The Nation’s new Digital Magazine format offers:

- The **Page-turning** experience of a print magazine

**PLUS:**

- Live **Web Links**
- **Multimedia** Access
Calling All Populists!

I admire The Nation, but now and then it hits me where I live and my gratitude spilleth over. To wit: Jim Hightower’s “Time for a Populist Revival!” [March 24]. Inspired and inspiring! Thank you! Valerie Govig Baltimore

I concur with Jim Hightower. At 101 years of age, I have declared myself a candidate for Congress (joenewman101.com) with the primary purpose of bringing to public attention the threat to morality from the far right. Part of my platform is to remind us that in 1787 some of our best minds met and set this goal—dreamed this dream, if you will—that “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, to establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity….” Can we keep that hope, that dream, alive? We must. Joe Newman Sarasota, Fla.

Climate leaders would do well to read Brother Hightower’s prescription for the progressive movement as a template for developing a working collaboration between the grassroots climate movement (including scientists) and climate advocates in Congress. Where is the coalition—you know, the one that a third of voters are waiting to be part of?

One hundred million Americans are concerned about the climate emergency. And yet the climate movement has no actionable unity of message on solutions, goals or plans to bring its separate entities together. The hour is late, friends. It’s five minutes to midnight for planetary life. Time to get very angry, very determined and very organized. Brian R. Smith

When French Foreign Minister Pierre Lavalle informed Comrade Stalin that he should promote Catholicism to appease the pope, Stalin replied, “The pope! How many divisions has he got?” Jim Hightower shows the same departure from reality. For two years now, we have been regaled with the impending demise of the Republicans. We are told of a party riven by internal war, on the wrong side of history, the issues and the demographics.

We hear of the resurgence of populism/liberalism among the American people, shot into afterburner by the Occupy movement. The massive injustices cited by the author are real enough, and they are lamented by a majority of Americans. But the contention that we can effect change by working harder and smarter and organizing better is an exercise in self-delusion.

The massive power crafted by the oligarchs by means of a carefully planned and hugely financed intergenerational program of political capture has carried the day. We have long passed the point where social, economic, legal and political justice can be obtained at the ballot box. Power never yields without a fight—a real fight. We can prevail only in the streets, by massive peaceful protest. We ended the Vietnam War and toppled a corrupt presidency, not from the ballot box but from the street.

(continued on page 26)
Jonathan Schell, who died of cancer on March 25 at 70, was an extraordinary writer, thinker and colleague. For nearly two decades, we were privileged to publish his eloquent, passionate and forcefully argued essays on behalf of peace, disarmament and nuclear abolition. He also wrote about presidential campaigns, the media and the growing threat to democracy by the national security state after 9/11.

The power and persuasiveness of Jonathan’s work came not only from his elegant style, analytic clarity and incisive logic, but also from the enduring belief that there is no idea so compelling as a moral one. On the nuclear crisis, no voice was as clear, no writing as perceptive, as Jonathan’s, going back to his acclaimed 1982 book *The Fate of the Earth*. In a 1998 *Nation* special issue making the case for the abolition of nuclear weapons, he brilliantly laid out the argument that there is a viable alternative to continued reliance on war and nuclear arms.

In the fraught days after the September 11 attacks and in the weeks leading up to the disastrous invasion of Iraq, Jonathan was one of the most thoughtful, independent and critical voices to emerge in a media landscape filled with cries for war and vengeance. He began writing “Letter From Ground Zero,” a *Nation* column he called “a series of entries in a sort of reflective public diary.” Sane and sensible, Jonathan used the column to advance the case for nonmilitary action. His “Letter” of September 2002, a *cri de coeur* against the nation’s post-9/11 aggression, asked if a democracy that feasted so heartily on violence was actually a democracy at all. The questions he posed then are just as relevant today.

Democracy was at the moral center of Jonathan’s work. “Empire or republic?” he asked in December 2005. Would we behave powerfully or justly? He took leaders to task for advocating the former. In 1999, he invoked Montesquieu to unmask the cynicism driving the impeachment of Bill Clinton, and in “An Open Letter to the Members of Congress,” an unsigned editorial he wrote in 2002, Jonathan called out legislators: “You are a deliberative body, but you do not deliberate. You are representatives, but you do not represent.”

“The Case Against the War,” from March 2003, was a forceful indictment against the looming invasion of Iraq, but it also exposed the essential weakness underlying it. Recalling previous doomed conflicts, like our war in Vietnam, he said, “The novelty this time is that the defeat has preceded the inauguration of hostilities.” Jonathan cut through the jingoism and mushroom cloud-mongering to remind us that prosecuting war now is the worst way to prevent war later.

Always steeped in history, his essays were straightforward, deeply informed, moving in their non-equivocating conscience. Not surprisingly, Jonathan’s work inspired a generation of activists and authors. He made it clear that on matters of conscience, inaction is unacceptable.

Jonathan’s best work has a timeless quality. His “Thinking the Unthinkable on Iran,” from April 2012, reminded us that war foolishly remained our government’s preferred means for preventing nuclear proliferation. In a creative reimagining of what is meant by the use of force, he argued that if the nuclear powers would agree to surrender their arsenals, they would be backed by “the force of the united will of the people of the world, aligned with their governments, to live free of the shadow of nuclear danger.”

Jonathan knew that more than words, or ideas, or even weapons, people possessed the true power to engender progress. In the dark days immediately after the Iraq invasion, he found a light more
brilliant and explosive than any ordnance fired by the Pentagon. Witnessing the gigantic global protests against the war, he wrote, “Shock and awe has found its riposte in courage and wonder.”

As talk of a new Cold War swirls around us, with Washington budgeting billions for nuclear weapons, we need Jonathan’s voice more than ever. We must reeducate ourselves to the peace mission he laid out.

Jonathan once said he valued the freedom The Nation accorded its writers. We will forever value Jonathan for the freedom he argued for and ceaselessly supported with his words and actions.

Peace, Jonathan

I met Jonathan Schell in 2003, just after the war in Iraq had erupted and his book The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People had been published. The latter was prophecy for the former, talking about how all the US firepower had done nothing to break the will of the Vietnamese people, and observing that violence was often not a sign of power but of weakness, and how little it could do to win or even crush hearts and minds, whatever it might do to bodies and places.

Largely ignored at the time, when many in the mainstream had thrown themselves into the cult of military power and fantasies of an American-dominated Middle East, Jonathan’s book has nevertheless become a talisman and key text for many of us, one that goes beyond the more pat versions of what nonviolence is and why it matters. His book was not an insistence on purist nonviolence, but an exploration of the will and acts of civil society as forces that can change the fate of a nation. He was saying in a quiet, scholarly way that we have power, and a book that in less capable hands would have been a condemnatory footnote to the Bush wars was instead a prefiguration of the opening passages of the Arab Spring and Occupy.

I met Schell at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books that bloody spring, and by saying something offhand about nuclear weapons, I opened up a conversation with Jonathan that trailed off in recent years but never ended. He seems to have had three major public eras in his life: as a critic of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s; as a singular voice about the threat of all-out nuclear war in the early age of Reagan; and then with his breathtakingly original critique of violence and rethinking of power eleven years ago. I have been told that Jonathan was at work on a book that might have remade our understanding of climate change, but, sadly, he was too ill to complete it or even leave us enough fragments to piece together his thinking.

Contemplating what that book might have been and how he might have bracketed for us the twin crises of technology—nuclear winter and the military destruction of the earth, versus the slow industrial overheating of it—is an invitation to think about them in tandem and to appreciate how much Jonathan deepened everything he considered. He had already posited nonviolence as the other major invention of the twentieth century, antithetical to the atomic bomb. He never stopped paying attention to the threat of nuclear weapons, even as the freeze movement (which he helped start) faded; the Soviet Union crumbled; and the world’s nuclear arsenals were reduced—but nevertheless remain, and remain a vast and largely overlooked threat now.

I had read The Fate of the Earth when it was serialized in The New Yorker in 1982, and some of my earliest political involvement had been in the antinuclear movement, which was galvanized by the slim and immensely influential book, published the same year. Jonathan was a modest man, always a bit aflutter; kind, diffident, embarrassed to receive praise but eager to give it; unworldly, contemplative by nature, a man who took questions and possibilities as far as he could through years of thought and research. His work on nonviolence was a tremendous influence on me, for its central argument and for its peripheral brilliances—that, for example, both the French and Russian revolutions were mostly nonviolent as they overthrew the previous regimes; violence arose in establishing the next.

Over the years we exchanged notes and books and saw each other every once in a while, when I was in New York or his brother, Orville, brought him west for a talk at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism. We were not close friends, but we were people who recognized in each other an alignment and a common set of principles, though I never read and adored Hannah Arendt as much as he hoped I would, and he never went as far into the anti-globalization and other contemporary movements as I hoped he would (to recognize them as the realization of some of his ideas about how popular power works). That he suffered makes me sad for his sake; that he’s gone now makes me sad for all of ours, because what he gave us was so beautiful, so significant, so strong. Books outlast their writers; his masterpieces are vividly alive now. We can remember Jonathan Schell by continuing to read his incomparable insights and analyses and be grateful that he gave us all those decades of words describing the world in unexpected and important ways.

Rebecca Solnit is the author of fifteen books, including Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities and A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster. She lives in San Francisco.
Why Cold War Again?

The East-West confrontation over Ukraine, which led to Moscow’s annexation of Crimea but long predated it, is potentially the worst international crisis in more than fifty years—and the most fateful. A negotiated resolution is possible, but time may be running out.

A new Cold War divide is already descending in Europe—not in Berlin but on Russia’s borders. Worse may follow. If NATO forces move toward Poland’s border with Ukraine, as is being called for in Washington and Europe, Moscow is likely to send its forces into eastern Ukraine. The result would be a danger of war comparable to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Even if the outcome is the nonmilitary “isolation of Russia,” today’s Western mantra, the consequences will be dire. Moscow will not bow but will turn, politically and economically, to the East, as it has done before, above all to fuller alliance with China. The United States will risk losing an essential partner in vital areas of its own national security, from Iran, Syria and Afghanistan to threats of a new arms race, nuclear proliferation and more terrorism. And—no small matter—prospects for a resumption of Russia’s democratization will be terminated for at least a generation.

Why did this happen, nearly twenty-three years after the end of Soviet Communism, when both Washington and Moscow proclaimed a new era of “friendship and strategic partnership”? The answer given by the Obama administration, and overwhelmingly by the US political-media establishment, is that President Vladimir Putin is solely to blame. The claim is that his “autocratic” rule at home and “neo-Soviet imperialist” policies abroad eviscerated the partnership established in the 1990s by Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin. This fundamental premise underpins the American mainstream narrative of two decades of US-Russian relations, and now the Ukrainian crisis.

But there is an alternative explanation, one more in accord with the facts. Beginning with the Clinton administration, and supported by every subsequent Republican and Democratic president and Congress, the US-led West has unrelentingly moved its military, political and economic power ever closer to post-Soviet Russia. Spearheaded by NATO’s eastward expansion, already encamped in the former Soviet Baltic republics on Russia’s border—now augmented by missile defense installations in neighboring states—this bipartisan, winner-take-all approach has come in various forms.

They include US-funded “democracy promotion” NGOs more deeply involved in Russia’s internal politics than foreign ones are permitted to be in our country; the 1999 bombing of Moscow’s Slav ally Serbia, forcibly detaching its historic province of Kosovo; a US military outpost in former Soviet Georgia (along with Ukraine, one of Putin’s previously declared “red lines”), contributing to a brief proxy war in 2008; and, throughout, one-sided negotiations, called “selective cooperation,” which took concessions from the Kremlin without meaningful White House reciprocity and followed by broken American promises.

All of this has unfolded, sincerely for some proponents, in the name of “democracy” and “sovereign choice” for the many countries involved, but the underlying geopolitical agenda has been clear. During the first East-West conflict over Ukraine, occasioned by its 2004 “Orange Revolution,” an influential GOP columnist, Charles Krauthammer, acknowledged, “This is about Russia first, democracy only second.… The West wants to finish the job begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall and continue Europe’s march to the east…. The great prize is Ukraine.” The late Richard Holbrooke, an aspiring Democratic secretary of state, concurred, hoping even then for Ukraine’s “final break with Moscow” and to “accelerate” Kiev’s membership in NATO.

That Russia’s political elite has long held this same menacing view of US intentions makes it no less true—or any less consequential. Formally announcing the annexation of Crimea on March 18, Putin vented Moscow’s longstanding resentments. Several of his assertions were untrue and alarming, but others were reasonable, or at least understandable, not “delusional.” Referring to Western (primarily American) policymakers since the 1990s, he complained bitterly that they were “trying to drive us into some kind of corner,” “have lied to us many times” and in Ukraine “have crossed the line,” warning: “Everything has its limits.”

We are left, then, with profoundly conflicting Russian-Western narratives and a political discourse of the incomprehending, itself often the prelude to war. Demonized for years, Putin receives almost no serious consideration in Washington. His annexation speech, for example, was dismissed as a “package of fictions” by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright. Nothing in Washington’s replies diminishes Putin’s reasonable belief that the EU trade agreement rejected by Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in November, and Yanukovych’s overthrow in February by violent street protests, leading to the current “illegitimate” government, were intended to sever Ukraine’s centuries-long ties with Russia and bind it to NATO. (“Today’s crisis was triggered by the EU’s reckless ultimatum, despite Putin’s offer of a “tripartite” agreement, which compelled an elected president of a deeply divided country to choose economically between the West and Russia, an approach since criticized by former German chancellors Helmut Kohl and…

The main culprit is NATO’s relentless expansionism. 

—Dave Zirin

TheNation.com/Students
Segregated Schools

According to a report by the UCLA’s Civil Rights Project, in 2009 New York State had the most racially segregated public schools in the country. The numbers are heavily influenced by New York City—the nation’s largest public school system—where nearly all black and Latino students attend schools in which students of color are the majority. In fact, black students typically attend schools in which fewer than 10 percent of the students are white, even though black students make up 30 percent of the district. The report also found that the dismantling of federal desegregation plans and the proliferation of charter schools have exacerbated racial segregation in New York.

—Julianne Hing

Colorlines.com

Marginalized Men

Will Obama help black men—or just lecture them?

Blacks are in the news. For a constituency that is a mere 6 percent of the population, they occupy a position that is unique in its visibility and vulnerability. On any given Sunday, like modern gladiators, they display their athletic prowess before audiences composed largely of wealthy white ticket-holders at basketball and football arenas throughout the country. They are similarly ubiquitous among the talent in the music industry, supplying a steady stream of singers and producers, from Quincy Jones and Berry Gordy to Jay-Z and Pharrell Williams.
"WOW! The perfect name for this amazing computer. Everything is so easy to use at the touch of my fingertips."

– Carol K., Benbrook, TX

WOW! The perfect name for this amazing computer. I have been using it for about a month and thoroughly enjoy the speed and ease in which I am able to download pictures from my camera and share them with family and friends via email. Everything is so easy to use at the touch of my fingertips. To be able to chat with and see my grandchildren as though they are here with me. I haven’t begun to explore all the benefits of this computer. It has opened up a whole new world for me. I love it, love it, love it!

– Carol K., Benbrook, TX

“WOW! The perfect name for this amazing computer. I have been using it for about a month and thoroughly enjoy the speed and ease in which I am able to download pictures from my camera and share them with family and friends via email. Everything is so easy to use at the touch of my fingertips. To be able to chat with and see my grandchildren as though they are here with me. I haven’t begun to explore all the benefits of this computer. It has opened up a whole new world for me. I love it, love it, love it!

– Carol K., Benbrook, TX

“WOW! The perfect name for this amazing computer. I have been using it for about a month and thoroughly enjoy the speed and ease in which I am able to download pictures from my camera and share them with family and friends via email. Everything is so easy to use at the touch of my fingertips. To be able to chat with and see my grandchildren as though they are here with me. I haven’t begun to explore all the benefits of this computer. It has opened up a whole new world for me. I love it, love it, love it!

– Carol K., Benbrook, TX

Whether you have never used a computer, or have tried one and found it too complicated… the WOW is for you. From the moment you open the box, you’ll see the difference. The components are all connected, all you do is plug it into an outlet and your high-speed Internet connection. Then you’ll see the screen – it’s now 22 inches. This is a completely new operating system, without the cluttered look of the normal computer screen. The “buttons” on the screen are easy to see and easy to understand. All you do is touch one of them, from the Web or Email or Calendar or Games— you name it— and a new screen opens up. It’s so easy to use, you won’t have to ask your children or grandchildren for help.

Don’t wait another minute… join the fun and call today! It’s nearly impossible to describe the difference in this computer- you have to try it for yourself. We’re so sure it will literally change your life that we are offering it to you with our exclusive 30-day home trial. Our knowledgeable product experts are standing by to answer any of your questions. There are no obligations and the call is toll-free, so why wait? Call now!

NEW
Now comes with...
- Larger 22-inch hi-resolution screen – easier to see
- 16% more viewing area
- Simple navigation – so you never get lost
- Intel® processor – lightning fast
- Computer is in the monitor – No bulky tower
- Advanced audio, Better speaker configuration – easier to hear
- Text to Speech translation – it can even read your emails to you!
- U.S. Based Customer Service

FREE
Automatic Software Updates

• Send & Receive Emails
• Have video chats with family and friends
• Surf the Internet:
  Get current weather and news
• Play games on line:
  Hundreds to choose from!

Call now toll free and find out how you can get the new WOW! Computer.

Mention promotional code 47946 for special introductory pricing.

1-877-718-2603

firstSTREET

© 2014 by firstSTREET for Boomers and Beyond, Inc.
Yet the quality of life for most black men in America is overwhelmingly negative. Across a broad array of indicators, the social and economic patterns are stark: in almost every aspect of life associated with success, black males are underrepresented, and in those aspects of life associated with failure and hardship, they are vastly overrepresented.

In education, the patterns are most disturbing. Black males have the highest dropout rates (50 percent or higher) in most cities and the lowest college enrollment, and they are more likely to be referred to special education or subjected to punitive discipline (suspension and expulsion) than any other group. They are more likely to be unemployed (and for longer periods), trapped in low-wage jobs or underrepresented in the professions. Finally, black and Latino men make up more than 50 percent of the US prison population. One out of thirty-five black men are behind bars, and one out of three can expect to be incarcerated at some point in his life.

These trends are not new. In fact, they have been around for so long that one could argue that the marginal status of black males has been “normalized”—like homelessness and cancer, accepted as an unpleasant but unavoidable fact of life. It may well be that the success of a small number of black men in sports and entertainment (and, perhaps, the ascension of one to the presidency) has obscured and overshadowed the dire hardships that beset the vast majority.

The lack of official response to this crisis finally came to an end in late February, when President Obama announced his My Brother’s Keeper initiative, an as-yet-undefined plan focused on addressing the plight of black males, which is designed to keep them in school and out of the criminal justice system. The initiative will bring foundations and private companies together to invest in a variety of strategies to support young black and Latino men. Already, hundreds of millions have been raised from private foundations (no public funds have been committed).

The initiative marks a departure for President Obama, who has largely avoided matters of race in his political career, well aware that his opponents would accuse him of “playing the race card” if there was even a hint that he was showing racial favoritism. Speaking at a press conference before a large group of young black men, the president made it clear that this is an issue he cares about deeply. He spoke in personal terms about his own challenges growing up: his marijuana use as a teenager, his lack of consistent effort in school, and the challenges he faced growing up without a father.

Some have expressed concern, based on Obama’s rhetorical emphasis on personal responsibility and his exhortations to young black men (“Brothers should pull up their pants”), that the president’s initiative will reinforce the notion that something is inherently wrong with young black men and not the society that has kept them isolated on the margins. And indeed, if the struggles of this group are defined as an attitude problem that can be fixed by exposing young black men to positive role models and admonishing them to display “grit,” we are unlikely to see the kinds of programs that concretely improve their lives.

To have an impact, the president will first have to recognize the structural barriers facing black and Latino men—lack of jobs in the inner city, persistently failing urban schools, mass incarceration and concentrated poverty—and then advance a set of policies aimed at removing them. This will not be easy. To call for a new series of education reforms would be an admission that his initiatives, like Race to the Top and the Common Core standards, have done little to improve academic outcomes for males of color.

Moreover, making the labor market more accessible to black and Latino men who are chronically unemployed and locked out of the labor force is a huge and complicated undertaking.

But there are ways that My Brother’s Keeper could make a difference. It could, for example, invest in the small number of educational and employment initiatives that have proven effective at meeting the needs of black and Latino men. YouthBuild provides job training and channels young men who have dropped out of school into construction jobs; Homeboy Industries has been successful in reducing violence and placing gang members and ex-convicts into jobs in Los Angeles, Milwaukee and the other cities where it operates; and Year Up, a private training program, has been able to help young people with just a high school diploma or GED find well-paid jobs in the finance and high-tech sectors.

These programs have been successful because they work at the nexus of education and employment and make it possible for those who have been shut out of the labor market to get jobs. Such programs won’t solve a problem that’s been centuries in the making, nor will they address the source of black male marginalization, frustration and despair. Still, by expanding opportunities for hundreds of young men, the president could show that his administration is capable of more than empty gestures. By taking meaningful action to help a constituency that has been counting on him (and that he is part of, at least theoretically), he can begin to restore the faith that has been eroding even among his most loyal supporters.

---

Pedro Noguera, a professor of sociology at New York University, is the co-author of Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys (Harvard Education Press).
Uncover the Secret Life of Words

If it seems as if English is changing all around you, you’re right. It’s evident in newer words such as “bling” and “email,” and from the loss of old forms such as “shall.” But does this mean our language is in decay—or is change just the natural order of things? The Secret Life of Words answers this question by presenting the fascinating history behind the everyday words in our lexicon.

Award-winning Professor Anne Curzan of the University of Michigan—a member of the American Dialect Society and the American Heritage Dictionary’s usage panel—approaches the subject like an archaeologist, digging deep below the surface to unearth the remarkable story of English, from its Germanic origins to the rise of globalization and cyber-communications. Packed with surprising insights, these 36 delightful lectures reveal how culture has evolved over the centuries and why there is no such thing as a boring word.

Offer expires 05/08/14
1-800-832-2412
WWW.THEGREATCOURSES.COM/3NTN
Sex Work: The New Normal?

Sure, let’s end the stigma. But why accept this intimate form of male privilege?

On the left, prostitution used to be seen as a bad thing: part of the general degradation of the working class, and the subjugation of women, under capitalism. Women who sold sex were victims, forced by circumstances into a painful and humiliating way of life, and socialism would liberate them. Now, selling sex is sex work—just another service job, with good points and bad—and if you suggest that the women who perform it are anything less than free agents, perhaps even “empowered” if they make enough money, you’re just a prude. Today’s villain is not the pimp or the john—it’s second-wave feminists, with their primitive men-are-the-enemy worldview, and “rescuers” like Nicholas Kristof, who presume to know what’s best for women.

The hot new left-wing journals are full of this thinking. Right now on the New Inquiry website, for example, you can take a satirical quiz called “Are You Being Sex Trafficked?” Of course, if you’re reading the New Inquiry, chances are you’re not being sex trafficked; if you’re a sex worker, chances are you’re a grad student or a writer or maybe an activist—a highly educated woman who has other options and prefers this one. And that is where things get tricky. Because in what other area of labor would leftists look to the elite craftsman to speak for the rank and file? You might as well ask a pastry chef what it’s like to ladle out mashed potatoes in a school cafeteria. In the discourse of sex work, it seems, the subaltern does not get to speak.

Melissa Gira Grant’s Playing the Whore, published by Verso and co-edited by Jacobin, is a good example of this phenomenon. It’s got a lot of Marxist bells and whistles—OK, OK, sex work is work, I get the point!—and is much concerned with the academically fashionable domains of language and representation, the portrayal of sex workers in movies and ads. “Sex workers should not be expected to defend the existence of sex work,” Grant writes, “in order to have the right to do it free from harm”—whether arrest or violence or the stigma of a fixed identity that can never be escaped. School teacher Melissa Petro discovered that when she lost her job after the New York Post got hold of an essay she had written about her time as an escort.

All fair enough, but the real world is more complicated. Grant has a great time beating the dead gray mare of 1980s anti-porn feminism but doesn’t seem to notice any difference between those vanished crusaders against smut—was any cause ever so decisively defeated?—and today’s campaigners against commercial sexual exploitation, who include former sex workers. Supporters of the “Swedish model” of outlawing the purchase but not the sale of sex—arrest johns, not sex workers—are “carceral feminists.” Women who fight sex trafficking are in it to build nonprofit empires, “jobs for the girls,” and are indistinguishable from paternalistic rescuers like Kristof.

Tellingly, Grant says barely a word about the women at the heart of this debate: those who are enslaved and coerced—illegal immigrants, young girls, runaways and throwaways, many of them survivors of sexual trauma, as well as transwomen and others cast out of mainstream society. Poor people, like the Chinese- and Korean-speaking women who are bused every morning from Queens to work in Nassau County massage parlors, or drug addicts doing survival sex in the Bronx, or the Honduran teenagers trafficked by a popular, politically connected New Jersey restaurateur—these girls and women are nowhere to be found in her pages. Nor does Grant concern herself with women like those Liberty Aldrich of the Center for Court Innovation told me she works with, the vast majority of whom would like to leave sex work but need help to do it—to get a GED, a place to live, connections to people who care about them.

The “sex work is work” cliché is that prostitution is much like any other service job—being a waitress is the usual example. I dunno how many waitresses would agree with that, and I don’t think anyone at Jacobin is asking them. But seriously, is it just prudery or fear of arrest or attack or stigma that keeps the vast majority of women working straight jobs? Maybe there’s a difference between a blow job and a slice of pie—one that is occluded when all types of service work are collapsed into one.
Shocker stat: among long-term unemployed interviewed 1 yr later, only 11 percent had found full-time, permanent jobs.

Jonathan Schell wrote: “A revival of worldwide disarmament negotiations must be the means, the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction the end. That idea has long been in eclipse, and today it lies outside the mainstream of political opinion. Unfortunately, historical reality is no respecter of conventional wisdom and often requires it to change course if calamity is to be avoided. But fortunately it is one element of the genius of democracy—and of US democracy in particular—that encrusted orthodoxy can be challenged and overturned by popular pressure. The movement against the war in Iraq should also become a movement for something, and that something should be a return to the long-neglected path to abolition of all weapons of mass destruction. Only by offering a solution to the problem that the war claims to solve but does not can this war and others be stopped….

“Let us try to imagine it: one human species on its one earth exercising one will to defeat forever a threat to its one collective existence….” True democracy is indispensable to disarmament, and vice versa. This is the power—not the power of cruise missiles and B-52s—that can release humanity from its peril.”

Kelly and Stepien became personally involved, although, by early August 2013, their personal relationship had cooled, apparently at Stepien’s choice.

We know now why those access lanes were closed. Yes, those of us who had no notion’ll Be pleased that Christie’s lawyers solved the case: A jilted female got emotional.

FINALLY

We know now why those access lanes were closed. Yes, those of us who had no notion’ll Be pleased that Christie’s lawyers solved the case: A jilted female got emotional.

exploitative—that it involves a particularly intimate form of male privilege, which bleeds into other areas of life—would be too sentimental, and too disturbing. It would mean, for example, thinking not just about the exhilarating figure of the sex worker but about the customer. This faceless man could be anyone: your colleague, your boyfriend, your father, your husband. Theoretically, if it’s OK to be a sex worker, it’s OK to be a john—after all, sex workers would be jobless without them. Do pro-sex work feminists really think that, though? I’d like to see an issue of Jacobin devoted to first-person accounts of buying sex. But men of the left seem content to let women fight the commercial sex battle for them. It’s chicks up front all over again.

It’s one thing to say sex workers shouldn’t be stigmatized, let alone put in jail. But when feminists argue that sex work should be normalized, they accept male privilege they would attack in any other area. They accept that sex is something women have and men get (do I hear “rape culture,” anyone?), that men are entitled to sex without attracting a partner, even to the limited extent of a pickup in a bar, much less pleasing or satisfying her. As Grant says, they are buying a fantasy—the fantasy of the woman who wants whatever they want (how johns persuade themselves of this is beyond me). But maybe men would be better partners, in bed and out of it, if they couldn’t purchase that fantasy, if sex for them, as for women, meant finding someone who likes them enough to exchange pleasure for pleasure, intimacy for intimacy. The current way of seeing sex work is all about liberty—but what about equality?

I thought the left was about that, too.
The Bush years were grim for progressives, but they did offer one small consolation: the hope that if only a smart and decent person could ascend to the White House, our politics could be repaired. Now, after years of destructive austerity and hopeless stalemate, that faith is dead. People on the left will debate where to lay the blame, but few will disagree that our federal institutions seem utterly unequal to the challenges of a country still reeling from economic crisis.

Indeed, our national politics are so deformed that it's hard even to imagine the steps necessary to fix things. Last year, The Boston Globe
ran an award-winning series, “Broken City,” about the entropy in Washington. The final piece noted that potential remedies for the country’s problems are met with “almost complete indifference in Washington, the world’s capital of gridlock, even when alternative, perhaps better, ways are already at work, some in plain sight.”

At the city level, though, things are very different. Among those who study urban governance and those who practice it, there’s an extraordinary sense of political excitement. An outpouring of books like If Mayors Ruled the World, Triumph of the City and The Metropolitan Revolution hymns urban dynamism. Not all the new urban optimists are on the left, but that’s where most of the energy is. With the federal government frozen, cities are seizing the initiative and becoming laboratories for progressive policy innovation. Amid widespread despair about national politics, cities have become new sources of hope.

“It’s a movement that reflects the paralyzed nature of the political system in Washington right now and the polarization of the political process,” says Neal Peirce, editor of Citiscope, an online magazine about cities that launched earlier this year. “On the local level, you can have these arguments without getting as much into partisan politics. At the same time, we’re having much more discussion about income inequality.” The result is a raft of local legislation intended to address problems that national politicians have let fester. “It’s quite a shift,” says Peirce. “It’s grown dramatically in the last year or so.”

There’s little chance, for example, that Congress will give us a living-wage law anytime soon, but the city of SeaTac in Washington State just raised its minimum wage to an unprecedented $15 an hour, and Los Angeles is considering a proposal to mandate a $15.37 minimum for workers at big hotels. San Francisco has adopted near-universal health coverage, including a program for the uninsured that functions like the “public option” left out of President Obama’s Affordable Care Act. The federal government has done disgracefully little about the collapse of the housing market, but Richmond, California, is pushing a bold, controversial plan to take over underwater mortgages through the use of eminent domain. Obama’s proposal for universal pre-K, first made in last year’s State of the Union address, may not go anywhere, but New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has promised to bring it to the country’s largest city, and both San Antonio and Denver have approved sales tax increases to pay for their own expanded preschool programs.

With a group of new, progressive mayors in office this year, the era of big-city liberalism has just begun. In addition to de Blasio, there’s Boston’s Marty Walsh, Minneapolis’s Betsy Hodges and Seattle’s Ed Murray, who wants to bring the $15 minimum wage to his city. Cities have the opportunity, Murray said in his State of the City address in February, to lead on “disparity in pay and in housing, in urban policing, on the environment and providing universal pre-K.” Quoting Franklin Delano Roosevelt, he called for “bold, persistent experimentation…. It is common sense to try a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

The Nation has launched a new project, “Cities Rising,” in order to report on these experiments. It will serve as a space to explore and share some of the most interesting ideas bubbling up around the country. Though the right controls most of the statehouses and large swaths of the federal government, the city, increasingly, belongs to progressives. We’re going to write about what they’re doing with it.

A few decades ago, the idea of cities as models of public-policy vitality would have seemed bizarre. In the 1960s and ’70s, urban America was seen as synonymous with chaos and decay. Manufacturing jobs flowed out of the cities in the 1960s, and by the end of that decade, a combination of economic privation and police brutality had sparked devastating urban riots nationwide. Violent crime shot up—according to Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, author of Triumph of the City, New York’s murder rate quadrupled from 1960 to 1975. Whites fled, and people of color who had the means soon followed them. A 1976 headline in The New York Times read: BLACK MIDDLE CLASS JOINING THE EXODUS TO WHITE SUBURBIA.

Many cities responded disastrously to their deterioration, razing poor neighborhoods and replacing them with federally funded urban renewal projects. Glaeser writes: “Those shiny new buildings were really Potemkin villages spread throughout America, built to provide politicians with the appearance of urban success…. Investing in buildings instead of people in places where prices were already low may have been the biggest mistake of urban policy over the past sixty years.”

Plenty of cities never came back from the dislocations of those years. A paper by Daniel Hartley, a research economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, points out that the Rust Belt cities of Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland and Pittsburgh lost more than 40 percent of their population over the past four decades. Hartley describes what happened as “reverse gentrification,” in which poverty encroached into formerly high-income neighborhoods. In these places, sheer economic desperation rather than inequality is the problem. And that's even harder to address, because there's little wealth there to redistribute, al-

The bureaucratic effort to engineer “cool” has failed to bring economic relief to hard-pressed urban areas.

Betsy Hodges is the new Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party mayor of Minneapolis.

Former construction worker and union member Marty Walsh is the new mayor of Boston.

The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life

Top: FLICKR/MPLS55408.COM, DAVID PARSONS

There are limits, of course, to what city governments can do independently. “The background issue for all mayors is that they are compelled to deal with the consequences of a system over which they have no power,” says the political theorist Benjamin Barber, author of If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities. Mayors have little say in the structures of global capitalism. De Blasio is proposing a city ID that would help undocumented New Yorkers when it comes to leases, bank accounts and other services, but he can’t regulate immigration or give out visas. New York City can’t even raise income taxes on its own. All this means that rather than addressing root causes, cities have to focus on “amelioration, palliation,” says Barber.

That said, city governments have certain advantages. For one thing, the far right has little power in cities. Texas may be the state that gave us Ted Cruz, but its biggest city, Houston, is run by Annise Parker, a Democrat and a lesbian who won her third term last year. Similarly, Salt Lake City, the capital of blood-red Utah, has a Democratic mayor, Ralph Becker, last year, when a judge struck down the state’s gay marriage ban, Becker...
Enjoy 12 superb wines for ONLY $69.99*

A special offer to Nation readers for joining + a special gift!

Direct Delivery to Your Door
By joining the Nation Wine Club, you’ll save $100 on 12 world-class wines. Then, five times a year (spring, summer, fall, holiday & winter) we’ll reserve for you an equally exciting dozen. There’s no commitment - you can accept, decline, change wines or delay delivery. All future cases are just $143.99 (saving at least 20%) and come with tasting notes, recipes, and a 100% money back guarantee.

ORDER NOW AT WWW.THENATIONWINECLUB.COM/PRINT OR CALL 800-659-1364

Your membership supports The Nation’s one-of-a-kind journalism.
The Nation Wine Club sources wines with progressive values.

*Plus $19.99 tax + shipping.
officiated at rushed weddings before a stay could be issued. In 2013, the radical human rights lawyer Chokwe Lumumba was elected mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, with more than 85 percent of the vote. (Tragically, he died of a heart attack after only eight months in office.) San Diego is the only one of the nation’s ten biggest cities to be led by a Republican, Kevin Faulconer, who won a special election after the Democratic mayor resigned amid a torrent of sexual harassment claims.

City government is thus largely free of the sort of conservative ideological grandstanding that has left Washington deadlocked. Of course, Democratic domination doesn’t necessarily mean progressivism—decades of machine politics have shown that. But it does mean that cities are liberated from culture-war skirmishing and market fundamentalism, giving them the chance to focus on what works. “Local governments tend to attract people who are solution-oriented rather than ideologues,” says Dave Cieslewicz, the former mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, and the co-founder of the Mayors Innovation Project, a network of progressive city leaders. “I don’t know many Tea Party mayors. As a rule, cities tend to hang together pretty well in terms of being politically homogenous and therefore governable.”

This has left our cities ideally placed to experiment with policies that mitigate, if not reverse, the ravages of poverty and economic inequality. Consider San Francisco, where two contradictory stories about inequality are playing out at once. On the one hand, San Francisco is the second-most-unequal city in the United States, according to the Brookings Institution (Atlanta ranks first). In the London Review of Books, Rebecca Solnit describes a crisis “precipitated by a huge influx of well-paid tech workers driving up housing costs and causing evictions, gentrification and cultural change.” Google buses have become the symbol of the city’s rapid transformation, and protesters have made international news blocking them as they try to ferry the company’s well-paid workers from their homes in San Francisco to their jobs in Silicon Valley.

Yet even as San Francisco exemplifies the social stratification of the postindustrial economy, it is also, more quietly, pioneering a new social safety net. Since 1996, the city has enacted some of the country’s most comprehensive laws on wages, benefits, paid sick leave and healthcare access. Michael Reich, the director of the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, and Ken Jacobs, chair of the UC Berkeley Labor Center, write that these measures, taken together, “represent a new social compact among businesses, workers, and government.”

Along with Miranda Dietz, Reich and Jacobs are the editors of the new book When Mandates Work: Raising Labor Standards at the Local Level, a careful, scholarly look at San Francisco’s largely unheralded policy experiment, which picked up steam a decade ago. In 2003, a ballot initiative made San Francisco the country’s first major city to enact its own minimum wage law, initially set at $8.50 an hour. (Tied to the Bay Area Consumer Price Index, it climbed to $10.55 by 2013.) Two years later, San Francisco instituted a Working Families Credit to supplement the Earned Income Tax Credit. The year after that, it became the first US city to require employers to provide paid sick leave. And it passed the groundbreaking San Francisco Health Care Security Ordinance, which mandated minimum health spending requirements for businesses with twenty or more workers and created Healthy San Francisco, which provides comprehensive healthcare to uninsured city residents.

“Although this public option is not formally considered insurance,” Reich and Jacobs note in their book, “it is tantamount to a generous public insurance policy, with the significant caveat that it is restricted to a network of providers located only within San Francisco.”

Although such policies will not be enough to reverse the dynamics that threaten to transform San Francisco into a playground for privileged high-tech workers, they have proved amazingly successful at improving the lives of people struggling to get by in a terribly unequal environment. As Reich and Jacobs write: “Remarkably, and despite many warnings about dire negative effects, these new policies raised living standards significantly for tens of thousands of people, and without creating any negative effects on employment. While modest by most European and Canadian standards, San Francisco’s policies represent a bold experiment in American labor market policies that provides important lessons for the rest of the United States.”

Elements of that experiment will likely soon be replicated in other cities. The push for local minimum wage laws, says Alan Berube, deputy director of the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program, has “serious legs” in the wake of last year’s progressive mayoral victories. “You can trace it back to the Occupy movement and [Mitt Romney’s] ‘47 percent’ and what was a broader kind of national growing awareness of inequality and its effects,” he says.

Berube especially credits the Service Employees International Union, which led last year’s successful campaign for a $15-an-hour minimum wage in SeaTac, the city around the Seattle–Tacoma International Airport, which has grown increasingly poor as airport wages declined. “It got attention because it was audacious, and I think that’s proven helpful to the cause of folks who are looking to do this in other places,” he says. In March, for example, Chicago voters overwhelmingly passed a nonbinding referendum calling for a $15 minimum wage for companies that do business in the city and gross more than $50 million a year.
Just as reactionary ideas tend to spread from one state legislature to another—witness the recent tide of state-level anti-abortion laws—good ideas spread among the cities. “Mayors are incredibly competitive and constantly bragging on their own cities,” says Cieslewicz, who founded the Mayors Innovation Project (originally called the New Cities Project) in 2005 as an alternative to the more mainstream US Conference of Mayors. “One result of that is the sharing of best practices. Mayors always want to tell you what it is they accomplished—and when they get challenged and hear that someone did it better, they want to steal that idea.”

One idea that Cieslewicz wants to steal comes out of Cleveland, where a group of worker-owned green cooperatives in low-income neighborhoods have been serving the city’s hospitals and college campuses since 2008. “Universities and hospitals in Cleveland are literally spending billions of dollars a year on all kinds of services: food for the cafeteria, laundry—hospitals go through an incredible amount of laundry,” Cieslewicz says. “What they did was set up three cooperatives, one dealing with laundry—it’s the greenest laundry service in Ohio—another producing local food, and a third one dealing with solar energy. Because every dollar that’s not being spent on fossil fuel—not being exported—can be kept in the community.”

The cooperatives, which receive both government and foundation support and bring in about $6 million a year, hire people from the surrounding neighborhoods and give them an ownership share, which is paid for through a payroll deduction and allows the workers to build up thousands of dollars in equity. All of this creates “a symbiotic relationship between these powerful big institutions and the neighborhoods that surrounded them,” Cieslewicz says. He’s now promoting a similar idea through his consulting business: “Of all the ideas I’ve gotten from the Mayors Innovation Project, that’s the one I love the most.”

For now, Cieslewicz believes that local initiatives—some modest and discreet, others sweeping and ambitious—represent the only way to make progress against poverty and inequality. “I’m a liberal Democrat,” he says. “I believe in the War on Poverty, and I wish the federal government would concentrate its resources on these issues. The truth is, it’s just not going to happen anytime soon. But it can happen at the local level.”

REMEMBERING THE

For years, the 1914 assault on striking miners was a touchstone of our radical tradition.

by THAI JONES

The tents huddled together on the high prairie. For seven months, they had borne deluge, frost and blizzard. In that time, the occupants—more than 1,000 striking coal miners and their families—had also endured the fear and fact of violence. On April 20, 1914, the sun rose at 5:20 am. It was the 209th daybreak over the tent colony at Ludlow, Colorado. And it was also the last.

The next twenty-four hours, in which roughly a score of people were killed, would be the bloodiest in the entire sanguinary history of the American labor movement. Immortalized as the Ludlow Massacre, its causes and ramifications have been discussed, disputed and decried for a century. As with the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911 or the Haymarket Riot of 1886, it generated martyrs, villains, monuments, social legislation and mass movements.

For years, the Ludlow Massacre was a touchstone of our radical tradition. Its legacy was fashioned and
sustained by some of the brightest publicists of the left, including John Reed, “Mother” Bloor, Upton Sinclair, Woody Guthrie, George McGovern and Howard Zinn. “It was a watershed event,” wrote novelist and historian Wallace Stegner. Ludlow, he thought, had touched “the conscience of the nation, and if it did not make raw corporate gun-law impossible, it gave it a bad name. At the very least, it made corporations more careful.”

The union movement drew enough strength from the events at Ludlow—as well as its defeats and victories on untold shop floors across the country—to force the implementation of new forms of welfare support and working-class power. In the 1930s and ’60s, the battle cry “Remember Ludlow!” inspired advocates for labor and civil rights. By the 1970s, however, the fatalities in those coalfields felt like wounds from a distant past, and the massacre fell from political discourse and education curriculums.

And then the world changed back. The gains of labor began to be undone, and the factors that defined the conflict in Colorado are with us once again: class warfare, corporate monopoly, environmental ruin, the demand for workers’ justice, the influence of media and public opinion. One hundred years on, the Ludlow Massacre is a starkly contemporary tragedy.

By 8 am on April 20, mountain breezes were gusting up loose earth around the tents. A clear, mild morning and the ordinary busyness of the community belied an atmosphere of dread that had been lingering for days. Nerves tensed as a squad of Colorado state militiamen rode past the baseball diamond and washing lines, into the center of the settlement. The uniformed men demanded to search the camp. Union leaders refused. The military promised to return.

Strikers took this ultimatum as proof of a looming attack. After months of strain, the ground suddenly teemed with motion. Terrified noncombatants fled the colony for a protective row of hills to the north and west. “Everybody was in a hurry-flurry,” recalled the local postmistress, “getting their children out of the way.” Union men shouldering rifles deployed south and east across the flats, hoping to divert enemy fire away from the tents. On the other side of no-man’s land, the soldiers prepared for battle. Privates raced to fill sandbags. Leaving headquarters, Lt. Karl Linderfelt, the brutal leader of the militia’s most feared unit, packed a machine gun on a mule cart and headed off to the front lines.

The battle lasted for hours, but the events of this day stemmed from decades, even eons, of history. Seventy million years earlier, verdant organic matter was overtopped by earth and began the process of coalification. By the nineteenth century, surveyors in southern Colorado came across an arid territory devoid of rivers and sparsely treed. The land wasn’t well-suited for farming, but it abounded with resources. A single ten-mile zone, one engineer reckoned, contained enough coal to power 2,000 locomotives for a century.

“Fossil fuels and the energy they contained,” writes Thomas Andrews in Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War, “transformed environments, refashioned everyday life, and deepened divisions of wealth and status.” Coal attracted railroads, steelworks, downtown business districts and monopoly capital. The Rockefeller family became majority owners of Colorado Fuel & Iron, the largest employer in the state. The laborers there were spectacularly diverse; twenty-four languages were spoken in the coalfields. African-Americans, Mexicans, Asians, Britons, Germans, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Swedes—all worked in close proximity. Many sojourned for a short stay and then returned home. Louis Tikas, from Crete, stayed and became a leader of the United Mine Workers, in charge of running affairs at the Ludlow colony.

No one knows who fired first. But by morn-

Dying for a union: The striking miners and their families, 1914. From top left to top right: members of the Colorado National Guard posing with their rifles; the tent colony in ruins after the attack; the funeral procession for victims of the massacre.
men had combat experience from European conflicts; maneuvering expertly, they sought to outflank the enemy position. State troopers were fewer at first, with less training and discipline, yet they dominated the battlefield. “The militia might have been outnumbered,” writes Scott Martelle in Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West, “but they were not outgunned.” Their machine guns fired thousands of rounds over the course of the day.

A soldier was shot in the neck and bled out. A striker “cried and cried” after being hit in the temple. A young man watching the battle had the top half of his skull blown off. An 11-year-old boy hiding in one of the tents fell dead with a bullet lodged in his brain. Wounded men and animals lay twisted across the field.

Militia reinforcements arrived throughout the afternoon. The strikers gradually fell back under the heightened assault by hundreds of soldiers. By 7 PM, the army pushed into Ludlow itself. The first tent began to blister and burn just as the sun was setting.

For decades, the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company had practiced every kind of industrial extortion or tyranny: overpriced company stores, lax safety standards, patriarchal social control, importation of scabs, exacerbation of ethnic rivalries. A coal miner in the district was three times more likely to be killed on the job than the average American laborer. Workers lived in company-owned hovels, which is why, when the work stoppage began, the UMWA provided families with tents. Near a tiny railroad depot, miles from any town, Ludlow was the largest in a topography of camps that altogether housed more than 10,000 strikers.

A variety of grievances drove the workers toward open revolt, but the protest was fundamentally about the right to join a union. In April 1914, John D. Rockefeller Jr. sanctimoniously told Congress that his family’s commitment to the “open shop”—a capitalist euphemism for a nonunion workplace—was a great American principle. Labor organizers believed the right to be protected and sustained by a union was worth dying for. Their enemies were ready to kill to prevent it.

Even before the battle, the Colorado strike was among the deadliest industrial conflicts in US history. Since its beginning in September 1913, nearly twenty people had been murdered. Scuffles between workers and the corporation had drawn state militiamen to the coalfields. The soldiers had originally come to preserve the peace, but as the months passed, volunteers were largely replaced by a corps of mine guards, pit bosses and mercenaries, who showed open enmity toward the strikers. Recurrent gunfire inspired many families to entrench. Some dug pits under the floorboards of their tents. Beneath one of the largest structures, there was a deep bunker meant to serve as a maternity ward for the settlement’s pregnant women.

As night fell on the 20th, the soldiers rioted amid the flames. The men, a military investigation would find, “had passed out of their officers’ control; had ceased to be an army and had become a mob.” They looted dresses and suits, bedding, jewelry, bicycles, silverware. Meanwhile, they systematically burned the tents, dousing the fabric with coal oil before tossing matches on the pyre.

With the fires spreading, women and children still in the camp fled from shelter to shelter. Many congregated in the bunker turned maternity ward. Terrified of the marauding militia, they remained even as the tent above them became engulfed in flames. They coughed in the smoke, and their prayers quickened as the fire extracted the oxygen from their hiding place and the floorboards above them grew too hot to touch.

During the strike months, no one had done more than Tikas, the union leader, to forestall violence. He was a “power for good,” acquaintances would recall, a “very quiet man.” Working to secure amity until the first gunshots made peace impossible, he had spent the entire day of the battle rushing between the tents, shepherding dozens to safety.

When the soldiers arrived in the evening, Tikas asked permission to continue searching for survivors. In response, Lieutenant Linderfelt smashed his Springfield rifle over the unarmed man’s skull so hard that he separated the stock from the barrel. His soldiers then murdered the union leader, putting three shots in his back and leaving him as he fell, face down in the sand. Three days would pass before the soldiers allowed Tikas’s body to be removed for interment.

On April 21, the morning after the battle, the sun rose over a scene of desolation. Smoke curled into the sky above a debris-filled ruin. Canvas and wood had burned away, leaving behind wracked iron bedsteads and cook stoves. Whiskey bottles littered the ground. Militiamen torched any structures that remained intact, refusing access to the Red Cross and firing without warning on passersby.

It was almost midday when rescue workers finally searched the maternity ward. Beneath the charred remains of the tent, they discovered the bodies of two young mothers and their eleven children, all of whom had suffocated.

**Class War in Colorado,** the title of Max Eastman’s essay in the June 1914 issue of The Masses, with cover art by John Sloan


**initial news of a “sharp fight between militia and strikers” spread quickly across Western newspapers. Within weeks, Americans were already speaking of the “Ludlow Massacre.” From the very first moments, no one doubted the enormity of the horror. “Worse than the order that sent the Light Brigade into the jaws of death,” The New York Times editorialized, “was the order that trained the**
machine guns of the State Militia of Colorado upon the strikers’ camp of Ludlow.”

Yet even while commentators shaped a narrative of massacre, miners were already declaring the need for vengeance. A defiant funeral procession for Tikas stretched for miles across the prairie. The UMW issued a call to arms, rousing more than 1,000 strikers into the field. Workers mounted “a miniature revolution,” in Upton Sinclair’s words, destroying mine property, sacking company towns and killing as many people as had been slain at Ludlow. Their forces were approaching Denver itself before the US Army arrived to restore order.

The outrage ignited protests in major cities across the nation. Demonstrators jammed Union Square in New York City. Socialists took the conflict directly to the richest men on the planet, picketing the Standard Oil Building on lower Broadway. Under the pressure, Rockefeller collapsed and took to his bed.

Radical revolutionists found even these efforts insufficient. “This is no time for theorizing, for fine-spun argument and phrases,” wrote Alexander Berkman in *Mother Earth*. “With machine guns trained upon the strikers, the best answer is—dynamite.” Disciples soon heeded this injunction. On July 4, 1914, three anarchists died after a bomb they were constructing—almost certainly to assassinate Rockefeller—prematurely detonated in their East Harlem tenement.

The Rockefellers would spend years working to efface the tarnish of Ludlow from the family reputation. They financed a massive public relations campaign and created new forms of managerial practice, offering workers important concessions (though not the crucial one of union membership). Such innovations, demanded by the nightmare of Colorado, would become the hallmarks of twentieth-century industrial relations.

In 1918, the UMW unveiled a monument to the fallen near the site of the battle. It took only a few decades for the shrine to outlast its milieu: the mining industry abandoned Colorado, working families were forced to move on, and the granite monolith positioned a half-mile off Interstate 25, south of Pueblo, remained as one of the few testaments to what had once been a landscape of epic struggle.

Observing from the vantage point of a half-century later, Howard Zinn saw two ways of understanding Ludlow. “If it is read narrowly, as an incident in the history of the trade union movement and the coal industry,” he wrote, “then it is an angry splotch in the past, fading rapidly amidst new events.” A second, more expansive view, he believed, revealed the true significance of the events of 1914: “If it is read as a commentary on a larger question—the relationship of government to corporate power and of both to movements of social protest—then we are dealing with the present.”

The export of manufacturing jobs abroad has produced an undoing of memory. Today, the nation is divided by the kind of severe income disparities last seen during the Gilded Age, and yet the traditions of labor militancy and resistance to corporate ferocity that flowered in the era of heavy industry have been largely forgotten by both workers and employers. But Ludlow is the terminus of capitalism’s regressive path. If our future is shaped by the further degradation of labor rights, there can only be more massacres and new monuments.
In late January, President Obama met some two dozen CEOs at the White House to discuss the plight of the long-term unemployed. Frustrated by the refusal of congressional Republicans to extend unemployment insurance benefits, Obama persuaded several hundred companies to sign a “best practices” hiring pledge promising not to discriminate against those who have been unable to find work for a lengthy period of time.

Among the executives present was Don Thompson, who made nearly $14 million in 2012 as the CEO of the McDonald’s Corporation, and whose restaurant workers are paid so little that they must rely on $1.2 billion in public assistance each year. Also present was Boeing CEO Jim McNerney, who earned $23.3 million in 2013 while threatening to move his company to a right-to-work state if the machinists’ union did not accept a contract that froze pensions and limited future raises. Walmart, which last year chose to buy back $7.6 billion of its own stock when it could have raised employee pay by more than $5 an hour instead, signed the agreement, as did JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America, whose fraudulent mortgage practices helped tank the economy and destroy decades of middle-class wealth. “I was really grateful to all of them for stepping up in this way,” Obama said.

The confab neatly illustrated the Democratic Party’s current predicament. As public disgust with rising inequality and a protracted jobs crisis compels a populist approach to governing and campaigning, the party remains inextricably tied to some of the elites responsible for the underlying problems. Publicly, the party seems united—but who is truly dedicated to reversing the country’s alarming descent into oligarchy, and who is just using the issue of the day to burnish their credentials or troll for votes?

At first blush, it might seem difficult to discern pretenders from true populists. Almost everyone who identifies as even an inch left of center acknowledges the need to address income inequality. The centrist Democratic think tank Third Way is a notable exception: it issued a lonely warning in a December Wall Street Journal op-ed that economic populism is “a dead end for Democrats.”

But look everywhere else: Chuck Schumer, the third-ranking Democrat in the Senate and one of the party’s biggest recipients of Wall Street campaign donations, laid out an unmistakable populist offensive in a January speech. “We must focus, this year, on four or five simple but compelling examples of where government can help the average family,” he said. Schumer suggested that Democrats pick and choose from a range of issues that includes extended unemployment insurance, raising the minimum wage, college affordability and other education assistance, infrastructure spending, equal pay for women, universal pre-school, job training and closing corporate tax loopholes.

Obama echoed Schumer’s populist pitch days later in his State of the Union address. Even folks like former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers are declaring income inequality “a major economic issue in the United States and beyond.”

The gloss of consensus, however, obscures deep divisions about inequality—including the explanation for its origins. Progressives like Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren explain concentrated wealth as the result of a rigged system that funnels the gains of the few to the detriment of the many. Opponents, however, argue that inequality is the result of individual choices and merit-based rewards. Without a clearer understanding of the underlying causes of inequality, it will be difficult to craft policies that truly address the needs of the American middle class.
from workers’ productivity to their bosses. On the other hand, a competing story of American inequality has emerged—one that “basically says it’s something happening out there, to us, and if we are at fault, it is only that we have been slow in responding to what’s happened,” observes economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz.

This is the narrative Barack Obama frequently offers. “Over more than three decades, even before the Great Recession hit, massive shifts in technology and global competition had eliminated a lot of good, middle-class jobs and weakened the economic foundations that families depend on,” he said in his recent State of the Union address. Robert Borosage, the co-director of the progressive think tank Institute for America’s Future, calls this “a version of events that neatly elides talking about the deliberate policy decisions that have led to increasingly unchecked corporate power. CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, for example, argues that when it comes to inequality, there is “a powerful story to be told about how technology, globalization, and declining American education and skills have contributed to the stagnation of wages for the median worker.”

The New York Times’ Thomas Friedman also repeatedly blames an untrained workforce for the country’s widespread unemployment, despite lacking evidence of a labor shortage.

Proponents of this viewpoint rarely, if ever, mention the declining bargaining power of the American worker—one of the chief causes of income inequality. The Economic Policy Institute found that the decline of unions accounts for about three-quarters of the increased wage gap between white- and blue-collar male workers from 1978 to 2011. Yet that fact remains virtually unmentioned in the “inevitable globalization” version of events.

This is not to say there’s nothing to the argument that globalization and technological change have driven the inequality crisis. “But,” Stiglitz cautions, “each of those have been shaped by our policies. So, for instance, with globalization, the rules of the game have all been set by legislation, treaties—NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement], the WTO [World Trade Organization]—and tax laws that made it easy to outsource jobs. The way we made globalization work, with all the volatility—it didn’t have to be that way.”

NOT SURPRISINGLY, PEOPLE WHO PERCEIVE wealth at the top as being disconnected from the losses in the middle and at the bottom have put forward solutions that fail to address the structural basis of the inequality crisis. In fact, the center-left’s inequality agenda depends on a modified trickle-down model, in which special treatment for the corporate class—people like Don Thompson and Jim McNerney—is the solution, rather than part of the problem.

Summers, though he has identified inequality as a major issue, has some crucial qualifications. “Reducing inequality is good, but it’s fifty times better to do it by lifting those up who are low than by tearing down those who are high,” he said in March. Democratic strategist Paul Begala has similarly called on the Democrats to “focus on the aspirational side of this—lifting people up—not on just complaining about a lack of fairness.”

Former New York Times editor Bill Keller, a self-appointed spokesman for the center-left, called for an inequality agenda aimed at “unleash[ing] the energy of the private sector.” Similarly, Al From, founder of the Democratic Leadership Council, claims that “without private sector growth, a redistribution strategy is self-defeating. That’s why Democrats cannot afford to lose our appreciation for business and the private sector.” While From ostensibly welcomes a populist campaign, he nevertheless advocates slashing Social Security and Medicare in his recent memoir.

The president himself has made a subtle shift in language, moving away from talking about inequality explicitly and instead speaking in terms of “opportunity.” The Obama economic agenda outlined of late has many echoes of the Keller approach: he wants revenue-neutral tax reform that would lower overall rates and bring home the money that corporations have stashed overseas at a fraction of the standard tax rate. The Obama administration is also pushing hard for more liberalized trade in the form of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (leaked drafts of which indicate that it contains substantial deregulatory language, including for the financial sector), while maintaining a stubborn insistence on deficit reduction. Although it took Social Security cuts out of its recent budget, the administration has expressed a desire to enact them should Republicans come to the table.

Most Democrats, from Obama to Summers, do favor some laudable measures to reduce inequality, such as closing tax loopholes that benefit the very wealthy, raising the minimum wage and strengthening the safety net for the very poor. Those are good policies, but they are not aimed at fundamentally changing the structure of the increasingly skewed economy. “Some of this is just getting back what we lost—just recently lost, not since 1968,” says Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. “It’s not a game-changer.” CEOs would be forced to spread a bit more of their profits around, but they’d still be winning the game.

Essentially, such proposals square with the strategy advocated by Zakaria. “This strikes me as the right approach: how to get people to move up and thus create a thriving middle class. If, in the process, the Google guys stay rich, so be it,” he has said.
Incidentally, the “Google guys” constitute an emerging power center in the Democratic Party. A group of Silicon Valley moguls—led by Sean Parker, a Facebook investor and one of the founders of FWD.us; Ro Khanna, a lawyer and former Commerce Department deputy assistant secretary; and Shervin Pishevar, a venture capitalist—are at the forefront of a concentrated effort to increase the clout that the tech sector wields on a broad range of issues. Citing a sense of social conscience, they are funding political advocacy groups, advising the White House, writing legislation, spending millions on lobbying and even—in the case of Khanna—running for office themselves. “We need to put our heads together and seize control over this system, quickly and stealthily, before incumbent players wake up to what’s happening,” Parker said last year.

But it’s not clear that this Silicon Valley “populism” extends far beyond the tech sector’s specific interests. Even the moguls who acknowledge inequality seem blithely oblivious to its scale—and to their own complicity. Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, for example, acknowledged that companies like his bear some responsibility for the deepening economic divide in San Francisco; he has also said that one of the remedial efforts he was most proud of was starting a weekly neighborhood outing to pick up the trash.

Then there’s the main “Google guy,” chairman Eric Schmidt (net worth: $8 billion), a major Democratic donor who said in 2012 that he was “very proud” of his company’s tax practices, which shield billions annually from the federal government.

Schmidt took up the inequality conundrum during his address at the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference in March. He proposed three ways for the government to close the gap: shore up the safety net for the poorest citizens; invest in education, particularly in science and technology; and give more support to fast-growing start-ups, which he dubbed “gazelles.”

But even with the favoritism Schmidt is calling for, past results suggest the gazelles will not live up to their promise as job creators. Silicon Valley has generated only 30,000 tech-related positions since 2008, while the region lost more than 40,000 manufacturing jobs in little more than a decade. Google’s $380 billion market cap is about seven times greater than General Motors’, but GM employs more than four times as many workers. Meanwhile, WhatsApp—which Facebook bought in February for $19 billion—employs just fifty people.

Schmidt sees no problem with the imbalance. As he said at SXSW, “Let us celebrate capitalism: $19 billion for fifty people? Good for them.” Schmidt’s inequality agenda is opportunism at its most crass: it may make him and his friends even richer, but it’s no prescription for full employment or higher wages for the masses.

T

These days, every politician wants to be a populist, but few want a class war. The essential question for Democrats is whether or not an effective policy response demands one. Unserious contributions like Schmidt’s, if accepted as “populist” policy, threaten to reduce a question of justice to a discussion of how the 1 percent can have its cake and put its fingers in the populist pie, too. But when progressives like Warren talk about breaking up the “too big to fail” banks, reforming corporate governance structures or tying wages to productivity, they are calling for a deep rupturing of the pact that Democrats have made with the corporate elite.

Many party centrists aren’t ready to end the affair. “The essential problem with the Democratic Party is that you have, for a variety of reasons, a wide number of Democrats who are also dependent on corporate interests for their funding and their support and, you know, have not come down clearly on the side of working families,” says Bernie Sanders, one of the Senate’s most stalwart progressives.

Of serious concern now is the prospect that those who don’t really want to address fundamental inequities will push Washington away from even modest reforms at the first possible opportunity. The backlash could come after the fall’s midterm elections, in which Democrats are forecast to fare poorly, due in large part to gerrymandering and a number of Senate swing races happening almost exclusively in red states.

The critical task, then, lies in building a national movement strong enough to convince the Democrats that making a real commitment to workers and the poor is not only a moral but a political imperative.

Heather McGhee, the president of the social justice policy organization Demos, notes that “politicians are opportunists—we just have to keep telling them this is the best opportunity, over and over again.” The willingness of tens of thousands of low-wage workers to walk off the job is what pushed the Democrats to embrace a wage hike as a rallying cry for 2014, and Obama to raise the minimum wage for federal contractors.

“There is only so far that a technocratic approach can take us,” McGhee adds. “I think that the story we tell about the future of our country and what’s gotten us to this place has to have heroes; it has to have redemption; it has to have a sense of what’s right and what’s wrong.”

It must also have villains. Senator Sherrod Brown, who won a tough 2012 race in Ohio with a pro-labor message and harsh words for Wall Street, showed that voters far from the liberal coasts are ready for stronger stuff. “Republicans commit class warfare every day,” he notes, but when Democrats point it out, “they accuse us of class warfare. And too many of us shrink from the discussion—and from the battle. Once we get over that fear, we not only govern better; we win elections.”
What if you want it both ways and right down the middle?

The Purple Network has you covered

Combining three legacy brands in print and online

The Purple Network delivers
more total circulation
than every other beltway publication combined!

nearly
300,000
print subscribers

delivers
50% MORE
DC Metro circulation
than POLITICO

online audience of
4.5 MILLION
unique visitors

To advertise with the Purple Network contact:
Andrew Pedersen | apedersen@thenation.com | 212 209 5445
Ellen Bollinger | Ellen@thenation.com | 212 209 5415

*Erdos & Morgan Opinion Leader Study
The Nation.

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Katrina vanden Heuvel
PRESIDENT: Teresa Stack
MANAGING EDITOR: Roane Carey
LITERARY EDITOR: John Palatella
EXECUTIVE EDITORS: Betsy Reed, Richard Kim (online)
SENIOR EDITORS: Emily Douglas (online), Sarah Leonard
DEPUTY LITERARY EDITOR: Mariam Markowitz
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Robert Best
COPY DIRECTOR: Rick Szykowny
COPY CHIEF: Judith Long
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR: Kate Murphy
ASSISTANT COPY EDITOR: Matthew Grace
COPY ASSOCIATE: Lisa Vandepaepe
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR: Francis Reynolds
COMMUNITY EDITOR: Annie Shields
ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR: Ricky D’Ambrose
INTERNS: Sam Adler-Bell, Dustin Christensen, Cecilia D’Anastasio, Simon Davis-Cohen, Justine K. Drennan, Corinne Grinapol, Mara Kardas-Nelson (online)
E-mail to letters@thenation.com (300-word limit). Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

Plus ça change...

Has the Front National won the soul of France? I doubt it [Cécile Alduy, “The Battle for the Soul of France,” March 24]. This is just a by-election. The French, as they are wont to do, are so pissed off with both major parties of the left and right that they will vote against them by electing FN candidates—because these elections (mostly regional) are not that important. Then, when the really ‘n’ truly important elections arrive next year... well, that’s a different ballgame. Et puis, c’est tout.

Talking Turkey

Jenna Krajeski may be missing the point in Turkey. The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) has organized a working-class, feminist, youth and Kurdish response to the Erdogan government and went into an electoral alliance with the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) last year. As the elections have drawn closer, coordinated violent attacks have been carried out against the BDP and HDP. These attacks mean that the Kurdish freedom movements lack substance. Kurds did and do participate in the protests. The CHP’s “Kemalist outlook” Krajeski’s phrase did much more to inhibit Kurdish participation in the protests. During this period, much Kurdish attention was focused on aiding the revolution in Rojava, a story our media have yet to tell.

The BDP-HDP alliance, with its feminist and working-class dimensions, and the Kurdish liberation movement are the heroes of the moment in Turkey and North Kurdistan. The March 30 elections were one step for these forces—but only one step.

Mistaken Identities

A caption in Susan Freinkel’s “Pesticides and the Young Brain” [March 31] misidentified the man pictured. That man is Jesús López, not José Camacho.

Ari Berman, in “What’s Next for the Moral Monday Movement?” [March 10/17], meant to say Yancey (not Yancee) County, North Carolina.

Letters

(continued from page 2)

Scottsdale, Ariz.

Betsy Reed, Richard Kim (online)
Emily Douglas (online), Sarah Leonard
Mariam Markowitz
Robert Best
Rick Szykowny
Judith Long
Kate Murphy
Matthew Grace
Lisa Vandepaepe
Francis Reynolds
Annie Shields
Ricky D’Ambrose
Sam Adler-Bell, Dustin Christensen, Cecilia D’Anastasio, Simon Davis-Cohen, Justine K. Drennan, Corinne Grinapol, Mara Kardas-Nelson
E-mail to letters@thenation.com

The concrete and asphalt. This octogenarian liberal is ready to go once more unto the breach.

Ron Zimmerman

Van Valkenburg

The Nation.

Plus ça change...

Has the Front National won the soul of France? I doubt it [Cécile Alduy, “The Battle for the Soul of France,” March 24]. This is just a by-election. The French, as they are wont to do, are so pissed off with both major parties of the left and right that they will vote against them by electing FN candidates—because these elections (mostly regional) are not that important. Then, when the really ‘n’ truly important elections arrive next year... well, that’s a different ballgame. Et puis, c’est tout.

Talking Turkey

Jenna Krajeski may be missing the point in Turkey. The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) has organized a working-class, feminist, youth and Kurdish response to the Erdogan government and went into an electoral alliance with the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) last year. As the elections have drawn closer, coordinated violent attacks have been carried out against the BDP and HDP. These attacks mean that the Kurdish freedom movements lack substance. Kurds did and do participate in the protests. The CHP’s “Kemalist outlook” Krajeski’s phrase did much more to inhibit Kurdish participation in the protests. During this period, much Kurdish attention was focused on aiding the revolution in Rojava, a story our media have yet to tell.

The BDP-HDP alliance, with its feminist and working-class dimensions, and the Kurdish liberation movement are the heroes of the moment in Turkey and North Kurdistan. The March 30 elections were one step for these forces—but only one step.

Mistaken Identities

A caption in Susan Freinkel’s “Pesticides and the Young Brain” [March 31] misidentified the man pictured. That man is Jesús López, not José Camacho.

Ari Berman, in “What’s Next for the Moral Monday Movement?” [March 10/17], meant to say Yancey (not Yancee) County, North Carolina.
There are some nice old trees in the more established sections of West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg, but the newer reaches of the Jewish section approximate the grasslands that existed before the Witwatersrand was settled. Around my father’s grave, right up against the kopje at the top of the cemetery and with excavations all around us for other new burials, the landscape seemed especially harsh and brittle. Burying the dead here scourcs you and dries you out, and you are grateful for the Jewish ritual at the end of it that requires you to wash your hands with a two-handled jug—one that you hold with your death-soiled hand and the other with your now-clean one. But West Park also, quite appropriately, makes you think about the earth: the red earth you shovel onto the pine casket, the red earth into which your loved one is dropped, the earth you wash from your hands, the earth you traverse so carelessly in a day and in a life. Often, I have left a funeral here discomfored by our denial of this earth, and I have been wondering recently if this is a condition specific to Johannesburg.

In his novel *Portrait With Keys*, the city’s muse, Ivan Vladislavic, describes Johannesburg drily as “the Venice of the South” because “the backdrop is always a man-made one. We have planted a forest the birds endorse. For hills, we have mine dumps covered with grass. We do not wait for time and the elements to weather us, we change the scenery ourselves, to suit our moods. Nature is for other people, in other places.”

“Nature” was actually imported into the highveld: there were almost no trees on the grasslands of the Witwatersrand, and Johannesburg’s developers realized that if their upper-end real estate was going to be attractive to foreign investors, it needed to be shaded. And so, when they planted the Sachsenwald forest on the northern slopes of Parktown Ridge to

*Mark Gevisser has been writing for The Nation since 1990. This essay is adapted from Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir*, forthcoming from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
provide pit props for the mines, they decided to multipurpose the trees to provide shade for the settlers and to reduce the dust of the veld and of the mining activities. The project succeeded. Look at Johannesburg's northern suburbs from the top of one of the ridges, or from my bedroom window up in the Melville Koppies, or from the sky or the Google Earth view, and you will see a vast forest that the birds have indeed endorsed; the largest man-made urban woodland in the world, according to the city's publicity shtick. Plane and oak, blue gums and jacarandas, immigrants all.

Like the people who flooded into the city at the same time, these trees are exotics and have rooted well—even though they have been threatened by democracy. In an echo of the nativism that flickered across the country in the first decade of freedom, the new government declared shortly after coming into power in 1994—not without reason—that South Africa's exotic trees were severely depleting its water table and needed to be uprooted. In Cape Town, shock teams took to Table Mountain to clear it of Port Jackson willows. The jacarandas that drizzle Johannesburg with their surreal purple haze every spring looked like they might be targeted, too, before they were granted a reprieve on the grounds of age: nearly a century old, they will die their natural deaths soon enough anyway.

Trees were needed on the highveld not only to prop up the mines and provide shade from the harsh sun, but to stake a sense of place into the seeming emptiness of the landscape, writes the urbanist Jeremy Foster; to stake a sense of temporality, too, into the “timelessness” of these seemingly featureless folds of high-lying land. Foster writes that when you plant trees, you mediate a sense of history, because trees have life spans and change “seasonally at a pace synchronised with the unfolding of human society.” The greening of Johannesburg, he says, was also an attempt by the city's new European settler population “to isolate itself from a regional environment they perceived as hostile…. In this treeless region, most white settlers saw the park or forest as a metonymic fragment of an imaginary ‘home,’ a triumph of civilization over nature.”

If the veld lurking on the edge of my childhood was the place of black people and Boers, of poisonous puff adders and ticks and bilharzia-transmitting snails in stagnant pools, then nature itself was conscripted to encamp a suburban laager against such threat: a canopy of oak trees and jacarandas and blue gums, a European screen of green, a fragrant curtain against this wilderness of cracked red earth and yellow grass and thorny silver scrub.

Rising above Johannesburg’s man-made forests are piles of white and yellow sand extracted from the mines and dumped, in mesa-like formations, along the southern perimeter of the city. “Slimes dams,” “tailings dumps”: the names given to these man-made hills are wonderfully onomatopoeic. They were the mountains of our childhood, covered in grass and planted with trees and, in one case, with the Top Star drive-in theater, long an iconic image of—and view site over—the city. There are 270 of these mine dumps spread over 400 square kilometers, fashioned from more than 400 million tons of earth removed from the mines. They provide the negative image, above ground, for what is going on below, and you can trace the route of the ore-bearing reef from above by following their line from east to west, just south of the ridges of the Witwatersrand. It is no coincidence that the green canopy of the Johannesburg urban forest spreads northward from this, while the tightly packed, treeless, zinc-roofed mass of township housing, glinting silver in the sun, is to the south. The mining lands formed an obvious buffer between the white parts of the city and the black ones: an urban vacuum, in effect, that reminded me, conceptually, when I visited Berlin for the first time in the mid-1990s, of the empty space left by the destruction of the Wall.

Once the mines were depleted and shut down, the mining lands became even more desolate, with rusting infrastructure strewn between the slimes dams as if by a capricious giant who had come out to play in his sandbox and then got bored and stomped off. The open shafts began to decant toxic water into the biosphere, and the abandoned miners’ houses and hostels became squatted by the poorest of the new migrants seeking refuge amid the discards of the modern city, the car wrecks and the scrap heaps.

Much of this empty land cannot be developed because it is literally undermined. The water filling the dolomite rock cavities to the south and west of Johannesburg destabilizes the landscape to such an extent that the earth’s crust often collapses into sinkholes. I first heard about sinkholes from Granny Gertie, who had traded her grand piano—her only asset of any value—for some land that had turned out to be riddled with them and thus useless. I remember some terrible nightmares about our secure suburban redoubt collapsing into the earth, and needing to be reassured that we were far enough away from the mines not to have to worry about this.

All children, I imagine, express their unconscious terrors through the metaphors provided by their environments: if I had been Californian, I’d have been waking up with the house shaking; if Sicilian, covered in molten lava. We know how humanity’s tampering with the environment has exacerbated the risk of natural disaster, but Johannesburg is different, for its vulnerability is entirely man-made—a paradoxical consequence of the city's very conception.

I think I have always known this, but I only really understood it when, in early 2012, I took a tour of the mining lands with a woman named Mariette Liefferink, Johannesburg’s own Erin Brockovich. Liefferink is a glamorous Afrikaner then in her early 60s, a former housewife and Jehovah’s Witness missionary who had found new meaning by exposing the way mining waste was contaminating the environment. With her always-reddened lips, her wardrobe of dramatic Chinese silk coats and her coronet of peroxided hair, she had become a familiar sight in the mining towns west of Johannesburg as she has picked her way tenaciously across the ghoulish landscape of mine dumps and runoff dams in stiletto heels, gathering research showing the effects of what has become known as acid mine drainage.

One of the major challenges in mining the Witwatersrand, she explained to me, was its very high water table: the name itself means “ridge of white waters.” And so the mining companies set up extensive pumping systems to drain their underground caverns, thus creating a huge “void” (the scientists actually use this word) beneath the city. For as long as they mined, they pumped, but as the older mines became worked out and shut down, the pumping stopped. The mines began filling with water, which became contaminated with metals— including uranium—as it interacted with both the exposed rock and the abandoned infrastructure. In 2002, this water began decanting through open disused shafts out of the Western Witwatersrand Basin; as a result, water of a foul, rust-red color (the result of the oxidation of iron pyrite) was released into the region’s water supply, leaving a thick crust of solidified heavy metals known as “yellow boy” along the sides and beds of rivers and dams.

As we watched a sulfurous, rust-red cascade of water gushing out of a shaft outside of Randfontein on the West Rand, Liefferink cited studies demonstrating that this decanted toxic water was unfit for human or animal consumption or for agricultural use, and that it would eventually kill all aquatic life. Due largely to her activism, the state had recognized the severity of the problem and...
JOIN

THE NATION’S

17th Annual
SEMINAR CRUISE

DECEMBER
14–21, 2014

with special guest speakers
1. Katrina vanden Heuvel
2. Victor Navasky
3. Melissa Harris-Perry
4. Oliver Stone
5. Mark Bittman
6. Rev. William Barber
7. Zoe Carpenter
8. James Perry
9. Pedro Noguera
10. Calvin Trillin
11. Patricia J. Williams
12. Dave Zirin
13. John Nichols
14. Mychal Denzel Smith

7-night

Eastern Caribbean cruise aboard
Holland America’s MS Eurodam

Departing from Fort Lauderdale and cruising to:
Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos
San Juan, Puerto Rico
St. Thomas, USVI
Half Moon Cay, Bahamas

WWW.NATIONCRUISE.COM
had begun an ambitious program to neutralize the water. Scientists in the field believe this will make a difference in the long run, but no one can say how long it will take, and Liefferink believes the matter requires urgent intervention. The only solution, she told me, was to begin pumping out the water from the mining cavities again—and to commit to keeping these pumps going ad infinitum.

Liefferink took me to Tudor Shaft, an abject informal settlement on top of a mine dump outside the township of Kagiso, where we met an elderly man covered in lesions: these, she said, could well be the result of exposure to radioactive uranium. Tudor Shaft was one of thirty-six areas in the province of Gauteng that had just been declared radioactive hot spots by the National Nuclear Regulator. All mine dumps contained tracings of radioactive uranium and cyanide, Liefferink told me, and the regulator had ascertained that more than 1.5 million people lived on top of them or too close to them and would need to be moved. As at Tudor Shaft, most of the people at risk lived in informal settlements: a toxic wasteland is an easy fit for surplus people.

Upon arrival at Tudor Shaft, Liefferink pulled several bags of Woolworths groceries out of the back of her hefty four-wheel-drive bakkie and began to distribute them. In that listless, unfocused way of very poor and hungry people in the midafternoon heat, children were corralled into a line by an elder, each to be handed an Easter egg and a polished red apple. This ritual, she told me, symbolized her good intentions and ensured her continued access to the community. Still, when she stopped on the way out to caution a group gathered around a rough kiln making bricks out of the toxic sand, a woman came rushing up to the bakkie screaming bloody murder, accusing her—presumably because of her white skin—of being an agent of the opposition Democratic Alliance party.

Liefferink had found her own voice, she told me, fighting for her own rights: resisting the construction of a Shell super-service station in her backyard in bucolic Bryanston, close to where I grew up in the northern suburbs. In the process, she had come up against a corporate system that tried both to bribe and extort her; she had understood the enemy and vowed to fight it. “We have mined our gold,” she said to me as we drove back to Johannesburg. “We have benefited from it. It defines us. We are eGoli [the place of gold]. We are Gauteng [the province of gold]. But gold has become our curse. If we had done a cost-benefit analysis in 1886, gold mining would never have been sustainable.”

She is right, of course, to hold both the mining houses and the state accountable. Still, as I tried to internalize the landscape of blood-colored water against the neon crust of yellow boy, this topography of my hometown, this dystopia just a few kilometers away from my birdsong-endorsed aerie on the Melville Kopjes, it seemed to express a deeper dilemma. None of us would exist—the city itself would not exist—were it not for these violations against nature. There is no reason for Johannesburg before or beyond them, but now it exists, despite them. This is our inheritance.

And a part of this inheritance is being smuggled away before our very eyes. In recent years, as the price of gold has risen, the city’s mountains have begun to fade away. The mining companies have begun resifting the mine dumps for gold deposits, and they are disappearing, taking the Top Star drive-in with them. In this second brewing of the mines, the original attempts to secure the dumps with grasses and trees have been disrupted: now, more than ever, the heavy mineral and sulfate deposits are blowing across Johannesburg and running off into its rivers.

The disappearance of our man-made mountains has become a favored trope for our labile city. Here is Lauren Beukes on the topic in her celebrated sci-fi novel Zoo City, and if you didn’t know Johannesburg, you might think that the description was part of her own dystopian vision of the city: “I drive out south,” says the novel’s spunky narrator, Zanele,

to where the last of the mine dumps are—sulphur-coloured artificial hills, laid waste by the ravages of weather and reprocessing, shored up with scrubby grass and eucalyptus trees. Ugly valleys have been gouged out and trucked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time round. Maybe it’s appropriate that eGoli, place of gold, should be self-cannibalising.

I have always admired the way the artist William Kentridge depicts Johannesburg’s mutability by rendering the city in charcoal, making animated films that show its landscape being perpetually sketched and erased, built and modified. Once the mine dumps began disappearing, life seemed to be imitating Kentridge’s art, and he found a perfect new job for his eraser: in his 2011 film, Other Faces, we watch the Village Deep mine dump being rubbed out before our very eyes, and the big screen of the Top Star drive-in comes tumbling down. “A mountain is a fact,” said Kentridge in his acceptance speech for the Kyoto Prize in 2010. “You can turn around, you can come back in ten years, the mountain will not have moved. The mountain itself, the idea of a mountain, of a piece of heavy earth, stands as a metaphor for understanding eternity. The opposite is true of our mine dumps, which in my childhood I had assumed were my hills.”

As a child, Kentridge said, he felt “cheated of landscape. I wanted a landscape of forests, of trees, of brooks—but I had this dry veld, beyond the green gardens of the city.” He resolved this for himself by starting to draw “the terrain itself—partly as a way of taking revenge against its barrenness, its dryness.” And he describes the congruence between his medium—charcoal—and this barren, mutable landscape: “There is a way in which the dryness of the winter veld, when the sun is very harsh and the grass is bleached very white, or else is very black from the veld fires, corresponds to the tonal range of a white sheet of paper and charcoal.... There was a way in which the winter veld fires, in which the grass is burned to black stubble, made drawings of themselves.” You could rub a sheet of paper across the Johannesburg landscape itself, Kentridge said, and you would come up with a charcoal drawing.

Kentridge spoke of the danger of water in Johannesburg—how it floods the cavities made by mining, thus causing geological instability—but also of its function as a “utopian blessing” in his drawings: “You can draw a very dry landscape; then with a single line of blue, you transform it, you bless it with water.”

As a child, I felt not so much cheated of landscape as oblivious to it. Beyond my vivid childhood memories of the Sandspruit, I had no knowledge at all of the profusion of streams that flowed down the continental watershed of the Witwatersrand and fed into two substantial rivers, the Jukskei to the north and the Klip to the south, that drained into the Indian and Atlantic oceans, respectively. You need know only one thing about these two rivers to get a sense of their marginality to the development of Johannesburg: the black township of Alexandra is sited along the Jukskei, and the black township of Soweto along the Klip.

To the extent that I thought about nature at all, it was elsewhere. Given my father’s forestry job, we spent many weekends and holidays in the forests on the Eastern Transvaal escarpment: that was where wilderness resided, and even there, it was bounded by the battalions of pine trees marching relentlessly
over the mountains. Nature was what we got when we arrived in Sabie after a few hours in the car, suffocating in the fug of my father's Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes. What we drove through to get there was known as “the veld”: it was a transit zone rather than nature itself.

Or nature was the beach, and the sea, where we went for summer holidays. As a boy, I had read in a children's compendium of Norse myths of Canute's defiance of the tides, and I turned into this a solitaire game I played along the shore: I would walk up and down the beach endlessly, controlling each wave by beckoning it in, commanding its arrest and then dispatching it out again. Every young child I have taught this game to has been enthralled by it, for the same reason that I was: the illusion of mastery it gives you over the elements. Nature bent to our will.

The Central Witwatersrand Basin, which lies directly beneath downtown Johannesburg, was expected to begin decanting toxic water in 2016. Initially, when it was predicted that this would happen in 2012, a wave of apocalyptic anxiety was triggered in Johannesburg's newspapers, with prophecies reading like something Lauren Beukes might write: a bubbling-up of foul, rust-red liquid that would finally envelop Frenchfontein, this city of sin. Reading one of these in a 2010 newspaper article, I was struck by the prediction that about 60 million liters of water a day would decant onto the surface, “equivalent to water from 24 Olympic pools hitting the city's streets daily.”

The swimming pool as measuring unit for a volume of water to be unleashed upon the city seems apt for Johannesburg; well, for my Johannesburg, at least. Despite the fact that we went, occasionally, to the Zoo Lake (there was an annual holiday children's show of Treasure Island performed there, on a pontoon stage set up in the skanky water), the only blue in my internal Johannesburg map was that which filled swimming pools. Like William Kentridge and Ivan Vladislavic, I, too, imagined my world as flat, thrown into relief by some mine dumps. Given the natural topography of the Witwatersand as represented so beautifully in those conical scratches made by Tompkins, such obliviousness is inexplicable. It strikes the adult in me as precisely the consequence of the type of blinkering we endured as white suburban children in apartheid South Africa. We lived in an artificial world, our own void of sorts, dug out of the earth by the hunger for gold.

Color-Blows and Line-Blows

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

For years I've been hearing it said that young artists think art began with Andy Warhol. It's never been true. But now what I hear is art historians complaining that none of their students want to study anything but contemporary art. Among young art historians, it seems, to delve as far back as the 1960s is to be considered an antiquarian. “They only take my courses because they think they need some ‘background,’” one Renaissance specialist told me. “We have to accept almost anyone who applies saying that they want to study anything before the present, just to give our current faculty something to do.” What a time, when the art historians have less historical consciousness than the artists—and no wonder that the former, these days, show so little interest in what the latter actually do.

When I was a grad student (in a different field), the budding art historians I knew were studying medieval, they were studying mannerism, they were studying the Maya. No one thought of studying living artists. The most adventurous ones might be investigating Italian Futurism. Now the Futurists seem as distant as the Maya. But might this be their own fault? They were the artists, after all, who vowed to “destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind”—to unburden themselves of the dead weight of culture and history. The Futurists meant to be men of action; and, following Nietzsche (who warned in his Untimely Meditations that the knowledge of history presented more disadvantages than advantages for life), they believed forgetting to be its inescapable prerequisite. “As the active person, according to what Goethe said, is always without conscience, so he is also always without knowledge,” the philosopher taught. “He forgets most things in order to do one thing; he is unjust towards what lies behind him and knows only one right, the right of what is to come into being now.” Filippo Tommaso Marinetti made the point more succinctly in a 1909 manifesto, already waving away the objection that his belligerent posture was nothing new: “Who cares? We don't want to understand!”

The museums, the libraries and the acad-
points out, “the movement that had despised the academy, saw its leader, Marinetti, become a member of the Academy of Italy.” But it should be added that Futurism might seem a bit less like just another tombstone in history’s cemetery were it not presented, as it is here, as mainly an affair of painting (and a bit of sculpture). Even the best work of the Futurist painters (Boccioni and Giacomo Balla among the early adherents, Fortunato Depero among the second wave of recruits) is pretty thin stuff compared with the likes of Picasso, Matisse, Duchamp, Mondrian, Malevich and a dozen others among their contemporaries working elsewhere in Europe. Putting Futurism’s animating literary and political ideas aside, the paintings, for the most part, simply lack body; they don’t live on the canvas. Despite their modernist styling, most are still really conceived of as old-fashioned pictures, depicting great events taking place elsewhere rather than embodying events in themselves.

Yes, Greene and her colleagues have tried to be expansive in presenting all the other dimensions of Futurist creativity—graphic design, architecture, fashion, furniture, photography, cinema, music, performance and poetry (especially that new form of visual poetry the Futurists dubbed parole in libertà, or “words in freedom,” with its letters scattered higgledy-piggledy across the page) among them. It is in some of these domains that the Futurist endeavor still seems to contain clues worth following. And they’re all present and accounted for here—more convincingly so, I might add, than the same side ventures (as one had to see them) were in last year’s equally grand-scale MoMA exhibition “Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art.” And yet, except to the extent that they can be credibly shown flat in a frame or a vitrine, they remain elusive: every sort of printed matter looks great, and carries more of its original electrical charge than all but a handful of the paintings, but how would it have ever been possible to re-create the Futurist serate, or evenings, that are as near as we can get to a point of origin for what today is called “performance art”? These events could include poetry, noises (also known as music) and anything else that came to mind, but less important than what took place onstage was the effect it would have on the public. Marinetti hymned “the pleasure of being booed,” and he knew it intimately. “Spurred on by the Futurists themselves,” For us viewers, by contrast, the pleasures at hand are of a more studious sort. One of the signal achievements of this exhibition is that, rather than concentrating on the period of Futurism’s inception and greatest energy—that is, from the publication of the first manifesto in 1909 through the years of World War I—it traces the movement all the way to Marinetti’s demise in 1944. As a result, the show features artists and works nearly unknown outside Italy, and sometimes half-forgotten even there. If none can be counted a major rediscovery, still, Depero at least is never uninteresting, and Enrico Prampolini’s polimaterici—assemblages of diverse materials—begin, however weakly, to envision the surface of the work as a substantial reality rather than a view onto an imaginary vista, and thereby look forward to the best art of postwar Italy. Lucio Fontana or Alberto Burri would have appreciated a work like Prampolini’s aptly titled Interviews With Matter (1930).

However curious it is to follow the trajectory of Futurism through the 1920s and ’30s, where few but specialists have followed, it is impossible to ignore that the whole exhibition is structured as an anticlimax, beginning as it does with Futurism’s highest moment, in which it transcends itself and becomes something quite other. The first room of the show is devoted to the three great sculptures Boccioni produced in 1912 and ’13, works in which he shows himself to have understood the lesson of Picasso and Braque’s Cubism more deeply than any of the other Futurists and in which he made something completely original from it. The first of them, Development of a Bottle in Space (1912), turns the Futurist cliché upside down: it shows not the trajectory of a person or object through space, but the Heraclitean movement of an object completely still. Antigraceful (1913) presents the head of an elderly woman, the artist’s mother, as if cut up and recombined (along with a few foreign elements), yet still imbued with tenderness as well as humor.

What better rejoinder to his colleagues’ belief that only the vitality of youth and the deeds of men of action are worth limning? Finally, in Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, also from
1913, Boccioni returned to a more expected Futurist subject, a man striding forward—but not with speed or freely scattering energies, as one might have expected. The fluid, rippling forms that make up this strange body are not its own; what Boccioni shows us, I believe, is the air moving around and about it as the body steps forward, seemingly against some great resistance. Boccioni’s man has no shape of his own, but is molded instead by those forces in the face of which he determinedly proceeds.

Biennials are generally supposed to be reports on the present, but they have become more and more concerned with the past. The last Documenta, in 2012, included figures such as Giorgio Morandi, Lee Miller, Emily Carr and Charlotte Salomon in its attempt to define the contemporary. The current Whitney Biennial (on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art through May 25) may not reach quite as far back as to those figures, but a sense of retrospection lingers over much of the show.

Two years ago, the Biennial included an impressive freestanding exhibition of works by Forrest Bess, the legendary Texas painter who died in 1977, curated by Robert Gober. This time around, there are many such moments. Richard Hawkins and Catherine Opie have curated a selection of iconlike mixed-media paintings by Tony Greene, a relatively little-known Californian who died young of AIDS in 1990. Philip Vanderhyden has re-created a massive 1988 wall sculpture in painted vinyl and neon by Gretchen Bender, an artist best known for her work in video, who died of cancer in 2004. Two more artists lost to AIDS, Martin Wong (1946–1999) and David Wojnarowicz (1954–1992), are re-presented by Julie Ault, both through works taken from the Whitney’s collection and documents borrowed from the Downtown Collection at New York University’s Fales Library. Joseph Grigely presents an archive of materials relating to the life and career of Gregory Battcock, the art critic and editor (best remembered for a pioneering 1968 anthology of writings on Minimalism), who was murdered in 1980. Another archive is the work of Public Collectors, a Chicago-based collaborative project led by Marc Fisher, whose subject here is Malachi Ritscher, a musician and activist who documented the Windy City’s lively free-jazz and experimental-music scenes in thousands of live recordings until his death in 2006, after setting himself on fire to protest the war in Iraq. And finally, there’s a selection of notebooks from the novelist David Foster Wallace, who committed suicide in 2008.

It all adds up to a reminder that, even as the art historians have been slowly trying to squeeze the history out of their discipline, artists have been assiduously turning themselves into historians, archivists, even collectors of a sort. Stylistically, much of the new art has its eye on the past, and is not necessarily the worse for that. Dawoud Bey’s black-and-white portrait photographs—haunted by the bombings in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963—have been made with the sober yet empathetic eye of an August Sander; Alma Allen’s biomorphic sculpture looks back to Arp and Brancusi; Susan Howe’s cut-up visual poetry (a distant and more ruminative descendant of the Futurists’ parode in libertà) seems to be attempting a literary séance. “Archives, the material—the fragment, the piece of paper,” Howe has said, “is all we have to connect with the dead.” This is more than just retro styling. There must be a terrible feeling abroad that no one but an artist is going to salvage any sense of memory, and that since, as Walter Benjamin put it, “the past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption,” our stubborn present-mindedness may represent the loss of some last chance.

This year, the selection of artists for the Biennial has been entrusted to three people, none of them Whitney employees. Anthony Elms is a curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia; Stuart Comer has recently arrived as chief curator of media and performance art at MoMA after having worked for many years at the Tate Modern in London; and Michelle Grabner is a Chicago-based artist and critic who (with her husband, Brad Killam) runs two exhibition spaces, the Suburban (originally the garage behind their home in Oak Park) and the Poor Farm in rural Wisconsin. The three curators did not work together as a committee; each has his or her own floor. What’s strange is how nearly interchangeable the artists seem from floor to floor. Yes, Elms’s second floor seems a little more political, Comer’s third floor is a bit more evocative of queer identity, and Grabner’s fourth floor is heavier on women abstract painters; but even a significant amount of re-shuffling might have left the floors feeling substantially the same. It’s as though each curator felt compelled to act as a committee of one and accommodate as much of the contemporary art spectrum as he or she could. I understand the impulse, but it blunts the point of having three curators work independently. It might have made for a more challenging (and more productively divisive) exhibition if each of the three had chosen to examine in depth just a handful of distinct tendencies in the contemporary scene, or even to focus on a single one exclusively. For instance, I’d love to have seen a whole floor of Grabner’s choice of women abstractionists (and quasi-abstractionists), all by themselves and with a lot more space for their work to breathe in—and, above all, with a lot more work from each artist. I’m crazy about Dona Nelson’s two-sided free-standing paintings and would have liked to see more than just a pair of them. And why only one work apiece from Molly Zuckerman-Hartung and Suzanne McClelland, two painters who embed language in their abstractions; why not show the breadth of their recent work instead? And I’d have the same question about quite a few of the other artists.

Whatever my misgivings about the structure of this year’s Biennial, it features a lot more good and substantial work than it did two years ago, in a show that was wildly overrated by many critics. Maybe one reason for the frantic praise was that show’s sparse installation; with the work of many fewer artists on view than this time around, when there are no less than 103, one could fully grasp what was there and focus on it more clearly. But just as was the case two years ago, I can’t get over the feeling of an art world becalmed, and not only at the Whitney—other big exhibitions, such as the 2012 Documenta, gave the same sensation of art at a standstill. But as Boccioni’s bottle reminds us, stasis also has its hidden inner movement; there’s some powerful work being made these days, and a good bit of it is here at the Whitney; but as an ensemble, it seems smaller than the sum of its parts.

The Futurists believed themselves to be riding and even somehow pushing forward a wave of progress that was bigger than they were as individuals; three decades later, as Europe was tearing itself to bits, Benjamin feared that “what we call progress” was instead an endless catastrophe. Today, we have our own reasons for thinking the same. Artists are searching for clues in the recent past, trying to imagine how to proceed in the absence of a common project based on faith in progress. Without that, museums can seem more than ever what Marinetti proclaimed they were: “public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings...absurd abattoirs of painters and sculptors ferociously slaughtering each other with color-blows and line-blows, the length of the fought-over walls.” (Benjamin called this “historicism’s bordello.”) Yet one day, all these beautiful sleepers may awake. Certain works here are somehow more compelling than the context from which they emerged—and in which they have been buried in turn. Who will light the fuse thanks to which they will be blasted, as Benjamin hoped, “out of the homogenous course of history”? 
WHEN WE SPEAK OF “POP,” WE OFTEN speak of an instance or, more likely, a set of similar instances that seem to elucidate the character of a given moment (that would be the “circumstance” part). Two examples is a coincidence; three, a zeitgeist.

What if we ignore instances altogether, at least for the moment? Pop exists, after all, independent of specific cases. It’s the 100-minute film narratively structured like a suspension bridge, or it’s the three-minute song. The forms can be filled time after time with infinitely varied contents. But the song remains the same: verse, chorus, bridge, chorus. It keeps working. The shape is the pop.

Every now and then, however, a new shape materializes, or an old shape suddenly seems able to hold the mercurial soul of an era, to give coherence to the hour’s charisma. In the last few years, a shape has stepped forth onto the world stage with precisely this capacity, a form that asks us to recognize it as a nightmare of precariousness and displacement; if this has hollowed out the hope of the good life, it is odd to demand reparations from the government. But the economy is not something on which one can make demands, exactly. True, you can join your colleagues in a workplace strike—if you have a job. Scratch that one. Led by their lack of some other shared life, into the plazas go the immiserated and the indignant, the plazas so often placed before the Parliament or City Hall, and so unfailingly ringed by the police, the state in its period-style work clothes.

The square now seems like the most natural form for refusal, resistance and revolt. This is not a development that content can explain—not quite, at least. If Occupy directed itself against banks, corruption and corporate power, urban squares were filled as well with calls to honor the Constitution, to abolish the Constitution, to go back to the Keynesian compromise, to go forward to some unimaginable future. No few were also neo-Hoovervilles. Internationally, the grievances were even more varied, ranging from the specifics of a transit fare hike in Brazil to the Arab Spring’s “The people want the regime to fall”—a maximalist slogan with a perverse fate, to say the least. Ask for the general, and the general you shall receive.

Zuccotti Park is likely the best known, but there is no shortage of celebrated candidates—the Añamapa Sol (Madrid), Oscar Grant Plaza (Oakland), Syntagma (Athens), Tahrir (Cairo), Taksim (Istanbul)—that can serve as examples for the defining political feature of our time, mass phenomena repeated and repeatable, shifting from city to city, continent to continent. Astute commentators point to Tiananmen Square in 1989 as precursor, and reasonably so. People have gathered in squares to express political sentiment since the dawn of geometry; nonetheless, there is nothing as tiresome as nothing-new-under-the-sun-ism. If the political pop of the square has a history, what doesn’t? But pop forms claim their moments precisely by seeming timeless, by suddenly suiting their own circumstances so well as to appear natural. The brilliant student movement in Quebec, more often in the streets than the camp, nonetheless drafted the red square as its symbol. It was 2012; nothing else would do.

The square now seems like the most natural form for refusal, resistance and revolt. This is not a development that content can explain—not quite, at least. If Occupy directed itself against banks, corruption and corporate power, urban squares were filled as well with calls to honor the Constitution, to abolish the Constitution, to go back to the Keynesian compromise, to go forward to some unimaginable future. No few were also neo-Hoovervilles. Internationally, the grievances were even more varied, ranging from the specifics of a transit fare hike in Brazil to the Arab Spring’s “The people want the regime to fall”—a maximalist slogan with a perverse fate, to say the least. Ask for the general, and the general you shall receive.

Still, the contents of squarepop are not perfectly fluid. Pop songs can be about anything, hypothetically, but it turns out they congeal into the same few themes over and over again: love, new beginnings, the desire for an exceptional life or the satisfactions of the ordinary (two sides of a single coin). A basic question of pop culture must be whether the form of the pop song compels this content, or if it’s perhaps the reverse: Is verse-chorus-bridge-chorus the way that such content can best say itself? The relating of these dimensions is the gold standard of all thinking about pop; it does not forsake us now.

If there are insistent contents coursing through the squares, two carry the most weight: the sense that the nation has betrayed its commitment to guarantee equitable access to the good life, and unemployment. This perhaps gets us near to the secret of the square. For the aforementioned pair are strangely mismatched. The dream of steady employment and a decent wage has become a nightmare of precariousness and displacement; if this has hollowed out the hope of the good life, it is odd to demand reparations from the government. But the economy is not something on which one can make demands, exactly. True, you can join your colleagues in a workplace strike—if you have a job. Scratch that one. Led by their lack of some other shared life, into the plazas go the immiserated and the indignant, the plazas so often placed before the Parliament or City Hall, and so unfailingly ringed by the police, the state in its period-style work clothes.

That is to say, it is exactly the hollowing-out of work that makes the square a necessary political form; it is precisely the character of the square that compels a confrontation with the state, which could not answer the underlying needs even if it wanted to. This may go toward explaining why the latest movements of the squares take on an increasingly nationalist aspect: Ukraine’s Euro-Maidan (literally, “Euro-Square”) movement, and the struggles leaping from plaza to plaza in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Surely these, with their competing and dangerous nationalisms, demonstrate the square’s great capacity to organize contemporary politics. But they also underscore the way in which the politics of the square, to seem sensible, must imagine that the state can solve every problem, and so must increasingly imagine a stronger state. This is a delusion, but one that comes from real conditions.

So we have come full circle. The seemingly natural form of our age’s politics is also the most unnatural. Far from being seamless and inevitable, it arises from contradiction and desperation. Perhaps we should admit that this is true of songs and movies too, and the rest of pop culture: that, beyond being the pleasures and pacifications with which we are familiar, their smooth consistency is the broken madness of the world stood on its head. Every perfect pop song wants a riot.
Three and a half years ago, after living for more than a quarter-century in a rent-stabilized apartment in a ratty Greenwich Village tenement, my wife and I moved to a condo in downtown Manhattan. Conscientious '60s veterans, we felt some anxiety about landing in the climes of privilege—honey, property is theft—but we got over it fast. This was cemented shortly after our arrival, when we were asked to weigh in on a pressing matter. At the time our building—formerly offices—was originally converted, it had three separate entrances: one for commercial space on the lower floors, another for rental apartments in the middle, and the last for the condos at the top. The rentals had been fairly quickly made into condos, and the question to be decided was whether the two residential lobbies should be combined into one, with potential savings on staff and electricity, and the possible production of new commercial space.

There was a catch: the wait for elevators would be fractionally longer, and the mail—which hitherto had been collected behind the front desk and delivered by hand—would be stuffed into standard mailboxes. There were other unspoken objections, such as sharing an elevator with residents of the formerly rental condos, which were a bit smaller than the original batch and were, of course, on floors lower down. A strong whiff of class and privilege was in the air, and our neighbors voiced concern about property values, if only under the guise of “reduced services” and “inconvenience.” For our part, we were disturbed that, after finally reaching real estate nirvana, our sumptuary delights (being actually handed the junk mail, a garbage room on every floor, riding an elevator!) were about to be snatched away. We voted no, along with almost everyone else.

Cities are difference engines, and one of the qualities they assign is the place of class in space. While the distinction between the two entries to our building is exceedingly fine, even ridiculous, a byproduct of the city’s inclusionary zoning law is that a need to make this assignment has been bred into development. The law, which originated in New York under Mayor Michael Bloomberg and has been strongly endorsed by his successor, Bill de Blasio, is designed to produce affordable housing. In exchange for its provision either within the project (“on site”) or elsewhere in the city (“off site”), developers are offered subsidies in the form of additional bulk, a substantial tax break and cheap financing. New York is only one of a number of cities—including Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Denver and San Diego—to use this strategy, although it has been deployed to a far lesser extent here than in many other places. The incentives are offered on a voluntary basis and only in “designated areas,” including Manhattan’s West Side and the Williamsburg/Greenpoint waterfront in Brooklyn. Projects making use of them have tended to be large, and the affordable apartments provided have either been mixed in with the market units or else located in separate portions of the buildings, even in separate buildings. Of course, separate buildings require separate entrances, hence the “poor door.”

There was a loud outcry this fall over a proposal by Extell for a tower at 40 Riverside Boulevard (currently under construction). It is a sorry-looking lump—with fabulous views—at the end of a long row of sorry-looking lumps along the Hudson River built by Donald Trump below 72nd Street. Like several buildings on the East River waterfront in Brooklyn (including the Toll Brothers Northside Piers), the building is divided into...
distinct affordable and market sections, each with its own entrance. The uproar was considerable, not least because the symbolism of those double doors was galling to what one might think of as the predominant sensibility on the good old Upper West Side, and plenty of politicians piled on. Still, the question must be approached conscientiously, as this clarity of division has long been the medium of both official policy and the general expectation of the culture, and nobody has offered a clear theory of either the value or the measure of such structured propinquity.

My own first years as a permanent resident in the city coincided with the build-out of the Upper West Side urban renewal area, first envisioned in 1955. It was the product, in part, of an infusion of federal funds and a nominally liberal idea about the way in which economic difference was to be sorted. There had been massive demolition of “substandard” housing and much new construction aimed primarily at middle-class residents (to counter the much-whispered fear of “white flight”). But there was some public housing in the mix as well as the retention of large areas of existing New York City Housing Authority projects, which had been built not so long before as part of the Moses-era vision of sweeping “slum” clearance and the construction of large, carceral complexes for the poor. Setting aside familiar arguments about urban renewal, the results retain a certain psychic influence over our paradigms of mix. Within a relatively small compass there was wealth along the park, and large complexes for middle- and lower-income citizens off the park, including scattered sites for buildings devoted to each. Moreover, in those days, the number of rent-regulated units in the neighborhood remained high.

Some form of differential rent regulation is surely the most effective way to guarantee both affordability and mix in housing, although there is not a successful formulation for harmonizing rent controls with the appropriate incentives to encourage construction by the private sector to accommodate these tenants—to ensure that they will not, in effect, be segregated. This has been the experience with the Section 8 voucher program, often offered inadequately as redress for the demolition of existing public housing but tending to reinforce existing patterns of segregation. There is no coherent national consensus about housing as a right, and few politicians are willing to describe it, at best, as anything more than a general good (like health, education or sound nutrition).

If we concede that the market is not a system that makes equality its first priority, then we must interfere with it in some way to produce equitable results. The idea of a distributive ethics in the city requires a distributive planning process that embraces not simply use—planning’s traditional interest—but social access. The crunch comes when questions of the allocation of social goods are entertained in the realm of space. For example, there has been an ongoing evolution in ideas about the provision and location of “social” housing that has yielded very different results at different times and in different places. In Vienna (a particularly instructive example), 60 percent of residents currently live in municipally built housing, which is directed mainly toward the middle class. During its socialist heyday in the ’20s and early ’30s, the city built gorgeous housing for nearly a quarter-million members of the working class in the “Red Ring.” In New York, from the nineteenth century to the present day, we have been caught up in a debate that dilutes its focus over four strategies: the remediation in place, the construction of large and concentrated new developments, the scattering of new affordable housing, and the distribution of subsidies via vouchers or rent regulations to allow existing systems of housing production to be more welcoming and useful to those whose resources can not meet the market rate.

As a rule, New Yorkers seem to have far more tolerance for well-motivated forms of “inequality” than might be expected. On the one hand, our huge income gap doesn’t seem to be stirring much insurrectionary rage. On the other, the better-off accept more quotidian forms of tolerance—as can be seen, for instance, among those living in buildings that charge wildly disparate amounts for identical rent-regulated apartments. (In our tenement, I was occasionally sent the rent bill for a next-door neighbor, who paid a quarter of what we did, and I suffered no ill effects.) Nor do Americans more generally appear unable to deal with their banked rage at, say, the other passengers in Row 38 on United Airlines, all of whom are traveling at insanely varying fares. It does seem clear that such circumstances do not, in general, exceed our psychical capacities, suggesting that we are able to accept as “normal” a certain scale of distributive redress as a cure for larger inequalities, as well as to tolerate the inequalities themselves. Indeed, in a city in which the richest census tract and the poorest are just a few miles apart, the lack of revolutionary discontent at this spectacle of inequality is both remarkable and symptomatic.

### Mule


Winters passed. I brought you presents. I kept remembering your magic, hearing the deeper silence. Then one spring you sent everything back. Stick.

CHRISTINA ROBB
nuanced issues of “equity” and “fairness.” But one must speak otherwise in any debate about the future, as the income gap only continues to accelerate. The statistics are indeed grim. A paper from the IMF—recently cited by the New York Times columnist Charles Blow—reported that the share of market income in the United States captured by the richest 10 percent grew from 30 percent in 1980 to 48 percent in 2012, and that the take of the wealthiest 0.1 percent quadrupled from 2.6 percent to 10.4, even as poverty rates have failed to budge for years.

In New York, this disparity gets compounded by escalating housing costs. A report by State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli found that half the renters in the state and more than a third of homeowners devote more than 30 percent of their income to housing, the federal threshold of affordability. As DiNapoli told the Times, “you’ve got households with less money and costs going up.” Like the income gap, the percentage of those who cannot afford housing is rising dramatically, from 40.5 percent in 2000 to 50.6 percent in 2012 for renters and from 26.4 to 33.9 percent over the same period for owners. The crisis is not simply limited to the city. DiNapoli found that while 57.6 percent of renters in the Bronx were paying more than they could afford, so were at least 54 percent of those in Greene, Ulster, Rockland and Orange counties.

Given the retreat of the public sector from the business of building housing, the structure of inducements for private developers and a staunch defense of rent regulations are increasingly the only ways to guarantee the creation and protection of affordable housing. However, there remains a lively discussion about the respective roles of the carrot and the stick. Under Bloomberg, it was carrots as far as the eye could see, and compliance was entirely voluntary. As Councilman Brad Lander documented in a 2013 report on the results of inclusionary zoning, the outcome has been unimpressive, although better in some locations (notably the West Side) than others. The bottom line, though, is that a total of 2,769 affordable units (amounting to about 13 percent of the total units developed in the designated areas during the period) have been produced since 2005—and if de Blasio is going to generate his promised 200,000 units in the next decade, some other approach is clearly necessary, especially since rent-regulated units are disappearing fast, either as the result of being deregulated once they become vacant, or because of the demolition of the buildings in which they sit (Lander reports that the latter cost the city around 8,000 units between 2005 and 2012).

Inclusionary zoning should be made both mandatory and general, a position advocated by Lander and, in his campaign, by de Blasio (who promises details in May), as well as by other community organizations (with leadership from the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development) and politicians, including Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. The first big planning move—and real estate deal—of the de Blasio administration seems to offer a promising sign of commitment to making more energetic use of the program. It concerns the development of the mighty Domino Sugar refinery and a surrounding eleven-acre site in Brooklyn. The project has been in play for a decade, and planning has been controversial from the start. Domino shut down operations in 2004 and sold its property to a developer, the Community Preservation Corporation (and two partners), for $55.8 million. CPC proposed a Rafael Viñoly–designed complex—part of the city’s plan to line the east side of the East River with towers—that would include 2,200 units, of which 660 were to be affordable, distributed in a brace of thirty- to forty-story buildings. Criticism included sentimental protest over the reuse of the hulking industrial building (now landmarked) for purposes less sweet, as well as fear of gentrification pressure on the neighborhoods nearby; strain on the benighted L train and other services by the new population; the long shadows that the forty-story buildings were expected to cast inland; and the likelihood that the proposed waterfront park would be a cut-off preserve. There was also a strong sense that giant buildings flanking the river might not be the most imaginative and productive use of the space.

The Planning Commission signed off on the project in 2010, but in 2012 the developer went bust and sold the land and rights for $185 million to Two Trees, the company owned by David and Jed Walentas (père et fils), who made their fortune gentrifying the Brooklyn waterfront neighborhood known as DUMBO (short for “Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass”). They brought in new architects—SHoP—who proposed more park space, a richer mix of uses and a dramatically different architecture, one that featured buildings twenty-five stories taller than Viñoly’s (which, while homely, begin to look fairly good in retrospect). But the basic housing numbers remained the same: 2,200 market and 660 affordable units. The mayor asked Two Trees back to the table for more. The good news: there will be an additional forty affordable units, as well as a greater proportion of larger apartments suitable for families; the units will remain below market rate in perpetuity; and the affordable and market apartments, according to SHoP, will be randomly mixed in each building. In other words, there will be no “poor door.”

Certainly, 700 affordable units are a good thing, particularly when the deal raises the percentage from the required 20 percent to closer to 30 percent. It appears that there will be substantially more—and more nuanced—park space. The inclusion of additional office space will help with the on-site mix. But the victory could be pyrrhic. There have been suggestions that much of the affordable housing will be sited in the buildings to go up on the inland side of Kent Avenue, the street that runs behind the waterfront row of towers, though the actual strategy for mixing the units has yet to be designed. The buildings themselves, however, are much taller than in the previous scheme, and the architecture—despite the disingenuous insistence that its arch—of—triumph morphologies will admit more light to the cowering low-rise streets behind—is dated, like something bought in a thrift shop in Rotterdam or Shanghai. It also represents de Blasio’s complete acquiescence to the Brooklyn—as—Pudong planning of his predecessor. Transportation will be a big problem; the Williamsburg Bridge will be overshadowed by looming skyscrapers; and, most fundamentally, the survival of the character and ecology of Williamsburg itself will surely be irrevocably compromised—not simply walled off, but overpopulated and deprived by rising values of the accommodating slack that made it so popular, and singular, in the first place.

As the de Blasio administration inches forward, I gain confidence in its quantitative intentions regarding planning. But urban quality is more than a numbers game, and we await some signal about the forms of life our streets and buildings and public spaces will support, some idea about design. Seven hundred units isn’t just lipstick on the pig, but the old east bank of the East River—low-rise, industrial, funky, diverse—is probably gone forever, and that’s too bad.

End Note

A student of mine, who happens to be from Morocco, visited Ground Zero the other day and was appalled to discover that while information brochures were being offered in eight languages, Arabic wasn’t among them. She asked a docent about this and was told that these were simply the top eight languages spoken by visitors to the plaza. No mosque, no Arabic, what next?
Puzzle No. 3320

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3319

ACROSS

1 Swimsuit escape: Einstein thought about it a lot (5,2,5)
9 If Julius Caesar said this word, point outside (9)
10 -26, somehow (5)
11 Alcohol as an alternative in dish (5)
12 Will state absurd theories, initially about guys (9)
13 Workers lacking leadership for billions of years (4)
14 Tangled tale: “Across and Down: ways to get there” (10)
18 Endangered, agitated teen interrupts online conversation (10)
20 Say no to donut, following doctor (4)
23 Lawman’s modernist tendency in poetry? (5,4)
25 Hesitation at lingerie’s shade (5)
26 10 altered briefly (2,3)
27 Courteous jockeys buy overseas, perhaps (9)
28 Spies extinct bird after holiday in Pacific islands (7,5)

DOWN

2 Rustic, pastoral deity embracing humble mass (7)
3 Regime changes for expat (6)
4 Poet: “God is the connection” (5)
5 To make the rules, member misses the beginning (9)
6 Dangerous wave of gray engulfing most of a Middle Eastern capital (5,3)
7 Well-behaved child is into fruit (7)
8 Wasps sting bears, yo (4)
9 Hundredth PC: “Enter” breaking down (7)
15 Jobs at the bottom of the scale for a longshoreman (9)
16 Present outside operating room—in closet, maybe (7)
17 Diversions from Pennsylvania’s halfback holding tight end (8)
19 Rise unsteadily and beg to publish again (7)
21 Seize me from below with one type of blood blockage (7)
22 Soft drink consumed, high in a rooftop structure (6)
23 Upset to be like 24 (4)
24 Old Nick took a chair on the outskirts of Austin (5)

Hints! Guidelines! Tips!
See Word Salad at thenation.com/blogs/word-salad.
You deserve a factual look at . . .

**Iran, Nuclear Weapons and the “Interim Agreement”**

Is this the time to relax—or rather increase—economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic?

Despite evasions, denials and equivocations, it is clear that Iran continues to pursue the holy grail of nuclear weapons. A temporary agreement recently struck between Iran and Western powers does nothing to disable Iran’s nuclear weapons development, yet it does loosen hard-earned economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic. In fact, Iranian diplomats brag that the agreement fails to inhibit them in the least and that their nuclear program will not be stopped. Does it really make sense to relax pressure on Iran, or should the U.S. and Western powers line up additional sanctions should Iran fail to discontinue nuclear weapons development?

**What are the facts?**

The P5 + 1 group of world powers—the U.S., China, Russia, France, Great Britain and Germany—celebrated when Iran recently agreed to a six-month interim agreement calling for the Islamic Republic to suspend enrichment of 20% uranium. In return, the P5 + 1 agreed to allow Iran to access $4.2 billion in previously blocked funds, and the U.S. agreed to apply no new economic sanctions for six months. Yet Iranian foreign minister Mohammed Javad Zarif says, “We did not agree to dismantle anything,” and its president Hassan Rouhani promises Iran will absolutely retain its enrichment capability.

U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged that if Iran fails to abide by the interim agreement or to dismantle its nuclear weapons development, he would seek additional economic sanctions and possibly resort to military action. A bill currently before Congress—the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act—would impose just such additional sanctions on Iran if it breaks the interim agreement or does not cease its nuclear weapons program following expiration of this agreement. In other words, the bill formalizes exactly the diplomatic consequences the President has threatened. No wonder the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act is currently supported by at least 59 U.S. Senators, a clear majority.

Distressingly, the President has threatened to veto this act if passed by the Senate. The White House fears that the threat of new sanctions—even though they would not go into effect unless Iran fails to comply—could derail current nuclear disarmament talks.

**What are the stakes?** The primary targets of the Iranian ayatollahs’ fanatical zeal are the U.S. (the “great Satan”) and Israel (the “little Satan”), perceived as being America’s agent in the Middle East. Iran’s leaders have repeatedly threatened Israel with destruction once they come into possession of nuclear weapons.

Israel is such a small country that one or two nuclear weapons strategically dropped on its narrow coastal territory would destroy it. Indeed, the effects of a nuclear attack on Israel are too horrible to consider. There can be little doubt, for example, that such an attack would turn the entire Middle East into a war zone, leaving wide-spread destruction and a worldwide economic disaster in its wake. Clearly this outcome must be prevented at all cost, and no effort should be spared to keep the hands of the ayatollahs off the nuclear trigger.

**What is the solution?** Of course, most Americans share the President’s hopes that Iran can be persuaded to set aside its nuclear ambitions—and its vendetta against Israel—through diplomacy and other peaceful means. But one thing is certain: It is crippling Western economic sanctions, backed by the threat of force, that have recently driven Iran to the negotiating table.

Above all, Iran must decommission its nuclear weapons infrastructure. Yet with Iran’s nuclear capability still intact and moving forward and its leaders vigorously asserting that the Islamic Republic will never reduce its 20,000 centrifuges or shut down its Arak heavy-water nuclear reactor or its Fordow enrichment facility, does it make sense to reduce the pressure of economic sanctions now? Sen. Robert Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee believes it’s a mistake to relax sanctions: “I am convinced that we should only relieve pressure on Iran in return for verifiable concessions that will fundamentally dismantle Iran’s nuclear program.”

FLAME is a tax-exempt, non-profit educational 501 (c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of the facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the interests of the United States and its allies in that area of the world. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome. They enable us to pursue these goals and to publish these messages in national newspapers and magazines. We have virtually no overhead. Almost all of our revenue pays for our educational work, for these clarifying messages, and for related direct mail.

To receive free FLAME updates, visit our website: www.factsandlogic.org
At Domini, we believe it’s possible to make money and make a difference at the same time. That’s why all of our investment decisions are guided by two fundamental objectives: universal human dignity and the protection of our natural environment.

How do you invest?
Commit yourself to a greener, more peaceful future with the Domini Social Equity Fund.

Investing for Good
Scan to watch our video to learn more about how responsible investors are making a difference.

Before investing, consider the Fund’s investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses. Contact us for a prospectus containing this information. Read it carefully.
The Domini Social Equity Fund is not insured and is subject to market risks such as sector concentration and style risk. You may lose money. DSIL Investment Services LLC, Distributor. 12/13