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‘THIS MAN WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY DIE’

How the US let dozens of immigrants die in segregated, privatized prisons

BY SETH FREED WESSLER
The Once and Future UN

The United Nations is not going to be transformed by the election of a new secretary general, as Barbara Crossette writes, no matter the transparency of the process [“In 2016, the UN Will Be Transformed,” Jan. 11/18]. It is the other election in the autumn of this new year—the election of the president of the United States—that has that possibility. Ban Ki-moon is a noble leader, a man of decency, ideals, and judgment, but he cannot force the Security Council after four years of slaughter and anguish to place the Syrian war on its priority agenda. His predecessor, Kofi Annan, was and is a man of “dignity, confidence, courage, and compassion.” He could not stop the American invasion of Iraq despite mighty efforts.

Terrorism is an international enemy against which the strongest military force in history has only limited effect. It is an enemy that can only be defeated by the universal coalition that the UN represents.

The structure is in place to allow and cause the needed transformation of the UN, whose basic mission is defined in its charter as saving “succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” The year 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The General Assembly should act now to designate 2020 as UN/75, a year to confront “the scourge of war.” The intervening years could then demonstrate the possibilities of bringing peace on earth by mobilizing the public and private sectors, by organizing the new energy of social media, by recognizing the extraordinary groups that have carried the struggle for peace against the seeming inevitability of violence, and by inviting “the peoples of the United Nations,” in whose name the charter was adopted, to find their voice in supporting what has to be done. If the new president of the United States and the new secretary general of the United Nations welcome and encourage such a movement, the needed transformation of the UN will be well under way.

William vanden Heuvel
Former US representative to the United Nations
New York City

Barbara Crossette was the best UN reporter, but it is not helpful to leave Nation readers without a strong reminder of the accomplishments of the world’s premier multilateral institution. Yes, the UN has many deficits. But a list of what it could accomplish in this new year would have been very much appreciated.

The UN’s progress in 2016 will build on its record of feeding 100 million people in 73 countries, vaccinating children, assisting millions of refugees, organizing elections, working with countries to prepare their climate-action plans, serving as a universal presence in developing countries, promoting maternal health—the list goes on. We need to be reminded that 193 member states have representatives who sit down together in one room where no guns are permitted and agree on life- and planet-saving policies. This results in treaties and resolutions to protect children, secure women a place at all levels of decision-making, protect the environment, promote nuclear disarmament, put the force of law ahead of the law of force, and more. A big nod to the purpose of the UN—to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war—along with recognition of some of its achievements would have helped readers.

To say that the UN Development Program (UNDP) is invisible is to ignore the world press and social media. To single out one of the last remaining female heads of an agency

Comments drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 26)
Poisoning the Public in Flint

In early 2015, shortly after his victory in a heated re-election contest, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder began exploring a run for president. With his business experience and electoral success in a blue state, Snyder was considered a viable potential candidate, so he embarked on a national speaking tour and set up a fund-raising organization. Its name: Making Government Accountable.

As Snyder was testing the presidential waters, however, his government was shirking its accountability to constituents concerned about their water supply. In April 2014, the city of Flint had switched its primary water source from Lake Huron, through Detroit’s system, to the Flint River. Approved by an emergency manager appointed by the governor, the move was supposed to save the beleaguered city millions of dollars. But residents soon began reporting that their tap water was discolored, smelled rotten, and was causing skin rashes.

“Today, Flint has become a nightmarish example of how misguided austerity policies can literally poison the public—and the disparate impact of those policies on minorities. It’s hard not to see this as yet another example of environmental racism, given that more than 50 percent of Flint’s population is black, and over 40 percent of its residents live below the poverty line. Black Lives Matter argues that Flint’s water crisis is “an egregious form of state violence, one that impacts low-income Black people hardest.”

After months of denial and stonewalling by local and state officials, Snyder finally issued a public apology to the city, declared a state of emergency, activated the National Guard, and requested assistance from President Obama, who declared a federal emergency. The Justice Department is currently investigating the actions of the state and local government; meanwhile, it could cost up to $1.5 billion to fix the city’s water-distribution system.

This crisis is the result of the Snyder administration’s stunning lack of accountability, beginning with the fateful decision, four years ago, to put Flint under the control of an unelected political appointee. When the city’s residents initially reported their concerns about the tainted water in 2014, officials responded by pumping hazardous levels of chlorine into it. When the complaints persisted, officials assured residents that the water was safe to drink, repeatedly disregarding clear evidence—reported to them at the time by the EPA, a Virginia Tech research team, and others—that it wasn’t. It wasn’t until a pediatrician’s public report this past fall confirming elevated levels of lead in children’s blood that the state government was forced to admit there was a problem. Snyder appointed a task force to investigate the crisis; it found, among other things, that legitimate fears had been met with “aggressive dismissal, belittlement, and attempts to discredit” the individuals speaking out.

“They cut every corner,” said Flint resident Melissa Mays. “They did more to cover up than actually fix it. That’s criminal.” Snyder’s then-chief of staff, Dennis Muchmore, acknowledged the administration’s deplorable response in a July 2015 e-mail, writing: “These folks are scared and worried about the health impacts and they are basically getting blown off by us (as a state we’re just not sympathizing with their plight).”

This is more than a catastrophic political failure. It is also the direct consequence of decades of policies based on the premise that government spending is always a problem and never a solution. Long before Flint tried to reduce spending by moving to a cheaper—and inadequately tested—water source, the pipes that ultimately poisoned the water had been neglected. Across the country, crumbling infrastructure threatens to produce similar crises. As Michigan State University economist Eric Scorsone explained, “Flint is an extreme case, but nationally, there’s been a lack of investment in water infrastructure.”

Unfortunately, the biggest obstacles to desperately needed public investment are politicians like...
Snyder who conflate “accountability” with austerity. For Republican technocrats in particular, more accountability almost always means less spending on government programs that help ensure the public good—and those cutbacks disproportionately affect poor and minority communities. As *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman pointed out, “It would be hard to imagine something similar happening in Grosse Pointe.”

The conventional wisdom during this election year has been that voters are fed up, and that their anger is reflected in the polls. That frustration and distrust of government is understandable, given the behavior of politicians like Snyder. Indeed, when government is polluted by officials who put corporate interests above those of citizens and cost-cutting above the common good, it fails to fulfill even its most basic duties, such as guaranteeing access to safe drinking water. But instead of giving in to anger or austerity, we should be having a vigorous debate about how government can be truly accountable to the people.

**GOP Blocks the Vote**

*From the Party of Lincoln to the Party of Cruz.*

On January 9, 2008, six days after Barack Obama’s victory in the Iowa caucuses, the Supreme Court heard a challenge to Indiana’s strict voter-ID law, the first of its kind. Ted Cruz, then solicitor general of Texas, filed a brief on behalf of Texas and seven other GOP-led states in support of the law.

Though Indiana presented no evidence of voter impersonation to justify the measure, Cruz wrote: “The specter of voter fraud has threatened the integrity of the electoral process for the entire history of our Nation.” Indiana did not have to show recent examples of such fraud, his brief argued, because “there is no right to be free from any inconvenience or burden in voting.”

Such burdens increased dramatically after the Supreme Court upheld Indiana’s law and Obama was elected president. Since 2010, 21 states—nearly all of them under Republican control—have implemented new voting restrictions, and the Supreme Court has overturned the centerpiece of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). Cruz has been at the forefront of this new movement to make it harder to vote.

As a senator from Texas, Cruz has championed his state’s voter-ID law, the strictest in the country. The law—which allows voters presenting a handgun permit to cast a ballot, but not those with a student ID—has been blocked by federal courts on three occasions. Cruz’s website featured a petition calling on supporters to tell Obama: “Don’t Mess With Texas Voter ID Laws.”

Praising the Supreme Court decision that gutted the VRA, Cruz claimed it no longer subjected “democratically-elected state legislatures to second-guessing by unelected federal bureaucrats.” Two hours after the Court ruled, in a separate verdict, that states couldn’t require proof of citizenship for voter registration in federal elections, he filed an amendment to an immigration bill that would override the decision.

Despite his outspoken conservatism, Cruz is not an outlier in the GOP on voting rights. The leading Republican presidential candidates—who unanimously support tough new voting restrictions—have all opposed efforts to expand access to the ballot box.

As a senator from Florida—a state with a well-documented history of voter suppression—Marco Rubio opposed the restoration of voting rights for nonviolent ex-felons and supported his state’s cutbacks in early voting, which contributed to seven-hour lines during the 2012 election. That same year, he supported a controversial purge of voter rolls by Governor Rick Scott that was stopped by a federal court. Along with Cruz, Rubio also backed a Senate amendment requiring a government-issued photo ID to vote in federal elections.

The so-called moderates in the race are no better. In the pivotal swing state of Ohio, Governor John Kasich signed legislation that cut the window for early voting and eliminated same-day voter registration.

As governor of Florida, Jeb Bush presided over a disastrous voter purge in 2000, when more than 12,000 registered voters were wrongly labeled as felons and blocked from the polls; his efforts helped swing that election in his brother’s favor. Florida barred ex-felons from casting ballots without the governor’s approval, and Bush OK’d just one-fifth of the 385,522 applications for voting-rights restoration submitted during his eight years in office, according to *Mother Jones*.

Like Rubio, Bush has evidently learned little from Florida’s numerous election debacles. While campaigning in Iowa in October, Bush said that he didn’t support restoring the VRA, a law his own brother reauthorized in 2006, because “there’s been dramatic improvement in access to voting…exponentially better improvement, and I don’t think there’s a role for the federal government to play in most places.”

While Bush denounced the VRA, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie vetoed an ambitious reform bill that would have added two weeks of early voting, as well as online registration and automatic voter registration at his state’s Department of Motor Vehicles. During the 2014 elections, Christie said it was essential that Republicans be in control of “overseeing the voting mechanism” in 2016.

Not to be outdone, GOP front-runner Donald Trump recently warned: “This voting system is out of control. You have people, in my opinion, that are voting many, many times.”

Michael Steele, the former chair of the Republican National Committee, criticizes his party’s myopic focus on voter fraud and its opposition to the VRA. “Republicans should be less afraid of how people vote and more concerned with making sure they do vote,” he says. Instead, from the GOP’s top-tier presidential candidates, “we’ve heard bickes. They’ve said nothing. No one has made a speech about voting rights. No one has argued...
that the VRA should be restored.”

The contrast between the parties has never been starker. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, for example, have called for fixing the VRA and making it much easier for people to register to vote and get access to the ballot.

Republicans “are political cowards, and if they can’t face a free election, they should get another job,” Sanders told Rachel Maddow. During a major speech on voting rights in June, Clinton asked: “What part of democracy are they afraid of?”

Everyday voters have been the casualties of the GOP’s attack on voting rights. After finishing a sentence for cocaine possession in 2013, Kelli Jo Griffin of Montrose, Iowa, was told by her lawyer that she was once again eligible to vote. The 42-year-old cleaned up her life and took her four children with her to the polls during a local election in 2013. Unbeknownst to Griffin, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad had revoked the automatic restoration of voting rights for ex-felons in 2011, so she was ineligible to cast a ballot. Facing a penalty of 15 years in prison, Griffin was prosecuted for knowingly lying on a voter-registration form. It was the first trial resulting from a massive investigation into voter fraud launched by Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz, who left office in 2014 and is now Cruz’s Iowa campaign chairman.

The jury deliberated for less than 40 minutes before acquitting Griffin. “I’m glad I can go back to being a mother,” she told The Des Moines Register.

Schultz spent two years and more than $250,000 of taxpayer money on his elaborate probe, but netted only six convictions out of 1.6 million votes cast in Iowa in 2012—a success rate of 0.00037 percent. “Schultz’s wolf cry ended in a whimper,” The Quad City Times wrote. Schultz was cited for misusing state funds from the Help America Vote Act and was blocked three times by a state court from attempting to illegally purge Iowa’s voter rolls.

Despite his lack of success, Schultz has urged Republicans to take up his voter-fraud crusade. “You have to start caring about voter ID and election integrity,” he said in 2013. “because if you don’t have that, you’ll never be able to make a difference in any other issue you care about. Never. Because they will cheat!”

Cruz shares Schultz’s apocalyptic view of Democrats as serial cheaters. During a campaign stop in South Carolina, he nodded when a questioner asserted that Obama was elected in 2008 because of fraud. “We have to win by a big enough margin so they can’t steal the election,” Cruz replied.

Ironically, if anyone is gaming the system to win an election, it’s Republicans like Cruz, who are rewriting election laws to their benefit in state after state.

It was only a decade ago that George W. Bush signed a 25-year reauthorization of the VRA—which had been approved 390–33 in the House and 98–0 in the Senate—but it feels like a century has passed. Today, critics of the VRA, who used to be a minority in the GOP, are now the vocal majority.

“We had a very big hand in the VRA’s creation and in sustaining it over the years,” Michael Steele says. “And now Republicans are controlling the Congress and it’s sitting there unattended to. To me, that is abhorrent. It’s a slap in the face of those Republicans who fought for the law and those Republicans who fought for civil rights since Reconstruction.”

It’s been a long time since the GOP was the Party of Lincoln. But regardless of what happens in Iowa and thereafter, when it comes to voting rights, the GOP is now the Party of Cruz.

ARI BERMAN

Ari Berman, a Nation senior contributing writer, is the author of Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America.

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**Clintonomics Failed**

**Why is Hillary running on Bill’s bad record?**

In trying to burnish her credentials as a can-do populist and portray Bernie Sanders as a purveyor of naive socialist fantasies, Hillary Clinton has increasingly invoked Bill Clinton’s presidency as her economic-policy lodestar. When Hillary was asked at the January 17 Democratic debate whether Bill would be advising her on the economy, she responded: “I’m going to have the very best advisers that I can possibly have, and when it comes to the economy and what was accomplished under my husband’s leadership in the ’90s—especially when it came to raising incomes for everybody and lifting more people out of poverty than at any time in recent history—you bet.”

There is no doubt that dramatic departures from past US economic trends occurred during Bill Clinton’s presidency, including the simultaneous fall of inflation and unemployment; the reversal of persistent federal budget deficits to three years of surplus at the end of his second term; and an unprecedented run-up in stock prices—i.e., the dot-com bubble. But these developments need to be evaluated in a broader context. Most importantly, we need to ask whether Clintonomics really did deliver the goods for working people and the poor.

The starting point for understanding Bill Clinton’s economic program is to recognize that it was thoroughly beholden to Wall Street, as Clinton himself acknowledged almost immediately after he was elected. Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward, in his 1994 book The Agenda, recounts that Clinton stated only weeks after winning the election, “We’re Eisenhower Republicans here.... We
CLINTONOMICS

It’s His Stupid Economics

While Hillary has touted the economic achievements of her husband’s administration as a model for her own, the evidence shows that working people suffered under the economic policies of the Clinton White House.

Let’s take a look at just one metric—wages:

$5.15
Minimum hourly wage when Bill Clinton left office

35%
Decline in the value of the minimum wage between 1968 and the end of Clinton’s presidency

$13.60
Average real wage (in 2001 dollars) for nonsupervisory workers during Clinton’s presidency—2 percent lower than it was under Ronald Reagan

stand for lower deficits, free trade, and the bond market. Isn’t that great?” Clinton further conceded that with his new policy focus, “we help the bond market, and we hurt the people who voted us in.”

How could Clinton have undergone such a lightning-fast reversal? The answer is straightforward, and explained with candor by Robert Rubin, who had been co-chair of Goldman Sachs before becoming Clinton’s Treasury secretary. Even before the inauguration, Rubin explained to the more populist members of the incoming administration that the rich “are running the economy and make the decisions about the economy.”

Wall Street certainly flourished under Clinton. By 1999, the average price of stocks had risen to 44 times company earnings. Historically, stock prices had averaged about 14 times more than earnings. Even during the 1920s bubble, stock prices rose only to 33 times earnings right before the 1929 crash.

A major driver here was Wall Street’s craze for Internet start-ups. In 1999, for example, AOL’s market value eclipsed that of Disney and Time Warner combined, and Priceline.com’s value was double that of United Airlines. The Clinton team created the environment that encouraged such absurd valuations. Throughout the bubble years, Clinton’s policy advisers, led by Rubin and his then-protégé Larry Summers, maintained that Wall Street regulation was an outmoded relic from the 1930s. They used this argument to push through the 1999 repeal of the Glass-Steagall financial regulatory system that had been operating since the New Deal. The Clinton team thus set the stage for the collapse of the dot-com bubble and ensuing recession in March 2001, only two months after Clinton left office. They also created the conditions that enabled the even more severe bubble that produced the 2008 global financial crisis and Great Recession.

Clinton followed the same playbook in other areas. The federal budget shifted from deficits to surpluses during his administration primarily because he allowed federal spending to decline. Between 1992 and 2000, support for education dropped by 24 percent, science by 19 percent, income security by 18 percent, and transportation by 10 percent. Clinton’s position on globalization was virtually identical to that of his Republican predecessors, proclaiming the universal virtues of free trade. But the benefits from NAFTA have flowed overwhelmingly to American businesses, while the wages and bargaining power of American workers have suffered.

Beyond NAFTA, the Clinton administration did almost nothing to support unions or working people generally. As longtime labor journalist David Moberg commented in 1999, “Clinton has probably identified less with organized labor than any Democratic president this century.” Of course, since unions provide major electoral backing for any Democratic president, their concerns could not be completely disregarded. Clinton thus supported a two-step rise in the minimum wage in 1996-97, from $4.25 to $5.15 an hour, the rate at which it remained for the rest of his presidency. But this modest increment did little to reverse the precipitous fall in the real value of the minimum wage. When Clinton left office, the minimum wage was still 35 percent below its real value in 1968, even though the economy had become 81 percent more productive between 1968 and 2000.

Meanwhile, Clinton dismantled the traditional welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The overall amount of funds provided by the federal government for “family support” consequently rose by only a negligible amount. Clinton’s campaign to “end welfare as we know it” created both a stigma for public-assistance recipients and greater practical difficulties in receiving such support. Under the pre-Clinton welfare system, a high proportion of recipients took their food stamps and cash assistance at the same time. Under Clinton, the pressures on private soup kitchens and food pantries increased dramatically.

The unemployment rate did begin falling after Clinton took office in 1993, reaching a 31-year low of 4 percent in 2000. But this growth in job opportunities resulted primarily from a major expansion in household and business spending tied to the stock-market bubble. A run-up in both household and business indebtedness financed this spending boom. Unemployment started rising again soon after the bubble burst, and the debt-financed expansion collapsed in March 2001.

In sum, Bill Clinton’s presidency accomplished almost nothing to improve conditions for working people and the poor on a sustained basis. Gestures to the poor and working class were slight and back-handed, while wages for the majority remained below their level of a generation prior. Wealth at the top exploded with the Wall Street bubble. But the stratospheric rise in stock prices and the debt-financed consumption and investment booms produced a mortgaged legacy. The financial unravelling began even as Clinton was basking in praise for his economic stewardship. Throughout the current presidential campaign, this reality needs to be recognized every time Hillary Clinton invokes her husband’s record as a compelling argument for supporting her own candidacy.

ROBERT POLLIN

Robert Pollin, a Distinguished Professor of Economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is the author of Greening the Global Economy.
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Next week’s topic: “I’ve tried everything… but I can’t get a good night’s sleep.”
The Score/Bryce Covert + Mike Konczal

**Bernie’s Blind Spot**

In advance of the Iowa primary, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have duked it out over who would tackle Wall Street best. Clinton’s reform package aims wide, extending scrutiny from the banks to smaller players who played an outsized role in the financial crisis. Sanders—who, unlike Clinton, has rejected Wall Street money—actually takes a narrower approach that favors a popular but insufficient strategy to “break up the banks.” If Sanders wants to challenge modern finance, he should incorporate and surpass Clinton’s plan.

It’s helpful, first, to understand why many find Sanders’s approach insufficient. Sanders wants to break up the big banks in two ways: by size and by line of business. Picture a horizontal cut making the largest banks smaller. Then picture a vertical cut separating ordinary banks from the investment banks. That would be the reincarnation of the Depression-era Glass-Steagall Act, which is only have to downsize by about a third in order to make the cap—which would hardly change its power over markets and politics.

Because he views their primary sins as political—big banks wield big influence—Sanders focuses on making the banks smaller. But the left can and should change the way that modern finance shapes the economy directly.

Sanders could start by emphasizing the cushion that the financial sector needs to maintain in the event that times go bad. These cushions are called “capital requirements”; they limit how much banks can fund themselves with riskier forms of debt. It’s too easy right now for any financial institution, regardless of its structure or size, to quickly blow itself up with too much debt, destabilizing the economy. The Dodd-Frank Act already made an important start here; JPMorgan Chase slimmed down 6 percent based on the act’s initial requirements, and General Electric broke off its finance unit rather than comply. Building through Dodd-Frank is a perfect place to start.

Sanders also needs to address the “shadow banking” sector; short-term lending and borrowing in arcane financial markets like commercial paper and repo, which invite the risks of banking without any of the accountability. Reducing leverage and increasing requirements on these players is a necessary first step. These reforms would reduce risky activities across several kinds of institutions.

Finally, finance does bad things besides crashing our economy through risky derivatives. Since the “shareholder revolution” of the 1980s, Wall Street has pushed corporations away from investment and toward high shareholder payouts. Corporations gave more than $1 trillion in buybacks and dividends to shareholders in 2014, largely to keep them happy and avoid takeovers. This far exceeds the roughly $200 billion these companies invested. Finance is sucking money out of productive enterprises rather than spurring investment in them. Rebalancing this power is essential for any left agenda.

Hillary Clinton is proposing reforms that address these problems, with a risk fee for debt and a focus on “short-termism” for investment. Republicans are likely to pay lip service to these issues, while stressing ways to weaken the progress that has been made. Sanders could immediately change the nature of this debate by proposing even stronger reforms, pointing toward a positive vision of finance. 

**Breaking up the big banks is a crowd pleaser, but it wouldn’t fundamentally change Wall Street.**

At the core of Sanders’s proposed reforms, however, the financial crisis started with the failure of Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers. Neither of these were traditional banks, so Glass-Steagall wouldn’t have changed them. The panic created by those two failures spread through many other financial institutions, creating, for example, runs on money-market mutual funds. These, too, exist outside the traditional banking sector and would not be addressed by Sanders’s plan.

The tactic would also change the financial landscape less than many hope. The main policy tool proposed has been to cap the banks’ risky debt at 3 percent of the economy, or about $522 billion. That cap is larger than that of Bear Stearns, and not much smaller than Lehman’s $613 billion when it went bankrupt. A firm like Goldman Sachs would have to downsize by about a third in order to make the cap—which would hardly change its power over markets and politics.

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Dissecting the Kochtopus
A new book exposes a secretive campaign to reshape US politics.

It's no secret that America is experiencing a crisis of economic inequality, or that Congress and the Supreme Court have made it worse by inviting the nation's wealthiest citizens to play a dominant role in politics. What remains largely hidden, however—thanks in significant measure to the decline of serious, in-depth political journalism—is the degree to which the super-wealthy have managed to seize control of not only the electoral process, but also many of the institutions that shape the political landscape.

I'm ashamed to admit that I had little understanding of the scope of the activities that Charles and David Koch have undertaken to mainstream their radical libertarian ideology until I read Jane Mayer's pathbreaking account in The New Yorker in 2010. (I fought a losing battle on the jury of the National Magazine Awards that year to award it the prize in the reporting category.) Back then, the fantastic reach of the Kochs' personal investments and subterranean funding network was difficult to track. It has since grown to a size almost impossible to imagine, with a sphere of influence that touches nearly every aspect of American public life. That's the message of Dark Money, the authoritative book on the Kochs that Mayer has spent the past five years reporting.

The book arrived just ahead of a blizzard that paralyzed the entire Eastern Seaboard. I read it cover to cover in one weekend, snowbound, and found so many shocking aspects of the Kochs' far-right netherworld that I couldn't choose which was the most important to focus on for this column. That's what makes thinking about the Kochtopus, much less trying to blunt its impact, so daunting.

An octopus is actually too harmless a metaphor, as it has only eight tentacles with which to capture its prey. When it comes to stifling honest, well-informed democratic debate, the Koch network has at least a hundred tongues as many, each of which enjoys far more funding than the groups fighting back. I've been writing on different aspects of this network for three decades, and I still can't quite believe its size and scope.

Those of us in opposition can only stand in awe and reluctant admiration of the Kochs' ability to use their fossil-fuel-funded fortune to turn their dystopian dreams—in which billionaires and corporate chieftains do what they like with the rest of us, unburdened by any kind of financial, environmental, or political limitations—into a nightmarish reality. (The fact that their antigovernment, anti-environmental agenda happens to serve the interests of the $86 billion they've so far amassed is, of course, mere coincidence.)

Mayer takes us through the weird Koch family history and places the brothers in relation to their precursors, including the conservative philanthropists John M. Olin, Richard Mellon Scaife, and Lynde and Harry Bradley. She also navigates the confusing world of the myriad organizations that the Kochs have founded and helped fund in order to shape America's political, legal, intellectual, and cultural institutions—almost all of them with deliberately obfuscating names like the Center to Protect Patient Rights ($247.9 million from 2009 to 2013) and the American Future Fund ($76.8 million from 2009 to 2013).

If you think our problem is simply that the Koch brothers have constructed a shadow Republican Party that plans to raise and spend $889 million or so to elect a conservative president in 2016, then you have missed the proverbial forest for a single tree. Their network of super-wealthy conservatives is underwriting efforts to remake America's state legislatures, universities, law schools, think tanks, public-television stations, and even its museums. The nearly $150 million that Sheldon Adelson spent in 2012 (according to Mayer) is chump change compared with the Kochtopus's overall expenditures.

The reach of the Kochs' funding network is almost impossible to imagine, so vast that it touches nearly every aspect of public life.
financial resources of rich folk (or what used to be called “capital”). But never in our lifetimes have the scales been so lopsided or the power of money so enormous.

Mayer is not alone in her in-depth reporting on the rise of the new American oligarchy. Harvard professor Theda Skocpol, writing with an assortment of co-authors, has recently provided lengthy studies of the forces behind the Tea Party and the transformation of state politics. The New York Times’s Nicholas Confessore gave us a finely grained, nearly 3,000-word portrait of the right-wing takeover of Illinois politics (with the enthusiastic participation of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel). And in The New York Review of Books, Michael Massing has offered up an extremely useful, nearly 10,000-word examination of the media’s coverage of the super-wealthy, with valuable suggestions on how we might improve it.

I mention these efforts in part for their rarity. Mayer’s book could have run a thousand pages without exhausting the topic. Yet the Kochtopus operates without scrutiny from all but a tiny number of publications. These outliers are increasingly imperiled in a media environment defined by disappearing resources and bite-size, easily tweeted articles. And many journalists have actively enlisted in the effort, most notably the hosts of MSNBC’s Morning Joe, who have treated the brothers as selfless do-gooders both on their program and at Koch-sponsored events.

A Washington Post review of Dark Money offers the hope that “it could inspire a more intense discussion about the impact of this wealthy conservative cadre on the Republican Party and the recent course of American politics.” It would be pretty to think so. But we see the future of Kochtopus governance in Rick Snyder’s criminal negligence vis-à-vis the poisoning of the water supply in Flint, Michigan, or in Scott Walker’s war on working people (including university students, workers, and faculty) in Wisconsin. No one can say we weren’t warned.
SEPARATE, UNEQUAL, AND DEADLY

How the US let dozens of immigrants die in segregated, privatized prisons.

Grave mistakes: Carlos Aguirre Venegas was deported six times before dying in federal custody. His family buried him near his mother’s home in Ojinaga, Mexico.
WHERE CLAUDIO FAGARDO-SAUCEO GREW UP, ON THE COLONIAL STREETS OF THE MEXICAN CITY of Durango, migrating to the United States was almost a rite of passage. It was following the stream of departures from Durango in the 1980s that the lanky young man left his family and traveled north. His mother, Julieta Saucedo Salazar, heard that he’d found jobs working as a laborer in Los Angeles. But they soon lost touch. “We did not know much about him, really,” his younger sister told me.

Fagardo-Saucedo worked, his jobs sometimes taking him out of California, and occasionally he got into trouble—once for “possession for sale” of cocaine, another time for stealing jewelry. Every seven or eight years, his mother recalled, he’d return to her house—but never by choice. “They caught him all the time for being illegal,” Julieta said. She always hoped her wandering son might stay, get to know the family again, but he never did. “He would be here a month, and then he’d go again.”

In the summer of 2003, immigration agents detained Fagardo-Saucedo on his way back to California, but this time the Border Patrol referred him to federal prosecutors, who charged him with “illegal re-entry,” or returning to the United States after deportation. He served nearly five years before being sent back to Mexico. Again, he tried to return. Early one morning in August of 2008, Fagardo-Saucedo triggered an infrared sensor as he and two others ran across the border near Tijuana. He pleaded guilty in a US District Court to another “illegal re-entry” charge. The judge sentenced him to four years in federal prison.

When Fagardo-Saucedo arrived at Reeves, a prison complex in rural West Texas, he entered a little-known segment of the federal prison system. Over the previous decade, elected officials and federal agencies had quietly recast the relationship between criminal justice and immigration enforcement. These changes have done as much to bloat the federal prison population as the War on Drugs; they have also helped make Latinos the largest racial or ethnic group sentenced to federal custody.

Until the 1990s, border crossing was almost always treated as a civil offense, punishable by deportation. But in the late 1980s, Congress started to change that. By 1996, crossing the border after deportation was punishable by years of imprisonment, with enhanced sentences for people previously convicted of crimes—most often drug offenses. Though federal investigators have found no evidence that criminalization has reduced the pace of border crossings over the long term, prosecutions for illegal entry and re-entry rose from fewer than 4,000 a year at the start of Bill Clinton’s presidency, to 31,000 in 2004 under George W. Bush, to a high of 91,000 in 2013 under President Obama.

By the late 1990s, the flood of inmates from this new class of prisoner, coupled with a raging War on Drugs, sent the Bureau of Prisons searching for places to put them. The BOP turned to private companies to operate a new type of facility, low-security prisons designed to hold only noncitizens convicted of federal crimes. As of June 2015, these facilities—which are distinct from immigration detention centers, where people are held pending deportation—housed nearly 23,000 people.

Three private companies now run 11 immigrant-only contract prisons. Five are run by the GEO Group, four by the Corrections Corporation of America, and two by a privately held company called the Management & Training Corporation. (A third MTC prison was recently shut down after inmates ransacked it in a protest.) Except for a prison largely used to house inmates from Washington, DC, these 11 facilities are the only privately run prisons in the federal criminal-justice system. In 2013, the BOP spent roughly $625 million on them. The contracts include the provision of medical care, for which the companies often hire health-services subcontractors. In one such facility in Reeves County, Texas, the BOP entered into an agreement with the county, which in turn hired GEO to operate the prison and Correct Care Solutions to manage prison healthcare.

The BOP’s contracts with these facilities are meant to cut costs. Though the prisons are part of the federal infrastructure, the companies that run them operate under a different—and less stringent—set of rules in order to allow cost-cutting innovations. As a retired BOP contracting official said in an interview, “The more specificity you put in the contract, the more money the contractors are going to want for performing the service.”

Repeated federal audits and reports have found these facilities to be in crisis. Prison medical care is notoriously bad, but for years, immigrant- and prisoner-rights advocates have sounded the alarm about these sites in particular, describing them as separate and unequal, segregated

“Call a helicopter to take him to the hospital—this man is dying!”
—Irineo Espinoza-Zepeda, inmate

Limited facilities: According to the BOP, prisons holding people who will be deported don’t require the same level of inmate services as regular prisons.
on the basis of citizenship. “These prisons operate without the same systems of accountability as regular Bureau of Prisons facilities, and prisoners suffer,” said Carl Takei, an ACLU attorney who co-authored a 2014 report documenting the subpar conditions.

Yet the full scale of the medical neglect at these immigrant-only contract prisons has remained opaque—until now. After two years of negotiations with the BOP in and out of federal court over an open-records request, I obtained more than 9,000 pages of medical records that contractors submitted to the BOP. They include the records for 103 of at least 137 people who have died in federal contract prisons from 1998 (the year after the first one opened) through the end of 2014. The records all concern men; women are sent to regular BOP-run prisons. The documents include nurse and doctor notes, records from hospital visits, psychological files, autopsies, and secret internal investigations. In their pages can be found striking tales of neglect.

Each case file—sometimes hundreds of pages long—was reviewed by at least two independent doctors who rendered opinions on the adequacy of the medical care provided. Some of the case files are meager and appear to be missing pages. But of the 77 that provided enough information to render a judgment, the doctors found that 38 contained indications of inadequate medical care. In 25 of these—a third of the total—the reviewers said the inadequacies likely contributed to the premature deaths of the prisoners. In only 39 cases did at least one reviewer find indications that the care had likely been in accordance with recognized medical standards.

Combined with interviews with relatives and cellmates of the deceased inmates, and with correctional officers and medical staff, the files tell the story of men sick with cancer, AIDS, mental illness, and liver and heart disease, forced to endure critical delays in care. They show prison medical units repeatedly failing to diagnose patients correctly despite obvious and painful symptoms, as well as the use of underqualified workers pressed to operate on the borders of their legal scope of practice. The files also show men dying of treatable diseases—men who very likely would have survived had they been given access to adequate care.

Overworked, Underqualified

Fagardo-Saucedo, then 43, was booked into Reeves, run by the GEO Group and a separate medical contractor, on January 27, 2009. When he arrived, the facility was in tumult. Six weeks earlier, inmates at the sprawling 3,700-bed complex had rioted, protesting the death of a man who was left in solitary confinement for a month without proper treatment for his epilepsy; he died after suffering a seizure. Four days after Fagardo-Saucedo’s arrival, the prisoners rioted again when another sick man was reportedly placed in segregation.

Reeves was still recovering from the unrest when a prison physician scrawled a cursory note in Fagardo-Saucedo’s file. The doctor noted that the inmate had arrived from pretrial detention with records indicating that he’d tested positive for latent tuberculosis and had complained of headaches. BOP rules require that TB-positive inmates also be tested for HIV, but an HIV test was never performed. Indeed, over the next two years, Fagardo-Saucedo wasn’t seen by a medical doctor ever once.

After three weeks in Reeves, he began to show up in the clinic complaining of pain—first tooth pain, then headaches, then nausea and back pain. Over two years, Fagardo-Saucedo went to the clinic 18 times. He was seen on nearly all of these occasions by one of a rotating group of licensed vocational nurses, or LVNs. Usually, the LVN sent him back to his bed with a prescription for Tylenol or ibuprofen. Meanwhile, his body was signaling a fatal breakdown, something that doctors who reviewed his case said should have been caught by the facility’s care providers.

The training for LVNs (known as licensed practical nurses, or LPNs, in some states) takes only a year. They are taught to change dressings, check blood pressure, help patients bathe, and gather basic information. They’re often hired to provide routine care in nursing homes or to assist registered nurses in hospitals. Unlike the RNs, who provide patients with substantive medical care and perform triage and evaluations, LVNs are intended as support staff.

This is the reason that BOP-run prisons rarely hire LVNs, said Sandy Parr, a vice president in the federal correctional officers’ union and formerly a registered nurse in a federal prison. “LVNs are too limited to make sense to hire,” she said. Yet in the BOP’s immigrant-only contract prisons, LVNs often appear in the files as the sole caregivers that sick prisoners see for days or weeks. They seem to perform jobs equivalent to those of registered nurses, a practice that prison medical staff confirm. In 19 of the cases reviewed, at least one medical doctor flagged the overextension of LVNs as a factor impeding proper medical care.

Martin Acosta, a Salvadoran man who served time
in Reeves for illegal re-entry at the same time as Fagardo-Saucedo, began complaining of abdominal pain late in the summer of 2010. Over four and half months, he went to the clinic more than 20 times. Other than a doctor’s visit a month after his complaints began, he saw only nursing staff until the last two weeks of his incarceration; on 14 of those occasions, he saw only LVNs. Notes in the handwritten medical logs and nursing templates reveal a cascade of missed signs indicating serious illness, said doctors who reviewed the files. The prison medical staff described Acosta as a difficult patient; one thought he was simply trying to obtain a prescription for narcotics. Acosta was sent back to his room with nothing but Maalox nine times. Physicians who reviewed the files said the nurses appear to have missed the larger story of a protracted medical condition.

“For prison medicine to work, a doctor has to be able to trust the people who work there,” said Dr. Neal Collins, a retired BOP and immigration detention-center physician and clinical director who reviewed the Acosta files. “If they have competent nurse practitioners, then they can trust that the system is catching it. But when people don’t know what to look for, that’s what you worry about.”

In significant discomfort on one of his many trips to plead for help, Acosta told an LVN that he’d vomited a dark substance and had seen blood in his stool. He asked to be sent to a hospital, and the LVN took a stool sample. Leafing through the file, I expected to find a hospital referral or at least the test results. Instead, the records suggest that the LVN eyeballed the stool sample and deemed it unremarkable. There’s no indication in the files that lab tests were performed or a doctor was called. When Acosta finally saw a physician at Reeves in December 2010, he could no longer eat. He was transferred to a hospital, where a large tumor was found in his abdomen. Acosta was ultimately diagnosed with severe metastatic stomach cancer.

In early 2014, an LVN at another facility—this one run by MTC—similarly failed to complete a basic test. Tasked with evaluating a man who complained of chest pains, the LVN attempted to use an electrocardiogram machine. But he wrote in his notes that he couldn’t get the machine to work because the patient’s “skin is oily and electrodes [sic] did not stick.” Rather than call a doctor, the LVN checked a box marked “No action indicated at this time” on the form for chest-pain complaints. The patient later died of a heart attack, despite subsequent treatment. Doctors who reviewed the file were divided about whether the shoddy care contributed to his death.

In the aftermath of the 2008 and 2009 riots at Reeves, BOP monitors began to visit the facility more regularly to check on healthcare conditions. But the increased oversight accomplished little: Each time the monitors returned, they found that Reeves had failed to fix the problems. One year after the riots, Reeves remained derelict. “The lack of an internal system of administrative and clinical controls has contributed to the provision of less than adequate medical care,” the monitors wrote.

Acosta’s common-law wife, Guillermina Yanez, showed me a photograph of him before his illness. Acosta appeared youthful and strong, his T-shirt hugging muscular arms. Then Guillermina showed me a picture taken after she and the couple’s 2-year-old daughter, Tania, boarded a bus from Atlanta to visit him in the hospital. Acosta’s frame was now skeletal, his face sunken, his chest tattoo pinned to paper-thin skin. “I asked a question to the guards: ‘Looking at him, how could you have left him to look like that?’” Guillermina recalled.

Acosta died in late January 2011. In a will that a nurse’s assistant at the hospital helped him prepare, Acosta wrote: “I want the deed to my house and land”—in a small town by a river on El Salvador’s far eastern edge—“to be placed in the name of the mother of my daughter.” Salvadoran officials facilitated the return of Acosta’s body to the country of his birth.

“By the time he got to the hospital, it was too late,” said Collins, the retired prison doctor. “If this case went to court, would they win a malpractice suit? Yes, I think they would.”

Reeves continued to fall short. The Justice Department’s inspector general, Michael Horowitz, released the results of an audit of the facility in April 2015. The audit found that Reeves’s medical contractor at the time, Correctional Healthcare Companies, had failed to meet contractual staffing obligations in the medical unit for at least 34 of the 37 months from 2010 to 2013. The BOP may have incentivized the understaffing: The financial penal-

**The Immigrant-Only Prison System**

As of June 2015, the Bureau of Prisons contracted three companies to run 11 facilities holding only noncitizens convicted of federal crimes.

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**The financial penalties for failing to fill open nursing positions were so modest that it cost less simply to leave them vacant.**

Seth Freed Wessler is a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism. This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.
02.15.16

Our Review Found at Least 25 Questionable Deaths in BOP’s Segregated Prisons as of 2014

(Some surnames have been omitted due to privacy concerns.)

CARLOS AGUIRRE-VENEGAS, 30
Died: Oct. 10, 2014
Carlos was deported six times before he was incarcerated for illegal re-entry. “Nothing at all could keep him away,” said Berenice Venegas, his wife and the mother of their three children.

NESTOR GARAY, 41
Died: June 28, 2014
Nestor would never have been placed in a private, immigrant-only federal prison if he’d become a US citizen like his brother Enrique. Nestor’s path to citizenship was derailed after his drug arrest.

PABLO ORAMA, 62
Died: March 24, 2014
Pablo visited the prison clinic multiple times over an eight-month period, complaining of chest and shoulder pain. He was given Maalox and told to avoid spicy foods. He died of heart disease.

JESUS ENRIQUE ZAVALA MONTES, 28
Died: March 1, 2013
More than two years after Jesus’s death, his sister still had no idea why he’d been locked up. “I thought he’d done something terrible,” she said. He was serving four months for illegal entry.

MARTIN LOPEZ CERVANTES, 45
Died: Jan. 7, 2013
“I have been trying...to get this [patient] the care I think he needs,” a doctor at a nearby hospital wrote, “but the treatment has been denied.” The chemotherapy that Martin finally received three days before his death was too late to save him from an aggressive cancer.

LUIS ALONSO ZAMORA VILLA, 31
Died: Sept. 8, 2012
Luis had been placed in solitary after a fight. The prison’s chief psychologist evaluated him without a translator. He hanged himself in the small room.

LUCIO GONZALEZ PEREZ, 33
Died: Jan. 18, 2011
“Right now, I weigh 120 pounds, when I used to weigh 145.” Lucio wrote in one of many letters to his sister. He would later die from AIDS-related illness.

LUIS B., 39
Died: Aug. 23, 2012
Luis’s body was already cool when staff found him hanging in his solitary cell. The officers assigned to monitor solitary had neglected to perform the required rounds that night.

JUAN CARLOS SANCHEZ-PEREZ, 33
Died: June 22, 2012
An intake questionnaire noted that he’d considered suicide in the past. There is no indication that Juan received any substantive mental-health service. “I assume that they should have given him treatment if he was depressed,” said his brother.

ALEJANDRO GUEVARA-AMAYA, 51
Died: July 6, 2011
“The people who leave here and go to the US...we lose them,” his brother Eduardo said upon learning that Alejandro died in an American prison. “If I had known he was in jail, I might’ve gone looking for him.”

CECILIO V., 37
Died: March 13, 2009
Cecilio was diagnosed with oral thrush, a common sign of HIV infection. But after he refused an HIV test, there’s no indication that medical staff tried to test him again, even as his condition worsened.

REYES G., 36
Reyes told prison counselors that he would kill himself. A doctor determined there was no need to put him on suicide watch. He slit his throat while in solitary confinement.

(Continued on page 18)
The captain ordered the prisoners to return Garay to their cell. The cellmates looked at one another and refused, one by one. After a brief exchange—and a threat by the captain to send them to a segregated housing unit, or SHU—the captain ordered the men to their cell without Garay. “We went to sleep thinking they were going to give him proper medical care,” Espinoza-Zepeda said.

Instead, according to Austin’s notes, he and the captain had Garay moved to another cell, where he was placed on a mattress on the floor. The LVN checked his vital signs once at 3:15 AM. By the time the morning nurse arrived at 6:15 AM, the right side of Garay’s face was drooping, his eyes were open but unresponsive, and his right arm was contracted. The new nurse called the clinical director, a physician, who ordered that Garay be taken immediately to the nearest ER, two miles away. It was another hour before the van left the prison.

The hospital intubated Garay and performed a CT scan. He had suffered a massive stroke, hospital records show. He was flown by helicopter to Midland Memorial Hospital, 40 miles away. When Ochoa Jaen and the other men learned what had happened the next morning, they quickly began searching through Garay’s belongings for a relative’s phone number.

Garay’s parents, Alvara and Indalecio, live in a neatly kept home off the boutique-lined Main Street in Napa Valley’s St. Helena. They were accustomed to hearing from their son in Texas: He’d call them several times each week to tell them about the books he’d read, the conversations he’d had about God. After Alvara’s cell phone rang at 6 AM Pacific Standard Time, waking her before she went to her job as a cleaner at a local winery, an unfamiliar voice introduced himself as a friend of Nestor’s.

“We’re going to give you some news,” said the man, who was using a contraband cell phone. “Something happened to Nestor.”

“What happened? Where is my son?” Alvara asked.

John Foster is the neurologist at Midland Memorial who treated Garay when he arrived that morning. “You have a three-hour window to give a clot buster” for the kind of stroke that Garay had suffered, he said. But by the time Garay made it to Midland, at least six hours had passed since his cellmates first heard him moaning. “It was pretty futile,” Foster said. “The time to fix him... may have been when he fell out of bed.”

Two days after the phone call, Garay’s family gathered in his hospital room. Alvara rushed to embrace her son, who lay on his back with his eyes closed and his feet shackled to the bed. “My mom hugged Nestor, and he cried,” said his brother Enrique. “That’s something I’m never going to forget—somehow Nestor was still there.” But the doctors told Alvara and Indalecio that their son was brain-dead, and the tear was just a reflex. The machines were all that were keeping him alive.

Only after Garay was declared dead did the officers remove his shackles. “It was as if they were saying, ‘If you’re still alive, then you’re under my control,’” Alvara told me later in the room where her son had slept, his closet still full of clothes.

The prison’s mortality review, performed by the contractors, faulted both Austin and Amaru for failing to alert the clinical director or director of nursing when Garay’s condition did not improve under observation. Four medical doctors who independently reviewed Garay’s records said that both Amaru and Austin should have immediately ordered him taken to an ER, and the mortality review found that Amaru “did not respond correctly to the initial report from nursing describing new onset of presumed seizure of a previously healthy 41 year old male.” It also found that neither diagnosis nor treatment was “appropriate and timely.”

I recently sat down with Amaru in his condo in Midland. While he said that he knows now that the events that night constituted a breakdown in medical procedure, he adds that Austin’s notes are a revisionist account of what happened. “I don’t think they’re totally accurate,” Amaru said at his kitchen table. “It leaves a bad taste in my mouth.”

Amaru said that when his phone rang that night, Austin was imprecise. He described a man who “was responsive” but “felt weak” and was “groggy,” Amaru said. Austin wrote in the notes that Garay was “unable to swallow pills at this time.” Amaru said he understood that Garay simply struggled to swallow the large Dilantin tablet.

The mortality review backs Amaru’s story, at least in part: “The information communicated to the physician’s assistant was incomplete,” it reads, followed by a recommendation that the facility’s nursing staff “be retrained on telephone orders.” But Amaru doesn’t blame Austin. “The fact is that the system—BOP and GEO—allows people to be short-staffed and in positions that they’re not properly trained for,” he said. “I am therefore operating in the dark.” Austin didn’t respond to messages seeking comment. According to Amaru, Big Spring took no meaningful action as a result of Garay’s death.

Had Nestor Garay become a US citizen like his parents and younger brother, he would never have ended up at Big Spring. He would have served his time at a BOP-run prison with access to the same healthcare that
federal government provides to US citizens in its custody. BOP rules require that after-hours "coverage will be provided by registered nurses and/or EMTs, where available." Sandy Parr, the nurse with the federal correctional officers' union, told me that prisons generally cover their night shifts with paramedics, who are trained to deal with emergencies. "That's what you have to deal with at night—emergencies," Parr said.

Garay's older brother Carlos, who lives 20 minutes from his parents, wants to empty Nestor's closet and "move forward." But he also wants answers about why his brother wasn't sent to a hospital sooner. "I can make a list of people who were involved," he said, "but who's really responsible? Who's the boss?"

Separate, Unequal, and Unaccountable

In 2008, Dr. John Farquhar retired from his long-time family medical practice in Big Spring. Boredom quickly set in, however, so in 2010 he took a job as Big Spring's clinical director—the lone medical doctor for "3,500 bad boys," he said. Farquhar, who left the job late in 2013, is 85 years old, tall and slim, with a military posture and a haircut to match.

Despite his deteriorating health, there is almost no doctor involvement in his care documented in Adalberto's medical records.

JAVIER R., 53
Died: Oct. 19, 2006
Javier, a patient with HIV, received what a doctor called "haphazard" care, including a barrage of antibiotics without a clear target and the termination of part of his HIV-drug regimen.

JAVIER MENDOZA-VARELA, 43
Died: Feb. 18, 2006
Javier had been treated for illness and appeared at the clinic reporting that he was dizzy and had vomited blood. He needed immediate attention, but a transfer to a hospital appears to have been delayed.

ALEJANDRO ROJAS, 45
Died: Dec. 26, 2004
After Alejandro collapsed from a heart attack, it took more than an hour to transfer him to a hospital.

Juan Angel showed signs of a previous heart attack, but he was not provided with standard preventive treatment. When he collapsed face-first of an apparent heart attack, officers did not immediately begin CPR.

Daniel complained repeatedly of being cold and vomiting. Nurses took his vital signs and found that his heart rate was unusually high. After two days, Daniel was finally transferred to a hospital, where he died of heart failure hours later.

RONALD H., 39
Died: June 19, 1998
After Ronald tested positive for HIV, treatment began. The records suggest that he was experiencing HIV-related neurological problems, but medical staff assumed he was mentally ill. He was not transferred to a hospital until it was far too late.

In the thousands of pages of medical records I obtained from the 12 immigrant-only prisons in operation as of 2014, sparse nursing notes—often from LVNs—are the norm. When doctors do appear, they often simply co-sign what the nurses write. Farquhar was different: His handwritten notes show him attending to sick patients as late as 11 pm. He'd come in on weekends and answer his phone when not on call. "He was nearly holding up a system that was ready to collapse around him," a doctor who reviewed the files said.

Yet Farquhar found himself in a medical system that didn't meet the standards he'd expected. "This is Gov't medicine—obviously—and it is now going to apply to all of us!" Farquhar scrawled in one patient file. "I feel badly for his shabby care," he wrote in another. I asked him about the notes. He would not comment on individual cases, but said, "I stand by that statement." The deficiencies, he added, stemmed from a culture of austerity: "The pressure of budget is always felt."

Farquhar often treated inmates whose health conditions were simply beyond the capacity of the bare-bones prison clinic and its stripped-down staff. But when he did request that prisoners be transferred to a federal-prison medical center or a local hospital, he was often denied. "This man will almost certainly die," he wrote about an 81-year-old who arrived at Big Spring in 2010, and whom Farquhar tried and failed to have transferred.

Farquhar felt the pressure to cut costs immediately. Administrators for the medical subcontractor traveled to Texas to tell him that the rate of ER referrals had been too high in the past, he said. They asked him, "Is there a way that we can cut this down?"

Donna Mott started working as a prison guard for the BOP in the 1980s and remained with the bureau until she retired in 2014. For the last seven years of her career, she supervised the performance of seven private contracts. Mott says the kinds of performance issues described in the monitoring reports and medical records are a direct result of the effort to cut costs via privatization.

BOP-run facilities are obligated to manage populations in accordance with rules set forth in dozens of detailed "program statements"—rules that have produced what many consider the country's best-run prison system. The rules require BOP facilities to provide inmates with access to educational programs, addiction treatment, mental healthcare, and rehabilitative services. But according to a review of five contract solicitations, the BOP's agreements with private-prison operators include only a fraction of these requirements and list others merely as guides.

"If you put in specificity exactly like BOP program statements," Mott said, "then it is basically going to cost the contractor the same amount to operate their facility as it does a bureau facility, which then takes the draw for private contracting off the table—because the draw is that it costs the government less money."

According to government reports and interviews with BOP officials, the contracts specified that the BOP would increase or dock fees based on performance, rather than stipulating extensive rules. The GEO Group says that, in practice, it follows the same rules as BOP facili-
ties. In a statement, GEO wrote that its prisons “adhere to strict contractual requirements set by the FBOP [Federal Bureau of Prisons] as well as all of the same policies and program statements enforced at FBOP-operated facilities.... All medical standards, policies, and practices in place at GEO-operated facilities strive to meet those in place at FBOP-operated facilities.”

GEO’s medical subcontractor, Correct Care Solutions, said it provides a “comprehensive scope of healthcare services per our contractual obligations.”

Neither MTC nor CCA responded to questions about their operations or particular deaths at their sites.

Yet Mott said because the contracts lack clear and specific requirements in many areas of operation, the BOP’s monitors on the ground “had no teeth.” The companies say they secure accreditation from two agencies that each set dozens of standards. But a 2013 Government Accountability Office report on mental healthcare in federal prisons found that seven of the 13 contract facilities then in operation were not fully compliant with the mental-health-related standards of the Joint Commission, one of the accreditation bodies.

Since the Tāft facility near Bakersfield, California, which opened in 1997, was the BOP’s pilot privatization effort, it received special scrutiny. In 2005, the Justice Department released two reports on Tāft, one by an outside research firm and another performed by an economist contracted directly by the BOP. The outside researchers found that GEO, then the facility’s operator, had cut costs. But the BOP-contracted economist found that even these savings were eclipsed by the extra costs to the BOP of monitoring the prison and administering its contract.

“The more rigorous analysis showed that there really were not any savings, which was the purpose,” said Gerald Gaes, who managed the BOP’s research division when the studies began. “I think that very often, the quality suffered because they try to save on cost.”

Death in Solitary

Among the many rules that some contract prisons were not required to follow were the program statements that relate to mental healthcare. If they had been in effect, those policies would have guided how Tāft treated Jesus Enrique Zavala Montes when he stepped off a bus on February 7, 2013, to serve a five-month sentence for illegal entry.

On the bus that transported him from Arizona to Tāft, run since 2007 by MTC, the 28-year-old was already acting strangely. Guards separated him from other prisoners because he thought “other inmates wanted to harm him,” records say. By the time he arrived at Tāft, prison staff said he seemed nervous, continuously watching the door.

Zavala’s sister Lisbia, who lives in the Mexican state of Sinaloa, told me she’s not sure when her brother’s troubles began. Sometimes she thinks they stem from their childhood—a violent father, the instability of bouncing from one relative’s house to another. Or maybe, she says, “it was just his mind.” What’s clear is that Zavala became an addict in his early 20s. When he was high—and sometimes when he wasn’t—Zavala would pace his room in his mother’s apartment, talking to himself. In 2008, he was incarcerated for more than a year in a Mexican jail after a fight and tried to kill himself while in solitary.

In 2010, Zavala’s mother forced him into a rehab program, where he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and sent home with two bottles of pills, which Lisbia confirmed were the anti-anxiety medication diazepam and a drug for bipolar disorder called carbamazepine. His mind now organized and clear, Zavala told his sister he was leaving for the United States. The next two years were marked by constant departures and returns, arrests and removals. He’d do 60 days in federal prison for illegal entry and then return to Mexico. On December 17, 2012, Zavala’s sister says, he left for the last time. He was arrested by border agents, criminally charged for crossing the border, and sentenced to five months.

When he arrived at Tāft, Zavala filled out a standard psychological questionnaire. In messy script, he wrote that he’d taken “deasepan” and “carmanasipin.” Speaking through a translator, Zavala told a therapy intern with a master’s degree that he had tried to kill himself in 2008. She noticed the scars on his wrists and asked why he’d done it. In the Mexican prison, “they would just throw food at him,” the intern wrote. She recommended Zavala for psychiatric consultation and therapy, but cleared him for admittance to the general population, writing that the inmate had “no debilitating mental disabilities” despite his statement that he had previously taken psychiatric drugs. A subsequent review also indicates she believed he’d been placed on a “hot list” of prisoners who may pose a danger to themselves.

A registered nurse intervened and the prison’s medical doctor ordered that Zavala be held in an observation unit overnight so that mental-health staff could see him in the morning. By 9:15 am, the intern, after consult-
Cummins, the psychologist, had again cleared Zavala from observation. There is no indication in the records that Cummins ever saw Zavala. “I met inmate in the infirmary to assess his mental status,” the intern wrote. “Inmate presented well.” But Zavala was not well. According to a confidential investigation by MTC, which operates Taft, in his first two days there, Zavala told a prison worker that he thought people were “out to get him.” Prison staff placed Zavala in solitary on a “protective custody” hold pending a review. That review did not take place; nor did Zavala ever see a psychiatrist. Instead, he sat in the bare room, alone.

Eight days later, Zavala smashed the window of his cell and scrawled graffiti on the wall. There is no record that Cummins was alerted.

Instead, on February 22, the prison held a disciplinary hearing to punish Zavala for breaking the window. Four days later, a correctional counselor e-mailed Cummins to ask for a psychiatric referral because Zavala was suffering from stress, anxiety, and sleeplessness. Now, 10 days after Zavala had acquiesced to the voices and smashed a window, Cummins finally scheduled Zavala for a psychiatric consultation. Falling deeper into psychological chaos, Zavala used a razor to shave off his eyebrows. A guard performing the required 30-minute rounds in the SHU noticed the change but failed to report it.

On March 1, at 1:29 AM, four days before he was scheduled to finally see a psychiatrist, Zavala was discovered dead in his cell; an officer found him hanging from a sheet that he’d tied to the handle of the top bunk.

**A String of Suicides**

Just six months before Zavala’s death, another inmate, Luis Alonso Zamora Villa, also killed himself at Taft. Zamora Villa had been held in a room like Zavala’s, with a window looking out over a dirt yard and a bunk bed, which he too used to hang himself. As with Zavala, his records show that he told the therapy intern he’d considered suicide before. She referred him to a psychiatrist, but there’s no indication he was ever seen by one. And although Cummins, the psychologist, saw him once, he arrived without a translator.

“In regular BOP prisons, mental-health treatment is part of the mission, because rehabilitation is part of the mission,” a BOP official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said. “For criminal-alien prisons, it’s just, ‘Hold them.’”

I asked Robert Trestman, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut and a national expert on correctional mental health, to review the two men’s files from Taft. “The care here was at best incredibly lackadaisical,” he said. “This is by no means an acceptable standard of care.”

According to the MTC report in the Zamora case, officers assigned to the SHU had in the past failed to conduct their required rounds. Zamora killed himself during a one-hour-and-17-minute span at dawn when no SHU checks were performed. The BOP had redacted significant portions of the post-death report on Zamora’s suicide in the documents I obtained.

Two months before Zamora died, the BOP warned Taft’s operators that “security procedures” in the SHU “were not always followed.” Nor were they at the GEO Group’s Big Spring prison, where five correctional officers were criminally charged because they falsely claimed that rounds were performed. There, a prisoner named Luis Bent killed himself in his solitary cell on a night when the guards failed to perform their required rounds.

Between 1998 and 2014, there were at least seven suicides in the BOP’s immigrant-only contract prisons. In Reeves, over seven months from 2008 to 2009, two men killed themselves, each in solitary cells, each using prison-issued shaving razors to slash their own necks.

The therapy intern, who told me she’s working in another prison now, declined to discuss the Zavala and Zamora cases, though she remembered them clearly. She was unavailable to investigators during an internal review of Zavala’s case; she was out on extended stress leave.

Many of the failures in Zavala’s case in particular might have been prevented if the BOP’s contract prisons were bound by the same program statements that mandate care in BOP-run facilities. The BOP’s program statement on suicide prevention mandates that prisons set up a “hot list” of prisoners who may pose a danger to themselves. The list is to be “distributed to Correctional Services, Health Services, and Unit Team staff.”

Though the contract solicitation for Taft did not include that rule, it did put a hot list in place in the wake of Zamora’s suicide. When Zavala broke the window or shaved off his eyebrows, that list would have alerted staff to his psychiatric distress. But Cummins, the only prison mental-health staffer who could add a name to it, never made the designation, a failure cited in the prison’s confidential after-action review. The review also found “a lack of follow-up when signs existed that suggested urgent attention was required.”

Cummins, who no longer works at Taft, declined to speak about the suicides, but he described Taft’s psychological services as under-resourced and understaffed. He
said it was challenging to work with a Spanish-speaking population when translation services were unavailable or unreliable. (Amaru, the physician’s assistant at Big Spring, said that the medical team there sometimes conscripts bilingual prisoners to provide translation.)

I asked the BOP if it took any action after Zavala’s death. The bureau did not respond. Technically, MTC may not have violated its contract, but the company was worried about liability. The after-action review was conducted “in anticipation of litigation,” it said.

No lawsuit was ever filed. Zavala’s family only learned of his death a year later, when a man from the Mexican consulate in Bakersfield, California, finally called. Zavala’s ashes were mailed in a box to a Foreign Relations office where a functionary told Zavala’s mother, Maria Elena Montes Garcia, that her son had killed himself in a prison called Taft.

When I spoke with her by phone, she told me she had wondered what he’d done to find himself locked up, if it had been hell again inside. I was the first one to tell her that he’d been convicted only for the crime of trying to re-enter the United States.

**Ignoring the Problem**

Unlike the BOP’s mental-health and staffing guidelines, federal authorities do require contractors to follow the bureau’s infectious-disease policies, likely due to the risks of an outbreak. In January 2008, a year before Fagardo-Saucedo arrived at Reeves with a positive tuberculosis screen, BOP monitors issued an annual compliance review to Reeves County that found at least two dozen inadequacies, largely in medical care. (The review was obtained by independent attorney Steven Raher.) Among the findings, Reeves’s medical unit had repeatedly failed to provide HIV tests to patients with past tuberculosis exposure.

In their responses to the review, Reeves officials told the BOP that they understood the requirement to test TB-positive inmates for HIV was open to “interpretation.” The BOP replied that the facility was mistaken. Even in the wake of this warning, Fagardo-Saucedo was never screened for HIV. Monitoring reports indicate that other contract facilities also failed to follow the rules on infectious-disease treatment.

In July 2010, six months after Fagardo-Saucedo’s arrival, monitors returned and again cited the prison for failing to properly care for inmates with tuberculosis.

Meanwhile, Fagardo-Saucedo’s symptoms were growing worse: acute headaches, intense nausea, and back pain. After 17 months of steady complaints, an LVN noted that a medical doctor should see him. Instead, two weeks later, a physician’s assistant evaluated him and again sent him back to his cell with ibuprofen. Fagardo-Saucedo missed three medical appointments. An LVN simply wrote, “No show for scheduled appointment. Security unable to deliver.” In a review of the files months later, a BOP doctor wrote: “It certainly looks like one could locate the inmate.” When Fagardo-Saucedo reappeared in the files three weeks later, saying that the ibuprofen hadn’t worked, he told a nurse, “I want to see a doctor.” He was not seen by one.

In mid-December of 2010, BOP monitors returned again to Reeves. This time, the deficiencies were severe enough to be flagged as a “significant finding.” “The lack of an internal system of administrative and clinical controls has contributed to the provision of less than adequate medical care,” they wrote, expressing particular concern about the infectious-disease clinics.

As monitors toured Reeves in December, the head of the BOP’s Privatization Management Branch—the office responsible for the routine monitoring of contract facilities—wrote an e-mail to staff: “[W]e have been informed they have identified serious issues in health care—specifically their infectious disease program.”

Reeves’s medical clinic had fallen into such disrepair that the BOP was finally grappling with whether to renew the contract with Reeves County. The BOP team listed the pros and cons. The five pros focused solely on logistics, noting that closure would place a “burden on [the] BOP inmate pipeline.”

On the 15-item cons list: 230 citations and $2 million in penalties for compliance failures, as well as a lack of healthcare that has “greatly impacted inmate health and well being.” Officials also called into question whether the contract was saving them any money at all: “While contract price appears reasonable, the oversee [sic] involved reduces the reasonableness.”

At 10:30 pm on New Year’s Eve 2010, a correctional officer contacted the clinic by radio and said that Fagardo-Saucedo appeared sick and that medical staff should check in on him. As he had for nearly two years, Fagardo-Saucedo described his severe pain and nausea. The LVN he saw called a doctor, who instructed her to administer an injection of pain medicine.

On his way back to his bunk early on New Year’s Day, Fagardo-Saucedo collapsed. “My legs gave out and I fell,” he told the LVN back in the clinic. After watching him struggle for the rest of the morning, the LVN called the doctor. Upon hearing of Fagardo-Saucedo’s condition, the physician ordered that he be taken to an ER. Two hours later, Fagardo-Saucedo was loaded into a security van and delivered first to a local hospital and then to another, one hour away in Odessa. There, he had a seizure.

Fagardo-Saucedo died four days later, shackled to the bed, alone but for the two guards assigned to watch him. The hospital had finally screened him for HIV; he tested positive. According to a county autopsy report, Fagardo-Saucedo died of an HIV-related infection in his brain.

The BOP and Reeves produced a trail of reports after his death. “An HIV test should have been offered based on his history of positive [TB] test,” the prison’s mortality review said. A BOP doctor who reviewed the case noted that HIV could have accounted for the headaches. “A more complete evaluation by the doctor…could have helped in providing an earlier intervention,” the physician wrote. In the months after Fagardo-Saucedo’s death, the BOP extended its contract with Reeves County. The GEO Group and Correct Care Solutions continue to manage the prison. In early 2015, BOP monitors cited the facility for again failing to properly follow up on positive TB tests.
After I Lived in Norway,

America Felt Backward.

Here’s Why.
A crash course in social democracy.

by ANN JONES
SOME YEARS AGO, I FACED UP TO THE FUTILITY OF REPORTING TRUTHS about America’s disastrous wars, and so I left Afghanistan for another mountainous country far away. It was the polar opposite of Afghanistan: a peaceful, prosperous land where nearly everybody seemed to enjoy a good life, on the job and in the family.

It’s true that they didn’t work much—not by American standards, anyway. In the United States, full-time salaried workers supposedly laboring 40 hours a week actually average 49, with almost 20 percent clocking more than 60. These people, on the other hand, worked only about 37 hours a week, when they weren’t away on long paid vacations. At the end of the workday, about four in the afternoon (perhaps three during the summer), they had time to enjoy a hike in the forest, a swim with the kids, or a beer with friends—which helps explain why, unlike so many Americans, they are pleased with their jobs.

Often I was invited to go along. I found it refreshing to hike and ski in a country with no land mines, and to hang out in cafés unlikely to be bombed. Gradually, my war-zone jitters subsided and I settled into the slow, calm, pleasantly uneventful stream of life there.

Four years on, thinking I should settle down, I returned to the United States. It felt quite a lot like stepping back into that other violent, impoverished world, where anxiety runs high and people are quarrelsome. I had, in fact, come back to the flip side of Afghanistan and Iraq: what America’s wars have done to America. Where I live now, in the homeland, there are not enough shelters for the homeless. Most people are either overworked or hurting for jobs; the housing is overpriced, the hospitals crowded and understaffed, the schools largely segregated and not so good. Opioid or heroin overdose is a popular form of death, and men in the street threaten women wearing hijabs. Did the American soldiers I covered in Afghanistan know they were fighting for this?

Ducking the Subject

ONE NIGHT I TUNED IN TO THE DEMOCRATS’ PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE to see if they had any plans to restore the America I used to know. To my amazement, I heard the name of my peaceful mountain hideaway: Norway. Bernie Sanders was denouncing America’s crooked version of “casino capitalism” that floats the already-rich ever higher and flushes the working class. He said that we ought to “look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway, and learn from what they have accomplished for their working people.”

He believes, he added, in “a society where all people do well. Not just a handful of billionaires.” That certainly sounds like Norway. For ages, they’ve worked at producing things for the use of everyone—not the profit of a few—so I was all ears, waiting for Sanders to spell it out for Americans.

But Hillary Clinton quickly countered, “We are not Denmark.” Smiling, she said, “I love Denmark,” and then delivered a patriotic punch line: “We are the United States of America.” (Well, there’s no denying that.) She also praised capitalism and “all the small businesses that were started because we have the opportunity and the freedom in our country for people to do that and to make a good living for themselves and their families.” She didn’t seem to know that Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians do that too, and with much higher rates of success.

The truth is that almost a quarter of American start-ups are not founded on brilliant new ideas, but on the desperation of men or women who can’t get a decent job. The majority of all American enterprises are solo ventures having zero payrolls, employing no one but the entrepreneur, and often quickly wasting away. Sanders said that he was all for small business too, but that meant nothing “if all of the new income and wealth is going to the top 1 percent.” (As George Carlin said, “The reason they call it the American Dream is because you have to be asleep to believe it.”)

In that debate, no more was heard of Denmark, Sweden, or Norway. The audience was left in the dark. Later, in a speech at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, Sanders tried to clarify his identity as a democratic socialist. He said he’s not the kind of socialist (with a capital S) who favors state ownership of the means of production. The Norwegian government, on the other hand, owns the means of producing lots of public assets and is the major stockholder in many a vital private enterprise.

I was dumbfounded. Norway, Denmark, and Sweden practice variations of a system that works much better than ours. Yet even the Democratic presidential candidates, who say they love or want to learn from those countries, don’t seem know how they actually work.

Why We’re Not Denmark

PROOF THAT THEY DO WORK IS DELIVERED every year in data-rich evaluations by the United Nations and other international bodies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s annual report on international well-being, for example, measures 11 factors, ranging from material conditions such as affordable housing and employment to quality-of-life matters like education, health, life expectancy, voter participation, and overall citizen satisfaction. Year after year, all the Nordic countries cluster at the top, while the United States lags far behind. In addition, Norway has ranked first on the UN Development Program’s Human Development Index for 12 of the last 15 years, and it consistently tops international comparisons in such areas as affordable housing and employment.
as democracy, civil and political rights, and freedom of expression and the press.

What is it, though, that makes the Scandinavians so different? Since the Democrats can’t tell you and the Republicans wouldn’t want you to know, let me offer you a quick introduction. What Scandinavians call the Nordic model is a smart and simple system that starts with a deep commitment to equality and democracy. That's two concepts combined in a single goal because, as far as they’re concerned, you can’t have one without the other.

Right there, they part company with capitalist America, now the most unequal of all the developed nations, and consequently a democracy no more. Political scientists say it has become an oligarchy, run at the expense of its citizenry by and for the superrich. Perhaps you’ve noticed that.

In the last century, Scandinavians, aiming for their egalitarian goal, refused to settle solely for any of the ideologies competing for power—not capitalism or fascism, not Marxist socialism or communism. Geographically stuck between powerful nations waging hot and cold wars for such doctrines, Scandinavians set out to find a middle path. That path was contested—by socialist-inspired workers on the one hand, and by capitalist owners and their elite cronies on the other—but in the end, it led to a mixed economy. That makes capitalism more or less cooperative, and then redistributes equitably the wealth it helps to produce.

That path was contested—by socialist-inspired workers on the one hand, and by capitalist owners and their elite cronies on the other—but in the end, it led to a mixed economy. That makes capitalism more or less cooperative, and then redistributes equitably the wealth it helps to produce. Struggles like this took place around the world in the 20th century, but the Scandinavians alone managed to combine the best ideas of both camps while chucking out the worst.

In 1936, the popular US journalist Marquis Childs first described the result to Americans in the book *Sweden: The Middle Way*. Since then, all the Scandinavian countries, and their Nordic neighbors Finland and Iceland, have been improving upon that hybrid system. Today in Norway, negotiations between the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise determine the wages and working conditions of most capitalist enterprises, public and private, that create wealth, while high but progressive income taxes fund the state’s universal welfare system, benefiting everyone. In addition, those confederations work together to minimize the disparity between high-wage and lower-wage jobs. As a result, Norway ranks with Sweden, Denmark, and Finland as among the most income-equal countries in the world, and its standard of living tops the charts.

So here’s the big difference: In Norway, capitalism serves the people. The government, elected by the people, sees to that. All eight of the parties that won parliamentary seats in the last national election—including the conservative Høyre party now leading the government—are committed to maintaining the welfare state. In the United States, however, neoliberal politics puts the foxes in charge of the henhouse, and capitalists have used the wealth generated by their enterprises (as well as financial and political manipulations) to capture the state and pluck the chickens.

They’ve done a masterful job of chewing up organized labor. Today, only 11 percent of American workers belong to a union. In Norway, that number is 52 percent; in Denmark, 67 percent; in Sweden, 70 percent. Thus, in the United States, oligarchs maximize their wealth and keep it, using the “democratically elected” government to shape policies and laws favorable to the interests of their foxy class. They bamboozle the people by insisting, as Hillary Clinton did at that debate, that all of us have the “freedom” to create a business in the “free” marketplace, which implies that being hard up is our own fault.

In the Nordic countries, on the other hand, democratically elected governments give their populations freedom from the market by using capitalism as a tool to benefit everyone. That liberates their people from the tyranny of the mighty profit motive that warps so many American lives, leaving them freer to follow their own dreams—to become poets or philosophers, bartenders or business owners, as they please.

**Family Matters**

Maybe our politicians don’t want to talk about the Nordic model because it shows so clearly that capitalism can be put to work for the many, not just the few.

Consider the Norwegian welfare state. It’s universal. In other words, aid to the sick or the elderly is not charity, but a right. The government, elected by the people, determines who qualifies and provides aid. In the United States, however, neoliberal politics puts the foxes in charge of the henhouse, and capitalists have used the wealth generated by their enterprises (as well as financial and political manipulations) to capture the state and pluck the chickens.

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Outside the box: Children at the Bjerkeveien Barnehage (kindergarten) spend much of their school day outdoors.
moved into paid work on equal footing with men, nearly doubling the tax base. That has, in fact, meant more to Norwegian prosperity than the coincidental discovery of North Atlantic oil reserves. The Ministry of Finance recently calculated that those additional working mothers add to Norway’s net national wealth a value equivalent to its “total petroleum wealth”—currently held in the world’s largest sovereign-wealth fund, worth over $873 billion. By 1981, women were sitting in parliament, in the prime minister’s chair, and in her cabinet.

American feminists also marched for such goals in the 1970s, but the big boys, busy with their own White House intrigues, initiated a war on women that set the country back and still rages today in brutal attacks on women’s basic civil rights, healthcare, and reproductive freedom. In 1971, thanks to the hard work of organized feminists, Congress passed the bipartisan Comprehensive Child Development Bill to establish a multibillion-dollar national daycare system for the children of working parents. In 1972, President Richard Nixon vetoed it, and that was that. In 1972, Congress also passed a bill (first proposed in 1923) to amend the Constitution to grant equal rights of citizenship to women. Ratified by only 35 states—three short of the required 38—that Equal Rights Amendment was declared dead in 1982, leaving American women in legal limbo. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, obliterating six decades of US social-welfare policy “as we know it,” ending federal cash payments to the nation’s poor, and consigning millions of female heads of household and their children to poverty, where many still dwell 20 years later. Today, even privileged women, torn between their underpaid work and their kids, are overwhelmed.

Things happened very differently in Norway. There, feminists and sociologists pushed hard against the biggest obstacle still standing in the path to full democracy: the nuclear family. In the 1950s, the world-famous American sociologist Talcott Parsons had pronounced that arrangement—with the hubby at work and the little wife at home—the ideal setup in which to socialize children. But in the 1970s, the Norwegian state began to deconstruct that undemocratic ideal by taking upon itself the traditional, unpaid household duties of women. Caring for children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled became the basic responsibilities of the universal welfare state, freeing women in the workforce to enjoy both their jobs and their families.

Paradoxically, setting women free made family life more genuine. Many in Norway say it has made both men and women more themselves and more alike: more understanding and happier. It also helped kids slip from the shadow of helicopter parents. In Norway, both mother and father in turn take paid parental leave from work during the child’s first year or longer. At age 1, however, children start attending a neighborhood barnehage (kindergarten) for schooling spent largely outdoors. By the time kids enter free primary school at age 6, they are remarkably self-sufficient, confident, and good-natured. They know their way around town, and if caught in a snowstorm in the forest, how to build a fire and find the makings of a meal. (One kindergarten teacher explained, “We teach them early to use an ax so they understand it’s a tool, not a weapon.”)

To Americans, the notion of a school “taking away” your child to make her an ax wielder is monstrous. Yet though it’s hard to measure, it’s likely that Scandinavian children actually spend more quality time with their non-work-obsessed parents than does a typical middle-class American child being driven by a stressed-out mother from music lessons to karate. For all these reasons and more, the international organization Save the Children cites Norway as the best country on earth in which to raise kids, while the United States finishes far down the list, in 33rd place.

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**Welfare State**

In countries with lower levels of political, economic, and social inequality, mothers and their children lead healthier, happier lives. (The US is #33 on the list.)

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**Nordic Index**

1. Norway
2. Finland
3. Iceland
4. Denmark
5. Sweden
6. Netherlands
7. Spain
8. Germany
9. Australia
10. Belgium

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**Bottom 10**

170. Sierra Leone / Haiti
171. Guinea-Bissau
172. Chad
173. Côte D’Ivoire
174. Gambia
175. Niger
176. Mali
177. Central African Republic
178. Dr Congo

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- **1 in 12,160** women die of a maternal cause
- **1 in 290** children die before age 5
- **$56,120** annual income per person
- **18** years of schooling
- **39%** seats held by women
- **1 in 30** women die of a maternal cause
- **1 in 8** children die before age 5
- **$635** annual income per person
- **8** years of schooling
- **11%** seats held by women

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**Don’t Take My Word for It**

This little summary just scratches the surface of Scandinavia, so I urge curious readers to Google away. But be forewarned: You’ll find much criticism of all the Nordic-model countries. Worse, neoliberal pundits, especially the Brits, are always beating up on the Scandinavians, predicting the imminent demise of their social democracies. Self-styled experts still in thrall to Margaret Thatcher tell Norwegians they must liberalize their economy and privatize everything short of the royal palace. Mostly, the Norwegian government does the opposite—or nothing at all—and social democracy keeps on ticking.

It’s not perfect, of course. It has always been a carefully considered work in progress. Governance by consensus takes time and effort. You might think of it as slow democracy. Even so, it’s light-years ahead of us.

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*Ann Jones is the author of, most recently, They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return From America’s Wars—the Untold Story. This is a joint Nation/ TomDispatch article and will appear on TomDispatch.com.*
It was good to see The Nation highlighting the United Nations. The challenges and opportunities the UN faces in 2016 are of enormous consequence, and Barbara Crossette has raised a number of issues I hope your readers and editors will continue to address. The appointment of the next UN secretary general is among the most important decisions that the international community will make this year.

As Crossette noted, the five “permanent members with veto,” especially the United States, Russia, and China, all want a secretary general who will take their orders, allow their nations to run the UN, and not make waves. The test in 2016 will be whether the other 188 member states will insist on a new, merit-based selection process that identifies a number of highly qualified candidates. If the Obama administration were not only to accept but also to support this reform—as well as relaunch the terrible misuse of the veto in this appointment process—that action alone could benefit the entire UN system for decades to come.

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t's 1983, and a family has landed at the Damascus airport. The father, who has avoided military service, bribes his way into the country. Accompanying him are his foreign wife and small blond son. Outside the airport, Syria assails them. A scrum of screaming cab drivers fights over the startled new arrivals. Cabbies abandon the brawl and compose themselves on the sidelines, combing their hair and smoking cigarettes, until the last one left shouting—and close to keeling over from his exertions—hustles the family into his taxi. He ashes his cigarettes through the moving vehicle's missing floorboard.

This scene of homecoming and culture shock falls about halfway through the first volume of The Arab of the Future, a graphic memoir by the French-Syrian cartoonist Riad Sattouf. The book delivers a vision of childhood that is both extreme and familiar: its terrors and painful revelations, the utter mystery and absolute power of adults, the sensory details that lodge forever in the memory. But Sattouf’s vision is also of the unusual childhood he lived in Moammar El-Gadhafi’s Libya and Hafez al-Assad’s Syria, as well as in the shadow of his father and his delusions. The Arab of the Future blends a rueful backward glance at the early days of two dictatorships that finally imploded in the Arab Spring and an intimate indictment of the way boys were taught to be men.

Sattouf, who is 37 and lives in Paris, has directed two movies and written dozens of graphic novels, many of them focused on adolescence and sexual losers (one is called Virgin’s Manual, another No Sex in New York). Other work is drawn from life: For one piece, he spent 15 days in an elite French high school. Between 2004 and 2014, Sattouf contributed a weekly comic called “The Secret Life of Youth” to the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. Based on scraps of life seen and heard on the streets and subways, it was preoccupied, like much of Sattouf’s work, with observing those moments of cruelty, violence, or strangeness that happen in plain sight but are generally passed over in silence, purposely ignored.

With The Arab of the Future, Sattouf has achieved a new level of recognition. The artist once told Le Monde that he has always wanted to create comics “that could be read by people who don’t usually read comics.” With his latest autobiographical work, he has succeeded: The memoir of his peculiar childhood is a literary phenomenon in France. Two volumes of a projected four-part series have been published so far; the first won France’s top prize for a graphic novel last year, and Sattouf has been acclaimed as an original talent and a sharp storyteller.

Recently published in an English translation by Sam Taylor, the first volume spans just six years, from 1978 to 1984. The narrator’s mother, Clementine, and his father, Abdel-Razaq, meet in Paris at the cafeteria of the Sorbonne. The gentle Clementine is from Brittany; the bumbling and eager Abdel-Razaq is from a small Sunni village outside Homs. One of the first members of his family to have pursued an education, he has won a scholarship to earn a doctorate in history.

Upon graduating, Abdel-Razaq declines a post at Oxford, deciding instead to take a job at one of the new universities that Gadhafi has established in Libya. By this time, Clementine has abandoned her studies, the two
have married, and their son Riad is a toddler. “My father believed in pan-Arabism. He was obsessed with education for the Arabs. He thought Arab men had to educate themselves to escape from religious dogma,” explains the adult narrator, who otherwise keeps his commentary to a minimum. Sattouf adds little context and no foreshadowing to the tale; he has said that he tried to follow only the trail of his memories. Tripoli is seen from the vantage point of a child whose world consists largely of the hallways and gardens of a housing complex for foreigners. Some of his most unforgettable excursions involve standing in a heaving line with his father to collect government-issued rations of bananas and ‘TAG’.

The young Riad’s world still operates on dream logic, so Gaddafi’s cult of personality and radical policies don’t strike him as strange. The colonel seems to be permanently present on TV. Because private property has been outlawed, residences are best kept continuously occupied, as Riad’s parents discover when they return from a walk to find their university housing occupied by squatters. There are other surreal losses: Clementine resigns from a job as a newscaster after bursting into hysterical laughter while reading Gaddafi’s threats to assassinate President Reagan. The dictator’s suggestion that Libyans should start exchanging jobs is one reason the family finally leaves. After a sojourn in France and the birth of Riad’s brother, Abdel-Razaq seizes a chance to return to Syria by taking a new job at the University of Homs.

By this point Riad is an increasingly observant child, but his attention is almost always drawn to the grotesque and the flawed: the cracks in new but poorly built houses, the smell of sweat, the hypocrisy and humiliations that underlie the seemingly cordial family and village politics. Upon arriving in his hometown, the village of Ter Maaleh, Abdel-Razaq discovers that his beloved older brother has sold most of the family’s land in his absence. The nightmare doesn’t end there. The village is bigoted, violent, backward; its streets are strewn with garbage and excrement, its children wander in a state of feral excitation (at one point they lynch a puppy). At family gatherings, women cook and serve the food, then sit in a separate room waiting to eat leftovers. Riad’s cousins attack him and call him a “Jew,” the first word he learns in Syrian Arabic. When the boys play with plastic toy soldiers, there are two sets: the valiant Syrians and the villainous Israelis, who raise flags of surrender while holding daggers behind their backs. In the school courtyard, the most popular game is war with Israel. “I tried to be the most aggressive towards the Jews to prove I wasn’t one,” says Sattouf.

Books Discussed in This Essay

**The Arab of the Future**
*A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978–1984.*
By Riad Sattouf.
Translated from the French by Sam Taylor.

**L’Arabe du futur**
By Riad Sattouf.
Allary. 153 pp. €20,90.

The *Arab of the Future* is drawn in a simple, confident, expressive style. A caricaturist’s hand animates faces distorted by fear, anger, or rage. As the plot moves between Libya, France, and Syria, each country is given its own wash of color: yellow, blue, or red. It’s when the family lands in the red zone that the story also arrives at its emotional center.

Sattouf has said in interviews that it was the Syrian uprising, and his experience helping the Syrian side of his family emigrate to France in 2011, that prompted him to write *The Arab of the Future.* “Part of me still finds it so unfair that they had to live that way,” he said of his relatives, looking shy and uncomfortable on one of France’s main TV talk shows. “I have the feeling that if I don’t tell this story, no one will ever tell how it really was.”

While *The Arab of the Future* has won many accolades, its depiction of a relentlessly unpleasant rural Syrian setting, offered with minimal social and political context, has drawn sharp criticism. The scholar Laurent Bonnefoy has argued on the website Orient XXI that the narrator’s seemingly naive gaze serves to reinforce racist stereotypes about Arabs. The book presents “Arab societies that are intrinsically sick and just as Western readers generally imagine them,” Bonnefoy writes. “A world appears whose pathologies are expected and supposedly well-known: the Arab is dirty…violent, backwards, always stupid, vulgar, bigoted and of course…anti-Semitic.”

I, too, was uncomfortable with the almost bestial depiction of the residents of Ter Maaleh. (Sattouf portrays his sojourns back in France with the same unflattering sensibility, but they are less vivid and troubling.) When Sattouf lived there in the 1980s, Syria was an unstable country, exhausted by a succession of coups and shaken by two wars with Israel. Hafez al-Assad’s regime had just quashed a domestic revolt, ending several years of civil unrest by sending the army to flatten the city of Hama (25 miles from the Sattoufs’ village) and kill at least 10,000 of its inhabitants. It is this invisible domestic front that best explains the strident militarization of society.

The French scholar Michel Seurat also lived in Syria in the early 1980s and wrote with passionate intelligence about the Assad regime. Seurat was kidnapped and killed in Beirut in 1986 by the Islamic Jihad Organization. In his writings, he applied the theories of the medieval sociologist Ibn Khaldun, who observed the cyclical capture of urban centers by rural tribes, to explain how the Alawites—despite being a despised minority—managed to seize political power in Syria. Seurat drew on the Khaldunian concept of *asabiyya,* which is about tribal solidarity or *esprit de corps.* Assad turned the military and the police into Alawite bastions, but to govern he needed a political rhetoric, however disingenuous, and so he cast his regime as the vanguard of Arab resistance to foreign intervention. This rhetoric, a blend of strident anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism, filters all the way down to the street games of rural boys and is the basis of the regime’s self-legitimation.

Sattouf ignores this big picture, focusing instead on daily life and the imposition of authority through violence. The little boys in his book brandish weapons at their mothers but sit in terrified silence when their fathers, the administrators of terrible beatings, come home. Sattouf sees parallels between the relationship to one’s father and to the “father” of one’s nation, whose face looms everywhere, and suggests that the omnipresent cult of strength flows from a sense of shame and weakness, whether it’s that of a postcolonial country, a traumatized citizenry, or a terrified child. In this world, there are seemingly only two choices for men: to be weak or to be brutal.

The source of much of the book’s narrative tension is a series of sharp disparities: between what young Riad is trying to understand and what the older Riad and the reader know; between a time when Arab nationalism held allure and promise, and its current hollowed-out state; between a family’s original whole-ness and its subsequent splintering (Sattouf’s parents separated; he returned to France with his mother and didn’t visit Syria for many years); between the “Arab of the future” dreamed by young Riad’s father and a successful Parisian cartoonist hung up on his origins and allergic to all forms of nationalism.

Sattouf has said that a “double regard,” or double vision, is integral to his book. It is very much trained on Abdel-Razaq, who is the object of both a child’s admiration and a grown son’s disappointment. Abdel-Razaq is
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
an endearing loser, a man still marked by the extreme poverty and hunger of his childhood and obsessed with acquiring the title of “doctor” and building a “presidential” villa on his plot of land in the village. He wants progress but doesn’t trust democracy, a Western ideal that can’t work in Arab countries, he thinks, whose citizens require a firm hand: “You have to be tough with them. You have to force them to get an education, make them go to school. If they decide for themselves, they do nothing. They’re lazy-ass bigots even though they have the same potential as everyone else.” He venerates education but believes in superstitions and magical apparitions; he doesn’t pray but is embarrassed when young Riad can’t recite the first sura of the Koran; and he lacks the courage to confront his family when they decide, in the devastating conclusion to the second volume, to let an honor killing go unpunished. Sattouf concentrates Abdel-Razaq’s pathos in his habit of always rubbing his nose and staring off into the distance when humiliated; a reader comes to anticipate this signature gesture as much as young Riad does. What’s particularly pathetic about Abdel-Razaq is his admiration for the qualities of macho brutality that he doesn’t possess and is the better for not possessing. In the first two volumes, he’s a much more compelling character than Riad’s mother, who is presented as the reasonable parent who nonetheless acquiesces to her husband’s schemes, her role largely confined to rolling her eyes in the background. In her horrified impotence, Clementine could be a stand-in for the Western reader, indignant but also entertained and mesmerized by this tale of cultural and familial dysfunction.

Bonfey is suspicious of the book’s success given the current climate in France, where a fixation on Muslims and Islam has come to dominate political and intellectual life. After the November 13 attacks in Paris, which were carried out in part by French nationals of Arab origin, Philippe de Villiers, the head of a right-wing party, cast blame on “the laxity and mosque-ization of France.” A high-ranking member of former president Nicolas Sarkozy’s party suggested interning the 4,000 suspected radicals currently under surveillance. Others have called for shutting down Islamic organizations and “radical mosques” and suspending all immigration.

But the concern about France’s Muslim minority dates back to at least 2005, when riots erupted in the banlieues of Paris after two young boys died fleeing the police. The disorder spread across the country and lasted several weeks. Young people largely of immigrant origin torched thousands of cars, vandalized schools, and threw Molotov cocktails at the police. The violence was largely treated as a cultural rather than socioeconomic phenomenon.

The Front National, headed by the charismatic Marine Le Pen, has capitalized on the sense that France is in decline, its identity threatened by immigrants and its millions of citizens of Arab origin (who already face discrimination in the workplace and from the police). The Front did better than ever in the regional elections, held in December, winning 27.8 percent of the vote (against 31.2 percent and 41 percent, respectively, for France’s traditional left- and right-wing parties).

But expressions of concern over the loss of France’s traditional identity are by no means limited to right-wing parties that despise immigrants and the European Union. Not a day goes by without the French media featuring yet another agonized reflection on threats to the country’s laïcité (its particular definition of secularism). Some want to protect it by banning the hijab and even fast-food chains that serve halal meat.

Last year, Michel Houellebecq toyed with this same theme in his novel Soumission, which imagines a near future where France elects its first Muslim president and quickly capitulates to the system of religious law known as Sharia. The Algerian writer Boualem Sansal followed suit with 2084: La fin du monde, a novel about an Islamic dystopia; it won the Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie Française.

The attacks last January and November in Paris, and the outpourings of public solidarity and indignation that followed, have both sharpened and muddled the discussion. After each, France’s Muslims were collectively called upon to explain themselves, while commentators across the political spectrum rushed to proclaim the need for Islam to reform itself and for minorities to embrace the values of the Republic. In a column that Sattouf published in Charlie Hebdo right after the January attacks, a young Frenchman of Arab extraction, arguing in heavily accented French on his phone in the street, dismisses the magazine itself (“It’s shit, I don’t give a fuck”) but also conspiracy theories and excuses, insisting on a simple, humane line of argument: “Listen bro, they’re some guys, they drew stuff, that’s it. You don’t kill them for that, that’s it.”

Asking Sattouf to provide the French public with a corrective vision of Arab culture seems an unfair burden to place on the author of one memoir in comic-book form. This sort of tiresome debate surrounds almost any work with Arab roots that is successful in the West: The very fact that a book or film gains an audience makes it suspect. For example, the Algerian writer Kamel Daoud’s novel The Meursault Investigation, which brilliantly plunders, interrogates, and expands upon Camus’s The Stranger, has been faulted by some for its debts to a colonialisit literary legacy. It’s a double bind: Arab authors are burdened with the responsibility of representing entire countries, cultures, and religions, then criticized for not representing them “correctly.”

Sattouf has tried to avoid this trap by acting skitish, almost disingenuous, in interviews, deflecting demands that he respond to the situation in Syria or to the status of Arabs in France. In the magazine Jeune Afrique, he explained: “I’m embarrassed when an artist gets engaged in politics; I always find it a bit ridiculous.” In a recent New Yorker profile by Adam Shatz, Sattouf wondered: “If I had written a book about a village in southern Italy or Norway, would I be asked about my vision of the European world?” No, and if Sattouf’s Syrian family had hailed from a cultural and
commercial center like Damascus or Aleppo, rather than a poor village—let alone if they had been Kurds or Christians or Alawites—he would have written a different book. This is just one Syrian story, and it is not the author’s fault if his audience reads too much into it. Yet as Shatz points out: “Sattouf didn’t call the book ‘The Boy from Ter Maaleh’; he called it ‘The Arab of the Future.’” The author is well aware of his story’s implications; he just refuses to spell them out.

In the book, the Sunni village that Sattouf’s family hails from is devoid of the posters of Hafez al-Assad that once plastered public spaces in major Syrian cities. Abdel-Razaq’s attitude toward the Alawite president is a mixture of contempt and admiration: Assad isn’t a real Muslim, he tells his son, but look at how cleverly he has seized his chance, putting his community into power and lording it over the Sunni majority: “Now we are their slaves.” When the family goes on vacation to Palmyra, they don’t mention Tadmur, the town’s infamous secret prison where as many as 1,000 inmates—many of them Islamists and political prisoners—were massacred in June 1980 by commandos led by Assad’s brother the day after a failed attempt on the president’s life. As for the Hama massacre of 1980, it is mentioned only once in the first two volumes of The Arab of the Future, and then merely in passing.

Michel Seurat pointed out that the schools and the military were the two institutions that most preoccupied the Assad regime. The ostensible goal of the shrill nationalism inculcated in soldiers and students alike was the creation of modern citizens. It concealed the negation of the state and was designed to break down any form of potential opposition. Much of the second volume chronicles Riad’s years in Syrian public school; with added touches of deep red and green, the palette matches the colors of the Syrian flag. The students—all boys—are subjected to sudden, astounding corporal punishments. The teachers are absolutely unmoved by a sobbing 6-year-old begging not to be beaten (to this day, extreme violence remains a fact in many Arab public schools; it only makes the news when a teacher actually kills a student).

On the occasion of the 1985 presidential referendum, young Riad’s schoolteacher explains that Syria is one of the few countries in the world “to ask the people their opinion.” One must vote for Assad, she explains, with a twisted sort of prescience, because “without him, Syria would destroy itself and we wouldn’t exist anymore.” Assad was re-elected with 100 percent of the vote in a yes/no referendum with no other candidates.

Despite the horrors of school, the second volume of The Arab of the Future is less dire than the first, its vision more nuanced and varied. There are new and sympathetic characters, like young Riad’s gentle, hardworking deskmate, who smiles through his tears when beaten and whose cough worsens till he disappears one day. And there’s the exhausted village doctor who chases Sattouf’s family down in the rain to indignantly refuse payment. Riad’s nice cousins, Wael and Mohamed, carry on with their well-intentioned and fascinating tutorials on topics such as swear words, religious rituals and superstitions, and attitudes to girls. Thus we learn that “Fuck your mother” is an opening insult, to be thrown around with nonchalance; “A curse on your father” signals a serious escalation; “A curse on your God” is an insult so serious it can only be whispered, and only conceivably aimed at non-Muslims. The cousins, who treat Riad’s unveiled foreign mother with affection and respect, also explain how girls are “impure” and practice yelling at them to get out of their sight. (Far from obliging them, the girls respond with harsh and graphic insults of their own.)

Sattouf describes the pleasure his younger self takes in mastering the Arabic alphabet, and his nervousness and pride in reciting the Koran, even though neither he nor any of the other pupils fully grasp the meaning of the passages they learn. Nonetheless, knowledge of their religion is one of the only fields in which the poor, dirty students who have been relegated to the back of the classroom are able to shine. There is even a lyrical description of the village in springtime: fields of poppies, skies full of swallows, “a good smell of warm grass,” turtles sunning themselves by the river (though Sattouf has to point out that they stick to the far bank, beyond the range of the village boys). The social panorama widens: We see upper-class Syrians, their wealth all the more shocking after the villagers’ destitution, their “modernity” skin-deep and their entitlement flecked with cruelty.

There is something terribly chilling about the 6-year-old son of a powerful man who humiliates Riad near a hotel jungle gym, playing on it while forbidding Riad to join in. Where does a child that age learn to say, “Otherwise I’ll kill you, dog”? It is through personal, resonant scenes like these that Sattouf raises larger questions about the formative years of any child and the unspoken codes of any society. Volume three, Sattouf has said, will chronicle his unhappy adolescence back in France, living in public housing in Brittany. His attentive, unflattering eye will presumably alight on plenty of other cracks and blemishes.
The body was that of a young man named William of Norwich, and the debate over his death eventually became the basis for one of the most heinous and lasting accusations against the Jews: that they conspired to kill children and use their blood for religious rites. The explanation for William's death that emerged, though slow to take hold in medieval England, became a mainstay of anti-Semitic thought and a justification for atrocious crimes against Jews in the Middle Ages and beyond. A little over 100 years after William's death, more than 90 Jews in Lincoln, a cathedral city in the English Midlands, were arrested when the body of a young boy was found in a well, 18 died hanging. Centuries later, town magistrates in the northern Italian town of Trent alleged that Jews had killed a 2-year-old named Simon and used his blood to make matzo. Trent's Jewish community was tortured to force their confessions. Some were burned at the stake; two converted to Christianity and were then beheaded. In Spain, Jews and conversos were condemned by the Inquisition for allegedly forcing a child to reenact the trials of Christ's Passion.

This accusation—often called the blood libel—didn’t die with the Middle Ages; it has been made many times since. Jews were charged in mid-19th-century Damascus with the death of a Christian monk, supposedly to use his blood in their rites. A 1913 indictment in Kiev alleged that the Jewish superintendent of a local brick factory had killed a 13-year-old at the start of Passover. Depictions of these supposed rites—some featuring Jews crowding around a corpse in their hunger and greed, others showing the lifeless bodies of innocent youths—appear in illustrations and stained glass. There are references to ritual murder in British folk songs and poetry. The accusations still happen today. In 2014, a Hamas spokesman told a Lebanese television channel: “We all remember how the Jews used to slaughter Christians, in order to mix their blood in their holy matzos. This is not a figment of imagination or something taken from a film. It is a fact, acknowledged by their own books and by historical evidence.” He did not present any such evidence when asked.

The Murder of William of Norwich, by E.M. Rose, seeks to understand the rise of the blood libel by examining the circumstances of the young man’s death and the way his story spread and was replicated around Europe. Rose’s exacting book tries to show that, rather than being the result of a misunderstanding of Jewish law or a by-product of changing English
national identity, as others have previously argued, the initial dissemination of the idea of Jewish ritual murder was closely tied to the system of moneylending and debt at the time, a system tested by the failures of the Second Crusade.

William's story was first recorded in print by Thomas of Monmouth, a monk who arrived in Norwich several years after the young man died. The Life and Passion of William of Norwich, completed in the early 1170s, remains the only detailed record of William's supposed murder. Thomas's treatise is more an impassioned argument for William's sanctity than a factual record of his death; in presenting William's holiness, he was helping to establish a patron saint for the city while possibly advancing his own reputation. This hagiography, however, became the template for anti-Semitic discourse distinct from its local origins. Analyzing Thomas's account against other historical evidence, Rose argues, can help us understand what really happened in Norwich and why the ritual-murder accusation took the shape that it did.

William came from a family of clerics closely affiliated with the local cathedral. As an apprentice tanner and a bright boy, he had a promising future. According to Thomas's text, a messenger for the Jews approached William during Easter week and asked him to work for the local archdeacon as a cook. William's mother refused, suspicious of the offer, but after some coaxing (and money), she fearfully allowed her son to go with the Jews.

William's stay was peaceful at first. But Thomas writes that as the Jews began to celebrate Passover, they grabbed William from his mother's house and took him to a tannery where he was beaten, his arms and legs bound, and his body pierced with thorns in a cruel imitation of Christ's Passion. They bound his right foot with chains and pierced his left side. When blood began to flow uncontrollably, they doused him with boiling water. Finally, after a few days, they hung the boy from a tree, until passersby eventually buried it.

When William's mother heard of her son's death, she immediately blamed the Jews. But the accusation was slow to gain credence. The local priest attempted to have the Jews tried for anti-Semitic discourse distinct from its local origins. Analyzing Thomas's account against other historical evidence, Rose argues, can help us understand what really happened in Norwich and why the ritual-murder accusation took the shape that it did.

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When William's mother heard of her son's death, she immediately blamed the Jews. But the accusation was slow to gain credence. The local priest attempted to have the Jews tried for anti-Semitic discourse distinct from its local origins. Analyzing Thomas's account against other historical evidence, Rose argues, can help us understand what really happened in Norwich and why the ritual-murder accusation took the shape that it did.
they had inflicted on him. Turbe didn’t single out any perpetrators aside from the dead moneylender. All Jews were guilty of the crime—a charge so overwhelming that the king and his stunned entourage adjourned the trial. De Novers was released. Soon thereafter, Rose claims, the clergy moved William’s remains into the cathedral, and Thomas began to promote the cult of the young saint in his *Life and Passion*.

Accounts of ritual murder were exploited in similar ways over the next few decades. In Gloucester, nobles used the blood libel to extort Jews who had lent them money. In the French town of Blois, Count Thibault used the charge of ritual murder to deflect rumors about his infidelity with a Jewish woman and assert his independence from the king. He had 30 local Jews burned, even though the accusation wasn’t only fantastic but entirely baseless: The rumors didn’t mention a specific Christian child, and no body was ever found. A bishop in another English town, Bury St. Edmunds, created an infant-martyr cult to compete with that of William and in the process exacerbated the tensions over local Jews. By the time that Phillip II, the French king, charged the Jews with killing a 12-year-old boy from Pontoise, the accusation of ritual murder had spread across much of France. It was powerful enough to cause the Jews to be expelled from the country in 1182; the king used their money to rebuild Paris.

*Rose limits her study to the world of the 12th century. “My subject,” she writes early on, “is not eternal truths of the Christian-Jewish encounter, but one particular encounter—its creation, elaboration, interpretation, cultural construction, and its dissemination as an enduring narrative.” This is an important distinction. The Middle Ages have often been seen as an incubator for religious hatred, and historians have long tried to use past persecution as an explanation for current religious violence. For historians of the Holocaust especially, the persecutions of the Middle Ages seem to offer a clear starting point for otherwise unfathomable and irrational acts. “When did Europe go wrong?” is a question that has been asked more and more frequently over the past fifty years,” David Nirenberg writes at the beginning of his study of religious violence in 14th-century Europe. “A frequent answer, it seems, is ‘in the Middle Ages.’” Yet, as Rose notes, drawing connections between the 12th century and the present can obscure the development of historical ideas more than it illuminates them. Similarities in actions don’t necessarily mean similarities in thought. Many studies of anti-Semitism end up erasing historical difference to advocate the idea of an eternal, unchanging form of hatred. “The only reason the blood libel accusation has persisted against Jews is because Jews continue to exist,” writes the Australian historian Darren O’Brien in his book *The Pinnacle of Hatred* (2011). “Witches, heretical Christians, and other groups accused in the past have all but disappeared from view. The only scapegoat remaining on which to hang the allegation is the Jew.”*

Rose strongly fights this tendency. She makes it clear that the blood-libel story didn’t emerge from an untapped well of hate. “This supposed ‘irrational, ‘bizarre,’ ‘literary trope’ was the product of lucid, cogent arguments, thoughtfully and carefully debated in executive councils, judged in detail by sober men who were not reacting under pressure to thoughtless mob violence,” she writes. She argues that the blood libel was an accusation developed by rational men in need of a “strategy”—a word Rose uses repeatedly throughout her book. She shows how slowly the blood libel spread and takes this as an indication that the myth’s anti-Semitic sentiments were not easily accepted. Thomas’s account of William’s death, for example, contains repeated defenses of his holiness, as if the monk is constantly imagining the retorts of naysayers who don’t believe the young man should become a saint. “I would like to confront some of those whom I know not what malicious or jealous leads to verbose chatter,” he writes before introducing William’s miracles. “I pick out from the satchel of my mind some spiritual claims of reason like stones.” The extortion of Jews in Gloucester using the blood libel happened two decades after William of Norwich’s death; it wasn’t until 1168—more than 20 years after the initial charge was made—that the blood libel began to gain ground in Europe.

*Nor did this discourse immediately provoke violence. No pogroms against Norwich Jews were recorded. The Jews were not expelled from England shortly afterward, as some reviewers of Rose’s book have written, but almost 150 years later. After William’s death, Norwich became, temporarily, a center for rabbinic scholarship and writing. It even produced a poet, who, likely writing during the Jews’ expulsion from England, memorialized the city in the acrostic to his poem “Exodus”: “I am Meir, son of Rabbi Elijah from the city of Norwich, which is in the Isle called Angleterre.”*
What does it require to enter into true dialogue?” asks J.M. Coetzee in *The Good Story*, a recently published debate/discussion between the novelist and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist Arabella Kurtz. “To begin with, it seems to me, two persons are required (two minds, two souls).” But this explanation hardly seems sufficient, for a dialogue “may take the form of a monologue,” as Coetzee notes shortly thereafter. He has demonstrated as much in his fiction, which is populated by a series of sorry soliloquists: The petulantly taciturn narrator of *Youth*, for example, and the embittered protagonist of *Disgrace* present us with specimens whose every effort at connection devolves into a feat of impotent self-imposition.

In *The Good Story*, Coetzee goes a step further, suggesting that identity is a matter of monologue and self-fictionalization even in the best of cases. His own life, which is so closely bound up with his writing, may prove his point, as literary scholar David Attwell intimates in *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing*. Is Coetzee’s assessment pessimistic, or hopeful? There are good fictions and bad fictions: soliloquies animated by self-awareness and soliloquies animated by self-importance. Coetzee’s self-inventions are only sometimes the good kind.

*The Good Story*, which offers cursory treatments of a range of philosophical topics, is sapped of the delicately affective irony that distinguishes much of Coetzee’s fiction, and it threatens to collapse into parallel soliloquies of the self-important variety. The book cannot answer the novelist’s preliminary question, because it cannot settle on a satisfactory account of selfhood. Do we write our own identities into existence, or do others write us into being? Or does some “authentic” personhood lurk beneath these overlapping presentations, as the psychoanalyst would have us believe? For all their theorizing, Kurtz and Coetzee cannot come to any conclusions, and their exchange is less a dialogue—an interaction between persons—than an exchange of recalcitrant frictions.

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, Attwell gives Coetzee’s self-fictionalization its due. The book is curiously depersonalized, a biography not of a man but of an oeuvre. Drawing on the collection of the author’s personal papers housed by the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Attwell attempts to reconstruct Coetzee’s processes and methods, tracing his works from inception to completion with reference to their revisions and reconceptualizations. The book’s approach is not quite critical, though Attwell does allow himself several critical pronouncements; nor is it quite psychological, though he does occasionally indulge in bouts of speculation as to Coetzee’s motivations. Centrally, it is genealogical, a history of the origins and evolution of each of Coetzee’s works. The result is a thorough if occasionally ponderous study that will please Coetzee scholars and devotees, though it is not entirely without a glimmer of wider appeal. The chapter on censorship in South Africa—where Coetzee was born in 1940 and lived until 2002, and where most of his novels are set—touches on more general political questions that bear interest for broader audiences. Coetzee would likely approve of Attwell’s approach: working backward, inferring a life from a text rather than the other way around. “We continue to read biograph...
Kurtz thinks that psychoanalysis displays a selection bias, treating only instances of failed repression—those problem cases in which self-description and behavior come apart so thoroughly that the self-ascribed fictions are no longer believable. The neuroses that result are “not freedom—the freedom to pick a preferred version of one’s life from the trees, as it were—but the opposite.” This response leaves several core questions unanswered: Why treat these neuroses by unearthing a patient’s repressed memories, rather than helping him to repress further and better? And what differentiates ineffectual cases of repression from effectual cases of the same?

In Attwell’s view, Coetzee’s writing, which labors under the historical burden of white South Africa’s colonialist roots, is a model of successful repression. The manuscript of *Writing for the Barbarians*, a fable about totalitarianism in an unidentified state, reveals that the cautiously sparse quality of Coetzee’s published works “is a function of editing, of late, tactical omissions: deletion is shown to be central to the process of invention.” The famously placeless novel was originally set in a recognizable if dystopian post-apartheid South Africa, and it underwent a dramatic shift from third- to first-person narration. It also endured several remakings: It was titled *Exile, Traitors, The Border Guard, Disposal of the Dead*, and, simply, *Barbarians* at various points in its composition.

In each of the subsequently revised passages that Attwell quotes, the words that were later excised are retained, marked with a strike-through. I found myself wondering about Coetzee’s ultimate choices of phrasing. Who can say for sure whether “comb these rocks” would have been better than “search these rocks,” or if “trying to restore” would have been better than “interested in restoring”? Delightfully, *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* undermines the certainty and seeming inevitability of Coetzee’s finished texts by charting the wavering course of self-doubt and revision that winds from authorial origin to textual destination. There is a dizzying freedom about Coetzee’s radical changes of direction, a sense of possibility so pronounced as to verge on fragility. Perhaps it is especially easy for Coetzee to subordinate his life, which he admits is anemic, to his writing, which is so robust. “When one is living a full life and working on a book, everything is transmuted *(comme on dit)* and used. With a thin life, I am writing a thin book,” he once mused in his notes. Attwell quotes an interview in which Coetzee famously proclaimed that “All writing is autobiography” and “All autobiography is storytelling.”

But we cannot fashion our identities as freely as all this might suggest. Coetzee writes in an early draft of *Dusklands*, his first novel, that “the need of the soul to be relieved of its past remains urgent as ever.” His lifelong preoccupation with guilt, confession, and expiation—especially apparent in his 1985 essay on “confession and double thoughts” in the work of Rousseau, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy—suggests that we are empowered to compose autobiographies but condemned to compose them in terms we have not chosen, using language that bears the traces of an uncooperative history.

Evidently, there are limitations on self-invention. But in *The Good Story*, Kurtz and Coetzee are maddeningly imprecise when it comes to spelling them out. “The claim here is not that autobiography is free, in the sense that we can make up our life-story as we wish,” Coetzee writes at the beginning of the book. “Rather, the claim is that in making up our autobiography we exercise the same freedom that we have in dreams, where we impose a narrative form that is our own, even if influenced by forces that are obscure to us, on elements of a remembered reality.” But how great is the world’s resistance in the face of confabulation? To what extent can we manipulate the facts?

Kurtz offers no guidance. “Subjective truth in psychoanalysis is not the same as external truth at all, and yet it is something one bums up against, sometimes quite violently and sometimes more gradually, almost in the manner of an external object or fact,” she remarks. Later, she writes that it is hard to discuss psychoanalytic truth without making reference to “the metaphor of an encounter with an aspect of external truth.” How, then, is psychoanalytic truth different from external truth, if the “metaphor” is really so apt?

Perhaps the problem is that Coetzee and Kurtz are never especially clear about their respective positions, nor do they take much care to define the terms of their discussion. At times, Coetzee seems to take the weaker view that the authentic self is present in principle and unknowable in practice. At one point, he posits that psychological truths are inaccessible to us only because we do not have time to undergo perpetual analysis. At other times, he seems to take the stronger view that the self is in fact indeterminate—that it comes to life in some robust sense via the act of self-description. All Kurtz contributes to this line of inquiry is the opaque platitude that “truth in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is internal truth”—a statement that has no bearing on...
whether truth of the “internal” variety is invented or discovered.

It’s difficult to know whether or not we should be optimistic about human relationships, given the ambiguity that characterizes the very nature of personhood. Kurtz believes, somewhat inexplicably, that a measure of intersubjective projection is possible—that by coming to inhabit the patient’s experience, the psychotherapist can come into nearly unmediated contact with his or her inner self. She even takes matters a step further, arguing that it’s only in discussion with others that we can discover our true identities. Coetzee remains staunchly skeptical, even nihilistic: “I believe most exchanges between human beings to be exchanges between projected fictions.” If there is a truth beneath all our posturing, this pronouncement is woefully insufficient. But if we are no more than our self-presentations, this flimsy fare is all we have to eat.

A
ttwell presents us with facts: Coetzee’s ambivalent relationship with the English language; his simultaneous distaste for and complicity in the censorship system that so terrorized the South African literary establishment in the 1970s; his nostalgia for the desert landscapes of his youth in Cape Town; his close relationship with his mother, and the characters she may have inspired; his fascination, literary and psychological, with the paranoia endemic to repressive regimes, South Africa’s under apartheid especially; the various books after which he loosely modeled his own works (Life & Times of Michael K after Heinrich von Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas; Foe after Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe). For the most part, we are left to draw the conclusions, to extrapolate the life from its creative products. Invariably, our best attempts prove fictional. There is no infallible way of traversing the expanse between the reticence of facts and the convulsions of experience.

Yet believable fictions—sometimes Coetzee’s own—can yield some of our richest interpersonal encounters. There is the indefatigable patience of Elizabeth Costello in her namesake novel, the impotent anger of David Lurie in Disgrace—and the thrilling emotional range of Coetzee’s autobiographical trilogy, Boyhood, Youth, and Summertime. At the end of Youth, a despairing account of a young author’s failed attempts at writing, comes this wrenching passage:

He may pull faces at the poems he reads in Ambit and Agenda, but at least they are there, in print, in the world. How is he to know that the men who wrote them did not spend years squirming as fastidiously as he in front of the blank page? They squirmed, but then finally they pulled themselves together and wrote as best they could what had to be written, and mailed it out, and suffered the humiliation of rejection or the equal humiliation of seeing their effusions in cold print, in all their poverty. In the same way these men would have found an excuse, however lame, for speaking to some or other beautiful girl in the Underground, and if she turned her head away or passed a scornful remark in Italian to a friend, well, they would have found a way of suffering the rebuff in silence and the next day would have tried again with another girl. That is how it is done, that is how the world works. And one day they, these men, these poets, these lovers, would be lucky: the girl, no matter how exaltedly beautiful, would speak back, and one thing would lead to another and their lives would be transformed, both their lives, and that would be that. What more is required than a kind of stupid, insensitive doggedness, as lover, as writer, together with a readiness to fail and fail again?

Writing, in this view, requires an almost religious faith in what can sometimes seem impossible: instances of true exchange, as fulfilling as they are elusive. The closest Coetzee ever comes to answering the question of selfhood in The Good Story is to say that the author “believes sincerely in the truth of what [he] is writing at the same time that [he] knows it is not the truth.”

Fiction lives somewhere between truth and fabrication. “Inventing is a creation, not a lie,” writes Italo Svevo in his 1923 confessional novel Zeno’s Conscience. The book is written as the journal of the endearingly neurotic Zeno, who has begun working on a memoir at the urging of his inept psychoanalyst. Zeno’s meditations are “inventions like those of a fever, which walk around the room so that you can see them from every side, and then they touch you. They had the solidity, the color, the insolence of living things.” These are fictions with bodies, fictions we can reach out and embrace.

If we believe irrationally in literature’s communicative capacities, Zeno suggests along with Coetzee, we may, incredibly, achieve something like connection—at least for the span of the book. The selves we write and read may be truer and more animate than any other.
Puzzle No. 3388

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1 “High and low openings on either side of zoo!” I rant in a random way (like this entry) (10)
6 At first, detectives have, like, half of this puzzle’s entries (4)
10 Dazed maestro puts animated segment backward (2,1,6)
11 Support includes a bit of love, like the space left of this entry (5)
12 Medium gets into unraveling mystery feature of this diagram (8)
13 Absurdly, anoint this puzzle’s publisher (6)
15 Disrupt usual parties… (5)
17 …oblique fiestas serving melts (9)
19 Impala, for instance, eaten by monstrous iguana in a foreign country (9)
21 Desert’s middle, so they say (5)
22 A hybrid, like half this puzzle’s entries (6)
23 Voltaire originally revised article that’s unlike this entry (8)
26 Having secured a blockbust, we like the unfilled parts of this diagram (5)
27 Court regular prints one novel (6,3)

28 No German announced the number of clues that reference some aspect of this puzzle, not counting this one (4)
29 Test-taking heavyweight holding pig, like this entry and 25 (10)

DOWN

1 Do establishment broadcasts in disk entertain, finally? (4,5)
2 Give more weapons to rebellious Estonians approaching Russian military fronts (5)
3 That woman is covered with pimples—things you might pick? (7)
4 Hey—prolong arcane organ study (10)
5 Restaurant has atmosphere (4)
7 Obscure qualities in the heart of Altoona, Scranton, and Allentown (9)
8 No relatives returned a camera (5)
9 A slice of banana loaf is on fire (6)
14 Screw up when taking live measurement (6,4)
16 Hard-rock band lacking drive, or a singer with a musical instrument (9)
18 Something you could use to clean a chair’s outside: fish whiskers, initially (5,4)
20 A bird drops an egg in a roll (6)
21 Aware of faction that keeps Romney without leadership (7)
22 Egyptian city is no ruddier (5)
24 Lewis and Peter form a TV channel (1-4)
25 Preeminent informers turning up (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3387

ACROSS

1 anag. 6 HA + DJ 9 NEP (rec)
+ TUNE 10 T[cond] + PICA + L 12 A + S
+ SET 13 HORE[en] + SEW + HIP 14 anag
15 CABRIOLE 18 B + BOOK + L + Y + N 20 2 def. 23 SA (rec.) + LESS LIP
25 SO + LID + 26 ROPES[EN] (perv anag.)
27 R + HOM[en] + BBC 28 2 def. 29 pun

DOWN

1 PEN[Z]ANCE 2 OPPOSED (up rev.) 3 anag. 4 triple anag. 5 hidden
16 BON(A)PARTE 17 PRODUCER
19 RELAP (rec.) = $tar B 21 HAIL + BUT
22 TSUR (rec.) + IS 24 hidden

PROSCIUTTO HADJ
E P O N A L A
NEPTUNE TYPICAL
Z ON E R O D
A SSET HORSEWHIP
N E E I C O Y
CEDAR CABRIOLE
E P A 00 P
BROOKLYN USHER
T E T A S A D
SALESSLIP SOLID
U A E T I A T I
R O PES I N RHOMBIC
I S G T N U E
S L E W LOVE LETTER

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*Peter Kornbluh*

The longtime Cuba correspondent for *The Nation*, Peter Kornbluh, is Cuba analyst at the National Security Archive in Washington DC. He is the author of *Bay of Pigs Declassified*, co-author of *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*, and co-author of the recently published *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Cuba*, chosen by *Foreign Affairs* as Best Book of the Year.

*Charles Bittner*

For almost two decades, Charles Bittner has served as *The Nation*’s academic liaison. He’s hosted five previous *Nation* trips to Cuba and teaches in the sociology department at St. John’s University.

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