go and *watch* them and keep our hands on them, the way the coal companies do."

Horror at the Vietnam War shaped his localism as well. In 1969, he wrote of walking on a hillside watching Air Force jets screech into the valley "perfecting deadliness" and concluded, "They do not represent anything I understand as my own or that I identify with…. I am afraid that nothing I value can withstand them. I am unable to believe that what I most hope for can be served by them."

Berry's emphasis on place and individual responsibility can become part of the problem in the wrong hands. Back-to-the-land ethics in the 1990s and since have often sagged into a conscious consumerism that forgets participatory politics, inflates individual choices, and offers local knowledge as a status symbol and a commodity rather than a set of traditions worth preserving to prevent even further devastation. By now, calls for individual responsibility—from one's choice of light bulbs to the search for happiness and meaningful work—are pretty clearly distractions from the lack of political

programs to provide living-wage jobs and ecological restoration. A contrarian is least essential when his dogged dissent becomes an era's lazy common sense; Berry risks becoming, willy-nilly, the philosopher of the Whole Foods meat counter.

At the same time, Berry has never shied from participating in collective action and organized resistance. He has been arrested for protesting the construction of nuclear power plants and risked arrest protesting surface mining. In 2009, he withdrew his papers from the University of Kentucky after it accepted coal money and has devoted recent years to working with his daughter, Mary Berry, to build a center to train young farmers in local practices that might resist the corporatization of agriculture. Growing up on the edge of Appalachian activist circles, I heard of him as someone who showed up—a good citizen. But it may be that the burden of his thought is a pessimism of the global intellect, married to joy (if not exactly optimism) in local work. In Wendell Berry's view, we are caught in a powerfully warped world, and nothing of our making is likely to save us. The beauty is the struggle or, in his case, the rhythmic and seasonal labor. Indeed, the joy of work is near the center of his thinking. Our wealth is in our activity, he argues, but it is fatuous to "do what you love." The point instead should be to make an economy, at whatever scale is possible, whose work deserves the affection of whoever joins in it.

In this respect, his local focus is not narrow but expansive. In the work of a farm and the ties of a region, he finds the materials for a theory of political economy. Like Pope Francis in the ecological tract *Laudato Si'*, and also like many contemporary socialists, Berry has long argued that the moral and material meaning of an economy must be two parts of the same thing. Our political economy shapes our intimate attachments, and vice versa. The personal is political, and our hearts follow our treasure. This twinned understanding of environment and economy, of personal and public life, is part of why he can appeal both to those who believe that the American ordering of political and economic power needs fundamental reconstruction and to those who believe that the values of individualism, mobility, and self-creation have led to a cultural blind alley.

Berry's affirmative vision of interdependence finds expression in an ideal of marriage that runs through his thinking. For him, marriage is a chosen limit, a self-bounding, that helps to support and dignify all the other limits he recommends: restraint from violence, from conquest, from unchecked acquisition or the vanity of progress. It is also an expression of an intentional community, of a deliberate bonding of souls, and he describes it as being "as good an example as we can find of the responsible use of energy" and, more fulsomely, "the sexual feast and celebration that joins [the couple] to all living things and to the fertility of the earth." In *The Unsettling of America*, the ideal farmscape that Berry imagines is filled with marriages on this model.

This moralizing of the most traditional relationship, along with the emphasis on localism, is part of the reason that Berry's writing appeals to conservatives as well as progressives. But he does not defend the traditional marriage of the 20th-century nuclear household. His ideal of a union of shared work in a shared place is at once more anachronistic and more radical than that. Repudiating the right's understanding of marriage, he argued in 2015 that the Constitution and political decency require opening marriage to same-sex couples without qualification. Speaking from his Christian tradition, he warns his coreligionists against "condemnation by category" (which he calls "the lowest form of hatred") and "the autoerotic pleasure of despising other members" of creation.

His ideal of marriage also extends far beyond two people. It is suggestive of his larger commitment to making things whole, to imagining a good society as a great chain of being that links people and households and the earth into a single pattern. Through this image of wholeness, Berry asks moral and ecological questions in ways that conjoin what is often held apart: What harm am I involved in? What change in life could possibly redress it?

Berry's visions of wholeness, however, can leave too little room for the thought that not all human and nonhuman goods can come into harmony, that conflict among them can be productive and a reason to prize individuality and strangeness—say, to honor a queer marriage not just because it is a marriage but also because it is queer. His passion for wholeness draws him toward the anachronistic margins of the present—the Amish, for instance, whose self-bounded form of community he admires—and dampens his interest in the radically new versions of ecological and social life that might be emerging on other margins. His wholeness is not the only wholeness, though he sometimes writes as if it were. He is, on the one hand, reconstructing his own Christian, border-state, mainly white history as one basis for "a life decent in possibility" and, on the other hand, trying to describe the general conditions for any others to live a responsible life. When his project is candidly idiosyncratic, then others may find in it some prompting for their own reconstruction, with their own equally particular inherited materials. But when Berry generalizes too hastily from what is particularly his own, his thought, ironically, can become provincial.

When I became a writer, it was probably inevitable that I would take some kind of instruction from Wendell Berry. He was the first writer I ever met, by more than a decade. I was introduced to him at a draft horse auction in Ohio sometime before I learned to read. When I did begin to read him, I found someone who had made a life's work out of materials I had, at that time, known my whole life. He too came from steep, eroded slopes, farmed wastefully; he too worked in hay fields and barns that left the body scratched, sore, soaked in sweat, delighted; he too admired the knowledge of old people who could make a meal of wild mushrooms, some roadside greens, and a swiftly dispatched chicken. I still carry with me many of the values that Berry praises as essential, but much of what he has evoked as a life decent in possibility is far away. At present, I live in New York City and have not dedicated my life to the fertility of the land I first knew or to any one lifelong community. I love a city of strangers, whose random sociability and surprising acts of helpfulness model a very different picture of interdependence from Berry's.

This sense of distance from him is particularly acute when it comes to abortion. Several times over the past year, I almost abandoned this essay because of Berry's view of it. He believes that abortion takes a life; I believe the right to it is essential to women's autonomy and egalitarian relationships. I see it as central to the vision of humane fairness that is reproductive justice and view

Artistic Dispatches From the Front Lines of Resistance

Phantoms / Edel Rodriguez

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reproductive justice as closely linked with ecological justice. Both are about a decent way for humans to go on within the larger living world. This is my version of wholeness, but it is not Berry's, and over the years I have struggled to reconcile his views on abortion with the parts of his work that I find indispensable. Unlike his localism or his skepticism of politics, which I do not share but seem honorable expressions of important traditions, his views on abortion pull me up short. With the stakes for women's lives so high right now, they do so even more.

Berry's writings on reproductive justice contain an important caveat: He does not believe abortion should be the decision of the state, and he has argued that for this reason, "there should be *no* law either for or against abortion." This cannot be a complete answer, and imagining it could be is a token of his distance from modern politics. Take Medicaid and the heavily regulated private insurance industry. Must they cover abortion? May they not? The question is not avoidable, and it is political as well as personal. In answering these questions, there is no such thing as the silence of the law.

Still, Berry's stance means that all bans on performing abortion should be rejected. This is a position that falls well to the left of anything the Supreme Court has said on the matter. Nonetheless, many readers would not remotely recognize their experience in his description of the procedure as a "tragic choice" and might mistrust his judgment on other matters because of his insistence on his opinion here.

Throughout his work, Berry likes to iron out paradoxes in favor of building a unified vision, but he is himself a bundle of paradoxes, some more generative than others. A defender of community and tradition, he has been an idiosyncratic outsider his whole life, a sharp critic of both the mainstream of power and wealth and the self-styled traditionalists of the religious and cultural right. A stylist with an air of timelessness, he is in essential ways a product of the late 1960s and early '70s, with their blend of political radicalism and ecological holism. An advocate of the commonplace against aesthetic and academic conceits, he has led his life as a richly memorialized and deeply literary adventure. Like Thoreau, Berry invites dismissive misreading as a sentimentalist, an egotist, or a scold. Like Thoreau, he is interested in the integrity of language, the quality of experience—what are the ways that one can know a place, encounter a terrain?—and above all, the question of how much scrutiny an American life can take.

All of Berry's essays serve as documents of the bewildering destruction in which our everyday lives involve us and as a testament to those qualities in people and traditions that resist the destruction. As the economic order becomes more harrying and abstract, a politics of place is emerging in response, much of it a genuine effort to understand the ecological and historical legacies of regions in the ways that Berry has recommended. This politics is present from Durham, North Carolina, where you can study the legacy of tobacco and slavery on the Piedmont soils and stand where locals took down a Confederate statue in a guerrilla action in 2017, to New York City, where activists have built up community land trusts for affordable housing and scientists have reconstructed the deep environmental history of the country's most densely developed region. But few of the activists and scholars involved in this politics would think of themselves as turning away from the international or the global. They are more likely to see climate change, migration, and technology as stitching together the local and global in ways that must be part of the rebuilding and enriching of community.

The global hypercapitalism that Berry denounces has involved life—human and otherwise—in a world-historical gamble concerning the effects of indefinite growth, innovation, and competition. Most of us are not the gamblers; we are the stakes. He reminds us that this gamble repeats an old pattern of mistakes and crimes: hubris and conquest, the idea that the world is here for human convenience, and the willingness of the powerful to take as much as they can. For most of his life, Berry has written as a kind of elegist, detailing the tragic path that we have taken and recalling other paths now mostly fading. In various ways, young agrarians, socialists, and other radicals now sound his themes, denouncing extractive capitalism and calling for new and renewed ways of honoring work—our own and what the writer Alyssa Battistoni calls the "work of nature." They also insist on the need to engage political power to shape a future, not just with local work but on national and global scales. They dare to demand what he has tended to relinquish. If these strands of resistance and reconstruction persist, even prevail, Wendell Berry's lifelong dissent—stubborn, sometimes maddening, not quite like anything else of its era—will deserve a place in our memory. ■

TRUE CRIME

Uncovering the mysteries of *Lolita*

by JENNIFER WILSON

"Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins." This disturbing sentence from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is often misremembered as the novel's opening line. The 1955 book in fact begins with a mock foreword, written by one John Ray Jr., PhD, of the fictional Widworth, Massachusetts. Ray has ostensibly been commissioned by the lawyer of the now deceased Humbert Humbert, the pedophile narrator of Nabokov's tale, to edit his client's manuscript. Ray assures us that "save for the correction of obvious solecisms and a careful suppression of a few tenacious details," the manuscript is "preserved intact," before going on to deride those "old fashioned readers" who try to deduce from such a narrative the "'real' people beyond the 'true' story."

Jennifer Wilson is a writer and critic. She has a PhD in Russian literature from Princeton University.

A creation of Nabokov, Ray unsurprisingly follows his maker's dictum that words like "reality" should come in quotation marks. For Nabokov, what was real and true was always up for debate—a matter of subjectivity as well as objectivity. He saw in the natural world as much deception as in the pages of a novel. "Reality," he insisted in a 1962 interview with the BBC, "is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable."

That is why the very title of Sarah Weinman's new book, *The Real Lolita: The Kidnapping of Sally Horner and the Novel That Scandalized the World*, should alert readers that her project is a defiant one. There are none of the quotation marks around "real" that Nabokov or his creation, John Ray Jr., PhD, would have insisted on. In this literary work of true-crime reporting, Weinman is less interested in abiding by Nabokov's rule book than in challenging what she sees as the ethical limits of his aestheticism.

Weinman argues that Nabokov downplayed the extent to which Sally Horner's case inspired his novel, a move she says was meant to preserve the "carefully constructed myth of Nabokov, the sui genesis artist." In telling Horner's story, Weinman hopes to right a narrative wrong, reining in the excesses of fiction writers like Nabokov and returning Horner to her rightful place at the center of his famous novel. It is an admirable, if at times unsuccessful, mission. While Weinman's refusal to read *Lolita* on Nabokov's terms is refreshing, her book can also feel hostile to the very nature of literary fiction—which is always attempting to draw both from the world and beyond it—and uninterested in the political capacities of stories that aren't true.

ILLUSTRATION BY **TIM ROBINSON**

Weinman knows crime. She runs a popular newsletter called *Crime Lady* and writes a regular column for the website *CrimeReads*. (Articles have explored the mysterious drowning death of spy novelist Holly Roth and Nabokov's obsession—though he denied it—with true-crime stories.) Weinman traces her fascination with the darkest corners of the human psyche back to, of all places, a childhood interest in baseball. When she was 8, she was reading a book on the subject and suddenly found herself more curious about how some of the players in the book had been murdered. "I wanted to understand why extreme things happen," she said.

In recent years, Weinman has devoted much of her energy and expertise to shining a light on the overlooked female writers of crime fiction. In 2015, she edited a collection for the Library of America. Two years before that, she edited a short-story collection called *Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives*, which looked at noir tales of idyllic marriages and perfect families gone bad, a genre known as domestic suspense.

This constellation of crime and feminism is a central theme in *The Real Lolita*. The book's main target is what Weinman describes as the erasure at the center of the text. She contends that Nabokov used but then hid in plain sight the story of Horner, who was 11 years old when she was kidnapped and raped in the summer of 1948 by a car mechanic named Frank La Salle. Much like Humbert Humbert, La Salle posed as his victim's father and evaded capture by repeatedly crossing state lines.

Nabokov has Humbert refer to the case in passing: "Had I done to Dolly, perhaps, what Frank Lasalle, a fifty-year-old mechanic, had done to eleven-year-old Sally Horner in 1948?" But this is the only mention of Horner's ordeal in the novel, and Weinman asserts that its parenthetical nature masks the extent to which Nabokov relied on news about the case when writing the novel. Such an elision, she insists, should raise serious ethical questions about literature and its responsibility to the real-life people who inspire particular works of fiction. Not mincing words, she describes Nabokov's creative process as an act of narrative violence, in which he transformed the traumas of Horner's life into mere "grist for his own literary mill" and "strip-mined" her story "to produce the bones of *Lolita*."

Weinman crafts *The Real Lolita* like a detective story, tracking down clues that indicate when Nabokov discovered the Horner case, how much he knew about it, and "his efforts to disguise that knowledge." Whether you find these parts of *The Real Lolita* convincing or not, the remainder of the book, which focuses on Horner, is compelling and forcefully narrated. Deeply researched and rich in detail, these sections provide a vivid glimpse into the way that crimes against women were reported on and investigated in postwar America. However, when Weinman shifts her attention to Nabokov, *The Real Lolita* wades into murkier waters, finding true crime in what arguably should be creative license.

The Real Lolita
The Kidnapping of Sally Horner and the Novel That Scandalized the World
By Sarah Weinman
Ecco. 320 pp. $27.99

In the spring of 1948, Sally Horner walked into a Woolworth's department store in Camden, New Jersey, and was slipping a shoplifted notebook into her bag when someone grabbed her arm. The person was Frank La Salle, a 50-something drifter who had just gotten out of jail for the statutory rape of five girls. He told her he was an FBI agent, and Horner, just a child, believed him.

La Salle let Horner go, and for some months her life went on as before. But La Salle, still posing as law enforcement, tracked her down. Horner was terrified that her mother, a single working woman, would find out about the shoplifting incident and agreed to go with him to Atlantic City under the ruse of vacationing with a friend. It was here that Horner's 21-month nightmare began.

Beyond these broad strokes—a pedophile abducting a young girl and transporting her across state lines while posing as her father—the alleged similarities between *Lolita* and the Horner case are largely unconvincing, if for no other reason than a few newspaper clippings that Nabokov may have read cannot produce the level of detail, characterization, subplots, and other basic elements that make up a compelling novel. And as Weinman herself notes, Nabokov drew on numerous other cases to create the crime at the heart of his novel.

In fact, the criminal mind of Humbert Humbert and the building blocks of *Lolita* had been forming in Nabokov's mind for some time; as Weinman acknowledges, the novel's themes appear across his earlier works going back nearly 20 years. *The Enchanter*, which was written before the Horner kidnapping, also concerned an older man obsessed with a 12-year-old girl. And many of *Lolita*'s plot points—for example, Humbert marrying Lolita's widowed mother to get closer to the child—can also be found in *The Gift* (1938), in which one of the characters has an idea for a book: "An old dog—but still in his prime, fiery, thirsting for happiness—gets to know a widow, and she has a daughter, still quite a little girl."

But for Weinman, Nabokov's brief reference to Horner doesn't acknowledge the way that her case was, as she puts it, "seeded" into the narrative of the novel. One of La Salle's aliases, Fogg, is the name of a character in Nabokov's screenplay for the film adaptation of *Lolita*, she notes, and she also points to the similarities in the names Camden and Ramsdale (the fictional New England town where Humbert first meets Lolita) and Linden and Lawn (the streets on which Horner and Lolita grew up)—though I'm not sure if, in either of these cases, there is much of a similarity.

One wonders why Weinman decided to frame the writing of *Lolita* and the issue of literary inspiration as a true-crime story at all. By making Nabokov the suspect under investigation, Weinman enacts a hostility toward what many would consider a standard feature of literary fiction: drawing inspiration, however loosely or tightly, from life. In one chapter, she finds a note in Nabokov's papers that contains details of Horner's kidnapping and La Salle's arrest and describes it as if it were a smoking gun. "Here, in this notecard, is proof that Nabokov knew of the Sally Horner case," Weinman writes. Yes, it is, but much more so is the direct mention of Horner and La Salle in the text of the novel. When it comes to these chapters on the writing of *Lolita*, one finds it hard not to feel that Weinman has perhaps overindulged the true-crime framework and found a transgression where most readers would not.

Weinman's book grew out of an article she wrote for the Canadian magazine *Hazlitt*. In a strange turn of events, that piece, like those newspaper clippings about the Horner case, also sparked a novel, T. Greenwood's *Rust and Stardust* (a reference to a line from *Lolita*), a fictionalized retelling of Horner's life and abduction. One of Nabokov's favorite themes was the double, so this concurrence—and the fact Weinman reviewed the novel for *Vanity Fair*—seems fitting.

For Weinman, Greenwood's book provokes a set of questions similar to those raised by *Lolita*. What responsibility, she asks in her review, do artists have to the real

people whose pain they fictionalize? What are the ethics of fiction when it comes to drawing from true-life stories of trauma and loss? Curiously, Weinman's answer here is very different from the one found in her book. "When a novel is based on an actual crime, it should do much more than loosely fictionalize it. The novel must stand alone as a work of art that justifies using the story for its own purposes," she concludes. I think it's safe to say this is precisely the standard that Nabokov meets in *Lolita*. The book does stand on its own—and has for decades.

But if we accept Weinman's thesis that fiction still needs to justify itself, then I would argue that *Lolita*—in demonstrating the way an elegantly crafted narrative can mask atrocity—does exactly that. Nabokov's lifelong fascination with obfuscation, artifice, unreliable narrators, and, yes, denials of influence has been characterized (often derogatorily) as art for art's sake, a kind of detached, apolitical aestheticism. Yet what lesson could be more politically urgent than understanding the potency of untruths and subverted realities? For this reason, I have always read *Lolita*—especially Humbert's stylized narration—as a peek into the inner workings of self-delusion, which, regardless of Nabokov's intent, is a useful lens through which to understand the darkest corners of the human mind.

There have been a few attempts to find the definitive source material for *Lolita*, including earlier efforts to trace the connections between Horner and the novel. One such attempt that Weinman profiles in her book is a 1963 article titled "*Lolita* Has a Secret—Shhh!" by the freelance journalist Peter Welding, which appeared in a men's magazine called *Nugget*. When a reporter for the *New York Post* read it, he sent a letter to Nabokov asking for a response. The reporter got one, but from Véra Nabokov, the author's wife. "At the time he was writing LOLITA," she wrote, "he studied a considerable number of case histories ('real' stories) many of which have more affinities with the LOLITA plot than the one mentioned by Mr. Welding."

Indeed, by means of the novel, Vladimir Nabokov was able to do what fiction lets a writer do: fold countless stories into a single narrative. *Lolita* tells stories about America and sex beyond the confines of a single case. Through them, we are shown a canvas of depravity and the kind of culture that allows it. Sally Horner's story, told in such rich, researched detail by Weinman, no doubt brings us closer to a reckoning with that culture. But so too does *Lolita*. ■

CÉSAR BERRÍOS

TAKING IT BACK

Ileana Cabra's songs for a revolution

by JULYSSA LOPEZ

On July 25, 1978, Puerto Rican independence activists Carlos Enrique Soto-Arriví and Arnaldo Darío Rosado-Torres took a taxi driver hostage and ordered him to drive to Cerro Maravilla, a mountain in central Puerto Rico. They planned to sabotage a TV tower there to protest the imprisonment of several Puerto Rican nationalists—an idea that had been encouraged by Alejandro González Malavé, whom the two men believed to be a fellow organizer. In fact, González Malavé was an undercover cop, and when the pair reached Cerro Maravilla, the police were waiting. Soto-Arriví and Rosado-Torres were ambushed and murdered execution-style as they begged for mercy on their knees. They were 18 and 24, respectively.

The Puerto Rican and US Justice departments initially held that the officers acted in self-defense, but later investigations exposed a possible conspiracy and a cover-up by both governments. Last year, when Puerto Rican singer Ileana Cabra (aka iLe) began composing her second album, *Almadura*, the police executions of Soto-Arriví and Rosado-Torres were on her mind as she began revisiting the glaring moments of injustice that Puerto Rico has experienced as a US-controlled territory, all while grappling with how her home has been brutally mismanaged and neglected

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by the Trump administration since Hurricane Maria hit.

Just after the 40th anniversary of the murders, Cabra released *Almadura*'s first single, "Odio" ("Hate"), along with a video that retraces the Cerro Maravilla killings in bloody detail. The song sets the tone for the entire album, as Cabra urges, "*Que el odio se muera de hambre*" (Let hatred die of hunger). The line is delivered evenly, building to a climax in which she unleashes her rage over a bomba rhythm, a percussion-driven style that originated with the island's African slaves in the 17th century.

Bomba has a particular relationship to Puerto Rican resistance. According to scholar Salvador E. Ferreras, colonial authorities restricted bomba in the 1800s because they feared the dance form could be used as a distraction to disguise slave rebellions. After Hurricane Maria, it was especially important as an acoustic form of music, which people could play with limited electricity. "Odio" becomes a thundering protest, and it reflects *Almadura*'s bellicose spirit. Even the album's title is a symbol of defiance. "Armadura" means "armor" in Spanish; however, the pronunciation of the letter "r" in Puerto Rico often makes the word sound like *alma dura*, which translates roughly as "hard soul" or "strong soul."

Such a forthright release isn't a total surprise coming from Cabra, who was an outspoken figure in the sweeping July protests that led disgraced Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló to step down. The now 30-year-old singer got her start as a part-time vocalist for Calle 13, the often political reggaeton and hip-hop duo made up of her two older brothers, René Pérez Joglar and Eduardo José Cabra Martínez (also known, respectively, as Residente and Visitante). In 2016, Cabra released *iLevitable*, a surprising solo debut filled with old-school boleros and traces of boogaloo. Her voice, deep and baroque, was a time warp to the Spanish-language singers of the 1950s and '60s, and the album's ability to pack a bit of nostalgia into contemporary pop won it a Grammy in 2017.

But the stakes have changed completely on Cabra's sophomore effort. *iLevitable* was primarily interested in romance and longing, and the tender songwriting showed off the emotive qualities of her voice. In a post-Maria world, the idea of heartbreak means something different in Puerto Rico; the Category 4 hurricane inflicted infrastructure damage that led to the second-largest blackout in recorded history, an official death toll of 2,975 (an adjusted number, after the Puerto Rican government reported a mere 69 deaths), and political unrest as residents demanded more from their representatives. On *Almadura*, Cabra returns to the traditional arrangements and genres that she featured on her debut album, only this time she uses the sounds of the past to help her reckon with the horror of the present.

While Cabra's messages are incisive, she doesn't mention the United States or the US government by name in her lyrics. Still, her songs teem with references to oppression and colonization. On "Contra Todo" ("Against Everything"), she sings about a stolen territory that wants to be free: "*Soy el terreno invadido / Naturaleza robada / Soy pensamiento indebido / Grito de voz silenciada*" (I am the invaded land / Nature robbed / I am a dangerous thought / A screaming voice silenced). Her voice is steady as she launches into the declarative chorus, "*Quieren verme caer / Pero daré bien la talla / Atravesar la muralla / Voy contra todo pa defender*" (They want to see me fall / But I'll stand tall / Breach the wall / I'll go against everything in order to defend).

Her frustration isn't limited to how Puerto Rico has been ravaged by external forces. Much of the album centers on Puerto Ricans' finding strength among themselves, a theme Cabra detailed while speaking to *Rolling Stone* last year. "It makes me feel a little sad that we as Puerto Ricans are still waiting for someone or something to help us," she said. "We need to recognize that we can help ourselves, together; not only as Puerto Ricans but as a human race." Ideas of self-sufficiency, solidarity, and autonomy surface again on the album, as Cabra questions the island's internal problems.

On "Ñe Ñe Ñé," which roughly translates as "Blah Blah Blah," Cabra takes on the Puerto Rican debt crisis. The island's $123 billion bankruptcy—comprising approximately $74 billion in debt and $49 billion in unresolved pension liabilities—was spurred by lax Wall Street policies, the powerful influence of investment banks, and a lack of federal regulation that encouraged Puerto Rico's destructive practice of borrowing money through the sale of faulty bonds. These economic woes are a result of Puerto Rico's status as a US territory; however, Cabra briefly examines the role of ineffectual leadership on the island and the way it contributed to the catastrophe. "*Endeudados hasta el ñó / Con gente que no es de aquí / Después de acabar con tó / Ponen cara de yo no fui*," she sings. (Indebted to the eyeballs / To people not from here / After finishing everything off / They act innocent.) Later, she fumes, "*Nadie se limpie las manos / Que aquí todos son culpables*" (No one wash your hands / Because here everyone is guilty"). The line is prescient in light of Rosselló's resignation, which came after leaked messages among the then-governor and his advisers showed him mocking Hurricane Maria survivors, using homophobic language, and calling a female politician a "whore."

Cabra also wrestles with Puerto Rico's epidemic of violence against women, which led to mass protests at the end of 2018—a year in which 51 women were murdered, nearly half by their domestic partners. On a slow-brewing bolero called "Temes," she reframes aggression as a symptom of male fear and fragility; the song, she says, was guided by her belief that "'machismo' is…a weak and horrifying reaction of fear." An accompanying video sees her appearing in the role of a woman who has just been raped on the street. Lying on the pavement, she wonders coldly why she's an object of fear when "*Todo lo que hago, es un pecado / Pero si tú lo tienes todo controlado*" (Everything I do is a sin / But you have it all under control). The delivery is subtle, but Cabra's lyrics are a sarcastic echo of the excuses that society makes for gender-based violence. "Why do you fear me?" she sings. "What are you afraid of?"

She is a careful writer, and her methods are less showy than those of, say, her former bandmate Residente, who joined forces with the rapper Bad Bunny to mobilize Puerto Ricans and boost the public demonstrations that led to Rosselló's ouster. Both rappers had tackled island politics in their music and on social media. Issues of gender violence and post-Maria anxieties surfaced in Bad Bunny's debut, *X 100Pre*; notably, he encouraged his people to stay optimistic on "Estamos Bien," an anthem of hope that has drawn comparisons to Kendrick Lamar's "Alright." During the protests, he teamed up with Residente for "Afilando los Cuchillos," or "Sharpening the Knives," a ferocious rebuke of Rosselló that featured Cabra's writing and vocals in a chorus that urges Puerto Ricans to come together.

Cabra's tone, on both "Afilando los Cuchillos" and *Almadura*, evokes history and takes inspiration from the island's

pro-independence thinkers from previous generations. Lyrics like the ones in "Contra Todo," with their image-driven natural descriptions and calls to fight back, seem to descend from the literary styles of revolutionaries like Juan Antonio Corretjer, whose epic poems were integral to the island's socially conscious and politically free-thinking *neocriollismo* movement. Cabra's writerly approach isn't as boisterous or as outwardly provocative as the work that Calle 13 became known for, but it's not any less stirring.

If there's one place the new album falters, it's in its diversity of sound. Cabra's debut established her nostalgic approach to making music, and hearing her revisit boogaloo and bolero can feel repetitive the second time around. Songs like "Invencible" and "Sin Masticar" use colors we've seen her paint with before—they're reminiscent of "Te Quiero con Bugalú" on the first album—and they keep the record from making any bold leaps into contemporary pop sounds. *Almadura* includes a major collaboration with the legendary salsa pianist Eddie Palmieri, but despite the impressive musicality of their partnership, it's a slice of the album that only proves how much Cabra chases the past more than she looks forward.

Almadura could have done more to link tradition to the present by blending the roots-oriented sounds that Cabra loves with the radical pop experiments exploding across all genres of Spanish-language music. The producer Trooko has sprinkled electronic beats onto the project, but they're often eclipsed by heavy classical arrangements. A breakthrough comes on "Tu Rumba," a song built on a slowed-down bomba rhythm. Toward the end, a burst of synths begins to pulse through the melody, like a transmission from another planet. The production introduces a flash of modernity that could have taken the project further and made it as innovative as it is emotional. A sense of the current moment seems especially lacking, given the timeliness of the thematic content.

Still, *Almadura* is a proud and sturdy record of resistance, serving as the wind-up before Cabra unleashed her fury on the global stage amid Puerto Rico's historic political uprising. Cabra throws herself into the cycle of trauma and healing and in the process reaches profound new depths as both an artist and a witness of history. The album becomes not only a mirror of Puerto Rico's courage and resilience but a testament to Cabra's own power as well. ■

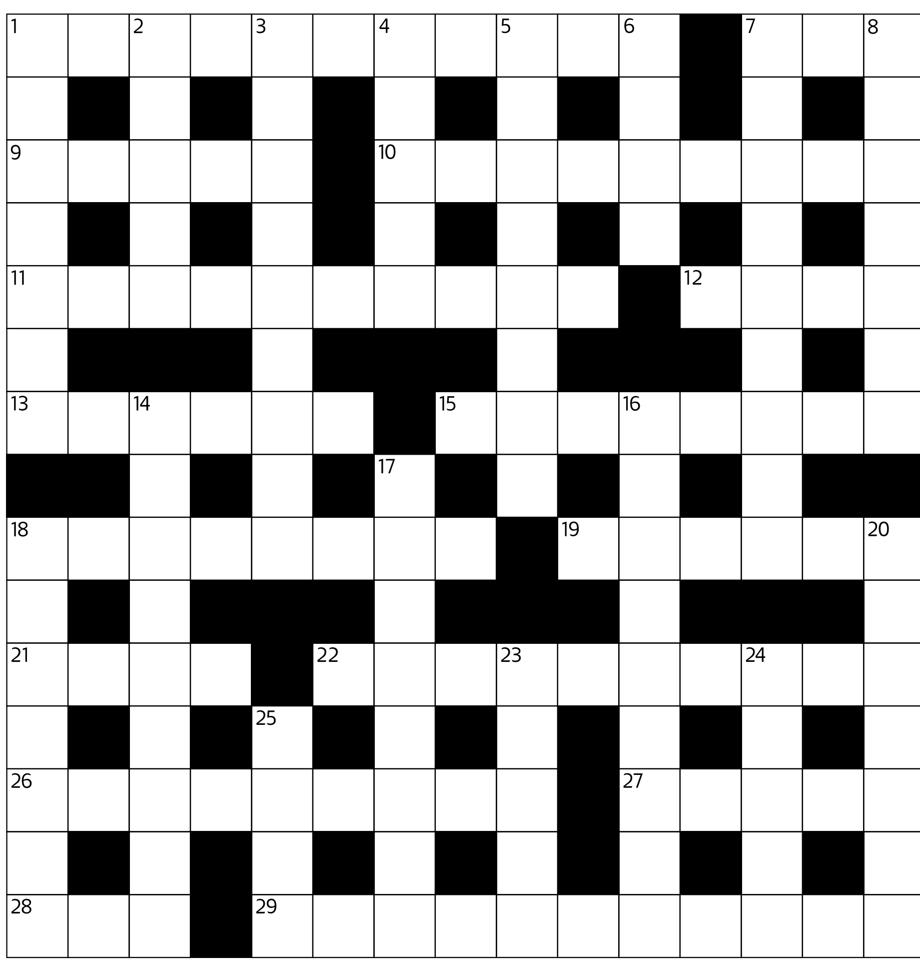
Everyone Is Acting as if We're Not Temporary, And I Am Falling Apart in the Privacy of My Own Home

When he said, *Sometimes we learn the most*
from losing, I think how often I've been bamboozled
by life, how I've dropped a quarter in a slot machine
and instead of cherries got coffins. *Got death?*
Yeah, I've seen the grim reaper wander
my neighborhood in a Chanel suit and a diamond
studded scythe because we all want to be overdressed
for the afterlife, we all want to believe
there is a special place for us. But when I watched
the body of my nana fade into thinness I thought
please let me leave early—in a plane crash, car accident,
a lightning bolt, don't let me hold on so long
I am a body longing for someone to text it
—*hey babe, I'm kind of into you.* To say, *I miss you*
even though I don't visit. Death and we butt dial
the wrong person. Death on a good drunk
of port. Once I remember my dad saying,
You are worth more than you think, as I always sold myself
off at a discount and I wish I didn't, I wish I didn't
say how much I hurt on social media
but sometimes I just want to believe I'm not alone
like how we're all doing cartwheels on life's grass
until someone lands in a sinkhole, until one of us
decides it's late and the streetlights
are telling us it's time to return back home.

KELLI RUSSELL AGODON

Puzzle No. 3508

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

1 Republican put off? That's too bad (11)

7 and **28** Toy weapon suitable for older kids: uranium engulfed in fire (3,3)

9 Renewable power to fly around lake (5)

10 Like a brother reflecting a canine expression almost entirely (9)

11 Actor is a gas (5,5)

12 Declare Northern capital for a goddess (4)

13 The Spanish continue into a body of water (6)

15 Snake found outside capital of Tanzania (country in Africa) (8)

18 Flower of a certain kind overturned (8)

19 Leave an arid region (6)

21 Famous dog, child, and hoop (4)

22 Deny C-note is counterfeit (10)

26 Lusts after missing leader and gets too warm (9)

27 Distributed guiltily in the center, behind a bunch of narcs (5)

28 See 7A

29 Corruptly elect fop who quickly vanished, like part of the wordplay in seven Across entries (4,3,4)

DOWN

1 Alternatively, set up terrific place to land a UFO? (7)

2 Foe of 21 starts to groan under large crashed house (5)

3 Flynn mostly no use when inebriated? Wrong! (9)

4 Rum inside? What a fiasco (5)

5 Boat's figurehead to go without spar that might be recovered after a crash (5,3)

6 I had spoken and observed (4)

7 Join 100 and 12, frolicking in front of entryway (9)

8 Look after the old man with a stumblebum (7)

14 Upset, we get on without live mediator (2-7)

16 Bolt hooked second half in seat (9)

17 Make self-driving, say, for car pool partner? (8)

18 Chart-topper ("Thong") is playing (3,4)

20 Peg, in harbor, brought up cradle location (7)

23 Receiver is against breaking up holiday (2,3)

24 In Homer, a towering inspiration to poets (5)

25 Compare capturing that man and a cook (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3507

ACROSS **1** "site" **4** S + AIL + B(O)ATS (rev.) **9** anag. **10** AB(OD)E **11** [p]ROOF **12** OC + CASIO + NAL (rev.) **14** S + KIN + RASH **15, 18, 5D** & **21D** anag. **19** anag. **22** IM + PORT + ANCE (anag.) **24** hidden **26** "carrot" **27** anag. **28** T(REEL)I + NED (rev.) **29** TIM + I'D

DOWN **1** letter bank **2** G(REGOR)IAN[t] (*roger* rev.) **3** anag. **4** S'YRAC (rev.) + USE **6** B + [d]RAZIL + NUTS (rev.) **7** A + CO + RN **8** S(HELL)AC **13** P + REMA(RITA)L (*La Mer* rev.) **16** MAE + L + S'TROM (rev.) **17** GOD(C)HILD (*bid gold* anag.) **18** 2 defs. **20** S(MA'S)HED **23** PUR(S)E **25** alternate letters

S	I	G	H	T		S	A	I	L	B	O	A	T	S
U		R		A		Y		C		R		C		H
B	R	E	A	K	F	R	E	E		A	B	O	D	E
U		G		E		A		M		Z		R		L
R	O	O	F		O	C	C	A	S	I	O	N	A	L
B		R		P		U		N		L				A
S	K	I	N	R	A	S	H		A	N	E	M	I	C
		A		E		E		G		U		A		
C	I	N	E	M	A		C	O	A	T	L	E	S	S
R				A		C		D		S		L		M
I	M	P	O	R	T	A	N	C	E		U	S	D	A
C		U		I		M		H		A		T		S
K	A	R	A	T		E	D	I	N	B	U	R	G	H
E		S		A		I		L		E		O		E
T	R	E	E	L	I	N	E	D		T	I	M	I	D

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