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THE VICTORIES OF 2012
JESSICA VALENTI ON WOMEN
EUGENE JARECKI ON THE DRUG WAR
WILLIAM GREIDER ON CHANGING AMERICA
JOHN NICHOLS ON DEMOCRACY AND MONEY
Letters

Now Let’s Move Forward!

New London, N.H.
As I age and my remaining days diminish, I do things I otherwise would not dare. And so, this open letter:

Dear Mr. President:
Congratulations on your re-election. It allows us to imagine a day when the earth will no longer be poisoned, and LGBT people, people of color and women will get an even break. As president, you carry burdens that are beyond my power to imagine, and I respect you for that. Here are my hopes for your second term. It is time to end government by military-industrial complex and to revive American democracy. Shut down Guantánamo and its sister prisons, end special rendition, put aside the drones and the policies of assassination and torture. End those bloody things. Strengthen our economy by feeding it, not bleeding it. Nourish our economy and you nourish our posterity. Prosperity and revenue will come, and the national deficits and debts will take care of themselves. Continue to support the humble and the meek, and establish justice.

There may be small and empty people who will oppose and mock you, and manufacture crises to frighten our fellow citizens. Do not let them deter you. You have it in your hands to do great things, and to restore America as the hope of the world.

Yes you can. Yes we can. Good luck.
John Raby

Bottom Line: He’s Gone

Marinette, Wis.
Re Greg Palast’s “Mitt Romney’s Bailout Bonanza” [Nov. 5]: you’ve probably just shown us why the Romneys didn’t want us to see their tax returns.
Grace Kvam

Lewisville, Tex.
I read with dismay and disgust how Romney and all his white-collar thieves on Wall Street took our money in the bailout, canceled pensions and made more money for their greedy selves. My questions are: Does the attorney general’s office read The Nation? If not, why not? If so, why haven’t they done anything about this thievery?
Warren Friedberg

A Plague on Both Their Houses

Gig Harbor, Wash.
Hurrah for Doug Henwood’s “Presidential Politricks” [Nov. 5]. At last, a Nation article challenging the absence of “a plague on both their houses.” As I read your earlier endorsement of Obama, I kept waiting to hear the position that both parties may be corrupt beyond hope, as they are bought and owned by the 1 percent. This year, I discovered the Green Party’s platform, and it contained everything my conscience holds dear. So I joined Jill Stein’s effort and voted for her. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks—by my vote I was boycotting both major parties. It was my sit-down strike. There is no hope of curing the corruption in either party. The data tell the story: as of October 26, Rocky Anderson had spent about $50,000; Stein, about $220,000; and Obama and Romney, about $1 billion each. No wonder our 99 percent voices are ignored.
William Nerin

No Kisses for Hershey Trust

Wyomissing, Pa.
I appreciate The Nation and F. Frederic Fouad for covering “Hershey’s Broken Trust” [Nov. 5]. I hope this article will shed additional light on all things relating to the Milton Hershey School and will help propel Kathleen Kane to the Pennsylvania attorney general’s office, so a real investigation and reform can take place.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not point out that for years the trust was besieged with frivolous and antiquated complaints by alumni and the community at

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 26)
The Real Losers of 2012

White guys at some important newspapers have hit upon a bizarre interpretation of the election returns: nothing much changed. Peter Baker of The New York Times: “When all the shouting was done, the American people on Tuesday more or less ratified the status quo.” Say what? Baker seems like a smart enough reporter, but his analysis is so stupid, he must be in postpartum shock. George Will, always cynical and condescending, echoes Baker. In a Washington Post column, Will observed, “A nation vocally disgusted with the status quo has reinforced it by ratifying existing control of the executive branch and both halves of the legislative branch.”

Lest anyone miss the point, the editors of the Post instructed their readers: “A status quo election result should spur both parties to compromise.” Compromise—that’s the ticket. By which they mean our president should punish the very people who re-elected him.

Why are white guys so reluctant to give Barack Obama credit? Because the 2012 election was a crucial watershed in the life of the nation. Obama’s re-election confirmed his goal. Who lost? Forget Romney and the Republicans: the real loser was white supremacy. That poisonous prejudice has endured in our national culture for two centuries. It still does, though it is now mostly cultivated by white Southerners who have taken over the party of Lincoln.

So whose “status quo” are these pun-dits clinging to? Maybe their own. They have typically belittled struggles by excluded minorities as “identity politics.” Well, yes, these people do intend to be identified as citizens, fully endowed with the rights other Americans enjoy. This election confirmed their goal.

Another big loser was male supremacy. The patriarchy isn’t defeated, of course, but its ancient dominance is disintegrating—at home, in the workplace and in politics. And clear-thinking voters now firmly reject discrimination against gays and lesbians. The question is not just about whom they can marry; it is whether they will become our trusted governing officials. Wisconsin’s Tammy Baldwin became the nation’s first openly gay senator—and the man elected to succeed her in the House is also gay.

The complexion of who governs us is changing in remarkable ways. We have just elected our first woman senator from Hawaii, who is also our first Buddhist, Mazie Hirono. And the woman who won the House seat she vacated, Tulsi Gabbard, will be the first Hindu member of Congress; according to The Hill, she plans to take the oath of office on the Bhagavad-Gita. For the first time ever, women and minorities will be the majority of House Democrats.

We should celebrate another deep shift—more promising and fulfilling, more just and democratic, than ever before.

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in politics—the arrival of new Americans—that is actually a very old story in our history. This chapter involves some of the same injustices that earlier generations of immigrants encountered. They have always had to dig in and fend for themselves, do the hard work to ensure that their children’s future is brighter than theirs (one more thing Romney did not understand). It always takes a generation or longer for new Americans to gain the self-confidence and courage to demand their rightful power as citizens. In an earlier era it was the Irish, Jews, Italians and others from Europe. In the election of 1928, they voted for Al Smith, the first Irish Catholic nominated for president. He lost that election, but his politics defined the future of the Democratic Party. A friend joked that Mexicans are the new Irish, Chinese are the new Jews. Or is it the Palestinians? Each American story is different, yet also seems alike.

The other big losers, of course, are the money guys—the billionaires who thought they could buy the election. No doubt they will try again, but now we know we can beat them with old-fashioned door-to-door politics. Organized people defeat organized money: that’s the formula for our future politics. One hopes our Supreme Court justices are reading the election returns. Those justices who vote with the billionaires may ask themselves whether their status quo is in trouble, too.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Feminists for the Win

Something strange is happening to feminists. We’re winning. The election gave us the re-election of a feminist-friendly president, a record number of women in Congress, the first openly gay US senator and wins for marriage equality in four states. There’s energy and interest on feminist issues the likes of which we haven’t seen in decades.

This shift comes to us courtesy of the perfect storm of sexist Republican misinformation, a vibrant online feminist movement and a nation of women unwilling to move backward. But with the election dust settling, we should examine why we’re winning the culture wars and think about what to do next.

We got a hint of the tide turning in our favor when SlutWalks went viral. What started as one march in Toronto in 2011 turned into hundreds of protests all over the world, all battling the myth that what a woman wears has some bearing on whether or not she’ll be assaulted. Despite the tempting fodder—pictures of young feminists subversively dressed in bras, miniskirts and heels—the media largely got the message wrong.

The marches also epitomized the emerging organizing strategy of young feminists: activism that’s largely self-directed and loosely organized; fast-moving micro-movements built organically and without institutional leadership.

The effectiveness of this approach was on display earlier this year during the Susan G. Komen for the Cure/Planned Parenthood debacle. Just days after Komen announced it would stop funding Planned Parenthood, an online furor forced the breast cancer foundation to reverse itself. Similar activism on a Virginia
bill that would have mandated invasive transvaginal ultrasounds for women seeking abortions—feminists called it “state rape” on Twitter—resulted in the legislation being lampooned on Saturday Night Live, The Daily Show and other media. The law was eventually amended. When Rush Limbaugh called Sandra Fluke a “slut,” the backlash that ensued was also thanks to online action. The National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood didn’t drive these campaigns; American women did.

Perhaps more interesting than the wins themselves, though, was the widespread media attention and cultural acceptance of feminist outrage. All of a sudden, women’s anger at the attempted defunding of Planned Parenthood or a male politician’s comment about rape wasn’t the mark of bitter “man haters”; it was an understandable reaction from smart, engaged women.

The shift was so stark that the Obama campaign was able to make feminist issues a part of its electoral strategy. David Axelrod recently told Politico that, “from May on, we were running a track that was specifically targeting women on women’s health issues, Planned Parenthood, contraception. It broadened out somewhat to economic issues, but primarily focused on those issues, and we maintained our support among women.” No doubt, the Republican Party’s sexist meltdown was also a tremendous motivator for American women. After all, there’s only so many comments about rape and birth control a gal can take.

On election day, the backlash against GOP extremism along with smart organizing by feminists culminated not only in women being the majority of the electorate but also in an 18 percent gender gap—the largest in reported history. The GOP underestimated how important issues like abortion, rape and birth control are to women—consider how many have ended a pregnancy or been assaulted—and reaped the whirlwind.

As gratifying as it was to see misogyny thumped at the polls, it should be noted that most of the feminist efforts over the past year have been defensive. Feminists have been fighting the attempted rollbacks of our rights for so long, we haven’t had the time, energy or resources to push for more progressive change. But now that we’ve averted a Romney administration, we have time, energy or resources to push for more progressive change. The National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood, contraception, and other media. The law was eventually amended. When Rush Limbaugh called Sandra Fluke a “slut,” the backlash that ensued was also thanks to online action. The National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood didn’t drive these campaigns; American women did.

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The activism that has gained us so much ground and cultural good will is undoubtedly a good thing, but it also reveals key gaps. When Virginia removed the transvaginal mandate from its legislation, for example, the requirement to have a “noninvasive” ultrasound remained. This means that low-income women will not be able to have abortions because of the hundreds of dollars an ultrasound can add to an already expensive procedure. Rush Limbaugh has been attacking women for years—notable women of color, especially—but it was Sandra Fluke who became American women’s “daughter.” It’s great that Richard Mourdock lost after calling pregnancy from rape something “God intended to happen,” but his opponent, Democratic Senator-elect Joe Donnelly, has a similar anti-choice stance, and believes that “life begins at conception.” Even the language of the “war on women”—while catchy and media-friendly—is exclusionary toward transgender people.

The successes that dominate the mainstream narrative on feminism largely center on the most privileged of American women, even when the consequences affect the most marginalized. And while symbolic successes—like beating Mourdock—are important, it’s more crucial that feminist actions make a difference in real women’s lives.

It’s the age-old feminist struggle of fighting for a politics that is progressive versus fighting for one that’s popular. But if there ever was an argument for an intersectional approach to feminism, the election provided a great one. Despite the well-reported gender gap, it turns out that white women as a whole voted for Romney. It was women of color who brought it home for Democrats and President Obama. Mainstream feminist organizations would do well to consider this when planning their next moves—not only because focusing on the most marginalized women is the right thing to do and the only way to build a comprehensive movement, but because it’s the most effective and politically savvy way as well.

Feminist organizations could also take a lesson from LGBT groups, which are preparing to push for marriage equality in more states. The Human Rights Campaign is even working to rank cities by their LGBT friendliness. A similar project on women could really make waves. We need to fight battles on our own terms, thinking about what big-picture successes might look like on rape, reproductive health and economic justice. And feminist funders should be strategizing ways to use online activism. Young feminists built the infrastructure that has given women the tools to turn their outrage into action, but they lack the financial and organizational resources to move forward on their own.

Most important, we need to keep winning. A generation of women is experiencing the excitement and solidarity that comes with hard-won successes, and this momentum can be channeled into an active, progressive agenda. There will always be resistance—the “feminazi” days are not over by a long shot—but we haven’t had a better opportunity in decades. It’s time to take it.

Jessica Valenti is the author of several books, most recently Why Have Kids? A New Mom Explores the Truth About Parenting and Happiness. She blogs at TheNation.com.

Voting Out the Drug War

As a filmmaker committed to addressing the injustices of the “war on drugs” and its devastating impact on American communities, I awoke on November 7 to a renewed sense of purpose. Beyond working to support the movement for marijuana reform in Colorado, Massachusetts and Washington, I had traveled to California in the week leading up to election day to work for the passage of Proposition 36, a vital piece of legislation that reduces the severity of California’s notorious “three strikes” law. By voting to amend the law so that offenders with two nonviolent “strikes” against them cannot henceforth receive a life sentence for a third strike that is petty or nonviolent, Californians have sent a resounding signal to the rest of the country:
it is possible to retreat from the tragic excesses of America’s criminal justice nightmare. The same state that helped lead the way into the darkness of draconian sentencing for nonviolent crimes has begun, it seems, to lead us back toward the light. And because every state has its own special brand of excess when it comes to the treatment of nonviolent offenders, as California goes, so, I hope, will go the nation.

In my new film, *The House I Live In*, I try to understand how this country became a land without pity in our treatment of drug crime. We are the world’s leading jailer, with more of our citizens behind bars than any other country on earth. The statistics speak volumes. Over forty years, the “war on drugs” has cost a trillion dollars and accounted for 45 million drug arrests. Yet for all that, America has nothing to show but a legacy of failure. Drugs are cheaper, purer, more available and used by more and younger people today than ever before. Perhaps this explains why any mention of the issue was notably absent from this year’s presidential campaign. Ever since Richard Nixon declared the “war on drugs” in 1971 and proved the electoral power of anti-crime rhetoric, politicians of both parties have known, as sure as they know where their bread is buttered, that talking tough on crime is smart politics. But what happens when people begin to acknowledge that the war is a total failure? What if politicians are starting to realize that associating themselves with this loser is just plain bad politics?

In making my film, I wanted to travel beyond the statistics, so I visited more than twenty-five states to meet people at all levels of the drug war whose lives have been affected by our misguided laws and vast prison system. What I found on the ground was nothing short of shattering. Wherever I went, everyone involved—prisoners, cops, judges, jailers, wardens, medical experts, senators—all described to me a system out of control, a predatory monster that sustains itself on the mass incarceration of fellow human beings. Their crimes, most often the nonviolent use or sale of drugs in petty quantities, have become such a warping fixation for our prison-industrial complex that they are often punished more severely than violent crimes.

So where do we go from here? How do we fix this? After so many years and with so many lives already affected, there’s no silver bullet. But for me and many others working to restore sanity to the criminal justice system, Prop 36—a small step for California—may indeed prove a giant step for the nation. Every state has a hand in our drug-war disaster, since every state has its share of excessive policies and practices in law enforcement and the courts. All of these can and should be challenged by a justice-seeking electorate.

Last I checked, every state is also facing a budget crisis. And herein lies perhaps one of the best pathways toward the light. California voters have not only set the stage for greater justice and smarter law enforcement; they will also save the state more than $100 million a year in wasteful criminal justice spending. Yes, fiscal conservatism can go hand in hand with a concern for justice and human dignity. Suddenly, Grover Norquist and Chris Christie have common cause with Al Sharpton and Russell Simmons.

This is why the ranks of those opposed to the drug war are growing (even Pat Robertson recently voiced his opposition, echoing Brad Pitt, one of my film’s executive producers). What this means is that reformers can now turn from California to other states across the country and offer them a win/win: by reducing excesses in their criminal justice systems—like stop-and-frisk in New York City—they too can improve the quality of mercy in their states, produce greater public safety and save vast sums of money at the same time. Who can argue with that?

EUGENE JARECKI

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**A Vote for Democracy**

Democracy has taken quite a beating over the past several years, with the blows raining down from an increasingly activist and obsessively pro-corporate Supreme Court, voter-ID promoting Republican governors and legislatures, and Karl Rove’s empire of influence. It was easy to imagine, going into the November 6 election, that the fix was in. But the people pushed back, giving President Obama a 3.4 million popular vote victory, a 332–206 Electoral College landslide, a Senate that is more Democratic and more progressive, and a House with considerably fewer Tea Party extremists. Reversing the pattern of the 2010 Republican wave, voters chose labor-backed Democrats in seven of eleven gubernatorial races and handed key legislative chambers in New York, Maine, New Hampshire and other states to Democrats.

This has led some commentators to imagine that a template has been developed for defending the will of the people in the face of unprecedented financial and structural assaults on the democratic process. But that’s a naïve assumption. It obscures the fact that a combination of gerrymandering and right-wing Super PAC money prevented Nancy Pelosi and the Democrats from regaining control of the House, and that many state capitals are still dominated by anti-union die-hards like Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, Ohio Governor John Kasich and their allies. And just because an incumbent president, reasonably

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**Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet**

**Republican Soul Searching**

We’re searching our souls and we’re wondering why We got beat so badly our rivals are gloating. It’s obvious now where our campaign went wrong: We should have prevented more people from voting.
ANNA KARENINA – THE NATION - NOV 26 ISSUE  FINAL

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A BOLD NEW VISION OF THE EPIC STORY OF LOVE

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ‘PRIDE AND PREJUDICE’ & ‘ATONEMENT’
well-funded Democrats, and fully mobilized labor, reproductive rights and civil rights activists were able in 2012 to push back against an unprecedented onslaught of right-wing Super PAC money does not mean they will be able to do so when more sophisticated and ever more abundantly financed conservatives return in 2014 or 2016—as they surely will.

The better lesson to take from 2012 is that voters really do want a fair and functional democracy, and that Democrats and their allies should use the authority they have been handed to fight for it. Americans do not want to cede control of their communities to austerity appointees, as evidenced by Michigan’s rejection of the emergency manager law that Republican Governor Rick Snyder deployed to overrule local elected officials. Americans recognize the danger of GOP-backed barriers to their right to vote, as Minnesotans showed by rejecting a constitutional amendment mandating photo voter IDs. And they do not want corporate money to dominate our politics any more than they want corporations to dominate our lives.

In Montana and Colorado, voters overwhelmingly supported calls for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court’s Citizens United ruling—and with it, the fantasy of “corporate personhood.” That ruling, decried even by Senator John McCain as the “worst decision ever” from the High Court, ended a century of controls over the corporate dominance of politics. The Montana and Colorado votes align those states with California, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Vermont—all of which have passed resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. And dozens of communities across the United States—including Chicago, San Francisco and conservative Pueblo, Colorado—have backed local resolutions promoted by groups like Common Cause, Public Citizen, Free Speech for People, and Move to Amend. Most did so by margins as wide as the 3–1 statewide votes in Colorado and Montana.

Montana went a big step further, electing as its governor Steve Bullock, the crusading attorney general who waged the boldest battle against the use of Citizens United to wipe away state laws that bar corporations from buying elections. Bullock lost that fight before the same Supreme Court that handed down the initial ruling, but his gubernatorial victory—after a campaign that declared, “If you believe elections should be decided by Montanans, not out-of-state corporations, stand with Steve Bullock”—offers a reminder that advocacy for real reform is smart politics.

That was especially evident in Senate elections, where some of the biggest winners were outspoken backers of a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. Independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders made his stance a central theme of a re-election that secured 71 percent of the vote; he’s proposing a Saving American Democracy Amendment that says: “Corporations are not persons with constitutional rights equal to real people. Corporations are subject to regulation by the people. Corporations may not make campaign contributions or any election expenditures. Congress and states have the power to regulate campaign finances.” Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, who beat back an unprecedented Super PAC assault, led his campaign website with a petition to “Overturn Citizens United.” Newly elected Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin supports an amendment, as does Maine Senator-elect Angus King, an independent who is likely to caucus with the Democrats.

They’re not alone. President Obama argued in an online conversation shortly before the Democratic National Convention that “we need to seriously consider mobilizing a constitutional amendment process to overturn Citizens United,” and the Democratic platform declared: “We support campaign finance reform, by constitutional amendment if necessary.” The president may have an opportunity to appoint several Supreme Court justices who will recognize the need to reverse not only the Citizens United ruling but a series of decisions that handed overwhelming power to those with overwhelming amounts of money.

But presuming that the courts can quickly or certainly be repurposed as defenders of democracy is another naïve assumption. The president is right to argue that the movement to amend “can shine a spotlight on the Super PAC phenomenon and help apply pressure for change.” And the voters are right to say, as they have with their ballots in states and communities nationwide, that corporations are not people. Democracy is popular, so popular that it beat back plutocracy in 2012. Those who won have a democracy mandate; they should use it to repair the damage done and usher in a new era where money is controlled and the popular will is unleashed.

JOHN NICHOLS

The Petraeus Legacy

While much of the media focus on l’affaire Petraeus has centered on the CIA director’s sexual relationship with his biographer, Paula Broadwell, the scandal opens a window onto a different and more consequential relationship: the one between the CIA and the military’s Joint Special Operations Command. In a behind-the-scenes turf war that has raged since 9/11, the two government bodies have fought for control of the expanding global wars waged by the United States—a turf war that JSOC has largely won. Petraeus, an instrumental player in this power struggle, leaves behind an agency that has strayed from intelligence to paramilitary-type activities. Though his legacy will be defined largely by the scandal that ended his career, to many within military and intelligence circles, Petraeus’s career trajectory, from commander of US military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to the helm of the CIA, is a symbol of this evolution.

“I would not say that CIA has been taken over by the military, but I would say that the CIA has become more militarized,” Philip Giraldi, a retired career CIA case officer, told The Nation. “A considerable part of the CIA budget is now no longer spying; it’s supporting paramilitaries who work closely with JSOC to kill terrorists, and to run the drone program.” The CIA, he added, “is a killing machine now.”

As head of US Central Command in 2009, Petraeus issued execute orders that significantly broadened the ability of US forces to operate in a variety of countries, including Yemen,
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where US forces began conducting missile strikes later that year. During Petraeus's short tenure at the CIA, drone strikes conducted by the agency, sometimes in conjunction with JSOC, escalated dramatically in Yemen; in his first month in office, he oversaw a series of strikes that killed three US citizens, including 16-year-old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki. In some cases, such as the raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, commandos from the elite JSOC operated under the auspices of the CIA, so that the mission could be kept secret if it went wrong.

One current State Department liaison who has also worked extensively with JSOC describes the CIA as becoming “a mini–Special Operations Command that purports to be an intelligence agency.” For all the praise Petraeus won for his counterinsurgency strategy and the “surge” in Iraq, he says, Petraeus's real legacy is as a “political tool,” an enabler of those in the national security apparatus who want to see covert global mini-wars continue. Pointing to the “mystique that surrounds JSOC” and Adm. William McRaven, head of the Special Operations Command, the liaison said, “Petraeus was trying to implement that kind of command climate at the CIA.”

“Petraeus wanted to be McRaven, and now that window has closed,” he said. “We are firmly in the age of McRaven. There is no other titular figure with the confidence of the president that is able to articulate strategies and hold their own in rooms where everyone else has the same or greater amount of intellectual heft. McRaven is everything that Petraeus is not.”

Retired Army Col. W. Patrick Lang, a former senior defense intelligence official, says that Petraeus's arrogance—“smoothly concealed beneath the appearance of the warrior scholar”—made him deeply unpopular among the military's high-ranking officers. Dismissing the media's portrayal of Petraeus the “super soldier” and great military leader as “phony bullshit,” Lang describes him as the product of a military promotion system that encourages generals to think of themselves as “divinely selected.” “In fact, he didn’t write the COIN manual, the surge was not the main thing in improving the situation in Iraq…. They sent him to Afghanistan to apply the COIN doctrine in the same glorious way he did in Iraq, and it hasn’t worked. So if you look beneath the surface from all this stuff, it’s just a lot of hot air. There are great generals, but this guy is not one of them.”

Arriving at the CIA, Lang says, Petraeus “wanted to drag them in the covert action direction and to be a major player.”

As for Petraeus’s future, the State Department liaison said, “There will be a lot of profits to be made by him and his immediate circle of advisers, as they’re given a soft landing, whether it’s in academia or within the nexus of the military-industrial complex.”

Giraldi, the former senior CIA officer, expressed concern that in these circumstances, the “CIA is going to forget how to spy.” He also noted the “long-term consequence” of the militarization of the CIA: “every bureaucracy in the world is best at protecting itself. So once the CIA becomes a paramilitary organization, there’s going to be in-built pressure to keep going

Nobel Laureates Speak

As people who have worked for decades against the increased militarization of societies and for international cooperation to end war, we are deeply dismayed by the treatment of Pfc. Bradley Manning.

We have dedicated our lives to working for peace because we have seen the many faces of armed conflict and violence, and we understand that no matter the cause of war, civilians always bear the brunt of the cost. With today’s advanced military technology and the continued ability of business and political elites to filter what information is made public, there exists a great barrier to many citizens being fully aware of the realities and consequences of conflicts in which their country is engaged.

Responsible governance requires fully informed citizens who can question their leadership. For those citizens worldwide who do not have direct, intimate knowledge of war, yet are still affected by rising international tensions and failing economies, the WikiLeaks releases attributed to Manning have provided unparalleled access to important facts.

Revealing covert crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, this window into the realities of modern international relations has changed the world for the better. While some of these documents may demonstrate how much work lies ahead in terms of securing international peace and justice, they also highlight the potential of the Internet as a forum for citizens to participate more directly in civic discussion and creative government accountability projects.

Questioning authority, as a soldier, is not easy. But it can at times be honorable. The words attributed to Manning reveal that he went through a profound moral struggle between the time he enlisted and when he became a whistleblower. Through his experience in Iraq, he became disturbed by top-level policy that undervalued human life and caused the suffering of innocent civilians and soldiers. Like other courageous whistleblowers, he was driven foremost by a desire to reveal the truth.

Private Manning said in chat logs that he hoped the releases would bring “discussion, debates and reforms” and condemned the ways the “first world exploits the third.” Much of the world regards him as a hero for these efforts toward peace and transparency, and he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. But it is our belief that leaders who use fear to govern, rather than sharing wisdom born from facts, cannot be just.

We Nobel Peace Prize laureates condemn the persecution Bradley Manning has suffered, including imprisonment in conditions declared “cruel, inhuman and degrading” by the United Nations, and call upon Americans to stand up in support of this whistleblower who defended their democratic rights. In the conflict in Iraq alone, more than 110,000 people have died since 2003, millions have been displaced and nearly 4,500 American soldiers have been killed. If someone needs to be held accountable for endangering Americans and civilians, let’s first take the time to examine the evidence regarding high-level crimes already committed, and what lessons can be learned. If Bradley Manning released the documents, as the prosecution contends, we should express to him our gratitude for his efforts toward accountability in government, informed democracy and peace.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Mairead Maguire

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, widely regarded as “South Africa’s moral conscience,” was awarded the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his work to end apartheid. Mairead Maguire, co-founder of Peace People, was awarded the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize for her actions to end conflict in her native Northern Ireland. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel received the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize for his work promoting nonviolent solutions to political trouble in Latin America; he was instrumental in creating the UN Human Rights Commission. To learn more about Bradley Manning’s case or to get involved, visit the Bradley Manning Support Network website at bradleymanning.org.

The Nation, with the ACLU and others, is suing the government over a law that allows unchecked surveillance. In Checking Big Brother, David Cole asks: Will the Supreme Court even allow us to argue our case on the merits?

James Carter IV tracked down a recording of Lee Atwater’s Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy, and shared it exclusively with The Nation. Listen to the full interview, and read Rick Perlstein’s take, at TheNation.com.
Eric Alterman

Don’t Stop Believin’

It’s a wonderful irony of the 2012 election that the only flaw the Romney team can find in their flawless campaign was the fact that they believed their own bullshit. They watched Fox News, read The Wall Street Journal, clicked on Drudge and the Daily Caller, and listened to the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Hugh Hewitt, Karl Rove, Dick Morris and Peggy Noonan promise them that their Kenyan/Muslim/socialist/terrorist nightmare was nearly over. One election was all that stood between them and a country without capital gains taxes, pollution regulation, healthcare mandates, gay marriage and abortions for rape victims. The less wonderful irony involves the supporting role the mainstream media played in this un-reality show.

Post-truth politics reached a new pinnacle this year as major MSM machers admitted to a lack of concern with the veracity of the news their institutions reported. “It’s not our job to litigate [the facts] in the paper,” New York Times national editor Sam Sifton told the paper’s public editor, Margaret Sullivan, regarding phony Republican “voter fraud” allegations. “We need to state what each side says.” “The truth? C’mon, this is a political convention” was the headline over a column by Glenn Kessler, the Washington Post “fact-checker.” (Yes, you read that right.)

Blogger and Rachel Maddow Show producer Steve Benen, who kept track of such things, counted fully 917 false statements made by Mitt Romney during 2012. Just about the truest words to come out of the campaign were those of the Romney pollster who explained, “We’re not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers.” But not only did many members of the MSM give Romney a pass on his serial lying; they actually cheered him on. “Which candidate could forge the compromises in Congress to achieve these goals? When the question is framed in those terms, Mitt Romney emerges the stronger candidate.”

It’s a wonderful irony of the 2012 election that one of the most reliable mainstream media watchdogs in the nation declared Mitt Romney to be “severely conservative,” ran as the candidate of a center-right moderate.” Recall that Romney, who described himself as “severely conservative,” ran as the candidate of a party that rejects science as well as basic economics. Yet the same “Republicans in Congress” who would prefer to see the country default on its debts rather than raise a nickel in tax revenue from people making more than a million a year “would probably go along,” says Brooks.

This form of magical thinking was not limited only to New York Times pundits. It characterized the reasoning of numerous newspaper editorial boards across the nation. As Ezra Klein wrote in The Washington Post, “In endorsement after endorsement, the basic argument is that President Obama hasn’t been able to persuade House or Senate Republicans to work with him. If Obama is reelected, it’s a safe bet that they’ll continue to refuse to work with him. So vote Romney!” The Des Moines Register made exactly this argument: “Which candidate could forge the compromises in Congress to achieve these goals? When the question is framed in those terms, Mitt Romney emerges the stronger candidate.”

It is almost unfair to focus on the Register editors when, as Slate’s Dave Weigel points out, at least twenty-one newspapers that endorsed Obama in 2008 switched to Romney four years later. Weigel calculated that roughly half of these were “couches in the hope that Romney hornswoggled Republican primary voters and will govern as a moderate.” This is post-truthism in its most pristine form. Never mind everything that Romney has said and done since announcing his first campaign for the presidency. As the leader of a radicalized Republican Party energized by an electoral victory and a particularly obstructionist Republican House majority—one that represents a minority of voters, by the way—Romney would govern in the same fashion he did when serving as the governor of America’s bluest state and faced with a liberal legislature. (The alleged bipartisan success of his term there was yet another myth, as it happens.)

Shortly after it endorsed Obama’s re-election, the Post published a remarkably plain-spoken indictment of his Republican challenger. Titled “Mitt Romney’s campaign insults voters,” the editorial itemized some (though, of course, not all) of the ways Romney had demonstrated “a contempt for the electorate. How else to explain his refusal to disclose essential information…. How, other than an assumption that voters are too dim to remember what Mr. Romney has said across the years and months, to account for his breathtaking ideological shifts? [Or] his misleading commercials (see: Jeep jobs to China) and his refusal to lay out an agenda….. And then there has been his chronic, baldly dishonest defense of mathematically impossible budget proposals.”

Mr. Romney, the editors concluded, “seems to be betting that voters have no memories, poor arithmetic skills and a general inability to look behind the curtain.” He was wrong about the voters, thank God, who turned out to care a great deal more about the truth than many of their constitutionally sanctioned watchdogs in the mainstream media.
The Nation.

THE GRAND BETRAYAL?

The ‘fiscal cliff’ is being used to demand cuts that would otherwise be politically impossible.

by ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

With the election behind us, President Obama and the lame-duck Congress return to Washington to face a fiscal showdown, occasioned by automatic tax hikes and spending cuts scheduled to kick in after the first of the year. Most economists, including the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, agree that if nothing is done, this arbitrary, Washington-created “fiscal cliff,” as Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke dubbed it, will likely drive the economy back into recession. It is probably already contributing to slower growth. The New York Times reports that manufacturers are delaying capital improvements and postponing hiring for fear that no deal will be made. More than a third of the nation’s school districts have reduced programs and hiring in anticipation. If there’s no deal, domestic agencies face an 8 percent cut across the board in fiscal year 2013. Middle-class families will see an income tax hike of about $1,500, a cut in child tax credits by about $500 per kid, a cut in tuition tax credits by $700 a year, and a hike in the payroll tax of $1,000 a year. Lower-income families will suffer cuts in the earned-income tax credit. The result is renewed discussion of a “grand bargain” to avoid that self-destructive course.

But the “cliff,” with its misleading metaphor of an imminent, irreversible fall, has been misconstrued by the media. These changes are not irrevocable; it’s not as if they can’t be fixed after January 1 (more on this later). But in true shock doctrine fashion, the ersatz crisis is being used to demand changes that would otherwise be politically impossible: cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, along with deep cuts in basic government services, combined with tax increases. Wall Street billionaire Pete Peterson has enlisted bankers and CEOs in a multimillion-dollar campaign spearheaded by the hysterical Cassandras of debt, Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles, former co-chairs of President Obama’s deficit commission, to demand action now. Editorial opinion and much of the punditry, along with a claque of supposedly bipartisan or nonpartisan lobbying groups, have dutifully echoed the call. Gaggles of senatorial aides have been meeting to explore what a deal might look like.

In an initially off-the-record campaign interview in late October with The Des Moines Register, Obama indicated that he intended to offer Republicans a deal similar to the one he offered House Speaker John Boehner in the summer of 2011: meeting the Simpson-Bowles target of $4 trillion in deficit reductions over ten years, with a ratio of $2.50 in spending cuts for every $1 in new revenue as well as “working to reduce the costs of our health care programs.” Since the election, Boehner and Senate Republicans have indicated they would support an agreement that reduces deficits by cutting Medicare and Social Security in exchange for tax reform that lowers rates but raises more revenue through closing loopholes.

Virtually every aspect of this hysteria is wrong. The United States does not have a short-term deficit problem, and the fundamental long-term problem isn’t one of soaring debt; rather, it is the lack of a foundation for sustainable growth that includes working people. Without a political movement to achieve the latter, very little progress will be made on the former.

The grand bargain being discussed in Washington reflects an elite consensus far removed from what voters want. Americans want action on jobs, and most support the president’s call to raise taxes on the rich. Overwhelmingly, they want basic family security programs protected. Any deal that cuts Medicare and Social Security, slows growth and increases unemployment will look a lot more like a grand betrayal than a grand bargain. And virtually
the entire organized base of the Democratic Party, from unions to civil rights and women’s groups, is mobilizing in opposition.

**Austerity Bites**

There are still more than 20 million people in need of full-time work. Mass unemployment guarantees stagnant or falling wages and sputtering growth. Long-term unemployment—40 percent of those out of work have been jobless for more than twenty-seven weeks—erodes skills, confidence and lives. The Federal Reserve, understanding the danger, has used monetary policy to keep interest rates low and pump money into the economy. Yet Americans are still strapped, given declining real wages, the collapse of the value of their homes and the rising cost of necessities, from gas to college education to healthcare. Companies are sitting on trillions in profits, waiting for demand to pick up for their products. The Fed can’t generate the growth we need through monetary policy alone. In this situation, the federal government should be acting to boost the economy.

Washington’s obsession with deficits is illogical for two reasons: first, there is no sign of accelerating inflation; interest rates are near record lows, as global investors seek shelter in US securities from economic turmoil abroad. We will never have a better opportunity to rebuild our decrepit infrastructure, so there’s no reason for Washington to focus on belt tightening now.

Second, austerity is, paradoxically, likely to undermine the stated goal of deficit reduction. Cutting spending and raising taxes in a weak economy destroys jobs and slows growth. The increased unemployment leads to declining tax revenue as well as increased demands on government services, all of which adds to the deficit. This is the famous “debt trap” recently experienced in much of Europe, where premature and harsh austerity drove many EU countries into recession. Spain, Portugal and Greece have piled up worse debt burdens as their economies collapsed.

American CEOs, fearful of the recession that would ensue from the fiscal cliff, have been clamoring for a deal to avoid it. But given the faltering recovery, the same logic applies to the less harsh grand bargain now under discussion. Job creation is barely able to keep up with new people coming into the workforce. Federal government purchases were down last year, as spending from Obama’s 2009 stimulus bill declined, and they are declining again this year. State and local expenditures continue to fall off. The results are felt all over the country as teachers are laid off, aging sewers collapse and Head Start programs close. Streets grow unsafe as police forces are reduced.

Adding to the drag on the economy are the budget caps passed by Congress—as part of the 2011 debt ceiling deal—that will reduce discretionary spending by $1.5 trillion over the next ten years. Any new deal would only add to the drag on the economy in a world where Europe is in recession and emerging nations like China, India and Brazil are struggling.

The hysteria about deficits ignores both their source and their solution. Publicly held debt was only about 36 percent of GDP in 2007, before the crash. When the housing bubble exploded, the economic collapse meant falling revenue and rising spending (particularly on unemployment insurance, food stamps and other programs for the jobless). The result just about doubled the debt burden, to 73 percent of GDP. Spending from the president’s recovery act temporarily contributed to the deficits, but that has already petered out. As a result, deficits are coming down; they are currently three-quarters of what they were in 2009, relative to the size of the economy.

Putting people back to work does more to reduce deficits than any other factor. That requires more federal spending now, preferably in areas vital to the economy, like modernizing our infrastructure and keeping teachers on the job. Once the economy is growing and people are working, the deficit will come down. Additional steps can be taken, if necessary, to reduce remaining imbalances and address our long-term debt problem.

It is the long-term, seventy-five-year debt projections—illustrated in the lavish charts that Pete Peterson’s various front groups have plastered across the country—that have terrified so many people. But those long-term deficits come almost entirely from one source: our broken healthcare system. The projected increase in healthcare costs—through Medicare, Medicaid, children’s and veterans’ healthcare—drive long-term deficits. The costs of Medicare and other public healthcare programs are rising more slowly than private healthcare, but even so, in the long term they are unaffordable. As economist Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research has pointed out, if per capita US healthcare spending were comparable to what other industrialized countries spend (with better results), we would be projecting budget surpluses as far as the eye could see. The solution requires challenging the predatory oligopolies—the insurance companies, drug companies and hospital complexes—that profit from high costs. Obamacare began that process; Medicare costs have begun to rise more slowly. The sensible solution to our long-term debt problem is continued healthcare reform, not cuts in basic security for Americans.

Other than our broken healthcare system, our structural problem is not so much deficits and debt as that the United States does not have a stable foundation for growth.

Our structural problem is not so much deficits and debt as that the United States does not have a stable foundation for growth.

Robert L. Borosage is the founder and president of the Institute for America’s Future and co-director of its sister organization, the Campaign for America’s Future.

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The Nation. December 3, 2012
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employment and consumption generated by the housing bubble. We can't reinflate that bubble, and we shouldn't want to. As discussed below, we need a different basis for growth.

The most damaging implication behind the call to balance our books now rather than get the economy moving is that it assumes the current recovery is adequate and that mass unemployment is the new normal. We will probably see a flood of articles by economists explaining that high unemployment is structural, and that workers don't have the skills needed for the twenty-first-century economy. As New York Times columnist and economist Paul Krugman has written, this callous assumption is not only wrong; it condemns millions of people to joblessness and despair.

This election was fought over which candidate and which party would do better at producing jobs and growth. To turn to deficit reduction now would be a great betrayal. But it would not be the only one.

**Chump Change**

The grand bargain not only offers the wrong answer; it poses the wrong question. In Washington, the bargainers intone the same mantra: It is a time for shared sacrifice. Everything must be on the table, from Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security to tax hikes. We must all do our part.

The call for shared sacrifice makes no sense given that in recent decades, the rewards have not been shared. The middle class lost ground even before the Great Recession, while the wealthiest 1 percent pocketed about two-thirds of the rewards of growth. In the first year after the recession, the top 1 percent pocketed a staggering 93 percent of income growth, as the stock market roared back but housing values and wages did not. The pious summons to shared sacrifice violates both fairness and common sense. Worse, the focus is on programs for ordinary Americans and the vulnerable, not on the people who have made out like bandits. For example: our debt burden nearly doubled because Wall Street's excesses blew up the economy and drove us into the deepest recession in seventy-five years. So you would think any discussion of how to reduce the deficit would start by demanding that Wall Street pay for the damage it caused. You would be wrong.

We are witnessing the worst inequality since the Gilded Age. The top 1 percent of taxpayers pocket more income each year than the bottom 40 percent, and they own more wealth than 90 percent of Americans. Yet their tax rates are near the lowest in post–World War II history. As billionaire investor Warren Buffett has noted—and as Mitt Romney has demonstrated with his 13.9 percent tax rate on $20 million in income—the richest Americans are often paying lower tax rates than their secretaries. You would think that any discussion of reducing deficits would begin with the assumption that there must be higher tax rates on millionaires and billionaires. You would be wrong.

Multinational corporations based in the United States pay among the lowest effective tax rates in the industrialized world. Many, like General Electric, earn billions in profits and pay nothing. Lower rates, corporate loopholes, offshore tax havens and transfer pricing have reduced the corporate share of federal tax revenues consistently since the 1950s. You would think that any discussion of reducing deficits would begin with a call for higher taxes on corporations and a clampdown on overseas tax havens. You would be wrong.

The military budget has doubled over the past decade, now exceeding what it was, in comparable dollars, at the height of the cold war. The United States and its NATO allies spend more on their militaries than the rest of the world combined. At the same time, domestic spending—with the temporary exception of Obama's 2009 stimulus bill—has declined as a portion of the economy, despite a growing population and spreading poverty. The president brags that nonsecurity discretionary spending—everything outside the military and guaranteed programs like Social Security and Medicare—is projected to decline to levels not seen since the Eisenhower era. The result is a continued decline in public provision: decrepit sewers, airports and bridges; an outmoded electric grid; inadequate research and development; national parks in decline; infants without adequate nutrition; families without affordable shelter; glaringly inadequate investment in public education from pre-K to college. You would think the focus of any spending cuts would be on the military, not on domestic spending. You would be wrong.

Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, the pillars on which family security rests, are not generous. The average annual Social Security benefit is $14,800, sufficient only to put a minimal floor under seniors. The average 65-year-old couple on Medicare will spend an average of $230,000 out of pocket on healthcare over the course of their retirement years. Without Social Security, 14 million more elderly Americans would live in poverty; without Medicare, few would be able to afford medical expenses.

Americans want these programs protected. They are so popular that politicians in both parties vie during the election to show who would protect them the most. Republicans strafed Obama and the Democrats by falsely claiming that they cut $716 billion from Medicare to pay for Obamacare. Joe Biden guaranteed absolutely that an Obama presidency would not allow cuts in Social Security. In an election night poll by the Campaign for America's Future with Democracy Corps, fully 79 percent of Americans—from across the political spectrum—stated that they would find unacceptable any deal that cut Medicare benefits; 62 percent opposed an agreement that would cut Social Security over time. You would think those programs would be off the table in any discussion. You would be wrong.

**The Sting**

The general frame for the grand bargain violates almost all these common-sense priorities. In Obama’s 2011 talks with Boehner, the president offered to trade cuts in Medicare and
Social Security for a tax reform that lowered rates on the rich and corporations while closing loopholes and exemptions to generate more revenue. Any tax proposal to raise revenue that begins with cutting top rates deserves only scorn. As Romney demonstrated with his mathematically impossible tax proposal during the campaign, raising significant revenue by cutting rates and then closing loopholes isn’t easy. To gain enough revenue, popular middle-class deductions—for home mortgages or employer-provided healthcare—are likely to get hit. And of course, as we saw with the Reagan-era tax law, such reforms eliminate loopholes but not lobbies. Pretty soon, new loopholes are slipped in, while rates remain at the lower level. The overall result: a more regressive, unjust tax system.

How did politicians arrive at this bad bargain? The essential dynamic is that Democrats reward Republican intransigence with concessions. Republicans refuse to hike taxes, so to entice them, Democrats offer the crown jewels: Medicare and Social Security. Republicans still resist tax hikes, so the austerity crowd suggests “reform” that will in theory bring in more revenue while lowering tax rates. Behind this are the big money lobbies that rig the rules: the Wall Street bankers, CEOs and private equity vultures who want to protect the scandalously low tax rates they now enjoy. The result is the outline of a deal that betrays promises made on the campaign trail and compromises the historic legacies of the New Deal and the Great Society. And it does all this while addressing the wrong problem.

Going over the so-called fiscal cliff is perilous, but probably preferable to a bargain under the terms currently in play.

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No Home to Go Back To

Last fall, as part of his comeback from the disastrous negotiations over the debt ceiling, President Obama put forth the American Jobs Act, calling for a $447 billion program that included $65 billion to rebuild schools and keep teachers on the job, $50 billion in infrastructure spending, an extension of the payroll tax cut and other measures. Senate majority leader Harry Reid offered to pay for it with a surtax on millionaires. This was a no-brainer, estimated to create another 1.9 million jobs by 2013. Republicans blocked all but a few minor parts. Mysteriously, Obama walked away from his own plan, choosing not to make an issue of it during the campaign.

Many assume that the White House will seek to add some money for jobs in the coming grand bargain, as a sweeterener for Democrats. But this economy needs far more than a short-term spending jolt. Although austerity and stimulus head in opposite directions, they share one assumption: that there will be a healthy economy to return to one day. Austerians would cut deficits and regulations. Stimularians would spend money and put people back to work. But the economy was not working for most Americans even before the Great Recession. The Bush years witnessed the first “recovery” in which most American households lost ground. Most real incomes went down, not up. The wealthiest few captured most of the rewards of growth. The middle class took on greater and greater debt simply to stay afloat.

The Excluded Alternative

The debate we should be having is about how to make the economy work for working people again, how to revive a broad middle class and make the American Dream more than a nostalgic fantasy. That would require both investments now in areas vital to our future and a fundamental change of course. It would include a strategy to revive domestic manufacturing and thus reduce the destabilizing trade deficits that have contributed to the global crisis. It would include an industrial policy designed to help the United States lead the new global green revolution. A serious long-term commitment to rebuild America would renovate our infrastructure to withstand the extreme weather that is already upon us. It would break up the big banks and shackle finance so that it serves, rather than threatens, the real economy. Measures to transform corporate governance, curb excessive executive compensation, and empower workers to organize and bargain collectively would help counter extreme inequality.

The new foundation would also require doing at least the basics in public education: universal preschool, small classes in the early years, greater rewards and respect for teachers, after-school programs, affordable college and advanced training. And of course it would feature progressive tax reform, compelling the wealthy and corporations to pay their fair share. It would continue healthcare reform and guarantee affordable care as a right for every citizen, not a privilege allowed only to those who can afford it. This requires taking on the most powerful and entrenched interests: multinationals that drive trade policy, Big Oil’s hold on energy policy, Wall Street’s grip on financial regulation, the military-industrial complex, the medical-industrial complex and more.

In the salad days of his presidency, Obama called for rebuilding the economy on a new foundation, not on the shifting sands of debt and bubbles. His recovery act, healthcare reform, Wall Street reforms and energy bill were first steps in that effort. But just as his premature turn to deficit reduction sabotaged the need to expand the initial recovery act, his turn now to a grand bargain will squelch any serious discussion of fundamental reforms.

Will Democratic legislators join Republicans in a danse macabre of austerity, accepting mass unemployment as the new normal? Will Democrats support a deal that cuts Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security while lowering tax rates on the rich and corporations? Will they embrace an austerity that makes vital public investments impossible? We’ve just completed a money-drenched election, and many Democratic officeholders will be tempted to curry favor with the deep pockets once more. But no one should be misled. Obama doesn’t have to run for re-election—legislators do. Voters want Medicare and Social Security protected, not cut. They want jobs and growth, not deficit reduction at the price of higher
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The battle lines are being drawn. The AFL-CIO, SEIU and AFSCME have announced labor’s opposition to cuts in entitlement programs and to continued tax cuts for the rich. Groups representing the base of the Democratic Party—from African-Americans to Latinos, women and the young—are lining up around a four-point program calling for jobs first; protecting Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security; letting the top-end Bush tax cuts expire; and protecting programs for the vulnerable.

Reaching no deal is preferable to a bad one that cuts entitlements. Going over the so-called fiscal cliff is perilous, but probably preferable to a bargain under the terms currently in play. With no agreement, the Bush tax cuts would expire. In January the Senate would immediately push to revive the lower rates for everyone but the top 2 percent. Republicans could vote for tax cuts, but rates at the top would rise. The automatic spending cuts would not kick in immediately (although the stock market might feel the hit quickly). But the thing to remember about failure to reach a deal before January is that Medicare, Social Security and many programs for the most vulnerable are shielded from the cuts. And the new Congress would likely act rapidly to reverse the cuts to military and domestic spending. The already faltering recovery would surely weaken, threatening the loss of more jobs. But that might force Congress to address the real crisis—jobs and growth—rather than court a ruinous austerity.

Whatever the outcome, the battle is likely to be only the first skirmish of a defining struggle over the future of the Democratic Party and the progressive movement. We’ve just had what might be called the first of a new era of class-warfare elections. The plutocracy ran one of their own, on their agenda and with their money. The American people’s rejection of Mitt Romney, despite the lousy economy, demonstrated the declining appeal of the conservative, trickle-down agenda. The budget debate will draw battle lines within the Democratic Party, between the Wall Street–dominated New Democratic wing and the progressive wing fighting for the change this country desperately needs.

We are headed into a new era of upheaval. Our money-soaked politics may suffocate growing demands for change. But if Democratic legislators join the president in a grand betrayal, they may witness a powerful Tea Party movement from the left, as Republican legislators have from the right.

After the Vote, Changing the System

During Obama’s second term, activists must create space for him to act on behalf of the majority.

by PETER DREIER and DONALD COHEN

Despite President Obama’s important, even landmark, accomplishments, by the time November 6 arrived, many Americans were disappointed with his first term. They expected him to be a “transformational” president who would somehow, single-handedly, change Washington’s political culture. When their hopes were dashed, they blamed Obama rather than the corporate plutocrats’ stranglehold on Congress—especially (but not only) on the Republicans, who acted like sock puppets for the Chamber of Commerce, opposing every proposal to tax the wealthy and regulate corporations as a “job killer,” and insisting that their top priority was to make Obama a one-term president.

Given the power of the Chamber of Commerce, Wall Street banks, the insurance industry, the oil lobby and the drug companies, it’s remarkable that Obama managed to enact the Affordable Care Act, the Dodd-Frank legislation, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and tough new standards on fuel efficiency and electric plant emissions. Voters rewarded Obama with a second term and defeated many business-backed candidates and ballot measures, like California’s anti-union Proposition 32.

But the major contours of American politics remain intact. The nation’s extreme concentration of wealth still gives businesses and billionaires outsized political influence. Corporate campaign contributions and lobbyists tilt the political playing field so much that ordinary citizens often feel their votes and voices don’t count. The United States ranks number one in low voter turnout: even in this year’s hotly contested elections, fewer than 60 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Paradoxically (but understandably), the people least likely to vote—the poor, the jobless, the young—are those who need government the most, and who, if they did vote, would tend to favor liberals and Democrats.

With re-election safely behind him, we hope Obama will be bolder in his second term. He should diversify his inner circle of economic advisers and cabinet appointees to include more progressive voices, not just those who reflect business and banking. He should use his bully pulpit to focus public attention on the disproportionate influence of the Chamber and other corporate lobbying groups. He should be willing to deflect their attacks, as FDR did when he said, “I welcome their hatred,” referring to the forces of “organized money.” We’d like to see more of

Peter Dreier, who teaches politics at Occidental College, is the author of The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame, published by Nation Books. Donald Cohen is the director of the Cry Wolf Project, a nonprofit research network that identifies and exposes misleading rhetoric about the economy, regulation and government.
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the Barack Obama who showed up on December 6, 2011, at a high school in Osawatomie, Kansas, echoing the themes of the then-burgeoning Occupy Wall Street movement.

As he did during his 2008 campaign (but stopped doing once he took office), Obama should encourage the organizers and activists who are challenging corporate power, recognizing that their ability to agitate and mobilize ordinary Americans can help him be a more effective president. LBJ understood this inside-outside dynamic when he embraced the civil rights movement—adopting its “We shall overcome” motto in a 1965 speech to Congress—and took on the segregationists in his own party.

Americans would respond positively. In fact, a majority actually have liberal or progressive views. They think corporate money plays too big a role in our political system, the very rich pay too little in taxes, and the government should help with

In Obama’s second term, activists need to be bolder and more audacious, like the suffragists, strikers and civil rights crusaders before them.

student loans, act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect consumers and workers. They believe Congress should raise the minimum wage and that Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, unemployment insurance and food stamps are needed to protect people from economic hardship and insecurity.

But however skilled Obama is as a politician—and despite the many principled progressives in Congress—we cannot expect to enact more than modest reforms until we tame the power of the corporate plutocrats. Ultimately, we need to change the system that ensnares even the most progressive politicians in its web.

Specifically, we need three kinds of structural “mobilizing” reforms that will dramatically level the political playing field, weakening the power of the corporate plutocracy and strengthening the voices of ordinary Americans:

§ Campaign finance reform. America must eliminate the corrosive impact of money in politics. But until a more liberal Supreme Court reverses the conservative rulings that consider corporate money a form of “free speech” (such as Buckley v. Valeo and Citizens United), we need stepping-stone reforms that start to address this power imbalance.

Pending legislation called the Fair Elections Now Act would provide public funding to candidates who get support from large numbers of small donors instead of wealthy contributors, bundlers and lobbyists. The act’s lead sponsors in the House are Representatives John Larson, Walter Jones and Chellie Pingree; in the Senate it’s majority whip Dick Durbin.

A number of states have passed “clean election” laws to reduce the influence of private cash in favor of public funding, but courts have struck several of these down. In New York State, reform activists and Governor Andrew Cuomo are backing a public financing bill modeled after a successful law in New York City.

§ Voting reform. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Congressman John Lewis are sponsoring the Voter Empowerment Act, which would make voter registration easier, thus increasing voter turnout. It would make election day registration the law of the land. According to Demos, a nonpartisan think tank, election day registration currently exists in nine states, and voter turnout in these states has historically exceeded the turnout elsewhere by 10 to 12 percentage points. We should also turn election day into a national holiday and require accessible early voting in every state. No one should have to wait several hours to cast his or her vote.

§ Labor law reform. Throughout the last century, unions have been the most powerful vehicles for challenging corporate power. Organized labor was the primary force responsible for giving us Social Security, the minimum wage, the eight-hour day, unemployment insurance, workplace safety laws and funding for public education.

Today, however, only 11.8 percent of the workforce is unionized, even though more than half of all nonmanagement employees tell pollsters that they would like a union in their workplace. Many employers violate the law by firing or demoting workers who show support for union organizing drives. These employers get away with it because the penalties are too trivial to deter them. We need to update the labor laws and give workers a voice by setting real, deterrent-size penalties and enforceable remedies against employers who violate their workers’ right to organize.

We can’t simply wait for these game-changing structural reforms to happen. In Obama’s second term, activists need to be bolder and more audacious, like the suffragists, strikers and civil rights crusaders before them. A central task for progressives is to expose the agenda of billionaires and plutocrats. We must name names and call out the business moguls whose overlapping memberships on corporate boards, lobbying groups and conservative think tanks make them a ruling class over the rest of us. Only visible, consistent action will create the political space—and pressure—for President Obama and Congress to act on behalf of the majority of Americans.

This strategy worked in Obama’s first term. His healthcare proposal seemed likely to fail until activists began organizing protests at insurance companies and at the homes of industry CEOs, drawing attention to their outrageous profits and compensation, and giving voice to the victims of the industry’s abusive practices. The protests catalyzed media coverage, strengthened Obama’s resolve and pushed reluctant Democrats to vote for reform.

Activists must use protests, civil disobedience, boycotts, lawsuits and other strategies to pressure Congress to act on such urgent issues as foreclosures, underwater home prices, student debt, taxes, the fiscal crisis of states and cities, and raising the minimum wage. Each of these issues has broad support, workable policy solutions and burgeoning movements behind them.

As Frederick Douglass once said, without struggle there is no progress. But the efforts of issue-oriented movements would be far easier and far more effective if we could “change the system” that puts so many hurdles in the way of making our country a healthier democracy.
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Oliver Stone’s Untold History

Missed opportunities, roads not taken—these are the central themes of this new documentary.

by JON WIENER

If you thought Oliver Stone’s Untold History of the United States—a ten-part documentary series premiering November 12 on Showtime—would offer a series of conspiracy theories concerning the American past, you would be wrong. Despite Stone’s 1991 film JFK, there’s no JFK assassination conspiracy here—just a statement that the public found “unconvincing” the Warren Commission’s conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. There’s no 9/11 conspiracy, and no allegations that Franklin Roosevelt schemed in secret to get the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor as a backdoor way to force the United States into World War II. The series’ massive, 750-page companion volume, co-written with historian Peter Kuznick, also shuns conspiracy theories.

The “untold history” here, which starts with World War II and ends with Obama, will not be unknown to readers of The Nation. Many of them already know that the Soviet Union defeated Hitler’s armies, not the United States; that Japan would have surrendered in August 1945 without the use of atomic bombs; that the United States has a long history of backing right-wing dictators around the world rather than supporting democratic movements. But many TV viewers are not Nation subscribers—at least that’s what I’ve been told—and even longtime readers of America’s oldest weekly will find plenty of provocative ideas here. Stone is quick to acknowledge that he is hardly the first to present this kind of alternative, critical view—his illustrious predecessors include, of course, Howard Zinn’s A People’s History of the United States, and also the bestselling Lies My Teacher Told Me by James Loewen. But neither of those historians ever had a ten-part series on cable television. Only Oliver Stone has the power to pull that off.

If there are no conspiracy theories here, Stone also eschews another line of argument that many might expect from him: that the ruling class is all-powerful, that Wall Street—the subject of one of his most memorable films—controls everything, along with bankers and the corporate elite, leaving ordinary people helpless. The thesis of the Showtime series, as well as its companion volume, is different: that history is not an iron cage, the keys to which are held by the ruling class. At many pivotal moments, Stone argues, history could have taken a radically different course. The missed opportunities, the roads not taken—these are Stone’s central themes, which he argues with energy, passion and a mountain of evidence (the companion volume has eighty-nine pages of footnotes).

Case number one: if Henry Wallace had won the vice presidential nomination in 1944, he would have become president when Roosevelt died in 1945, and we probably would not have bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and could have avoided the cold war as well. It’s a startling and intriguing argument. Usually we teach about Wallace as the hopeless, left-wing third-party candidate of 1948, when he split from the Democrats and ran on the Progressive Party ticket. McCarthyism had already taken hold of American politics, and Wallace was redhated into a crushing defeat.

Four years earlier, however, the situation was very different: Wallace was Roosevelt’s incumbent vice president, and the Soviets were our allies. A Gallup poll in July 1944 asked likely Democratic voters whom they wanted on the ticket as veep. Sixty-five percent said Wallace, while Truman came in eighth, with just 2 percent. Roosevelt announced that, were he a delegate, he would vote for Wallace. Claude Pepper, a Democratic senator from Florida, tried to nominate Wallace, while Truman came in eighth, with just 2 percent. Roosevelt announced that, were he a delegate, he would vote for Wallace. Claude Pepper, a Democratic senator from Florida, tried to nominate Wallace at the convention, but the conservative party bosses, who opposed him, adjourned the proceedings. “Had Pepper made it five more feet [to the microphone] and nominated Wallace,” Stone argues, “Wallace would have become president in 1945 and...there might have been no atomic bombings, no nuclear arms race, and no Cold War.”

Case number two: even with Truman as president in 1945, it was not a foregone conclusion that the United States would drop the bomb. Generals Eisenhower and MacArthur both opposed it, along with most of the other top generals and admirals—and they were joined by many of the scientists who had developed the bomb. If only President Truman had listened to them...

Case number three: if JFK had not been shot in 1963, Stone is convinced he would have pulled US forces out of Vietnam and negotiated an end to the cold war.

Case number four: if George W. Bush had listened to his intelligence agencies in 2001, the 9/11 attacks would not have taken place.

None of these hypotheticals, Stone claims, were impossible long shots or hopeless causes; every one of them could have happened. There’s plenty here to argue about—I debated with

Jon Wiener, a Nation contributing editor, teaches American history at the University of California, Irvine. His new book is How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America.
“Good night, Johnny – they say the sun might come out tomorrow!”

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torical documentaries are familiar fare on TV. Of course, we have Ken Burns on PBS and the endless hours of World War II on the History Channel. But these are celebratory stories of American heroism and virtue—precisely what Stone rejects. He has achieved something quite different, something closer to what Jeremy Isaacs accomplished in his two monumental documentaries: The World at War, a twenty-six-hour series on World War II produced by Britain’s Thames Television and broadcast in the United States on PBS in 1975, and Cold War, a twenty-four-part series conceived by Ted Turner and shown on CNN in 1998. These are magnificent works that tell their stories from different viewpoints and avoid American exceptionalism.

Stone’s style of documentary filmmaking, however, departs radically from the conventions. Ken Burns, Jeremy Isaacs and the History Channel all follow the same timeworn format: a series of talking heads—experts and “witnesses”—appear onscreen to tell viewers what to think, and when they are finished, illustrative footage is presented. Stone has eliminated all the talking heads, on the grounds that they disrupt the flow of images. Indeed, a parade of different people, with their different ways of speaking, can be distracting. In Stone’s series, he is the sole narrator, calm but forceful, and aside from a brief appearance at the start of the first episode, we never see him onscreen—we see only the newsreel footage, the headlines, the maps, the historical documents. The resulting programs have an undeniable visual power, even though the black-and-white newsreel footage may not engage younger generations raised on high-definition color.

When I asked Stone at a recent book event in West Hollywood why he decided to take up TV documentaries, he said one man was responsible: Peter Kuznick, a professor of history and the director of the award-winning Nuclear Studies Institute at American University. Kuznick is the author of Beyond the Laboratory: Scientists as Political Activists in 1930s America, and the co-editor of Rethinking Cold War Culture. He also provides a valuable service every summer: he takes an American history class on a field trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (He calls it “education abroad.”)

For years, Kuznick taught a course at American University titled “Oliver Stone’s America.” Stone finally accepted an invitation to come to the class, and at a dinner afterward, he says, Kuznick told him the story of how close Wallace came to getting renominated as vice president in 1944. Stone says that’s what convinced him to do a history documentary for TV, and to ask Kuznick to be his co-author and partner on what would become a four-year project. There’s never been anything like it on television; the prevailing notions of American “altruism, benevolence, and self-sacrifice” have never been challenged quite so effectively for such a wide audience.

Letters

(continued from page 2)

large, so that it became difficult for anyone to discern what was justified and valid and what was merely attention seeking or rallying the masses. The issues are complicated, and a lot of anger, hurt, time and energy have been wasted in supposed pursuit of reform. For Milton Hershey School’s sake and needy children everywhere, I hope one day it will actually happen.

Dan Sauder,

Weapons of Mass Terror

Mill Valley, Calif.

As a teenager during World War II, I remember the horror we felt when the Nazis launched long-range missiles, known as “buzz bombs,” at London and other cities. These bombs killed civilians and terrorized those they did not kill. It was a cruel weapon that indicated the ruthlessness of the Nazis. I was reminded of this when I read “Life and Death Under Drones” [“Noted,” Oct. 22]. It cites a Stanford University report that says the harm done by drones “goes beyond death and injury…. Their presence terrorizes men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities.” How quickly we forget, and how easily we adopt practices we once condemned as barbaric.

Rachelle Marshall

Clear the Air With Russia on Syria

Columbia, Mo.

I appreciate Jonathan Steele’s nuanced look at some of the nonviolent opposition’s perspective on the conflict in Syria [“A Way Out of Syria’s Catastrophe,” Oct. 15]. However, regarding working together with Russia to ameliorate this crisis and move Syria toward reconciliation and a more democratic system, there is a lot of bad air to clear with Russia first. The United States and other NATO allies cannot really form a coalition with Russia to put pressure on the parties in Syria without addressing the fallout from the intervention in Libya. Russia, South Africa, Brazil, India and China all had—and continue to have—major problems with the way NATO went far beyond its mandate in that “humanitarian” intervention. Without any acknowledgment of this overreach by the United States and NATO, why would Russia consider them as neutral actors who would pass the relevant UN Security Council resolutions on Syria in good faith?

Jack Draper

Swank Filer, Where Are You?

Los Angeles

I miss Frank Lewis! The puzzle clues by Kosman and Picciotto are so opaque as to make a complete solution practically impossible. Even when I see the answer, I do not always get it. I hate to give up, but repeated tries just lead to frustration.

Julie May

Our puzzle constructors enjoy “meeting” their solvers and discussing their quibbles, questions, kudos or complaints directly. We hope frustrated puzzlers will visit Kosman and Picciotto’s blog, Word Salad (thenation.com/blogs/word-salad). There, they can comment directly about the clues they are unable to fathom. Note: Word Salad always includes a link to a Pennsylvania solver’s blog, where every clue is fully explained on the Monday following online publication.
Earlier this year, while conferring a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom on the Polish hero Jan Karski, Barack Obama inadvertently touched off the greatest crisis in US-Polish relations in recent memory. The man he honored had served as a courier for the Polish resistance against Hitler, and in 1942 Karski traveled across occupied Europe to tell Western leaders about the Nazi war crimes being committed in Poland, including the Holocaust. Karski had been sent on this secret mission, Obama explained, after fellow underground fighters had told him that “Jews were being murdered on a massive scale and smuggled him into the Warsaw Ghetto and a Polish death camp to see for himself.” It was late evening in Warsaw when Obama spoke, but within minutes Polish officials were demanding an apology for his use of the phrase “Polish death camp,” which they thought scandalous.

Even those well-versed in European history must wonder why. After all, the media routinely speak of “French camps,” from which Jews were sent to their deaths, and the phrase doesn’t draw similar ire from the French government. On the contrary, in July the French president himself, François Hollande, began a widely covered speech on the seventieth anniversary of the roundup of Jews at Vélodrome d’Hiver by stating, “We’ve gathered this morning to remember the horror of a crime, express the sorrow of those who experienced the tragedy…and therefore France’s responsibility.” Why are Poles so sensitive on the matter of Polish camps? Readers of Halik Kochanski’s new book, *The Eagle Unbowed*, will ask the opposite question: How could a famously well-educated person such as Barack Obama be so insensitive regarding the simple facts about Poland, the first country to stand up to Hitler?

Here’s one undisputed, essential fact: after the Nazis and their Soviet allies overran Poland in September 1939, they did not permit the Poles to form a new national government. The Soviets made the eastern Polish territories into western Soviet republics; the Germans annexed the western Polish territories into the Reich and made central Poland a “General Government” that they ruled directly. This arrangement was radically different from those in Nazi-occupied France, Denmark or Slovakia, which were ruled by collaborationist regimes. The French camps, then, really were French—that is, operated by French collaborators (a fact stressed by Hollande in his July speech). In Poland the death camps were German, like most other institutions. The Germans allowed the Poles no administration above the village level, reduced the police force to 15,000 men and made the population into a pool of slave labor. They denied Poles schooling above grade six and closed down newspapers and journals while making vodka and pornography readily available. Meat rations disappeared almost entirely, and the population was kept on a starvation diet.

To break Polish resistance, the Germans staged frequent “round-ups,” cordoning off sections of a city’s streets and detaining everyone caught in the dragnet, or sealing off apartment houses, trams or churches and arresting everyone inside. The prisoners were sent to concentration camps or to the Reich as slave labor—or, if circumstances required, kept as hostages, to be shot if Germans were killed by the Polish underground (the ratio was 100 Poles for every German). As one of Kochanski’s sources recalled, in this climate of terror “there was never a moment when
we did not feel threatened.” By 1942, the SS had devised a plan to deport some 31 million Slavs to areas beyond the Ural Mountains. That number was to include 85 percent of all Poles. (A small percentage would stay behind and be forcibly “Germanized.”) In their place would come millions of German settlers, and with them the transformation of Poland into the eastern marches of the thousand-year Reich. The plan calculated a fatality rate from deliberate starvation of up to 80 percent. The mass expulsions began in late 1942, when the Germans cleared some 300 villages near Lublin.

Poles resisted these genocidal policies. By 1944, an underground “Home Army” (AK) had grown to more than 400,000 soldiers on Polish territory, who harassed the Germans while awaiting the right moment for an uprising. Thousands of other Poles escaped and continued the fight outside Poland. Polish pilots accounted for one of every eight German planes shot down during the Battle of Britain. An entire army of Poles left the Soviet Union in 1942 and fought through North Africa and up the Italian peninsula. In September 1944, a Polish parachute brigade under British command dropped into the Netherlands, the Home Army staged an uprising on the opposite bank of the Vistula River, the Home Army staged an uprising against the Germans in Warsaw. Soviet forces simply looked on as the Germans regrouped and destroyed the insurgency. Some 200,000 Poles lost their lives. (More than 2 million non-Jewish Poles died in World War II.) Though Poland was the first state to resist Hitler, it lost huge swaths of territory to the Soviet Union without its Western allies so much as uttering a protest. Poles from the lost areas were placed in cattle cars and resettled in central and western Poland (some of which was being “cleansed” of Germans).

Such dramas of idealism, self-sacrifice and betrayal—told well if selectively in Kochanski’s history—seem indelibly compelling. So how did they escape Obama and his speechwriters? The Eagle Unbowed is billed as the “first truly comprehensive account” of Poland in World War II, but previous works have told the basic story. On my small office shelf I count five such volumes (including Timothy Snyder’s important recent work Bloodlands). Why do Westerners remain so ignorant about the simple facts of Poland’s war?

Blues are offered by Jan Gross and Irena Grudzinska-Gross in their new book Golden Harvest. The facts are not so simple, because the country they depict hardly resembles the one described by Kochanski. Instead of starved and recalcitrant victims, gentle Poles appear as accomplices in Nazi policies to exterminate their Jewish co-citizens. These policies involved not only death camps but also massive seizures of Jewish property.

After deporting Jews from ghettos, German officials confiscated and sent home the most valuable loot—but much remained to tempt local Poles. When news circulated that Germans were about to clear a ghetto, peasants from surrounding villages drove up their horse carts to haul away all they could. Lust for gold sent Poles to fields around Treblinka and other German death camps, where they dug many meters into the earth seeking tooth fillings and jewelry. Regions around the camps experienced economic booms.

Rather than being heroic, Poles appear in Golden Harvest not so different from other Europeans in their willingness to aid Hitler in destroying the Jews. Such a perspective, which may seem unremarkable to Western readers, culminates a revolution in historical thinking within Poland itself, sparked some eleven years ago by the publication of Jan Gross’s book Neighbors (2001). Previously, the standard view was that Poles did not help the Nazis because the Nazis viewed Poles as subhumans unfit for collaboration; instead, the Germans sought camp guards from the Ukrainian or Baltic populations. If Poles did not rescue more Jews, that was because of the penalties for doing so: unlike any other people under Nazi occupation, Poles hiding Jews were punished with death for themselves and their families.

In Neighbors, Gross began to undermine this consensus by showing that in the small town of Jedwabne in northeast Poland, on July 10, 1941, Poles murdered their Jewish neighbors in a day-long orgy of violence. After recovering from the shock of this revelation, Polish historians examined previously neglected sources and found more than twenty other places where Poles—encouraged but not forced by the Germans—had abused and killed Jews in the summer of 1941. A new Polish Center for Holocaust Research in Warsaw has pushed forward this revolution. Historians still agree that the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews were killed by the Germans, first in overcrowded ghettos under conditions calculated to kill slowly, and then through deportations to the death camps, a process mostly completed by late 1942. But they estimate that some 10 percent of Poland’s Jews escaped deportation and sought shelter in villages and forests, often in large family units. The great majority of these Jews (probably more than 80 percent) did not survive until liberation because Poles helped Germans hunt them down.

In their studies of rural Poland, the Polish historians Jan Grabowski, who teaches at the University of Ottawa, and Barbara Engelking, of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, have shown how this happened. First, German police and Polish village leaders enlisted peasants to comb the forests for Jews who were attempting to survive, often in hand-dug caves and bunkers. Once discovered, the Jews were usually executed on the spot, often by German policemen but sometimes by Polish ones. Jews who took shelter with Polish...
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peasants likewise were usually hunted down and killed. This was due not to frequent patrols by the German police, who were actually few and far between, but to the watchful eyes of other Poles, recording in an invisible ledger every commonplace fact, such as extra portions of bread or milk being consumed by a given household. The members of one Polish family lost their lives when German gendarmes—tipped off by the family’s neighbors—discovered stores of food intended for Jews in hiding (who were also discovered and shot).

Polish historians have long known about Polish collaborators, whom they described as marginal, the dregs of society. Now a consensus is arising among researchers that Jews and either let them return to the forest or decided to hide them themselves. The new historical work makes it clear that rural Poland was a hostile, indeed deadly, environment for Jews seeking help.

Alih Kochanski does not deny that Jews under German occupation faced a different situation from Poles. “For all the sufferings of the Christian Poles during this period,” she writes, “they were not being subjected to the unprecedented policy of calculated and deliberate extermination that the Polish Jews faced.” Yet though Kochanski reads Polish, the revolution in the history of Polish-Jewish relations has passed her by. She acknowledges the killings at Jedwabne but attributes them to German instigation. Of the pogroms in nearby Polish towns she says nothing, though she eagerly reports that Ukrainians abused Jews in eastern Poland. The “Ukrainians needed little encouragement,” she writes. But Poles needed no more.

Kochanski admits to the existence of anti-Semitism in Poland but denies it explanatory power. She cites an SS report from 1941 complaining there was “no real anti-Semitism in the country, but she fails to ask whether the perspective of the SS is reliable on this score: Who, after all, might count as “real” anti-Semites for these hyper-racists? In keeping with the old stereotypes, Kochanski explains Polish hostility to the Jews as a reaction to the supposed Jewish sympathetic for Communism. “One possible motive for taking part in the pogroms” at Jedwabne, she writes, “could have been revenge against the perceived prominence of the Jews in the Soviet administration.” Does that account for the hundreds of men, women and children who were burned to death in a single barn (and whose screams were so loud that a band was brought in to drown them out)?

Though she has not read recent studies of the fate of Jewish refugees, Kochanski does respond to earlier work by the Israeli historian Shmuel Krakowski on the Polish Home Army’s hunting down of Jewish partisans hiding in the forests. In tune with nationalist writers, she calls these partisans “Jewish bandits” and asserts that, by executing such alleged marauders, the AK “protected” the Polish population. And yet, if it had included Jews as part of the population to protect, the Polish underground would have fed those in hiding rather than hunt them down. In a sense, members of the AK were also bandits, dependent on the local population for provisions, taking by force what they could not obtain by consent. Why does Kochanski think that Polish Jewish partisans were a menace whereas Polish Christian partisans were not?

The answer is that Kochanski repeats the stereotypes of her sources. In the Polish mind, Jews were Communists, and armed groups of Jewish escapes were feared for showing particular brutality toward the Polish Christian population. The combing of forests for “bandits” thus produced a sense of security among Poles. Like the nationalist authors she favors, Kochanski assumes that most Poles wanted to help the Jews. Drawing on a few stories from eastern Poland (including recollections of her relatives), she asserts that “the outsourcing of Jewish labour [from camps] to local landowners and farmers gave the Poles the opportunity to provide assistance.” If more Jews did not survive, that was because they refused to help themselves. Władysława Chomsowa, a Pole who was “very active in saving Jews,” noted, “the greatest difficulty was the passivity of the Jews themselves.” Kochanski cites a Jewish survivor from Wilno: “we should have mobilized and fought.”

If Kochanski had read more Jewish memoirs, she would feel the cold absence of sympathy characteristic of such opinions. Resistance is not spontaneous. A crowd consisting largely of women and children, herded by heavily armed and extremely violent guards, does not “as a man” start thrashing or hitting. Until the end, Jews could not be certain of their fate, though they could be certain that even a slight display of disobedience would result in the immediate execution of oneself and one’s loved ones. The Nazis diabolically exploited Jews’ devotion to their families: though Kochanski writes that the Jews of eastern Poland were “poorly guarded and had ample opportunities for escape,” it would have meant abandoning children and elderly parents to their fate. When some Jews finally did escape from the ghettos in 1942 to avoid being sent to the death camps, they fled in large family units—and that is how they met their deaths during the ensuing manhunts. In Kochanski’s account, Poles have no role in this story. She writes that some Jews “took to the forests where the Germans hunted them down.”

Referring to Polish attitudes toward Jews during the Holocaust, Kochanski writes that the issue has “provoked intense and highly emotional debates which show no sign of ending.” The implication is that the historiography consists of a predictable repetition of viewpoints, “Polish” and “Jewish.” In her book, the former mostly prevails.
One might have thought it understandable that destitute Poles would seize Jewish property after its owners were killed; after all, they also seized the property of other Poles. Historian Anna Machcewicz has written of a B-24 bomber that crashed in Poland; soon, local peasants went inside the wreckage and stripped the dead Polish crew of their clothes. Silent hoards of Polish looters descended on the Warsaw Ghetto after it was emptied in 1943, but the same thing happened in the ruins of the city’s west bank after the Germans left in January 1945. And after the fighting, millions of Poles moved in and began using property left by the Germans in the western part of the country. In desperate times, people take what they need to survive.

Jan Gross refuses to accept such reasoning. Though many in Poland dismiss him as a Jew, Gross represents a particular kind of Polish perspective, one that is self-critical though patriotic. Of the inhabitants of the villages around Treblinka, he writes: “It can be safely assumed that the customs of every social and ethnic group demand respect toward their dead. Such respect is not a sign of some ‘higher’ civilization, but of basic human solidarity. The body is not a thing; even after death it retains the shape of the person whom it was serving in life…. one cannot say that the despoiling of the ‘bottomless Treblinka earth,’ as Vasili Grossman described it, could be justified by poverty, need, or necessity.” Vital here are two words yoked together, “their dead”: in Gross’s telling, the murdered Jews were as much Polish as Jewish.

How to relate Poles and Jews is a question that has confounded historians. Gross himself omitted Jews from his first book, _Polish Society Under German Occupation_ (1979), because they were “separated from the rest of the population and treated differently by the occupiers.” He wrote of the self-sacrifice and heroism of Poles as they created institutions to salvage their national life. Yet his sources made him wonder about the realities left out of this “heroic” narrative. At the Hoover Institution in Stanford, Gross discovered a shocking report written in 1940 by Jan Karski, who began using property left by the Germans in the western part of the country. In desperate times, people take what they need to survive.

Yet the intensity of this criticism left little space for the more tolerant Poland that was his parents’: none of the protagonists in _Golden Harvest_ communicate values that transcend the ethnic perspective. Historian Paweł Machcewicz, himself a leader in investigating the Jedwabne massacre, has criticized Gross for not including in his accounts the thousands of Poles who helped Jews. In Warsaw alone, some 25,000 Jews...
are thought to have lived in hiding before the outbreak of the uprising in August 1944, and, according to conservative estimates, at least three times that number of Poles would have been required to keep them alive. No other group is as numerous among the “Righteous Gentiles” honored at Yad Vashem as Poles.

Gross’s answer to criticisms like Machcewicz’s is that the heroic story is well-known in Poland, and his task as an author is to say something new. But why has no one before him told of Poles robbing and murdering Jews? Gross’s book on Jedwabne appeared sixty years after the crime. A partial explanation lies in the decades of collusion between Communism and nationalism. Poland’s Communists were placed in power by the Red Army and widely seen as lackeys of Moscow, Poland’s historic enemy. They therefore sought to boost support through an ethnic narrative that was anti-German but also, at times, anti-Semitic. The historians of Communist Poland ignored questions of wartime collaboration and wrote that 6 million Polish citizens had died, failing to note that more than half were Jewish. As late as 1995, only 8 percent of Poles surveyed believed that Auschwitz was, above all, a place where Jews were killed (of the 1.1 million people killed at Auschwitz, about 90 percent were Jewish); by 2010, that number had risen to 47.4 percent.

In this sense, the work of Jan and Irena Gross and younger Polish historians like Engelking and Grabowski is pedagogical: part of the broader democratization of Polish society, excavating and contextualizing evidence deemed inopportune by the Communist regime—for example, the hundreds of Yiddish-language memoirs left by survivors in the immediate postwar era and stored in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Even historians on the far right are now admitting some Polish role in the Holocaust. But Kochanski, a military historian whose parents fought in the resistance, also wants to educate, and her target audience is Westerners ignorant of the Polish struggle against Nazi and Communist totalitarianism.

The question is whether these two images of Poland—a country of heroes and a country of collaborators—can be combined. The difficulty stems from the occupation itself. Rarely has a society been more violently divided than Polish society was during the war: Jews divided from Poles, but also Poles divided from other Poles. The Polish Jewish writer Janina Bauman, who escaped the Warsaw Ghetto with her mother and sister and lived among Poles, described the process. “Some time and several shelters passed,” she recalled, “before I realised that for the people who sheltered us our presence also meant more than great danger, nuisance, or extra income. Somehow it affected them, too. It boosted what was noble in them, or what was base. Sometimes it divided the family, at other times it brought the family together in a shared endeavor to help and survive.”

The base attained a distance from the noble that Westerners can scarcely imagine. But the story does not end there, for the distance between the two poles was also collapsed as each was inverted, and each inversion compounded. The base became more so by being presented as virtuous, and the noble eluded people’s reach because it was stigmatized as harmful, indeed self-serving. Jan Gross writes of a case in southern Poland where neighbors hounded a woman to dispose of the two Jewish children in her care, insisting she was “selfishly endangering the village. They left her in peace only after she had assured them—falsely—that she had drowned the pair. Gross asks us to ponder the inversion of morality in a place where people breathed a sigh of relief believing that their neighbor had murdered two children. In his sources, Grabowski repeatedly encounters Polish police carrying out their “patriotic” duty of turning over Jewish women and children to the Germans. The debasement of the noble continued after the war, as Polish rescuers begged the Jews they had saved to keep quiet. The eminent critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki and his wife owed their lives—and gave their lives—to save Jews from the Nazis. Gross cites an esteemed Polish ethnographer who has spent decades collecting folklore in the Polish countryside, who is “enamored of Polish village life and its culture,” but who writes, “The most painful thing for me is the attitude in the countryside toward Jews, and a universal sense of triumph because they are no longer there.”

A keen reporter for the Polish underground had already written in December 1942 that in the “soul” of Polish society, there was no “elemental protest” against the murder of the Jews. Instead, Poles felt “a subconscious satisfaction that there will be no Jews in the Polish organism.” This was a confirmation of Karski’s worst fears. By 1943, writes the historian Andrzej Zbikowski, Poles took for granted that the Jews would disappear, and a kind of solidarity spread through the Polish underground, from the (otherwise nonracist) socialists to the deeply anti-Semitic nationalists. The war would lead to the defeat of two enemies: the Germans, but also the Jews.

From a European perspective, Poland seems to be advancing toward a “normal” open society that is working its way through a difficult past. In France, decades elapsed before the public and the French state recognized the extent of native collaboration with the Nazis. What is different in Poland is the severity of the clash between the old and new narratives. The Polish underground was more massive, Polish collaboration far smaller than its French counterpart, and Polish suffering on a scale unknown in Western Europe—yet the crimes against Jews on Polish territory, and the virulence of native anti-Semitism, were also far greater. And even more is at stake here: the myth (not to say fiction) of martyrdom became a pillar of identity in Poland, a country made to live not only under the yoke of a system imposed by the Soviets but also in great poverty, forgotten by Europe and seemingly irrelevant. If Poland did not have a present, at least it had a past.

In a May 31 letter to his Polish counterpart, President Obama apologized for the words “Polish death camps.” “The killing centers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Treblinka, and elsewhere in occupied Poland were built and operated by the Nazi regime,” he wrote. “In contrast many Poles risked their lives—and gave their lives—to save Jews from the Holocaust.” Yet if one reads the newly translated memoirs of Jewish survivors, and the neglected court testimonies backing up the long-suppressed popular memories of looting and murder, one can say that during World War II, Poland itself became a death camp for Jews. If it worked effectively, that was because Poles helped keep it running. Exactly how many took part in the manhunts and denunciations isn’t known, but their numbers were significant enough to produce the result that the country’s nationalists wanted, satisfying widespread hopes that Poland would become “Polish.” To say so is not to hurl slander at the Poles from afar, but to reprise a story that ever more Poles are telling about themselves, in the name of a Poland that is at the same time very old and very new.
Children of the Storm

by HELEN EPSTEIN

Schools are supposed to be America’s engine of social mobility, but they are clearly failing in that function. The United States ranks twenty-first of twenty-six Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in high school graduation rates. In New York City, 72 percent of African-American boys fail to graduate. Of those students who make it to college—rich, poor, black and white—40 percent need remedial classes. Teachers, administrators, parents, and state and federal policies have all been blamed for these dismal results. Charles Murray of the conservative American Enterprise Institute has even blamed the children themselves for their lack of aptitude.

In How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character, New York Times journalist Paul Tough presents an alternative explanation for why American students do so poorly. Like Murray, he attributes the problem to the children themselves, but he also maintains that most are born with the cognitive abilities to succeed. What they lack is motivation and the related qualities of persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, self-confidence and “grit”—the willingness to sacrifice immediate pleasures for longer-term goals. What holds back many poor children, and some rich ones, are the toxic, brain-distorting effects of stressful childhood experiences. Child abuse, separation from or neglect by parents, exposure to violence, and living with a mentally ill or drug-addicted relative all affect the developing brain and personality. During early childhood, the brain doesn’t merely grow bigger, like the other organs; it molds itself to the perceived environment by creating and destroying billions of neurons in different brain regions. The brain of a stressed-out child becomes hyper-alert to threat, and extremely poor at planning and organizing tasks, delaying gratification and controlling emotion—the very abilities needed to spend long hours in a library, pay attention to a boring lecture, plan and carry out complex activities, and believe that hard work will pay off in the future. This may help explain why some children find it difficult to concentrate, are angered easily, become depressed and discouraged over minor failures, and privilege instant gratification over longer-term rewards. Stress may even help to explain why some children are attracted to drug abuse, as if they were medicating themselves to tame the neurochemical storm in their heads.

The science is still fuzzy, but some researchers using brain imaging and hormonal tests have detected the effects of childhood stress on the growth of those brain regions involved in anxiety, concentration and short-term memory. Equally striking are the more easily measured effects of maternal separation and other traumas on the brains of baby mice and monkeys and their subsequent behavior as adult animals. Such animals perform poorly on memory tests, exhibit behaviors suggestive of anxiety and depression, and are frequently rejected by their fellow animals.

A major cause of stress in children appears to be stress in their parents. Beginning in the 1960s, child psychologists such as John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth and Mary Main showed that some mothers—often those who were themselves abused or depressed—fail to behave in warm, sensitive, responsive ways to their small children. In turn, these children develop anxious or irritable social styles. Ordinarily, toddlers will scramble to their mothers after a brief separation, but a child with what psychologists call “insecure attachment” might treat his or her mother with indifference when she returns, or circle around her as if undecided about whether to approach or flee. These behaviors appear to be markers for early childhood stress and predict what that child will be like decades later. In one long-term study of roughly 200 children born into poverty in Minnesota, the quality of the mother-child relationship during the first three and a half years of life strongly predicted whether the child would drop out of high school, abuse drugs, succumb to mental illness or end up behind bars by age 19. Genes have little to do with it. Some children are born fussy and difficult, and this has long been hypothesized to determine their likelihood of success in life; but the Minnesota researchers measured the temperaments of the children right after birth, using standard techniques developed in the 1950s and still in use today. They found that inborn characteristics such as calmness, fearfulness, infantile aggression and so on failed to predict the children’s long-term educational or behavioral outcomes. Since then, genes associated with behavior problems have been discovered, but they appear to be expressed only in children who experienced abuse or neglect early on.

Tough’s book focuses on programs that can help change self-defeating, stress-related behavior patterns in troubled children by strengthening positive character traits. For example, Riverdale, a fancy New York day school, and the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, a network of charter schools for poor children, both try to instill attitudes of respect, perseverance and conscientiousness. In some programs, students are even graded on qualities like “optimism” or “zest” and then given exercises if they score poorly.

The long-term effect of these programs hasn’t been rigorously measured, but they clearly help some people, including one young woman whom Tough gets to know named Kewauna Lerma. Kewauna grew up shuttling from state to state with her rootless mother, sometimes living in homeless shelters, sometimes landing with her grandmother. In school, she snarled at her teachers, skipped class and was eventually arrested for tussling with a police officer. Then, after a stern lecture from her mother, she decided to change. Her grades improved a bit, and a teacher suggested that she apply to OneGoal, a Chicago mentoring program for struggling but ambitious high school students. At OneGoal, Kewauna learned to study more effectively, set achievable goals, learn from mistakes rather than despair over them and plan for the future. Now she’s a sophomore in college with a 3.8 GPA.

Kewauna’s story and those of other young people in Tough’s book are inspiring, but missing from the narrative is a discussion of where all this brain-damaging stress came from in the first place. Part of the answer can be found in other books about the long and depressing history of US policies toward families and children, including The War Against Parents (1998), by Sylvia Hewlett and Cornel West; So Rich, So Poor (2012), by Peter Edelman; and The Hidden History of Head Start (2010) and The Tragedy of Child

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Care in America (2009), by Edward Zigler.

The story begins in the 1950s and '60s, when family life vastly improved after the miseries of the Great Depression and World War II. Inequality fell as men's wages rose and generous tax breaks favored families with children. Millions of young people also benefited from the GI Bill, which sent them to college, subsidized their mortgages and paid for their healthcare. These policies enabled most women to stay home and devote themselves to caring for their children, who eventually grew up to become the most productive Americans in history. By 1973, the poverty rate had fallen to a historic low of 11 percent, much lower than what it is today.

Then progress stalled. As the economy faltered in the 1970s, companies blamed workers and wage growth stagnated. Most job growth since then has been in very low-wage categories. Soon men found themselves working an average of twelve extra days per year just to make ends meet. Meanwhile, tax policies became less favorable to families with children, and programs aimed at the poor, such as rent subsidies and public housing, were cut in favor of programs like mortgage tax relief, which benefit wealthier people. Rising incarceration rates, frequently driven by racial bias, further weakened poor black families.

Beginning in the 1970s, many American women began going to work, which helped to stabilize family incomes but often left children in precarious circumstances. By the end of the 1980s, American children had lost more than ten hours a week of parental time compared with the 1960s. Some policy-makers anticipated the growing stress on families. In 1971, Senator Walter Mondale, Representative John Brademas and their allies in the White House Office of Economic Opportunity drafted a bill to guarantee high-quality daycare and preschool for every American child. The program was to be administered through community hubs that could also provide home visiting for new mothers, job counseling, after-school programs and other services. The Comprehensive Child Development Bill had enormous public support and passed both houses of Congress, but President Nixon, bowing to conservative and other anti-government groups has bitterly fought efforts to do anything about it. High-quality daycare for several hours a day has been shown to benefit small children, as long as they have a devoted adult in their lives. But the cost of high-quality daycare now exceeds tuition at some state colleges, so millions of parents have to rely instead on the vast informal daycare market, in which children have been found strapped into car seats, and toxic chemicals and machetes have been found in play areas. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 increased government support for childcare, but it also reduced requirements for states to ensure that these programs were of decent quality. Today, only twelve states require daycare workers to have any training at all, and in California, daycare centers are inspected less often than cemeteries.

Forty years of family-unfriendly policies have perpetuated the cycles of toxic stress in which many American children now grow up. These stressed-out young people become, in turn, the cause of stress in others, including their relatives, their neighbors, their romantic partners and, of course, the victims of their crimes. Needless to say, we must also include their children, who go on to perpetuate the cycle, generation after generation. While there’s a great deal to be said for the character remediation programs Tough explores, America clearly needs to do far more about this problem.

It is true, as Tough maintains, that we “don’t know quite what to do” about poverty in America, but we could start by investing in first-rate early childcare, increasing the minimum wage, using economic stimulus to generate jobs with decent wages, giving parents paid time off to care for their children, and reducing the incarceration of nonviolent offenders so that more families can stay together. The United Kingdom enacted many such practices under the Blair administration, and child poverty rates there fell by 50 percent in five years.

n Fire in the Ashes, his memoir about a group of extremely poor South Bronx children, Jonathan Kozol comes to a conclusion very similar to Tough’s about the ways in which children overcome adversity. Kozol has been working with disadvantaged American children for nearly fifty years, but the portraits in this book seem especially intimate. He spent long hours hanging out in their houses and talking to their parents and teachers, and he also helped them out with money when they needed it. In return, these children and their parents shared their inner lives with him.

Some of these young people succumbed to drugs, crime and suicide, while others stayed in school, got jobs and established stable families of their own. Like Tough, Kozol attributes the difference between them to a mysterious process of “inward growth—in decency, in character.” Kozol doesn’t analyze what he means by character, as Tough does, but he doesn’t need to; you sense from his descriptions exactly what it is.

During the 1980s, Kozol helped expose the grim conditions in New York City’s welfare hotels, where many homeless families then resided, at city expense, in conditions reminiscent of the squalid nineteenth-century tenements described by Jacob Riis in How the Other Half Lives: entire families were crowded into tiny rooms with a hot plate and intermittent running water. As one of Kozol’s friends remarked, municipal documents used plumbing imagery to describe the homeless problem at this time. There was a “back-up” in the homeless population, and an “overflow” into the hotels of Times Square. Kozol had to sneak into the hotels to conduct interviews because the city barred journalists and researchers from entering; but somehow, abusive drunks and drug dealers found a way in without much interference. Boys seem to have been especially vulnerable to the effects of these living conditions, and two of those Kozol knew later killed themselves—adding to the body count of the threefold surge in young male suicides across the nation between 1960 and 1994. One of these children, whom Kozol calls Christopher, begs from passing cars,
seldom attends school, and may have been sexually abused by a man who took him to Long Island on weekends. Over the course of roughly a decade, Kozol watches Christopher become increasingly cold and aloof, except when he needs money; he sells heroin, becomes addicted himself, lands in jail and dies of an overdose in his early 20s.

The city eventually closed the welfare hotels and moved the families to apartments in the South Bronx, where Kozol remained in touch with them. Many of these children and others with similarly grim backgrounds are now doing surprisingly well. Most extraordinary is the story of Benjamin, who was raped at age 9 and lost his mother to cancer at 12. His absentee father was often drunk, and his sister and older brothers were either dead or in jail. After his mother died, Benjamin was adopted by Martha Overall, an Episcopal priest at St. Ann's Church in the South Bronx. St. Ann's had an excellent after-school program, where Kozol met many of the subjects in this book. Despite Overall's determination to help Benjamin stay on the straight and narrow, he ran away from school, joined a gang, took drugs, and stole from stores and from Overall herself. Eventually he too ended up in jail. Martha bailed him out and the judge sentenced him to probation.

Then, miraculously, Benjamin decided to join a drug recovery program at Odyssey House. He's now clean and counseling other recovering addicts. (It's worth noting that every one of the success stories in Kozol's book is working to help others, either as a social worker, a volunteer at an after-school or neighborhood program, or as a caring stay-at-home parent.)

Kozol never explains the “Fire in the Ashes” to which his title refers, but Benjamin does. At one point, he and Kozol are reminiscing about the opposition that Overall faced when she first took over St. Ann's Church. Many local people were loyal to her Hispanic predecessor, who had been removed for corruption. One day, when Benjamin was still a small boy, long before Overall adopted him, he was at her side when she arrived at the center to find protesters waving signs saying No White Woman Wanted Here. She went ahead and did her work anyway, and the example of her persistence, conscientiousness, self-confidence and “grit” (as Tough would put it) sent a message to Benjamin. As he explains to Kozol, her determined benevolence and, above all, her fierce faith—in herself, her greater mission and in him, personally—“helped me find the strength inside of me I didn’t know I had.”

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**Generation X**

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

Wade Guyton must like the idea that he’s become an artist in spite of himself. For an article previewing his current exhibition, “Wade Guyton: OS,” at the Whitney Museum of American Art (through January 13), he told Carol Vogel of *The New York Times* that, growing up in Tennessee, “I never really enjoyed drawing or art classes,” preferring instead to watch TV and play video games. When his homework required drawing, he let his stepdad do it for him. “I didn’t have the patience,” Guyton went on, “and he enjoyed it.”

To be sure, Guyton isn’t an “outsider artist,” even though when he finally found the patience to make art himself, in the early 1990s, some of his first works—mostly not included in the Whitney’s show—were sculptures made of materials that “were less likely to be found in an art supply store than a Home Depot,” as Whitney curator Scott Rothkopf writes in his catalog essay. While Guyton’s models came from the distinctly brainy tradition of Minimalism, he always gave them a “down-market, DIY twist.” “I come from a lowbrow culture,” he declares elsewhere in the catalog, in an interview with Donna De Salvo, also a Whitney curator, “so I have a skewed sense of what’s highbrow and lowbrow.”

But how many of us have really sprung fully formed from highbrow culture? Making that distinction—if it still matters, which isn’t entirely clear—is something you have to do for yourself. Today, highbrow culture is probably the ultimate lo-fi DIY setup. But I can with considerable confidence inform Guyton, if he’s still unsure about this, that he’s the proprietor of a nice little line in highbrow taste—a kind of cool, austere sensuality. His work is small—in minimal, geometric without being uptight about it, and emphasizes white, gray and black over color. Very Helmut Lang, very Jil Sander. Writing about Guyton in *Parkett* a few years ago, Daniel Birnbaum invoked Alexandre Kojeve’s Hegelian vision of “post-historical creations or forms of life allowing for the most elaborate, formalistic and ritualized kinds of cultural activity, such as the fascinating ‘snobbery’ found in Japan: ‘the Noh theater, the ceremony of tea, and the art of bouquets of flowers.”’ Why the Russian philosopher should have imagined Tokugawa Japan as a post-historical society is an open question, but the ethos being summoned is clear enough. Keeping her references closer to home, Johanna Burton in *Artforum* merely noted that, “hung sparingly on white walls, the paintings take on the stark elegance we attribute to a whole lineage of morphologically similar items” by the likes of Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt or Brice Marden.

Yet the first thing you’ll see when you step out of the elevator on the Whitney’s third floor is false advertising for the rest of Guyton’s show. It’s a group of large canvases (seven and a half feet tall or more) that are untitled, like most of Guyton’s works. In each, a photographic image of flames on a black ground is overlaid with one or more iterations of a sans serif letter U. To my eye, the letter’s form echoes that of the flames on the left side of the image, as if one was an abstraction of the other; this introduces a little puzzle into the viewer’s perception of the painting, a doubt about whether that U is a letter—and if so, what it’s meant to signify in the absence of any word of which it would be a part. Should it be read as “SMS-ese” for “you,” as if to say something like “You are really out of the frying pan and into the fire now”? Or is it simply a form that happens to resemble a letter?

These works are redolent of Jack Goldstein’s 1980s paintings of dramatic atmospheric phenomena—lightning bolts, auroras or any other kind of fiery-looking thing—which also sometimes included overlaid abstract forms. Goldstein’s paintings had something to do with the idea of spectacle, and with how the image of a natural spectacle could be at once patently fake and genuinely awe-inspiring, although innately meaningless. Guyton’s, by contrast, are not about grand manifestations of nature’s power; they seem to depict a close-up of a small fire, like one on a gas range. It’s the flickering beauty of the flame that is evoked in Guyton’s pieces, although the sense of its closeness also stirs up associations with the pain it would cause if touched. Guyton calls the pieces “romantic, but camp.”

In general, Guyton’s work is far from fiery. It prizes an intellectualized relation to the world, one that is tentative and skeptical, and operates by way of a studied diffidence. His recollection to De Salvo that “in the beginning I don’t know how serious I was about making a painting,” and that even now “I’ve tried to present them as paintings but to undermine them at the same time,” conveys how carefully he’s cultivated his cool ambivalence. More broadly,
he’s spoken of “the work satisfying certain demands and then also failing to satisfy those demands.” The doubts about whether what he exhibits as painting should be called such is not all to his disadvantage, however. He is one of those artists who makes paintings but never paints, and this eschewal of anything recognizable as a traditional act of painting is precisely what redeems him in the eyes of those who believe that painting is prima facie reactionary, and acceptable as contemporary art only when it somehow or other isn’t painting.

In Guyton’s case, his painting isn’t painting because it’s printing. Every commentator on his paintings has explained the process by which they are made. The clearest account is by Burton, one of his earliest and best proponents, and explains how Guyton produced a painting from one of his favorite sources, a computer file consisting of an all-black rectangle.

Having folded lengths of factory-primed linen so that each half equals the width of his Epson UltraChrome large-format printer (forty-four inches), Guyton runs them through the machine, which deploys hundreds of individual ink-jet heads. Together, these tiny, dumb mechanical soldiers labor at Guyton’s behest to produce just as dumb an “image”: A black rectangle, drawn and then “filled” by Guyton in Photoshop, is printed twice, once on each side of his folded linen, doubling, in essence, the image of the rectangle (at the same time as trying to unite its parts on one field). Depending on the effects of the initial printing process, Guyton opts to run one side or the other (or sometimes both) through the machine a second and sometimes third time (or more), smoothing and filling prior snags and drags on the one hand and on the other providing an even denser surface on which new anomalies can occur…Guyton aids and abets the glitches, gagging his printer with material not meant for it and asking it to lay uniform sheets of ink over an expanse twice its size—feats hardly enumerated in the user’s manual.

What Burton’s description of the process inadvertently reveals is that Guyton is cultivating a sort of technological picturesque. In the aesthetic of the eighteenth century, the picturesque was a way of combining aspects of the beautiful and the sublime—incorporating the rough, rugged and irregular character of sublime scenes but omitting their threatening and inhuman aspect. This kind of vista came to be regarded as “that kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture,” because it was more interesting than an entirely groomed and gentle one. In today’s terminology, the picturesque is beauty with a little edge to it; it courts the slippages in the system but doesn’t break the machine. Guyton, by availing himself of computer technology but using it in such a way as to elicit its parapraxes, cultivating the irregularities and imperfections that expose its limitations, at once humanizes the machine and encourages us to view our own present—seemingly receding into history before our very eyes, given the unprecedented pace of technological change—with something of the elegiac distance that ancient ruins built for the purpose gave to eighteenth-century gentlemen contemplating the classical past.
at vast scale on primed linen, Guyton’s black tends to look gray.) But only our awareness of the artist’s process enables us to consider the image as an image. Mostly we see it as tone, as texture, as atmosphere. Likewise, another of Guyton’s favorite images, the letter X, tends to catch us out by making it hard to know whether we should perceive it as image or text. As an image, in Guyton’s paintings, the X can be part of a sort of deconstructed pattern, skittering in serried ranks here and there, now fuzzy, now crisp—but always more or less in line—across the face of the canvas; or it can be a single splintered form nailing down the center of the painting and holding its four corners in tense discipline, like a wounded soldier of formalism making one last stand. As a text, the single X, like any other letter, can be said to have no meaning at all—except that the X has more null meanings than any other letter, certainly more than U. It is also a number (the Roman numeral for ten); the sign for a mathematical operation as well as an independent variable; the mark that stands in for the signature of an illiterate, and for both negation (crossing out) and affirmation (check the box if you agree). And it identifies Guyton, who was born in 1972, as part of a generation. X is the signifier of signifiers, and seeing a multitude of them on a canvas, it is possible to think that one is encountering an illegible, abstract text, a poetry of spacing and dissemination, a temptation to meaning that will always be denied.

Guyton’s X is whatever you want it to mean and its opposite. It’s infinitely generative or wholly redundant—you decide. The same is true of his art as a whole: it responds to its context and defers to its viewer, but not necessarily in predictable ways. Rothkopf praises the way Guyton demonstrates “how images and signs circulate today, the malleability of what an artwork might be and accomplish,” and “how the activity of making things can point both to itself and to the world in which that activity occurs.” This is hard to dispute, and I sympathize with Rothkopf when he adds, “This is not a cynical position; it is honest and even optimistic.” But I can’t help wonder whether this stance of realism needs to be quite so blasé and tight-lipped, when he adds, “This is not a cynical position; it’s an entirely separate work from the paintings—and in the presence of such grandiose works are impossible for the eye to grasp, and I can tell you that trying to look at them for any length of time is a great way to get a headache.”

Contemplating Richter’s Strip Paintings amounts to what Immanuel Kant called a negative pleasure. In place of Guyton’s technological picturesque, what Richter is aiming at here is a technological sublime. In the ungraspable blur of these seemingly crisp streaks of color, the line—the very vehicle of demarcation and delimitation—is transformed instead into a vehicle of the boundlessness or formlessness characteristic of everything sublime. This blurring testifies to the incapacity of the sense of sight. And yet, in themselves, the Strip Paintings fail to convey the experience of the sublime. Perhaps this is because they do not engage the senses sufficiently to expose to the imagination the senses’ inadequacy. Richter’s case is just what the title says: six massive and very shiny panes of glass supported, parallel to one another, by a steel framework. The panes function both as windows and as mirrors, depending on the viewer’s position. Although the sculpture is an entirely separate work from the paintings shown with it, in this room it seemed to function as a sort of machine for viewing (and interrupting the view of) the paintings.

As it turns out, I’m no longer so diffident about referring to these works as paintings. The reason is that it was only through the movement imposed on the paintings through the perception-altering action of the sculpture that they came to life. If you look at Gerhard Richter: Patterns, you’ll see just how fascinating and intricate the process of making the Strip Paintings must have been. Yet all evidence of this process has been effaced from the paintings themselves, leaving only slick and dead glassy surfaces that recall nothing more than the “licked finish” of the academic painting of the nineteenth century. The addition of the sculpture’s glassy surfaces, however, broke up those hard, cold images and put the viewer back into the process again. And one began to think that these paintings, or ones like them, really could have been made to embody a technological sublime.
Puzzle No. 3261

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS
1 and 28 Word such as “wine” or “water”—or “transubstantiation”? (4,4)
3 Auditory realignment: outside of North Carolina, everybody supposedly gets one (3,2,5)
10 Bargains with lunatic, softer on the exterior (7)
11 Evangelist pursues hiding place for The Nation (7)
12 In retrospective, Picasso’s outrivaled masters of technique (9)
13 Giant clamp on the tongue (5)
14 Smoking near pillow’s center in lodges (6)
16 3.0 (three) crackers held by nurse’s colleagues (8)
18 Chilled dessert, for the most part, sometimes referred to as a meat dish (8)
19 Rewind parts of an inning I’d seen inside TV station (6)
22 “Orcuspay” language? (5)
23 Underworld figure and stoolie hold $100 for powerful magnate (9)
25 Key group of spies supplants Egypt’s leader in inflicting pain (7)
26 Zero grade for speechifying (7)
27 Married gays, initially, beginning to educate children! (5,5)
28 See 1

DOWN
1 Something good but confusing—viz: math (7)
2 Track from satisfactory to unsatisfactory (5)
4 Musician lacking first aid (6)
5 Business attempt at the foot of Asian river (8)
6 Walk within legal limits (14)
7 Otherwise neutral, Asner is just the same (9)
8 Welcomed neatnik after tidying up (5,2)
9 Cocktail’s mixed-in asset: liqueur (7,7)
15 Could this be a source of financial independence? Sounds like bondage play would (5,4)
17 They help you go down fast and pass over shouts of encouragement (3,5)
18 Exploit to frighten farm animal (4,3)
20 Go on—act crazy with a stop sign, e.g. (7)
21 Speaker’s false takeover is a puzzle (6)
24 One sporting frightful horn! (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3260

ACROSS
1 TWEN (rev.) + TY 9 anag.
10 EMERBER (beer anag.) 14 2 defs.
12 BOR + A (rev.) 14 [asp]HALT 15 2
defs. 19 WALLA) 21 AM 1 + D 24 [e]
LANG 26 hidden 28 CR + AWL
29 RE)(ELECTED 10 DOUB[t] +
LEVTS)10 + ON

DOWN
1 TURM(OIL (rum anag.)
2 anag. 3 TO + TE 4 T + OR SO
5 EWELAMBS (male rev., tush anag.)
6 anag. 7 2 def. 8 [m]ARIA 13 A +
BUT (rev.) 16 anag. 17 YAD + A (rev.)
18 BALL + CLUB 20 LON(GAGO)
(ln anag.) 22 anag. 23 YE(ME)NI
Memory Pill Helps the Brain Like Prescription Glasses
Help the Eyes, Claims US Surgeon General Candidate

Remarkable changes observed, helps users match the memory power of others 15 years younger in as little as 30 days!

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON – Help is on the way for those who routinely lose their car keys, get lost while driving, forget to call people back, or misplaced their TV remote control.

Just like a good pair of glasses can make blurry vision, sharp and crystal-clear, there’s a new, doctor-recommended memory pill that may help your brain, sharpening your memory powers and mental powers, and making that slow-thinking, sluggish brain as sharp as a tack.

In controlled research studies, the prescription-free formula, known as Procera AVH® has been shown to increase memory, mood, and mental clarity, but it does much more than that.

Time Travel For Your Brain?
If you have ever dreamed of traveling back in time, this drug-free compound may be the next best thing.

Younger-Functioning Brain in 30 Days?
If the results of this randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, published in JAMA, a leading peer-reviewed scientific journal, are to be believed, it may be entirely possible that you can get your new, younger-functioning brain in as little as 30 days.

This is old news for Robert Heller, MD, who uses and recommends the formula. “It’s not a drug,” says Dr. Heller, “it’s a nutritional supplement that can help a foggy, sluggish brain become a sharper, quicker, and healthier brain.”

Wake Up Call for Tired Brains
For years, Dr. Heller looked for an effective solution to patients’ complaints about mind and memory.

“I searched for a remedy or treatment that could help my patients, even friends and family, regain the memory and mental sharpness we all seem to lose with age. I am quite happy to now recommend Procera AVH as it gives the brain much needed support against free radicals and improve the decline in neurotransmitters, and blood flow and oxygen.”

“For me, it’s like reading an eye chart with the right pair of glasses instead of an old pair of lenses. Everything comes into focus, my brain is more crisp, more focused, clearer, and sharper.”

Dr. Con Stough at the Brain Sciences Institute concurs, “It’s a fairly unique process that pumps the brain full of more energy (oxygen), improves blood circulation to the brain and increases the key neurotransmitters that are responsible for cognitive functioning.”

A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study on what may be the world’s first truly effective memory pill was conducted at this university research facility.

Elizabeth K. of Rochester, New York experienced a night-and-day difference in her mind and memory. At the age of 54, her memory was declining at an alarming rate.

She searched high and low for a solution, before she heard about Procera AVH. She decided to give it a try.

“It took about a month for the memory benefit to kick in. Six months later, even my husband was impressed with my improved memory. And I am very happy with my renewed mental clarity and focus!”

A ‘Bonus’ Effect?
Elizabeth was pleasantly surprised with one of the formula’s ‘bonus effects.’

“Within a week I felt a wonderful change in my mood. It was such an unexpected bonus,” smiles Elizabeth.

Pharmacist Gene Steiner, Pharm.D., was relocating to another state and was apprehensive about taking the state board of pharmacy jurisprudence examination, a daunting examination that tests a candidate’s mastery of pharmacy law.

Dr. Steiner took Procera AVH daily for two weeks prior to the test, and passed with flying colors.

“The recall I experienced was near fantastic,” says Steiner. Curiosity piqued, Dr. Steiner did his own research to learn more about the formula he read about a US cognitive researcher who had taken a new approach to treating memory loss, addressing the “energy crisis” that occurs naturally in human brains around the age of 40-50.

Author, researcher, preeminent brain expert, and lead formulator for Procera AVH, Joshua Reynolds, explains, “One-third of your brainpower may be lost by the age of 40, and up to 50 percent may be lost by the age of 50!”

Half-Blind...and Can’t See It
“If you were to lose half your vision, essentially go half-blind, you would surely notice it,” says Reynolds. “But the gradual loss of mental acuity and brainpower over many years may be too subtle to people to notice.”

This explains why many Procera AVH users seem surprised at the effects.

Frustrated and concerned about her “alarming rate” of memory loss, 54-year-old Elizabeth K., Rochester, New York, discovered a natural memory pill that changed her life.

Mark S. in Aledo, Texas, was worried about being at his best during sales calls.

“I really needed something to help with mental clarity, focus and memory. I have to be at my best when I meet with clients.”

Shortly after he started taking Procera AVH, Mark was amazed at how sharp and mentally focused he was during his appointments.

“It was definitely a noticeable difference. I was very pleased with Procera AVH and happy to know it will help me stay at my best.”

Age-related vision loss is easily corrected with glasses. A novel drug-free compound has been found to help fight age-related memory loss and poor mental clarity in as little as 30 days.

Get a FREE Bonus Supply And a Free Book, Too!
Try Procera AVH Risk-Free today and receive a Free Bonus Supply along with a free copy of medically acclaimed, 20/20 Brainspower: 20 Days To A Quicker, Calmer, Sharper Mind!, a $20 value.

Procera AVH is the leading US brain health supplement. It is clinically shown to help improve memory, mood and mental clarity! And it comes with a 90-day satisfaction guarantee so you can experience the long-term results risk-free, too!

Free Rapid Detox Formula for First 500 Callers!
Reynolds is also including, with the first 500 orders, a FREE supply of his powerful brain detox formula, Ceraplex, scientifically designed to help flush away environmental toxins from the brain to help enhance memory and focus even further. This is a special introductory offer and supplies are limited, so call now.

Call Toll-Free! 1-800-647-5767
Twin Stabilizers
Smart Memory Master Shock Absorber Adjusts to Your Weight
Air Ventilation System Circulates Air with Every 7 Steps
VS2 VersoShock™ Sole Exclusive Shock Absorbing System
Comfort-Fit Removable Insole

A natural way to RELIEVE DISCOMFORT and ENERGIZE YOUR LIFE
Introducing the NEW VS2 VersoShock™ sole: 3X more SHOCK ABSORPTION –2X more ENERGY RETURN

Ease tender feet, knees and even your aching back! The all-new VS2 VersoShock™ trampoline sole absorbs the pounding that your body receives every day. Experience relief from standing on hard surfaces like concrete, brick and tile with the only shoe that makes every step pillow-soft. You’ll find yourself parking further from the entrance of the grocery store –just to walk more. You’ll feel enthusiastic about your work –even if you spend all day on your feet. Life can be enjoyable again!

Feel less of your own body weight on your feet and relieve the harmful stress that walking and running can put on your muscles, bones and joints. This amazing footwear is unlike anything you have worn before, reducing nerve pressure and allowing your muscles to relax. They will help you feel rejuvenated by restoring energy and propelling you forward with every step. Imagine a healthier more active you – free from the stress and discomfort of being on your feet… Walk more, run more, jump higher and stay on your feet longer with the ultimate in comfort and athletic performance: the new NEXTA by G-Defy™!

Dr. Arnold Ross, DPM
“I recommend Gravity Defyer shoes to my patients and friends... I wear them myself!”
Associate Clinical Professor: Western University College of Podiatric Medicine, Private Practice: West Los Angeles Board Certified, ABPOPPM

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