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Last Chance for Planet Earth?
High stakes at the Paris climate conference

MARK HERTSGAARD
Letters

Bombs Without Borders

Thank you, Bob Dreyfuss, Nick Turse, and all of the journalists who are helping to inform us about the recent war crime in Kunduz, Afghanistan. The online title of Dreyfuss’s article, “The US Massacre in Kunduz Exposes the Bankruptcy of Obama’s National-Security Policy” [“The Lessons of Kunduz” in the Nov. 2 issue], immediately caught my attention. By the time I’d finished the second paragraph, I had the very strong feeling that here was a reporter who is writing the truth, rather than repeating the rationalizations of the irresponsible architects of our Middle East policies.

Thanks also to Dreyfuss and Turse for researching and reporting on civilian deaths in “America’s Afghan Victims” [Oct. 7, 2013]. All too often, our government and corporate media conspire to ignore, silence, or minimize the victims of our wars. I believe Americans need to be made aware of the results of our actions—maybe then they’ll demand responsibility and accountability from our leaders.

Hugh R. Hays
Soldotna, Alaska

Bob Dreyfuss’s repeated use of the word “massacre” to describe the bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz is irresponsible rhetoric. A massacre is an intentional, targeted mass murder. Dreyfuss doesn’t even try to prove that’s what the bombing was; he just trots out the word for shock value. Fatal incompetence on top of misguided policy it certainly was, and that’s the only case Dreyfuss actually makes. That in itself could possibly be called a war crime by some stretch. But there’s no evidence anywhere that US military forces, let alone President Obama, consciously intended to kill MSF staff and their patients.

Chris Nielsen
Seattle

Burying Inequality

@ With regard to Seth Freed Wessler’s article “Black Deaths Matter” [Nov. 2]: On the one hand, there is the argument that the unmarked grave has always been with us and may mean even less in the future because of the greater population’s inability—or unwillingness—to pay for traditional burial services. But that’s immaterial here. This is a great piece, and it demonstrates just how undervalued not only African-American lives but all marginalized groups are in the magic marketplace of the United States.

Walter Pewen

In the early 1990s I was working at NASA in Huntsville, Alabama, and went to a Veterans Day ceremony held at a cemetery in the beautiful old part of Huntsville, a relatively liberal town thanks to the large number of out-of-state engineers working for NASA. Most of the cemetery was all dolled up, but I asked a black TV cameraman filming the ceremony about the corner of the cemetery that was unkempt, with stones fallen over. He replied matter-of-factly that those were the graves of the black soldiers. Enough said.

Robert Lee

Objective Unreasonable

@ Some police seem to forget that they are civilian officers serving a civilian population of fellow citizens [“Reasoning Away Murder,” Nov. 2]. They are not an occupying army. If fact, even American soldiers in war zones operate under rules of engagement that do not authorize them to kill civilians out

Comments drawn from our website

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 26)
The GOP’s Base Problem

After Mitt Romney’s defeat in 2012, Republican National Committee chair Reince Priebus performed an oddly aptly named “autopsy” designed to avoid a rerun of that year’s debacle, when freak-show candidates competed in 20 presidential debates, a Senate candidate opined alarmingly about “legitimate rape,” and Romney himself suggested that tightening the screws on illegal immigrants might get them to “self-deport.” To court Latinos and younger voters, Priebus and his advisers urged Republicans to tackle comprehensive immigration reform and tone down the anti-gay rhetoric. They offered sessions to teach candidates how to talk to and about women. And in February of this year, Priebus boasted of his proudest achievement yet: He had done “exactly what I wanted to do…taking control of the presidential primary debate process,” he told radio host Hugh Hewitt.

Priebus had trimmed the debate schedule from 20 to between nine and 12, and he found those debates friendlier homes. Hewitt and his home base, the right-wing Salem Radio Network, would co-sponsor three debates with CNN, and conservative clubhouse Fox News would have another three. The “liberal” MSNBC, which had three debates with CNN, and conservative establishment candidates in the race—Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio—at least recognize that the party’s reliance on aging white voters will eventually doom it to demographic extinction, especially in national elections. They just haven’t had the fortitude to do anything about it. Bush, for example, has said that the next Republican nominee would have to defy the GOP’s base at times: “to lose the primary to win the general [election]” is how he put it. Yet in September alone, Bush went from defending his so-called Gang of Eight and helped craft a bipartisan, comprehensive immigration bill that easily passed the Senate. But when the right rebelled, he turned on his own bill and urged the House not to pass it. Still, the party’s anti-immigration base distrusts Rubio, as well it should.

And so, stymied on the policy front, party leaders have tried to tinker with the primary rules, the debate calendar, and now the debate moderators. Trying to win the general election hinges on the Paris climate conference.

Meanwhile, the candidates have revolted. After the October 28 CNBC debate, representatives from the warring Republican campaigns got together to wrest control away from the RNC. But the fracas only highlights the GOP’s fundamental problem. More than 50 years after GOP leaders began their cynical tilt toward angry white voters, the party is reaping what it has sown: a base that’s consumed by fury, not just at Democrats but at Republicans who have made and broken promises over and over again.

From 2009 on, the party’s leaders have either peddled or tolerated the notion that Barack Obama is an illegitimate president who wasn’t born in the United States—and now Trump, the 2012 birther-in-chief, has been leading the pack most of this cycle. GOP leaders promised to repeal Obamacare, take the debt ceiling hostage to force budget cuts, and slash taxes without inflating the deficit. They accomplished none of this. Now they wonder why their base is so enraged.

Like Priebus, the two leading establishment candidates in the race—Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio—at least recognize that the party’s reliance on aging white voters will eventually doom it to demographic extinction, especially in national elections. They just haven’t had the fortitude to do anything about it. Bush, for example, has said that the next Republican nominee would have to defy the GOP’s base at times: “to lose the primary to win the general [election]” is how he put it. Yet in September alone, Bush went from defending his decision to speak Spanish on the campaign trail—“This is a diverse country. We should celebrate that diversity”—to asserting that “we should not have a multicultural society.” Likewise, Rubio joined the so-called Gang of Eight and helped craft a bipartisan, comprehensive immigration bill that easily passed the Senate. But when the right rebelled, he turned on his own bill and urged the House not to pass it. Still, the party’s anti-immigration base distrusts Rubio, as well it should.

And so, stymied on the policy front, party leaders have tried to tinker with the primary rules, the debate calendar, and now the debate moderators. Trying...
Policing Education

How did all these cops get into our schools?

The mainstream media have been abuzz with possible justifications for the recent brutalization of a South Carolina high-school student by a sheriff's deputy assigned to the school. CNN analyst and former police detective Harry Houck opined that perhaps she had it coming because she didn't respect the officer's authority. Sheriff Leon Lott went so far as to claim that the young woman punched the officer as he placed her in a chokehold and flipped her upside down at her desk.

This only misses the point: A police officer had no business setting foot in that classroom in the first place.

As the Justice Policy Institute pointed out in an exhaustive 2011 study, it's long past time to “remove all law enforcement officers from schools.” Abundant research shows that having cops in schools does nothing to reduce crime. Instead, it contributes to an atmosphere of fear and intimidation and results in the criminalization of young people of color.

Over the past 20 years, the number of police officers stationed in our schools has exploded—one of the most dramatic and clearly harmful expansions of police power in postwar America. In 2009, The New York Times estimated that there were more than 17,000 police officers based in schools. According to figures from the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, 28 percent of all schools now have armed security officers assigned to them.

While the origins of “school resource officers” (SROs) can be traced to the 1950s, there was a dramatic change in their number and scope in the 1990s thanks in large part to the Justice Department's "COPS in Schools" program (the acronym stands for “Community Oriented Policing Services”), which gave out over $750 million in the late ’90s and early 2000s, resulting in the hiring of an additional 6,500 new school-based police.

This increase is tied to a variety of social and political factors that converged over the course of the '90s. First came the emergence of the “juvenile superpredator” concept developed by conservative political scientist John DiIulio. In 1996, DiIulio argued that the United States was about to experience a youth crime wave driven by the evils of the crack trade and the high rate of single-parent families; he also cited a series of (racially coded) concerns about declining values and public morality. DiIulio predicted that by 2010, there would be an additional 270,000 of these youthful predators on the streets, resulting in a massive increase in violent crime. He described these young people as hardened criminals, bordering on sociopaths: “radically impulsive, brutally remorseless...elementary school youngsters who pack guns instead of lunches” and “have absolutely no respect for human life.” Given their alleged fundamental disregard for the welfare of others, DiIulio and others argued, there was nothing to be done but to exclude these young people from settings where they could harm others and, ultimately, to incarcerate them for as long as possible.

The second major factor was the Columbine massacre in 1999, in which two young men at the Colorado high school murdered 12 of their fellow students and a teacher despite the presence of armed police in the school. In keeping with the broader ethos of get-tough criminal-justice measures, the response to the massacre was to increase the presence of armed police in schools, rather than deal with the underlying issues of bullying, mental illness, and the widespread availability of guns. A similar dynamic emerged after the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

These events dovetailed with a broader trend toward harsher punishments that was driving the rise of mass incarceration more generally. Politicians had already embraced the idea that criminality is a deeply embedded moral failing largely impervious to reform-oriented measures. As a result, the argument went, the only appropriate response was long-term incarceration, as seen in the rise of “three strikes” laws and other mandatory-minimum sentencing schemes. In this political environment, every public-safety threat was immediately turned into another opportunity to roll out more punishment and control.

Then-President Bill Clinton was more than happy to join in. In 1994, he introduced the Gun-Free Schools Act, which ushered in the wave of “zero tolerance” discipline policies. Following that lead, legislators at all levels, along with school administrators, embraced a raft of harsh disciplinary codes, the use of metal detectors, and the placement of huge numbers of cops in schools.

The “broken windows” theory of policing (that cracking down on vandalism and other minor “quality of life” offenses promotes law and order) has also found its way into school disciplinary procedures. Manhattan Institute fellows Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom, in their 2003 pro-charter-school book No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning, lauded the widespread adoption of “broken windows” policies in schools as a way to instill greater classroom discipline through strict rule enforcement and ever-increasing punishments for infractions.

Over time, the discourse around such methods provided the foundation for “no excuses”-based school disciplin-
Dear Liza,
Is my depression individual or political?
—Depressed or Oppressed

Dear Depressed,

Let’s not draw too sharp a distinction. Life under capitalism can be a profound bummer!

British psychotherapist Andrew Samuels explained to me via e-mail that “alongside the usual suspects like parents and trauma,” some therapists do think that the social and political world shapes our inner lives.

Take environment degradation. Dr. Samuels says depression is often caused by feeling guilt when we hurt someone we love. We love the planet, and as we’re bombarded with images of its imminent demise—dying polar bears, mass migration, catastrophic oil spills—we may take upon ourselves the responsibility for having damaged it. Neoliberal environmental ideology pins responsibility on us as individuals who should be using locally fermented lip balm, rather than on the CEO of Exxon. This doesn’t help.

But depression also has roots in your particular psyche: How do you handle anger, Depressed? Dr. Harriet Fraad, one of the few Marxist psychoanalysts currently in clinical practice, told me by phone that “depression is anger unexpressed.” Following the news makes you mad. That is good; you are not a selfish asshole. But instead of turning that anger inward on yourself, Dr. Fraad urges you to turn it outward, toward the bad guys, through political engagement.

Though the state of the world is depressing, she says, “fighting it is not depressing. It offers hope and connects us to others who feel the same way.” She emphasizes that “the basis of mental health is connection.”

You probably can’t fix serious clinical depression simply by joining the Portland bridge hangers—please do also try whatever combination of talk therapy, drugs, and exercise is right for you—but the research does suggest that political participation boosts well-being, especially for women inclined to psychic distress. It can even help offset some of the mental-health risks of being part of an oppressed group; probably because, following Dr. Fraad, we (women, the poor, people of color, and the working class) have even more things to be angry about.

Dear Liza,
My roommate is a slob, and I don’t like cleaning up after him. The problem is, neither does he. When I suggested splitting a cleaning service, he told me the ones I researched—worker cooperatives with good labor practices—were too expensive. Then, without asking me, he used Handy.com, a cheap start-up, before I could ask him to cancel. How should I handle this situation?
—Resident, Pigpen or Sweatshop

Dear Resident,

Partly because so much household labor used to be performed by slaves, domestic workers—nannies, housecleaners, and home health care aides—have been deprived of even the minimal labor protections accorded to most other workers under the law. They have therefore had to depend heavily on the good intentions of people like you.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) is the major national organization working to reform this industry. Another group, Hand in Hand, helps employers who want to treat domestic workers better but don’t know how to go about it. This organization’s website has terrific guidelines on wages, time off, and other matters to consider when your home becomes someone else’s workplace.

Reading Hand in Hand’s guidelines, I was struck by how much this voluntary reform effort depends on the employer and the worker having an ongoing relationship. The parties are advised to work on communication. The boss is advised to provide paid sick days, vacation time, and regular raises. Handy, an app to summon household help (Uber for domestic work), is antithetical to such well-meaning efforts. The customer, who swipes to summon a maid for a one-time job through Handy, not only doesn’t feel obligated to provide any of the benefits recommended by Hand in Hand, but structurally can’t.

What’s more, workers have sued that company for treating them as employees (dictating what they wear and what they say to clients) while also categorizing them as “independent contractors” so they won’t be entitled to any stability or benefits.
You can also tell your roommate that Handy gets terrible reviews on iTunes; even the convenience doesn’t seem to make up for the aggravations of bad service.

While the sharing economy is rife with exploitation now, domestic workers and their advocates don’t reject the possibility that such technologies could be made to benefit workers as well as customers. The NDWA has a department of “social innovations” working on ideas for making the sharing economy more just, and it hopes to persuade companies like Handy to endorse a code of conduct. And professors Trebor Scholz and Nathan Schneider—not to mention Mike Konczal in these pages—have been arguing that the sharing economy lends itself to a worker-cooperative revolution.

At present, though, you are right to avoid Handy, and your roommate is wrong to use it. The best way to find a cleaner is by supporting the movement for workers’ rights at the same time: hiring someone through one of the worker-run hiring halls affiliated with the National Domestic Workers Alliance (domesticemployers.org has a list).

But also we need to talk about your relationship with this roommate.

Sure, some of us are cleaner than others, but I’m distressed that he made an important household decision without consulting you—especially one that he knew you wouldn’t approve. A friend of mine just ejected her roommate for leaving moldy dishes in his room and other degenerate behavior, but to me your roommate’s conduct is even worse. If you’re the one on the lease, try once more to explain what you need: He must clean, or allow someone else to be fairly compensated for doing so. If he won’t do that, kick him to the curb.

(continued from page 4)

ary procedures (a.k.a “sweating the small stuff”), creating ever more restrictive rules and increasing the severity and frequency of punishments. These procedures play a crucial role in targeting students who may be a drag on the school’s all-important standardized-test scores. Black boys, in particular, are being driven out of these schools not for educational failure, but for failing to sit still in class or wear the right kind of shoes. PBS NewsHour found New York City charter schools that were suspending kids as young as kindergarteners for behavioral infractions. These children then disproportionately leave the charter schools, in part because their parents can’t manage the constant disciplinary conferences and suspensions.

These policies have resulted in the growing criminalization of young people despite the country’s falling crime rates. One study shows that schools with SROs had nearly five times the arrest rate of non-SRO schools, even after controlling for student demographics like income and race. The impact of these policies has been particularly harmful on students of color, especially those with disabilities. Schools with high percentages of students of color are more likely to have zero-tolerance policies and generate more suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. A 2011 study by the New York Civil Liberties Union found that students with disabilities are four times more likely to be suspended than their peers, which in turn leads to more involvement with police both inside and outside of school.

Even more disturbing, school-based police are using a high level of physical force against students, including pepper spray and Tasers. According to a report by Mother Jones, from 2010 to 2015 at least 28 students were severely injured by SROs. In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a class-action lawsuit against the schools of Birmingham, Alabama, claiming that they were systematically using excessive force. The SPLC alleges that since 2006, more than 300 students had been assailed by SROs with a combination of pepper spray and a tear-gas agent called Freeze +P that causes extreme pain and skin irritation and can impede breathing and vision. Other horrifying examples: A 17-year-old student in Texas was tased by an SRO in 2014 while trying to break up a school fight. The student was critically injured by the resulting fall and a blow to the head and spent 52 days in a medically induced coma—even through surveillance video shows that the young man was actually stepping away from the officers when he was zapped.

In 2010, 14-year-old Derek Lopez was shot to death by an SRO in San Antonio, Texas, after punching a student on school grounds. Officer Daniel Alvarado ordered Lopez to freeze and then chased him to a nearby shed, where he shot him. Alvarado claimed that Lopez “bull rushed” him as he opened the shed’s door. In August 2012, a grand jury declined to indict the officer.

While no national data are available, local studies show that lower levels of force against students are even more prevalent. The Houston Chronicle, for example, found that in the last four years, police in eight Houston-area school districts reported 1,300 “use of force” incidents.

The massive expansion of school-based police is predicated on the idea that it makes

Inter
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—Liza Featherstone
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YOUR HOSTS

Sujatha Fernandes

Sujatha Fernandes is a professor of sociology at Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center. Her first book, Cuba Represent!, looks at the forms of cultural struggle that arose in post-Soviet Cuban society. Her most recent book, Close to the Edge, grapples with questions of global voices and local critiques in hip-hop, and the rage that underlies both. Fernandes has been published in both academic journals and popular forums, including The Nation, The New York Times, American Prospect, and Dissent.

Charles Bittner

For almost two decades, Charles Bittner has served as The Nation’s academic liaison, representing the magazine and organizing panels at academic conferences throughout the country. He has hosted four previous Nation trips to Cuba and teaches in the sociology department at St. John’s University.

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schools safer, but this just isn’t true. Students in schools with a heavy police presence consistently report feeling less safe than students in similar schools with no police; nor is there any evidence that SROs have reduced crime or have prevented any mass-shooting incidents.

There are alternatives. A New York task force chaired by former state chief judge Judith Kaye found that schools with less punitive disciplinary systems were able to achieve a greater sense of safety for students, lower arrest and suspension rates, and fewer crimes, even in high-crime, low-income neighborhoods. What made the difference was a set of nonpunitive measures designed to keep kids in school while getting to the roots of disruptive behavior. In addition to better funding for high-needs schools more generally, officials should adopt a range of evidence-based reforms that are both cheaper and more effective than using police. Programs like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Social and Emotional Learning, and restorative justice have all shown positive results without relying on the logic of control and punishment that characterizes police-based “zero tolerance” school discipline.

It’s time to take the police out of our schools and reject the harsh, punitive focus of school management. Our young people need compassion and care, not coercion and control.

ALEX S. VITALE

Alex S. Vitale is an associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and author of City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

Rubio Cuts Down His Mentor

If Jeb had just remembered Shakespeare’s play,
He would have had the insight that it took
To notice long before the last debate
That Marco had “a lean and hungry look.”

Did You Detect the Subtle Sexism in Bernie Sanders’ Latest Remark on Hillary?

He’s always yelling, sure, but his 109% more yell-y with women.

Or Maybe People Are Reading Too Much Into Things?

Total feminist male ally here, reporting for duty! Did not hear the sexism.

Or Maybe You Have a Problem With Women in Power—Don’t You, Buddy? ? ?

Me? No, it’s just she murdered Vince Foster to cover up their aborted love child whose brains she sold to Planned Parenthood for $13.50 a pound, the lesbian?

That’s all.

I, for One, Am Definitely Looking Forward to Hashing This Out Every Week for the Next Year

That’s right. Because I’m a: a) pro-Bernie misogynist b) Clinton cultist.

Please Circle One.
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Germaine Greer has said a lot of foolish things in her long career. She’s defended female genital mutilation and polygyny. She’s said that what really matters to women isn’t sex but children—this from the author of *The Female Eunuch*, a feminist classic that urged women to claim freedom and sexual pleasure just like men! I reviewed *The Change*, her 1992 book about menopause, for *The New Yorker*, and found it an entertaining mess: On one page, she blamed society for ignoring the sexuality of middle-aged women; on the next, she urged those same women to stop fighting nature and embrace their inner crones. Still, when I was invited to interview her a few years ago about *Shakespeare’s Wife*, her biography of Anne Hathaway, I was delighted. I did not start a petition to have her invitation canceled on the grounds that anyone who approves of cutting off little girls’ clitorises has no place on a podium talking about any subject, even Elizabethan England. I thought: Here’s a woman who has lived a big life and, at 70, has written a book that tries to rescue one of history’s most famous wives from oblivion and misogyny. That’s feminism.

Not to Rachael Melhuish, a women’s officer at the Cardiff University Students’ Union in Wales, it seems. She’s trying to get Greer disinvited from speaking at her school. But she isn’t particularly concerned with Greer’s views on female genital mutilation or patriarchal family structures in the developing world. What she objects to is Greer’s “transphobia”—her “misogynistic” belief, expressed with characteristic exasperation on the BBC and elsewhere, that trans women are not real women. In a Change.org petition, Melhuish writes:

"Where to begin? Violence against trans women is the fault of feminists! I doubt the brutal men who assault and murder trans women have even heard of Greer—or are likely to attend her proposed lecture on feminism in the 20th century (which, she says, will not touch on the subject of trans women at all). And if you believe that inviting someone to lecture on campus is an endorsement of their views—even on subjects they’re not lecturing about—it doesn’t sound as if you’re really all that keen on debate. It sounds more like you want the university to invite only people who think like yourself.

I don’t want to make too much of this incident. The petition hasn’t proved very popular, Cardiff has said the lecture is on, and Greer has said she’ll be there. But it’s only the latest in a series of incidents, in the United Kingdom and the United States, in which campus feminists and leftists have tried to force universities to cancel speakers they’ve decided are beyond the pale. It’s both unfortunate and bizarre that at a moment when feminism is showing renewed signs of life, the first impulse is to narrow the conversation and throw rotten vegetables at everyone who isn’t singing 100 percent in unison. And did I mention ageism? That prejudice seems to be completely acceptable.

A typical tweet: “Germaine Greer is an insane old woman. Just watched the interview, she should be in an old peoples home.” In the UK, the National Union of Students has “no-platformed” (attempted to prevent from speaking anywhere) the lesbian feminist writer and activist Julie Bindel for “transphobia” stemming from a 2004 article in *The Guardian* in which she mocked the notion that having a sex change made someone a woman. (Although she’s apologized for the tone of that piece, it doesn’t matter: She questions the use of sex-reassignment surgery, especially for children, and that’s enough.) Transgender-rights activists argue that trans women are real women, irrespec-
tive of their physical attributes, and have always been so. But even if that view prevails, the movement has taken a wrong turn somewhere if Bindel—a decades-long campaigner for lesbian rights and against male violence toward women—is the misogynist, and the feminists include male “allies” screaming at her to shut up.

Why can’t feminists, like other people, be valued for what they get right—for the questions they raise and the productive lines of thought they open up—rather than declared personae non gratae for what they get wrong? It’s hard to find an intellectually curious, energetic writer or scholar or activist or human being who hasn’t said or written something very, very mistaken. But you can still learn from them—if only how better to argue against them. And if that’s too upsetting, you can always stay home.

Even abortion isn’t as divisive a subject as transgender rights. No one pickets a campus talk by Sister Helen Prejean because she belongs to a church that demands that raped 10-year-olds give birth. You don’t see anyone no-platforming conservatives who support cuts in government programs that devastate poor women and families, or foreign officials representing governments that deny women basic human rights. There’s a virtual standing army of prominent people—people with actual real-world power—who are more intimately connected with the subjection of women than Germaine Greer or Julie Bindel; to say nothing of the numerous people, like the classics scholar Mary Beard and the gay-rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, who have supported their campus appearances and found themselves in the same crosshairs.

Supporters of speaking bans often argue that no freedom-of-speech issues are involved, because the banned speaker is famous and has plenty of ways to get his or her word out. That’s true for Greer, but beside the point: While she doesn’t need Cardiff, maybe the feminists of Cardiff need Greer. Because a movement that has no room for controversy is a movement that risks talking only to itself.

* * *

Ros Baxandall, 1939–2015. The historian, educator, left-wing feminist activist, and onetime Nation contributor Rosalyn Baxandall died last month of kidney cancer. Ros was brilliant, funny, and fearless, with more vitality than most people half her age. A pioneer of women’s labor studies, she not only wrote history, she made some too: In the late 1960s, she picketed the Miss America pageant, helped organize the famous speak-out on abortion at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, and organized the first feminist daycare center in New York City. Even after she moved into scholarship and teaching—she was for many years the head of American Studies at the State University of New York at Old Westbury—activism remained part of her life, along with tennis, gossip, reading, and adventure. She was one of those people who made the world seem full of possibility and surprise, and I will miss her very much. Sometimes it feels like all the really interesting people are going.

There will be a memorial service for Ros from 2 to 4 PM on January 9 at Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan.

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SNAPSHOT/NGUYEN HUY KHAM

Retail Rip-Off

Employees at work inside a garment factory in Bac Giang province near Hanoi. Vietnam is one of 12 countries that have signed on to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, which critics say will further undermine working conditions for laborers across the globe.
Last Chance for Planet Earth?

High stakes at the Paris climate conference.

by MARK HERTSGAARD
EVERYTHING IS COMING TOGETHER AS EVERYTHING IS COMING APART.” So said Jamie Henn, strategy and communications director at 350.org, after he and the other organizers of the People’s Climate March put hundreds of thousands of people on the streets of New York City in September 2014 for the largest climate demonstration in history. Henn’s observation has grown even more apt over the last 14 months, especially the “coming together” part. Interviewed in Germany during the final negotiating session before the Paris climate summit in December, Henn predicted that “Paris won’t deliver everything we need, but the dominoes that will take out the fossil-fuel industry have already started to fall.”

There’s no need to dwell on how things are “coming apart”: With 2015 on track to become the hottest year ever recorded, Mexico just having dodged a bullet from the strongest hurricane ever seen in the Western Hemisphere, and South Carolina still recovering from floods that ranked as the country’s sixth one-in-1,000-years weather event since 2010, the evidence of intensifying climate disruption is obvious to anyone who doesn’t believe that snowballs in February somehow disprove humanity’s role in this. At the same time, encouraging and, frankly, surprising things are coming together. At the popular level, there is unprecedented organization, mobilization, and support for tackling the crisis; a genuine mass movement, which first emerged at the ill-fated Copenhagen summit in 2009, has come of age. And at the elite level, there is unprecedented consensus that the situation is truly grave and that meaningful action must be taken if our children are not to inherit a hell on earth.

Whether all this will yield a successful result in Paris—indeed, what “success” will even mean at the 21st Conference of the Parties—will be answered in time. But the outcome is at least up for grabs. There are more positive signs now than before any global climate negotiations in history (and this reporter has been covering them since the Earth Summit in Brazil back in 1992). Words are coming out of the mouths of government, corporate, and financial elites that would have been inconceivable a few years ago. And the words are not mere greenwashing; they are backed by actions that are fundamentally redirecting the policies of some of the most powerful actors on the global stage.

START WITH THE HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH THAT the presidents of the two climate-change superpowers made seven weeks after the People’s Climate March, when China and the United States agreed to a joint agenda of slashing greenhouse-gas emissions and super-accelerating clean-energy development. China’s coal use is already peaking, and the country is slated to deploy enough wind and other renewably sourced electricity to match the entire US electricity grid by 2030. The US-China breakthrough is a game-changing development, but its full implications still have not sunk in for many observers. On the diplomacy front, it ends the stalemate between Washington and Beijing that for decades has been the main stumbling block to an international treaty, thus opening the door for better news from the Paris summit. Arguably even more important is the economic message that the US-China agreement sends. When the world’s two largest economies and two largest carbon polluters pledge a specific timetable for cutting their emissions, it sends a clear signal to investors and policy-makers the world over. The message is straight out of Economics 101: limit the supply of a commodity—in this case, the authority to emit carbon pollution—and its price rises.

It’s no coincidence that putting a price on carbon—the single most powerful climate-policy reform available—is now endorsed by a Who’s Who of global heavyweights, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, two of the world’s foremost political leaders on climate change (Angela Merkel of Germany and Jerry Brown of California, a state that ranks as the eighth-largest economy in the world), four of its largest banks (Citi, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, and JPMorgan Chase), and even a few oil companies. How high such a carbon price will be, and by when, are knotty issues. But even ExxonMobil assumes that a price on carbon is inevitable; the only question is how long governments take to impose it. The immensity of the People’s Climate March brought that day closer, a company spokesman told me—evidence of how putting people in the streets can get results.

Pricing carbon will bring the power of the market to bear on the day-to-day decisions that shape economic behavior worldwide. Once consumers, producers, and investors begin paying some of the costs of carbon pollution, the prices will shift their choices away from climate-destroying products and investments and toward climate-friendly ones—and at a much greater speed and scale than government mandates achieve.

This pending economic reorientation reflects another astonishing break from the past: growing acceptance of the scientific finding that roughly two-thirds of the earth’s fossil-fuel reserves must be left in the ground if humanity is to limit the temperature rise to two degrees Celsius, the current international goal. A few years ago, this two-thirds imperative was a demand of grassroots activists; now it is a position embraced by such dangerous radicals as the president of the United States and the central banker of Great Britain. Even the chief economist of the oil giant BP concedes the basic point. “Concerns about carbon emissions and climate change mean that it is increasingly unlikely that the world’s reserves of oil will ever be exhausted,” Spencer Dale said on October 13.

The financial reverberations of leaving most fossil fuels in the ground would be, pardon the pun, earth-shaking. If you can’t burn them, why invest scores of billions of dollars to find, extract, and bring them to market? Thus arises the fear of “stranded assets”—sunken investments that do not earn back their initial cost, much less a profit. Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, has been sounding the alarm on this threat, warning investors they face “potentially huge” losses that could even destabilize world markets.

No investor wants to be left holding the bag, and more and more big players are getting out. The world’s largest sovereign-wealth fund, Norway’s $890 billion Government Pension Fund Global, divested all of its holdings in major coal companies, the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel. Pension funds, regional governments, universities, celebrities, and other investors owning a combined

Putti ng a price on carbon is now endorsed by a Who’s Who of global heavyweights.

Mark Hertsgaard, The Nation’s environment correspondent, is the author, most recently, of HOT: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth. He’ll be reporting from Paris for The Nation.

November 23/30, 2015 | 13
S$2.6 trillion of wealth have committed to ridding their portfolios of fossil-fuel holdings, a smashing triumph for the divestment campaign launched by 350.org and championed by The Guardian.

All this is fastening the death spiral of coal—the industry is in “terminal” and “structural” decline, concludes a recent report—and oil is feeling the heat. Fear of stranded assets was one reason that the Shell Oil Company recently retreated from the staggeringly costly proposition of drilling in the Arctic—that, and the ruckus that climate activists kicked up, including launching a flotilla of kayaks to block the company’s rig from leaving the port of Seattle.

Which highlights another transformation: The climate movement is not only growing; it’s winning concrete victories. Most mainstream media attributed Shell’s retreat to low oil prices, and those doubtless played a role. But Shell’s announcement also cited the “unpredictable federal regulatory environment.” That “regulatory environment” is a function of politics, and the climate movement is now clearly affecting how political leaders and institutions calculate.

Grassroots pressure has pushed Hillary Clinton, a political fence-sitter extraordinaire, to take noticeably stronger climate positions as she campaigns for president. Facing primary challengers whose more aggressive stances were exciting activists, Clinton announced in August that she supported Arctic drilling. Then she even came out against the Keystone XL pipeline, a project that as secretary of state she had said she was “inclined” to support.

All three Democratic candidates now oppose Keystone XL and Arctic drilling, illustrating how the climate movement is also defining a higher standard for true leadership on the issue. A general commitment to cutting emissions and boosting renewable energy no longer suffices; candidates must also embrace the two-thirds imperative by opposing new fossil-fuel infrastructure projects that would spew heat-trapping emissions for decades to come. “We have to draw the line against new long-term investments that lock in doom,” says K.C. Golden, senior policy adviser of Climate Solutions, a Northwest-based group active in blockading Shell’s drilling rig.

The climate movement may also be on the verge of a monumental breakthrough in public consciousness: portraying Big Oil as the moral equivalent of the tobacco industry. Blockbuster investigative reporting by two teams of journalists—one at the Los Angeles Times (with help from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism), the other at InsideClimate News—has shown that, as the hashtag puts it, “Exxon Knew.” As Bill McKibben wrote in The Nation, Exxon (now ExxonMobil) “knew everything there was to know about climate change by the mid-1980s—and denied it.” Indeed, top executives responded to their scientists’ findings by making Exxon the loudest practitioner and largest funder of climate denial, which helped block action in Washington and around the world.

ExxonMobil has called the articles “deliberately misleading” and sought to marginalize their impact by pointing that the company’s past opposition to (supposedly) “ineffective climate policies subjects us to criticism by climate activist groups.” R.L. Miller, founder of the NGO Climate Hawks Vote, notes that ExxonMobil’s statement is “uncannily similar to the talking points of the tobacco industry” in the way that it calls investigative journalists “activist organizations” and downplays the company’s “central role in creating and broadcasting scientific disinformation.” Bern Sanders, whose full-throated criticisms of corporate malfeasance have shaken up the presidential campaign, has urged Attorney General Loretta Lynch to investigate, arguing that Exxon “lied to protect their business model at the expense of the planet.”

The conflict between a 1.5°C and 2°C target exemplifies the rich/poor divide in climate talks.

Kayaktivism in Seattle: Protesters led by Greenpeace swarm Shell Oil’s Polar Pioneer drilling rig, June 15.

The hill to climb in Paris is steep, precisely because the climate deniers have blocked action for so long. The more greenhouse gases that accumulate in the atmosphere, the more temperature rise gets locked in. The planet is now 0.85°C warmer than before the Industrial Revolution. Since CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for decades after being emitted, global temperatures are bound to increase further—unless humans can extract sizable amounts of carbon from the atmosphere, as discussed below.

Two degrees or not 2 degrees, that is the question. Considering the damages that today’s 0.85°C is causing—record storms and droughts, leaders preparing to evacuate Pacific islands doomed to vanish under rising seas—many of the world’s governments are calling for limiting the temperature rise to 1.5°C. But these governments represent the poorest parts of the world, in Africa, Asia, South America. The big powers—including the United States, China, and the European Union—remain committed to 2°C. What’s more, they’re warning that any plausible Paris agreement will not secure even the 2°C goal.

The conflict between a 1.5°C and 2°C target exemplifies the rich/poor divide that has haunted global environmental negotiations since the 1992 Earth Summit. Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, has joked that she will cut off the head of any journalist who reports as news that the Paris summit will not deliver the 2°C target. What counts, she argues, is that virtually all of the world’s nations have officially committed to reducing their emissions, a notable difference from Copenhagen. If their pledges thus far yield an “emissions gap” that would raise temperatures at least 2.7°C—a catastrophic amount—it simply reflects the fact that the world’s political and economic systems cannot transition to low-carbon alternatives any faster. The way to fix the problem, say Figueres and others, including the Obama administration, is to make sure that any Paris agreement includes mechanisms to review the progress
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at, say, five-year intervals and strengthen commitments as needed to reach 2°C.

Such talk amounts to a death sentence for millions who inhabit especially vulnerable places, say the advocates for a 1.5°C target. “How can we possibly subscribe to more than double [the] current warming, given what less than 1°C has entailed?” asks Mary Ann Lucille Sering, director of the Climate Change Commission of the Philippines, a country that has endured record-breaking typhoons in recent years.

It’s not true that 2°C, or even 1.5°C, is unattainable, according to independent studies, though it would require jettisoning fossil fuels at breakneck speed. Emission reductions “need to scale up swiftly in the next decades,” says Joeri Rogelj, lead author of a little-noticed study published by Nature in May, arguing that a 1.5°C goal is still viable. The world can achieve 100 percent renewable energy for everyone by 2050 (and at slightly cheaper cost, because the installation costs of solar, wind, and other renewable sources are offset by the zero permanent costs of their “fuel”), according to a report that Greenpeace researched with the German Aerospace Center. Yes, Greenpeace is an advocacy organization, but its analysts were the only ones to accurately predict the spectacular recent rise of wind and solar power, while their counterparts at the big banks and investment firms missed it. Greenpeace International executive director Kumi Naidoo urges “all those who say ‘it can’t be done’ to read this report and recognize that it can be done, it must be done, and it will be for the benefit of everyone if it is done.”

Fracking must also halt or be radically transformed, concludes a recent study by Robert Howarth of Cornell University, long a leader in the field. Fracking releases methane, a much more potent greenhouse gas than CO₂. Its silver lining, though, is that methane is also much faster-acting, so slashing methane emissions can reduce temperature rise sooner. “Only by reducing methane emissions and emissions of soot can we…keep global warming below the 2-degree threshold,” Howarth tells The Nation.

There’s a catch to the 1.5°C target: Even the study by Rogelj et al. concludes that it’s too late to prevent a 2°C rise. But this rise can be temporary, they argue, if humanity deploys photosynthesis and other “carbon-negative” tools to extract CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it where it can’t trap heat. Growing and protecting forests, planting cover crops, and producing and burying biochar are the best-known tools to date. Australian climate scientist Tim Flannery describes a dizzying array of carbon-negative tools in his new book Atmosphere of Hope, including cement and plastics that “eat” carbon. “We must start preparing the ground now [to deploy such tools], even as we undertake the gargantuan effort of cutting emissions,” Flannery writes.

**Will rich countries make good on past promises to help poor countries fund their responses to climate change?**

A second rich/poor conflict in Paris: Will rich countries make good on past promises to help fund poor countries’ two-track responses to climate change? The Copenhagen accord obligates rich countries to provide $100 billion a year by 2020 to help the poor both shift to low-carbon energy sources and prepare for the impacts that can no longer be prevented. And experts reckon that the necessary funding will soon rise well above $100 billion a year.

For now, the aforementioned emissions gap is mirrored by a funding gap. The OECD claims that rich countries provided $62 billion in climate aid in 2014 and that “significant progress” is being made toward the $100 billion goal. Those figures are based on “dodgy accounting,” counter such antipoverty advocates as ActionAid, which notes that the majority of the OECD’s $62 billion is composed of loans, not grants, along with export credits that benefit companies in rich countries more than residents of poor countries.

A more fundamental objection comes from Saleemul Huq, who heads the International Center for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University of Bangladesh, and who trained diplomats of developing nations to participate in previous UN negotiations. Huq points out that many climate impacts are too overwhelming to manage, no matter how much money is thrown at them (recall the Pacific island nations disappearing beneath rising waves). What’s needed, he argues, is not only adaptation funding but also what’s known in UN parlance as “loss and damage” compensation. Most rich countries, however, resist the very concept of “loss and damage,” if only for fear it would expose them to lawsuits for climate disasters past and future.

The mix of good and bad news going into Paris has left Huq feeling “ambivalent about the entire enterprise.” He asks whether he should “accept some modest progress and say that we have achieved something and keep the show on the road, as I have done so many times before. Or should I call a spade a spade and say that Paris is not a beginning but the end of over two decades of inadequate efforts to tackle the biggest existential threat that mankind has ever had to face?”

I know what he means. But the outcome of Paris is still to be written. And never in the history of international climate negotiations has there been the kind of popular pressure that exists today, thanks to the rise of the climate-justice movement, which has planned a series of globally coordinated demonstrations, starting with national “days of action” and building up to rallies in Paris and other world capitals on November 28 and 29, as diplomats arrive for the summit. And never before have there been so many people in the corridors of power sincerely committed to averting catastrophe. The UN’s Figueres says that Paris must not be the destination but “the departure station” for a movement to “very, very deeply decarbonize” the world economy. Henri of 350.org puts it more simply: “The message coming out of Paris should be clear: We’re keeping fossil fuels in the ground.”
In 2008, Clinton took Nevada and its powerful unions for granted. She’s not making that mistake this time around.

by D.D. Guttenplan
T HIS IS WHERE IRONY GOES TO DIE—OR GET DEFIRBRILLATED.

A state with two Mormon senators where the hookers and wedding chapels “accept all major credit cards,” and the airport greets new arrivals with a phalanx of slot machines. Long before the first crapshooter rolled the dice, Nevada had already clinched its place in American mythology as the home of the Comstock Lode—a silver deposit that formed the basis of the Hearst media empire, the Bank of California, and the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. But the odds on success were long even then. A young Confederate deserter named Samuel Clemens came out from Missouri in 1861 with his older brother Orion, a Lincoln man appointed secretary of the territory. Failing to make his fortune as a prospector, Clemens became a reporter for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, where he adopted the pen name Mark Twain.

What would Twain have made of Bernie Sanders, scourge of “casino capitalism,” treading the embroidered carpets of the Wynn, or greeting his supporters after last month’s Democratic debate in the hotel’s Petrus Room? (In the nearby Tower Suite Bar, a 1996 Bordeaux goes for $400 a glass, or $5,790 for a full bottle.) Or the Clinton donor who boasted of winning $23,000 at poker before the debate began? Or Anderson Cooper, great-great-great-grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, challenging Sanders: “How can any kind of socialist win a general election in the United States?”

What might memory, or history, mean when most of the neon landmarks that turn the nighttime sky here into a huge billboard for greed and the main chance didn’t exist 30 years ago? Of the five casinos knocked over in the original Sinatra version of Ocean’s 11—the Desert Inn, the Flamingo, the Riviera, the Sahara, and the Sands—only the Flamingo remains. Most of the people here are new, too. Between 2000 and 2010, the population of Las Vegas grew by 42 percent, making it the fastest-growing city in the country. Now it’s the foreclosure capital of the South-west. Walking from the Strip to Binion’s downtown, I saw homeless people camped out under the freeways. What happens in America happens in Vegas, too.

That includes politics. Harry Reid’s claim that “no body lives” in New Hampshire and that Iowa is “a place that does not demonstrate what America is all about” may have been calculated to please his hometown crowd, but he had a point. Nevada has more than twice the population of New Hampshire and is almost twice the size of Iowa—too big to rely on face-to-face politicking. And in a state where nearly half the population is nonwhite, talking the talk on diversity won’t cut it.

Neither will platitudes about the middle class. Journey a few blocks from the bright lights of the Strip, and economic insecurity hangs over the place like a toxic cloud. Nevada lost 186,000 jobs during the crash. Unemployment in Las Vegas is still at 6.8 percent—worse than in any other big city. “There’s a huge disconnect between the debate in Washington and the things that actually affect people’s lives every day,” says Yvanna Cancela, political director of the Culinary Union Local 226.

In the 2016 election calendar, the Nevada caucus on February 20 is when reality begins to bite. Along with South Carolina’s primary on February 27, it’s the last hurdle before March 1, when Democrats in 11 states vote at once. Like Iowa’s caucus, the contest here is a test of passion and organization—only this time in a swing state the Democrats need to win in November. Nevada

Las Vegas

is where the campaign comes back down to earth. And when it does, Hillary Clinton’s people will be waiting.

**Social Security and Medicare— I think about my grandmother, waiting for that check every month.**

—Vanessa Valdivia, on why she’s working for Hillary Clinton

D.D. Guttenplan, an editor at large for The Nation, is the author of The Nation: A Biography.
THIS IS MY THIRD PRESIDENTIAL CYCLE IN NEVADA," SAYS Emmy Ruiz, a Texan who was in charge of Latino outreach for Clinton in 2008 and ran Obama’s campaign here in 2012. Ruiz, Clinton’s state director, has been in Las Vegas since March. (Jim Farrell, who runs the Sanders campaign in Nevada, only arrived last month.) “We’ve seen a lot of excitement,” Ruiz says as we grab a quiet moment in her office. Outside, in campaign headquarters, volunteers work the phones in two languages. “In Hillary, they see a woman who has spent her entire life fighting on behalf of people like us. They see her as a fighter.”

Clinton took Nevada for granted in 2008. Not this time. As they say in Las Vegas, only a fool bets against the house, and Clinton’s people are leaving no stone unturned to make sure that the house is on their side in 2016. To fire up the troops, Ruiz has brought in Joaquin Castro, the young congressman from San Antonio (his twin brother, Julian, was that city’s mayor before becoming Obama’s secretary of housing and urban development). Articulate, photogenic graduates of Stanford University and Harvard Law, the Castros give Texas Democrats reason to look forward to the future. Here in this small room, though, Castro’s rhetoric just bounces around, and his claim that “Clinton has a long-standing relationship with the Latino community” because she worked for George McGovern in Texas in 1972 sounds like an awfully long reach.

But when Dina Titus, the local Democratic congresswoman, turns up with her mother in tow, the volunteers burst into cheers. “You look around this room and look around Las Vegas,” she says. “We are the real face of America!” Not only will Titus become the state’s senior elected Democrat once Reid retires, but as a longtime government professor at the University of Nevada—Las Vegas, she taught many of her younger colleagues. And although Reid says that he likes all of the Democratic candidates, his son Rory, the former chairman of the Clark County commission, has been on Hillary’s side since 2008—as has Brian Greenspun, publisher of the Las Vegas Sun, who hosted a Clinton fundraiser in May. The son of Hank Greenspun, the Las Vegas legend who started as Bugsy Siegel’s publicist at the Flamingo and fought Joe McCarthy in the 1950s, Brian roomed with Bill Clinton at Georgetown.

Here, as elsewhere, Clinton has assiduously cultivated the “grasstops”—elected officials and other Democratic power brokers. Harvey Greene, who handled the press for Clinton during her visit to Nevada for the debate, is the former head of media for the Miami Dolphins—and another 2008 veteran. The campaign also flew Jason Colins, the former NBA star, to lend some celebrity glamour to a forum on LGBT issues in Reno last month.

But Clinton has plenty of grassroots supporters here, too. Donna West describes herself as “a process wonk.” Born and raised in Lititz, Pennsylvania, she spent 30 years working for the state of Nevada, staying out of politics because she “had to work in Republican and Democratic administrations.” But when she retired, she got into politics and got in deep. “I started by volunteering as a precinct captain and worked for Hillary in 2008—that’s when I chaired my first caucus,” she says.

“I liked Hillary when Bill ran in 1992,” she continues. “People said then that if you vote for him, you’re voting for her. My response was that I am voting for her. I felt she understood me. She was a working mom.”

West is passionate about animal rights—her DogLovers4Hillary Twitter account has nearly 21,000 followers—and gun safety. Her husband was in law enforcement. “We have weapons in our home. But I worry about my grandsons. Will they be safe at the mall? At the movies?” A member of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, she was also active in Occupy Las Vegas. So what does she make of Bernie Sanders? “I just don’t trust him. And his record on guns is really iffy.”

LAS VEGAS IS A UNION TOWN IN A RIGHT-TO-work state. Unions can’t require anyone to join—or even to pay dues—as a condition of employment. Anything workers get here, they’ve had to fight for. “We have 55,000 members across the Strip and downtown,” says Yvanna Cancela, making Local 226 by far the largest union in the state. Though 56 percent of the membership is Hispanic, “we represent workers from 167 countries,” she says, “from cooks and pastry chefs to bellboys and chambermaids. Everyone but the people who deal directly with gaming money.”

Thanks to the union, she adds, Las Vegas is “probably the last city where you can be a member of the middle class without a college degree.” Union members form a crucial part of any Democratic victory here.

But mapping labor politics onto presidential politics is never simple. Last month’s endorsement of Clinton by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the nation’s largest public-employee union, may have had more to do with Joe Biden’s withdrawal from the race than a sudden surge of enthusiasm among its membership. Even so, it offered Clinton a formidable counter to National Nurses United’s earlier backing for Sanders. It also added to the pressure on Local 226 and its parent organization, UNITE HERE, and on Local 1107 of the Service Employees International Union, Nevada’s second-largest, whose own parent organization fought bloody jurisdictional battles with the nurses’ union through much of the last decade.

In 2008, both Nevada locals stunned Clinton’s campaign when they endorsed Obama. Billed as a triumph for the rank and file, those endorsements also let the national unions hedge their bets. In response, Clinton’s allies in the state teachers’ union went to court to try to prevent casinos on the Strip from opening early so more casino workers could participate—a move that Donald Taylor, then president of 226, described as “despicable.” Ads on Spanish-language radio called Clinton “shameless,” accusing her of trying to suppress the Latino vote.

Those 2008 ads were paid for by UNITE HERE—a union now led by Taylor. Which may partially explain why Hillary Clinton took time out, the day before the debate, to drop by a Local 226 rally in front of the Trump Hotel, a gold-plated 64-story eyesore whose workers want a union contract. Her attack on the GOP front-runner got her on every network, but it hasn’t yet persuaded her former foes to endorse her.

Still, it seemed an obvious gesture, so I asked Jim Farrell why Bernie Sanders hadn’t shown up too. In response, Farrell pointed out that Sanders had addressed Local 226 workers earlier in the summer and would “almost certainly join them on a picket line before this is over,” then e-mailed me to add: “I don’t think photo-op politics are
going to determine the outcome in Nevada this year.”

Behind the scenes, Clinton is pressing hard for an early endorsement—a far cry from the candidate who, in 2008, told SEIU leaders here: “I don’t need you to win.” How much influence national endorsements would have in Nevada is another question—especially when many members remain bitter over what they see as broken promises from the last presidential candidate they endorsed.

O local 226 members, who for years have “sacrificed wage increases and pension increases to make sure their healthcare plan is well-funded,” Cancela says, the Affordable Care Act’s 40 percent tax on so-called Cadillac coverage was like a slap in the face. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have both said they favor repealing the tax. But to Cancela, such talk is cheap.

“Same as immigration reform—it’s an issue that gets a lot of lip service every election cycle and then disappears from view,” she says. “Obama told [Univision anchor] Jorge Ramos he’d do it in his first year. But it never happened. We learned our lesson.”

So far, the local hasn’t backed anyone. Instead, Cancela started a political academy to give her members a chance to discuss the issues and to shift the focus onto local bodies like the state legislature and the county commission.

In class the day after the Democratic debate, I found no clear winner among the people in attendance—and a fear that workers would again be the losers.

“They came to Las Vegas—a union town,” said Efrain Becerra, a shop steward at Harrah’s. “Debated in a union hotel. They had an opportunity to stand with working people. But they didn’t say anything about the ‘Cadillac tax,’ and they didn’t talk about immigration.”

“I heard them talk about college, but we need to talk about the lower grades,” said Annette Wright-DeCampos. “All of our costs—gas, milk, groceries—have gone up. But our wages have not gone up,” said David Hancock. “For me, personally, there was not a winner—no specifics on immigration or a pathway to citizenship,” said Rory Martinez, who hopes to run for office himself in 2016.

That call for specifics—and for both Clinton and Sanders to up their game—was one I heard repeatedly during my visit. Courtney Errington works for the Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority and is treasurer of SEIU Nevada. “We know we need jobs—but what kind of jobs? Where are they going to come from? Are they going to be jobs where everybody on their off days are going to be standing around holding signs saying $15 or BUST? And what are we doing about replacing the jobs we’ve already sent overseas in our various trade agreements? That’s like putting toothpaste back in the tube,” she said.

Errington too has yet to decide on a candidate. “Bernie Sanders, he puts it out there. What I like about him—what I liked about Obama—is being more with the people than with the money. Hillary doesn’t get the people…. I’m not saying she’ll be a bad president.” Errington laughs. “After all, she’s been living in public housing for a long time—but it ain’t the kind of public housing I work in.”

Alfredo Serrano is also an SEIU member—and he says he has decided. “Hillary’s the best candidate,” he asserts. “I can’t see wasting my vote on someone who’s not going to be elected.” But he’s not exactly a true believer: “I’m like, ‘Any Democrat will do.’” He’s excited, though, to be taking his daughter to a Clinton rally the day after the debate, saying, “She might get to meet the next president.”

Now that the democratic field has essentially become a two-person race, we can expect the media—and the candidates themselves—to emphasize the differences between the contenders. As we saw in the first debate, Clinton and Sanders really do represent two different views of politics and possibility. Far more than her shape-shifting husband, Hillary Clinton is running as a genuine liberal, committed to reforming the system to make it fairer and sharing its benefits more widely, but also to preserving its essential structures, from Wall Street to Wal-Mart. The promise, and the peril, of the Sanders campaign comes from his refusal to accept the premises that have for so long bound our politics—especially regarding the economy. When Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren says, “The game is rigged,” they’re usually talking about that.

Yet our politics are rigged, too—perhaps nowhere more openly than right here in Las Vegas, where two of the biggest non-union casinos, the Venetian and the Palazzo, belong to Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson. You can’t change one without the other—and in neither case can you expect a fair fight. Regardless of what happens in Iowa or New Hampshire, a win here for Clinton would put her on the path from electable to inevitable. A victory for Sanders would be a huge upset, undeniable evidence that his talk of a “political revolution” really is more than a pipe dream. Of course, that assumes—as most of us do—that the two candidates’ objectives are mutually exclusive.

On the afternoon before the debate, both campaigns staged “visibility” events outside the Wynn. Clinton’s crowd—about 50 people wearing matching blue shirts with a big “H”—took the sky bridge over Las Vegas Boulevard chanting, “HRC in 2016!” There were more Sanders supporters—I counted at least 120, with nurses’-union members in red, others in Bernie blue—but instead of staying in one place, they marched in a circuitous route dictated, the organizers said, by their lack of a permit. They mostly chanted, “We are the 99 percent!”—the two groups met. At first, both competed to see who could chant the loudest. Then, as the Sanders contingent got halfway across the bridge, someone started chanting, “We’re on the same team!”—and both sides picked it up. After about a minute, it was back to politics as usual. I don’t know what it means. But I was there, and I saw it.
Grassroots Democrats in Iowa know exactly where Bernie Sanders is coming from.

by JOHN NICHOLS
DO I THINK BERNIE SANDERS SHOULD TALK ABOUT DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM? Yes, I do,” says Iowan Mary Clark. “I want him to explain everything in detail—give people a really good explanation. People who like Bernie are probably going to like him a little more if he does that. And people who aren’t supporting Bernie now might just say, ‘It sounds like he’s got some ideas that would actually solve our problems.’”

Clark isn’t a pundit or a pollster; nor does she sell herself as an expert on economics or presidential politics. She’s a rural Iowan who worries a lot about whether her neighbors will have clean water, decent housing, and fair pay. She’s worked a few minimum-wage jobs herself, and she knows a lot of folks who are struggling to get by along the rural routes that pass through her corner of Iowa’s Polk County. She talks to them about politics, and she always talks up Sanders. People like what they hear, she says. “But then they hear these guys on television saying, ‘Bernie Sanders can’t get elected because he’s a democratic socialist.’ So Bernie has to talk about it. But he doesn’t have to apologize for anything. He should say, ‘You’re wrong—I can get elected as a democratic socialist, and here’s why.’”

As he prepared to deliver one of the most important speeches of his presidential campaign, the independent senator from Vermont got a lot of advice on how to explain the democratic-socialist ideal that he’s embraced for more than five decades—an ideology that Donald Trump equates with Soviet-style communism and Rand Paul promises will “exterminate” those who do not follow the party line.

Sanders, who has said that he would like to debate Republicans and Democrats as part of his boundary-breaking presidential run, might yet find that the best way to demythologize the notion of democratic socialism would be in a spirited debate with a member of the billionaire class like Trump. In the meantime, he finds himself leading a discussion that American politics and the American media haven’t really entertained since the days of Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party candidate who appeared on the cover of Time magazine and was featured on a daily basis in The New York Times’s coverage of the 1932 presidential race.

Talking about democratic socialism is nothing new for Sanders. In fact, what distinguishes his candidacy from that of any nationally noted contender since Thomas is that he not only accepts the label but willingly engages in extended discussions of the concepts, values, and models associated with it. “I’m not afraid of the word,” he told The Nation earlier this year, adding that “Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader of the Senate, often criticizes President Obama—incorrectly—for trying to push ‘European-style socialism,’ and McConnell says the American people don’t want it. First of all, of course, Obama is not trying to push European-style socialism. Second of all, I happen to believe that, if the American people understood the significant accomplishments that have taken place under social-democratic governments, democratic-socialist governments, labor governments throughout Europe, they would be shocked [by] those accomplishments. One of the goals of this campaign is to advance that understanding.”

Actually, that’s been one of the goals of Sanders’s entire career. With remarkable consistency over the decades, he has patiently distinguished between democratic socialism and Soviet-style communism, expressed “continued oppo-

An October YouGov poll shows Democrats favoring socialism over capitalism by 12 percentage points.

The new edition of John Nichols’s book The S Word: A Short History of an American Tradition... Socialism will be published this month by Verso.
to Lyndon Johnson on how to wage a “war on poverty.” In the early 1980s, Harrington co-founded the group Democratic Socialists of America with an eye toward building an American version of social democracy along the lines practiced in Denmark, Norway, and other European countries. Harrington argued for situating the movement within the Democratic Party, because it tended to align itself with organized labor, attract working-class voters, and appeal to the young Americans and people of color who might be most open to an alternative politics.

However, the late 1980s and ’90s saw the emergence of a dramatically more cautious Democratic Party, with the “left wing of the possible” dumbed down by “New Democrats” like Bill Clinton, who veered away from the Democrats’ traditional allies in labor and other social movements and toward new allies on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley. Where Franklin Roosevelt welcomed the hatred of bankers and CEOs, and met at the White House with “my good friend Norman Thomas” and other Socialist Party leaders, Clinton as president undid New Deal–era regulations on big banks, and President Obama once called a New York Times reporter to point out not only that he was not a socialist, but that his administration was “operating in a way that has been entirely consistent with free-market principles, and some of the same folks who are throwing the word ‘socialist’ around can’t say the same.”

Yet even as the Democratic Party tended to grow more cautious, a substantial portion of the party’s base continued to embrace Harrington’s left wing of the possible. In the upper Midwest, activists warmly embraced Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, who talked up the uniquely radical legacy of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, and Iowa Senator Tom Harkin’s pro-labor, pro-farmer prairie populism. Wellstone and Harkin didn’t identify as democratic socialists, but they kept alive an old-school progressive-populist sensibility. More recently, Sanders, their friend and frequent ally, has returned that old-school progressive-populist sensibility. More recently, Sanders, their friend and frequent ally, has returned that sensibility to center stage with bolder language and bolder plans for ending austerity, taxing the rich, and tipping the balance in favor of working Americans.

Grassroots Democrats got to know Sanders as a frequent guest on MSNBC cable shows, on Thom Hartmann’s radio show, and as a tireless traveler to progressive gatherings across the country. It never seemed to bother the base that he was a democratic socialist, because democratic socialism never seemed to bother the base. Long before Sanders considered making a presidential bid, a 2012 Gallup survey found that while 55 percent of Democrats had a favorable view of capitalism, a nearly equal amount—53 percent—had a favorable view of socialism. An October 2015 YouGov poll shows a growing divide, with Democrats favoring socialism over capitalism by 12 percentage points. Among young people and people of color, socialism polls significantly better than among the general population. But polls also find that only half of Americans say they would vote for a socialist for president (59 percent of Democrats, 49 percent of independents, 26 percent of Republicans). That raises the electability issue, and it’s one reason Sanders started talking about delivering a “major speech” on socialism—something he probably should have done much earlier in the campaign. “I think we have some explaining and work to do,” the senator told an audience at an Iowa house party, acknowledging that the word “socialist” makes some people “very, very nervous.”

It doesn’t have that effect on George Naylor, a farmer–activist from Churdan, Iowa: “Oh, I never thought it was as much of a problem as people say.” An outspoken advocate for family farmers, he adds that “the way to talk about socialism is to remind people of what they don’t like about most politicians: They’re too close to big business. Well, democratic socialists aren’t close to big business. They want to make sure big business doesn’t run over the rest of us. Talk about it that way, and even some folks who think they’re conservatives might say, ‘That makes sense.’”

That’s a good place to start tapping into the populist sentiment that has always gotten Americans thinking about economic and political alternatives. That mood rises when capitalism is in crisis—or when many Americans feel, as they do now, that existing systems are failing them. The whole point of the “political revolution” that Sanders argues for is to get millions of Americans to respond to those failures by engaging politically. If that happens, it won’t be the first time that economic turbulence has inspired interest in social–democratic solutions.

It was during the economic downturn culminating in the Panic of 1797 that Thomas Paine wrote Agrarian Justice, in which he outlined a social-welfare state with estate taxes used to fund universal old-age and disability pensions and a onetime payment to citizens to help lift them out of poverty. A century later, the Panic of 1893 brought a new generation of radicals to the fore, including Eugene Debs. The American Railway Union leader would eventually head a Socialist Party presidential ticket that twice gained nearly a million votes and elected members of the US House, as well as big-city mayors and substantial legislative caucuses in states like Wisconsin and Oklahoma.

Historian Eric Foner urges Sanders to “embrace our own American radical tradition” rather than “inadvertently [reinforce] the idea that socialism is a foreign import.” Historian Harvey Kaye goes a step further, encouraging Sanders to say that “social democracy is 100 percent American” and to explain that this country has a rich history of leading rather than following Europe when it comes to guaranteeing universal access to public education and
setting aside land for public parks. They’re right. But Sanders has to focus on more than just the academic argument, which he could easily win; he has to focus on the electability question. As such, he must make the point that American socialists have advanced their agenda in the past by winning elections—lots of them. For more than a century, socialists, social democrats, and allied radicals have been winning elections all across America—from New York to Los Angeles, from Oklahoma to Minnesota. They have run big cities and school boards, they have written laws, and they have provided the impetus for the creation of state banks, worker-compensation programs, public-health programs, and now-cherished institutions like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Debs’s successor as the Socialist Party’s presidential candidate was Norman Thomas, counselor to presidents and inspiration to the leaders of unions like the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Thomas addressed the 1963 March on Washington at the behest of the man who called the march, Socialist Party stalwart and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union leader A. Philip Randolph. Thomas later allied with Randolph and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as they worked on the unfinished business of the civil-rights revolution by promoting a “Freedom Budget for All Americans,” which advocated social-welfare programs similar to those Sanders now hails in Denmark and Norway.

Sanders must make the argument that the political revolution he’s calling for will occur only if his candidacy goes beyond a protest vote or educational endeavor and becomes an actual movement, similar to the Robert F. Kennedy coalition of the 1968 primaries, which aligned working-class white, Latino, and African-American voters with liberals and students. Sanders would do well to take the advice of Joe Fagan, a founder of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI). Discussing the left wing of the possible, Fagan points out that “there are a lot of good examples from around the world. But there are some pretty good examples right here: schools, libraries, roads…. “There’s nothing scary about what Bernie is saying,” Fagan adds. “He’s fighting for what people believe in, what they want. That’s how he should talk about it. Free college education—who doesn’t want that? Break up the banks—who isn’t for that? Addressing inequality—who is opposed to that?”

Lou Ann Burkle, a CCI activist, argues that Sanders has a unique opportunity to open up the debate across the country. “You can change the conversation by putting things in perspective,” she says. Tim Tutt, an elementary school teacher from Des Moines, suggests that Sanders “shouldn’t just explain democratic socialism,—he should explain capitalism.” An experienced Iowa caucus-goer, Tutt says that a lot of Iowans, like a lot of Americans, know that with bank bailouts, corporate abuses, and the widening gap between rich and poor, “what we’ve got now isn’t working.” Just as Roosevelt tempered the excesses of capitalism with a New Deal during the Great Depression, Tutt says, Sanders should lay out why he thinks democratic socialism can temper the excesses of contemporary capitalism.

“It’s not something you do in a sound bite,” warns Sharon Gunder, a retired teacher from Ames. But, says Fallon, the former legislator, “if you’re being called a democratic socialist by people who think that’s a bad thing, then the only way to deal with that is to talk about why you think it’s a good thing.”

“Sure, it’s a big conversation,” says Naylor, the farm activist. “So what? If you’re running for president, you ought to be able to get a big conversation going. That’s what people want you to be able to do.” He smiles and points to a Sanders for President sign, with an outline of Iowa and the words “The Revolution Starts Here.”
A Real Bad Apple

Eric Alterman is right to insist that Apple's corporate misdeeds are more worthy of our scrutiny than Steve Jobs's character flaws ["Rotten at the Core," Nov. 2]. What amazes me is the way companies like Apple so effectively seduce even educated liberals to buy their products, despite the environmental and human-rights abuses that go into making them.

The "mad men" of advertising effectively manufacture appealing brand images that cast ruthless, corrupt companies like Apple and Volkswagen as cuddly countercultural icons. And after all these years of being duped, we still fall for it (iPhone 6s, anyone?). Is it naïveté or willful blindness?

Eric Etelson
Berkely, Calif.

Yes, it seems likely that Apple is every bit as mendacious and unscrupulous as other multinational corporations. What irks me most, however, is the near-deification of Steve Jobs, who has more than once been portrayed by the media as a Zen master and a Buddhist—who has more than once been portrayed by the media as a Zen master and a Buddhist—who has more than once been portrayed by the media as a Zen master and a Buddhist—who has more than once been portrayed by the media as a Zen master and a Buddhist.

Bettyann Lopate
Beacon, N.Y.

Et Tu, MSNBC?

Those of us who live in rural areas (read: web access is not a given, data caps are low, overage charges are high) have relied on MSNBC for news from a leftist/progressive viewpoint ["I Want My Progressive TV!," Oct. 26]. The only reason I've been willing to pay for TV service is to have MSNBC. If the network continues to cut back on content relevant to my political interests, dumping the dish will be an easy decision.

Nancy Ames

Correction

Eric Alterman's column "St. Paul Returns" [Nov. 16] incorrectly identified the Brookings Institution's Thomas Mann as Theodore Mann. We regret the error.

(continued from page 2) of fear that those civilians might be dangerous. It would seem time to reconsider how police officers are trained and directed to respond to ambiguous but potentially dangerous situations. While no one wants officers to be killed or injured in the line of duty, they are hired specifically to protect civilian populations, not to inflict harm upon the innocent, no matter how much fear officers may experience during their encounters.

Georgia Johnson
The man across the aisle on the flight home spent thousands of dollars on a European vacation with his family. While killing time in the airport, he unloaded almost all of what was left of his euros—the big notes—on duty-free souvenirs for friends. Now, as the plane begins its descent, he tosses his pocket change into a fund for African children.

The airline launched the charity collection a few years ago, as part of the widespread drive for so-called corporate social responsibility. You have a bout of nausea as you watch the flight attendants collect the donations. What’s revolting is not so much the program itself; as the announcement on the PA earnestly insists, “Change adds up”—which, though a vile piece of marketing, is true enough. Rather, it’s the ritual you have witnessed, with artificial gratitude on one side of the transaction and a passing moment of self-satisfaction on the other.

But then, you are on the same flight. You have also donated your loose change to the cause and perhaps a bill, even a large one, and have shed with it a bit of the complacency that comes with enjoying a world of wealth and privilege. The plane taxis to the gate, and, after clearing customs, you get on with your life. The limo to Manhattan from JFK comes to $100, tip included.

That such a life—a uniquely fortunate one in the annals of history—is essentially unearned in a world of horrors is a truth that our culture keeps at bay most of the time. But disquiet about it erupts all the same, in some people more than others. What if you were so often troubled by the incongruity between your sense of material comfort and the destitution of others, or unable to find routine defenses against it, that you felt you had to change your life entirely?

“It was never a new idea that people are selfish,” Larissa MacFarquhar observes in one of the lapidary aphorisms scattered throughout Strangers Drowning, her masterpiece of a book about those among us who decide to drop everything and become extreme altruists. Is their “impossible idealism” a genuine alternative to our self-involvement and smug advantage, abetted by a showy generosity that is all the more grating for being deeply inadequate? More important, who are these saintly few who, refusing to tolerate worries about complacency and complicity, set out to change or even save a life a hundred or a thousand miles away? Their “inhumanly lofty” benevolence sharpens our inevitable but passing doubts about our unprecedented entitlement. It pushes our fleeting outrage or rational condemnation of things as they are into an extreme and perhaps extremist ethic, transforming what might be supererogatory duties—things that might be done for extra credit—into necessary, if not militant, demands.

What is most arresting, and troubling, to MacFarquhar about extreme altruists is that, unlike most people, they rank the needs of perfect strangers with those of their own families and friends. An African child can suffer as much as my mother—or me; no one is more or less human than anyone else; foreigners in pain around the world outnumber even the widest group of one individual’s acquaintances, especially for anyone living in a rich nation. MacFarquhar’s do-gooders, by turning the ephemeral fancy of being ethically upright into a whole way of life, substitute a kind of impersonality for the overwhelmingly personal moral relationships that even the most generous people favor.

MacFarquhar herself is intensely interested in the people she gets to know. A New Yorker staff writer renowned for her luminous profiles of the famous and the anonymous (some of which have been successfully folded into this book), she is one of the most talented nonfiction writers working today. Most of Strangers Drowning consists of profiles of do-gooders, which are its beating heart and the greatest evidence of MacFarquhar’s extraordinary gifts. “Only actual lives,” she says, “convey fully and in a visceral way the beauty and cost of a certain kind of moral existence.” Interleaved among her case studies are more reflective chapters, including a series on possible objections to the single-minded exigency of these do-gooders.

MacFarquhar describes her cast of characters with a kind of sympathetic neutrality, like the ethnographer of a tribe that most of us would never ditch our family and friends to
asked more than four decades ago to explain why people are morally obligated to do what they can to alleviate famine. If you passed a dying child, would you really not feel impelled to save her? If so, then why should the intermediation of long distances matter? Singer was spurred to make this argument by a civil war and a cyclone in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). He preaches effective altruism today in some of his popular books, and his TED Talk on the subject long ago passed a million views.

MacFarquhar’s book begins with a scene in a restaurant in which a philosophy student who has clearly read Singer’s work is explaining to his professor—a family man—why the welfare of abstract humanity matters as much as that of his own children. MacFarquhar takes a long look at another young man who, already burning with idealism, reads Singer’s famous essay “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” and sets out to live frugally in order to bring his personal life into conformity with altruistic justice. To buy a can of soda, it might be argued, is to opt for killing a child far away—because absent that dollar spent on humanity, somebody somewhere will die. And once you know this, how could you spend that dollar on a can of soda for yourself? If the amount spent on luxuries for the 1 percent were redirected to Africa, how many more people would survive?

MacFarquhar invokes another philosopher, Susan Wolf, who refers to such people as “moral saints.” MacFarquhar claims that the skepticism of such moral extremists “has a history,” one around three centuries old. In fact, her view seems to be that a humanitarian devotion to one’s fellow beings was much more ethically plausible long ago, when religion dominated human life and there were literal saints and widespread cults of saintliness. She says as much in a passing remark about Singer’s conclusion that most people are, in effect, constantly perpetrating massive crimes by preferring their own comforts or their family’s wants and thereby spurning “the life you can save” (the title of one of Singer’s books). This may seem the hectoring of a bizarre malcontent, MacFarquhar acknowledges, even though, “in the past…the idea that nearly everybody was a wretched sinner seemed perfectly normal.”

For contemporary do-gooders, she continues, life is always an emergency situation, much like wartime. But whereas war was once a much more participatory and widely shared experience because of conscription and privation, she concludes, our time demands less self-sacrifice in general, “which may be one reason do-gooders look even odder now than they used to.”

But the rise of figures with an extreme devotion to the remediation of distant suffering also has a history. Religion was never mainly concerned with establishing a morality fixed on the pain of others. In the monotheistic religions, most of one’s duties were to God, not to one’s fellow creatures; the golden age of sincere moralizing about philanthropic duties came about only in the 19th century, not before. If war was once a regular part of human experience, the appearance of humanitarians who treat the remediation of suffering as if it were a personal war—or even its moral equivalent, in William James’s phrase—is a much more recent phenomenon.

Then too, Christian saints were rarely canonized because they wanted to rid the world of suffering. Many were models of fidelity in the face of persecution; some were “extremists” only in their devotion to contemplation and prayer. If some of them helped the poor, it was often to illustrate how to seek God’s grace. Humanitarians may be likened to saints, but the comparison is inapt, because what the saints exemplified was never primarily an identification with the travails of others, let alone some vision of global justice.

It is true that identifying with suffering—but mostly with that of God’s human incarnation—has been seen as part and parcel of Christianity. And a modicum of charity has long been a component of organized religion. Faith has also provided reconciliation with the endurability of suffering: Pain was sometimes consensual and indeed valuable. Monks lacerated their flesh, while some female saints starved themselves in “holy fast” (which was not undertaken out of charity for others). For aristocrats, ritualized dueling and military service had an innate nobility, while the common folk viewed human and animal pain as sport. That Mother Teresa springs to mind when someone says the word “saint” is far more a consequence of a generally secular revolution in moral standards than its cause.

Today’s purists do not violate their flesh in monasteries; they heal the bodies of oth-
THE NATION has been going strong for 150 years, an embarrassing portion of which I have witnessed firsthand. I hesitate to confess the exact number of years, but I am proud to admit that I have left a gift to The Nation in my will.

It was an easy decision to make, and not difficult to arrange. I encourage you to join my wife, Annie, and me in doing the same. Please consider leaving a gift to The Nation in your will or through your retirement plan.

You don’t need me to tell you that the independent, unfettered voice of The Nation remains as necessary as ever, but I will anyway. Help us keep it that way. Help ensure a home for dissent and dissenters who will challenge the conventional wisdoms of the future, as they envision the world we truly want our grandchildren to inherit.

—Victor Navasky

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MacFarquhar rightly observes that great devotion to the cause of relieving faraway suffering no longer depends on people feeling compassion. She discusses the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, who, though inspired by sentimentalism, worried that duty couldn’t be grounded in something as evanescent, unreliable, and unevenly distributed as sympathy for others. But as MacFarquhar also observes, often the most boldly rational calls for justice conceal deep wells of emotional affect. On seeing the student in the restaurant moved to tears at the thought of the people who perished in catastrophes hundreds of years ago, even though they are beyond any one’s help, she remarks: “What appears at first to be an absence of emotion then appears to be a need to control overwhelming emotion that is apt to surface without warning.” Grounding a duty to humanity in reason makes philosophical sense, but for many of its partisans, reason also functions as a justification for something more primal.

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In a particularly insightful passage, she dwells on George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy, who exchanged art for humanitarianism and then indicted art’s complacency. Both writers bitterly attacked Shakespeare for portraying human frailty so generously—almost novelistically—without proposing to mend it. After his conversion to Christianity, Tolstoy went so far as to rank Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin above the Bard’s plays, because Stowe had transformed art into humanitarian propaganda to spectacular effect. In response to such heresies, MacFarquhar cites James Baldwin arguing that the price of Tolstoy’s transformation was grave: “The wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart.” And, let’s not forget, his love of bad art.

MacFarquhar also draws on novelists, along with the late English philosopher Bernard Williams, to criticize rigorous altruism in a different way. Extremism in morality threatens not only morality itself, but a range of other concerns. We are not just moral beings, after all. “Morality likes to make it seem as though outside its kingdom of duty there is only meaningless, selfish impulse,” MacFarquhar writes, “but this is not true…. If a person is at every moment required to be attending to his moral duty, then much of what makes life worth living, and people worth loving, will have to be abandoned.” If full-bodied experience is what makes life valuable in the first place, then prioritizing rescue could become self-defeating. It could focus our culture so intently on saving bare life as to marginalize living well.

At times, MacFarquhar can sound like a novelist herself. In a symposium on Peter Singer’s effective altruism in a recent issue of Boston Review, her response to Singer’s proposals is more direct than the neutral profile she offers of him in her book. Singer’s movement, she says, is “the drone program of altruism,” in the sense that it tries to save lives from a clean distance, much in the way that the American military now kills most of its enemies. For all of the arguments in favor of saving or taking these lives, operations conducted from a safe distance on behalf of essentially anonymous strangers seem “off-putting,” she remarks. As in her book, she is absorbed by a moral extremism that the devotion to strangers makes especially graphic, and that seems to take ordinary commitments to their logical conclusions. But because it must interfere with other ordinary commitments—such as devotion to friends, family, and intimates, even if they are not suffering—the extremism risks “crushing” our “moral roots.” (In his response, Singer is unmoved by her suggestion of a paradox.)

MacFarquhar ends up fascinated by humanitarian sainthood but unsure about its claims. Immediately after presenting the novelists’ wisdom, she turns to a case study of a woman named Stephanie, who revolts against her onetime moral extremism—moving in the opposite direction of Tolstoy. Previously convinced by Singer, Stephanie rejects his thinking and decides to pursue a multifaceted life that necessarily reduces morality to one commitment among oth-
ers in a shifting constellation. She had once worked for GiveWell, an effective-altruism outfit, but found herself hampered by her partner's even more grandiose hopes to save the world, which she felt belittled her. So she leaves him, having realized that her extremism and embarrassment over not doing even more were rooted in self-loathing. Therefore, Stephanie "didn't have a philosophical refutation of [Singer's] argument, but she no longer believed that she had to have one." MacFarquhar presents Stephanie's evolution as one toward emotional maturity, and "its vertiginous uncertainty was the price of her freedom."

Criticisms of extraordinary humanitarian devotion in the name of "ordinary life," however, pale beside others that indict it in the name of a different radicalism. The most acerbic critic of the man of feeling, as MacFarquhar briefly notes, was Friedrich Nietzsche, who thought that the humanitarian impulse swamped the quest for personal distinction. Nietzsche attacked the notion of philosophers defending mediocrities simply because they could suffer, seeking instead to preserve "aristocratic" greatness in a crowd shedding modern tears: "This overestimation of and predilection for pity on the part of modern philosophers is something new: hitherto philosophers have been at one as to the worthlessness of pity."

Karl Marx didn't exactly find pity worthless, but he was more (or differently) radical in response to the man of feeling. For Marx, the character of one's personal devotion didn't matter much, and he had little patience for the psychology and paradoxes of altruism; instead, he asserted, justice is necessarily institutional. If change you can believe in occurs because of systemic reform (or revolution), the only interesting thing about somebody's everyday or extreme altruism is whether it contributes to that larger project.

Marx wasn't the only critic advancing such notions, of course, but he was notable in arguing for an institutional rather than an individual focus so early and taking it so far. By concentrating mainly on contemporary moral philosophers who know little, and care less, about politics and institutions, MacFarquhar skirts the fact that the institutional problem has become the essential one across the board, as outstanding recent books about humanitarianism by Alex de Waal and Jennifer Rubenstein argue. Such analysts take the next step beyond effective altruism, which remains stuck in a philanthropic model without challenging hierarchy or focusing on what kind of state and interstate institutions bring about actual change. The most telling responses to Singer, for example, indict his individualization of justice, as if wrongdoing were primarily to be remedied one donor at a time. In a laudatory preface to a new pamphlet version of Singer's essay, to be published in December, Bill and Melinda Gates celebrate it for teaching that "we can work together to prevent very bad things from happening." But do "we" work together through philanthropy or politics?

MacFarquhar doesn't focus on this question. She describes one extremist as moving from trying "to help one person" to trying "to change the whole world." But aside from a few pages on foreign aid, she doesn't explore the implications of her passing comment that many observers have concluded along the way "that organized politics was a more effective vehicle for human progress than the full hearts of the leisure bourgeoise." Institutionalists might respond, for this very reason, that perhaps singling out the tourist in business class and his potentially inconvenient awareness of justice is more of a problem than a solution.

MacFarquhar's stories are not directly about suffering and how it could ever end on its own, with or without our help; they are about our private dilemmas over that suffering and how they make us feel. If MacFarquhar were living in an age of widespread faith in God, it would be permissible to stop there. But in an age of humanitarian faith, it is this world and the concrete results within it that count. Martin Luther criticized the medieval church, yet he never claimed to offer an unerring path to salvation. But when moderns criticize their institutions, it is often because they insist that the imperfect world is the only one we have—and so we must seek the best institutions to take caring beyond hypocrisy and self-doubt.

Perhaps because many people think that organized politics is a rickety vehicle for progress—and because it's more typically seen as a recipe for the human tragedies that humanitarian sentiment is meant to palliate—MacFarquhar is thrown back in her brilliant book on the alternatives of everyday versus extreme personal morality. She risks turning the effort of heeding the pain of others into a psychological or spiritual burden for those who must then choose between uncomfortably tolerating the mix of their commitments or abandoning them for monomaniacal sainthood. It's a tough choice, and as with similar quandaries, the best response may be to create more options.

The Muteness of Signs

by AVA KOFMAN

In the summer of 1963, Elizabeth Bishop was translating three short stories from Portuguese, which she described in a letter to Robert Lowell as the work of "the most non-literary writer I've ever known." "She's never read anything that I can discover," Bishop said of the Brazilian writer's "self-taught" approach, and 'never cracks a book' as we used to say." If Clarice Lispector, the author of the stories, had overheard Bishop's remarks, she likely would have agreed with them, because she had so often spoken similarly of herself. "This is not a book," she announced at the beginning of her 1973 work *Água Viva*, "because this is not how one writes."

Bishop was not the first translator, or reader, to have been mystified by the enigma that Lispector represented, on the page and in person. The riddle of her nonliterary self has been described, psychoanalyzed, even supposedly solved by so many readers as to become its own literary cliché. The essential question of *Why This World*, Benjamin Moser's 2009 hagiography of "the Sphinx," is how a woman so modern—one who even flew in airplanes! he adds—could remain so "fundamentally unfamiliar," unclassifiable, and indecipherable to her own countrymen and few friends.

She often wondered the same thing. "Why do I write? What do I know?" she asked in *The Hour of the Star*. "No idea. I seem to belong to a distant galaxy because I'm so strange to myself. Is this me? I am frightened to encounter myself." In another work, another variation: "I am obscure to myself." And so on.

When her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, appeared in 1943, it was compared to the fiction of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust—none of which, she told critics, she had previously read. (Her book's title was taken from a line in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, on the suggestion of a friend.) Lispector's unfamiliarity with the instant classics

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Discussed in This Essay

The Hour of the Star
Translated by Benjamin Moser.
New Directions. 81 pp. Paper $12.95.

Near to the Wild Heart
Translated by Alison Entrekin.
New Directions. 194 pp. Paper $15.95.

The Passion According to G.H.
Translated by Idra Novey.
New Directions. 193 pp. Paper $15.95.

Água Viva
Translated by Stefan Tobler.

A Breath of Life
Translated by Johnny Lorenz.
New Directions. 167 pp. Paper $15.95.

The Complete Stories
Translated by Katrina Dodson.
Edited and introduced by Benjamin Moser.

All by Clarice Lispector.

of an earlier generation might have been understandable given her age—she was an enviable 23 when her first novel launched her to stardom—but she maintained her aloof indifference, if not disdain, toward capital-L literature for the rest of her prolific career.

The literary world, on the other hand, gazed at Lispector’s work with bewildered fascination, particularly after her debut novel won the year’s top prize. Over the course of her life, the translations, reprints, lectures, awards, and admirers of her writing only grew, even as she remained reticent in interviews and averse to publicity. When asked in a rare interview near the end of her life if she considered herself a popular writer, she answered in the negative. “Why not?” the interviewer asked. “How,” she shot back, “can I be popular and hermetic at the same time?”

Foreign. Unfamiliar. Nonliterary. Lispector wore these characterizations of her writing as medals of honor. With each successive work, she polished her prose until it shimmered with the dizziness of benevolence.” Even when the psychological viewpoint made me impatient and still does, it’s an instrument that merely trespasses. I think I’d left the psychological stage in adolescence.”

Nowhere is this distaste for the “psychological viewpoint” more evident than in Lispector’s short stories, collected for the first time in a complete English translation by Katrina Dodson. Almost always unnamed, the characters of these stories remain anonymous save for a fleeting transcription of their immediate subjectivities. Knowing just as little as we do, and getting that part wrong too, her protagonists are intensely sensitive to how little agency they have over the vagaries of their fate. These women are surprised by how suddenly they collide with their cathartic destiny—the story’s climax—and ashamed by the severity of the emotions, fantasies, and projections they display while doing so. Their lives read like emotional charts in a perverse astrology: psychically charged scenes filled with misplaced manners, instincts, and impulses.

Plot, especially in Lispector’s “First Stories,” is a theatrical moment of personal revelation—a fire of insight that, given the moodiness of each first-person narrator, often burns out as quickly as it sparked. Sometimes action comes in the form of an extended gaze, and in an instant, everything changes. A short passage from one of Lispector’s earliest stories encapsulates the sudden, fitful movements of many others: “She often felt like crying, which generally was no more than an urge, as though the crisis spent itself in the desire. Some days, filled with boredom, peevish and sad. Other days, languid like a cat, becoming intoxicated by the slightest occurrences. A leaf falling, a child’s cry, and she’d think: one more moment and I won’t be able to bear such happiness.”

The proliferation of these rapid sequences of suffering leads one character to imagine asking “the government to create a department of abandoned and sad women,” likely to house those in Lispector’s stories.

In her second collection, Family Ties, her characters are somehow even more unequal than before, full of “sweet nausea” and “the dizziness of benevolence.” Even when the bourgeois familial trappings of her protagonists fit them well, they remain dissatisfied. In “Happy Birthday,” a matriarch’s hard-won 89th birthday ends in the revelation that she despises her entire family. In “Love,” a woman spots a blind man chewing gum on a train and collapses into a dissociated daze. When she returns home, she barely recognizes her own son. She realizes “she had fallen into a woman’s fate, with the surprise of fitting into it as if she had invented it. The man she’d married was a real man, the children she’d had were real children.”
of the word “real,” of course, has the effect of modifying all of its objects into fakes.

To Lispector, family, like femininity, is an imperfect impersonation of appearances—in her words, “the fragile product of many precautions and a handful of lies.” “False domestication,” an affect coined by Lispector in a vignette about horses, aptly names the alienation experienced by her characters, especially those who are married.

As a way of entering this alienation, Lispector often compared her characters to animals—hunted, wary, instinctual, erotic. Her stories are populated with a menagerie of nonmetaphoric creatures—from the popular (dogs, monkeys, hens, horses) to the grotesque and strange (buffalo, crickets, elephants, rats, cockroaches). In the pity and terror of these animals, in their pathetic innocence, she approximates a vision of what human consciousness might look like from above, from the point of view of something else. In her aphoristic Água Viva, she reflects: “I don’t humanize animals because it’s an offense—you must respect their nature—I am the one who animalizes myself.” “Not having been born an animal,” she adds two pages later, “is a secret nostalgia of mine.”

In “A Chicken,” one of Lispector’s greatest stories about animals, a hen impervious to the respect that a human family accords her becomes “queen of the house. Everyone, except her, knew it.” With her “twin talents: apathy and alarm,” the chicken clucks between the terrace and the kitchen, until one day, in an act as sudden as her lucky adoption, she is killed and eaten for supper. So often with a hint of absurdity, Lispector abruptly kills her characters off as though they stumbled into the wrong tragicomedy, perhaps the author’s own.

Her study of perversity reached its peak in The Foreign Legion, stories collected and published in 1964, the same year as The Passion According to G.H. The book opens with the story of a cruel and clever schoolgirl named Sofia. She tortures her lonely teacher, only to discover that he values her for exactly the qualities that she wishes to renounce. In her teacher’s misplaced kindness, “the way he offended me by believing in me,” Sofia sees the abyss of the world. His candid smile is transformed into something that “so little resembled a smile as if a liver or a foot were trying to smile.” She sees.

As if my curious eye were glued to the keyhole and in shock came upon another eye looking back at me from the other side. I saw inside an eye. Which was as incomprehensible as an eye. An eye opened up with its moving jelly. With its organic tears. An eye cries all by itself, an eye laughs all by itself. . . . Seeing hope terrified me.

Most likely because of their shared status as avatars of Latin American literature, Lispector is not infrequently compared to Jorge Luis Borges. Bishop, for one, called her short fictions “better than J.L. Borges,” and Moser, who spearheaded New Directions’ publication of Lispector’s corpus, has called it “the most important project of translation into English of a Latin American author since the complete works of. . . Borges were published a decade ago.”

But the comparison only goes so far. Where Borges speculated on the infinite and the infinity of literature, Lispector meditated on eternity, its flat, static shadow. Speaking to an audience in Texas in 1962, she found
fault with “young writers who are a bit over-intellectualized.” “It seems to me,” she said, “that they are not inspired by, shall we say, ‘the thing itself,’ but by other literature, ‘the thing already literalized.’”

Unlike Borges, Lispector was not interested in literature, but in the failures of language to address the question of being. She stripped her work of literature, in order to write “the antiliterature of the thing.” Whereas Borges exalted the possibilities of writing about writing, Lispector searched impossibly in writing for the thing itself. In her least, and most, Borgesian story, “Report on the Thing,” she speaks “without literature” of “one particular clock.” The electronic clock, called Sveglia, operates like a curse, taking over the author’s life as she incants on its essence and, later, dies.

Hélène Cixous’s winking search for Lispector’s literary analog demonstrates the absurdity of efforts to compare her to other authors. Lispector, Cixous writes, was Kafka if he had been a Jewish woman. She was Rilke “if Rilke had been a Jewish Brazilian born in the Ukraine. If Rimbaud had been a mother, if he had reached the age of fifty. If Heidegger could have ceased being German.” Or as Lispector put it: “I can’t sum myself up because you can’t add a chair and two apples. I am a chair and two apples. And I cannot be added up.”

What gets forgotten in the popular characterization of Lispector as enigmatic or inexplicable is that she was always the expert at naming her own mystery. “I’m the vestal priestess of a secret I have forgotten,” she writes in G.H. “And I serve the forgotten danger. I found out something I could not understand, my lips were sealed, and all I’ve got are the incomprehensible fragments of a ritual.” In an outright autobiographical moment midway through her last novel, she reflects on her work’s philosophical fixation: “The object—the thing—always fascinated me and in a certain sense destroyed me.”

Getting to “the thing,” she admits time and again, is an impossible project: To write about the thing itself is inevitably to cloud it with language. “I have to the extent I designate—and this is the splendor of having a language,” she notes. “But I have much more to the extent I cannot designate. Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it—and the way I do not find it.”

For an author so reverential toward “the muteness of the signs,” she constantly fails herself, using words. “Ah, but to reach muteness, what a great effort of voice,” she laments in The Passion. “The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve.” To grasp the reality of the thing, or to indirectly catch it by surprise, she has no choice but to use “hands that are coarse and full of words.” Only through this excess of language, through exploding a form past its opposite, could she hope to approach the asymptote of “the thing”—or, at the least, to fail trying. When she does succeed, “the thing being pointed at” with words then “wakens like a milligram of radium in the tranquil dark.”

Reading Lispector often feels like reading the light blocked behind a book—or, in divine terms, the light of the word itself. There is something nonsensical about the pleasure of surrendering to her prose, like kissing a stomachache. Her phrasings have all of the delicate transgression of being naked with oneself, and the entangled digressions of thinking with too much company.

Even as the mystery of Lispector stayed constant, the characters in her short stories matured: Her young girls age into older women, sexual tension slips into sex, the obsession of young love mutates into disappointed passion, bourgeois life gives way to lucid dreaming, the wild heart slouches toward death. Throughout her 86 stories, her familiar cast of characters, animals, ecstasies, and fallen nuns submit to the slow toll of aging with the same pain as their author. “All the stories in this book hit hard,” she wrote in a note of introduction to her collection The Via Crucis of the Body. “And I myself suffered the most.”

In a late story, “The Departure of the Train,” her main archetypes finally meet. A young girl full of romantic idealism sits on a train across from an old woman shamed by her advanced age. The former is traveling to her aunt and uncle’s farm to get over a recent breakup; the latter to her son’s farm, where she will spend the rest of her life. Both are frightened and alone. Time is too much with them, and they know it can’t be stopped.

Lispector was death-obsessed from the beginning of her writings, and no more so than at her end. Joana, the amoral and free protagonist of Near to the Wild Heart, wonders: “How many times had she tipped the waiter more than necessary just because she’d remembered that he was going to die and didn’t know it.” Thirty years later, the old woman of “The Departure of the Train” has a similar realization: “Death was always such a surprise for the person dying.”

Writing to prolong a life at its end, Lispector increasingly writes in the creases of time. She produces an autophagic literature: “What I’m writing now is meant for no one: it’s directly meant for writing itself, this writing consumes writing.” Of her two final stories in this new collection, one tells of a day in the life of a woman who watches the clock all day, only to kill herself after dinner. Her last thought: a vague desire that her maid had left her a raspberry tart. Like the deaths of the blithe chicken and charming monkey before her, the woman’s abrupt death is at once sardonic and sad. It’s also surprising.

“I hope to die writing,” Lispector told an interviewer in 1976, after winning a national prize for a lifetime of literary achievement. In a sense, she did. Her final novel, A Breath of Life, was incomplete when she died on December 9, 1977, one day shy of her 57th birthday. The novel closes with three fragments, each a paragraph. Her last words do not end so much as they continue.

As for me, I am. Yes.
“...I...no. I cannot end.”
I think that...

An affirmation, a negation, an incomplete declaration: two apples and a chair.
Guillermo del Toro has pulled off a difficult trick with *Crimson Peak*: making a movie that detractors claim is too easy to figure out and yet too difficult to categorize. According to *Variety*, this ghost story—or rather “story with a ghost in it,” as its heroine would say—has disappointed audiences by being “more of a romance than a straight scare machine.” But even as the film’s genre refuses to settle down, the plot, according to critics, confirms expectations to a fault. As A.O. Scott wrote in *The New York Times*, “it does not take much of a sleuth to discern that some terrible things have happened” in the luxuriously rotting mansion to which *Crimson Peak* brings its heroine as a virgin bride.

Well, terrible things have been happening in the House of Usher since 1839. Is that any reason not to visit? Before the gorgeously perverse *Crimson Peak* fades from the screen like one of its own wraiths, I want to make a case that this is a movie worth viewing. I might even say it demands to be seen—sight being its dominant motif, and a reluctance to look at the obvious being the engine of its venerable plot.

Cast as another strange adventure of Mia Wasikowska, the pale and outwardly fragile actress who has previously shown reserves of inner strength and weirdness for Tim Burton and David Cronenberg, *Crimson Peak* is the tale of Edith Cushing, a young woman in gaslight-era Buffalo who wears eyeglasses and ignores the amorous glances of a dash- ing ophthalmologist. Her would-be suitor, Dr. McMichael (Charlie Hunnam), takes an interest in the latest development in optical science: spirit photography. He has recently acquired an entire collection of indisputably authentic glass slides, which he is eager for Edith to view. But she doesn’t need to be convinced that ghosts are real. She can see them with the naked eye and has been doing so since she was a little girl.

Visited now and then by the ghost of her cholera-stricken mother, whose intrusions haven’t exactly wrapped the girl in sustaining warmth, and bound perhaps a little too tightly to her wealthy, widowed father, Edith has grown into an aspiring author, who derides the sentimentality of people who would marry her off and disdains the myopia of editors who would limit her, as a woman, to purveying only love stories. Plausibly single-minded in her ambition, thanks to the endowments that del Toro and Wasikowska give her, Edith has a writer’s capacity for focused work (witness the inky thumbprint she absently leaves on her forehead), an appropriate range of reference, and a ready wit. When teased that she’ll die an old maid, like Jane Austen, Edith shoots back that she’d prefer to be Mary Shelley and die as a widow.

She has a writer’s eye, too. After being introduced to an English baronet, Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston), who has come to Buffalo seeking investors for a machine he’s invented, Edith points out to her father that the suit of this sleek aristocrat is beautifully cut but almost threadbare. She means to compliment Thomas on his fortitude; she thinks she may have been too hasty to express American contempt for Europeans born with titles and property. But this seem-
ingly acute observation is actually a sign that desire has at last clouded Edith’s vision. She sees only what pleases her about Thomas, overlooking the shadows that trail him like a cloak. To the audience, the man is clearly on the make—and like Roderick Usher, he’s also manifestly too close to his sister, played by Jessica Chastain with a brutish nose, a facial expression that’s barely warmed to room temperature, and a gait that makes you think she’s got wheels, not feet, under those floor-sweeping velvet gowns. To stroll through the park with Thomas’s sister is to find dozens of butterflies littering the lawn with trembling, dying wings. Yet Edith, blind to the omen, goes on asking about the Sharpe estate, oblivious to the close-up del Toro gives you of ants biting into the butterflies’ eyes.

So, after an iris-in effect (even del Toro’s transitions are thematic, contracting the image to a little circle that then blinks shut), Edith does what you know she should not—at which point, you can choose one of two ways to think about the action. You can bore yourself by reducing her experience to a list of paraphrastic events, with so many easily anticipated discoveries and so many unsurprising struggles. Or you can amuse yourself by watching the Sharpe mansion, called Crimson Peak, shift its form around Edith, sometimes seeming to become her killing jar and sometimes her cocoon, as she undergoes the pains of an attempted metamorphosis that is aided by her peculiar visual talents.

Without lapsing too far into synopsis, I can tell you there’s more for Edith to see at Crimson Peak than there was in Buffalo, and that this gloomy ancestral pile offers her other expanded possibilities as well. She has gone from the muddied streets of a new American city to a vast, empty plain of mud (red clay, actually), into which the mansion is inexorably sinking. She has left behind her father’s house, with its bourgeois American imitation of baronial magnificence, and entered the full-scale original, encrusted on all sides by the carvings, mementos, and sins of generations of Sharpes but open (through its shattered roof) to a perpetual snowfall. This place suits Edith, despite the plot’s assumption that she’s trapped here, and the visual scheme’s sly deceptive pretense that she’s the angelic opposite of a diabolical sister-in-law. Edith has the funereal sensibilities to grow here, even if she’s as white as a conventional ghost by the time she spreads her wings.

And Edith can fulfill herself here without giving up her authorial skills. You might go so far as to say that her final act in the movie is to slice away a redundancy. This being a horror movie—more or less—she just happens to do it not with a pen but a shovel.

I know that all moviegoers’ eyes will soon be on a different kind of Spectre (unseen by The Nation, by the way, at the time of this writing). I’m as eager for it as anybody. But I think film culture would be much poorer if it looked away from this deliciously mordant work by del Toro, one of the few writer-directors today who don’t just craft images but think in them. Cast a backward glance, if you can, at Crimson Peak as it dissolves into the past, and you might feel a rare frisson of delight mixed with shock—especially when the import of Jessica Chastain’s climactic utterance sinks in. The reason so much horror has been needed, she explains, is that love requires it.

While we’re on the subject of young women who leave home, and movies that can offer familiar stories and yet be deeply satisfying, let me recommend the lovely, gentle period drama Brooklyn. Its director, John Crowley, is not someone who thinks in images; but going beyond the efficiency of previous pictures such as Closed Circuit, he now shows he can draw out moods that linger across entire sequences, as a melody is phrased over bars, and is willing to give emotional nuances the time and space to breathe within scenes.

If I hesitate to call Brooklyn “a film by John Crowley,” it’s not to belittle his artistry but to give credit to other authors who also must be acknowledged: screenwriter Nick Hornby (working from a novel by Colm Tóibín) and actress Saoirse Ronan, who appears in every frame, her every downward glance, all involving people. Even Eilis’s growing awareness of the art of eating spaghetti. She takes instruction at the boardinghouse in Brooklyn of the early 1950s, where a helpful schoolmistress (working from a novel by Colm Tóibín) and actress Saoirse Ronan, who appears in every scene and brings life to them all.

A seemingly self-possessed young woman whose crystal blue eyes and porcelain skin can be made to seem eerie, and have been put to that use in films from Atonement to Hamma, Ronan here gives down-to-earth flesh to a thoroughly normal character: Eilis Lacey, whose rural Irish town offers her no future beyond the opportunity to reproduce its present. With muted excitement (because emotional outbursts wouldn’t be proper among her people) and nagging guilt (because she’s leaving behind a widowed mother), Eilis embarks from Cork to the Brooklyn of the early 1950s, where a helpful priest (Jim Broadbent, at his most twingly and comfortable) has arranged for her working papers, her lodging in the boardinghouse of strict old Mrs. Kehoe (Julie Walters), and a job behind the counter in a department store.

The charm of Brooklyn, and its quiet daring, is that it keeps you engaged with Eilis through her slow, undemonstrative months of seeing the world open up, little by little. A man who isn’t Irish—the counterman at Berman’s deli—casually flirts with her when she calls for the check. Night classes in bookkeeping take her to Brooklyn College, where she ventures a few words with strangers. A new girl settles in at the boardinghouse and makes Eilis feel almost experienced. Then comes the biggest step yet: She attempts a very restrained jitterbug at the parish dance and finds herself being walked home by Tony (Emory Cohen), who nervously confesses, just so she doesn’t think he’s hiding anything, that he’s Italian. Eilis remains close-lipped but resolves to expand her horizons further. She takes instruction at the boardinghouse in the art of eating spaghetti.

This is the first half of Brooklyn: a softly lit series of mealtimes scenes, shifts behind the department store counter, rides on the streetcar, and conversations conducted with many downward glances, all involving people who are remarkable only for the excellent though undramatic reason that they’re kind and decent. Then, as subtly as Brooklyn has expanded Eilis’s world, it intensifies the drama by making her measure the change. Returning home for a visit, she appreciates her town for the first time as a “calm and gracious” place. How could she have known before? And how could she have discovered, without having left, that a lanky, gentlemanly rugby player (Domhnall Gleeson) could make her feel she might like to stay?

A story about having to find the world in order to find one’s place in it, Brooklyn recreates an immigrant experience that is separated from us by 60 years in time, and perhaps an eternity in sensibility, but that feels immediate and true. Of course, if you’re drawn exclusively to stories of today’s Brooklyn, where the immigrants are from utterly different backgrounds and the young people would attend a parish dance only to prove they weren’t ironic, then Brooklyn might seem to be old news. But to me, very little is as fresh as Saoirse Ronan in Brooklyn: an actress whose every thought, whether voiced or silent, seems to register on her skin, playing a woman who mostly keeps her feelings under the surface.

Among the other films that November brings are two exceptional political documentaries: one about the years of jockeying and negotiation that led to the adoption of Zimbabwe’s constitution in 2013, the other about the Six-Day War and Israeli efforts to shape its meaning. Both are notable for presenting material that you never would have imagined you’d see, or that (in the case of the Israeli film) had been kept from the public for decades.

Democrats, directed by Camilla Niels-
son, represents the work of three years for the filmmaker and more than that for her subjects: Paul Mangwana, a high-ranking official in Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party, and Douglas Mwonzora, a human rights lawyer associated with the opposition MDC-T. In the wake of the 2008 power-sharing agreement between Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai, these two were appointed co-chairs of the committee charged with polling citizens about their views on government and then writing a constitution. As you see from Niellson’s footage, Mugabe began by treating the initiative as a farce, and he was still laughing when it ended in 2013. But for Mangwana, a rotund, gap-toothed man whose personality leaps off the screen, the joking stopped around the time he realized he might be murdered—not by the opposition but by members of his own party, who were calling him a “sellout” for speaking with Mwonzora. Given astonishing freedom of access to both men, Niellson takes you into their negotiations and private moments alike, revealing some of the hidden realities in a society that operates by blatant pretense, and (even better) movingly documenting the change that came over Mangwana. Not only did he draw close to Mwonzora, but he grew to believe in the constitution they were writing together.

_Censored Voices_, directed by Mor Loushy, makes public some of the audiotapes that Amos Oz and Avraham Shapira recorded, only days after the end of the Six-Day War, with young men who had returned from battle. Some of the material from these conversations emerged in Shapira’s oral history _The Seventh Day_, published in Israel in 1970. The bulk of it was censored by the Israel Defense Forces and has since been withheld by Shapira. Now Loushy has taken excerpts of the censored tapes and combined them with archival footage of the war, commentary by Oz, and present-day images of the speakers listening to their own voices, creating a collage film that serves as a counternarrative to the standard triumphalist account.

The victors—at least the ones whom Oz and Shapira talked to on the kibbutz, with its special social and political atmosphere—confessed they felt estranged from the nationalistic euphoria. They spoke of the shock of realizing they had become injured, within hours, to the horror of killing people. They talked about feeling their spirits break when they at last saw the cringing, humiliated men they had defeated. They asked why a war for survival had so quickly turned into a land grab. And in the recollections that were particularly offensive to the censors, they confessed to carrying out summary executions of captured soldiers (civilians, too, for all they knew) and emptying entire West Bank villages at rifle point. In outline, virtually all of this information has been known for a long time, even if many people refuse to listen. In its raw detail, though, the material in _Censored Voices_ is new and indispensable. It won’t contribute to Israel’s national morale, as Oz comments drily at the start of the film, “but we’ll do a small service to truth.”

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**In Our Orbit**

**Green’s Days**

by SARA RATHOD

Philip Green, a political theorist who taught at Smith College for 34 years and has served on _The Nation_’s editorial board since 1978, was kicked out of his sixth-grade classroom at the communist-friendly Little Red School House in Greenwich Village for criticizing the Soviet invasion of Finland—the beginning of a lifetime of unabashed political opposition. In _Taking Sides: A Memoir in Stories_ (Levellers Press; Paper $19.95), his unfiltered memoir of life, love, and dissent, the 83-year-old Green recounts his youth as a liberal Jewish intellectual developing his political consciousness while hopping freight trains, thumbing rides in Mexico, wandering the streets of Paris, and arguing with his buddies over beer. A city boy in the golden age of suburbs and a leftist at the height of the McCarthy era, Green was not dazzled by the prosperity of the Eisenhower years.

In his book, Green might as well be sitting on a sofa regaling the reader with tales from his youth. His lively narrative is interrupted by lengthy sections of commentary on the state of American society today; he wistfully recalls friends, love affairs, and Parisian desserts, but maintains a clear eye for the scourges of the 1950s: poverty, segregation, and machismo.

Green came of age at a time when the United States was a bit complacent itself, before the crashing waves of political dissent in the 1960s. He offers glimpses of what was to come: In one, it’s 1953, and he and a college friend have boarded a bus to Maryland after having spent the summer hitchhiking through the American South. As the two young men, both white, relax in their seats in the back of the bus, an elderly black passenger gets their attention. They’re in the wrong seats, she tells them, and the bus won’t budge until they’ve taken the right ones. Startled to find themselves the center of attention, the two friends survey the scene:

[The driver] was not going to move until we did, to the front of the bus where as members of the superior race we truly and rightly belonged…. [W]hen we looked around, hell, the black faces were staring at us, visibly angry…places to go, things to do, and two fuck-stupid white boys are going to stand on principle, or excuse me, sit on principle? Some other time, some other place, some other persons, Montgomery, Alabama, say: I had been to the Highlander Folk School [a social-justice leadership training school in Tennessee] but I was not Rosa Parks; we moved to the front of the bus.

These moments of deer-in-the-headlights revelation are interspersed with episodes of spontaneity and risk-taking: Green arguing in front of his high school that the prom should be canceled in order to support the teachers’ strike; hitchhiking with a shaggy, sunburned man who sold his blood for a living; sticking up for a bullied recruit, and sticking it to the colonel in charge during his army deployment in France in the relatively peaceful years between the Korean War and Vietnam; stuffing a jukebox in Paris with 240 francs so that it would repeatedly play one song for him and his date to dance to all evening long.

Overall, Green’s book is a call to action. His basic political impulse, as he describes it: “Whatever is at stake, I must always be choosing sides [and] coming to a conclusion about who are the victims and who are the victimizers.” But _Taking Sides_ is also a tribute to a life lived passionately and with eyes wide open, unapologetically embracing risk while choosing one’s battles wisely.

_Sara Rathod is a former Nation intern._
Puzzle No. 3380

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1 Endorsement of a program to introduce pests? (12)
9 Callas beginning to master a vocal solo (5)
10 Get pain from bread or Lean Tarts mix (9)
11 State sent letters, mostly duplicates (9)
12 City in Texas, Washington, and Colorado (4)
14 Running away is doubly false (6)
15 Like Mister Wilder’s group of stars (8)
17 Put a weapon in storage! (8)
19 Composed a pattern that contains a piece of calico (6)
22 Data gathered from rain forest (4)
23 Anglican version of Pepsi-Cola (9)
26 9 once stirred coffee (9)
27 Competes to follow the lead of Ira Brown, et al. (5)
28 Mail corn bread, dudes, with time delay (12)

DOWN

1 Return a watch and send the money in (5)
2 Terribly arty fashion, in the end, dominates New York with oppressive power (7)
3 Cook outside of a seabird—it is a common sight on campuses (10)
4 Annoyingly affected hairdo? Yes, sort of (6)
5 Author of Mary Poppins Close to Home is cross (8)
6 Roughly concealed in ambassador’s oration (2,2)
7 Condiment used to be somewhat before the end (6)
8 Improved note in support of drug (8)
9 Strange, lice-free TV in which you can see yourself (10)
13 Loud summery celebration (8)
16 Material concerning part of the Middle East (8)
18 French engineer in excellent condition fell short (6)
20 Turn over important information about a hat (7)
21 Asian covering The King and I overlooks an illness (6)
24 Composer is held back by Horowitz, silly! (5)
25 Spies going over cipher to create a greeting (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3379

ACROSS
1 PUNISHMENT(T) (brow in anag.) 6 held
10 [p]VERSE(s) 1
11 D(UMLI)JINGS (lump anag.) 12 anag.
13 [A]narev(s) 13 C(HICK)EN[r] 17 anag. (inkh.) 19 rev. 20 MADDGOS (s rev.) 22 C(HAP)TER 24 RUBILE

DOWN
1 P + AVE (inkh.) 2 NORTHW (anag.) + IN + D 3 [SP(EL)JUNK 4 MI + DAS (rev.) 5 NUMB[er] 7 held
8 D + [ES]CENDER (anag.) 9 ELL + CITY) 14 alternate letters 15 anag. 16 held
18 anag. 21 ONE + ILL 23 AUTOB (anag.) + US 25 2 def. 26 B(A)SLIL 27 “scene”
28 [p]ORDIN

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Justice and Profit

There are certain services so vital to the health of our society that they can only be performed by government. The administration of our criminal justice system is perhaps the clearest example.

Since the 1980’s, however, our state and federal governments have increasingly turned to private companies to incarcerate criminals. According to the ACLU, “Today, for-profit companies are responsible for approximately 6% of state prisoners, 16% of federal prisoners, and, according to one report, nearly half of all immigrants detained by the federal government.” Although the United States has only 5% of the world’s population, it holds 25% of the world’s prisoners. The ACLU believes that the growth of private prisons has helped to fuel this “mass incarceration crisis.” Banking on Bondage: Private Prisons and Mass Incarceration (ACLU, 11/1/11)

The largest of these companies are publicly traded, meaning that ordinary investors, including mutual funds, participate in their growth, vote on governance matters, and generally align themselves with their long-term success. What does success look like for these companies? More prisoners equal more profit. Longer sentences equal more profit. Criminalization of non-violent offenses equals more profit. Draconian sentencing guidelines equal more profit. A number of reports have documented atrocious conditions, abusive treatment and negligence at private prisons. Certainly, these problems are not limited to private prisons. According to the ACLU, however, “While evidence is mixed, certain empirical studies show a heightened level of violence against prisoners in private institutions.”

These companies have legal obligations to their shareholders and are driven by the pressures of the public markets to increase their profits and minimize their costs. They have little incentive to provide humane conditions. The flood of campaign contributions from these companies further complicates the difficult task of ensuring that vulnerable prison populations – literally out of sight and generally out of mind – are treated with dignity. These substantial conflicts of interest threaten to undermine public trust in our criminal justice and immigration systems and, ultimately, the provision of justice.

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