

TONI MORRISON'S COSMOS || THE MEDICAID EFFECT

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BRYCE COVERT

THE Nation.

DEC. 30, 2019 / JAN. 6, 2020

IMPEACHMENT

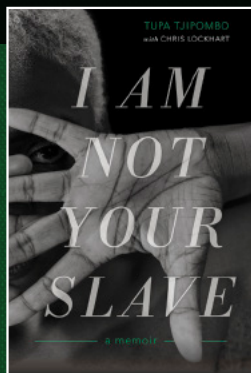
Needs to Move to the Streets

Mass protests
can turn a Beltway
scandal into an effective
anti-Trump weapon

JEET HEER



A shocking memoir
from a human
trafficking survivor.



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Letters

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Debating Biden

I agree with the assessments in the editorial “Against Biden” [November 25] that Joe Biden is weak and distracting as a candidate and that we should be grateful to have a wider lane of progressive candidates than we’ve had in the past. So it’s disturbing that, according to polls and interviews, many people with sympathies for the progressive candidates are inclined toward Biden or one of the other centrists because they think those are safer bets for defeating Donald Trump. But that evaluation may well prove wrong.

A poll is needed that asks people which candidate they favor without regard to any estimate of electability. If more people prefer the progressives than emerges in the current polling, then broadcasting that finding might persuade voters to vote for their true choice.

SUSAN SUGARMAN
PRINCETON, N.J.

So in 2016, Hillary Clinton was bad, and Bernie Sanders was great—and *The Nation* and others with a similar bent (which I share) attacked her during the nominating process. Then she won the nomination, after which came a grudging acceptance, especially as progressives realized the disaster that awaited if the Republican won. The Republican won, and it has been a disaster.

It would be nice if *The Nation* had learned from that experience that you do not attack the Democratic candidate you disagree with. You lay out how other candidates have better positions while explaining that those you find disagreeable are still better than Trump’s. But *The Nation* has learned nothing from 2016. Then again, many of my fellow lefty Democrats didn’t learn anything from 1968, 1980, 1988, or 2000 either. So perhaps as you criticize Biden for making the same errors over and over again, you might want to look in the mirror.

MICHAEL GREEN
LAS VEGAS

Andrew Yang’s Fuzzy Math

It is unfortunate that my friend John Nichols seems to have bought Andrew Yang’s upside-down understanding of the economy [“Yang Isn’t Ready,” December 2/9]. Yang’s basic story is that we are facing a massive wave of unemployment due to the spread of automation and artificial intelligence. This is a story in which we are seeing enormous increases in productivity, as we can now produce the same output with many fewer hours of work or, alternatively, can produce hugely more output with the same number of hours of work. The basic problem with this story is that all the evidence points in the opposite direction.

Rather than being a period of exceptional productivity growth, the years since 2005 have been a time of extraordinarily weak productivity growth. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, productivity growth has averaged just 1.3 percent annually over the last 14 years. That compares with 3.0 percent annually in the long golden age from 1947 to 1973 and again from 1995 to 2005.

Not only is it flat-out wrong to claim that we are seeing a massive displacement of labor by technology; there is no reason to think that workers would be suffering if we did. The high-productivity-growth years from 1947 to 1973 were ones of rapid wage gains and low unemployment.

Basically, Yang has gotten everything wrong. It’s as though we had a major presidential candidate warning us about the dangers of global cooling. He is wrong on both the economy’s problems and his proposed solution.

DEAN BAKER
Senior Economist
Center for Economic and Policy Research
WASHINGTON

letters@thenation.com

Trump's Hunger Games

Donald Trump's plutocratic administration has been promising to "reform" the food stamp program for months. In early December it announced that the first of these changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program will kick in next spring, when nearly 700,000 people will lose their

SNAP benefits. If the administration goes ahead with other proposed changes—such as removing from the rolls those with household savings or assets—millions more will have their benefits slashed or withdrawn entirely. And nearly 1 million children will lose automatic access to free or low-cost school lunches.

This attack on the social safety net is nothing new. Bill Clinton introduced strict work requirements when he signed the welfare "reform" bill of 1996: Although mainly remembered for creating the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, the legislation also sets time limits on access to food stamps for the able-bodied, though it allows states to grant waivers during economic downturns.

In the wake of the 2008 crash, so many people hit the skids financially that Barack Obama's administration loosened restriction so that more impoverished people could enroll in the food stamp program. After the Great Recession, many states continued to grant waivers, allowing non-working able-bodied adult residents to claim SNAP benefits. The reason was that, even if a particular county had a low unemployment rate, it could still have clusters of high unemployment, including among people without the necessary transportation or child care. Those are the waivers the Trump administration is now rescinding.

Deficit hawks in the GOP have long yearned to extend the workfare requirement to SNAP and Medicaid. Until the recent election of a Democratic governor, Kentucky was working to introduce a workfare pilot program for Medicaid. These changes are pitched in terms of fairness, the idea being that in today's economy, with its low unemployment rate, anyone who is healthy should have no problem finding a job and thus shouldn't need taxpayer-funded benefits. Yet even in our supposedly booming economy, upward of 5 million people are unemployed, and there are over a million more who have gotten so

frustrated with fruitless job searching that they have stopped looking and are thus statistically invisible when unemployment is calculated.

Many of these people would love to work but lack the education or skills needed to function in our high-tech economy—the result, in part, of decades of grievous underinvestment in public education and vocational training, especially for minority communities. Many others suffer from serious physical or mental ailments that make it difficult for them to work. Yet because of huge inequities in our access to health care, they can't see the doctors who would provide the diagnoses and paperwork needed to keep them eligible for public benefits. Taking away these people's food stamps will not increase their chances of finding employment, but it will increase the likelihood that they and their families go hungry.

Perhaps the biggest indictment of the Trump administration's values is that this "reform" stresses that those who work will retain eligibility for food stamps. Think about that: In a country as wealthy as the United States, the government accepts that many workers will receive paychecks so puny that the state will have to step in to help their families avoid hunger. Yet the Senate still refuses to raise the federal minimum wage, GOP-run state governments resist increasing their minimum wages, and the US labor secretary remains dismissive of the very idea of a minimum wage. The result? Taxpayers pick up the tab by subsidizing, through public benefits, the scandalously low wages paid by corporate behemoths like Walmart, which receives tax breaks that benefit the company's owners, not its workers. Bashing the poor while protecting the rich is the defining trait of this faux-populist administration, and its new food stamp policy is just the latest example of this sadistic impulse.

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BY THE
NUMBERS

\$338K

Cost per year to house an inmate in New York City's jails

161%

Increase in the annual cost to jail a person in New York City over the past decade

42%

Increase in use-of-force incidents and allegations in New York City's jails this fiscal year

1.44M

Total state and federal prison population in the United States in 2017

162K

Number of prisoners in the US serving life sentences in 2016; in 1984 that number was 34,000

6x

Estimated incarceration rate in the US for black men born in 2001 compared with white men born the same year

0

Number of countries that incarcerate people at a higher rate than the US does

—Shirley Nwangwa

Offshoring Asylum

The cruel new plan to send asylum seekers far, far away.

Just before Thanksgiving, the Trump administration began carrying out one of its strangest and most callous policies to date: sending would-be asylees who show up at the US-Mexico border to Guatemala under what it calls a “safe third country” agreement.

The United States forged this deportation pact with Guatemala largely in secret and is working to implement similar agreements with the governments of such balmy destinations as Honduras and El Salvador and, if the US gets its way, Mexico and Panama. The idea behind the policy is that asylum seekers ought to seek refuge in the first country they pass through on the way to their final destination. It's comparable to the European Union's Dublin regulation, which requires migrants' asylum claims to be processed in the nation of their first port of entry—and it's no coincidence that both place a disproportionate burden on the regions' peripheral, southern, and poorer states.

Unlike the EU countries of first resort, though, there's nothing safe about the places Trump is sending people to. Far from it. These are states that large numbers of people routinely flee in order to escape violence, poverty, and unrest in their own right. The point is not—and never was—safety. What the agreement does is make it virtually impossible for anyone from Latin America to seek asylum in this country, thereby reducing legal immigration to the US to the bare minimum.

The temptation to slam the door on unwanted populations—let them land where they may—has a long and brutish history in our country and elsewhere. In theory, this was supposed to have changed after World War II, when the nations of the world came up with systems to ensure they would do better for those threatened and displaced by war. The idea was simple: People have “the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution,” in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and should not be sent back to a country where they would face such persecution. The problem is that many states don't really want to take in the world's victimized and persecuted, not if they're poor and, increasingly, not if they're black or brown. So nations come up with work-arounds, sketchy adaptations like Trump's “safe” third-country agreements, to avoid the legal scaffolds the international community built to ensure that displaced, persecuted, and stateless people would not face the same horrors as they did in the first half of the 20th century.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the US has been adept at pioneering these kinds of end runs around its international obligations. There are plenty of instances from which to pick, but one that resonates is the decision by George H.W. Bush's administration to turn the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba into a prison for Haitians seeking

asylum, several hundred of them HIV positive, rather than allow them to pursue their applications here. It was an early blatant attempt to offshore asylum obligations and a preview of what was to come around the world.

Today, Australia sends migrants to islands it rents from the (ostensibly independent) nations of Nauru and Papua New Guinea for the sole purpose of mass detentions. The European Union strikes multi-million-euro deals with the Libyan coast guard and its violent militias to prevent migrants from making the trip across the Mediterranean. From 2015 to early 2018, Israel deported 1,700 Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers to Uganda—a move Amnesty International characterized as a way for Israel “to abdicate its responsibility towards the refugees and asylum-seekers under its jurisdiction and shift it to less wealthy countries with bigger refugee populations.”

If there's a link that connects these many examples, beyond the evident cruelty, it is the way they exploit novel technicalities in the international legal order. They also reflect bigger social and geopolitical currents that have seen our societies grow more financialized, globalized, and individualistic. People aren't necessarily being sent back to the places they came from or to set locations where they're expected to start anew alongside others from their communities; rather, they're being dumped in countries they might never have known, with people they might never have met and whose language they might never have learned. That speaks to how interchangeable Honduras and Guatemala look to Beltway officials. The assumption is that all South and Central Americans are somehow the same, so it matters little which “shithole” (to quote the president) they are sent to.

Moreover, these scenarios turn sovereign territory into a trading chip: Powerful countries can essentially strong-arm weaker states into doing the things they would rather avoid on their own turf. The United States ropes Honduras or El Salvador into fulfilling our international obligations, and those countries don't have the resources or the clout to say no.

The most extreme example of this kind I've encountered takes the dystopia of third-country deportations almost to the level of science fiction. When I was reporting my book, *The Cosmopolites*, in 2014, I met a stateless activist who had spent the first three decades of his life in the United Arab Emirates state of Ajman. After signing a pro-democracy petition that upset the Emirati government, he was thrown in prison and, after being given a “choice” among a handful of places, was deported to... Thailand.

At the time, I assumed this man was an outlier, the victim of a strange set of circumstances that could occur only in a repressive Gulf monarchy. Now I'm not so sure. If the Trump administration expands its “safe”—or is it “arbitrary”?—third-country agreements against the warnings of human rights groups and international lawyers, it will set a precedent that will inevitably lead to

(continued on page 8)

These resettlement agreements aren't born of goodwill and diplomacy.

COMMENT



On the Art of Finishing a Novel

Two 20th century giants who got the job done.

At the heart of the new Kurt Vonnegut book, *Pity the Reader: On Writing with Style*, is this letter from Vonnegut to the Chilean novelist José Donoso. The two men were in the midst of writing the great novel of their careers. But Donoso had informed Vonnegut that he was abandoning his book, despairing that he could ever finish it. Vonnegut replied to his friend and colleague with extraordinary generosity, urging him to cast off his despair

and soldier on in the name of honoring the writer he was when he began it 10 years earlier. It is possible that this letter made a difference to them both: Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* would be published two years later, Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night* a year after that—each changing the course of literary history. As Suzanne McConnell, the coauthor of *Pity the Reader*, notes, the key words here are “Be not afraid.”

Helsinki
October 22, 1967

Dear Jose— Dear Maria Pilar*—

Here I am, smug to be in someplace as queer as Helsinki. These people are raging, reeling drunk when the sun goes down. My companion, an old war buddy, is the District Attorney of North[h]ampton County, Pennsylvania. I would never have made it to Dresden if I hadn't had a lawyer along. It was an extremely difficult visa to get. Still, when we got there, we found “007,” James Bond's code name, of course, scrawled on the walls of men's rooms everywhere.

We were royally hosed by a communist travel agency. For about \$300, they sold us tickets and hotel accommodations which would supposedly entitle us to a six-day trip from Berlin to Warsaw to Leningrad. When we tried to take the trip, we weren't even allowed to board the train in Berlin, the papers were so bungled. We tried to get our money back, and they laughed, and they told us to take a flying fuck at the moon. Which we more or less did. We flew to Hamburg and thence to here. Tomorrow (Monday), we will try to get to Leningrad again. It is now only sixty miles away. English doesn't work here. Neither do French or German.

This October is, of course, the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, so Leningrad should be sensational. East Germany is pretending to be hilarious about those fifty years, too. Skirts are short everywhere.

And what is really on my mind now is your having abandoned *The Bird*. I find this intolerable and absurd: Donoso should not abandon Donoso. Why despise yourself ten years ago. I'm certain that man was a charming writer, too, as much entitled to a hearing as you are.

I will as[k] a crude question: Do you need an ending? If so, let's make one up immediately, as a crass favor to the man you used to be. Let us be his literary executors. Has he said enough in his thousand pages (great God!) to permit us to end in the middle of a sentence? You simply must have an outsider read what you have done. I don't trust your moods at all, except where friendship is concerned. I wish you had learned more about mental hygiene from Vance [Bourjaily]. If he had written one thousand pages, he would have damn well divided those pages into four equal stacks and sold those stacks one-by-one to the Literary Guild. Nobody is writing any better than you are these days. Be not afraid.

We will of course see a lot more of each other before we're jailed as dirty old men. I want to live in Europe for a year or more—probably starting in 1969. We will probably live in Hamburg. I was startled to find myself at home there. My Irish friend felt the same way, which means that the congeniality of the city is at least slightly universal.

Give my love to my wife, in case you see her.

Cheers—
Kurt Vonnegut

*Donoso's wife

From Pity the Reader: On Writing with Style by Kurt Vonnegut and Suzanne McConnell, courtesy of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University, reprinted with permission from Seven Stories Press.

You can read another excerpt from Pity the Reader, on making a living as a writer, at TheNation.com/Vonnegut.

TRANSPORTATION

A Fair Fare

Kansas City, Missouri, is set to become the first major US city to offer free public transit for all. In a unanimous vote in early December, the City Council passed a resolution that, if implemented, will eliminate the \$1.50 fare on all public buses.

While a number of US cities have considered similar ideas as a way to increase ridership, reduce congestion, and improve air quality, so far only Kansas City has been willing to give up funding transit through its passengers.

Instead, cities across the country are doing the opposite. In San Francisco, after the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported in March that tickets for fare evasion rarely get paid, teams of police officers and fare inspectors filled train stations for weeks. (The *Chronicle* described the move as a “blitz”; transit officials called it “strategic saturation.”) In New York City, an additional 500 police officers were deployed across the subway system by Governor Andrew Cuomo this summer.

These moves to police the poor have been met with local backlash. In New York hundreds, probably thousands, of people marched through the streets in November, and organizers expect to keep the protests going until the additional policing ends.

The city manager of Kansas City still needs to find \$8 million in the budget to fund free public transit before it becomes a reality, but the City Council is confident it will happen soon. “I want to do it because it’s the right thing to do,” said Councilman Eric Bunch, who cosponsored the measure. “I believe that people have a right to move about this city.” —Molly Minta



Eric Alterman



Inequality and the City

Michael Bloomberg was a terrible mayor. Why is the media so obsessed?

Politically speaking, former New York mayor and 77-year-old billionaire Michael Bloomberg is in nowhereville, polling around 5 percent and with the highest negative ratings of anyone in the Democratic presidential primary. Yet he’s everywhere in the media. According to data from Newship, which tracks social network activity, the tens of millions of dollars that he has dumped into the race have bought him more social media interactions for his announcement than Amy Klobuchar, Andrew Yang, Julián Castro, and Tom Steyer have enjoyed since they entered the race. Just the rumor that Bloomberg was considering running, according to the nonprofit Internet Archive, got him more attention on cable news shows in a single day than any other candidates besides Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. In November, cable news mentioned him more than any other candidates save for Biden and Elizabeth Warren.

The coverage has occasionally focused on Bloomberg’s billions, his obscure comments about women, and his erstwhile commitment to a draconian stop-and-frisk policy for the city’s police that targeted black and Latino neighborhoods and was later determined to be not only ineffective but also unconstitutional. There has also been some attention to the fact that Bloomberg recently devoted some of his financial munificence to help ensure that Republicans maintained their US Senate majority: In 2016 he spent nearly \$12 million to persuade Pennsylvanians to reelect Senator Pat Toomey, a Republican who supports background checks for all gun sales but who is otherwise your standard-issue, Trump-supporting conservative.

Even so, Bloomberg’s base in the mainstream media remains rock solid. All those donations to cultural institutions and mildly reformist organizations have created a near-perfect profile for the economically conservative, socially liberal punditocracy. In November, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman explained that he was “glad Bloomberg may enter the race, because he will forcefully put a Democratic pro-growth, pro-innovation, pro-business agenda on the table, while also pushing ahead on major social issues.”

This same narrative plays out when pundits discuss Bloomberg’s 12-year mayoralty. *The Nation’s*

editors called his tenure a “mix of technocratic efficiency and top-down urbanism,” which many in the media view as a model for how the federal government should be run. But that perception is wrong: Bloomberg was a terrible mayor, especially for the city’s nonwealthy residents.

New York’s biggest problem is affordable housing. Every year during his tenure, the city lost thousands of rent-stabilized apartments to market rates that were often double what tenants had been paying. Bloomberg’s solution was to encourage the building and purchase of luxury housing—often by people who couldn’t be bothered to show up at their luxury investment properties. “The way to help those who are less fortunate,” he explained, “is, number one, to attract more very fortunate people.... Wouldn’t it be great if we could get all the Russian billionaires to move here?”

According to housing researchers Benjamin Dulchin, Moses Gates, and Barika Williams, the Bloomberg administration “left affordable housing out of the picture entirely, projecting a large increase in population but ignoring the near certainty that a large share of those additional New Yorkers would be unable to afford market-rate housing.” From 2000 to 2012, the number of housing units in New York City rose by less than 6 percent, a rate below all but three of the 22 largest cities in the United States and by far the lowest among cities with growing populations. In a city where 65 percent of households live in rentals, the median rent rose 23 percent from 2002 to 2011, while incomes increased by just 2 percent.

What about public housing? Don’t even ask. Its management under Bloomberg was characterized by “incompetence and [a] lack of accountability,” according to a report by City Comptroller Scott Stringer.

The report found that in 2011 almost 80 percent of the city’s 334 public housing developments



What about public housing? Don't even ask. Its management under Mayor Bloomberg was characterized by incompetence.

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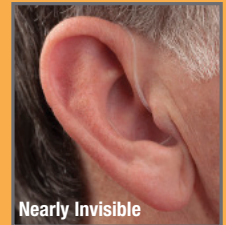
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From 2005 to 2011, the number of broken windows in New York City Housing Authority apartments increased 945 percent.

had at least one deficiency, a 20 percentage point increase since 2002. It also revealed that from 2005 to 2011, the number of broken windows in New York City Housing Authority apartments increased 945 percent, and the number of rats spotted jumped 12 percent.

Remember Superstorm Sandy? It arrived on October 29, 2012, and damaged or destroyed an estimated 69,000 homes. Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars made available by the federal and state governments, the Bloomberg administration somehow managed not to rebuild a single damaged home by the time Bill de Blasio took over on January 1, 2014. According to a long review by *The New York Times*, “the standstill... was largely attributable to the design and execution of the [disaster recovery] program by the administration of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.”

But he’s a wiz at economic development, you say. Only if you consider a living wage another luxury item. Laura Wolf-Powers, an urban studies profes-

sor at Hunter College, tallied some of the costs to lower-income communities of the mayor’s economic strategies, “While Bloomberg’s ambitious five-borough development program created new destinations and boosted job growth in some sectors, it also imposed high costs on low- and moderate-income neighborhood residents and small businesses.” The result was that, according to a 2014 study by the Women’s Center for Education and Career Advancement, fully 42 percent of New Yorkers lived in households whose incomes could not cover the cost of “housing, food, transportation, health care and other basic necessities.” To make matters worse, Bloomberg, in Trumpian fashion, ensured that New York City would be the only place in the state to refuse food stamps to people who needed them for more than three months.

Bloomberg might make an effective alternative to Trump in some respects, but this professed “nonpartisan” candidate is definitely running in the wrong primary. ■

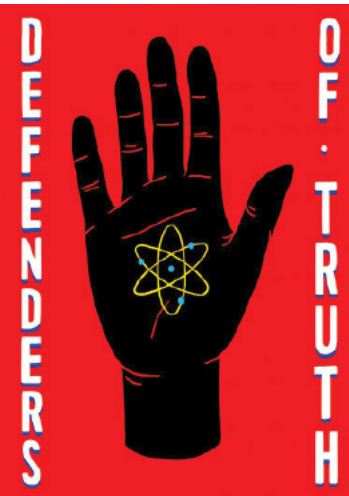
PROTEST DIY

Poster Politics

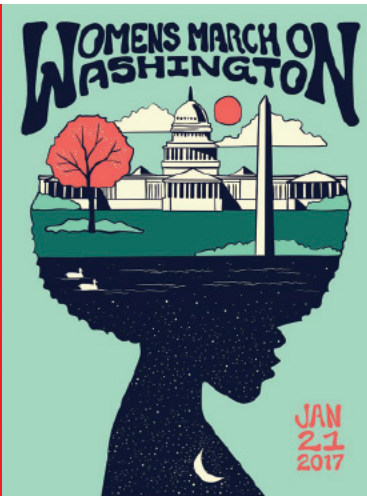
The Seattle-based design lab Amplifier says its mission is to “flip artists into activists, and observers into participants.” It does this by working with a roster of artists and grassroots organizations to create activist art that addresses such issues as climate justice, women’s rights, gun control, and the role of science in government.

Amplifier says it is trying to “rebuild an American identity rooted in equality, dignity, diversity, truth, and beauty.”

On amplifier.org, dozens of open-source posters, including the four shown below, are available and free to download. Now you’ll be able to bring world-class art to your next protest.



Gina Kiel



Kelley Wills



Shepard Fairey



Ernesto Yerena

(continued from page 4)

more of these expulsions. Poor, powerless countries will end up absorbing the world’s tired, poor, wretched, and homeless simply because they have been threatened, bribed, or otherwise compelled to do so. And people seeking a safe place to live (for reasons linked to politics, war, climate change, or personal circumstances) will be shunted to nations unable and often unwilling to give them the support they need to survive, let alone lead a good life. Because these reset-

tlement agreements aren’t born of goodwill and diplomacy, a sense of humanitarian purpose, or even noblesse oblige. They are the result of massive geopolitical economic and power imbalances that make a mockery of national sovereignty.

And that’s what makes these arrangements so contrived. The instigators of these xenophobic, anti-migrant ideologies—the Steve Bannons and Stephen Millers of the world, along with the bureaucrats and statesmen who lack the imagination

to come up with racist nonsense of their own—invariably talk a big game about restoring a world order friendly to strong borders and national sovereignty. They denounce multilateralism, internationalism, and globalization in favor of nationalistic state control.

Yet this worldview is as hypocritical as it is reprehensible. What these mercenary legal maneuvers prove is that the only borders these men really care about are their own.

ATOSSA ARAXIA ABRAHAMIAN

SOUTH AFRICA

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SIGNAL: NOISE

Fanatical State Bills

Twenty-one legislators in the Ohio House of Representatives have cosponsored HB 413, which would prohibit abortion, with no exceptions for rape or incest. The bill defines a fertilized egg as an unborn human, which presumably would make taking the morning-after pill a felony called “abortion murder,” punishable by life imprisonment. That charge could be brought against those who administer and use such pills—including girls as young as 13. The provision that has received the most attention would require doctors to implant an

ectopic pregnancy in a patient’s uterus. As many obstetricians have pointed out, this procedure is medically impossible, but if doctors don’t attempt it, they could face murder charges if the bill becomes law.

This is what now passes for serious politics in large parts of the country. It reflects attitudes that align more with the ignorance and cruelty of fundamentalist sects such as the Taliban than with the pluralist virtues of an open society.

It’s no accident that these increasingly fanatical state bills are popping up like mushrooms at a time when the federal government has turned its back on the science of climate change and when public health agencies and scientific advisory committees in Washington are being systematically stripped of influence and their findings deliberately ignored.

Read the semiweekly column “Signal:Noise” at thenation.com/signal-noise.

—Sasha Abramsky



Laila Lalami



The Danger of “Both Sides”

Zealous coverage of political point scoring doesn’t help anyone outside Washington.

The media is “biased,” the president often complains. It’s also “fake,” “lame,” “dishonest,” “the enemy.” These accusations aren’t exactly surprising, coming from a man with a long track record of lies, racism, sexual assaults, and tax evasion who clearly fears more press scrutiny of his past. What is surprising is how far many in the media are willing to go in order to prove that they’re not biased against him.

So they give space to both sides of any story, no matter what the facts show, leaving them open to manipulation by surrogates acting in bad faith and, more worrying, making it harder for ordinary citizens to remain informed and engaged.

The impeachment proceedings unfolding in the House of Representatives provide a good illustration of the danger of reporters practicing “both sides” journalism. In September, when Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced that the House would open a formal investigation of Donald Trump, *The New York Times* covered the breaking news under the headline “Impeachment Inquiry Is High-Stakes Showdown for Both Sides.”

In fact, the inquiry was opened only after weeks of hearings uncovered evidence that Trump had attempted to pressure Volodymyr Zelensky, the president of Ukraine, to investigate former vice president Joe Biden, one of Trump’s political rivals. Yet the headline made impeachment seem like an abstract game indulged in by Democrats and Republicans alike rather than a concrete remedy provided by the Constitution to address criminal behavior. (*The Times* has since removed the headline.)

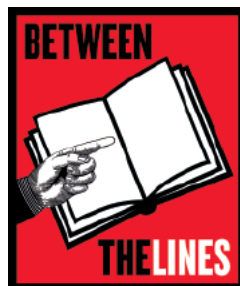
More recently, testimony from four legal scholars on the value of impeachment was somewhat eclipsed by a pun one of them made. Speaking about the historical differences between kings and presidents, Stanford University law professor Pamela Karlan pointed out that a king could do no wrong but a president was bound by law and could not, for example, grant titles of nobility. She said, “While the president can name his son Barron, he can’t make him a baron.” First lady Melania Trump took to Twitter to complain that “a minor child” had inappropriately been invoked in the hearings, a charge echoed by other Republicans. Fox News host Tucker Carlson chimed in with

insults aimed at Karlan. But this was a clear case of bad faith. The first lady, you’ll recall, wore a jacket that read “I really don’t care. Do u?” to visit a child migrant detention center on the border with Mexico at the height of the family separation crisis. Yet several media outlets dutifully covered Karlan’s pun as though it were as serious and consequential as the matters being considered by the Judiciary Committee.

Bothsidesism is hardly confined to the impeachment coverage. It happened last year during the government shutdown over funding for the border wall, a decision that Trump declared he was “proud” to make. Before long, however, pundits began placing responsibility on both parties for the standoff and urged them to come together to end it. Nor is bothsidesism restricted to this administration. The slogan “fair and balanced,” coined by former Fox News head Roger Ailes in the late 1990s, was an early indicator that false equivalence would become part of the daily news. But Trump, who has proved to be extremely savvy with social media, has benefited tremendously from it.

The truth is that most people have neither the time nor the luxury to read the newspaper from front to back or to watch television coverage all day. They have jobs to do, classes to attend, families to take care of, which means they have only a few minutes each day to catch up on what’s happening in the country. And if what the media tells them is happening seems entirely disconnected from their lives or muddled by bothsidesism, they have no reason to care. There is more to political life than the competition between the two major parties. Zealous coverage of the political points being scored by either side isn’t going to help anyone outside Washington, but it will certainly ensure that the media becomes ever more remote from the electorate it is meant to serve.

Another consequence of bothsidesism is that there are no repercussions for spreading lies and arguing in bad faith. Sean Spicer, who when he was the White House press secretary defended the



There is more to political life than the competition between the two major parties.

conspiracy theory that 3 million fraudulent votes were cast in the 2016 election, has since appeared at the Emmy Awards and on *Dancing With the Stars*. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Spicer's successor, admitted to investigators that she had lied—she called it “a slip of the tongue”—when she said that “countless” FBI agents had told her they agreed with Trump's decision to fire James Comey as the bureau's director. Sanders is now a paid Fox News contributor, is working on a memoir slated to be published next year, and is reportedly considering a run for governor of Arkansas.

In the best of times, I get frustrated with bothsidesism because it fails to properly hold policy-makers to account. But with the next presidential election less than a year away, I'm increasingly concerned about the effect it will have on all our futures. From the West Coast to the East, climate change is affecting people's lives and

livelihoods. Health care continues to be a leading cause of bankruptcy, and the number of uninsured Americans is on the rise. A white nationalist is helping to write our immigration policy. Migrant children are dying in Customs and Border Protection custody. Convicted war criminals are getting pardoned. Food stamps are being cut back. Students' college debt has passed \$1.5 trillion. By any measure, the United States today is a country in crisis, which is why engaging in bothsidesism is so dangerous.

This is not to say there isn't value in providing different perspectives on an issue. News stories are vastly enriched by the relevant context supplied by sources, experts, and observers. But to give print space or airtime to surrogates who repeat dishonest talking points or engage in bad-faith arguments only distorts that context. Handing a bullhorn to “both sides” isn't objective; it's merely relinquishing the responsibility to inform the public. ■

By any measure, the United States is a country in crisis, which is why engaging in bothsidesism is so dangerous.

SNAPSHOT / PIUS UTOMI EKPEI

Line of Fire

A federal firefighter carries a hose as he tries to put out a fire from a ruptured oil pipeline in Lagos, Nigeria, on December 5. A Christian healing service in an area ravaged by oil spills inadvertently ignited the blaze, in which at least two people were killed and another person was seriously injured.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL FIELD

The leading candidates present a plight:
They're mostly old, and they're completely white.
They need, to keep the plight from getting starker,
To add someone not old and somewhat darker.
Some Democrats may ask, as worries grow,
“You think Barack would like another go?”



The Nation.

IMPEACHMENT

Needs to Move to the Streets

Mass protests can turn
a Beltway scandal
into an effective
anti-Trump weapon.

JEET HEER



IN JULY OF 2019, THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO SHOWED THAT YOU CAN REMOVE A CORRUPT chief executive without recourse to impeachment. Governor Ricardo A. Rosselló, already unpopular thanks to his administration's incompetent response to Hurricane Maria, became the target of a mass movement pushing for his ouster after the leak of text messages demonstrating that he and his cronies were engaged in sleazy backroom deals and used crude, misogynistic language. Over the course of two weeks, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans flooded the streets in raucous, disruptive protests. There was talk of impeaching Rosselló—but that proved unnecessary once he resigned in the face of the public's revolt.

Unleashing the power of mass protest to force resignation is rare in America but common elsewhere. Indeed, we seem to be living in an age when it's not unusual for street protesters to topple governments. From South Korea to Spain to Iceland to Finland, street protests have played a key role in bringing down despised heads of government.

As the impeachment of Donald Trump winds its way through Congress, can mass protest play the same role in the United States as a whole as it did in Puerto Rico? Some pundits, notably Michelle Goldberg of *The New York Times* and Matthew Yglesias of *Vox*, have called for mass protests to bolster the cause of impeachment.

It's a compelling idea but one that would involve transforming the existing impeachment, which under House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been a cautious centrist project. Her main goal has been to frame an impeachment acceptable to the most conservative members of her caucus—one that is so carefully confined to issues of national security that it might even win over some moderate Republicans.

The articles of impeachment she introduced on December 10 are in keeping with her cautious approach: They narrowly focus on abuse of power and obstructing Congress. That they were introduced the same day House Democrats pushed forward with ratifying Trump's revision to NAFTA only underscored the message of a fundamentally conservative impeachment that would not hinder business as usual.

Yale history professor Samuel Moyn is skeptical that Pelosi's version of impeachment offers any basis for energizing mass politics. "Why the narrow charge, and why the parade of figures who basically represent Cold War foreign policy business as usual?" he asks. "The pageant in Washington lately has been playing on expected outrage that the president didn't follow hostility to Russia as the rational course. It doesn't seem like it's been organized in Washington as a larger grassroots strategy. Just the reverse." Impeachment, he worries, will be a way for moderate Democrats to join forces with never-Trump Republicans for a "centrist restoration."

Centrists are using impeachment to cast the Trump years as a regrettable detour in American history, one that is soundly rebuked by Washington professionals who uphold a Cold War consensus that will again become the norm after

he is out of office. Absent in this centrist impeachment is any acknowledgment of the systemic dangers Trump's racism and corruption pose to American democracy—or the complicity of large swaths of the GOP in his regime. Like the funerals of John McCain and George H.W. Bush, impeachment has a largely theatrical function. It's a way of upholding the values of the ancien regime, a foreign policy consensus currently under threat, and preparing the ground for a return to normality restoration after the vulgar demagogue is out of office.

Pelosi's centrist impeachment, confined to the halls of power, is the very opposite of the rowdy street protests of Puerto Rico. Is it really possible to transform this centrist impeachment into something more ambitious and far-reaching—a people's impeachment? And can such an impeachment hope to achieve the success of the mass actions seen in Puerto Rico and elsewhere?

THE RAW MATERIAL FOR A PEOPLE'S IMPEACHMENT already exists in the infrastructure of protest built over the last three years. One of Trump's undoubted achievements is provoking the greatest surge of mass protest America has experienced since the 1960s. A wave of mass politics was gathering strength even before Trump announced his candidacy in 2015. Barack Obama's presidency saw the birth of Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, as well as a newly energized gun control movement in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre of 2012. But these disparate movements, while important for elevating issues, were ambiguously connected to electoral politics.

Trump's surprise victory in 2016 ignited the kindling of existing discontent, turning sparks into a forest fire. As an openly racist president with a long public record of misogyny and the habit of referring to climate change as a hoax, he is the very embodiment of everything progressives hate. As Dana Fisher observes in her 2019 book *American Resistance*, his election created a "moral shock" that turned many previously disengaged "nonjoiners" into activists, leading to a resistance movement that is intentional about targeting elected officials with its demands.

The day after Trump's inauguration, his pres-

"Why the narrow charge, and why the parade of figures who basically represent Cold War foreign policy business as usual?"

—Samuel Moyn, Yale history professor



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idemy was greeted by the Women's March, which drew as many as 5.2 million protesters across the country, making it one of the largest single-day protests in American history. That was soon followed by spontaneous protests against his administration's first Muslim ban, the March for Science, People's Climate March, demonstrations in support of the Affordable Care Act and against Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination, among many other manifestations of insurgent politics. Organized by groups like Indivisible and MoveOn, these protests had a measurable real-world impact: They helped preserve the ACA and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program as well as revitalize the Democratic Party.

Unlike earlier protest waves, the anti-Trump resistance movement was plugged into electoral politics from the start. Beyond the battles over the ACA and DACA, its goal was to use the ballot box to end unified Republican control of the government. Fisher credits these protests with helping Democrats win back the House of Representatives in 2018. But that victory also led to a tapering off of protest politics. Anti-Trump passion remains high, but the energy once displayed in street chants is now more likely to be channeled into intramural debates about the direction of the Democratic Party and the choice of a 2020 presidential nominee.

Yet impeachment could give protest politics a second wind. "The energy is there for impeachment," says Meagan Hatcher-Mays, the director of democracy policy for the Indivisible Project, a group fighting Trump's agenda. Working with partners like MoveOn, Indivisible plans to launch Impeachment Eve rallies in 48 states the night before the House votes on impeachment.

Lucy Flores, a Women's March board member, says impeachment will figure heavily in the next march, scheduled for January 18, 2020. "If you can imagine potentially hundreds of thousands of women and people marching in DC, having that kind of crowd in front of Congress all demanding impeachment, that's a very powerful thing," she says.

But the existing protest infrastructure will get you only so far if the passion for impeachment is missing. After all, there have already been impeachment rallies, and they were not enormous successes. The Impeachment March, held in several dozen cities July 2 to 4, 2017,

Progressives favoring impeachment have to fight a war on two fronts: against moderates in their own party and against Republicans.

People power:

(Clockwise from top left) In September 2017, activists marched on the offices of Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, demanding they work to save the Affordable Care Act; the Women's March was one of the largest single-day protests in American history; in July 2019, protesters successfully demanded the resignation of Puerto Rico's Governor Ricardo Rosselló; the 2017 People's Climate March.

focused on Trump's violation of the emoluments clauses and his firing of acting Attorney General Sally Yates and FBI Director James Comey. These attracted crowds of just a few hundred people each—a smattering compared with the massive Women's March and other anti-Trump protests. There were similarly small rallies on October 13, 2019. Polls show that the overwhelming majority of Democrats support impeachment, but there has been scant evidence that it is an issue that can move bodies.

Mass protests tend to work best when they galvanize around visceral issues that spark outrage—misogyny, climate change, immigration roundups, police brutality. The existing centrist impeachment undercuts such outrage by focusing on Trump's violation of national security norms, an issue that inflames few passions among ordinary people. A crucial problem is determining how impeachment can be framed in a way that excites activism rather than simply passive approval.

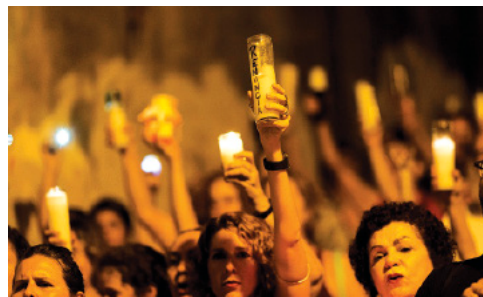
PRO-IMPEACHMENT PROGRESSIVES HAVE TO FIGHT A war on two fronts: against moderates in their own party and against Republicans. A people's impeachment can't rely on the leadership of congressional Democrats. Rather, it has to work to take the narrative away from them.

This might be easier than it looks. Pelosi's embrace of impeachment, however belated and in a constricted form, is itself a victory of protest politics. Representative Rashida Tlaib's famous rallying cry "Impeach the motherfucker" was followed by agitation inside the Democratic Party. Pelosi initially dismissed Tlaib and other progressives but eventually came to accept the necessity of impeachment. As Bernie Sanders adviser Winnie Wong says, "I think the fact that we're in impeachment proceedings now should be attributed to rolling protests organized by groups like By the People, Demand Justice, CPD Action, CREDO, NARAL, and Indivisible, to name just a few. These groups and their members, in my opinion, have sent a message that is very clear to politicians: Political apathy and inaction are unacceptable. Do something now or pay a price at the ballot box later."

Now that the Democratic Party is finally on board with impeachment, the goal of popular protest should be to force a wholesale indictment of Trump. His use of the office for selfish political ends in Ukrainegate is certainly impeachment-worthy, but it hardly exhausts his sins. Indeed, it might be one of his lesser infractions.

A people's impeachment doesn't need to be bound by what is discovered by congressional investigators. In the halls of Congress, there was a tension between crafting a narrow impeachment with the goal of winning over GOP legislators and making the most comprehensive case against Trump. But there's no reason for those outside Congress to be so tight-lipped in talking about his crimes.

An impeachment hearing has a legal form; a popular protest doesn't. While the articles of impeachment are narrow, impeachment rallies will need to be organized around the





broader theme of Trump's corruption.

Before the impeachment articles were unveiled, Hatcher-Mays said she hoped they would be broadly based. "There are a lot of things Donald Trump has done that have brought people to this resistance fight, from keeping kids in cages to credible accusations of sexual assault. He's a racist. He employs white nationalists in his White House. All these things are horrific and form the basis for why a lot of people joined this fight in the first place," she said.

A people's impeachment can also be more explicitly political than the official effort. Pelosi is trying to win over Republicans with high-minded invocations of constitutional duty. "Politics has nothing to do with impeachment, in my view," she told *The New Yorker* in September. Explicating this comment, *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik argued, "Impeachment in this sense is anti-politics; it presumes that there exists a constitutional principle that overrules the politics of popularity."

In the words of Pelosi and Gopnik, we once again hear the yearning for a centrist restoration. Trump, in this worldview, is a horrific anomaly in an otherwise well-functioning system. After you get rid of him—or even just give him a symbolic rebuke in the form of impeachment—the system will return to normal. The hope is that once Trump is gone, the old order will rise again, with Democrats and Republicans joining hands in bipartisan comity.

Pelosi and Gopnik radically misunderstand the crisis of our time. The current impeachment crisis is inextricable from partisan politics. Trump is able to violate constitutional principles precisely because of the overwhelming partisan support he has from Republicans, who will overlook any misdeed. The only solution for this political standoff is a political one: to make the Republican Party pay the price for its support of Trump. The goal of impeachment rallies has to be to make clear to Republicans that if they cast their lot with him, they will be held accountable.

REPUBLICAN COMPLICITY IN TRUMP'S CRIMES IS AT the core of the crisis and explains why we need a people's impeachment to both bolster and go beyond the congressional impeachment. His corruption of American democracy isn't confined to the acts of a lawless president and his inner circle of cronies. The Ukraine affair implicates members of his cabinet, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and outgoing Secretary of Energy Rick Perry. It also implicates some members of Congress, like Representative Devin Nunes. As Greg Sargent of *The Washington Post* notes, "A crucial aspect of the House Intelligence Committee impeachment report is that it paints a picture of a corrupt extortion plot that involved multiple cabinet officials and large swaths of the government."

Given the complicity of the Republicans in Trump's crimes, along with the existence of a right-wing media infrastructure that shields Republican voters from evi-

Impeachment cast list: (From left) House Intelligence Committee chair Adam Schiff, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Ohio Republican Jim Jordan, President Donald Trump, and Republican Senators Lisa Murkowski, Marco Rubio, and Ben Sasse.

Protests are the only way to break the political stalemate and raise the political cost to Republicans for continuing to support Trump.

dence of his wrongdoing, it's virtually impossible to have a repeat of Watergate. We're not going to see a large number of Republican lawmakers abandon Trump unless there is a radical new element in the equation.

Protests are perhaps the only way to break the political stalemate. The key is to raise the political cost to Republicans of supporting Trump. The short-term goal would be to try to turn a few Republicans against him. Hatcher-Mays says the fierce protests against Republicans who supported Brett Kavanaugh offer a model for impeachment mobilization. "The fact that we flipped a Republican, the fact Lisa Murkowski said, 'I'm not going to vote for this guy,' is a huge victory," Hatcher-Mays says. "The other lesson we learned is that the unpopularity of Kavanaugh can be of political consequence. Susan Collins and Cory Gardner are in the fight of their lives. We can make any vote to acquit Donald Trump one of the most consequential votes of their career."

There are three types of Republicans who could be targeted for distinct forms of protest. One would be the potentially flippable lawmakers who can be met with chants reminding them of their constitutional duty, senators like Murkowski, Mitt Romney, and Ben Sasse.

Another would be Republicans who are likely to stick with Trump but whose support is embarrassing on a personal level. He, after all, insulted Ted Cruz's wife and referred to Marco Rubio as "Little Marco." Protests that went after these senators would have the goal of highlighting how they are humiliating themselves, with the hope that self-respect might cause them to abandon Trump.

Finally, members of the House and Senate facing tight races, like Collins, could be targeted with the aim of strengthening opposition to them.

If popular protests pry three or four Republican senators loose, that could profoundly shape how the impeachment plays out in their chamber. The Senate gets to set its own rules for an impeachment trial, voted on by a simple majority. It wouldn't take more than a handful of GOP defections for the Democrats to control the way the trial is conducted and what evidence gets presented.

Could a people's impeachment achieve the level of success of the Puerto Rico protests? This is unlikely, given that removal by the Senate would require 67 votes. Further, the anti-Trump resistance isn't yet as radicalized as Puerto Rico was in the summer of 2017.

Puerto Rico should be treated as a benchmark for the best possible outcome. But even if a people's impeachment falls short of forcing Trump's resignation, it still has a crucial role to play in mobilizing the population to defend democracy.

Fisher says the hallmark of the resistance to date is a commitment to peaceful protest. But she adds that this could change, given that a younger cohort of protesters is being radicalized. She speculates that if Trump is re-elected, we could see a wave of truly disruptive protests.

There's another possibility that might call for direct action. Imagine that Trump loses in November but refuses to give up power. In that eventuality, Americans would have to follow the path of protesters in Hong Kong and Chile. One reason to have a people's impeachment is to make sure that Trump knows people are willing to take to the streets—peacefully for now but in strong enough numbers that they could disrupt the country. ■

JAMIE RASKIN IS TRYING TO READ A BOOK ABOUT IMPEACHMENT every couple of days. On a Tuesday in late November, when final preparations were being made for the Trump impeachment inquiry to move to the House Judiciary Committee on which he sits, the Democratic congressman from Maryland was racing out of his office. He realized he'd left behind the most recent book, circled back to his office, and grabbed a slim volume by James Reston Jr., *The Impeachment Diary: Eyewitness to the Removal of a President*. "This is it!" said the congressman, holding aloft the book, on the 1974 impeachment of President Richard Nixon. "I'm trying to read as much material as I can about Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, the Clinton impeachment, and I'm trying to get a sense of the process of each of those cases and the patterns of discussion and debate that are likely to return."

It's not as if Raskin was uninformed. Before his 2016 election to the House, he spent a quarter century at American University's Washington College of Law, where he taught about famous impeachment cases and earned national recognition for his ruminations on the Constitution's system of checks and balances. "He's the best constitutional lawyer in all of Congress," says Harvard Law professor Laurence Tribe. As the impeachment inquiry ramped up in November, Tribe argued that "Raskin's clarity and dedication to truth will ultimately make the difference that the rule of law and the survival of constitutional democracy demand." So why is the congressman doing all this reading? "We have to move at the speed of democracy right now to get this right."

Getting it right is about much more than holding a president to account, Raskin adds. "Authoritarianism is on the march all over the world, and the new authoritarians have dredged up every ghost and skeleton from the 20th century," he says, ticking off the evidence of a crisis that has unfolded on his watch—as a congressman first elected on the same day that Donald Trump secured the presidency.

"The marriage of autocratic forms of government with financial corruption is the principal mode of doing business in many governments around the world, and all of these figures have found each other—Putin in Russia,

Duterte in the Philippines, Orbán in Hungary, Sisi in Egypt, the homicidal crown prince of Saudi Arabia, and then Donald Trump in the White House and over at the Trump Hotel, which I call the Washington Emolument, the headquarters of all the corruption. So we do have a historic task here, and it's not easy. We have got to rescue American democracy," he says.

This is the gospel that Raskin preaches with an energy and enthusiasm that recalls his hero Thomas Paine—a fellow freethinker he names (along with Frederick Douglass) as the historical figure he'd most like to dine with—as he appears with increasing frequency on cable shows and at town hall forums where the busy congressman will spend 90 minutes or more making the case for a think-big approach to the crisis. Less than a month into Trump's presidency, Raskin was delivering addresses like "The Future of American Democracy in the Age of Trump" before a packed main hall at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland. He was back on a Sunday night in early November, telling 500 cheering constituents that Trump's pressuring of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to open an investigation into a potential election rival, former vice president Joe Biden, sounds to him like "the most impeachable thing an American president has ever done."

Raskin was getting noticed even before the House Intelligence Committee handed things off to the Judiciary Committee at the end of November. And with that handoff, he's in demand. "No matter how complicated the question, even if something just happened, he's on top of it," an MSNBC booker tells me when I mention that I am writing about the congressman. That's what Raskin strives for. He wants to convince people not by engaging in the bombast playing out all around him but by speaking a language Americans will understand as logical and compelling. Instead of casually declaring Trump guilty as charged, for instance, Raskin explains, "I've been honest enough to say that I've seen overwhelming evidence of high crimes and misdemeanors, which has been uncontra-

"So we do have a historic task here, and it's not easy. We have got to rescue American democracy."

—Representative Jamie Raskin

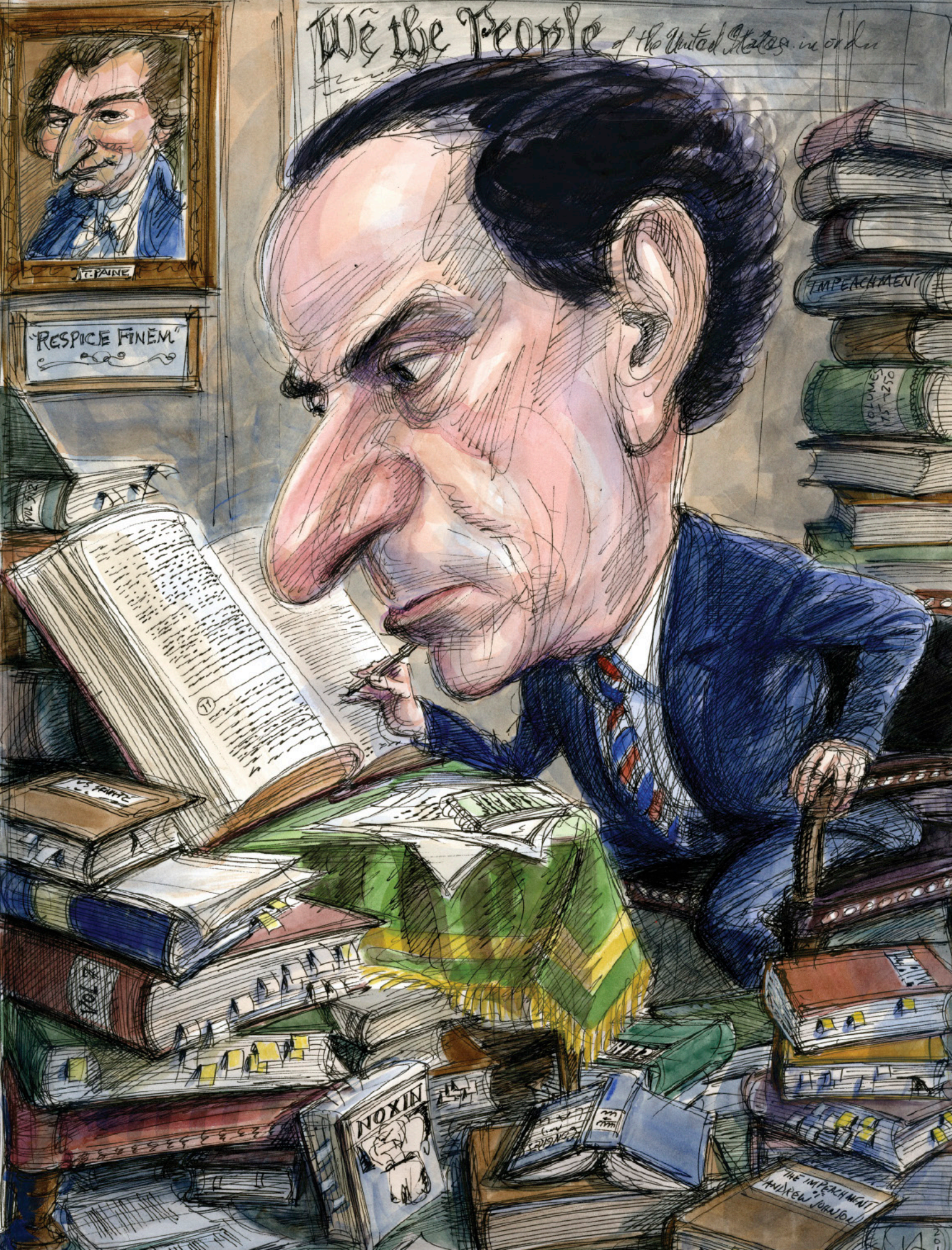
THE IMPEACHMENT SCHOLAR

Representative Jamie Raskin has been training for the Trump impeachment inquiry his whole life.

JOHN NICHOLS

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR JUHASZ

We the People of the United States in order



"RESPICE FINEM"

J.F. KENNEDY

IMPEACHMENT

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THE IMPEACHMENT ANDREW JURKOVIC

2017

dicted. I'm open to factual contradiction if it's out there, but so far, the only people who seem inclined to want to contradict it refuse to testify and speak under oath."

Raskin, who has emerged as a key player on the Judiciary Committee in the same way that a previous generation of new members like Elizabeth Holtzman and Barbara Jordan stepped up during Watergate, wants to put what happens over the next weeks and months into perspective for the committee, for the Congress, and for the American people. He genuinely believes that a proper impeachment could persuade Republican senators to break with Trump—or, at the least, create a circumstance in which Trump becomes clearly and completely unacceptable to the American people—and that the act of holding a president to account could usher in an era of reform and activist government.

"Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that democracy is always either contracting and withering or democracy is expanding and growing," Raskin observes. "So Donald Trump represents the shrinking and diminution of democracy, and the exercise of impeachment is a reassertion of the muscle memory of the American people. If and when we do this, it will lead us to think about the structural reforms that we need in American political democracy so we never get into a situation like this again."

PUTTING CRITICAL MOMENTS IN PERSPECTIVE AND then using that perspective to push for change is what Jamin Ben Raskin was brought up to do. His office in the Cannon House Office Building is a museum of activism that extends back years—to an era long before the 56-year-old congressman's birth in Washington, DC. A poster near the door recalls the 1934 campaign of Samuel Bellman, his maternal grandfather, who battled anti-Semitism as a member of the Farmer-Labor Party and as a legislator in Minnesota in the 1930s. A great uncle, Max Raskin, was a socialist city attorney and then a judge in Milwaukee. Near the poster



Representative Jamie Raskin talks with reporters in Washington after a closed-door briefing with the State Department inspector general in October.

"The exercise of impeachment is a reassertion of the muscle memory of the American people."

—Raskin

Raskin reads the Mueller report in his office on Capitol Hill, April 18, 2019, the day it was released to the public.



is a Kennedy White House Christmas card from when Jamie Raskin's father, Marcus Raskin, served in John F. Kennedy's administration. The elder Raskin was national security adviser McGeorge Bundy's assistant on disarmament as well as a member of the delegation that laid the groundwork for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Marcus Raskin cofounded the Institute for Policy Studies in 1963, became a fierce

foe of the Vietnam War, worked with Daniel Ellsberg to get the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times*, and emerged as one of the great radical thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Jamie Raskin graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University and Harvard Law School, where he served as an editor of the *Law Review*. As a law professor in his own right, he established himself in academic and activist circles—championing student rights and campaign finance reform, representing Ross Perot in a fight to open up the 1996 presidential debates—and was as an outspoken critic of the Electoral College and as the author of *Overruling Democracy*, a scathing critique of Supreme Court decisions that have undermined democracy. (Many of his arguments were made in articles for *The Nation*.)

Eager to put theory into practice, Raskin challenged a veteran Maryland state senator in a 2006 Democratic primary, won, and went on to lead the successful fight to overturn the state's death penalty. In 2016 he entered a crowded primary for an open US House seat for a Democratic district that is home to liberal strongholds such as Takoma Park. He beat two better-funded candidates in a campaign in which the activist and law professor Zephyr Teachout hailed him as "the lion for the anti-corruption forces."

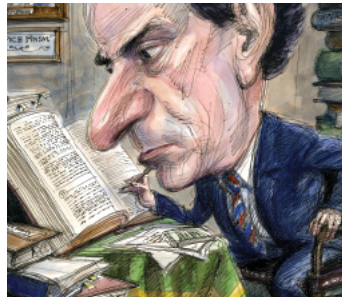
Barely a month after taking office, Raskin met with impeachment activists and accepted a petition with more than 860,000 signatures calling on the House of Representatives to initiate an impeachment investigation into Trump's violations of the Constitution's foreign and domestic emoluments clauses. But to the frustration of at least some, the congressman focused during his first term on the 25th Amendment, which outlines procedures by which a president who "is unable to discharge the powers and duties" of the office might be removed. After the 2018 election put Democrats in charge of the House, Raskin began working closely with new Judiciary Committee chair Jerrold Nadler to reassert the authority of the committee, including the subpoena power.

ON A LATE NOVEMBER EVENING, RASKIN AND I ARE in his office discussing impeachment when the news comes that the DC District Court rejected White House claims of executive privilege intended to prevent former White House counsel Don McGahn from testifying before the committee. Both of Raskin's smartphones fill up with text messages from reporters. Schedules are shuffled to make room for an appearance on MSNBC. An aide pops in with printouts of

the decision. Raskin spreads out the 120-page document on a table and runs his finger across the paragraphs. He delights in the decision's smackdown of the Trump Justice Department for getting "constitutional commands exactly backwards" and nods approvingly at a reference to "a core tenet of this Nation's founding that the powers of a monarch must be split between the branches of the government to prevent tyranny." This is vital stuff, as far as Raskin is concerned, not merely because it strengthens the committee's hand but also because it points toward what he hopes will be a reassertion of congressional authority over the executive branch.

"Oftentimes my Democratic colleagues will jump up on the floor after Trump commits this or that outrage against the Constitution or the Bill of Rights, and they'll say, 'Mr. President, you have to stop doing this. We are a coequal branch of government.' And I just want to scream," Raskin says. "I know that this is dogma in fifth-grade social studies classes across the country, but we are not a coequal branch of government. We are the primary and predominant branch of government, and my colleagues need to understand that." Raskin tested the concept at the Unitarian church, asking, "If we were coequal branches, why is it that the founders say that Congress can impeach the president but the president can't impeach the Congress?" That line earned a standing ovation, which didn't really surprise him.

As a congressman who takes the time to call 10 to 15 constituents every weekend, Raskin recognizes that "the Ukraine episode has caught the public imagination precise-



"We are the primary and predominant branch of government, and my colleagues need to understand that."

—Raskin

ly because it's vivid, it's contemporaneous, and it's outrageous and unprecedented." But it is also, he argues, "perfectly consistent with an unlawful course of conduct that has taken place from the beginning." This is why he talks in expansive terms about holding the president to account for obstructions of justice, witness tampering, and refusals to cooperate with Congress—and for violating the Constitution's foreign and domestic emoluments clauses.

"I think I bring some depth of constitutional vision to this process of figuring out what has gone so wrong with the Trump administration," Raskin says. "There has never been a more impeachable president than Donald Trump, based on his monarchical pretensions, ambitions, and misconduct in office." Raskin adds that tackling Trump's abuses will give Americans a sense that it is possible to challenge entrenched power—and to achieve immense change. How immense? "There are only two things we need to do: One is to save the democracy, and the other is to save the human species." Raskin reminds me that everything Congress does, even impeachment, "takes place in the shadow of climate change." This is what he means by thinking big. He hardly wants to diminish the importance of holding a president to account. Quite the contrary: He wants to expand the sense of the moment, to put it in a grander perspective, so that if and when this president is impeached, Americans will be inspired to believe again in the power of the people to make their government act. ■



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THE MEDICAID EXPANSION EFFECT

BRYCE COVERT

Voters vigorously defend the program, even in deep-red states. That's transforming politics as we know it.

KATHERINE MITCHELL WAS IN THE EIGHTH GRADE WHEN SHE STARTED having health problems. Eventually she was diagnosed with a rare connective-tissue disorder, the first in a series of serious medical issues. “I’ve just been plagued by health stuff ever since,” she said.

She moved from Alabama to Kentucky for college and stayed. About four years ago, she developed one of the most debilitating conditions she faces: trigeminal neuralgia, chronic pain that stems from veins in her brain pressing on facial nerves. The first time she experienced it, “an electric shock just shot through my head, and I fell to the floor,” she recalled. It created “unfathomable” pain, “a pain that humans just were never supposed to feel.” Those intense shocks would ricochet through her face whenever she tried to talk, smile, eat, drink, or brush her teeth.

One day she was trying to eat her favorite Indian food, a process that required opening her mouth, waiting for the stabbing pain to subside, and slowly closing it around her food. Then something changed, and the pain didn’t stop. “It was really the worst pain I’d ever had,” she said. “I remember looking up at the ceiling and being like, ‘I am fucked. I’m not going to make it. The end [is] coming.’”

Soon after that, Mitchell lost her office job, which meant she also lost her health insurance. But this was around the time in 2014 that Kentucky’s then-governor, Democrat Steve Beshear, expanded Medicaid, the public health program that primarily serves low-income people, via an executive order under the Affordable Care Act. Mitchell, who was able to sign up under the expansion, said she “couldn’t believe how easy it was...and that someone could so easily help me.” She found a neurosurgeon who performed a craniotomy on her, which relieved the compression on the nerve causing the pain. She said she would have been pushed to suicide if it hadn’t been for the relief. “The procedure did save my life.”

Mitchell also suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, and Medicaid has allowed her to get counseling. “I don’t know what I would have done if I was not able to have that,” she said. Getting insurance through the state’s Medicaid expansion “has literally saved my life.”

The experience proved transformative for Mitchell in other ways. She was raised in a wealthy conservative family, with Fox News and Rush Limbaugh constantly playing; she even referred to Limbaugh as “Uncle Rush.” If there was any discussion of public programs in her home, it was about people gaming the system and taking advantage of

their fellow taxpayers. Though Mitchell developed some “progressive leanings” as an adult, she said that being able to enroll in Medicaid so easily and get the care she needed was an eye opener. It “made me think a lot more intensely about how public programs work,” she said. “Just having a small taste of the barriers that you come up against...it made me think about a lot of people outside of myself and the endless complexities of who has access to what.

“Public programs saved me,” she said. “It has definitely shaped how I think [and] the intensity with which I feel my political views.”

Mitchell is one of hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians who get their health care through the state’s Medicaid expansion under the ACA. In the 37 states that have decided to take part, Medicaid coverage is open to everyone living at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty line. By March of 2018, nearly 672,000 more people were enrolled in Kentucky’s Medicaid program and Children’s Health Insurance Program than in 2013, most of them thanks to the expansion—a more than 110 percent increase. That’s 15 percent of the state’s population, including close to a fifth of the voting-age population. “If you don’t have Medicaid yourself, you’re interacting with people covered by Medicaid every single day,” said Emily Beauregard, the executive director of Kentucky Voices for Health. By 2017, the state’s uninsured rate dropped from 20 percent to 7.5 percent, the largest decrease in the country.

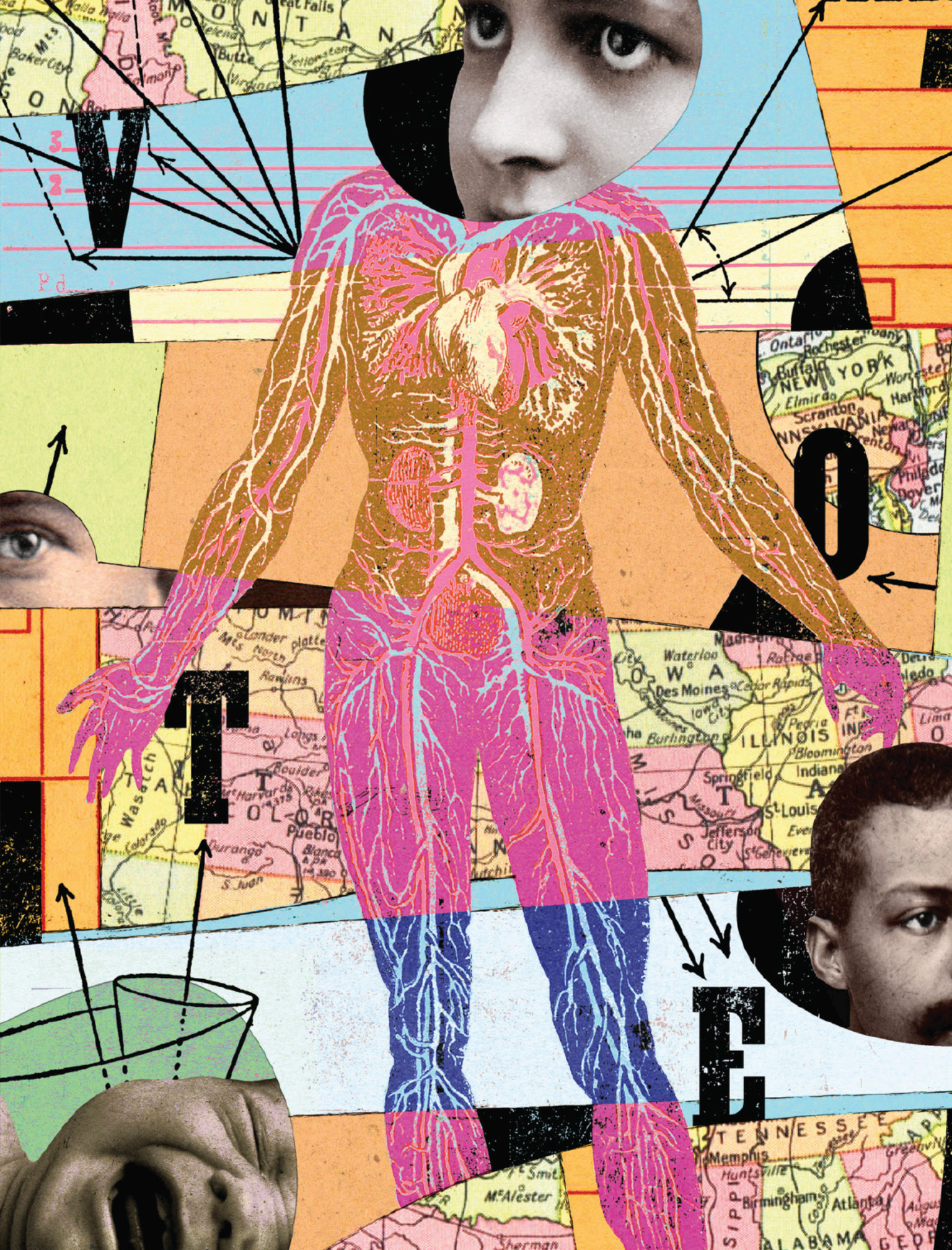
Those enormous gains make the deep-red state of Kentucky a particularly powerful example of an unexpected outcome: Beyond improving people’s health and finances, the Medicaid expansion is changing how they view politics and their government. It’s prompting them to get out and vote, and it has become a winning issue for Democrats, even in heavily Republican areas. And it could be transforming the way Americans view publicly funded health insurance itself.

Medicaid expansion “saved me. It has definitely shaped how I think [and] the intensity with which I feel my political views.”

—Katherine Mitchell, Kentucky resident

Bryce Covert is a contributor at The Nation and a contributing op-ed writer at The New York Times.

KENTUCKY’S MEDICAID EXPANSION MEANS THAT more than a quarter of the state’s population now gets coverage through the program. But just a year after its implementation, Republican Matt Bevin ran for governor promising to end the Medicaid expansion completely. “The fact that we have one out of four people in this state on Medicaid is



unsustainable. It's unaffordable," he said on the campaign trail. "And we need to create jobs in this state, not more government programs to cover people." He won with 49.2 percent of the vote. After taking office, he sought a waiver from the federal government to allow him to impose a work requirement on Medicaid recipients, require monthly premiums, and eliminate retroactive eligibility, among other punitive changes. A judge struck down the waiver, but Bevin signed an executive order that would reverse the entire expansion if he didn't get his way in court.

Even so, he never carried out his threat. "There has not been one serious bill filed to end the Medicaid expansion," Beuregard said. "There was the sense that it wasn't a winning issue to take coverage away from people."

Now Bevin's efforts appear doomed. Six years after the expansion, Medicaid played a huge role in this year's gubernatorial contest between Bevin and Democrat Andy Beshear, the former governor's son. "Medicaid expansion and health care were front and center in the campaign," Beuregard noted. For Beshear, "it was a platform issue": He not only supported the Medicaid expansion but also repeatedly asserted that health care is a human right.

Voters paid attention. In a survey conducted by Beuregard's organization, many of those who said they cared about the issue were not enrolled in Medicaid themselves; they were just "concerned citizens who understood this was an economic issue, a social justice issue, an issue of neighbors taking care of neighbors," Beuregard said. "It was really striking to read so many comments from people who were not going to be directly affected and who could just as easily say, 'I'm the taxpayer footing the bill.' But instead they recognized there was value in their neighbors and coworkers having access to health care coverage."

In the lead-up to the election, Tiffany Kennedy-Pyette canvassed door-to-door with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and found that the issue was key for voters. "The conversations that I had with people were very focused on...taking care of their health and their families, and that was different for me from the usual political conversations that people tend to have," she said. "It was at the top of people's concerns."

She recalled meeting one woman who gained coverage under the expansion. Medicaid covered her surgeries and treatments for three serious health events over the past year, including an aggressive cancer. Kennedy-Pyette, who has a disability, could relate. "She and I talked about how [expansion] would be heavy on our minds when we went to the polls, that we're voting for our health and the health of our neighbors," she said.

In the end, voter turnout was higher than expected, particularly for an off-year election. "People were paying attention and wanted to have a say," Beuregard observed. And they chose Beshear over Bevin, even as the Republicans fared better down ballot. "I think that voters were very clear on what policies they were voting for," Beuregard continued. In his victory speech, Beshear vowed that one of his first acts as governor would be to rescind the Medicaid work requirement.

Medicaid played a clear role in other November races as well. In Louisiana, Democrat John Bel Edwards won reelection as governor; he also ran on Medicaid expansion, having implemented it in his first term. His

lead pollster told *The Washington Post* that "no single issue was more important than the Medicaid expansion." And Democrats took back control of Virginia's state legislature on a promise to defend the state's Medicaid expansion from Republicans.

Medicaid "wound up being really central to the gubernatorial election [in Kentucky] in a way that is absolutely consistent with the idea that Medicaid expansion has a lot of political salience," said Eliot Fishman, the senior director of health policy at Families USA. This is a relatively new development: He looked at polling data in the early 2000s and found that health care was never among the issues that voters cared about most; instead taxes, education, and crime were top of mind. But more recently, "health care has emerged as a major issue." Last year, voters in Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah approved ballot measures to expand Medicaid in their states. Even when voters approve such measures, it doesn't mean they immediately take effect; lawmakers in Nebraska delayed benefits until late 2020, and Utah's legislature implemented them only in part. But not a single state that expanded Medicaid coverage has fully rolled back the expansion. "I don't believe it'll ever happen," Fishman said.

Medicaid expansion has had a number of dramatic effects: One study found that it saved at least 19,200 lives from 2014 to 2017. It has increased insurance coverage, given people better access to medical care, improved health, and preserved recipients' finances. The program is also changing the political landscape. In 2017 political scientist Jake Haselswerdt looked at district-level election data and concluded that Medicaid expansion was associated with increased voter turnout. That year, two other analysts found that Medicaid expansion states had higher rates of political participation and these effects were greatest in counties with the largest share of eligible recipients. This jibes with research examining data from before the expansion. In Oregon, for example, which selected Medicaid recipients via a lottery in 2008, people who got into the program were more likely to vote in that year's presidential election.

All the data points in one direction: "When you expand Medicaid, it's associated with a higher likelihood of voting," Haselswerdt said. Extrapolating from this research, he and Jamila Michener, an assistant professor of government at Cornell, wrote a memo estimating that if the states that have refused to expand Medicaid decided to reverse course, about 1.3 million more people would vote.

Haselswerdt and Michener also found that when Medicaid recipients lost coverage in 2002 and 2006, turnout decreased. Michener's research likewise found that in states that have expanded Medicaid but then retrenched the benefits or imposed hurdles like work requirements, there has been a dampening effect on political participation. "When people are getting more from Medicaid," she said, "it makes them more engaged in politics and empowers them."



The voters speak: Democrat Andy Beshear won the 2019 Kentucky governor's race vowing to protect Medicaid expansion.

"If you don't have Medicaid yourself, you're interacting with people covered by Medicaid every single day."

—Emily Beuregard,
Kentucky Voices
for Health

Medicaid expansion may even change the way people view government. In a study published in 2019, political scientists Daniel J. Hopkins and Kalind Parish found that Medicaid expansion made low-income people view the Affordable Care Act more favorably than those who lived in non-expansion states. Yet there was no such change for higher-income residents. “This is people who are either themselves personally benefitting or are likely to know people who are benefitting,” Hopkins observed. Covering more people under Medicaid, then, is an approach that “reshapes the political landscape by generating more support for the underlying policy,” he added. “The ways in which people interact with government programs tells them important facts about how the government values them.”

But Michener had a note of caution: It all depends on how public programs are structured. In interviews with recipients across the country, she found that if people enrolled in Medicaid are required to prove that they deserve coverage over and over again, then they no longer feel valued. “If we’re going to give people more access and eligibility on paper...but we’re going to make people’s lives harder at the same time and [make them] feel the weight and burden of being involved with the government in this way, it could end up neutralizing any positive effect,” she said. That would turn the government into “an entity that is interested in controlling them, punishing them, judging their worth and deservingness.” In such an event, “it’s not surprising they don’t think it’s worth participating.”

At the federal level, too, Medicaid has proved to be a powerful political issue. When Republicans were voting to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act in 2017, the need to preserve Medicaid was one of the rallying cries of those fighting the legislation, particularly among disability rights advocates, who stormed the Capitol to defend the ACA, holding 24-hour vigils and sleeping in their wheelchairs. Despite their control of the White House and both chambers of Congress, the Republicans couldn’t get a repeal bill through, thanks to three of their own who voted against it, including a last-minute nay vote from a gravely ill John McCain. “Historically I don’t think we ever would have seen that kind of a mass popular groundswell around defending the Medicaid program,” Fishman said. “The big change was the advent of Medicaid expansion and this big new population that relied on the program.”



Going door-to-door: Tiffany Kennedy-Pyette with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

“If you had told me in 2010 that the Medicaid expansion was going to be one of the most popular parts of the Affordable Care Act, I would have been quite surprised.”

—Daniel J. Hopkins, political scientist

High stakes: In Salt Lake City, protesters showed their opposition to Republican attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act in 2017. Utah residents voted to expand Medicaid in 2018.

Republicans like Jeb Bush and Mitt Romney cynically argue that Democrats are rewarded with votes for giving out “free stuff,” but it makes sense that recipients might be inclined to protect a program that is life-changing for them. “Once [new recipients] have access to that benefit, I think it is no longer a ‘nice to have,’” Fishman said. “They realize how important it is and how basic it is to a modern existence as a household. And it moves more to the center of their concerns.”

But researchers are finding that’s not the only reason Medicaid expansion is driving political participation. For some, having health insurance may lift such a heavy burden that they now have more capacity to engage with politics. “If you’re suddenly eligible for Medicaid, that could be a resource equivalent to one fifth of your income. That’s a sizable benefit,” Hopkins explained. That frees up a lot more time and resources to spend on politics. “People are more likely to vote when their lives are more stable,” Haselswerdt said. “If you’re struggling with medical expenses, dealing with medical bankruptcy, politics is not the first thing you’re thinking about.”

Medicaid expansion may also encourage people to view the government and their elected representatives in a whole new way. When Michener talked to Medicaid recipients, many mentioned how people like them—poor, on the margins of society—don’t usually get what they need from the government. Summarizing their statements, she said, “When there’s an expansion, suddenly people like me are getting more. This tells me that there are possibilities. It tells me that change is possible. That politicians responding to the needs of people like me is possible.”

“What that signals is people like you do have power, you do have a voice.”

JOE MERLINO WAS DIAGNOSED IN 2011 WITH SARCOMA of the larynx, a rare type of cancer that created a tumor in his voice box. At the time, he had health insurance through his employer in Nevada, allowing him to get surgery to remove the tumor as well as a partial laryngectomy. But he wound up with tracheal stenosis, or a narrowing of his windpipe, which required more surgeries. In early 2014, right after he had his trachea removed, he found out that his employer was going to stop providing health insurance. The cost of COBRA to continue his coverage was nearly



TOP: KENTUCKIANS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH; BOTTOM: AP/RICK BOWMER

equivalent to the disability checks he was receiving.

“With a hole in my neck, I had to run out and find some way to get covered,” he recalled, his voice whispery. He discovered that he qualified for Nevada’s Medicaid program, expanded by Republican Governor Brian Sandoval in 2014. “I didn’t really know a lot about Medicaid at the time, so my first question was, ‘How much does it cost?’ because I wasn’t making very much,” Merlino said. He was told it wouldn’t cost him anything. “I was like, ‘Are you kidding me?’... It was a huge, huge relief.”

He was also told that if he had applied just a few months earlier, he would have been turned down; the Medicaid expansion hadn’t been in place yet. “I’d been through hell,” he said. Getting Medicaid coverage was “finally something that was positive in my life.” He was able to get surgery to widen his airway and close the hole left from having his trachea removed. “It was all paid for by Medicaid,” he said. “Without Medicaid, I would have died.”

Merlino, a professed “news geek,” had followed the passage of the Affordable Care Act in Congress and was generally supportive of it. But his ability to enroll in Medicaid and get lifesaving treatment without cost transformed him. “It propelled me into this health care advocacy that I’ve taken on in the last few years,” he explained. He has since appeared in a video for a think tank that has been viewed millions of times, talked to the press, and recounted his experience for a number of politicians. He appeared in a commercial for Jacky Rosen, who unseated Nevada’s Senator Dean Heller, a Republican, in 2018. (Heller supported ACA repeal.) “I was blessed to have Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act there for me,” Merlino said, “and this is my way of fighting so other people can have that opportunity.”

“My personal experience obviously changed the path of my life,” he continued. “It made me see so much more the potential good that certain government programs can have, including Medicaid. I felt that somebody cared. These programs bring back dignity to people.”

Merlino was among the more than 200,000 people affected by Medicaid’s expansion in Nevada—nearly one-fifth of its residents are now covered by Medicaid and CHIP—and last year’s elections were likely influenced by that expansion. Democrats not only took control of the governor’s mansion but also deepened their control of the legislature. “Medicaid [was] very central to that fight,” Fishman said.

“There’s this old idea that a poor people’s program is a poor program,” Haselswerdt said. A public benefit offered only to low-income people is usually thought to be politically vulnerable, cut off from the more powerful support of the well-to-do. “I think Medicaid has defied that in some ways,” he added. “It’s more popular than people think.”

It’s a surprising outcome and one that doesn’t necessarily hold for other components of the ACA. Hopkins hasn’t been able to find the same effect for, say, the private insurance exchanges the act created. Americans may be turned off by the high prices on the exchanges: Premiums grew 22 percent on average from 2016 to 2017, and copays and deductibles have also risen. Hopkins found that as prices on the exchanges rise, people feel less favorable about the Affordable Care Act. (Medicaid typically covers care cost-free.) Those who didn’t get subsidies to buy insurance on the exchanges are particularly likely to feel excluded from the law’s benefits. The exchanges match consumers with private insurance companies, cre-

ating a relationship between a company and a customer. “The fact that the government is playing a role to backstop my private insurance is not especially visible,” Hopkins said. Medicaid, on the other hand, creates a direct relationship between government and citizen.

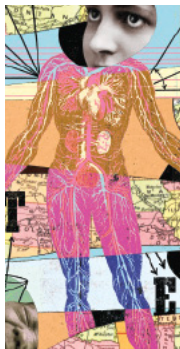
“If you had told me in 2010 that the Medicaid expansion was actually going to be one of the most popular parts of the Affordable Care Act and one that, for a Republican Congress, was harder to repeal, I would have been quite surprised,” Hopkins continued.

It may be because of the program’s vast reach. Over the last two decades, enrollment in Medicaid has more than doubled. “The politics have changed because of the scope of the program,” Fishman said. In expansion states, anyone earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty line—or about \$35,500 for a family of four—can enroll. Medicaid covers not just poor people but also people with disabilities, children with severe health conditions, and the elderly who need nursing home care. The ripple effects are even larger. Seventy percent of Americans now either have personal experience with Medicaid or know someone who does. “When there’s somebody you can think of who’s on this program, it does give it a different kind of power,” Michener said. That makes for a broad constituency ready to fight for it. “Expansion can bring people together across class,” she added, which can build momentum toward universal coverage.

Medicaid’s growth may be giving the country a taste of single-payer health care for all—one that people are finding they enjoy. Joan Alker, the executive director of the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University, has worked in health policy for more than two decades. She said she has seen a huge change in how Americans view health care ever since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. “When confronted with the question of whether or not people should have access to health care or not, they increasingly think the answer is yes,” she noted. “The paradigm has shifted in this country.” Indeed, 60 percent of Americans now say it’s the government’s responsibility to make sure Americans have health coverage—the highest share in a decade.

Seven contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination, including front-runners Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, are running on Medicare for All. That idea springs in part from Medicare’s considerable popularity. But Medicaid is increasingly seen as positive, too. It’s “an additional significant factor in people being more and more open to the increasing role of government in the provision of health care,” Fishman said.

The impact of Medicaid expansion on the country’s politics and the way Americans view their government is likely to increase in the years ahead. “It wouldn’t at all surprise me if, with some more time down the road, we’re seeing much bigger effects,” Haselswerdt said. “Being able to have treatment for your chronic condition may not make that huge a difference in years one through five. But 20 years from now, you’ll be in much better shape than you would have been.” As more states consider expanding Medicaid and more people get health care through it, the political landscape will continue to be transformed. ■



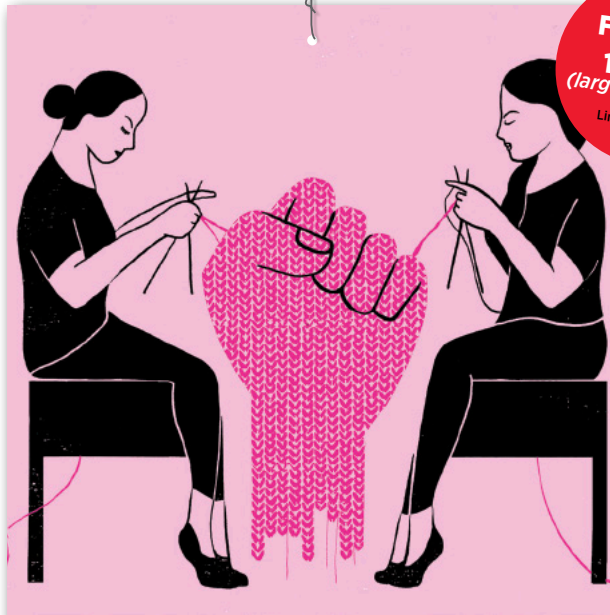
After enrolling in Medicaid, “I felt that somebody cared. These programs bring back dignity to people.”

—Joe Merlino,
Nevada resident

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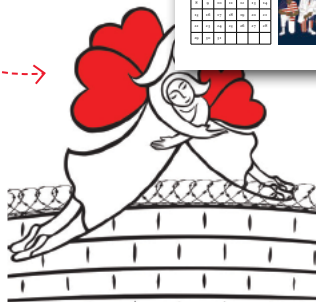
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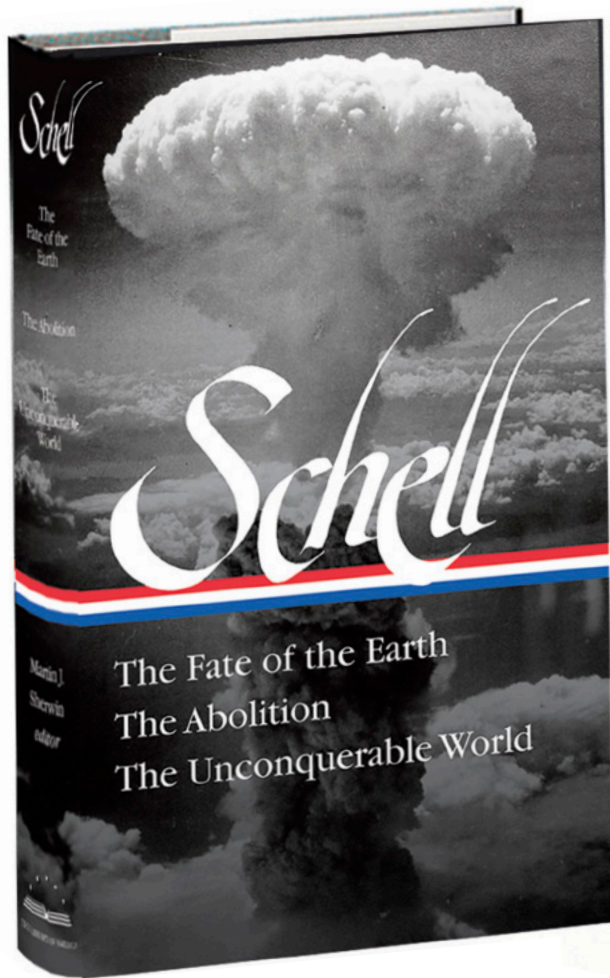
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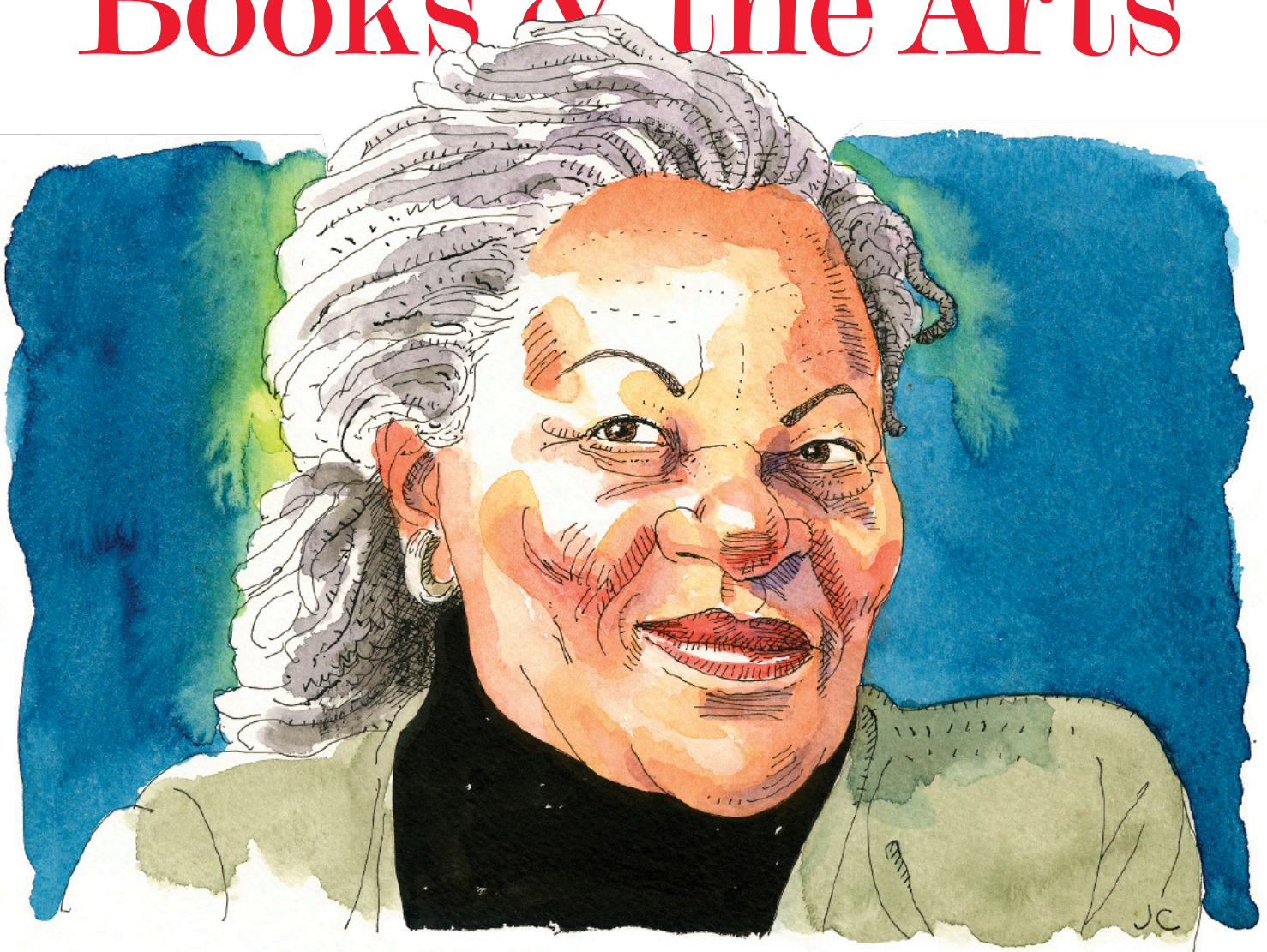
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Books & the Arts



FINDING THE OTHER

The radical vision of Toni Morrison

by JESSE McCARTHY

In Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, the word "nigger" appears exactly once, in a sentence that describes a queer artist feverishly at work. Miss La Trobe is in charge of putting on a pageant representing the procession of English history for an assembly of villagers on a beautiful summer's day. With a phonograph at her disposal as well as a grab bag of

costumes and a troupe of amateur actors, she runs around behind the stage trying to get everything in order, a depressingly familiar image of a woman laboring to restore the dignity and history of her community—and being rewarded, for the most part, with little to no recognition. Indeed, this is why the word is used: "Miss La Trobe had vanished," Woolf writes. Where did she go? "Down among the bushes she worked like a nigger."

Woolf's usage reflects a disturbing if common colloquialism of its time.

With the brutal shadow of slavery still darkening the horizon, the equation of blackness with unremunerated labor was as much an ordinary piece of mental furniture in the cultivated coterie of Bloomsbury as it was in the rest of the Western world. But Woolf's description indicates something else as well: Miss La Trobe may not be a black woman, but by using the word, Woolf nonetheless forces her readers to confront the figure of the racialized outcast, a figure still prevalent in a society benefiting from the resources and exploited labor of mil-

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ILLUSTRATION BY JOE CIARDIELLO

lions of colonized people around the world.

Woolf always used the novel as a means for acute social criticism—to dilate those moments of moral complicity and complacency found in the daily lives of middle-class Westerners. Her celebrated style brought ordinary syntax into ever-closer contact with the layers of consciousness that operate just below our cultivated personalities, turbulent areas of inner life where the stability of human character and morality breaks down and creates, as Zadie Smith put it recently, “grave doubts about the nature of the self.” Woolf’s faith in this moral power of fiction allowed her to wager that the lived quality of a black person’s experience, however dimly apprehended, was not ultimately divorceable from the deepest self-understandings of white people.

Woolf, in other words, dared to insist that there are “other” people in our midst; all around us (and within us) are hidden facets of humanity. Virtually everything in our society encourages us to deny, repress, disavow, distort, or irreparably damage that truth, which is, of course, one of the main goals of racism. Part of this invisibility is the result of a social system beyond any individual’s making. But Woolf’s point is that the perpetuation of this invisibility is our collective responsibility. To make us safe from the abjection of living in a society built on the foundations of violence and stratification, we assure ourselves that such a status belongs only to a well-defined stranger. The power of great fiction to challenge that common sense lies only partially in reflecting our lives to us like a mirror; a great deal more resides in its capacity to dispossess us of our preferred assumptions, plunging us into knowledge like photographic paper into its chemical bath, revealing, even against our will, all the gray areas we find inconvenient, unpleasant, even impossible to acknowledge.

Today we almost take for granted the idea that a powerful eruption of racial blackness in a novel should be obviously worthy of comment. But of course, that hasn’t always been the case. Our reading practices and habits are shaped by, among other things, our education, and the systematic examination of race in literary texts was still a relatively new concept well into the 1990s. At one time I, too, might have casually glossed over the page on which it appears. But by the time I started reading Woolf, Toni Morrison had made her powerful argument in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* for us to pause and consider precisely how

The Source of Self-Regard

Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations

By Toni Morrison

Knopf. 368 pp. \$28.95

racial eruptions like this occur throughout modern literature.

Since its publication in 1992, *Playing in the Dark* has become a seminal reference work for literary studies in the academy and a regular presence on syllabi. The book has helped transform the way many general readers consume the West’s so-called canon, offering searing dissections of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and teaching a generation of literary scholars how to read for the “Africanist presence” in texts that otherwise pretend not to be concerned with race.

With *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison changed the rules of the game, effectively recasting what we see when we look back to figures like Woolf and to writers of the present and future like Colson Whitehead, Jesmyn Ward, and Angela Flournoy. “All of us are bereft,” Morrison writes, “when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes.” Although we focus, for good reason, on Morrison’s novels, which will endure far into the future as great works of art, her essays opened up new worlds as well: As seen from the range and depth of moral insight collected in her last book, *The Source of Self-Regard*, her essays bequeathed to us a mandate to see and speak clearly, in particular about the ways in which otherness persists in almost every facet of life—a responsibility we need to acknowledge more than ever in the present.

Taking the full measure of Morrison’s recent passing—comprehending all that she has done to change what we read, how we read, and who we read—will be the work of subsequent generations. Arguably, no single writer has done more to shape the direction of American fiction in the past 50 years, and no writer has set the bar for achievement in the form of the novel higher than where she left it in 1987 with her masterpiece *Beloved*. As with Pilate, the fierce outsider and moral conscience who guides the plot of *Song of Solomon*, it never occurred to Morrison to ask for the proverbial seat at the table. Instead, she pulled the entire table over to her side of the room.

Born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, Morrison began her revolution in American literature from within the gates of the lettered

city. A graduate of Howard University, class of 1953, she went on to Cornell, where she studied modernism and wrote a thesis on Faulkner (already a major figure in American letters) and Woolf. It was a pioneering choice for a thesis in the 1950s, when Woolf had not yet been canonized and many of her books were out of print.

With her degree in hand, Morrison embarked on a teaching career, first at Texas Southern University in Houston and then at Howard, where she remained for seven years and met her husband, Harold Morrison. That marriage ended in 1964, and she was forced to leave academe to support her two children with a job editing textbooks for Random House. Her confidence and formidable talents as an editor got her noticed, and after an opening appeared in the company’s trade division in New York City in 1967, she became the first black woman to occupy a senior editorial position in the publishing industry.

Toni Morrison’s time at Random House was productive. She used her position to irrigate the literary and cultural landscape with new voices from the Black Arts Movement and with the icons and political champions of black power and black feminism, publishing Gail Jones and Toni Cade Bambara, the still underrecognized Henry Dumas, and the autobiographies of Angela Davis and Muhammad Ali.

Morrison’s most daring and experimental project at Random House was *The Black Book*, which gathered stories of black life across history and created a remarkable and mesmerizing commonplace book from it—something in between W.E.B. Du Bois’s cherished dream of an *Encyclopedia Africana* and Stéphane Mallarmé’s vision of “the Book” as a repository in which all that has ever been attains its preordained legibility.

In these years, Morrison began to write, publishing *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, *Sula* in 1973, and *Song of Solomon* in 1977—works of uncompromising vision, assured in their purpose and crackling with passionate urgency. Each was groundbreaking in its own way, combining the power of black oral tradition with the authority of folklore, communal memory, and a feminist consciousness.

Morrison did all of this fearlessly, no matter the costs that came with forcing American culture to come to her and her people. She composed her novels, edited her books, and published her literary criticism knowing that she could write circles around her critics—and often did. No one has gone to bat for William Styron’s *The*

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Confessions of Nat Turner since. The genuflecting esteem and towering fame accorded to writers like John Updike and Norman Mailer have never recovered. Others played a role in this too, but Morrison's critiques were hard to look past, and the due respect accorded to female novelists white, black, and of every other shade owes something to her epochal impact on the "literary field," as Pierre Bourdieu would put it. That Morrison will always be read first and foremost as a novelist is, of course, as it should be. But the tremendous impact of her fiction and her very public career as a novelist have tended to eclipse her contributions as a moral and political essayist, which the pieces gathered in *The Source of Self-Regard* help correct. Taken together with *What Moves at the Margin*, her first volume of nonfiction, as well as *Playing in the Dark* and *The Origin of Others*, her 2017 collection of lectures, this final book brings Morrison the moral and social critic into view.

In her essays, lectures, and reviews, we discover a writer working in a register that many readers may not readily associate with her. Rather than the deft orchestrator of ritual and fable, chronicler of the material and spiritual experience of black girlhood, and master artificer of the vernacular constitution of black communal life, here we encounter Morrison as a dispassionate social theorist and moral anthropologist, someone who offers acute and even scathing readings of America's contemporary malaise and civic and moral decline in an age defined by the mindless boosterism of laissez-faire capitalism.

In essays like "The Foreigner's Home," one almost hears echoes of Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulated life under late capitalism and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* as she examines the disorienting loss of distinction between private and public space and its effect on our interior lives. The politicization of the "migrant" and the "illegal alien," Morrison argues, is not merely a circling of the wagons in the face of "the transglobal tread of peoples." It is also an act of bad faith, a warped projection of our fears of homelessness and "our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging" reflecting the anxieties produced by the privatization of public goods and commons and the erosion of face-to-face association. Our lives, Morrison tells us, have now become refracted through a "looking-glass" that has compressed our public and private lives "into a ubiquitous blur" and created a pressure that "can make

us deny the foreigner in ourselves."

In other essays, one finds Morrison venturing bravely into the tense intersections of race, gender, class, and radical politics. The essay "Women, Race, and Memory," written in 1989, offers a retrospective attempt to make sense of the fractures within the 1960s and '70s left, to understand why a set of interlocking liberation struggles ended up splitting along racial, gender, and class lines. One can't help feeling a wincing recognition when Morrison writes of "the internecine conflicts, cul-de-sacs, and mini-causes that have shredded the [women's] movement." On top of racial divides, she asserts, class fissures broke apart a movement just as it was coming together, exacerbating "the differences between black and white women, poor and rich women, old and young women, single welfare mothers and single employed mothers." Class and race, Morrison laments, ended up pitting "women against one another in male-invented differences of opinion—differences that determine who shall work, who shall be well educated, who controls the womb and/or the vagina; who goes to jail, who lives where." Achieving solidarity may be daunting, but the alternative is "a slow and subtle form of soricide. There is no one to save us from that," Morrison cautions—"no one except ourselves."

Even as her essays ranged widely, from dissections of feminist politics to the rise of African literature, from extolling the achievements of black women ("you are what fashion tries to be—original and endlessly refreshing") to the parallels between modern and medieval conceptions of violence and conflict in *Beowulf*, they came together around a set of core concerns about the degradation and coarsening of our politics as we cast one another as others and how this process often manifests itself through language.

This is particularly true of the essays included in *The Source of Self-Regard*, which give their readers little doubt about the power of her insights when she trains her eye on the dismal state of contemporary politics and asks how the rhetoric and experiences of otherness came to be transformed by the rise of new media and global free-market fundamentalism into a potent source of reactionary friction. Despite the fact that some of these essays are now several decades old, Morrison's insights are still relevant. For example, her gimlet-eyed description of the cant of our political class in the essay "Wartalk," that

"empurpled comic-book language in which they express themselves." Or her warning against "being bullied" by those in power "into understanding the human project as a manliness contest where women and children are the most dispensable collateral." Or her chiding of the "commercial media" in the run-up to the Iraq War for echoing the uninterrogated lines of Tony Blair and George W. Bush. Journalists, she insisted, must take up the cause of fighting "against cultivated ignorance, enforced silence, and metastasizing lies." They are not supposed to contribute to it.

The sheer quantity of her speeches and essays testifies to Morrison's power as a moral and social critic. But this does not mean she left literature entirely behind in her essays. In fact, the greater part of *The Source of Self-Regard* is dedicated to her applying her moral and political insights in the arena of art as well. Fiction writers are not always the best readers of their own work or others'. (It's only natural that they have their blind spots.) Yet Morrison proves to be a literary critic of the highest order, besotted with the intricacies and pleasures of textual interpretation and with their political and moral import and enviably providing such close readings of her own work that we are sometimes left wondering whether there is anything else for us to really say.

In her 1988 lecture "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," she provides a carefully argued account of black literature in relation to the Western canon (while, in passing, wonderfully provincializing Milan Kundera's Europhilia in *The Art of the Novel*) before peeling back the layers of her creative process and guiding us through her decisions, omissions, and qualified judgments as a novelist, from the opening sentences of her novels to their concluding lines. "There is something about numerals," she explains in a passage on the famous opening of *Beloved* ("124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom"),

that makes them spoken, heard, in this context, because one expects words to read in a book, not numbers to say, or hear. And the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner-ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can. Thus the second sentence is not

one: it is a phrase that properly, grammatically, belongs as a dependent clause with the first.... The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign... snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense.

Reading her pieces on literature, one immediately recognizes that, for Morrison, literary criticism was also an art, the essay another vehicle for conveying her moral and political insights. Her skills as a writer of nonfiction are one and the same as her powers as a writer of fiction. For her, both the essay and the novel can undo the work of individuation foisted upon us by modern society; they can bring “others” into contact and remind us of our common humanity.

Sometimes this larger project of humanization can show itself in the choice of a single word, like the solemn weight and subtle inflections of the adjective “educated” as it describes Paul D’s hands in *Beloved* as he and Sethe fumble toward the beginnings of a new life eked out within the living memory of enslavement. Other times it expresses itself in a lyrical outburst that captures a fleeting moment of self-fashioned freedom, a world of possibility momentarily gleaned from an otherwise desperate circumstance, as in this passage from *Jazz*:

Oh, the room—the music—the people leaning in doorways. This is the place where things pop. This is the market where gesture is all: a tongue’s lightning lick; a thumbnail grazing the split cheeks of a purple plum.

Finding those places where things pop is the central task of her humanism, which she calls, in the titular essay of the new collection, the act of “self-regard.” Self-regard, Morrison insists, is the process in which we recover our selves—in which we once again become human. It means experiencing black culture “from a viewpoint that precedes its appropriation”; it means seeing humanity after the veil of otherness has fallen. By stirring people into prideful expression, self-regard can help us see through the literalism and literal-mindedness that centuries of racist thought and practice that has prevented us from being better readers of our lives and, in turn, others’.

Humanism is not much in vogue these days. The urgency of our moment has impressed upon us other, more specific political programs. Yet the quiddity of Morrison’s writing ultimately is just that. Her humanism is not restricted, as it is still often taken to be, to a tradition solely refracted through a small circle of men whose taste for classical learning, preference for moderation and reform, and disposition to kindness and optimism helped them weather late medieval Europe’s brutal religious and tribal warfare. For Morrison, humanism is a tradition of self-regard, confident and open to all that is worth knowing, but one that draws its special strength from the historical experience, community, and values possessed and refashioned by those Africans driven into the holds and shipped across the Atlantic while Erasmus and Thomas More exchanged their letters on the duties of conscience and friendship.

Morrison’s humanism, therefore, is something made of far loamier and more challenging conditions of dispossession and natal alienation that only make the project of humanization all the more pressing. “It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negritá,” as the mother in her novel *A Mercy*, known to the reader only in her Portuguese form of address, “*a minha mãe*,” puts it, and it is in these conditions that humanity is also recovered, where “language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song” take on new meaning.

Morrison has always written out of this black humanist tradition. The battle over the meaning of black humanity has consistently been central to both her fiction and her essays—and not just for the sake of black people but also to further what we hope all of humanity can become. This is a humanism informed by Anna Julia Cooper, who insisted on the education of black women and the affirmation of their “undisputed dignity” as vital to any meaningful realization of social justice. It is the determination of Mary McLeod Bethune, who told a doctor who advised her in 1941 to slow down her relentless administrative and philanthropic activism, “I am my mother’s daughter, and the drums of Africa still beat in my heart. They will not let me rest while there is a single Negro boy or girl without a chance to prove his worth.”

And of Sojourner Truth, who, when advised that the meeting house in Angola, Indiana, where she was to speak was going to be burned down, replied, “Then I shall speak upon the ashes.”

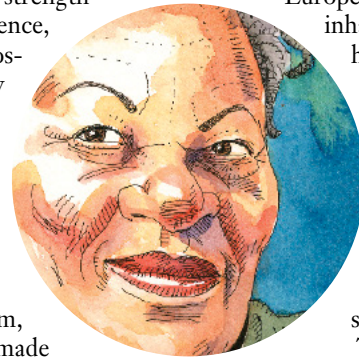
Although her writings remain far less well-known, one of the contemporary thinkers who most resemble Morrison in this respect is the philosopher Sylvia Wynter, who has, as it happens, called for a “re-enchantment of humanism” that would complete the work of Erasmus and his circle by breaking out of the paradigm that understood his intellectual and ethical virtues to be the special property of bourgeois

European men over all the other inhabitants of the globe. While humanist, it seeks to effect a revolution in ethics and perspective that is sensitive to the natural world around us. Such a humanism knows that those who endured slavery are some of the best people to consult on questions of social and political freedom.

This humanistic bent is especially evident in one of Morrison’s most important essays included in the collection, “The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations.” Its ostensible subject is the apocalyptic way we regard the future of human life—a future that is unquestionably at risk of being foreshortened—but its real targets lie elsewhere. What Morrison takes issue with is the pronoun at the center of the appeal for action:

Political discourse enunciates the future it references as something we can leave to or assure “our” children or—in a giant leap of faith—“our” grandchildren. It is the pronoun, I suggest, that ought to trouble us. We are not being asked to rally for *the* children, but for *ours*. “Our children” stretches our concern for two or five generations. “The children” gestures toward time to come of greater, broader, brighter possibilities—precisely what politics veils from view.

Morrison wants us to think in more general terms: for humanity itself. Our inability to do so—to envision, plan, or imagine a deep future for the human race—is evidence, she worries, of a larger bankruptcy in our present culture, which cannot



summon a sense of what we would do even if we could safely guarantee that kind of longevity. To have such an attitude toward the future we would need a common mission, some cultural pattern of vitality with which to fill the empty stretches of time to come—in short, we would need a humanism. “It will require,” she concludes, “thinking about the quality of human life, not just its length. The quality of intelligent life, not just its strategizing abilities. The obligations of moral life, not just its ad hoc capacity for pity.”

There is a speech not included in *The Source of Self-Regard* that should have been: Morrison’s 1995 convocation address to the students of Howard University on the 128th anniversary of its founding. In it, she apologizes for not dwelling on “the sweetness and the beauty and the conviviality” of the old days and instead traces Howard’s long history of perseverance in the face of a nation openly hostile or skeptical (often both) to the notion of educating black people in the liberal arts.

Turning to the present, Morrison warns her listeners that this struggle is far from over. There is, she insists, a creeping fascism in the midst of American culture that

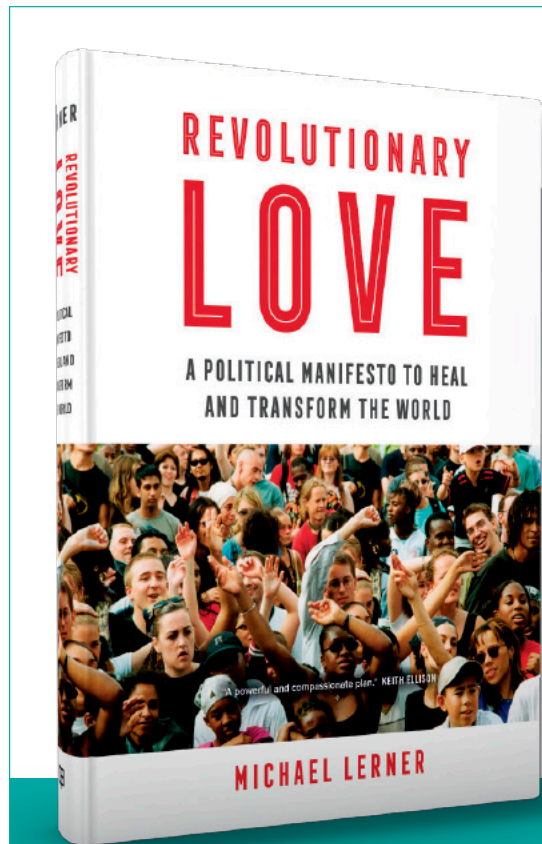
relies on the construction of “an interior enemy” for “both focus and diversion.” Do not, she commends her audience, trust any one political party to combat this drift toward creating others out of neighbors. It will make no difference who is in power if, in the end, we are interested only in building a bunkered future, a siloed desert without social intercourse and mutual conversation, a world with quantified convenience but no qualitative conviction that can help us transcend the otherness imposed on all of us.

Making a homeland worth keeping, for Morrison, is centrally about this: It requires a deep mutuality—a solidarity that can’t be achieved by cutting any group or individual out but that looks past difference to find a shared sameness. As Morrison told another gathering of students, this time in 2013, “We owe others our language, our history, our art, our survival, our neighborhood, our relationships with family and colleagues, our ability to defy social conventions as well as support these conventions. All of this we learned from others. None of us is alone; each of us is dependent on others—some of us depend on others for life itself.”

To read Morrison today is to remember all over again how badly we need the rogue

sanity found in her essays and speeches as well as her novels. Sometimes this rogue sanity consists of bright new ideas, but many other times it is just very simple things, very old ideas that we already know and should already understand but that magnify under Morrison’s glass. As Morrison puts it in her penultimate collection of lectures, *The Origin of Others*, “The resources available to us for benign access to each other, for vaulting the mere blue air that separates us, are few but powerful: language, image, and experience.”

Our country is not now and never has been as noble as Morrison’s work insisted we could be. In this sense, she wrote for the future—for the young readers who are only now taking their first steps into the classroom and the public library, gazing at the shelves searching for answers to as yet unknown questions. This generation will pull down those books and feel with enviable freshness that inordinate beauty and vitality we hold dear. They may find themselves, as we so often have, echoing Morrison, who said in praise of James Baldwin at his funeral, “In your hands language was handsome again. In your hands we saw how it was meant to be: neither bloodless nor bloody, and yet alive.” ■



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NOW WE CAN BEGIN

Crystal Eastman's revolution

by VIVIAN GORNICK

In the first decades of the 20th century, there were gathered in Greenwich Village a few hundred women and men of radical temperament—artists, intellectuals, activists—bent on making a revolution in cultural consciousness. European modernism had crossed the Atlantic, and a great refusal to conform to the dictates of a worn-out American bourgeoisie was filling the air, one that made art and transgression and politics seem (as they always do in times of social rebellion) interchangeable. What was wanted, as one of them put it, was a “regeneration of the just-before-dawn of a new day in American art and literature and living-of-life as well as in politics.”

They were organizing in the name of experience, direct experience. To know oneself through unmarried sex, transgressive opinion, eccentric dress—these became the startling conventions of downtown radicalism in the years surrounding World War I. Among the

Vivian Gornick's *Unfinished Business: Notes of a Chronic Re-Reader*, will be published in February.

women and men then flocking to the Village were many whose names are now inscribed in the cultural histories of the time: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Eugene O'Neill, Margaret Sanger, John Reed, Randolph Bourne, Max Eastman, and his sister, Crystal. Actually, it was Crystal who got there first.

Crystal Eastman was born in 1881 to a father who was a Congregational minister and a mother who soon became a minister. Both parents served as pastors to a number of churches in upstate New York, and that's where Eastman and her three brothers, of whom Max was the youngest, grew up. The parents were among those 19th century Christians imbued with humanist values—they supported abolition, universal suffrage, justice for the poor, education for women—and they poured it all into the children, most especially into Crystal.

As Amy Aronson's informative new biography, *Crystal Eastman: A Revolutionary Life*, tells us, the passion for social reform was mother's milk to Eastman. She grew up hungry for an education that would prepare

Crystal Eastman

A Revolutionary Life

By Amy Aronson

Oxford University Press. 408 pp. \$34.95

her to do good in the world. Between 1899 and 1907, she attended Vassar College, Columbia University for an MA, and finally New York University Law School. She also fell in with a variety of Greenwich Village progressives—suffragists, settlement house workers, crusading journalists—who provided her with the company needed to begin a life of activism that eventually included (very nearly equally) the struggle over suffrage for women, legislation for worker safety, and the abolishment of militarism.

Eastman's commitment to so many causes often resulted in her losing the position of leadership to which she was probably entitled, but she saw the world as all of a piece and couldn't help trying to join the ills of society into a united reform effort. In 1910, she delivered a speech, Aronson tells us, in which she lamely tried to bridge the suffrage and labor movements by arguing that suffragists should appropriate the radical labor tactic of the strike to hasten the success of their cause: “If I had my way...we would tell the men of this country we were not going to work any more... until they gave us a share in the government of the country.... If this strike were possible I am willing to wager that women would be given the ballot within several hours.”

In the course of her life, Eastman worked for or helped found the American Association for Labor Legislation, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Women's Peace Party, and the American Union Against Militarism, which, in time, morphed into the American Civil Liberties Union. On behalf of her twin political loves—suffrage and labor legislation—she traveled widely throughout the years, making speeches, writing articles, organizing campaigns. She also coedited the left-wing magazine *The Liberator* and produced a now-classic report on industrial accidents. Two weeks after the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in 1911, she delivered a speech in which she said that when we know a disaster has occurred because the laws of the state permitted the absence of safety measures, “we want to put somebody in jail,” but “when the dead bodies of girls are found piled up against locked doors leading to the exits after a factory fire...what we want is to start a revolution.” She married twice (both marriages failed) and had two children. In 1928, at the age of 47, she died of kidney disease.

And there we have Eastman's résumé. Now for something of Eastman herself.

Greenwich Village, in the early years of the 20th century, was a working-class neighborhood that had let the bohemians in. Eastman was enchanted. Describing the crowded street scene in a letter to her mother, she wrote, “Everyone is out. Mothers and fathers and babies line the doorsteps...little girls playing...in the middle of the street, and boys running in and out, chasing each other.” And to Max, urging him to join her when he graduated from college, she wrote, “I love it so for the people that are there and the thousands of things they do and think about.” The women and men she especially loved were “all the interesting between ones who really know how to live—who are working hard at something all the time; and especially the radicals, the reformers, the students—because they are open-minded, and eager over every new movement, and because they know when it is right for them to let go and amuse themselves and because they can laugh, even at themselves.” (Pace Emma Goldman: If I can’t dance, I’m not coming to your revolution.)

Eastman was bent on living a life of meaning that would include, as she liked to say, loving hard as well as working hard. (Rosa Luxemburg said almost the identical thing when she urged socialists to make the revolution, yes, but not give up the joy of life.) Eastman had many suitors—she was tall and beautiful and glowed when she talked—but somehow passion with a capital “P” eluded her. One man after another fell short. Nothing, she wrote her mother, “could be as soul destroying as to discover a poverty of fine feelings and appreciativeness in the man you must live with all your life and whose children would be yours also.”

Time passed, and soon Eastman was close to 30, and although her days were packed—politics, activism, and a vast social life—she began to suffer from an inner discontent. “I have been feeling lately, somewhat lost and stranded, as if I couldn’t tell where or with what people I belonged,” she wrote her mother. These feelings did not slow down her work (nothing could except being near death), but she grew weary of waiting for the right man to appear. In such a mood it was inevitable that she would marry, and probably just as inevitable that it would be to the wrong man for the wrong reasons.

In 1912, the National American Woman Suffrage Association took Eastman on as a salaried organizer to run its campaign in Wisconsin. That year there was great hope that a turning point had been reached in the 64-year struggle for the vote. A considerable number of states now had suffrage for women on the

ballot, and Wisconsin seemed ripe for the next great push. NAWSA thought Eastman was the right woman for the job: She was young and enthusiastic and a dynamic worker.

Eastman took the job, Aronson tells us, and moved to Wisconsin, though not for suffrage but for love. The previous year she had married Wallace Benedict, known as “Bennie,” an insurance agent from Milwaukee she’d been introduced to on one of her organizing trips to the Midwest. When they met, Bennie’s interest in labor organizing seemed as passionate as hers, his animal energy an excitement, and his “sturdy boyish masculinity,” as Max Eastman put it, in striking contrast with “the cerebral social worker types” that his sister met in New York—a distinct attraction. He was also “one of those rare males...who like to have the woman they love amount to something.” But Max never liked Bennie. Crystal, he insisted, was in “work accidents” for social justice, Bennie for the insurance fees.

In Wisconsin, her virtues and vices as a leader emerged full force. On the one hand, as an organizer, she was superbly skilled and accomplished a great deal, speaking everywhere, easily countering every argument against suffrage that came her way, defending eloquently the moral rightness of the cause. On the other, her behavior with those working under her was less than perfect. Her comrades often found her bossy and bullying—overly direct, blunt to a fault, even abrasive. In Milwaukee, her style was resented from the start. “I think [she] will manage to antagonize us all before she has been in the office another week,” one suffragist wrote another.

In the end, the Wisconsin campaign failed to put suffrage on the ballot, and by the time it was over, Eastman wanted out of both Milwaukee and the life she’d been living there. Her husband, she realized, was a true bourgeois and she, just as truly, a bohemian. She really didn’t want a prosperous, middle-class life, and Bennie was hell-bent on getting rich. “You see,” she wrote Max, “I can feel this deadly middle-western life with a big house and a big automobile and a comfortable home—and no chance to raise hell if I want to—closing in on me. I must get Bennie away *now*.” But Bennie didn’t want to get away, now or ever. The marriage was over.

If ever there was a woman determined on taking in her experience with as much honesty as possible, that woman was Crystal Eastman. But in 1916 she married again with not much more foresight than she’d shown before, this time to an Englishman named Walter Fuller, a somewhat

itinerant radical with whom she had two children and lived on and off for over a decade. She loved Fuller—they were genuine comrades in radicalism—but the fearful totality with which she flung herself into one cause or another ultimately alienated him. (God knows what it did to the children.) A passion for getting the thing done exactly as she thought it should be done overtook Eastman whenever the next crisis in labor or suffrage occurred, and she became hopelessly single-minded, the extreme position being the only one she ever wanted to occupy. There are millions of marriages that have survived that kind of pressure when the obsessive is a man. But how many when it is a woman?

One of the most interesting political developments in which Eastman had a strong stake was the quarrel that broke out in the 1920s, after the vote was won, between egalitarian feminists who supported the newly hatched Equal Rights Amendment and social reformers like Lillian Wald and Jane Addams (and later Eleanor Roosevelt) who supported protective legislation for women and denounced the ERA as a danger to them rather than a boon. Eastman, of course, was an egalitarian through and through. “I am interested...in seeing that [women] are no longer classed with children and minors,” she explained. If she should be told that women couldn’t work at night, she’d pronounce the messenger an enemy at the gates. She knew that she was speaking from a privileged position—that of the white middle-class woman unthreatened by industrial dangers—but she firmly believed that to vote for equality under the law instead of protection was to vote for the grown-up future rather than the patronizing status quo.

It is painful to realize that this argument was repeated as late as the 1970s and ’80s and to some degree will be with us until the ERA becomes the law of the land. But shortly after the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment, every feminist in the country had a take on the ERA, and many of them included some very telling complaints. Eastman delivered a speech called “Now We Can Begin” in which she laid out all the issues on which equality had yet to be won, and among them was embedded one gripe that had never softened in her:

It must be womanly as well as manly to earn your own living. And it must be manly as well as womanly to know how to cook and sew and clean and take care of yourself in the ordinary exigencies of life. I need

not add that the second part of this revolution will be more passionately resisted than the first. Men will not give up their privilege of helplessness without a struggle. The average man has a carefully cultivated ignorance about household matters—from what to do with the crumbs to the grocer's telephone number—a sort of cheerful inefficiency which protects him better than the reputation for having a violent temper.... Even as a boy he was quick to see how a general reputation for being 'no good around the house' would serve him throughout life, and half-consciously he began to cultivate that helplessness until today it is the despair of feminist wives.

I can hear her voice as I read these words, and behind her voice I can also hear Emma Goldman's and Rosa Luxemburg's and Elizabeth Stanton's and Simone de Beauvoir's, all radical women distinguished not so much by any unusual feats of intellection as by an urgency of spirit that emerges from a love of life empowered by a passion for moral suasion: the incredible excitement of doing the right thing. After Eastman died, Freda Kirchwey, who later became the editor of *The Nation*, wrote, "When she spoke to people—whether it was to a small committee or a swarming crowd—hearts beat faster and nerves tightened as she talked.... She was for thousands a symbol of what the free woman might be."

Aronson's biography pays Crystal Eastman the enormous respect of presenting her as a woman of parts in whom we see fused the best of American leftism with the best of Christian compassion and the near best of modernist courage. For this, I applaud it. But I also must say that this is an academic biography, meaning the author feels obliged to provide extensive explanations of the social, political, and cultural atmosphere surrounding every move Eastman made. The issues, the organizations, the internecine clashes are all here in somewhat wearying detail. It's not that it isn't all interesting; it's just that Eastman herself gets lost for pages (and pages!) at a time. Only rarely—and then mainly through her letters—do we glimpse the progress of her inner life, gain any insight into her conflicts, her blind spots, her fearsome drive. In short, only rarely do we feel her alive on the page. These objections notwithstanding, Aronson's book is prodigiously researched, the writing easy on the eyes, and it deserves, without a doubt, a place on any shelf of biographies devoted to the stirring history of American radicalism. ■



THE BREAKUP

The unmaking of the postwar international order

by RICHARD J. EVANS

Almost immediately upon entering the White House in 2017, Donald Trump began a series of assaults on the existing global order, which has lasted in its essentials since the end of World War II. In 1945, it seemed obvious to the architects of the postwar system that a broad network of international agreements was needed to avoid the virulent nationalism that so recently plunged the world into the bloodiest and most disastrous war in history. Organizations and accords like the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and the North American Free Trade Agreement and its more limited predecessor came into being. Declaring a policy of nationalism, Trump has launched

verbal attacks on such international institutions, threatening to pull out of many of them, including the more recent Paris Climate Agreement.

Underlying the postwar international order was a widespread belief that the spread of democratic institutions was the best way to prevent the recurrence of the war, dictatorship, and genocide that caused so much destruction between 1914 and 1945, and Trump has attacked these too. At home, he has criticized the American judiciary and the American press, while abroad he has cozied up to dictators and authoritarian strongmen like Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, Jair Bolsonaro, Kim Jong-un, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Seldom do we hear professions emanating from the White House of America's leadership in support of peace, democracy, and international cooperation. Instead, we usually hear threats of trade wars, boasts of nuclear arsenals, and slogans such as "America first."

Richard J. Evans is the author, most recently, of Eric Hobsbawm: A Biography.

These are alarming developments. But are there broader causes of what many commentators describe as the breakup of the West and the decline of the postwar international order? What was and, in fact, what *is* the West? And has it really ever promoted democratic values across the globe? Is it a concept that has had its day, or is it still a useful tool for understanding the international order? All these questions are raised in an often acute form in British geographer Simon Reid-Henry's massive new study, *Empire of Democracy: The Remaking of the West Since the Cold War, 1971–2017*. It leaves us in no doubt that what is happening in the United States is far from a new or isolated phenomenon. In one country after another, politics has become polarized, and the center has been hollowed out. Democratic institutions have come under fire, and right-wing populists and demagogues have taken the reins of power. The liberal values that have long held sway over the internal and external policies of many countries can no longer be taken for granted. Putin has announced that the “liberal idea” has become “obsolete” in the world.

It seems obvious that this situation is the result, above all, of the global financial crisis of 2008–09. But Reid-Henry argues that it began long before the Cold War came to an end. With urban riots and widespread protests over the Vietnam War in the United States, with frequent labor conflicts in Europe, and with skyrocketing inflation in the wake of massive oil-price hikes, he says, the West was already experiencing a serious challenge to the postwar liberal order four decades ago.

Reid-Henry begins his narrative in the early 1970s, in the aftermath of the student movements of 1968 and the challenge they posed, along with the economic downturn that began in 1973. Governments in Europe and the United States struggled to find a way of bringing back economic prosperity and progress as the old industrial base of the advanced economies began to decline under the impact of the global energy crisis and rising competition from China. In these years of economic and political uncertainty, a new generation of leaders—Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand—came to power with the promise of addressing these issues.

In communist Eastern Europe, the economic challenges of the 1980s proved too much for many planned economies and led to rapidly escalating economic and political

Empire of Democracy

The Remaking of the West Since the Cold War, 1971–2017

By Simon Reid-Henry

Simon & Schuster. 880 pp. \$35

bankruptcy. In the West, another solution was found in what was beginning to be called neoliberalism—a loose set of doctrines taken up by parties of the right and center-left that transformed social democracies into regimes defined by low taxation, fiscal deregulation, and a minimalist state.

Neoliberalism triumphed over communism at the end of the 1980s, according to Reid-Henry, and helped create the economic boom of the 1990s. But, he is quick to add, neoliberalism also planted the seeds of the crisis that followed. As the United States and its allies plunged deeper into economic inequality and pursued a series of disastrous and staggeringly expensive wars after 9/11, the deregulation of the financial system caught up with them. Financial institutions lent money with abandon to people who increasingly couldn't afford to pay it back, and the global interconnectedness of investment and lending banks ensured that when one bank got into trouble over unpaid loans, the crisis would spread with astonishing rapidity across the entire system.

When this finally came to pass in 2008, with banks crashing, borrowers defaulting, and businesses going bust, the advanced industrial societies found themselves facing a sharp increase in unemployment. Still dominated by neoliberal dogma, their governments proved unable to imagine any way to resolve their economic quandaries beyond imposing further cuts in state spending.

Perhaps in another era, this might have led to a resurgence of social democracy and the left. But instead, a new and unprecedented wave of right-wing populism emerged, including the Tea Party in the United States, the Brexit movement in the United Kingdom, the revitalized National Front in France, and the Fidesz party in Hungary. “The pent-up frustration and self-loathing under which a large portion of Westerners had been toiling,” Reid-Henry observes, now found its outlet in the rise of the politics of resentment and extremism, which drove Western democracy into the deepest crisis in its history.

Underpinned by prosperity and rising expectations, neoliberalism was long able to gloss over its contradictions. But in an age of economic crisis and widespread inequality, it has shown itself to be singularly unsuited to withstand the challenges of the new order. To

survive, Reid-Henry argues, modern liberal democracies urgently need to be reimaged.

E*mpire of Democracy* gives us a detailed account of this story, telling us how we got to where we are today and tracking the rise and fall of an economic, social, and political order that now seems to be under fundamental and potentially lethal pressure. Despite the convincing nature of his overall diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of neoliberalism, however, there are many problems with how Reid-Henry tells this story, starting with the narrative style in which he has chosen to cast it. To put it bluntly, he doesn't seem to be aware of even the most basic rules of historical narrative. Individual actors in the story, from Mitterrand to Trump, are introduced with only scant background information; important dates are missing in dense chapters; and statements and observations are ventured without any attempt to ground them in evidence. For a more or less random example, near the end of the book we are told that “Dodd-Frank had belatedly been passed in 2011, along with its famous Volcker rule.” You have to read back more than 60 pages for any explanation as to what these things are. At roughly that time, Reid-Henry tells us on the very same page, “amplified by the extended reach of new media, the culture wars... leapt back into life as never before, as tirades blared out across the raucous and indiscriminating airwaves of shock-jock radio and Fox television.” He makes no attempt to unpack this sentence, simply assuming that readers will understand the references. But it's not a safe assumption to make, and terms such as “culture wars” and “shock-jock radio” really do need to be explained for the uninitiated.

There are more substantive problems as well. For quite long stretches of the book, I found it difficult to understand the sweeping generalizations that pepper the text. For instance, what was “the distinctive sense of ennui that had haunted the Western democracies during the 1990s”? Among whom? Bored with what? “Americans in particular,” we read a couple of pages earlier, “found themselves in a confusing place.” All Americans, and what place? “They were concerned about growing inequity,” the text continues, but we aren't told how or why or which Americans were concerned or in what way.

Similar generalizations occur about other peoples, such as “the French,” who apparently “felt that they were immune from the troubles that had struck the United States, because their banking system was more prudent.” Actually, most likely the

vast majority of “the French” neither knew nor cared very much about their banking system, prudent or not. Later, we are told that a “declining sense of trust within society” in the early 21st century meant that “left and right now converged upon a resolutely anti-state ethos.” Leaving aside the question of precisely which countries this applies to, one can think of myriad issues where this is simply untrue, from the introduction of the Sure Start program in the UK in 1998 to the British left’s growing demand for the renationalization of private utilities, including the railways (now part of the official program of the Labour Party), to the pressure exerted in the US by the right for the expansion of the state security apparatus in the “war against terror” and the persistent advocacy by Republicans of more state expenditure on the military.

Often, Reid-Henry’s use of the passive voice disguises an almost complete absence of detail: “the balance between freedom and democracy that Western liberal democracies had struggled for forty years to maintain was now rejected altogether.” What is the evidence for this struggle? Why should freedom and democracy be treated as opposites between which a balance needed to be maintained? And was this balance actually rejected by everyone? Or if only partially rejected—or not rejected at all—then by whom and when and where? It’s not even true of Poland and Hungary, where substantial forces remain in opposition to the right-wing nationalists currently in power.

In many sections, the book reads more like a commentary on events than an analytical narrative. The description of the election that put Barack Obama in the White House is a good example. There are some interesting observations on Sarah Palin, but we’re not told what public office she held before becoming a candidate for the vice presidency; the Tea Party is brought into the narrative, but we’re apparently expected to know what it was, who helped launch it, and what policies it advocated; and no statistics are provided for the election to indicate how many people voted for Obama and who they were.

The nature of Obama’s appeal is also largely left unexplored (his powerful catchphrase “Yes, we can!” isn’t even mentioned), and running throughout the book is also the highly dubious assumption that street politics exercise a profound effect on political systems, from the anti-Vietnam War movement, which the author tells us inaugurated the remaking of the West in the early 1970s, to the Occupy movement, which flared up briefly in 2011 and is now almost complete-

ly forgotten. Yet the more than 1 million people who marched through the streets of London on February 15, 2003, to protest the impending invasion of Iraq achieved precisely nothing, nor did the similar number of people who marched through the same streets on March 23, 2019, to demand that Britain remain in the European Union.

There are still many passages in this book that can be read with considerable profit: The account of the 2008–09 financial crisis is particularly perceptive, and one could mention many other examples. But there is a more fundamental and perhaps more interesting respect in which the book rests on a highly questionable assumption. Chief among these is the concept of “the West” itself and its linkage with liberalism and democracy.

Empire of Democracy falls into a long tradition of historical writing centered on predictions of the downfall of the West. In the 19th century, the idea of the West became a foil against which political theorists developed their recipes for progress and change. Russian Slavophiles rejected what they saw as Western individualism and the Western advocacy of material progress based on industrial capitalism, for example, while Russian Westernizers saw their country’s future very much in embracing these things. In the early 20th century, right-wing nationalists in Germany and Central Europe offered similar warnings, excoriating what they saw as the decadent materialism, spiritual weakness, and moral corruption of a West that was no longer able to prevent its own decline. Foremost among them was Oswald Spengler, whose book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, usually translated as *The Decline of the West*, became hugely popular in Germany during the 1920s, largely because it was read as a prophecy of Germany’s resurgence under a future nationalist dictatorship and then was taken, not entirely accurately, as a prediction of Hitler’s coming to power in 1933.

During the Cold War, liberals contrasted what they portrayed as the West’s preference for individual freedom, representative democracy, private property, public education, and scientific progress with the negation of these values that they claimed was found in the communist East. This liberal concept of the West was incorporated into Western civilization courses in American universities (but not European ones) and promulgated in major historical works like William H. McNeill’s 1963 *The Rise of the West*, which contained in its exposition of the rise, spread, and eventual supersession of other cultures

in world history the implication that such a decline would also be the West’s fate at some point. These also became the themes of post-Cold War texts by conservatives like Samuel P. Huntington and Niall Ferguson, with their neo-Spenglerian predictions of the West’s decline.

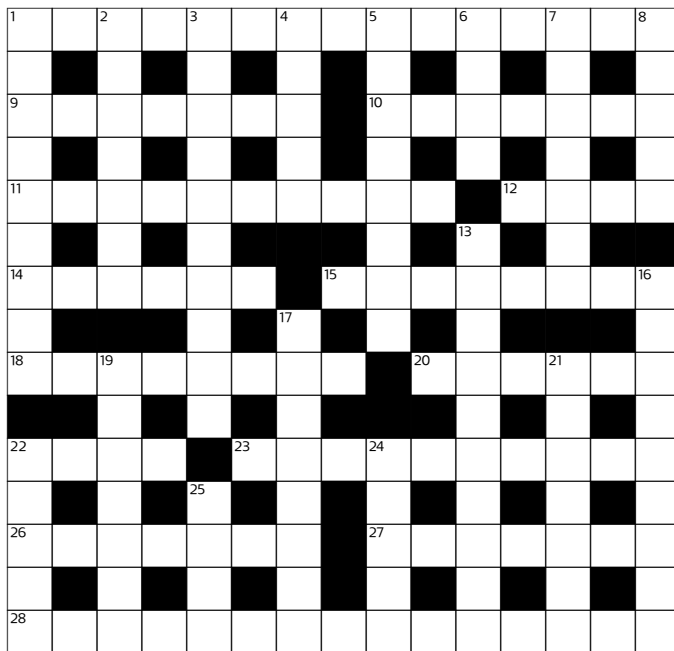
While Reid-Henry doesn’t embrace the conservative implications of these later works, he does take for granted that the West, for better or worse, can be broadly equated with liberal democracy and the free market, and so the measure of its decline is found in the failing health of these two institutions. Yet in today’s world, liberal democracy is as loaded a concept as it was during the Cold War or at the turn of the 20th century. If one looks at *The Economist* Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2017, for example, 89 countries became less democratic that year, over three times the number that became more democratic. Many of these countries are found in the geographical West, but they are present as well in other parts of the world. Democracy isn’t necessarily Western, as the stable democratic political systems found outside the West—from Indonesia to Tunisia—surely indicate.

The truth is that histories of “Western democracy” in the early 20th century no longer carry any kind of persuasiveness. For the last decade or more, historians have increasingly adopted a global approach that rejects the idea that the modern world was exclusively shaped or even mainly defined by the spread of “Western” culture across the rest of the globe. Before his death in 2016, even the great William H. McNeill came to the conclusion that his thesis concerning “the rise of the West” reflected the imperialist mood of postwar America, and so he preferred instead to lay stress on the contacts and connections among civilizations rather than their rivalries and conflicts.

More recently, global historians have been exploring the interconnectedness of different parts of the world and documenting their influences on one another. The decline of democracy in Europe and America and the economic crisis that lies at its heart are part of a general erosion of democratic and economic institutions worldwide. While *Empire of Democracy*’s title might suggest the continents-spanning nature of the current moment’s quandaries, much of this goes unexplored. The book offers a wide-ranging narrative of what happened in one part of the world, but because its scope is restricted by its reliance on the outdated notion of the West, the full story of today’s crisis remains to be told. ■

Puzzle No. 3518

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Immaculate lace tangled by a bunch of astronauts while holding two pieces of string (5,2,1,7)
- 9 Business gatherings grow (7)
- 10 With 99.5 percent reduction just past the head, metalworker becomes more willowy (7)
- 11 Conflict is an offense to Sadat (7,3)
- 12 Members of administration, lying to the exclusion of everything else (4)
- 14 French one's no longer in style, so it's still on the shelf (6)
- 15 Expert resource involving average code of conduct (8)
- 18 For the most part, athletic activity has to impart magnificence (8)
- 20 Dog is prying? (6)
- 22 Spray a spice (4)
- 23 Write unadventurous word, almost what Shakespeare often wrote (10)
- 26 Cool performer missing opening of *Rent*, actually (2,5)

- 27 Mark pursues advanced degree (and a beauty aid) (7)
- 28 Queen redistributed letters from Maronite (5,10)

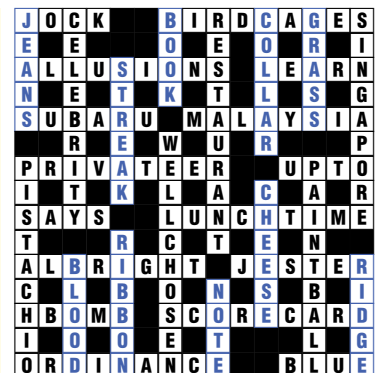
DOWN

- 1 Uniformed children's bus crashing into crumbling stucco (3,6)
- 2 I see men sorted into a president's list (7)
- 3 Country broadcast antelopes—and another antelope (3,7)
- 4 German beginning to synthesize part of a nerve cell (5)
- 5 Know-it-all with independent ocean team does not make it to the end (8)
- 6 Turner with a Swedish outfit (4)
- 7 Dismantled attic in old passenger ship (7)
- 8 Primitive, like a nobleman? (5)
- 13 Builder's short note to mother and child (10)
- 16 Yes, meandering race in body of water is one way to make a birthday party festive (5,4)
- 17 How endless fruit conceals a potentially large debt (4,4)
- 19 Satan provided ghastly ulcer externally (7)
- 21 Act up inside? Expel pariah! (7)
- 22 Palindromic start of a famous palindrome (5)
- 24 Experimental poet adopts medium pace (5)
- 25 Top pilot circumnavigating mountain's summit (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3517

ACROSS 1 J(O)CK (co. rev.)
 3 BIR + DC + AGES (rev.) 8 anag.
 10 LEA(R)N 11 SUB A (rev.) + RU[e]
 12 MA + LAYS + IA 14 PRI(V)ATE + ER
 (pirate anag., &lit.) 15 anag. 18 "seize"
 19 L(UN(C)HT)IME (bunt anag.)
 21 ALB + RIGHT 23 JE(S)TE + R
 26 HBO + MB 27 SCO(RECAR)D (rev.)
 28 OR + D(IN)ANCE 29 theme revealer

DOWN 1 JEAN S[tableton]
 2 C(ELEBR)ITY (rebel anag.) 3 BOO + K
 4 RESTAU (anag.) + RANT 5 anag.
 6 rev. hidden 7 SIN + GAP + ORE
 9 anag. 13 WE, LLC + HOSE + N
 14 [mu/PI]-STACHIO 16 P(AIN'T)B + ALL
 17 CHE + ESE (anag.) 20 RI(BB)ON (iron
 anag.) 22 B(LO)OD (&lit.) 24 RID + GE
 (rev.) 25 anag. (&lit.)



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—Claudia Sole, Calif.



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¹ Constanza et al., (2017) Twenty years of ecosystem services, Journal of Ecosystem Services.

² <https://www.iucn.org/content/facts-and-figures-forests>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/W4345E/w4345e05.htm>

⁴ <https://www.iucn.org/content/facts-and-figures-forests>

⁵ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/habitats/forest-habitat>

⁶ <https://www.iucn.org/content/facts-and-figures-forests>

⁷ <http://assets.wwf.org.uk/>