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The Nation

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Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars

Michelle Goldberg
...And the Poor Get Poorer

Re Saket Soni’s “Low-Wage Nation” [Jan. 20]: yes, wages have been and are falling or flat. Yes, US workers are, to some degree, “contingent,” as are (legal and illegal) immigrant workers. I could add that a high unemployment rate is the “new normal.”

And these phenomena are caused by not passing an immigration bill? There are laudable reasons for passing that bill, but helping US wage earners is not one of them. Unless, that is, you can repeal the law of supply and demand. Soni is, in effect, advocating the opposite of his well-intentioned cause. An excess of low-skilled labor is not the only cause of US wage earners’ (and no-wage earners’) distress, but it may top the list of economic and social variables.

Jerry Bronk
San Francisco

The Viagra Effect

Believe it or not, there was a time, not that long ago, when employers had to offer employees top-notch healthcare or they didn’t get top-notch employees [Katha Pollitt, “Goodbye, 2013,” Jan. 20]. There was also a time when birth control wasn’t an option—most insurance companies wouldn’t cover it, and if they did, premiums were exorbitant. When did birth control coverage begin? When Viagra came out and was immediately covered. As an employer, I say you do not have, nor should you, the right to dictate anything to your employees.

The biggest mistake was having employers control healthcare in the first place. It started during World War II as an incentive when wages were frozen. No employer should have that kind of power over the lives of employees.

Thomas Blaney

Neutralize Gerrymandering

In “A New Era for New York City” [Jan. 20], Bob Master says, “State-level gerrymandering will preserve redoubts of reactionary power at least until the next redistricting in 2022.”

But the evils of gerrymandering can be neutralized without waiting until 2022. State constitutions can be amended. Promote constitutional amendments that say simply, “The people of the State of [name] direct that a system of elections be created by law that results in voting strength in the (House) (Senate) (Congressional delegation) that is distributed between and among the various parties in direct proportion to the distribution of total statewide votes received by each party in the General Election.”

Dan Brown
Dewitt, Mich.

Put the Nation back in The Nation

This issue’s overabundance of New York content is too much of the city and not enough of the nation. Case in point: Betsy Reed’s “The Education Conversation” [Jan. 20]. She says that overscheduling is but a peccadillo of the rich and not an issue for most families. The parents in my congregation (as well as their children) are not elite families making more than $75,000 per year, yet they continue to be troubled by overscheduling—fitting faith, music,
President Obama was re-elected in 2012 by a wider-than-expected margin because the American people wanted him to do more, not less, in a second term. Unfortunately, 2013 was a year of more frustration than accomplishment. So it should come as no surprise that Obama used his State of the Union address to declare that 2014 would be a “year of action.” Some of the action the president proposed will simply attempt to do what should have already been done: extending long-term unemployment benefits, enacting comprehensive immigration reform, making healthcare reform work instead of voting repeatedly to overturn settled law. But Obama did identify new measures addressing the dire circumstance of a moment when “after four years of economic growth, corporate profits and stock prices have rarely been higher, and those at the top have never done better. But average wages have barely budged. Inequality has deepened. Upward mobility has stalled. The cold, hard fact is that even in the midst of recovery, too many Americans are working more than ever just to get by—let alone get ahead. And too many still aren’t working at all.”

The president outlined solid proposals “to create jobs rebuilding our roads, upgrading our ports, unclogging our commutes” and made the essential case that “first-class jobs gravitate to first-class infrastructure.” He proposed the development of six new hubs for high-tech manufacturing, with federal investment to link “businesses to research universities that can help America lead the world in advanced technologies.”

But he also went to the heart of the matter with a proposal to raise the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour. That’s a great leap forward; not enough of a leap, in a country where the agitation is now, quite appropriately, for a $15 minimum, but a significant presidential embrace of the self-evident truth that “no one who works full time should ever have to raise a family in poverty.” And Obama went beyond that good rhetoric by announcing that he would use an executive order to raise the minimum wage for federal contractors—something this magazine called for a year ago. By using all the authority available to him, Obama is energizing progressives and giving Democrats a fighting chance in this fall’s critical midterm elections. One of the strongest parts of his speech, in fact, was the call for equal pay for women and an end to “workplace policies that belong in a Mad Men episode.”

But the president muddled his message when he renewed tired arguments for the free-trade policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations. This undermines much of the rest of his speech; such deals deepen income inequality. Obama has to unite and activate his base, and that’s harder to do when he’s proposing a trade policy that alienates labor, environmental and progressive farm groups.

The president also delivered a mixed message on the environment. On the one hand, he used robust language to call out the climate change denialists, and he reiterated the need to strengthen pollution and fuel standards and develop renewables. On the other hand, he celebrated his “all of the above” energy strategy, which encourages domestic oil and gas production.

In foreign policy, the president showed courage by vowing to veto increased sanctions on Iran and calling for diplomacy to work; in doing so, he resisted not only Republican hawks but many members of his own party. Obama’s willingness to fight for more jobs and higher wages takes much of its energy from grassroots activism: fast-food workers, economic justice groups and climate activists across the country have moved the national discourse in a progressive direction. Only continued activism and pressure will force Washington to do the right thing.
AIPAC’s Stranglehold
NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio should fight it. Here’s how.

Last summer, this magazine enthusiastically endorsed Bill de Blasio in his campaign for mayor of New York City, praising “his commitment to reimagining the city in boldly progressive, egalitarian terms.” Later we celebrated his landslide victory, and we still stand firmly behind him on the issues most critical to the future of New York.

So it was especially dismaying to learn that, less than a month after he assumed office, the mayor who had promised a more inclusive and transparent administration than that of his predecessor delivered a speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in a gala not listed on his public schedule and not open to reporters. De Blasio pandered to the powerful right-wing lobby, assuring attendees that “City Hall will always be open to AIPAC...when you need me to stand by you in Washington or anywhere, I will answer the call and I will answer it happily, because that’s my job.”

Deplorable? Yes. Surprising? Hardly. Perhaps the most depressing feature of this ritual of abjection is its predictability—the fact that for decades, this has been standard operating procedure for many American politicians, even ones who are steadfast on core progressive issues like de Blasio. Office-seekers learn to assume early in their career that if they don’t pledge fealty to AIPAC, retribution will be swift and their political life could be a short one. So rather than test the limits of the lobby’s power, most of them go along.

AIPAC’s dominion—reinforced by Christian Zionists and the usual cast of neocon hawks—is destructive on many fronts. Not only has it prevented a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict by enforcing lockstep US support for the most retrograde elements in Israel; in recent years it has, in league with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, been doing everything it can to provoke US conflict with Iran. Now, when a conciliatory new government in Tehran is seeking rapprochement with Washington—the best hope for US and regional security in more than three decades—AIPAC and its allies have been pressing Congress for renewed sanctions precisely in order to kill that hope, which could set Washington on the path to war.

However, it’s important to recognize that many of the assumptions that underpin AIPAC’s influence don’t carry the force they used to. Praising what he called the “deep connection” between New York and Israel, de Blasio pointed out that New York is “home to the largest Jewish community outside the state of Israel,” as if Jewishness and Zionism (and, by implication, Zionism of the AIPAC sort) were indivisible. But polls consistently show that among Jews, Israel actually ranks very low on the list of political priorities, as do the long-running tensions with Iran. Of far greater concern are the economy, the growing gap between rich and poor, the struggle for social justice—the same issues that animated de Blasio’s mayoral campaign and propelled him to victory. Apart from the question of what Jewish New Yorkers want is that de Blasio is the mayor of, and should speak for, all New Yorkers, including the hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Arabs, not to mention Christians, Buddhists, atheists and others, who live, work, pay taxes and vote in the city.

And beyond that is the fact that AIPAC is no longer the only lobby game in town. J Street was es-

Pete Seeger, 1919–2014
He outlasted the bastards.

Bruce Springsteen celebrated Pete Seeger’s ninetieth birthday by telling the great folk singer and activist, “You outlasted the bastards, man.” And so he did.

Seeger, who died on January 27 at 94, was singing with Woody Guthrie when “This Land Is Your Land” was a new song. And because he meant and lived the words of the oft-neglected final verse—“Nobody living can ever stop me, / As I go walking that freedom highway”—Seeger was hailed before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s, blacklisted and sent to the sidelines of what was becoming an entertainment industry. But Seeger just kept singing “This Land,” kept writing songs...
tablished in 2008 specifically to back politicians who support a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It also supports the recent interim accord between Tehran and Washington, opposes the new sanctions AIPAC is pushing and—in a pointed rebuke to AIPAC’s bullying tactics—encourages “vibrant but respectful debate about Israel.” Criticism of Israeli policies, it argues, “does not threaten the health of the state of Israel—but certain Israeli policies (and the silence that too many in the American Jewish establishment choose when vigorous protest of those policies is necessary) do threaten Israel’s future.” Beyond J Street, a host of Jewish groups and individuals in New York and across the country are fighting not only for social justice here but against occupation in Palestine too—an ethical mission they see as truly indivisible, and far more in keeping with the ancient Jewish precept of tikkun olam (“healing the world”) than the toxic militarism of AIPAC. Jews are a strong presence in many campus chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine, for example, and activist groups like Jewish Voice for Peace have been mounting a courageous resistance to AIPAC.

Bill de Blasio, an “unapologetically progressive” mayor, as he put it in his primary victory speech, is at the height of his popularity. He thus has a unique opportunity to help end the stranglehold of AIPAC by meeting with J Street. He could also meet with New York’s sizable Palestinian and Muslim communities. By publicly welcoming groups that promote genuine peace in the Middle East, his foreign policy would be far more consistent with the progressive policies he promotes at home. And he might find, just as he did in his mayoral race, that such actions have far more support among New York’s—and the country’s—citizens than many imagined.

like “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” kept playing a banjo inscribed with the message “This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender,” and kept rambling across the country and around the world—for every cause from labor rights to civil rights to peace.

Seeger was convicted in 1961 of contempt of Congress for refusing to name the Young Communists and Young Socialists he sang with in the heyday of 1930s and ’40s anti-fascist organizing. Before his conviction, which was overturned the following year, he told the court: “I have been singing folk songs of America and other lands to people everywhere. I am proud that I never refused to sing to any group of people because I might disagree with some of the ideas of some of the people listening to me. I have sung for rich and poor, for Americans of every possible political and religious opinion and persuasion, of every race, color and creed.”

Seeger’s singing was stronger than the forces that sought to silence him. With what Springsteen hailed as a “stubborn, defiant and nasty optimism,” the bestselling singer of the early 1950s—crooning “Goodnight Irene” with the Weavers—was still up for a Grammy in 2014. Along the way, he helped teach civil rights campaigners how to sing “We Shall Overcome,” slipped anti-Vietnam War messages into TV variety shows and shaped modern environmental activism with his Hudson River Sloop Clearwater project. Seeger lived long enough to inspire the great-grandchildren of those who first heard him singing the songs of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, or serenading Eleanor Roosevelt, or accompanying Henry Wallace’s 1948 presidential run. When he led Occupy Wall Street activists seventy years his junior on a thirty-five-block march through Manhattan in October 2011, his friend Gary Davis said Seeger was “seeing his life come to fruition.”

It was this understanding of music as art and mission that drew Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen and Billy Bragg and Ani DiFranco to the man whose energy, warmth, intellect and integrity they emulated.

When Springsteen invited Seeger to perform as part of the celebration of Barack Obama’s first inauguration, they sang “This Land Is Your Land” the way Seeger liked it: with all the verses—all the ones that Woody wrote, especially the two that usually get left out. So a new president heard an old lefty take a class-conscious swipe at the “Private Property” signs that turned away union organizers, hobos and banjo-pickers.

Pete Seeger outlasted the bastards. But he did so much more. He showed us how to do our time with grace, with a sense of history and honor, with a progressive vision for the ages and a determination to embrace the next great cause because the good fight is never finished. It’s just waiting for a singer to remind us that “the world would never amount to a hill of beans if people didn’t use their imaginations to think of the impossible.”

JOHN NICHOLS

**COMMENT**

**AROUND THE WEB**

WORST CAMPAIGN STRATEGY EVER

An African-American candidate for the Florida House of Representatives went on Twitter and Facebook to call for President Obama’s death. Joshua Black, who’s running as a Republican for a State House seat, tweeted on Martin Luther King Day that it’s time to arrest Obama and “hang him high.” Threatening the life of a US president is a felony, and Black has received a visit from the Secret Service. Despite outraged calls from his fellow Republicans to withdraw from the race, Black has vowed to stay the course.

—Brentin Mock

Colorlines.com

“*If the House and Senate are willing to turn over their legislative function to the executive branch, they might as well abolish themselves.*”

—Paul Craig Roberts, former assistant treasury secretary under Ronald Reagan, on fast-tracking the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement
**Our “Fiendish” Laws**

*For 100 years, racist myths have helped sell drug policy.*

**NEGRO COCAINE “FIENDS” ARE A NEW SOUTHERN MENACE.** That was the headline of an article I came across while doing research for my PhD in 1996. It involved trying to understand the neurobiological and behavioral effects of psychoactive drugs like cocaine and nicotine. So I read everything that seemed relevant.

The provocatively headlined article had appeared in *The New York Times* on February 8, 1914. I was surprised by the title, although I knew it was once acceptable to print such blatantly racist words in respectable papers. But what really shocked me was how similar it was to modern media coverage of illegal drugs and how, from early on, the racialized discourse on drugs served a larger political purpose.

The author, a distinguished physician, wrote: “[The Negro fiend] imagines that he hears people taunting and abusing him, and this often incites homicidal attacks upon innocent and unsuspecting victims.” And he continued, “the deadly accuracy of the cocaine user has become axiomatic in Southern police circles…. the record of the ‘cocaine nigger’ near Asheville who dropped five men dead in their tracks using only one cartridge for each, offers evidence that is sufficiently convincing.”

Cocaine, in other words, made black men uniquely murderous and better marksmen. But that wasn’t all.

It also produced “a resistance to the ‘knock down’ effects of fatal wounds. Bullets fired into vital parts that would drop a sane man in his tracks, fail to check the ‘fiend.’” Preposterous? Yes, but such reporting was not the exception. Between 1898 and 1914, numerous articles appeared exaggerating the association of heinous crimes and cocaine use by blacks. In some cases, suspicion of cocaine intoxication by blacks was reason enough to justify lynchings. Eventually, it helped influence legislation.

Around this time, Congress was debating whether to pass the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, one of the country’s first forays into national drug legislation. This unprecedented law sought to tax and regulate the production, importation and distribution of opium and cocoa products. Proponents of the law saw it as a strategy to improve strained trade relations with China by demonstrating a commitment to controlling the opium trade. Opponents, mostly from Southern states, viewed it as an intrusion into states’ rights and had predicted passage of previous versions.

By 1914, however, the law’s proponents had found an important ally in their quest to get it passed: the mythic “negro cocaine fiend,” which prominent newspapers, physicians and politicians readily exploited. Indeed, at congressional hearings, “experts” testified that “most of the attacks upon white women of the South are the direct result of a cocaine-crazed Negro brain.” When the Harrison Act became law, proponents could thank the South’s fear of blacks for easing its passage.

With this as background, drug policy in the decades following takes on a sharper focus. Although the Harrison Act did not explicitly prohibit the use of opiates or cocaine, enforcement of the new law quickly became increasingly punitive, helping set the stage for passage of the Eighteenth Amendment (alcohol prohibition) in 1919 and, ultimately, all our narcotics policy until 1970. As important, the rhetoric that laced those early conversations about drug use didn’t just evaporate; it continued and evolved, reinventing itself most powerfully in the mythology of crack.

From its earliest appearance in the 1980s, crack cocaine was steeped in a narrative of race and pathology. While powder cocaine came to be regarded as a symbol of luxury and associated with whites, crack was portrayed as producing uniquely addictive, unpredictable and deadly effects and associated with blacks. By this time, of course, references to race in such a context were no longer acceptable. So problems related to crack were described as being prevalent in “poor,” “urban” or “troubled” neighborhoods, “inner cities” and “ghettos,” terms that were codes for “blacks” and other undesired people.

A March 7, 1987, *New York Times* article, “New violence seen in users of cocaine” offers a potent example. It describes an incident in which “a man apparently using cocaine held four people hostage for 30 hours in an East Harlem apartment.” That cocaine use was never confirmed was minimized; and since East Harlem was almost exclusively black and Latino, there was no need to mention the suspect’s race. The message was clear: crack makes poor people of color crazy and violent.

Over the next few years, a barrage of similar articles connected crack and its associated problems with black people. Entire specialty police units were deployed to “troubled neighborhoods,” making excessive arrests and subjecting the targeted communities to dehumanizing treatment. Along the way, complex economic and social forces were reduced to criminal justice problems; resources were directed toward law enforcement rather than neighborhoods’ real needs, such as job creation.

In 1986, Congress passed the infamous Anti-Drug Abuse Act, setting penalties that were 100 times harsher for crack than for powder cocaine convictions. We now know that an astonishing 85 percent of those sentenced for crack cocaine offenses were black, even though the majority of users of the drug were, and are, white. We also know that the effects of crack were greatly exaggerated; crack is no more harmful than...
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Vicious Circle
How the Rich Get Richer

Here’s a riddle: What do the eighty-five wealthiest people in the world have in common with the 3.5 billion poorest? Answer: the richest sliver possesses the same share of the world’s wealth as its poorest half. Another startling fact? One percent of the world’s families now possess 46 percent of the world’s wealth. And another? Seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has grown in the last three decades. These and similar revelations are at the heart of “Working for the Few,” a new report by Oxfam International about rising inequality. Released two days before this year’s World Economic Forum, the global elite’s annual high-altitude shmooze-fest, the report is a bracing look at the way the world’s wealthiest have rigged the system, bending it into a “winner-takes-all” feedback loop to perpetuate their place at the top.

As laid out in the report, the rigging is made possible by this fantastic “ill-gotten” wealth ($110 trillion for the top 1 percent alone), which creates “political capture”: the ability of elites to influence lawmakers to enact policies favorable to their interests. And that leads, in turn, to “opportunity capture,” in which the best of everything, from healthcare to education, flows to the wealthy and their offspring. Then the cycle begins again. This is a serious problem. As Oxfam’s executive director, Winnie Byanyima, explains, “We cannot hope to win the fight against poverty without tackling inequality. Widening inequality is creating a vicious circle where wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, leaving the rest of us to fight over crumbs from the top table.” To break this cycle, the report offers a roster of solutions aimed squarely at the privileged class: progressive taxation, an end to tax shelters, a living wage for workers, etc. They’re all solid suggestions, with just one problem: many require the wealthy to use their political heft to advocate policies that run counter to their interests. Now there’s a riddle waiting for an answer.

Carl L. Hart, an associate professor of psychology at Columbia University, is the author of High Price: A Neuroscientist’s Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society.

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The Tiger Mother Returns
Stoking class anxiety with crude racial and ethnic stereotypes

S
he’s ba-a-ack! Yale Law School professor Amy Chua, who last tormented status- anxious Americans with tales of her emotionally sadistic parenting techniques in Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, has produced a sequel of sorts. The Triple Package, which she wrote with her husband, Jed Rubenfeld (also a professor of law at Yale), attempts to explain how “three unlikely traits” account for the “rise and fall of cultural groups in America.” As the power couple describe it, in both the book and their widely shared New York Times op-ed “What Drives Success?”, these three traits are: a collective superiority complex (“a deeply internalized belief in your group’s specialness”); a simultaneous and abiding sense of insecurity (“a goading chip on the shoulder, a need to prove oneself”); and impulse control (not so much against carnal desires, but the ability to resist “the temptation to give up in the face of hardship”). According to Chua and Rubenfeld, only eight groups in the United States today possess this Triple Package—and none of them are gay male porn stars. They are: Jews, Chinese, Indians, Mormons, Lebanese, Iranians, Cubans and Nigerians.

Do you feel triggered yet? Because you should. Chua and Rubenfeld’s book is many things: pop psychology, ersatz self-help manual, shallow cultural history, a Who’s Who of rich and famous people without a WASPy last name. But first and foremost, it is an epic feat of trolling. In 225 dazzlingly glib pages, Chua and Rubenfeld traffic in broad stereotypes, hijack social science, sow worry, revel in conflict and derail the conversation—all with the gleeful “sorry not sorry” mania of a Cheetos and Dr Pepper–fueled Reddit poster.

To say that The Triple Package suffers from logical and evidential leaps and gaps is somewhat beside the point. The book is clearly intended to plumb the depths of American nihilism and panic, not showcase rational social science. But just to begin: it’s difficult not to conclude that Chua and Rubenfeld picked their Triple Package groups to resemble an ’80s Benetton ad. Look, there’s at least one of each color! But Russian-Americans, who rank seventh in terms of ethnic household income, are excluded for no given reason. So are South African–, British- and Australian-Americans (nos. 2, 6 and 8, respectively), presumably because they lack the necessary social cohesion (and melanin) to qualify as a distinct ethnic group. Mormons, however, are included, even though they don’t make much more than average Americans; this is explained away by the fact that Mormon men do most of that breadwinning on their own. Meanwhile, Filipino-Americans are not included, because even though they rank third on the list of ethnic groups by household income, Filipino men make less than the individual national average. So much for women being a part of any package!

If you’re feeling left out at this point, count yourself lucky—because the treatment that Chua and Rubenfeld give the ethnic groups they do write about is cringe-inducing at best. Jews are successful because they are told by Talmudic texts, rabbis and parents that they are the “chosen people.” Nigerians of Yoruba background have a sense of superiority because they “boast a royal lineage and a once great empire,” whereas the Igbo, as everyone knows, are called the “Jews of West Africa.” Cuban exiles of the ’50s and ’60s were “humiliated by Castro” and set out to prove him and communism wrong by prospering in Miami. Likewise, Iranian-Americans were not only humiliated by the Arab conquest of Persia 1,500 years ago, but also by the 2007 film 300, which depicted King Xerxes as “effeminate, corrupt, and monstrously body-pierced.” They’ve been working overtime to regain their lost dignity ever since, as the ubiquity of Mercedes-Benzes in the Bravo reality show Shahs of Sunset proves. No, I am not making this stuff up.

Everything in The Triple Package is adduced to support racialized, ethnic and religious notions of “culture,” a concept the authors summarily refuse to define. Critics will compare their treatise to Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s notorious The Bell Curve, but it’s worth noting that they serve two very different purposes. Herrnstein and Murray’s book, written in the mid-’90s, invoked the specter of American decline to naturalize the unequal distribution of resources and opportunity among racial groups. For Chua and

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Richard Kim

February 17, 2014

The Nation.

CATHOLIC STUDENTS PUSH BACK

In December, the Seattle archdiocese fired Mark Zmuda, vice principal of Eastside Catholic High School. His transgression? Legally marrying his partner, another man. Outraged students began a sit-in and took to social media. Hundreds of students at other Seattle-area Catholic high schools organized protests in solidarity. A majority of the student body eventually came to occupy Eastside’s cafeteria.

Zmuda’s case is still roiling the region. Dismissals based on sexual preference are an all-too-common occurrence in a country lacking LGBTQ-inclusive federal anti-discrimination laws. Only twenty-one states and Washington, DC, have sexual-orientation employment protections. Passing a comprehensive Employment Non-Discrimination Act—one that does not exempt religious institutions—is of paramount importance to combating intolerance in the workplace.

—Keegan O’Brien

TheNation.com/Students
Rubenfeld, however, racial and ethnic hierarchies aren’t the end goal; they’re merely expedient vectors of Triple Package culture, and the authors maintain a blithe nonchalance about the validity of chauvinist claims. It doesn’t matter whether Jews really are chosen by the one God, or whether Indian-American Brahmins are truly born to rule; what matters is that the people within those groups believe it to be so. In one particularly galling twist, Chua and Rubenfeld argue that the civil rights movement is partly responsible for holding African-Americans down, because by ushering in the liberal mantra of racial equality, it denied them the opportunity to espouse racial superiority.

But Chua and Rubenfeld are equal-opportunity trolls. Anyone, they repeatedly claim, can instill Triple Package values in their offspring. And more important, anyone can lose them in “a single generation”—from the WASPs, who once combined a sense of manifest destiny with a Puritan work ethic to vault to the top of the American pyramid but now suffer from a “culture of lassitude,” to the Jews, who, the authors warn, are “long overdue for a fall.” In a world riven by inequality, capitalist excess and brutal social Darwinism, their advice is simple: be more prejudiced, work harder, suffer more. The rewards, for those who manage to claw their way to the top while shoving others down, aren’t just the conventional measures of success, which the authors acknowledge come with downsides, but also the ability to “cast aside the constraints of the Triple Package” and define success on their own terms. Now that’s a message that the 1 percent of every race, nationality and creed will love.

SnapShot/ValentyN Ogirenko
Love and Revolution
A newlywed couple near a barricade built by anti-government protesters, Kiev, Ukraine, January 26

FRIENDLY ADVICE
“No more playing the race card.”
—Sarah Palin’s Twitter advice to Barack Obama

One fact that the man can’t evade:
The race card should never be played.
If he’s to start making the grade,
He’ll have to stop being that shade.

50 YEARS AGO
How We Learned to Love the Bomb

When Dr. Strange-love was released on January 29, 1964, the New York Times critic Bosley Crowther called it “too contemptuous of our defense establishment for my comfort and taste.” Those were not the concerns of The Nation’s Robert Hatch, who recognized that director Stanley Kubrick—with screenwriter Terry Southern (a frequent Nation contributor in the early 1960s) and Peter Sellers—had created a masterpiece. “Mr. Kubrick is a bold man,” wrote Hatch: “he has taken a whole complex of America’s basic assumptions by the shoulders and given them a rough shaking.” But Hatch thought the satire might obscure the message: “The danger is that it will be cheered by the people who already agree with it and resented by those still unconverted. Kubrick can argue with good logic that if you are to expose the fallacy of depending on the hydrogen bomb as the last bastion of a free society, you must also expose the ignorance of bigotry that invents and fosters such nonsense. But he and Terry Southern take a pleasure in flaying their contemporaries that may be more effective as sadistic humor than as adult education.” Fifty years later, and long after the Cold War, it’s clear that Dr. Strange-love succeeds as both, holding, as Hatch wrote, “a cold blade of scorn against the spectator’s throat.”

We’ve had SEVEN shootings at schools in the first FOURTEEN school days of 2014.
@schemaly, activist and writer Soraya Chemaly
Empowered by social media, feminists are calling one another out for ideological offenses. Is it good for the movement? And whose movement is it?

by MICHELLE GOLDBERG
In the summer of 2012, twenty-one feminist bloggers and online activists gathered at Barnard College for a meeting that would soon become infamous. Convened by activists Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti, the women came together to talk about ways to leverage institutional and philanthropic support for online feminism. Afterward, Martin and Valenti used the discussion as the basis for a report, “#Femfuture: Online Revolution,” which called on funders to support the largely unpaid work that feminists do on the Internet. “An unfunded online feminist movement isn’t merely a threat to the livelihood of these hard-working activists, but a threat to the larger feminist movement itself,” they wrote.

#Femfuture was earnest and studiously politically correct. An important reason to put resources into online feminism, Martin and Valenti wrote, was to bolster the voices of writers from marginalized communities. “Women of color and other groups are already overlooked for adequate media attention and already struggle disproportionally in this culture of scarcity,” they noted. The pair discussed the way online activism has highlighted the particular injustices suffered by transgender women of color and celebrated the ability of the Internet to hold white feminists accountable for their unwitting displays of racial privilege. “A lot of feminist dialogue online has focused on recognizing the complex ways that privilege shapes our approach to work and community,” they wrote.

The women involved with #Femfuture knew that many would contest at least some of their conclusions. They weren’t prepared, though, for the wave of corrosating anger and contempt that greeted their work. Online, the Barnard group—nine of whom were women of color—was savaged as a cabal of white opportunists. People were upset that the meeting had excluded those who don’t live in New York (Martin and Valenti had no travel budget). There was fury expressed on behalf of everyone—indigenous women, feminist mothers, veterans—whose concerns were not explicitly addressed. Some were outraged that tweets were quoted without the explicit permission of the tweeters. Others were incensed that a report about online feminism left out women who aren’t online. “Where is the space in all of these #femfuture movements for people who don’t have internet access?” tweeted Mikki Kendall, a feminist writer who, months later, would come up with the influential hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen.

Martin was floored. She’s long believed that it’s incumbent on feminists to be open to critique—but the response was so vitriolic, so full of bad faith and stubborn misinformation, that it felt like some sort of Maoist hazing. Kendall, for example, compared #Femfuture to Rebecca Latimer Felton, a viciously racist Southern suffragist who supported lynching because she said it protected white women from rape. “It was really hard to engage in processing real critique because so much of it was couched in an absolute disavowal of my intentions and my person,” Martin says.

Beyond bruised feelings, the reaction made it harder to use the paper to garner support for online feminist efforts. The controversy was all most people knew of the project, and it left a lasting taint. “Almost anyone who asks us about it wants to know what happened, including editors that I’ve worked with,” says Samhita Mukhopadhyay, an activist and freelance writer who was then the editor of Feministing.com. “It’s like you’ve been backed into a corner.”

Though Mukhopadhyay continues to believe in the empowering potential of online feminism, she sees that much of it is becoming dysfunctional, even unhealthy. “Everyone is so scared to speak right now,” she says.

Just a few years ago, the feminist blogosphere seemed an insouciant, freewheeling place, revivifying women’s liberation for a new generation. “It felt like there was fun and possibility…a momentum or excitement that was building,” says Anna Holmes, who founded Jezebel, Gawker Media’s influential women’s website, in 2007. In 2011, critic Emily Nussbaum celebrated the feminist blogosphere in New York magazine: “Freed from the boundaries of print, writers could blur the lines between formal and casual writing; between a call to arms, a confession, and a stand-up routine—and this new looseness of form in turn emboldened readers to join in, to take risks in the safety of the shared spotlight.”

The Internet also became a crucial place for feminist organizing. When the breast cancer organization Komen for the Cure decided to defund Planned Parenthood in 2012, the overwhelming online backlash led to a reversal of the policy and the departure of the executive who had pushed it. Last year, Women, Action & the Media and the Everyday Sexism Project spearheaded a successful online campaign to get Facebook to ban pro-rape content.

Yet even as online feminism has proved itself a real force for change, many of the most avid digital feminists will tell you that it’s become toxic. Indeed, there’s a nascent genre of essays by people who feel emotionally savaged by their involvement in it—not because of sexist trolls, but because of the slashing righteousness of other feminists. On January 3, for example,
Katherine Cross, a Puerto Rican trans woman working on a PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center, wrote about how often she hesitates to publish articles or blog posts out of fear of inadvertently stepping on an ideological land mine and bringing down the wrath of the online enforcers. “I fear being cast suddenly as one of the ‘bad guys’ for being insufficiently radical, too nuanced or too forgiving, or for simply writing something whose offensive dimensions would be unknown to me at the time of publication,” she wrote.

In some ways, the fact that people are being mean to each other on Twitter is hardly worthy of comment. Still, as the #Femfuture report attempted to point out, the Internet is where a lot of contemporary feminist activism is happening. “The Internet is the modern-day agora,” says Cross, who studies online social dynamics in her academic work. “It is increasingly a place where so many people are coming together and doing very meaningful, very real things, so that the social patterns prevailing on the Internet are of interest to everybody.”

Further, as Cross says, “this goes to the heart of the efficacy of radical movements.” After all, this is hardly the first time that feminism—to say nothing of other left-wing movements—has been racked by furious contentions over ideological purity. Many second-wave feminist groups tore themselves apart by denouncing and ostracizing members who demonstrated too much ambition or presumed to act as leaders. As the radical second-waver Ti-Grace Atkinson famously put it: “Sisterhood is powerful. It kills. Mostly sisters.”

In “Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” a 1976 Ms. magazine article, Jo Freeman described how feminists of her generation destroyed one another. Trashing, she wrote, is “accomplished by making you feel that your very existence is inimical to the Movement and that nothing can change this short of ceasing to exist. These feelings are reinforced when you are isolated from your friends as they become convinced that their association with you is similarly inimical to the Movement and to themselves. Any support of you will taint them. … You are reduced to a mere parody of your previous self.”

Like the authors of #Femfuture, Freeman was trashed for presuming to represent feminism without explicit sanction, in this case of the group she’d founded with Shulamith Firestone. It began, she told me, when the left-wing magazine Ramparts published a neck-down picture of a woman in a leotard with a button hanging from one breast. The group decided to write a letter to the editor. Four members drafted one without Freeman’s knowledge, and when they presented it to the rest of the group, she realized it was too long and would never be printed. Freeman had magazine experience, and she decided to write a pithier letter of her own under her movement name, Joreen. When Ramparts published it but not the other one, the women in her group were apoplectic, and Freeman was excoriated at their next meeting. “That was a public trashing,” she says. “I was horrible, disloyal, a traitor.” It went beyond mere criticism: “There’s a difference between trashing someone and challenging them. You can challenge someone’s idea. When you’re trashing someone, you’re essentially saying they’re a bad person.”

For feminists today, knowing that others have been through similar things is not necessarily comforting. “Some of it is the product of new technologies that create more shallow relationships, and some of it feels like this age-old conundrum within feminism,” Martin says. “How do we disentangle what part is about social media and what part is about the way women interact with one another? If there’s something inherent about the way women work within movements that makes us assholes to each other, that is incredibly sad.”

There’s a shorthand way of talking about online feminist arguments that pits middle-class white women against all the groups they oppress. Clearly, there’s some truth here: privileged white people dominate feminism, just as they do most other sectors of American life. Brittny Cooper, an assistant professor at Rutgers and co-founder of the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, is one of the black women who participated in #Femfuture, and she has spoken out against the viciousness that dominates Twitter. But she also emphasizes that the resentment expressed online is rooted in something real.

“I want to be clear: I think there’s an actual injury,” Cooper says. The online feminist efflorescence a few years back led to book deals and writing careers for far more white women than women of color. “Black women are brought into these mainstream feminist websites to bring a little bit of color or a little bit of diversity, but that doesn’t parlay into other career advancement opportunities.” On Twitter, by contrast, women of color, trans women and other people who feel silenced can amplify one another’s voices, talking back to people with power in an unparalleled way.

That doesn’t mean, though, that social media’s climate of perpetual outrage and hair-trigger offense is constructive. “There is a problem with toxicity on Twitter and in social media,” Cooper says. “I think we have to say that. I’m not sure that black women are benefiting from the toxicity.”

After all, it’s not just privileged white women who find themselves on the wrong side of an online trashing. The prospect can be particularly devastating for marginalized people who depend on the Internet for community. As an academic, Cross studies the terrifying harassment many women face from sexist trolls, but she says that putative allies can be nearly as intimidating.
Being targeted by other activists, she says, “leaves you feeling threatened in the sense that you’re getting turned out of your own home…. The one place that you are able to look to for safety, where you were valued, where there is a lot less of the structural prejudice that makes you feel so outcast in the rest of the world—that’s now been closed to you. That you now have this terrible reputation… I know a lot of friends that live in fear of that.”

If your professional life is tied up with activism, the threat is redoubled. “To suddenly be tarred by the very people that I’m supposed to be able to work with, my allies, as being a sellout or being infatuated with power or being an apologist for this, that and the other privilege—if that kind of reputation gets around, its extremely damaging,” says Cross.

The dogma that’s being enforced in online feminist spaces is often called “intersectionality,” but in practice it’s quite different from the theory elaborated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the UCLA law professor who coined the word. In a 1989 article in The University of Chicago Legal Forum, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” Crenshaw described how the failure to consider the intersection of racism and sexism in the lives of women of color left a lacuna in civil rights law. She cited a failed lawsuit by a group of black women against General Motors; the court ruled that while race discrimination and sex discrimination are both causes of action, “a combination of both” is not. Another of Crenshaw’s articles described a women’s shelter balking at accepting a Latina victim of domestic violence because she wasn’t proficient in English and thus couldn’t participate in mandated group therapy sessions. Her work can be theoretical, but it’s focused on legal and material conditions far more than patterns of discourse.

“My own efforts to create a voice and a perspective on these failures haven’t really been about chastisement, or a certain set of assumptions about what the articulation that I’m critiquing should have been, or what the failure of it represents in the person,” Crenshaw says, “but rather a collective effort to build a feminism that does more of the work that it claims to do.”

Online, however, intersectionality is overwhelmingly about chastisement and rooting out individual sin. Partly, says Cooper, this comes from academic feminism, steeped as it is in a postmodern culture of critique that emphasizes the power relations embedded in language. “We actually have come to believe that how we talk about things is the best indicator of our politics,” she notes. An elaborate series of norms and rules has evolved out of that belief, generally unknown to the uninitiated, who are nevertheless hammered if they unwittingly violate them. Often, these rules began as useful insights into the way rhetorical power works but, says Cross, “have metamorphosed into something much more rigid and inflexible.” One such rule is a prohibition on what’s called “tone policing.” An insight into the way marginalized people are punished for their anger has turned into an imperative “that you can never question the efficacy of anger, especially when voiced by a person from a marginalized background.”

Similarly, there’s a norm that intention doesn’t matter — indeed, if you offend someone and then try to explain that you were misunderstood, this is seen as compounding the original injury. Again, there’s a significant insight here: people often behave in bigoted ways without meaning to, and their benign intention doesn’t make the prejudice less painful for those subjected to it. However, “that became a rule where you say intentions never matter; there is no added value to understanding the intentions of the speaker,” Cross says.

There are also rules, elaborated by white feminists, on how other white feminists should talk to women of color. For example, after Kendall’s #solidarityfor whitewomen hashtag erupted last fall, Sarah Milstein, co-author of a guide to Twitter, published a piece on the Huffington Post titled “5 Ways White Feminists Can Address Our Own Racism.” At one point, Milstein argued that if a person of color says something that makes you uncomfortable, “assume your discomfort is telling you something about you, not about the other person.” After Rule No. 3, “Look for ways that you are racist, rather than ways to prove you’re not,” she confesses to her own racial crimes, including being “awkwardly too friendly” toward black people at parties.

Now, it’s true that white people need to make an effort not to be racist. And there are countless examples of white feminists failing women of color and then hiding behind their good intentions. Ani DiFranco provided a textbook example of what not to do when, following an uproar over her plan to hold a songwriting retreat on a former slave plantation, she then canceled it with a self-pitying statement: “I know that the pain of slavery is real and runs very deep and wide. However, in this incident I think [it] is very unfortunate what many have chosen to do with that pain.” (DiFranco later issued a more sincere apology.)

But the expectation that feminists should always be ready to berate themselves for even the most minor transgressions—like being too friendly at a party—creates an environment of perpetual psychodrama, particularly when coupled with the refusal to ever question the expression of an oppressed person’s anger.

“I actually think there’s a subset of black women who really do get off on white women being prostrate,” Cooper says. “It’s about feeling disempowered and always feeling at the mercy of white authority, and
Lived History

Lives We’ve Lost, 2012–13

edited by Peter Rothberg

thenation.com/ebooks
wanting to feel like for once the things you’re saying are being given credibility and authority. And to have white folks do that is powerful, particularly in a world where white women often deploy power against black women in ways that are really problematic.”

Preening displays of white feminist abjection, however, are not the same as respect. “What’s disgusting and disturbing to me is that I see some of the more intellectually dishonest arguments put forth by women of color being legitimized and performed by white feminists, who seem to be in some sort of competition to exhibit how intersectional they are,” says Jezebel founder Holmes, who is black. “There are these Olympian attempts on the part of white feminists to underscore and display their ally-ship in a way that feels gross and dishonest and, yes, patronizing.”

This reached an absurd peak during the tempest over #Femfuture. Jamia Wilson was one of the black women involved in the Barnard meeting, and she has since become part of the four-woman leadership team for the #Femfuture project, which continues to work on ways to make online feminism financially sustainable. She watched incredulously as white women joined in the pile-on about #Femfuture’s alleged racial insensitivity. One self-described white feminist tweeted at her to explain that no women of color had been at the Barnard meeting “and that I needed to be educated about that,” Wilson recalls. Somehow, activists who prided themselves on their racial enlightenment “were whitesplaining me about racism,” she adds, laughing.

In a revolution-eats-its-own irony, some online feminists have even deemed the word “vagina” problematic. In January, the actress and activist Martha Plimpton tweeted about a benefit for Texas abortion funds called “A Night of a Thousand Vaginas,” sponsored by A Is For, a reproductive rights organization she’s involved with. Plimpton was surprised when some offended Internet feminists urged people to stay away, arguing that emphasizing “vaginas” hurts trans men who don’t want their reproductive organs coded as female. “Given the constant genital policing, you can’t expect trans folks to feel included by an event title focused on a policed, binary genital,” tweeted @DrJaneChani, an abortion and transgender health provider. (She mentioned “internal genitals” as an alternative.) When Plimpton insisted that she would continue to say “vagina,” her feed filled up with indignation. “So you’re really committed to doubling down on using a term that you’ve been told many times is exclusionary & harmful?” asked one self-described intersectional feminist blogger.

Plimpton takes intersectionality seriously—A Is For is hosting a series of discussions on the subject this year—but she was flummoxed by this purist, arcane form. “I’m not going to stop using the word ‘vagina’ for anybody, whether it’s Glenn Beck or Mike Huckabee or somebody on Twitter who feels it creates a dysphoric response,” she tells me. “I can’t do that and still advocate for reproductive freedom. It’s just not a realistic thing to expect.”

Mikki Kendall is unmoved by complaints about the repressive climate online. An Army veteran, graduate student and married mother of two in Chicago, Kendall is both famous and feared in Internet feminist circles. Mother Jones declared her one of the “13 Badass Women of 2013”—along with Wendy Davis and Malala Yousafzai—for her creation of the #solidarityisforwhitewomen hashtag. But as Kendall well knows, many consider her a bully, though few want to say so out loud. “I kind of have a reputation for being mean,” she says.

On the phone, Kendall isn’t mean. She seems warm and engaging, but also obsessed—she talks at length about slights made in the comment threads of blogs more than five years ago. As she sees it, feminist elites have been snubbing women with less power for years, and now that their power is being challenged, they’re crying foul. Their complaints, she argues, are yet another assertion of privilege, since they’re unmindful of how much more flak Kendall and her friends take.

“If you look at the mentions for me, for @BlackAmazon, for @FeministaJones, for a lot of other black feminists, it’s hard for us to see this other stuff as bullying. I’ll be honest with you,” she says. “Because we are getting so much more than ‘I don’t like your article.’ And we’re getting it all day. I had someone who spent four hours last week dumping porn images into my mentions. I’ve had people send me pictures of lynchings. So then when somebody says, ‘Oh, this article is terrible,’ and a bunch of people talk about how terrible an article was, and you say that’s bullying—I’m going to side-eye your definition of bullying.”

The problem, as she sees it, lies in mainstream white feminists’ expectations of how they deserve to be treated. “Feminism has a mammy problem, and mammy doesn’t live here anymore,” Kendall says. “I know The Help told you you was smart, you was important, you was special. The Help lied. You’re going to have to deal with anger, you’re going to have to deal with hurt.” And if it all gets to be too much? “Self-care comes into this. Sometimes you have to close the Internet.”

Few people are doing that, but they are disengaging from online feminism. Holmes, who left Jezebel in 2010 and is now a columnist for The New York Times Book Review, says she would never start a women’s website today. “Hello, no,” she says. The women’s blogosphere “feels like a much more insular, protective, brittle environment than it did before. It’s really depressing,” she adds. “It makes me think I got out at the right time.”
ECONOMICS OF A RASPBERRY COAT

Can the garment industry once again be a source of good jobs in New York City?

by ELIZABETH CLINE

INAUGURATIONS SET THE TONE FOR AN ADMINISTRATION. So when New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's wife, Chirlane McCray, and his daughter Chiara chose to wear the designer Nanette Lepore on the occasion of his inauguration, the decision was not just about style. Lepore's brand of clothing is made almost entirely in New York City. Chirlane, who wore a bold raspberry-colored coat during the January 1 ceremony, released a statement explaining her family's fashion choice: “This city needs more creative entrepreneurs like Nanette Lepore who are committed to keeping our city's garment industry thriving.”

Well into the 1960s, the vast majority of clothing sold in the United States was made in New York. After a half-century of job loss (including more than 200,000 cut-and-sew jobs nationally in the last two decades alone), there's a renewed interest in made-in-America fashion and, surprisingly, a renewed faith in the industry as a source of quality job creation. To be sure, this is a mission that faces plenty of obstacles—the scarcity and high cost of industrial space among them—but a number of organizations and activists are determined to overcome them and to reinvent the industry.

Reviving and reinventing the garment trades could address one of New York’s most pressing problems: the lack of decent-paying jobs. While post-recession job growth has been concentrated in low-paying service-industry positions, there is evidence that the average pay for cut-and-sew workers, now $12 an hour in New York State, is rising. (Nationally, it increased 13.2 percent between 2007 and 2012.) There's also potential for advancement within the industry: pattern-makers, for example, can fetch $30 or more an hour.

In some ways, the buzz about local fashion recalls the way the tech industry caught the imagination of urban policy-makers in recent decades. But there are good reasons why the city and other institutions have been slower to see apparel as an economic powerhouse: unlike tech start-ups, new fashion companies have a lower return on investment and can take a decade or more to develop into multimillion-dollar enterprises. Still, there's a compelling argument for building up the garment sector: apparel is exceptionally labor-intensive and has the potential not only to absorb unemployment but to create jobs for those who need them most—the non-college-educated and the nonwealthy.
Apparel-making is not the most lucrative of factory gigs: after the collapse of the city’s once-vibrant apparel unions, most of the sector’s jobs are now nonunion. But supporters argue that investment can be targeted to factories that emphasize quality—of jobs and product—over price. Plus, they point out that apparel has wider economic implications. As Josh Eichen of the Pratt Center for Community Development notes, support for garment-making is a barometer of support for manufacturing overall. “We want to promote these garment businesses, because they are the more outward, public-facing manufacturing sector,” he says. In other words, fashion is the extrovert of the manufacturing world. If land use and zoning policies are devised to help foster apparel-making, the benefits flow out to machinery, metalworking and other types of industry that are more commonly unionized and pay higher wages.

One organization supporting a full-scale revival of the garment trades is Manufacture New York. At its pilot program in the heart of Manhattan’s storied garment district, the organization provides fledgling fashion designers with the leg up they need to launch a clothing line. Its members enjoy below-market-rate workspaces and branding and merchandising training. Skilled garment workers are also finding new jobs here, stitching together designers’ visions. “Domestic manufacturing is coming back. We can’t keep up with it,” says Bob Bland, founder and CEO of Manufacture New York. “We’ve had to hire new sample and pattern-makers every week for the last four weeks to keep up with the demand.”

For the city’s established manufacturers, a new program has been launched to help them dust off, modernize, and take advantage of the sudden surge in domestic orders. Launched in September by the New York City Economic Development Corporation and the Council of Fashion Designers of America (whose members include fashion heavyweights Calvin Klein, Diane von Furstenberg and Oscar de la Renta), the Fashion Manufacturing Initiative provides grants of up to $150,000.

Johnny’s Fashion Studio, located a few blocks from Manufacture New York, is among the applicants. “We’re growing and we’re transitioning,” says Joann Kim, the factory’s sales and marketing director. “We need everything.” During the lean years of outsourcing, Johnny’s stayed afloat by developing samples for high-end clients like Phillip Lim and Helmut Lang. In the past year, the company has been able to hire five more full-time garment workers in addition to Kim, who helps with the outreach to emerging designers increasingly committed to making their lines in New York.

Pay in New York’s garment trades varies based on experience and from factory to factory. Johnny’s newest sample maker, for example, was just hired at $13.50 an hour, and Kim says she’s a candidate for quick promotion. But with limited space, there are only so many more people Johnny’s can take on. Real job growth is predicted to occur as new factories open up—and that will depend on the mayor and his wife sticking to their inauguration day sentiments.

Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg approached factories as so many inconvenient roadblocks to his post-industrial urban utopia. Countless manufacturing spaces were rezoned and rehabbed or torn down to make way for sky-high condos. According to a Pratt Center brief, “Of the 95 rezonings from 2003 to 2008, one-quarter converted manufacturing districts into some other category of land use.” As a result, the city lost more than 1,700 acres of manufacturing space during the Bloomberg era.

Still, the former mayor had one redeeming industrial policy: in 2005, he set aside sixteen industrial business zones, or IBZs (five each in the Bronx and Queens and six in Brooklyn), protected areas where residential development is prohibited and industrial businesses are offered incentives, such as tax credits for relocation and grants for employee training and technical assistance.

To secure the apparel renaissance far into the future, the city must protect the remaining industrial space. Even within the IBZs, manufacturers are still at risk of being pushed out by hotels, big-box retail stores or large office buildings, which can legally be built in many of these areas. De Blasio’s four-point industrial development plan, released during his campaign, looks promising on this front, as it includes new regulations that would forbid non-industrial development in the IBZs.

One answer to the industrial space conundrum can be found off the R train subway stop at 36th Street in Brooklyn. There, blocks of hulking green and taupe buildings—old military and shipping terminals along the Gowanus Bay waterfront—provide one of the best infrastructure skeletons for a manufacturing revival to be found anywhere in the United States.

These vast buildings mark a time when New York dominated North American manufacturing and shipping and served as a main deployment port for troops and military supplies. The neighborhood of Sunset Park, Brooklyn, grew up around these waterfront industrial areas and the jobs they created. Sunset Park remains a working-class neighborhood today, one that has resisted gentrification’s worst effects. Rents are still relatively affordable, and roughly 20,000 people in this largely Hispanic and Asian neighborhood still toil in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, including garment work. Twenty years ago, the neighborhood
rivaled Manhattan in the number of its apparel factories—but outsourcing pushed wages in the Sunset Park industry down and eventually many skilled stressers out of the industry altogether.

Later this year, Manufacture New York will open a flagship facility in Sunset Park, re-establishing the neighborhood’s garment-making prowess and giving the city’s newest and most promising apparel makers a place to call home. This will be, the organization hopes, only the beginning of a boom in new apparel factories here. To this end, Manufacture New York has plans to open a 160,000-square-foot space inside one of the largest of Sunset Park’s terminals, the Liberty View Industrial Plaza, later this year. And the scope of what it hopes to achieve here is as staggering as the former Navy complex’s looming edifice.

The Manufacture New York flagship building will provide shared workspace for up to seventy-five fashion designers (not to mention a catwalk, photo studio, tech annex and dye lab). But most of the space will be leased out to thirty private manufacturers of apparel, accessories, jewelry and textiles, creating an instant community of makers—and an estimated 280 manufacturing and office jobs in the first year, with salaries ranging from $35,000 for an entry-level sewer to more than $75,000 for a skilled pattern-maker. At least half of the hires will come from the Sunset Park area, says Bland, and all will enjoy full health benefits. “This is about creating a manufacturing center that is going to provide jobs and services to New York City for at least the next twenty years,” says Bland.

There is broad recognition that to be successful, the local fashion revival has to do better at nurturing new and emerging fashion businesses. New York’s fashion industry has become too dominated by a handful of mega-brands and established luxe designers, creating a hyper-competitive, top-heavy industry controlled by big business—which has a predilection for outsourcing production jobs.

Debora Johnson is one woman committed to giving designers the support they need to flourish in New York. A Pratt Institute educator as well as the founder and executive director of Pratt’s Design Incubator, Johnson is aggressively expanding the Incubator into a production facility dubbed the Brooklyn Fashion and Design Accelerator, set to open this spring. The BF+DA has leased 20,000 square feet in the Pfizer building, the eight-acre former pharmaceutical facility in the Brooklyn neighborhood of South Williamsburg that is currently home to dozens of small food manufacturers.

Johnson isn’t interested in simply getting the local garment industry back on its feet. (“The perception of manufacturing is so archaic,” she laments.) She hopes to transform it instead by fostering only the most innovative and sustainable design entrepreneurs. “We are attached to an educational institution, so our motivation is more around innovation and changing the industry, rather than the status quo,” Johnson says. In addition to offering low-cost studio space, the BF+DA will house research labs for the development of new, environmentally friendly dyeing and finishing techniques. Among some of the new jobs being created here are for 3-D fabrication technicians: the BF+DA is partnering with workforce development groups in Bedford-Stuyvesant to train local people in the use of these high-tech fabric-printing machines.

Outsourcing relies on labor that is not only cheap but de-skilled to make products that are of poor quality, and whose manufacture can be broken down into a series of repetitive motions performed by a disposable workforce. When a factory collapsed in Bangladesh last April, killing 1,129 people who were making clothes for Western brands, locally made fashion suddenly appeared to be a morally compelling alternative. But it also became clear that the fashion supply chain needs to be fundamentally rethought in order to sustain healthy workplaces. Even in New York, some apparel factories still look a lot like Third World sweatshops, as factories have rolled back decades of workplace progress to compete with overseas factories on cost.

It remains to be seen if garment workers will regain the numbers and leverage necessary to organize in the near future. But vertically integrated factories such as Manufacture New York and the BF+DA, where the designers work closely with producers, have the potential to elevate and re-skill the manufacturing jobs they create by bridging the divide between designers, consumers and people who make things. This is New York fashion’s most radical promise, and the most exciting prospect offered by Chirlane McCray’s choice of coat.

New York City has emerged as a global brand, as a marker of luxury imbued with a dose of rugged American practicality and craftsmanship. It’s an image that was frequently dismissed as elitist in the Bloomberg-era past. Under a new mayor, the city’s pool of talented designers has been reframed as a source of job creation for ordinary New Yorkers. There are many hurdles to overcome, but hopes are high that New York fashion could become the harbinger of a twenty-first-century urban Industrial Revolution, heralding a new, more equitable era for the city.

Dan Reisman
Are Our Brains Wired to Worship?

Does God exist? Do we have a soul? Can we make contact with a spiritual realm? Religion plays such a prominent role in the human experience and is so pervasive across cultures that, whatever your beliefs, you have probably pondered these questions. Now, neurotheologians are studying the reasons why.

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University presidents once spoke their conscience on matters of great public importance. In the early 1950s, many protested the loyalty oaths that required faculty members to forswear membership in the Communist Party. One of the most courageous critics of McCarthyism was Nathan Pusey, first as president of Lawrence College in Senator Joseph McCarthy’s hometown of Appleton, Wisconsin, then as president of Harvard. In the 1960s, some university presidents openly opposed the war in Vietnam. Even at the cost of donor support, Yale president Kingman Brewster Jr. publicly contested the war and decried the inequities in the draft. He permitted protest demonstrations and skillfully kept the Yale campus open and relatively calm.

In the 1980s, a protest movement arose on American campuses as students—and some campus presidents—argued that it was immoral for universities to own stock in companies doing business in apartheid South Africa. Although Harvard president...
Derek Bok refused to support divestment over apartheid, Harvard eventually did sell most of its South Africa–related stock—and Bok did endorse the sale of stock in tobacco companies.

Today, university presidents and the institutions they lead confront a moral choice over a crisis that threatens human health and society on a far greater scale than either tobacco or apartheid: climate change. As Elizabeth Kolbert wrote in Field Notes From a Catastrophe, “It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing.” In the last few years, students have begun urging their colleges and universities to divest from fossil fuel companies (FFCs), whose products are driving climate change. Two of the first university presidents to respond, Drew Gilpin Faust of Harvard and Christina Paxson of Brown, this fall placed themselves and their institutions on the wrong side of science and of history by rejecting divestment.

I believe that presidents Faust and Paxson were wrong, gravely wrong, not only in the broadest sense—because their choice harms humanity—but because they failed in their narrow duty to protect their institutions and their present and future students.

Both presidents argue, as Faust puts it, that it is an “inconsistency” to “boycott a whole class of companies at the same time that, as individuals and as a community, we are extensively relying on those companies’ products and services.” Yes, this is a dilemma that each person and each organization faces. We have no choice but to be embedded in a carbon economy, yet science tells us unequivocally that carbon emissions threaten our future and that of our institutions. Ohio State University climatologist Lonnie Thompson warns that “virtually all of us are now convinced that global warming poses a clear and present danger to civilization.” Retired NASA scientist James Hansen tells us that “coal is the single greatest threat to civilization and all life on our planet.” Sea level rises due to melting ice sheets, Hansen says, hang “like the sword of Damocles over our children and grandchildren.”

The influential Stern Report from 2006 cautions that the damage from man-made climate change could be on the scale of “the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century.” That warning, sobering as it is, vastly underestimates the danger: those wars and the Great Depression occurred at different times and were not accompanied by record-setting sea level rises, storm surges, heat waves, floods, droughts and hurricanes. Neither world war reached into every corner of the globe, and, thankfully, each one ended far short of a decade. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the effects of climate change will not end “for more than 1,000 years after carbon dioxide emissions are completely stopped.”

Climate change threatens to return the world to the Dark Ages, or worse. As Oberlin College professor David Orr put it, “Whatever your cause, it’s a lost cause on a dying planet.” Which is more inconsistent: for a university to divest from FFCs while remaining embedded in a carbon economy in other ways, or to profit from products that threaten the university’s own future, that of its alumni and even civilization itself?

Universities in this country are already suffering the effects of a changing climate. The American Association of University Professors reports that Hurricane Katrina caused “undoubtedly the most serious disruption of American higher education in the nation’s history.” Hurricane Sandy closed dozens of colleges and universities and, according to CNN, affected an estimated 1.2 million students. Hurricane Irene caused many colleges and universities—including Brown and Harvard—to cancel campus events or close temporarily. Scientists believe that warmer oceans likely strengthened Irene, Katrina and Sandy, as well as Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines more recently. Those storms and a multitude of other recent extreme weather events offer an ominous portent of what life in the coming greenhouse world will be like.

Climate change is a special threat in the Northeast, home to Harvard and Brown. Global sea levels are already rising at the fastest rate on record—but according to the US Geological Survey, along the East Coast from North Carolina to New England, the sea levels are climbing at three to four times the global average. As one report put it, “if sea levels rise just 2.5 feet, it could take little more than a Nor’easter to put much of the Back Bay, East Boston, South Boston, Chelsea, Cambridge, and elsewhere underwater, including much of Logan International Airport and the financial district.”

Sometime around the end of this century or early in the next, sea levels will have risen six feet (judging by the present trajectory), and water will lap at the foot of Harvard’s buildings. In Providence, Rhode Island, home to Brown University, the city waterfront will be submerged, flooding the Rhode Island School of Design and the Brown University Continuing Education site. Then the sea level will keep on rising. The Center for Climate Systems Research estimates that climate change will expose 2.75 billion people worldwide to the effects of sea level rise and other coastal threats. The largest mass migration in history may develop as people flee the doomed seacoast and attempt to relocate to higher ground.

Under such conditions, people will have no choice but to focus on survival; education and culture will be luxuries few can afford. Think of life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The storm caused
Loyola and Tulane universities to close for months and damaged each of the city's academic institutions. Imagine the fate of New Orleans and its institutions had Katrina rolled in on seas six feet higher.

Climate change imperils institutions of higher education in two particular ways. First, it threatens the very purpose of education. Academic institutions prepare students for the world and its professions as they are understood based on past experience. But climate change is already making past experience irrelevant. Colleges and universities are training this generation of students for a world that, given the present trajectory of climate change, will not survive. Many students have figured this out, and they are angry.

The second threat is to the purpose of a university endowment: to support an institution's mission in perpetuity. Brown's policy statement is typical: “The University's goals are to provide stable support from the endowment each year to the budget and to preserve the long-term value of the endowment to provide support for future generations....” But if stock markets collapse—and it is hard to see how they would not in the face of a ceaseless set of global catastrophes—the value of university endowments will plummet. This makes it absurd to claim that students in the 2080s, say, will benefit from their institutions' endowments to the same relative extent as today's students. Climate change will make a mockery of intergenerational equity.

Presidents Faust and Paxson ultimately justify their decision by saying, in effect, that divestment from FFCs would do little or no good. Faust believes, for example, that there are “more effective ways to address climate change,” favoring “engagement over withdrawal.” The language echoes the Reagan administration's policy of “constructive engagement”: trying through quiet conversation to persuade the white minority government of South Africa to change its ways. But in that case, constructive engagement failed. As an article in Foreign Affairs summed up, “Having been offered many carrots by the United States over a period of four-and-a-half years...the South African authorities had simply made a carrot stew and eaten it.” The analogy is not perfect, and constructive engagement may have worked in other instances. But as of now, FFCs have no reason to pay attention to universities, which are minor shareholders in their giant industry. Indeed, these companies have funded campaigns to discredit and ridicule the research of university scientists.

Between 1988 and 2006, ExxonMobil provided more than half a million dollars to the Heartland Institute. Last year, the institute ran large billboards comparing those who accept climate science to Charles Manson, the Unabomber and Osama bin Laden.

Acting alone, an individual academic institution will have little influence. But if, as happened with apartheid, scores of colleges and universities were to divest, Big Oil, Big Coal and the nation would have to pay attention.

Paxson says that “divestiture [from coal companies] would convey only a nebulous statement—that coal is harmful.... [A] symbolic statement of divestiture would not elucidate the complex scientific and policy issues surrounding coal and climate change and...would run counter to Brown's mission of communicating knowledge.” But divestment could have far more than a symbolic effect, as it plainly did in helping to end apartheid. By divesting, Brown would endorse and transmit the scientific knowledge that fossil fuels are dangerous. What could be more important to communicate?

Brown's own Advisory Committee on Corporate Responsibility in Investment Policies told Paxson that coal companies “perpetrate grave, indeed egregious, social harm, and there is no possible way to square our profiting from such harm with the values and principles of the University.” Yet Paxson rejected divestment.

When Brown and Harvard divested from tobacco companies, neither was under the illusion that the action would affect smoking rates or Big Tobacco itself. Rather, the universities divested because they did not want “to be associated with companies whose products create a substantial and unjustifiable risk of harm to other human beings,” as Harvard's then-president Bok explained. Brown said that it divested from tobacco because the action could have “significant symbolic value.” Brown and Harvard stood on principle then; why not now? Never has a threat been so grave, so potentially widespread and long-lasting, as climate change. If protecting civilization is not a principle worth standing up for, what is?

To be sure, divestment is not an issue that campus presidents may decide on their own. They must also speak for trustees, many of whom come from corporate America and are more likely to resist the idea that decisions about the endowment ought to be made for other than financial reasons. In campus debates over apartheid, students and faculty led, and trustees eventually
followed. Had Faust and Paxson endorsed divestment, they would have had to weather criticism from some board members and alumni as well as the fossil fuel industry. But many others—including environmentalists, concerned citizens and, eventually, members of the establishment—would have admired their courage.

Some have claimed that divestment from the FFCs would lead to immediate and damaging cuts in campus budgets. It is hard to understand why that should be so. When a university sells stock, it has the same amount of cash as the market value of the stock at the time of sale, minus transaction costs (estimated at 0.4 percent in a study of South African divestment). Skilled university investment managers can use that cash to buy other promising stocks. Divestment would phase in over several years, reducing any potential effect on annual budgets. And, in any case, universities tend to have only a small percentage of their highly diversified portfolios in FFCs.

During the apartheid divestment debate, many trustees worried that divesting might lower the long-run endowment return. This concern was reasonable, since some of the American companies doing business in South Africa—including Chevron, Citicorp, Control Data, Ford, General Electric, General Motors and IBM—were regarded as blue-chip stocks, the bulwark of a sound portfolio. But those fears proved unfounded: a 1986 study reported that, based on “historical returns since 1959,” the South Africa–free portfolio, “diluted with Treasury bills to bring its risk in line with the [New York Stock Exchange], would have outperformed the NYSE by 0.187 per cent annually.”

Would selling stock in FFCs harm long-run endowment returns? One way to judge is to look at recent stock market performance. Suppose that ten years ago, a university had invested $1 billion in a “fossil-free” portfolio. Today that investment would be worth $2.26 billion, while the S&P 500 pool of stocks, which includes FFCs, would be worth $2.14 billion. A study by Deutsche Bank found that investment funds using environmental, social and governance factors have performed as well or better than other funds.

Though FFCs have yielded no better than average returns in the recent past, might they be superior investments in the decades ahead? Many experts doubt it. These companies are valued primarily on the basis of their reserves: the amount of extractable oil, coal and gas they have discovered but have yet to exploit. But once the effects of burning carbon have become intolerable, whatever reserves the FFCs have in the ground will stay there. These “stranded assets” will come off the corporate books, and the value and stock price of those FFCs that have failed to develop other businesses will fall. A report by Oxford University’s Stranded Assets Program lists several other factors that threaten the value of FFCs, including water scarcity, new government regulations such as carbon pricing and air pollution restrictions, rising competition from clean technology, and legal challenges. Add to that list the techniques that must increasingly be used as oil becomes harder to extract—techniques like fracking and steam injection, which consume large amounts of energy and water and damage the environment.

The Economist headlined its recent article on the subject “Yesterday’s Fuel: The world’s thirst for oil could be nearing a peak. That is bad news for producers, excellent for everyone else.” No one can predict how the stock market will perform, but there appears to be no particular financial reason to hold stock in FFCs.

A nationwide divestment movement will arise despite the decisions of presidents Faust and Paxson.

A nationwide divestment movement will arise despite the decisions of presidents Faust and Paxson—it is inevitable. Remember that even though American students had no personal stake in South Africa, their determined protests shook many campuses and helped to end apartheid. Students, parents, alumni and all of us have not only an altruistic interest in combating climate change, but our own self-interest and that of our children and grandchildren. University presidents may declare the consideration of divestiture over, as Paxson did, but that will not make it so. Just the opposite: as the effects of climate change become ever more dire, college students and their parents and supporters will ratchet up their protests until divestment from FFCs becomes the most contentious issue in American campus history. Some institutions will decide to divest early in order to stand on principle. College of the Atlantic, Green Mountain College, San Francisco State University and Unity College are among those that have already done so. Others will reject divestment initially, only to adopt it later. But delay is not a neutral act. Scientists believe that we have one or two decades at most in which to act to limit global warming to the 3.6°F (2°C) already in the pipeline. But as Justin Gillis of The New York Times recently pointed out, that target “would still mean vast ecological and economic damage.” To delay action that might help prevent the worst effects of climate change has the same consequences as the denial of climate change science.

Divestment now allows universities and their presidents and trustees to take a principled stand on the greatest threat in human history while there is still time to make a difference.

When, a few decades hence, our grandchildren judge today’s colleges and universities, do we want them to say, “They knew the most, yet chose to do nothing?”
The Nation

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Letters

(continued from page 2)

sports, homework, dance, scouts, friends and more into tight schedules.

THE REV. NICHOLAS UTHPHALL
MADISON, WIS.

Parochial New York

Re Dana Goldstein’s “Will New York Lead the Way on Pre-K?” [Jan. 20]: Oklahoma has had universal pre-K since 1998. New Yorkers have no idea what goes on west of the Hudson.

JB

Towering New York

In “The Fungibility of Air” [Jan. 6/13], Michael Sorkin meticulously details the mindset in New York City regarding planning and zoning, which has become the basis for our land-use policies. Development is directed primarily toward higher profit, achievable by ever-growing density. Sales of air rights and of public buildings like schools and libraries are used to create this “profitable” density. The problems of congestion, preservation and the inconvenient fact of sea level rise are being dangerously overlooked.

So pervasive is the policy of monetizing our public resources that even a city park, Damrosch Park in Lincoln Center, was destroyed and converted into a profit-making venue for private corporations, thereby excluding the public from its own ever-scarcer space. It has become acceptable to use air rights to build 100- to 150-story buildings on 57th Street, resulting in mile-long shadows on Central Park. Low-lying areas in Hudson River Park, adversely affected by sea rise due to climate change, are nonetheless considered suitable sites for tall buildings.

If the priorities of the residents of this already densely populated city are to be maintained—our parks, sunshine, reduced traffic and development for the public good—we must insist on environmental impact studies for all new buildings and a reduced floor area ratio, which would limit building heights. We must re-evaluate as-of-right policies, and we must do it now.

OLIVE FREUD, president, Committee for Environmentally Sound Development
NEW YORK CITY

Bothered and Bewildered

I’ve been a subscriber for more than thirty years, and what I most love about The Nation is that the columns and articles respect my intelligence by expecting me to focus and think while I read them. Periodically someone with more aesthetic sense than I decides that the magazine needs to be redesigned. Until now, I’ve not cared much and just go on reading what your writers have to say and not worrying about what typeface or column arrangement they’re saying it in.

The latest “new look” is different. Now when I try to read a column, brightly colored factoids are over in the margin shouting at me to pay attention to them. They’ve crowded the column off the page so I have to go looking somewhere else for its ending. To read a feature article all the way through I have to skip over two or three other articles sharing the pages with it and try to follow it through multiple page jumps. Then I have to back up to find those other articles, if I remember.

I used to read The Nation cover to cover. Now I have to read it back and forth and back and forth. I suspect a hostile and covert takeover. Why else would you try so hard to distract me from what you have to say? Sometimes, despite my best efforts, it works.

—TIM JOSEPH
ITHACA, N.Y.
Books & the Arts.

With this book, David Brion Davis brings to a conclusion one of the towering achievements of historical scholarship of the past half-century, his three-volume study of the “problem of slavery.” It must also set a record for the length of time—forty-eight years—between the appearance of the first and last works in a three-part series, a point I raise not to chide Davis for being dilatory but to commend him for perseverance. As in the previous volumes, Davis exhibits his command of a remarkable range of primary and secondary sources and of different nations’ historical experiences. And like its predecessors, the new volume reflects how scholarship on slavery has evolved, partly under the impact of the first two works in this trilogy.

The first volume, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966), offered a penetrating analysis of thinking about slavery from ancient times to the late eighteenth century. It posed an obvious but previously neglected question: Why did it take so long for a belief in slavery’s inherent immorality to emerge? In one form or another, slavery has existed since the dawn of civilization. Slaves, to be sure, have always known that slavery is wrong. But Davis’s concern was with the rise of a humanitarian sensibility among those who did not suffer under the institution. Slavery was long accepted as an imperfect part of a necessarily imperfect social system, one example among many of social hierarchies on which public order was thought to depend. Anti-slavery, as a coherent body of thought, emerged only in the eighteenth century, due to a revolution in moral perceptions. Central to this process were evangelical religion and Enlightenment thought, both of which placed a new emphasis on every person’s inherent dignity and natural rights and on the possibility of perfecting society.

As intellectual history, Davis’s book was pathbreaking. But perhaps its deepest impact arose from his demonstration of slavery’s indispensable role in the rise of the modern world. Previous historians, especially in the United States, had tended to see slavery as an exception, a footnote in a teleological narrative of progress. But Davis demonstrated that slavery became the key institution in the European conquest and settlement of the New World. The book inspired a spate of works that showed the centrality of slavery to American and Atlantic history.

Davis’s second volume, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (1975), again led scholarship in new directions. It discussed the Haitian Revolution as a pivotal episode of that era, a commonplace today but a revelation forty years ago. The index to R.R. Palmer’s influential two-volume study *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1959–64), for example, does not include the words “Haiti,” “Saint-Domingue” or “slavery.” Davis explored with great subtlety the views of Thomas Jefferson and other American founders and analyzed how the leaders of the French Revolution confronted slavery. But what generated the most attention among historians was the part of the book that sought an explanation for the rise of abolitionism in the realm of social relations, not simply ideas. Noting the close connection of British Quakers and other Dissenters with both the early Industrial Revolution and the movement to abolish the Atlantic slave trade, Davis suggested that the condemnation of slavery had the effect of legitimizing free wage labor at a time of deeply oppressive conditions in English.
factories. This was not a conspiracy theory, as some interpreted it—a capitalist plot to use the slavery issue to deflect attention away from the situation of the working class—but an analysis of the social functions, sometimes unintended, of abolitionist ideology. The book stimulated a wide-ranging and fruitful debate about capitalism’s relationship to the emergence of modern moral sensibilities.

In the decades since the second volume appeared, the focus of the study of emancipation has shifted again. Increasingly, blacks—not white abolitionists—occupy center stage. Slave resistance is now seen as central to the process of abolition in the United States, the Caribbean and Brazil. The crucial role of free blacks in abolitionist movements has been widely recognized. In this latest work, Davis—following in the wake of recent scholarship—makes the role of blacks as historical actors and catalysts of emancipation far more central than in his previous volumes.

The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation is considerably less comprehensive than its earlier companions. A “highly selective study,” as Davis describes it, the book focuses almost exclusively on the United States and Great Britain. For the end of slavery in Cuba and Brazil, the reader must turn to the work of other historians, most recently Robin Blackburn’s The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights. [See Foner, “Inhuman Bondage,” August 29, 2011.] Rather than a full history of abolition in the nineteenth century, Davis offers a set of erudite ruminations on questions central to the debate over slavery.

The book's central theme is slavery’s tendency toward the “dehumanization” of its victims and the implications of this for abolitionist movements and the prospects for emancipation. Throughout the hemisphere, as Davis points out, black slaves were literally “treated like animals.” Legally, they were reduced to chattel, lacking both rights and a will of their own. They were disciplined and restrained as animals were, with whips and chains. Slave-sale broadsides often listed slaves and animals side by side, with similar prices and descriptions.

What interests Davis, however, is less the legal or physical treatment than the psychological implications for both whites and blacks of this “animalization.” In adopting this approach, he follows in the footsteps of Stanley Elkin’s Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (1959) and its discussion of the impact of total institutions on their victims. Like Elkins, Davis has a penchant for practicing psychiatry without a license. He briefly veers off on a not entirely helpful Freudian excursion, proposing that whites “projection of an ‘animal Id’” onto blacks became the key to racism, even as some whites “sacred to the appeal of the ‘Negro Id’” by seeking to emblaze black music, dance and other cultural expressions. More persuasively, he insists that by describing and treating slaves as animals, whites enhanced their view of themselves as rational and self-disciplined human beings. One wishes that Davis had also delved into Jefferson’s insight that exercising absolute command over other men and women warped the psychology of the slaveholders as much as the slaves, instilling in them a tendency toward authoritarianism and violence. More controversially, perhaps, Davis probes the extent to which slaves internalized their own dehumanization and how black abolitionists sought to counter this tendency.

The emphasis on the dehumanization inherent in slavery helps explain what may strike many readers as the surprising amount of space (four full chapters) that Davis devotes to the movement to “colonize” freed slaves outside the United States. As he points out, although barely remembered today, colonization was a mainstream movement before the Civil War. Prominent white Americans from Jefferson to Lincoln (at least until he issued the Emancipation Proclamation) believed that with the end of slavery, blacks should be encouraged or even required to leave the United States. Moreover, a remarkable number of black leaders at one time or another embraced the idea of seeking a homeland elsewhere. For its white advocates, colonization would remove a people who had become so brutalized that they posed a menace to the social order if allowed to remain in this country in freedom. For blacks, separation from the American environment would allow former slaves to overcome the psychological effects of being treated like animals.

For supporters of colonization, white and black, Davis argues, the biblical narrative of Exodus imbued the idea with millennial significance. More recent precedents also existed: the expulsion of Moors and Jews from Spain and the deportation of the Acadians from the Canadian Maritime Provinces by Great Britain in 1755, not to mention Indian removal in the United States. A considerable number of American blacks migrated to Haiti in the 1820s, although many returned after finding that island nation less of a utopia than they had hoped. As conditions for free blacks in the United States worsened in the 1850s, emigrationist sentiment revived. If black Americans, in the words of the black abolitionist Martin Delany, constituted a “nation within a nation,” then logic suggested that they deserved a nation state of their own. Davis makes the point that unlike white colonizationists, Delany did not advocate the emigration of the entire black population; indeed, he and others insisted that the establishment of a powerful black nation overseas would help those who remained in the United States to win citizenship rights.

Nonetheless, Davis acknowledges, emigration was always a minority impulse among black Americans. Liberia, established in West Africa by the American Colonization Society, failed to attract a large number of colonists. [Those who did go, he writes, frequently acted like “high-handed imperialists” in their relations with the native population.] The establishment of the Colonization Society in 1816 produced an immediate backlash among ordinary free blacks, leading them to assert their Americanness and to articulate a vision of the United States as a land of equality before the law, where rights did not depend on color, ancestry or racial designation. The black mobilization against colonization became a key factor in the rise of a new, militant abolitionism in the 1830s. Compared with previous anti-slavery organizations, mostly led by whites and promoting gradual emancipation, the new abolitionism was different: immediate, interracial, and committed to making the United States a biracial nation of equals.

Davis offers a thoughtful discussion of the role of free blacks in abolitionist movements and their relations with slaves. That relationship differed from society to society, but free blacks everywhere occupied an ambiguous and marginal place in slave systems. Disdained by whites, they often tried to establish an identity separate from slaves. But sometimes, as in revolutionary Haiti or the northern United States, they made common cause with those in bondage.

Free blacks were “the key to slave emancipation,” but in a double sense. Their work was essential for the abolitionist movement, but they bore a great burden—demonstrating in their own lives the slaves’ capacity for freedom. Consequently, Davis argues, even the most militant abolitionists chastised many free blacks for poverty, intemperance and violations of the Sabbath. They worried that evidence of the impact of “dehumanization” on the black population might make emancipation seem inadvisable.

David Walker, whose Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World (1829) in some ways launched the new abolitionism, spent part of that radical manifesto berating slaves and free blacks for accepting and internaliz-
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ing their inferior status. Frederick Douglass called on free blacks to prove themselves “men” by working hard, rising in the social scale and, during the Civil War, enlisting in the Union Army. Unlike some recent scholars, however, Davis stresses that rather than being a conservative impulse—an attempt to impose elite values on a Dionysian lower-class black culture—the campaign for “racial uplift” formed part of the movement to demonstrate to white America the fitness of black people for freedom. Its aim was “empowerment,” not repression.

In this context, the Haitian Revolution took on sharply different meanings among whites and blacks. The very existence of a black nation founded by a slave revolution challenged every slave regime in the hemisphere. Among whites, the alleged “horrors” of Haiti, including massacres of white residents, not only produced “alarm and terror” but also offered evidence of the bestial nature of the rebel slaves and the need to strengthen slavery where it still existed. For blacks, free and slave, Haiti was an inspiration. It demonstrated black “manhood,” Douglass would later declare. The example of Haiti inspired the leaders of the Barbados insurrection of 1816, Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy in Charleston in 1822, and slave rebels in Cuba. Walker urged his readers to study the history of Haiti, “the glory of the blacks and terror of tyrants.”

Davis devotes a revealing chapter to another form of slave resistance—running away from slavery—and its political impact in the United States. In some ways, however, this discussion seems to cut against the argument about the impact of slavery on slaves. The fugitives’ courage, ingenuity and self-reliance challenges the idea of widespread psychological “dehumanization.” William Still, a free black and the key operative of the underground railroad in Philadelphia, wrote that his encounters with fugitives led him to realize how many slaves had “deeply thought on the subject of their freedom.” Speeches by fugitives, including Douglass, Henry H. Garnet, Henry Brown and many others, attracted large audiences in the North and Great Britain. Fugitive slave narratives—accounts written by runaways of their ordeals and accomplishments—emerged as a popular literary genre. The accounts of fugitives forced onto the center stage of American politics intractable questions about the balance between federal and state authority, the extent to which the laws of slave states extended into the North, and the relationship between the national government and slavery. Washington’s active efforts to assist slaveholders in their attempts to reclaim fugitives reinforced the abolitionist contention that the Slave Power effectively determined national policy. None of this would have happened without the actions of slaves who sought to escape to freedom.

If Haiti inspired black radicalism, Parliament’s abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 convinced American abolitionists of the practicality of immediate emancipation. Yet, Davis points out, this moral triumph was also the product of political negotiation and compromise. Britain liberated 800,000 slaves, but rewarded their owners with £20 million in monetary compensation—an immense sum, amounting to 40 percent of the national budget. (Because of a regressive tax system, the British working class paid most of the bill.) Moreover, as former slaves took up small plots of land to grow food for their families, Caribbean sugar production plummeted. By midcentury, respectable opinion on both sides of the Atlantic had concluded that emancipation was a failure. Thus, ironically, the British experience hardened opposition to abolition in the United States, stoking fears that it would lead to economic disaster.

Nonetheless, August 1, 1834—the date the British law went into effect—was celebrated as a “turning point in human history.” For free African-Americans, August 1 replaced July 4 as a day of annual celebration. Their admiration for Great Britain put abolitionists (black and white) in a complicated position when they lectured in the British Isles during the 1840s, just as the Chartist movement was drawing attention to political and economic inequalities there. In a brief discussion that to some extent modifies his earlier analysis of the ideological relationship between chattel and wage slavery, Davis points out that Garrison and Douglass did express sympathy for Chartist demands. Yet Davis also notes that despite the success of speaking tours by American abolitionists, there was a remarkable degree of support for the Confederacy in England during the American Civil War—not only among the aristocracy, which despised democracy, but also journalists, reformers and clerics.

The abolition of slavery appears, in retrospect, so inevitable a part of the story of human progress that it may seem jarring when Davis emphasizes that there was nothing predetermined about it. He endorses the view advanced by recent scholars that, far from being retrograde or economically backward, slavery in the mid-nineteenth century was a dynamic, expanding institution, with powerful support everywhere it existed. “Never was the prospect of emancipation more distant than now,” the Times of London observed in 1857. Despite abolition in the British Caribbean and Spanish America, there were more slaves in the Western Hemisphere on the eve of the Civil War than at any point in history. Had the Confederacy emerged victorious, which was entirely possible, “it is clear that slavery would have continued well into the twentieth century.” Contingency, even accident, produced the end of slavery in the Old South, the greatest slave society the modern world has known.

Davis is well aware, of course, that emancipation did not usher in the abolitionist dream of a society of equals. The end of slavery in the Caribbean was succeeded by new forms of inequality, as planters brought in indentured workers from Asia to replace the blacks who had abandoned the plantations. Davis notes that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, adopted in the United States immediately after the Civil War to guarantee the civil and political equality of the former slaves, were virtually without precedent in other post-emancipation societies. Yet Reconstruction was soon succeeded by a new system of racial inequality. Did emancipation, then, make any difference in the United States?

In a moving personal reflection that opens the book, Davis dates his interest in studying the history of slavery and racism to his experience in 1945 as an 18-year-old draftee on a troop ship headed to Europe. He was shocked to discover that hundreds of black soldiers were jammed together in the hold, in conditions reminiscent of what he imagined a slave ship during the Middle Passage must have been like. When he reached Germany, he had to listen to racist diatribes by US Army officers. Three hundred pages later, Davis ends by acknowledging that, in various forms, slavery persists in the world even today.

Davis is fully aware of the moral ambiguities involved in the crusade against slavery, the process of abolition and the long afterlife of racism. Nonetheless, in a rebuke to those historians today who belittle the entire project of emancipation, he insists that the abolition of slavery in the Western Hemisphere was one of the profoundest achievements in human history, “a crucial landmark of moral progress that we should never forget.” His monumental three-volume study helps to ensure that it will always be remembered.
Abie’s Yiddish Muse

by D.D. GUTTENPLAN

One evening in 1892, William Dean Howells received a caller at his house on East 17th Street. A former editor of The Atlantic Monthly, where he’d championed the work of his friend Mark Twain, as well as a celebrated poet, novelist and critic, Howells was the American literary establishment made flesh. His visitor was Abraham Cahan, editor of the Arbeiter Zeitung, an obscure Yiddish weekly named after the Chicago-based German anarchist paper whose staff had recently furnished four of the eight defendants in the Haymarket bombing trial. Although Cahan’s own literary efforts had so far mostly been limited to his columns “The Proletarian Preacher” and “The Hester Street Reporter,” he was thrilled to be invited to meet the author of The Rise of Silas Lapham and A Hazard of New Fortunes. Howells, who maintained a lively interest in the Lower East Side, was in turn astonished to learn that the man he’d sought out as a local informant—what today would be called a “fixer”—had read all of his work.

The following year, Cahan published excerpts of Howells’s utopian satire A Traveler From Altruria in the Arbeiter Zeitung and, with his mentor’s encouragement, completed his own first novel, Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto. Though Cahan’s manuscript was rejected by Harper’s and McClure’s—whose editor told Cahan, “Someone who reads your novel is likely to think there are no other kinds of people in America than Jews”—Howells persisted, sending it to his own editor, who’d already struck gold with Maggie: A Girl of the Streets by Stephen Crane, another Howells discove.

The answer came two decades later. The Rise of David Levinsky—note the hat tip in the title—blends elements of Cahan’s own childhood in Vilna, Talmudic training, youthful involvement with the Russian revolutionary underground and flight to America with his fictional alter-ego’s relentless climb to the top of the garment industry. Deemed an “artistic triumph” by Howells, the novel’s unsparring anatomy of bare-knuckles capitalism among the “cloak and suit” trade was more than some readers could stomach. The Nation’s anonymous reviewer, describing Levinsky as “a sneaking, malodorous animal [whose] fumblings with friendship and love are nauseating,” sniffed that if Cahan “has determined to paint that type of Jew who raises the gorge of all decent human beings, he has succeeded.” But most critics agreed with those nimble dialecticians at The New York Times Book Review, who (in a front-page review) announced: “In this story of ‘The Rise’ of one individual is pictured the development of an entire class.”

Today, both Cahan and his antithero are largely forgotten. Martin Amis recently informed the readers of the same Times Book Review that “Jewish-American literature… began with Saul Bellow, circa 1950.” Unlike those of us whose ancestors landed at Castle Garden or Ellis Island, Amis may not have been subject to parental recitations of “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus, the nineteenth-century poet who probably qualifies as the mother of Jewish-American literature. But neither the ghetto pastoral of Mike Gold’s Jews Without Money (1930) and Henry Roth’s Call It Sleep (1934) nor Bellow’s The Adventures of Augie March and Bernard Malamud’s The Natural (1952) are imaginable without Abraham Cahan, who if he had accomplished nothing beyond bringing David Levinsky into the world would still be worth remembering.

Cahan, however, kept his day job—or, rather, day jobs, since his career as a newspaperman grew out of his commitments as a revolutionary. Making his debut on Manhattan’s radical speaking circuit, Cahan hit upon the novel tactic of addressing the workers not in English (which few of them spoke) or German or Russian, the acknowledged languages of revolution, but in Yiddish. Prompted partly by Henry George’s 1886 New York mayoral campaign, Cahan abandoned anarchism for socialism, joining the Socialist Labor Party, where he found himself at odds with its contentious leader, Daniel De Leon. In 1897, Cahan left the Arbeiter Zeitung to start a new paper deter-
mined to “hold high the flag of international class conflict” and bearing the same name as the official organ of the German Social Democratic Party: Vorwärts, or the Forward.

Driven out after only a few months by staff instifting, and fired from his night-school English teacher's job for making socialist street-corner speeches, Cahan soon got freelance work from Lincoln Steffens, at the time an assistant editor at the Evening Post and an admirer of Yekl. Steffens steered Cahan to the Commercial Advertiser, and when Steffens himself joined the paper, Cahan became part of his cadre of young reporters with literary ambitions. Steffens put Cahan on the police beat, where the pioneering muckraker Jacob Riis taught the newbie how to use cutting-edge technology to “phone in” a story. He stayed at the paper for five years, escorting Steffens and the writer Hutchins Hapgood (author of The Spirit of the Ghetto) through the city's teeming Jewish quarter, but also interviewing President McKinley, lunching with “Buffalo Bill” Cody and, thanks to Steffens, meeting frequently with Theodore Roosevelt. By the time he returned to the Forward in 1902, Cahan knew everyone worth knowing in New York. But he was never provincial.

Before he’d even started at the Forward, Cahan journeyed to London to meet with Eleanor Marx and Friedrich Engels, who gave him permission to translate The Communist Manifesto into Yiddish. In 1912, he met Lenin in Krakow, though the encounter must have been only partially successful, unlike Marx and Engels, whose terra-cotta busts still adorn the old Forward building, Lenin—and Leninism—were quickly consigned to the dustbin of history. Trotsky, however, was another story. Arriving in New York to a hero's welcome in January 1917, he was immediately signed up by Cahan, though the new columnist’s insistence that, faced with a choice between internationalism and patriotism, Americans—“especially the Jewish American workers”—should choose internationalism probably would have got him fired if the czar’s abdication that March hadn’t allowed Trotsky to return to Russia.

Like a lot of red revolutionaries, Abraham Cahan ended up to the right of where he began. 

Why am I telling you this? Because reading Seth Lipsky’s biography, it is all too easy to forget why anyone should care about Cahan, a serial espouser of lost causes who died more than half a century ago and whose monument, the Forward building on East Broadway—in the paper’s heyday, a hive of radical activity that housed the Workmen’s Circle and the United Hebrew Trades in addition to presses and editorial offices, and that also hosted weekly concerts and dances and a Yiddish theater troupe—is now a luxury condominium. In theory, Lipsky—who left a secure job at the Wall Street Journal in 1990 to start a weekly English-language edition of the Forward, and who went on to revive The New York Sun as a right-wing daily—ought to be an ideal match for his illustrious predecessor. At the Forward, Lipsky was known as an inspiring editor who serialized Art Spiegelman’s Maus II and nurtured writers who didn’t always share his politics. Yet as a biographer, Lipsky is small-minded, preachy, dull and inattentive, trampling over the twists and turns of Cahan’s often capricious political evolution in a rush to fit the epic contours of his unruly life into the cookie-cutter confines of wised-up American neoconservatism. Describing a 1923 speech denouncing Soviet Russia, Lipsky says: “with this speech, Cahan took his place within the leadership of an anti-Communist movement that would not be fully vindicated until 1989, nearly 40 years after Cahan’s death, when the Soviet Union finally collapsed in the face of a three-pronged strategy led by President Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul II, and Lane Kirkland.” (Lane Kirkland?) But then Lipsky also believes that the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, which at its peak had nearly half a million members, was “the Forward’s arm in the labor movement.” And that Jay Lovestone, the American communist renegade who distributed CIA money to pliable labor leaders throughout Western Europe and Latin America, deserves much of the credit for the rise of Solidarity in Poland—a claim that might have come straight from the pages of the Workers Vanguard, circa 1982.

Identification with the subject is a biographer’s déformation professionnelle, a mostly harmless vice that sometimes frees a writer to make imaginative leaps beyond the bounds of archival evidence and strict citation. But Lipsky doesn’t really do empathy, When the young Cahan, seeking a route out of Russia, rejects Palestine as a possible destination, Lipsky writes: “Cahan was not yet ready to throw in his lot with the Zionists. He viewed himself as ‘first of all a socialist’”—thereby dismissing as a youthful error what remained, for Cahan, a lifelong commitment. Similarly, in describing Cahan’s bitter dispute with Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism—the ideological ancestor of Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, and a tendency denounced by Cahan as appealing to “extremist chauvinists”—Lipsky airbrushes Jabotinsky’s fascist sympathies, the better to embrace his “stark assessment of the coming struggle” with the Arabs.

As for Cahan’s dedication to socialism, “although I myself was never a socialist or a member of a labor union, I had great sympathy for labor and its long march,” Lipsky writes. “I had moved to the right over the years, and as the Jewish story began to assert itself in the last quarter of the twentieth century, I perceived Cahan and what he built at the Forward as taking on...a new relevance.” Lipsky’s own politics are not the problem—or, at least, not the whole problem—but when his search for a usable past leads him to cut his subject down to his own size, readers have reason to complain. Especially since Lipsky seems to think that Cahan’s anticommunism is the most interesting thing about him.

Like a lot of red revolutionaries, Cahan ended up to the right of where he began. What makes any of those journeys worth writing about isn’t the terminus, though, but the choices that were faced—and the scenery along the way. As the historian Yuri Slezkine notes in The Jewish Century, “in the early twentieth century, Jews had three options—and three destinations—that represented alternative ways of being modern.” Zionists went to Palestine. Capitalists—and lumpen refugees—went to America. Socialists stayed in Russia. As a young member of the terrorist Narodnaya Volya (the People’s Will), Cahan fled to America only after many in his cell had been arrested in the crackdown that followed the assassination of Alexander II. His aim was to build “a wonderful communist life in that far-off country, a life without ‘mine’ and ‘thee’.” Visiting Russia years after his break with Lenin, Cahan sought out the Narodnik Vera Figner, who introduced the American to her Soviet comrades as “one of us.” To say that Cahan became an anticommunist tells us nothing; the same could be
said of anyone who preferred the *Forward* to the *Freiheit* (including my grandparents). Likewise any of the *seborers*, *schleppers* and *tumblers* assembled at the Garden Cafeteria (now the Wing Shoon seafood restaurant)—except, possibly, when Fidel Castro came for lunch. What matters, rather, is how and why his views changed—and what kind of anticommunist he became.

As the editor of the paper whose “Bintel Briefs” were read more avidly by many more union members than the *Daily Worker*, and as a power himself in the garment unions, Cahan’s own story is bound up with the saga of organized labor. Cahan, Lipsky writes, “had stood with labor throughout its great awakening and the years during which it was being organized, but he had broken early with the hard-left factions and played a leading role in the long struggle against Communism.” It’s true that Cahan played a prominent, honorable—and, for that matter, radical—role in helping to organize the needle trades in New York City. But labor’s “awakening” in the United States preceded Cahan’s arrival in 1882, and despite what Lipsky appears to believe, the main battles between unions in the garment industry had little to do with ideology. David Dubinsky, who led the ILGWU—and was very close to Cahan—was an anticommunist. But so was Sidney Hillman, leader of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, who didn’t like or trust Cahan. Yet Hillman and Dubinsky joined Cahan to form the American Labor Party—whose sole congressman, East Harlem Representative Vito Marcantonio (formerly Fiorello La Guardia’s campaign manager), was a frequent ally of the Communist Party—so that New York’s workers could back the New Deal without supporting Tammany Hall.

Then there is the language question. As a revolutionary, Cahan spoke the workers’ language, which in the early twentieth century on the Lower East Side meant Yiddish. And, of course, the *Forward* was written in Yiddish—but a peculiar kind of Yiddish, filled with neologisms and Americanisms, completely disdainful of any notion of linguistic purity. Even the name *Forverts* shuns the literal *Forvoy* in order to echo its German socialist forebear. Cahan’s biographer isn’t required to speak Yiddish—though I couldn’t help thinking of Paul Buhle, a non-Jew who learned it at a relatively advanced age in order to better understand his subjects when compiling his oral history of the American left. But you don’t need much Yiddishkeit to wonder what it meant for Cahan to conduct his political and journalistic life in Yiddish while writing his novels in English. One clue is provided by Slezkine, who quotes a passage from Cahan’s autobiography, *The Education of Abramah Cahan*, saying that his Yiddish-speaking childhood lacked names for common flowers such as daisies or dandelions: “When I grew older I learned their Russian names and, in America, their English names. But in that early time we didn’t even know their Yiddish names. We called all of them ‘tchatchaluch,’ playthings.” What did Yiddish mean for a man whose fictional alter ego retained “a lurking fear of restaurant waiters”? Lipsky never asks.

Nor does he seem curious about why Cahan’s wife Anna, who translated his other stories into Russian, refused even to read *The Rise of David Levinsky*. He tells us that in Cahan’s memoirs he “devoted remarkably few words to her,” and that he wrote more warmly about a girl who served as his tour guide on a single visit to Paris. He also says that the Cahans “lived separately for a while.” But he takes at face value the claim, by a crony of Anna’s, that she objected to Levinsky’s “all-rightnik” vulgarity, without considering whether the character’s incessant womanizing might have been more relevant. As a member of precisely that cohort whom Isaac Babel exhorted to “forget for a while that you have glasses on your nose and autumn in your heart,” Cahan may have had a genuinely happy marriage—and a vivid imagination. The point is that his inner life remains opaque. Neither here nor elsewhere is there any indication, in the book’s admirably clear endnotes, that Lipsky ever made any attempt to investigate any primary source, on any topic, beyond the two volumes (out of five) of Cahan’s memoirs that were translated into English.

And when it comes to the Socialist Party’s interminable internecine battles, Lipsky really loses his grip. “By 1934,” he writes, “a rift had developed within the Socialist Party: a radical and pacifist faction had developed, led by Norman Thomas, that unlike the *Forward* was prepared to work with various affiliates and fronts for the Communist Party.” What Lipsky neglects to mention is that the other faction—the right wing of the party—tried to seize control of the party’s assets. In his memoirs Louis Waldman, the leader of this “Old Guard,” reveals what was at stake: “In New York alone there were such institutions as the *Jewish Daily Forward*…with reserve funds amounting to millions…. There was the Rand School of Social Science which, together with Camp Tamiment, had enormous property value…. Control of the *Forward* alone also meant probable control of fraternal and labor organizations such as the Workmen’s Circle, with its many millions of dollars in property.”

Lipsky contrasts Cahan with B. Charney Vladeck, the *Forward’s* longtime general manager: “Vladeck was, at bottom, a politician; Cahan was, at bottom, a newspaper editor.” Unlike Vladeck, who served a term as a city alderman (elected on the Socialist ticket) and later won election to the City Council on the American Labor Party line, Cahan never held public office. But he was every bit as much of a politician. Perhaps it’s just that Lipsky finds something embarrassing about Cahan’s politics.

Lipsky wants Cahan to be a winner. It’s not enough for the *Forward* to have been the leading Yiddish publication in the world (which it was). It has to be “the third-largest morning newspaper in the city in any language, with a circulation of nearly 140,000,” right behind “Pulitzer’s *World* and Hearst’s *Journal*”—making Cahan a peer of those newspaper legends. Except that even at its peak, the *Forward* never equaled *The New York Times*, which had a circulation of 240,000 before World War I and over 360,000 in 1918. A similar grandiosity leads him to describe Jabotinsky as “the only Jewish journalist of [Cahan’s] own rank” at a time (1940) when Walter Winchell had a nightly audience of millions, and when J. David Stern—who owned daily papers in New York, Philadelphia and New Jersey—employed George Seldes and I.F. Stone. (And, of course, when Arthur Hays Sulzberger inherited what was even then probably the best newspaper in the country—though as an old *Journal* man, Lipsky seems to have *brogged* with the *Times*.)

Cahan backed the Russian populists over the Bolsheviks, the American Socialists over the Communists, and the Yiddish nationalists over the Zionists, making him a washout as a prophet in three languages. For most of his life, Cahan remained stubbornly out of step with the mainstream—at least if your sense of the mainstream is bounded on the left by empty liberal pieties and on the right by the wisdom of Robert Bartley. Yet as writers with politics as diverse as Paul Berman and Alan Wald have reminded us, Jewish revolutionaries for whom winning was everything tended to embrace Stalinism. Or neoconservatism. Or both. Abraham Cahan is far more interesting than that. It’s a shame that Lipsky seems more eager to recruit him than to understand him.
by JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE

Diane Ravitch is a historian of education who was once a proponent of conservative school “reform.” Starting out in the 1970s as an ally of Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, Ravitch moved rightward when she joined the movement calling for national standards and test-based accountability in education. Famously, in the wake of the wreckage created by President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind policy, with its emphasis on high-stakes testing and the policy of punishing failing schools, she changed her mind. And she let people know it with a brilliant broadside, The Life and Death of the Great American School System, aimed at what she now calls “corporate education reform.” [See Featherstone, “Resisting Reforms,” August 12, 2010.] She has since used her popular blog and nationwide stump speeches to rally a fast-growing army of Commoners that includes groups like FairTest and Citizens for Public Schools as well as teachers and parents around the country.

In her new book, Reign of Error, Ravitch attacks the central narrative of corporate education reform, which goes like this: test scores prove that US schools have failed, sinking in relation to measures of aptitude in other countries. High school dropout rates are on the rise, and our economy and security are at risk. At the heart of the problem are lazy, incompetent and undemanding teachers. For this reason, unions and teacher job protection must go. Schools need evaluation and monitoring, not support. But they are basically a triage operation, not a model for inclusive public education. And especially in the right direction, toward innovation and school reform.

Reign of Error is both a manifesto fueled by righteous indignation about this narrative and a policy wonk’s memo crammed with charts and footnotes refuting it. Much like the celebrated statistics wizard Nate Silver, Ravitch is an explainer, someone who is adept at explicating technical data without resorting to geek speak. She extends the arguments of her previous book by claiming that the American public is the victim of a “hoax” in which purported free-market solutions have worked as distractions from the truly pressing problems of poverty and segregation by race and class, which impede learning and therefore should be the actual target of education and social reform. The corporate-reform narrative tactfully avoids using language that smacks of privatization because, while accurate, it would almost certainly make the proposed reforms less popular. “Public education is in a crisis only so far as society is and only so far as this new narrative of crisis has destabilized it,” Ravitch writes. Having explained why student scores on standardized tests cannot reliably be used to measure and assess their teachers’ performance, Ravitch concludes by offering a stinging appraisal: this signature idea of corporate reformers “may even be junk science.”

Ours is an age of relentless testing, corrupted by cooked or deceitful results and widespread cheating scandals. Only one test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has remained credible, because there are no stakes attached to it. Ravitch cites NAEP results showing that, contrary to the corporate reformers’ talking points, children’s test scores are at the highest point on record. Reading and math have improved over time (the biggest gains occurred, however, before No Child Left Behind—a showing that may reflect the shift in federal policy from equity to test scores). Nor is it true that the United States is falling behind compared with other nations, though its scores have never been very high, and policy-makers should probably worry more than Ravitch does about the stagnation of US college graduation rates. (Severe inequality pulls US scores down in international comparisons.) But the high school dropout rate is at an all-time low, and graduation rates are at an all-time high. Moreover, there is absolutely no good evidence that schools are to blame for the struggling economy. On the contrary, business leaders have succeeded in turning schools into scapegoats for their decisions to export jobs and lower labor costs. Nor is there any basis for the claim that schools will improve if teacher tenure and seniority are abandoned. Likewise, the claim that learning can be improved by a scorched-earth policy of firing principals and teachers, closing schools, and starting anew remains unproven.

Ravitch demonstrates that a key claim of the corporate reformers—that charter schools will be able to produce better results than regular district schools—is not supported by the evidence. Charters “run the gamut from excellent to awful,” she notes, but on average they’re no better than public schools with comparable populations of students. Too many charters obtain their good results by culling students who test well from the public school population, not by taking their share of special-needs and immigrant students and improving their capacity to learn. Ravitch does admire the best charters: top-notch schools that are drawing imaginative teaching talent and doing a brilliant job with kids in poor communities. She would like to see good stand-alone nonprofit charters flourish, but with ground rules that would tether them more closely to public purposes and prevent them from becoming the foundation of a dual school system even more segregated by race and class than our present one. She opposes the growing shift to large charter management chains, which raise serious questions of accountability, quality and public purpose. The well-known Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) schools do an admirable job of selecting smart and determined students, but they are basically a triage operation, not a model for inclusive public education. And despite there being some real promise in technology, Ravitch scorns for-profit virtual and online schools.

The mission of public schools should not be to make money, she insists. Required to educate all citizens, public schools embody hard-won principles of equity and inclusion that are now endangered. The free market always favors those with more money and information, generating inequality. Many who protest the corporate reformers’ fixation on tests and the current efforts to narrow curriculum and pedagogy will agree with Ravitch that public schools also have an obligation to produce a full, rounded and “liberal” education for all citizens. Good schools with such a curriculum should be, like clean air and medical care, available to all families. For all the unfairness and vagaries of local school control and the myriad ways that political arrangements in the United States act as sieves...
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*Erdos & Morgan Opinion Leader Study
for privilege, many local schools still knit together the common life of a community or neighborhood. *Reign of Error* is a moving plea to renew democratic principles and justify education not as a consumer good, but as an integral part of democratic society.

In the second half of *Reign of Error*, also written in a punchy, data-rich style, Ravitch offers a set of proposals for education, and they are in keeping with the social and educational vision of progressives like John Dewey. Specific policy proposals range from prenatal care for pregnant teens to smaller class sizes. Ravitch has now joined the growing ranks of scholars and educators who, while arguing that genuine school reform is crucial, decry the claims of reform utopians that schools alone can somehow solve the problems of a radically unequal social order. The quality of teaching at public schools can be improved, she says, but such efforts should march in tandem with progressive initiatives in areas like jobs, housing, healthcare and early childhood education.

Nearly one-quarter of American children are poor. By emphasizing that poverty is the central tragic fact about the nation and its schools, Ravitch is able to explain how, with their false crises and ill-judged solutions, corporate educators have created a world of school “reform” that masks the true forces of deterioration in the public sector: constant school budget cuts and swelling class sizes; the tailoring of the curriculum to what tests easily in a multiple-choice format; and an impoverishment of educational services and vision that erodes the prospects for poor children more than anyone else. The result is a system in which, increasingly, regular district schools become dumping grounds for low-scoring children sitting in decaying buildings that resemble those of a failed state.

It is especially worrying that the federal government, a big backer of corporate reform, seems to be abandoning its role as a defender of equity and social justice. The test score gap between black and white students narrowed in the era of school desegregation, which was enforced by a vigilant federal government and the courts—but in recent decades, segregation by race and income has returned as the new normal in American education. Much of the public, and parts of the government, have shown little interest in countering the exacerbation of racial and class segregation; instead, Republican gerrymandering and the Supreme Court have chipped away at older civil rights advances. The rare, brave and successful efforts at desegregation by race and income, such as in the Wake County school district in North Carolina, are now in retreat under threats from suburban whites, right-wing politicians and cynical profiteers.

Many educators who backed President Obama were shocked when he not only backed major elements of No Child Left Behind but also doubled down on its preference for school “reform” by means of testing and privatization. His Race to the Top program is worse than its predecessor in its insistence that states evaluate teachers on the “junk science” basis of yearly gains in students’ test scores. Its requirements and goals have also triggered a whole new machinery of failure that culminates in the privatization of schools. This may be the first time in history that the federal government has encouraged private sector investors to create for-profit schools.

Ravitch offers an excellent snapshot of the interlocking directorate of the corporate-reform movement, which spans a political spectrum ranging from the Obama administration to the Koch brothers and ALEC, the right-wing legislative outfit, and includes the powerful and little-understood Gates, Walton and Broad foundations. These actors have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in a grand effort to depprofessionalize and privatize public education. The Common Core State Standards, for example, have already been adopted by forty-five states (though few have even heard of them)—rushed through, as Ravitch says, by coalitions of corporate reformers and their allies. When students across New York State did poorly on Common Core–aligned tests last year, some observers began to suspect that beneath its lofty aims, the Common Core could become yet another layer of pointless testing and another means of labeling schools and teachers as failures. The most urgent question posed by corporate education reform, Ravitch says, is “whether a small number of very wealthy entrepreneurs, corporations and individuals will be able to purchase educational policy in this nation, either by funding candidates for local and state school boards, for state legislatures, for governor and for Congress or by using foundation ‘gifts’ to advance the privatization of public education.”

The school failures and closings sanctioned by Race to the Top cause disruptions in neighborhoods where there is already little stability in children’s lives. When a school is labeled a failing or “focus” school, it must concentrate all the more on test results, but at that point many of the academically ambitious families who can will have fled for better prospects. Federal regulations operate like quicksand: the more schools struggle, the deeper they sink. Increasingly, such schools enroll more and more of the disadvantaged in a downward spiral.

In a high-profile experiment in New York City, then–Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Mayor Michael Bloomberg closed low-scoring schools and replaced them with charters, but the city still has many strong district schools. In Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel has closed forty-nine allegedly “failing” schools (some of them launched not so long ago by an earlier corporate reformer—Arne Duncan, the current secretary of education—when he was in charge of the Chicago schools). Emanuel claims that the charters have a “secret sauce” for success, not knowing—or pretending not to know—that charter test scores are often the result of pushing underperforming students out. A badly informed public has little idea of the excesses of privatization now unfolding in cities like New Orleans, Cleveland and Philadelphia, or in states like Tennessee, Louisiana, North Carolina, Arizona, Michigan and Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, as in so many other states, the election of a radically right-wing Republican governor spells deep trouble for public education. There and in Ohio, wealthy entrepreneurs have created businesses to run charter schools that get terrible results but are never held accountable because the entrepreneurs are major campaign contributors. In Cleveland, the mayor replaced dozens of public schools with charters even though Ohio charters generally perform worse than district schools. In Philadelphia, the Boston Consulting Group—which is paid well by consultants include Margaret Spellings, secretary of education under President George W. Bush—was invited to write a report recommending privatization, even though many Philadelphia schools were privatized years ago and are doing badly.

Ravitch could have written more extensively about how reform is dumbing down the teaching profession. The attractive face of Teach for America—drawing elite college graduates into education—masks the fact that students taught by TFA graduates score no better than comparable teachers with comparable kids. But TFA does provide cheap staffing for the new charter-management chains. (Just under half of TFA instructors continue to teach past their two-year commitment, how-
ever, and they are often very good.) The Broad Foundation has been credentialing professionals with no teaching experience to work as principals and superintendents. The Obama administration has provided incentive for states competing for Race to the Top funding to promote often dubious alternative-certification programs. And now it is taking aim at education schools, armed with the same “junk science” used to shutter public schools. Who doubts that the machinery of privatization will follow? Granted, much of teacher education could be improved; teaching credentials in many places are suspect. Any defense of teacher education needs to accept that many education programs do not produce teachers or administrators with the skills necessary to create the schools needed most. By contrast, the world’s leading school systems—from test-heavy Singapore to progressive Finland—go to great lengths to support and strengthen teachers as professionals. The reformers say that teaching is the heart of the matter, and the public agrees. Yet these same reformers oppose various proposals to strengthen teacher education and cultivate good teaching in schools, or to guarantee decent working conditions in order to attract and retain talented teachers. It’s a scandal that many of the new privatized schools supposedly offering “great teachers” are staffed by low-cost, untrained instructors with no rights. Nor is it any surprise that they have considerable staff turnover.

Ravitch can sometimes sound as if she thinks all teachers are irreproachable, but of course she knows they’re not. What to do about incompetent or abusive teachers and those public schools that operate like safe houses? Ravitch points to the excellent peer review system in places like Montgomery County, Maryland, which provides assistance to struggling teachers and fair processes by which they can be evaluated and, if necessary, dismissed. Teachers unions too often stonewall such reforms, but they have also made it possible for teachers to have careers rather than short-term jobs. Unions are more necessary than ever to defend the rights of teachers in a new world of corporate bosses—and to defend public education against the privatizers. Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey—three states with test scores that compare favorably with the best in the world—all have reasonably strong teachers unions. Apart from the “bad apple” problems, however, national education policy in the long run should aim for the complete opposite of what the corporate reformers want: promoting teacher professionalism and finding ways to attract, retain and promote talented teachers in public schools.

Those like Ravitch who defend public education need to concede—more than they have been willing to do thus far—that the US system as it stood before the current wave of corporate reform was not effective at cultivating good teaching or developing teachers skilled at reaching children in struggling communities. Good teachers always exist in numbers, but they are rarely developed by the system. The depths of racism, poverty and segregation that still exist in this country strike at families and children in ways that only highlight the inadequacy of the lazy old bromides about public education. Many classrooms are not working well for children of the poor (the phrase “failure factories” comes to mind). Changing this will require, as Ravitch insists, initiatives against poverty and segregation. We also urgently need educational resources and—if the word is still permitted—reform that involves ongoing teacher development. Similarly, to create, as Ravitch proposes, good universal preschools will require teachers, schools and professional development programs of very high quality that we do not now have in any great number.

David Kirp has recently written in his fine book Improbable Scholars of the ongoing development of principals and teaching staff in Union City, New Jersey, who have reformed an entire school system that now does remarkably well by its population of immigrants and the poor. Union City offers no “secret sauce,” but it is a good example of how the performance of school staff can improve in a district without corporate reform. Union City has no charters, no TFA teachers and no school closings—although one catalyst for change was a warning from the state that the schools were in trouble. Kirp details the way that teachers and administrators have concentrated collectively on developing mutual respect, the emotional and character-building aspects of education, the skills of the teacher, the engagement of students, parental involvement and the rigor of the curriculum. Everyone involved is working toward a truly complex—yet achievable—common goal: “To succeed, students must become thinkers, not just test-takers.” (Among its other reforms, the district offers two years of pre-K education.)

It may be easier to fight the corporate reformers than to reimagine and enact the kind of public education that really does leave no child behind—let alone to reinvent our broken political and economic systems. But Ravitch’s critique of the corporate reformers’ manufactured agenda, along with the truly progressive alternative she offers, shows us a way to begin the long haul toward improving democracy’s classrooms.

OCEAN VUONG

**Eurydice**

It’s more like the sound a doe makes when an arrowhead replaces the day with an answer to the rib’s hollowed hum. We saw it coming but kept walking through the hole in the garden. Because the leaves were bright green & the fire only a pink brushstroke in the distance. It’s not about the light—but how dark it makes you depending on where you stand. Depending on where you stand his name can appear like moonlight shredded in a dead dog’s fur. His name changed when touched by gravity. Gravity breaking our kneescaps just to show us the sky. We kept saying Yes—even with all those birds. Who would believe us now? My voice cracking even with all those birds. Sily me. I thought love was real & the body imaginary. But here we are—standing in the cold field, him calling for the girl. The girl beside him. Frosted grass snapping beneath her hooves.

—OCEAN VUONG
# Puzzle No. 3312

**JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO**

## ACROSS

1. Loss of power, with liberal disappearing in retreat (4,3)
2. For example, the past 10 heads of 7-Eleven (5)
3. Motorist has to keep closer to the ocean (9)
4. Nerd to bully: “Start to expect a devious strategy” (4,6)
5. Sound opinion involving a command that is unfortunately not available in real life (4)
6. Loses consciousness in fast, surprisingly (6)
7. For Arabs, the axiom is unselfishness (8)
8. Hey, a Jew in a national park! (8)
9. Repeat what I say: “Moving in pairs, shift from front to back.” That’s what girls used to be taught (4,2)
10. Within the law: to sacrifice limb for a friend (4)
11. Handle check to underwrite second-rate accommodations (10)
12. Cruelly poke at Midwestern capital (6)
13. Oddball criticism at outset of evaluation (5)
14. Overcome with anger, how a critic would describe his work (5)
15. Middle Eastern variety of orange is held up over the end of a fork (9)
16. Shortening overtime to catch a pop-up? In Florida, it might lead to confusion (9,6)
17. Greek sporting inane hat (8)
18. Silence? No, misbehaving! (9)
19. Hear, touch or taste money (5)
20. Every fortnight, said farewell in a half-hearted manner (8)
21. Socks financial institution, starting late with rents (7)
22. Overdue with anger, how a critic would describe his work (5)
23. Awareness in the air? (7)
24. Middle Eastern variety of orange is held up over the end of a fork (9)
25. Oddball criticism at outset of evaluation (5)
26. Resistance units initially on Her Majesty’s service (4)
27. Charge levied at whistleblower by despicable senator (7)

## DOWN

1. Rural ailment afflicting infants at a New England school? (7)
2. Writer Ford (and others) covering host with those making a selection (6,9)
3. Every fortnight, said farewell in a half-hearted manner (8)
4. Hear, touch or taste money (5)
5. Middle Eastern variety of orange is held up over the end of a fork (9)
6. Overdue with anger, how a critic would describe his work (5)
7. How a critic would describe his work (5)
8. Middle Eastern variety of orange is held up over the end of a fork (9)
9. Overdue with anger, how a critic would describe his work (5)
10. For example, the past 10 heads of 7-Eleven (5)
11. Motorist has to keep closer to the ocean (9)
12. Sound opinion involving a command that is unfortunately not available in real life (4)
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22. Overdue with anger, how a critic would describe his work (5)
23. Awareness in the air? (7)
24. Resistance units initially on Her Majesty’s service (4)

## SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3311

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