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FIRST THEY MARCHED...

NOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WOMEN RUN?

In Virginia, Democrats hope that female candidates will be the key to taking back the state.

JOAN WALSH
Uneasy Is the Head

Thanks, Katha Pollitt, for distinguishing between the original Julius Caesar and our current imposter [“Orange Julius,” July 17/24]. As Caesar might have remarked observing the current alliance of dolts and cynics now in power but comically stymied: “Waney, weedy, weaky.”

Steve Harris
St. Louis

Katha Pollitt provides a cogent analysis of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and rightly sees it as a lesson in the destruction that unfolds when a ruler is violently overthrown. Regicide was looked upon with horror in Shakespeare’s time, while in Dante’s Inferno, the worst punishment is reserved for the betrayers Cassius, Brutus, and Judas.

That said, in April of this year when the production was announced, a statement from the Public Theater described Julius Caesar as a play about a leader who is “a force unlike any the city has seen. Magnetic, popular, he seems bent on absolute power. A small band of patriots...must decide how to oppose him.” I took that as a disguised shout-out to the significant anti-Trump forces in New York City, and promptly notified the US Secret Service. It struck me then, and even more so now, as an incitement to violence. I can only be grateful that some, such as Delta Airlines and Bank of America, saw through Oskar Eustis’s charade and bravely withdrew their support.

Alexander Goldstein
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Impeachment-phobia

In “For Impeachment” [June 9/26], John Nichols asserts that “the American people have always been more constitutionally inclined than the political elites.” Whether or not the writers of the two letters that The Nation printed under the headline “Pyrrhic Impeachment” [July 31/Aug. 7] reflect political elites in opposing Nichols and “centrist media outlets like CNN,” their arguments misunderstand the value of the impeachment—and conviction—of President Trump.

The first letter focuses on the benefits that Mike Pence would reap if he rescued the country “from a lunatic.” Impeachment would also “divert progressive energy away from the less glamorous” but more important causes. “If a constitutional case for impeachment can be made,” the letter writer concludes, “let the Republicans take responsibility.”

The writer of the second letter “cannot get the least bit excited about the prospect of impeachment.” Rather, “a better use of our energies would be to work on a constitutional amendment that would abolish the Electoral Col-

Land Lords

Re “Stolen Birthright,” by Leah Douglas [July 17/24]: One of the underlying problems is not mentioned here and cannot be quantitatively stated, and that is the particular white American fetish, if you will, for property (land) rights. Simply take a look at what happened when Anglo-American values met Hawaiian values over the issue. We have this pathological obsession with our own and others’ land. It exists worldwide, but we have created our own nasty brand of it. Now that Northeasterners are willing to move south to places like the Carolinas, expect it to get much nastier, as the competition for prime pieces of land at places like Hilton Head becomes a blood sport, as it did here in California some time ago. Only if you are used to a place like New York City is this somehow acceptable.

Walter Deuen
A Taxing Debate

After crashing and burning in their quest to repeal Obamacare, Republicans have turned to their perennial passion: tax cuts. President Trump has promised “the biggest tax cut” in history, and the GOP is ready to help him deliver. According to early outlines of Republican plans, the party will push for—wait for it—cuts skewed to the very rich, along with deep cuts in corporate taxes. Trump wants the latter to go from a nominal rate of 35 percent to just 15 percent. The GOP sales pitch promises growth, competitiveness, and other fantasies in which the cuts will supposedly pay for themselves—in other words, the same old supply-side snake oil.

Corporations are also looking to avoid the bulk of the taxes they owe on profits reported abroad, while ending taxation on any such profits in the future. The intended result of this “territorial” tax system will be deeper austerity, with growing pressure for cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and education.

Democrats, their spines stiffened by massive popular mobilizations, displayed remarkable unity and grit in opposing the GOP push to destroy Obamacare. How will they respond to this new grotesquerie?

Senator Charles Schumer acted quickly, joining with Senator Ron Wyden to release a letter signed by 45 of the 48 Senate Democrats that set forth parameters on tax reform. The letter invites Republicans to join in a bipartisan effort while laying out the conditions for cooperation: no cuts for the top 1 percent. No increase in burdens on the middle class. No “deficit-financed tax cuts, which would endanger critical programs like Medicare, Medicaid, [and] Social Security.” There’s one glaring omission: They didn’t include corporate tax cuts inside their red line. This omission undermines the party’s “Better Deal” platform, which relies against an economy in which the rules “are rigid” against working Americans by “special interests, lobbyists, and large corporations.”

Sensible reform would address the fact that inequality has reached obscene extremes. Billionaires are paying lower tax rates than teachers. Hedge-funders pay lower rates than plumbers. And corporate profits are at record levels as a percentage of GDP, but revenues from corporate taxes are lower, as a percentage of federal income, than the industrial-world average. Global corporations book literally trillions in profits as earned abroad to avoid paying taxes. Loopholes, tax havens, and dodges benefit special interests, while small businesses get hit with the full load.

The public understands this. Poll after poll demonstrates that the American people are far more sensible about taxes than most politicians. The tax reform with the most support involves big corporations and the rich paying their fair share. So why aren’t Democrats as bold as the majority of voters? Because money talks. Corporations and the rich deploy legions of lobbyists, fund volumes of bogus studies, and lavish campaign contributions on legislators to secure these top-end tax cuts. And their efforts have clearly had an effect: Last October, when Schumer was anticipating becoming majority leader under President Hillary Clinton, he told CNBC that a first order of business would be a giant corporate tax cut, albeit one intended for infrastructure projects.

The growing populist movement must challenge the limits of this debate. The People’s Budget put out by the Congressional Progressive Caucus calls for many sensible tax reforms, including hiking rates on the rich and on bigger estates; shutting down the most egregious tax dodges; and levying a tax on financial speculation. These measures would generate revenue, curb the growing inequality, and ensure sufficient resources to rebuild America’s infrastructure and expand the social contract. Democrats could turn the tax debate on its ear, but only if their pledge to be on the side of working people applies when it comes to taxing corporations and the wealthy. We know Republicans are in the bag. The question for Democrats is whether they will meet their own test.

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE
**Venezuela’s Agony**

Civil war is now a real possibility.

News from Venezuela is coming fast and furiously. On July 30, the country held a highly controversial election to appoint a new Constituent Assembly, which will rewrite the Constitution and rule Venezuela for up to two years. The vote unfolded amid the worst violence that Venezuela has seen in the four-month-old conflict that broke out in April. At least 10 people, including a candidate for the Assembly, were killed. Opposition protesters attacked 200 voting centers, according to the government. And eight National Police officers suffered serious burns from a roadside bomb set off in the wealthy, pro-opposition Caracas neighborhood of Altamira.

Since the vote occurred, Venezuela has been mired in controversy, particularly over the number of people who voted. (This figure is important because it is seen as a measure of the government’s level of popular support.) The government claims that over 8 million people voted. This number has been widely rejected as fraudulent not only by the opposition (which has a long history of falsely alleging electoral fraud), but also by Smartmatic, the company that supplied voting machines for the election; the sole opposition rector on Venezuela’s National Electoral Council (CNE); and a number of prominent dissident Chavista officials, most notably former attorney general Luisa Ortega and Andrés Izarra, communications minister under both Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro.

If electoral fraud has occurred, it would be a severe blow to the government’s legitimacy, as well as a major departure from the past, when, in Jimmy Carter’s words, Venezuela’s election process was “the best in the world.” It is difficult to dismiss the current claims of electoral fraud out of hand, for five reasons. First, the CNE did not follow the procedures typically used to guarantee the vote’s accuracy: Voters’ fingers were not marked with indelible ink; the vote was not audited in the normal manner (partly due to the opposition boycott of the election); and the CNE has yet to release the full results (e.g., the number of valid and null votes), something that is normally done within hours of an election’s end. Second, it is not just the “usual suspects” (the opposition and the US government) claiming fraud this time. Third, Smartmatic has supplied Venezuela’s voting machines since 2004, but this is the first time that it has stated the election results were altered. According to Smartmatic’s CEO, the government’s announced vote total was off by at least 1 million. Fourth, this is the first time that a CNE rector has invalidated an election result outright. Finally, the continuing deterioration of Venezuela’s economy makes it hard to believe that support for the government has increased by 2.5 million since December 2015, when 5.6 million people voted for the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in legislative elections. For their part, government supporters claim that not everyone who voted was Chavista: Some people allegedly voted not to support the government but rather to end the violence wracking the country. This claim is not implausible, but it does not address the first four points raised above.

The decision to push ahead with the Constituent Assembly has led to Venezuela’s growing international isolation. As of August 4, the day the Assembly was sworn in, 44 countries had condemned or refused to recognize it, while only six (Russia, Iran, and four left governments in Latin America) had expressed support. Even the Vatican, which has supported Venezuela’s government in the past, has called for the Constituent Assembly to be disbanded. On August 5, Venezuela was suspended from Mercosur, a regional trade bloc. Washington has repeatedly condemned the Constituent Assembly and has imposed sanctions on 14 top officials, including Maduro, in the past two weeks. The United States has threatened sanctions on Venezuelan oil, which would be devastating for ordinary citizens. Venezuela’s isolation is not only diplomatic but also physical, with half a dozen major airlines suspending flights in recent months due to security concerns.

The government’s actions in the week after the vote have been inconsistent. There are signs that repression and intolerance toward dissent are growing. One of the first acts of the newly installed Constituent Assembly was to suspend Attorney General Luisa Ortega, who has been outspoken in her criticism of the government in recent months. On August 1, state security forces transferred two prominent opposition leaders, Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma, from house arrest to prison. Days later, both were returned to house arrest, raising questions about the balance of “moderates” versus “hard-liners” within the government.

How should members of the international community, particularly those on the left who have supported Chavismo for many years, make sense of recent developments? Does Venezuela deserve the full-throated condemnation it has received from foreign leaders and the mainstream media? Is the government, whatever its faults, a more reliable protector of the interests of the people than the opposition? Should the global left refrain from criticizing the government, at least publicly, out of concern that such criticism may strengthen the hand of malignant domestic and foreign forces opposing Maduro? Is it true that Venezuela “faces a choice between deepening revolution and an elite-enforced rollback,” as George Ciccariello-Maher argues in a recent *Jacobin* article?

Some of these questions have straightforward answers, while others are far more challenging. (As an aside, this is why the left should engage in open, honest, and civil debate regarding Venezuela, rather than the circular-firing-squad style of argument that has, unfortunately, often prevailed recently.)

While the government deserves criticism for its recent actions, the international frenzy concerning Venezuela is unwarranted and reeks of hypocrisy. Western media, foreign governments, multilateral institutions, and the human-rights establishment employ a double standard (continued on page 8)
**All the Rage**

Dear Liza,

How do I contain my RAGE at all these REGRESSIVE PATRIARCHAL JACKASSES who are KILLING MY BUZZ on the DAILY?

—Mad as Hell

Dear Mad as Hell,

DON’T! Rage gets a bad rap in bourgeois thought. In June, after a gunman opened fire on a group of Republican congressmen during their baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia, pundits clumsily deplored all the anger out there, as if it were weird that Americans would be mad at the GOP for trying to take away our health care. When he was first running for president, Barack Obama, discussing the anger of black Americans over racism, lamented, “That anger…distracts attention from solving real problems.” In a recent book, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum sees anger as inherently vengeful and argues that it inhibits a society’s progress. As University of Texas professor William Sokoloff notes in an insightful 2014 *New Political Science* paper, “Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Rage,” mainstream political theorists have tended to see rage as “anathema to democratic citizenship” and equating it with insanity and chaos. But what about rage that is rational and justified, like that of young Frederick Douglass as he came to understand his condition as an enslaved person? Or your own, Mad? Why not rage at patriarchal jackasses?

Feminists, especially black feminists, have often welcomed such rage and celebrated its political possibilities; for bell hooks, for example, it’s a sign that the “space inside oneself where resistance is possible remains.” (Documentaries, including *She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry* and *A Place of Rage*, about 1960s women’s activism, have also placed great emphasis on this anger.) Young black writers, including Mina Ezikpe—and, in these pages, Mychal Denzel Smith—have noted the central role of rage in the Black Lives Matter protests. Sokoloff, for his part, acknowledges some of these voices and argues that anger is critical to democratic agency, exploring how Douglass was able to channel his rage to become one of American history’s most effective revolutionaries. (Hey, I hear he’s being “recognized more and more” in some surprising quarters.) If we let rage drive us completely, of course, we can end up like the Alexandria shooter. Instead, Douglass learned to discipline his rage: rhetorically deploying it to show how inhuman slavery was, while thinking coldly and soberly about political remedies and tactics. His writings and speeches were infused with anger and were more powerful for it: “Your republicanism is a sham, your humanity a base pretense, and your Christianity is a lie.” Yet he tempered this fury with practicality: While he defended John Brown’s rebellion, he declined to help organize it, because he thought it would fail (as it did). He engaged in the political process. He became, Sokoloff writes, “a threatening democratic individual who would not go away.”

Whatever you do, don’t contain your rage. That’s how we end up hurting and sabotaging ourselves. As Dr. Melfi, Tony Soprano’s wise shrink, observed, “Depression is anger turned inward.” Suppressed rage can also lead to physical ills, like high blood pressure and heart attacks. Even worse, it leaves the world’s depravity untouched.

Dear Liza,

Can a union organizer date one of the members and still represent everyone in the unit fairly? I’m a dedicated union member (female) and quite fond of our organizer (male). The crush is mutual (yay!), but we are both wondering about this. —Besotted Unionist

Dear Besotted,

It’s very common for organizers and members to date one another. This happens not only in unions, but in any member-based organization with staff organizers (lots of community and environmental organizations follow this model.) What’s less usual, and commendable, according to

(continued on page 7)
Fox in the White House
The crazy world of cable news is Trump’s reality.

LIKE WAYLON JENNINGS, cable news has always been crazy. CNN, after all, was founded by Ted Turner. (Sample wisdom: “Castro’s not a communist. He’s like me—a dictator.”) MSNBC has gone through more permutations than the late artist formerly and latterly known as Prince. And then there’s Fox. While the first two have often (if not always) prized ratings over news judgment, Fox transformed the genre by its willingness to make stuff up—stuff that, without exception, favored far-right conservatives in their battle against centrists, liberals, and reality.

In the past, these stations have damaged our country not only by misinforming their viewers and giving voice to nefarious and deranged hosts and guests, but also by setting the agenda for much of the rest of the news media. Stupid issue after stupid issue has dominated political debate in America, owing to the willingness of news networks and others to follow the lead laid down by ratings-chasing cable executives. Judging by airtime alone, a missing blond girl, a shark sighting, and, of course, a poop-filled cruise ship were all deemed to be of greater importance than, say, global warming, the opioid epidemic, or the US war in Afghanistan.

When cable news did get serious, the results were even worse. To the degree that presidents and politicians found their hands forced by cable-news panics, the result was almost always catastrophic, regardless of party. Recall that in 2010, Obama agriculture secretary Tom Vilsack fired Shirley Sherrod, the director of rural development in Georgia, on the basis of a purposefully misleading video posted by the late right-wing charlatan, Andrew Breitbart, because Vilsack feared what would appear on Fox News. (He later apologized, and Sherrod was offered a new position at the USDA.) That same year, when Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, Democrat John Kerry, and conservative independent Joe Lieberman were working on a bipartisan energy bill, Graham warned both men that they needed to hurry up and finish “before Fox News got wind of the fact that this was a serious process,” according to a report in The New Yorker. “[I]t’s gonna be all cap-and-tax all the time, and it’s gonna become just a disaster for me,” he explained. Graham’s prediction turned out to be correct, and the bill never came to fruition. “Republicans originally thought that Fox worked for us,” the dissident GOP conservative David Frum commented around that time, “and now we’re discovering we work for Fox.” So, too, it turned out, were Democrats.

OK, that was bad, especially when you consider that Fox, whose ratings were the highest and drove this process more powerfully than its competitors, was run as a kind of private bordello by any number of its executives and hosts. (It is, undoubtedly, no coincidence that a “news” channel crawling with sexual predators played a pivotal role in getting another one elected president of the United States.) But that has since turned out to be a golden age of measured, sensible debate compared with the cable-news program that is Donald Trump’s America.

Trump lives and breathes cable news. It’s not just that, like so many ill-informed, emotionally immature, and insecure older white men, the guy who has the most powerful and sensitive job on earth reportedly wastes at least five hours a day with Fox et al. It’s that the crazy world of Sean Hannity and Fox & Friends is his reality. Because Trump possesses little actual knowledge about the real world outside his family and paid fluffers, the lunatic conspiracy theories that make up the programming day at Fox and, to a lesser degree, CNN and MSNBC—with a dollop of Bannon-supplied Breitbart—are the equivalent of Scripture. Not only are Trump’s tweets often plagiarized versions of stupid Fox News arguments; so, too, are his legislative proposals and executive orders.

When members of Congress, world leaders, and even his own aides want to reach Trump, they often get themselves booked on TV to make sure he’s paying attention. Anthony Scaramucci got his job by impressing Trump this way. He lost it after complaining about a leak regarding his dinner with Trump, Fox host Sean Hannity, former Fox News honcho Bill Shine,
and Fox contributor Kimberly Guilfoyle. Shine and Guilfoyle have both been floated as candidates for top White House jobs, while Hannity couldn’t stand the pay cut. Now the white-nationalist lunatic Stephen Miller is rumored to be ready to replace “The Mooch” because he had an argument about immigration with CNN’s Jim Acosta. According to National Security Council staffer Sebastian Gorka, Miller received high fives after his appalling performance. Gorka himself is a longtime associate of a Fascist-friendly organization in Hungary who, according to Axios’s Mike Allen, “was effectively a non-entity…until he began tearing shreds of CNN anchors.”

This cable-as-reality dynamic took a giant step into totalitarian territory when, according to a recent lawsuit filed by Rod Wheeler, a Fox News contributor and former homicide detective, Fox colluded with the White House—according to the suit, allegedly Trump himself—to push the phony/crazy story that ex-DNC staffer Seth Rich had been murdered because of his links to WikiLeaks. The story, designed as an “alternative fact” to the likely-but-still-murky Russian role in the drama, was shamelessly and obsessively peddled on Fox, particularly by Trumpists like Sean Hannity and the cast of Fox & Friends, until Rich’s parents publicly objected. It was based on the “reporting” of Malia Zimmerman, a FoxNews.com fantasist who has repeatedly reported on events for which no evidence exists.

A closed circle in which an administration colludes with a faux-independent media to purposely mislead the nation on behalf of its program of political control is one that has no room for democratic practice of any kind. It’s long past time to stop treating Trump like any other legitimate leader and Fox like an actual news network. They are, respectively and collectively, a metastasizing cancer on our body politic.

(continued from page 5)

Jane McAlevey, a veteran labor organizer and author of No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age, is that you’re both stopping to ask this question. Often, she says, male organizers fail to consider the way that such romances can affect the dynamics of a campaign. If it’s a new fight—to gain union recognition or win specific contract gains—then “knock it off until victory,” McAlevey says. If the relationship is worth pursuing, it can wait.

Even then, McAlevey adds, “have fun but be sensitive. Don’t show your love in meetings.” The pitfalls can include romantic jealousy from other members. “In a hot campaign, the organizer has a lot of cachet,” McAlevey points out. “I’ve witnessed dynamics where 30 hearts were broken when it turned out he really liked X person.” Some organizers exploit this status. McAlevey worked on a nurses’ union campaign with a guy she describes as a “wrecking ball.” To get someone to sign a union card, she recalls in amazement, “he would sleep with them!” Perhaps even worse, this labor-movement Casanova would “put his dick into every nurse-leader all over the country,” then, being married, would leave town, claiming that he’d been recalled by the national organization, thus igniting fury and resentment at anyone representing headquarters.

Of course, it’s unlikely your would-be paramour is anything like that guy. But even if the organizer isn’t exploiting anyone and even if you’re pretty sure only one member is crushing on the organizer, any obvious love affair risks annoying other workers, especially if they perceive that this one member is getting special treatment. It’s crucial, as you suggest, that workers feel that the union belongs to everyone. So the organizer must attend to that, and you need to remember that when he doesn’t treat you in a special way in front of others, it’s not because his feelings have changed; he’s just trying to be fair to everyone.

Then again, the desire to impress—and spend time with the adored person—can serve us well. Organizing is hard; love can move us to actually do that work, and enjoy it a lot more, too. That’s why it’s easy to imagine the rom-com version of your situation: After a few hitches, misunderstandings, and madcap scenarios, your dalliance transforms you both into ridiculously successful unionists. Together, you mobilize the workers, bring the bosses to their knees, and find love.

Someone please make this movie, with a Nora Ephron–inspired script. The world needs it more than ever.
for Venezuela. Does it deserve pariah status when countries like Brazil, Mexico, and even Saudi Arabia are welcomed as “normal” members of the international community? Unlike Maduro, who was legitimately elected, Brazil’s Michel Temer came to office through a parliamentary coup. In March, Temer was caught on tape authorizing illegal bribes, but he has remained in office and avoided jail by buying off politicians who are likely even more corrupt. Mexico’s ruling party has systematically blocked efforts to investigate the disappearances of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, spied on journalists and activists, and used illegal tactics to stay in office. Saudi Arabia has beheaded dozens of pro-democracy activists this year but is still on the UN Human Rights Council. Venezuela’s government and opposition are also subjected to different standards. The government is criticized at every turn, but there is scant criticism of vile opposition actions, including the burning alive of a number of black and brown citizens who “look” Chavista, destruction of public property and government food warehouses, and calls on social media for Chavistas to be summarily executed.

It is easy (though very much necessary) to criticize the hypocrisy of Western politicians and media vis-à-vis Venezuela. The same is true concerning opposition leaders who claim to favor democracy but have worked for nearly two decades to overthrow the elected government, and who bemoan the economic crisis and the suffering of the masses but have no concrete plans to revive the economy or ease that suffering. It is also easy to find fault with the Venezuelan government, not only for the highly questionable political actions discussed earlier, but also for its failure to resolve the economic crisis. It is much harder to say whether or not the international left should support the government, particularly in the passive sense of refraining from public criticism.

The agony of the crisis consists of this: Millions of Venezuelans are suffering profoundly. They cannot feed themselves properly or obtain the medicine they need. They have very limited access to basic goods like shampoo, diapers, and toothpaste. This makes daily life a struggle. The primary reason for this situation is the government’s inability or unwillingness to take the necessary steps (in particular, desperately needed currency reform) to ease the crisis. There is little reason to think that the Constituent Assembly will do anything useful, since it is led by the same people who have presided over Venezuela while the crisis has deepened. Most people inside and outside the country, including many Chavistas, seem to agree that the PSUV’s top leadership is rotten. The idea that this group will “deepen” the Bolivarian Revolution seems highly improbable.

And yet it is far from clear that Venezuela’s popular sectors would fare any better under an opposition-led government, which would be likely to privatize state-owned resources, deepen the current de facto austerity regime (arising from government policies that make the poor bear the brunt of the crisis), and quite possibly engage in vindictive action against Chavistas, real and alleged. This is why millions continue to support the government, despite significant misgivings.

The country’s popular sectors are likely to suffer for years to come, whether the PSUV or the opposition is in charge. It is worth asking what series of actions (and inactions) led to this unenviable point. Are there decisions that could have led to a better outcome? If so, why were they not taken? It is also worth asking what Venezuelans will think about Chavismo in 10, 20, or 30 years. (At the moment, it is hard to imagine a positive answer.) These are important questions, but the most pressing one now is this: Of the various plausible scenarios that may unfold in Venezuela over the next few years, which would be most favorable—or, more accurately, least disastrous—for the country’s increasingly desperate majority?

Neither of the two scenarios already mentioned—a continuation of the status quo, or an opposition-led government—is particularly attractive. There is, however, an even worse alternative: civil war, which would only deepen the suffering and likely set Venezuela’s left back for decades. The following factors suggest that civil war is a real possibility: the opposition’s thirst for power and its willingness to engage in violence; the narrowing of space for institutional contestation; the government’s isolation; and a failed August 6 military uprising, which suggests that sectors of the armed forces may be willing to turn against the government.

The international left should do everything in its power to prevent civil war. This means supporting a negotiated solution to the conflict. To be effective, such a solution must offer something to both sides: a credible electoral calendar that provides the opposition with a peaceful path to office, lessening the chance of a military coup (and forcing the opposition to articulate concrete solutions to the crisis); and guarantees for those on the losing side of elections, decreasing the incentive for the government to avoid them at all costs. “Negotiated solution” is hardly a stirring rallying cry. Increasingly, however, it appears that it may be the only way to prevent a tragedy of untold proportions from unfolding in Venezuela.

Gabriel Hetland is assistant professor of Latin American, Caribbean, and US Latino Studies at the University at Albany, SUNY. His writings on Venezuela have appeared in Qualitative Sociology, Latin American Perspectives, Jacobin, The Nation, NACLA, and elsewhere.

We must support a negotiated solution to the conflict.

(continued from page 4)
If you consume soda or know anyone who does, then this is affecting you directly.

For years, Big Soda companies have been handing out **millions of dollars** in an attempt to prove that their drinks are NOT the cause of obesity.

In fact, the New York Times recently exposed one Big Soda company that paid **$1.5 million** to fund their own research group. Their ultimate goal? To convince the public that drinking soda is safe. (NYT, August 9, 2015).

But this goes beyond just soda. It turns out there are **THREE OTHER DANGEROUS FOODS** that are being marketed as “health foods.”

These foods may be harming you from the inside, and they could **be the reason why you are not losing weight, no matter what you have tried.**

One of these foods even contains an ingredient that is actually banned in almost every first world country – except the U.S., where it is still legal!

These are three foods you should never eat! But they’re so common, you probably have at least one of them in your pantry right now! You may have even consumed these foods today.

Go to **www.BadFood5.com** to find out these foods.

P.S. These foods might be extremely harmful to your health. About 80% of Americans consume at least one of these foods. So please watch this shocking presentation at **www.BadFood5.com** before it’s too late.
How to Win the Culture War

Democrats must not compromise on fundamental principles.

At the grocery store the other day, I found myself in the checkout line behind an old man whose T-shirt showed an electoral map of the country. The caption for red states said “United States of America”; for blue states, it said “Dumbfuckistan.” Like me, this man lives in California, which has a strong economy, low unemployment, the nation’s best public-university system, and some of the most innovative tech companies. But along with other blue states, it was being assaulted as a land of “dumbfucks,” while red states were praised as the “real” America.

In the parking lot afterward, as the man loaded his groceries into a luxury SUV, I stared at him, unable to get past the message he was trying to convey to people like me: that he and I were not fellow Americans, working to form a more perfect union, but rather citizens of two battling nations. This wasn’t just a political statement; it was propaganda—and it was emblematic of the current culture war.

The trenches of this war are getting deeper. In July, two Republican senators, Tom Cotton and David Perdue, introduced the RAISE Act, a bill that would effectively cut legal immigration by 50 percent over the course of a decade. According to its sponsors, the bill would spur economic growth and raise workers’ wages by limiting competition from newcomers. It would establish a points system for all prospective immigrants, place restrictions on the type of relatives they can sponsor, add an English-language test, eliminate the diversity visa lottery, and limit the number of refugees.

But this legislation will not necessarily help the economy, simply because employers’ needs range widely, depending on the industry. In California, for example, tech and agricultural workers are both vital to the state’s economic health. Furthermore, automation and declining unionization, not just immigration, have been shown to be strong contributing factors to declining wages. What the bill will do, however, is limit the arrival of relatives through family reunification, close our doors to refugees, and give an immediate advantage to immigrants from English-speaking countries. The RAISE Act may or may not make the economy stronger, but it will probably make the country whiter.

Outside the Senate, the culture war is being fought on many fronts. At the Justice Department, Jeff Sessions has been critical of consent decrees—reform agreements with police departments that are accused of abuses—saying they “reduce the morale of police officers.” Sessions’s attorneys have also filed a brief in federal court arguing that the 1964 Civil Rights Act does not protect workers from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. At the Education Department, Betsy DeVos is currently reconsidering the responsibilities that colleges and universities have under Title IX to investigate campus rapes. And on July 26, Donald Trump abruptly announced on Twitter that transgender service members would be banned from the military.

There is one kind of discrimination, however, that the administration seems keen on investigating. On August 1, it informed the Justice Department’s civil-rights division that it would be redirecting resources toward investigating and suing colleges for discrimination against white applicants. The reason for this is no great mystery: Trump is trying to appeal to his shrinking base. He is also trying to cover up his failures as president. The first six months of his administration have been remarkable for their incompetence. The “big, beautiful” wall he promised along the southern border has not received funding. The Muslim ban he championed resulted in chaos at airports and was rejected by federal courts. His vow to repeal and replace Obamacare led to multiple bills in the GOP-controlled Senate, all of which ultimately failed. His presidential campaign is under investigation for potential collusion with the Russian government. So Trump resorts to what he does best: waging a culture war.

Some people believe that the culture war is a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing, that it distracts from tangible issues like health care, the economy, education, and the environment. Every time Trump sends a tweet or endorses legislation
that targets a minority group, a few good souls can be relied upon to cry, “Distraction!” But for those at the receiving end of insults or attacks, there is only the searing pain of rejection. The culture war cannot be ignored, or even avoided. Trump has brought the white-resentment battle to Democrats, while insisting to his supporters that Democrats are the party of identity politics.

How should Democrats respond? The chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Ben Ray Luján, has said there would not be “a litmus test” for candidates. To win back Congress in 2018, he said, the party needs a broad coalition, and candidates who oppose abortion rights could receive funding.

The Washington Post’s Fareed Zakaria advised Democrats to “rethink their immigration absolutism” in order to appeal to Trump voters.

This is like saying that you can win a war by switching sides. If Democrats give up on women’s reproductive rights and immigrant rights, then what will they give up next—and what will they stand for? It makes far more sense, morally and strategically, to energize the eligible voters who didn’t bother casting ballots last fall. This doesn’t mean that discussions of abortion or immigration ought to be avoided. On the contrary, Democrats should make a better case for how their policies can reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies or bring about progressive immigration reform.

In other words, instead of trying to convince the guy in the “Dumbfuckistan” T-shirt, try talking to his neighbor. Large segments of the public already know that Trump is a boor unfit to be president, but they haven’t yet heard what they might gain under a fresh, fearless leadership: universal health care, higher wages, and better opportunities, in a nation that does not compromise on its ideals.

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SNAPSHOT/NOAH BERGER
Where There’s Smoke...
An air tanker drops retardant over the Detwiler fire in Mariposa, California. Gunshots touched off the blaze, which has burned nearly 82,000 acres and destroyed 63 homes since July 16.

BACK ISSUES/1933
Not Free From Bloodthirst
In this issue’s “Books & the Arts” section, Michael Kazin reviews the new biography of Andrew Jackson by Jason Opal, which focuses on Old Hickory’s life before he became the seventh president of the United States. Eighty-four years ago in these pages, the Southern historian J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton reviewed the first volume of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Marquis James’s two-part biography of Jackson. In those early days of Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency, many historians were re-assessing Jackson’s place in the history of the Democratic Party. The title of Hamilton’s review—“Was Jackson a Democrat?”—summarizes one line of questioning that Michael Kazin continues this week.

“In face of the evidence it can scarcely be maintained hereafter that Jackson himself ever acquired any taint of democracy,” Hamilton concluded. “A more selfish Jackson here stalks—Jackson, apparently, always stalked—along various highways, all of them leading with his full intention to the magnifying of Andrew Jackson. His enemies—and of course those of his country—were those who disagreed with him, stood in his way, or failed to concede his primacy. High-tempered, often ill-tempered, implacable in his resentments, and not free from bloodthirst where his opponents were concerned, he is not always highly admirable, but he is none the less uniformly fascinating.”
—Richard Kreitner

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A CONSPIRACY THEORY ABOUT SCARAMUCCI
It all worked precisely according to plan.
This guy Scaramucci was played for a chump.
They wanted him there for a week at the most
To show there are people more vulgar than Trump.

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Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

If Democrats give up on reproductive rights and immigrant rights, then what will they give up next?
FIRST THEY MARCHED...

NOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WOMEN RUN?

In Virginia, Democrats hope that first-time women candidates are the key to taking back the state.

by JOAN WALSH

Jennifer Carroll Foy  Kelly Fowler  Dawn Adams  Elizabeth Guzman
CAROLYN FIDDLER LIKES TO CALL IT “THE TRUMP EFFECT”—THE SUDDEN SURGE OF new candidates, most of them women, who said to themselves: If that fucking schlub can be president, I can run for office. Fiddler, an expert on Virginia politics, is partly kidding—but partly not. For a host of reasons, the election of the pussy-grabbing, utterly incompetent, nationally embarrassing Donald Trump has inspired a stunning wave of female newcomers to electoral politics. Since November, an astonishing 16,000 women have contacted Emily’s List, which works to elect pro-choice Democratic women, to say they want to run. In the 2015–16 election cycle, only 920 women did that.

Nowhere is this surge more evident than in Fiddler’s home state. Virginia stands at the intersection of two remarkable progressive trends. The unprecedented surge of Democratic women running for office is one; the dawning recognition among Democrats of the importance of statehouse races is the other. Since 2008, Democrats have lost almost 1,000 legislative seats and 27 statehouse chambers, and Republicans now control 68 of 99 state legislative chambers nationwide. This decade of Republican dominance has allowed the GOP to gerrymander congressional and local districts alike, further cementing their advantage.

Today, at the statewide level, Virginia is solid blue: Its governor, lieutenant governor, two US senators, and state attorney general are all Democrats. It voted for Barack Obama twice, and for Hillary Clinton in 2016. But when it comes to the House of Representatives and Virginia’s House of Delegates, the impact of partisan gerrymandering is clear: Seven of 11 US House members are Republican, as are 66 of 100 state delegates.

The balance among the latter could change dramatically this fall, as Virginia’s off-year elections provide an opportunity to test whether a wave of fresh Democratic female candidates and a renewed focus on taking back statehouses can break the Republican grasp on power. Democrats are running 54 challengers against GOP incumbents, up from only 21 in 2015. And of all the Democrats running for the House of Delegates, including incumbents, 42 are women and 28 are people of color. The Democrats need 17 more seats to flip the House—and, coincidentally, there are 17 districts in Republican hands where Clinton defeated Trump last November. Those districts have come to be known as the “Hillary 17,” and Democratic women are running in 10 of them.

“We might not flip the majority this year,” says Catherine Vaughan of Flippable, a new post-Trump political start-up that is focused exclusively on winning statehouses. “But we could get close and then do it in 2019.”

Flippable is just one of the intriguing new “pop-up groups” getting involved in Virginia state politics. Candidates here are getting help from Bernie Sanders’s Our Revolution as well as Run for Something, founded by Hillary Clinton loyalists. Tom Perriello moved on from his disappointing loss in the gubernatorial primary to run Win Virginia, which is backing progressives in state races. And Sister District, founded last year to let folks in safe blue districts partner with those in red or purple ones, has endorsed candidates in 12 races.

Some of these new women candidates are active in local Indivisible chapters, while others credit Indivisible activists for bolstering their volunteer base. Established groups like the Progressive Change Campaign Committee (PCCC), Blue Virginia, and Daily Kos are also kicking in. Meanwhile, the state’s House Democratic Caucus is providing technical assistance and training, as is the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC).

Emily’s List, the venerable 32-year-old political powerhouse, is also playing a role. The 16,000 women who have approached the group, including many of the Virginia newcomers, are challenging the organization’s premise, based on decades of research, that women need to be asked repeatedly before they decide to run. Men step up; women need to be pushed—or so the conventional wisdom goes.

But not this year, says Emily’s List president Stephanie Schriock: “We’ve never seen anything like it.” In Virginia, the group endorsed candidates in seven primary races for delegate. “And all of our women won their primaries,” Schriock marveled. Something is going on here. Even with all the attention, though, some of the women candidates confess that running for office is much harder than they expected. Some feel bypassed by new and/or old groups; others are getting help, but less than they anticipated or need. David Toscano, the Democratic leader in the House of Delegates, says he’s excited about all of these unexpected opportunities, but supporting more than twice as many challengers as the party did in 2015 is a stiff test. “It’s stretching our re-

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*The Nation.*
bated requiring women in the first trimester to undergo a medically unnecessary transvaginal ultrasound to get an abortion. The proposal was ultimately derailed by local activists, part of a national backlash against the GOP’s “War on Women” that also helped reelect Obama and made Democrat Terry McAuliffe the state’s governor in 2013. Since then, McAuliffe has vetoed a roster of anti-choice bills, including a 20-week abortion ban, but he’s playing whack-a-mole with the state’s conservative lawmakers. Just this year, Virginia Republicans passed a bill to make the anniversary of Roe v. Wade a “Day of Tears,” during which flags would fly at half-staff. Almost all of these women candidates say that Trump gave them the final push to run, but most have been angry and active in Virginia for a while.

Those given the best chance of winning include the 10 women in the Hillary 17, and one of the standouts there is Jennifer Carroll Foy, an African-American public defender, foster parent, and new mother of twins. In the primary, she challenged Josh King, a veteran and deputy sheriff who had run a close race in 2015, and who won the endorsement of the leaders of the House Democratic Caucus for a rare open seat this year (the GOP incumbent retired). The odds were long at the start, but Carroll Foy ran anyway and beat King in the primary, despite being heavily outspent. She went on bed rest election night (she’d learned she was pregnant with twins after deciding to run). There was a recount, which she monitored from home; Emily’s List helped pay for her recount lawyer. In the end, Carroll Foy won by 14 votes.

“I decided to run the day after Trump’s election,” she told me. “I went to bed election night knowing he was ahead, but also knowing that the American people would never, ever elect anyone as intolerant or incompetent.” When she woke up, “I learned I’d been wrong. I was anxious and worried. He was talking about defunding Planned Parenthood, the travel ban, bringing back stop-and-frisk…. I couldn’t believe we were having those conversations in 2017. I knew I had to run.”

Running against a seasoned candidate backed by the establishment, Carroll Foy took the outside route. “I knocked on as many doors as I could. And I also went to outside groups. I talked to Emily’s List, Our Revolution, Flippable, Run for Something, PCCC, #VoteProChoice. I made my case. I showed that I’m a real progressive: I support the fight for $15, criminal-justice reform, de-criminalization of marijuana.”

She rattles off local measures of injustice as few candidates can. “We have 211 trailer classrooms in Prince William County, and they’re all in low-income neighborhoods,” she told me. “Our second graders go to the bathroom in outhouses.” Virginia has the lowest threshold for grand larceny—just $200. “I’ve had to fight to keep kids from being charged with a felony for stealing a coat because they’re cold.” If elected, Carroll Foy would be the first public defender ever in the Virginia Assembly.

Another strong contender, Elizabeth Guzman, would represent three firsts—the first Latina in the House of Delegates, the first AFSCME member, and the first social worker. A Bernie Sanders supporter in the primary, Guzman was inspired by Sanders’s call for others to run for office. She volunteered tirelessly for Clinton in the
Guzman lives in the county where Corey Stewart, the conservative with white-nationalist leanings who almost won the GOP nomination for governor this year, has been on the Board of Supervisors since 2006. She’s been fighting his anti-immigrant crusades the whole time. After Stewart first started pushing anti-immigrant policies, Guzman recalls her daughter coming home crying, “Mom, do we have to leave?” A decade later, the day after Trump’s election, her youngest son came home with the exact same question (Guzman and her children are citizens). “This should never happen. I’m running so people like us have representation in Richmond.”

At the moment, Danica Roem might be the candidate with the highest national profile. Roem, who beat three challengers in the primary, is a trans woman running against Bob Marshall, the author of Virginia’s ludicrous anti-transgender bathroom bill. The former reporter says she’s not centering her campaign on trans issues but on traffic, which she claims is a nightmare in her district. On the night of her primary win, Roem tweeted: “We know how to defeat Del. Bob Marshall (R). We’re ready. #NoH8 #FixRoute28”—deftly combining her national and local messages.

There are other remarkable women who have been given a good chance, like Haya Ayala, a single mother who worked her way out of a service-sector job to become a cybersecurity specialist in the Department of Homeland Security, and Kathy Tran, who came to the United States as a Vietnamese boat refugee when she was 7 months old. As with Ayala and Guzman, immigrant rights are a top issue for Tran, a workforce-development expert who’s also the president of her local PTA. Cheryl Turpin ran in a special election earlier this year and lost, but got up to run again. Party leaders say she’s doing everything right, and front-runners or not. As with Ayala and Guzman, immigrant rights are a top issue for Tran, a workforce-development expert who’s also the president of her local PTA. Cheryl Turpin ran in a special election earlier this year and lost, but got up to run again. Party leaders say she’s doing everything right, and count her among the women who could be giving victory speeches on November 7.

I got a chance to meet about a dozen more Democratic women candidates at an Emily’s List training session in Richmond in late July. Some are in the Hillary 17; others are in deep-red districts where they’re considered long shots. Emily’s List is happy to train all of them, front-runners or not. “There will definitely be some surprises in these races,” Schriock told me. “We can’t write anyone off. Even in very red districts, they’re going to turn out Democratic voters who will help the [statewide candidates].”

These particular candidates had been to earlier trainings sponsored by the Virginia House Democratic Caucus and Emerge, another group that grooms Democratic women, and have built a community of sorts. They are collegial, gathering over coffee and pastries to share stories from the trail. Dawn Adams, a six-foot-tall nurse practitioner and professor, strode over to me to introduce herself. “After November 8, you could either get into the fetal position or get involved,” she said. She’s running for Virginia’s 68th District in the Richmond suburbs, which Clinton carried in November by 10 points. Her issue is health care; she’s tired of Republicans keeping Medicaid expansion out of reach when so many Virginians need it. “We have a bunch of old men deciding what’s right for women,” lawyer and Air Force veteran Rebecca Colaw told me. The Suffolk resident and 64th District candidate described herself as devastated by Trump’s election—as a woman, as a lesbian, and as an American. Then she was galvanized by the Women’s March. “I went to the march, and I just felt so angry,” Colaw said. She paused, as her candidate training kicked in. “They tell me not to say I’m ‘angry’ so much, so let’s see: I felt incredibly disappointed that this man who we wouldn’t want as our neighbor or boss or friend was our president. But surrounded by the marchers—black, brown, gay, straight—I felt: Our world is not like him. Instead of breaking my TV, I decided to run.”

Kelly Fowler of Virginia Beach, a teacher turned real-estate broker and the mother of two girls, took her 8-year-old daughter to the march and came home transformed. “I had to do this for my daughters,” she told me. Her opponent, Ron Villanueva, is a passionate backer of the Day of Tears resolution, yet he tries to posture as a moderate. Clinton beat Trump in Fowler’s district by four points, so she’s one of the lucky Hillary 17.

Kimberly Anne Tucker, a retired African-American educator, was mostly enjoying being a grandmother before the 2016 election. A Sanders delegate to the Democratic National Convention, she volunteered for Clinton in the general election and despaired at Trump’s victory. One night in January, she saw MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow talking about Indivisible, and she founded a local chapter. Tucker went to the Women’s March in Norfolk to organize and came back inspired. “You know, Bernie got all of his delegates on the phone last year and told us the most important thing we could do was run for office. But I said, ‘Not I!’” Still, as Tucker began to recruit candidates as part of her Indivisible activism, she suddenly thought, “It’s hypocritical of me not to run.” She’s in a district that Clinton lost by more than 20 points, but she’s getting help from Emily’s List and Win Virginia nonetheless and is hoping for an Our Revolution endorsement soon.

When Muthoni Wambu Kraal, the head of training for Emily’s List, asks each person in the room for one
THE NEXT BIG THING

By enabling self-organized groups to bypass the established systems of authority and institutional power, we will enter a new kind of politics—one that is more accountable, democratic, and human-scale.

WILL BE A LOT OF...

SMALL THINGS

by DAVID BOLLIER
In the aftermath of Donald Trump’s shocking election victory, a shattered Democratic Party and dazed progressives agree on at least one thing: Democrats must replace Republicans in Congress as quickly as possible. As usual, however, the quest to recapture power is focused on tactical concerns and political optics, and not on the need for the deeper conversation that the 2016 election should have provoked us to have: How can we overcome the structural pathologies of our rigged economy and toxic political culture, and galvanize new movements capable of building functional alternatives? Since at least the 1980s, Democrats have accepted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the free-market “progress” narrative—the idea that constant economic growth with minimal government involvement is the only reliable way to advance freedom and improve well-being. Dependent on contributions from Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood, and Big Pharma, the Democratic Party remains incapable of recognizing our current political economy as fundamentally extractive and predatory. The party’s commitment to serious change is halfhearted, at best.

While the mainstream resistance to Trump is angry, spirited, and widespread, its implicit agenda, at least on economic matters, is more to restore a bygone liberal normalcy than to forge a new vision for the future. The impressive grassroots resistance to Trump may prove to be an ambiguous gift. While inspiring fierce mobilizations, the politicization of ordinary people, and unity among an otherwise fractious left, it has thus far failed to produce a much-needed paradigm shift in progressive thought.

This search for a new paradigm is crucial as the world grapples with some profound existential questions: Is continued economic growth compatible with efforts to address the urgent dangers of climate change? If not, what does this mean for restructuring capitalism and reorienting our lives? How can we reap the benefits of digital technologies and artificial intelligence without exacerbating unemployment, inequality, and social marginalization? And how shall we deal with the threats posed by global capital and right-wing nationalism to liberal democracy itself?

In the face of such daunting questions, most progressive political conversations still revolve around the detritus churned up by the latest news cycle. Even the most outraged opponents of the Trump administration seem to presume that the existing structures of government, law, and policy are up to the job of delivering much-needed answers. But they aren’t, they haven’t, and they won’t.

Instead of trying to reassemble the broken pieces of the old order, progressives would be better off developing a new vision more suited to our times. There are already a number of projects that dare to imagine what a fairer, economic development, emphasizing instead community and the mutualization of benefits. Democratic Party has little to offer, and the president, needless to say, is clueless. It falls to the rest of us, then, to figure out a way to move forward.

The energy for serious, durable change will originate, as always, on the periphery, far from the guarded sanctums of official power and respectable opinion. Resources may be scarce at the local level, but the potential for innovation is enormous: Here one finds fewer big institutional reputations at stake, a greater openness to risk-taking, and an abundance of grassroots imagination and enthusiasm.

Beyond the Beltway’s gaze, the seeds of a new social economy are being germinated in neighborhoods and farmers’ fields, in community initiatives and on digital platforms. A variety of experimental projects, innovative organizations, and social movements are developing new types of local provisioning and self-governance systems. Aspiring to much more than another wave of incremental reform, most of these actors deliberately bypass conventional politics and policy. In piecemeal fashion, they unabashedly seek to develop the DNA for new types of postcapitalist social and economic institutions.

The “commons sector,” as I call this bricolage of projects and movements, is a world of DIY experimentation and open-source ethics that holds itself together not through coercion or profiteering but through social collaboration, resourceful creativity, and sweat equity, often with the help of digital platforms. Its fruits can be seen in cooperatives, locally rooted food systems, alternative currencies, community land trusts, and much else.

While these insurgent projects are fragmentary and do not constitute a movement in the traditional sense, they tend to share basic values and goals: production for household needs, not market profit; decision-making that is bottom-up, consensual, and decentralized; and stewardship of shared wealth for the long term. They reject the standard ideals of economic development and a return on shareholder investment, emphasizing instead community self-determination and the mutualization of benefits.

Not surprisingly, the Washington cognoscenti have evinced scant interest in these emerging forms of social economy and their political potential. As the 2016 campaigns showed, mainstream politicians can barely discuss climate change intelligently, let alone imagine a post-fossil-fuel economy (as the climate-justice and transition-towns movements do) or apply deep ecological principles and wisdom traditions to politics (as Native Americans have done at Standing Rock). They are similarly oblivious to the hacktivists developing community-driven alternatives to Uber and Airbnb, and to the work of the social-and-solidarity-economy (SSE) movement to build multi-stakeholder cooperatives for social services.

But that’s precisely why those seeking profound change should be paying attention to these experiments. The commons sector goes beyond the orthodox approach to social change and justice, which tends to privilege individual rights and the redistribution of wealth via the tax system and government programs. Instead, the
Animating ideals of the commons are collective emancipation and the “pre-distribution” of benefits by giving people direct ownership and control over discrete chunks of land, water, infrastructure, housing, public space, and online services.

With greater equity stakes and opportunities for self-governance, people are remarkably eager to contribute to their communities, whether local or digital. They welcome an escape from consumerism, exploitative markets, and remote bureaucracies. These sorts of local and regional experiments not only advance effective structural solutions at a time when national politics is dysfunctional; they also provide meaningful ways for ordinary people to become agents of change themselves.

Almost 50 years ago, Fannie Lou Hamer came up with a shrewd strategy for dealing with community disempowerment—in her case, the vestiges of the plantation system and exploitative white-owned businesses. The civil-rights leader purchased hundreds of acres of Mississippi Delta farmland so that poor blacks could grow their own food. “When you’ve got 400 quarts of greens and gumbo soup for the winter, you can push you around or tell you what to say or do,” Hamer noted.

This is roughly the same strategy that must be pursued today. Relocalizing and decommodifying production and services represents a compelling strategy for the small cities, towns, and rural areas that have been ruthlessly hollowed out by big-box stores, online retailers, automation, big agriculture, and outsourcing.

In fact, that’s just what the local-food movement has done over the past few decades. Faced with a long list of agribusiness horrors—pesticides, processed foods, monoculture farming, seed monopolies, a loss of biodiversity, and more—countless champions of localism re-anchored to create a semi-autonomous parallel economy on their own terms: community-oriented, fair-minded, humane, and ecologically respectful. Today, there are more than 1,650 community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects and more than 8,000 local farmers’ markets across the country. Organic farming is a robust market sector, and agroecology and permaculture are pointing the way to eco-friendly approaches.

In California, the Food Commons Fresno project is one of the most ambitious regional efforts to reimagine the food system from farm to plate. Even though Fresno is located in the heart of prime agriculture lands, the region has been ecologically abused for decades and is a food desert for half a million low-income residents and farm workers. To develop systemic solutions, the Food Commons has established a network of community-owned trusts that bring together landowners, farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers, and workers to support a shared mission: high-quality, safe, locally grown food that everyone can afford.

Instead of siphoning away profits to investors, the Food Commons mutualizes financial surpluses on a system-wide scale, reducing market pressures to deplete the soil, exploit farm workers, degrade food quality, and raise prices. This approach, writes the social thinker John Thackara, “marks a radical shift from a narrow focus on the production of food on its own, towards a whole-system approach in which the interests of farm communities and local people, the land, watersheds and biodiversity are all considered together.”

Another impressive innovation in regional self-determination is the BerkShares currency, launched in 2006 by the Schumacher Center for a New Economics (where I work) in the largely rural Berkshires of western Massachusetts. The goal is to strengthen the local economy and community life by reengineering the flow of money. Anyone can exchange $100 in US currency for $105 worth of BerkShares at any of four banks with a total of 16 branches throughout Berkshire County, and then spend them at 400 participating businesses. Consumers get a 5 percent bump in purchasing power from this buy-local strategy while boosting the regional economy and strengthening the region’s identity. The BerkShares story is part of a global trend in which dozens of localities worldwide are deploying their own currencies to reclaim some measure of control from hedge funds and banks.

New-economy renegades are not shy about engaging with the policy world, but many regard it as a rigged game that won’t yield the transformations needed. In the meantime, they ask, why not grow our own greens and make our own gumbo soup? As in Fannie Lou Hamer’s day, the focus should be on securing tangible results and greater leverage for change.

Relocalization strategies can also help reinvigorate democratic self-governance. Just as the rise of public-interest organizations in the 1970s propelled far-reaching changes, today our economic future is taking shape in new organizational forms. Innovative cooperative structures, platform-share projects, self-managed digital platforms, and collaborative global networks are changing the topography for pursuing social change.

One of the most notable new forms may be the platform cooperative, a socially constructive alternative to Silicon Valley start-ups, which famously like to “move fast and break things.” Gig-economy companies rely on heaps of capital, proprietary algorithms, and political muscle to control new markets that leapfrog over government standards for public safety, fair labor, and consumer protection. Platform co-ops are attempting to write a different story: Instead of using networking technologies to extract money from communities for the benefit of investors and speculators, platform co-ops work with communities, workers, and consumers to share the gains.

These dynamics play out at Stocksy United, a global co-op of photographers that sells royalty-free stock photos and video, and on service-swapping platforms like...
Tend to eschew politics and policy, and often don’t re- sequential. They don’t swing elections. Their participants
educational resources, and open design and hardware.
Commons licenses, citizen science, data commons, open
implications of free and open-source software, Creative
little interest in the profound political and economic
of self-organized governance and networked collaboration
 eventual transforming the global economy itself, the rise
organizations network changed the inner dynamics of business,
change. Just as the microprocessor and the telecommuni-
cation, and other fields by making their outputs legally
ment, scientific research, academic publishing, educa-
tional systems and cultures on a small scale may be
making broadscale social change. But transforming
organizations may seem irrelevant to the task of making broadscale social change. But transforming
organizational systems and cultures on a small scale may
be one of the most effective ways to bring about macro-
change. Just as the microprocessor and the telecommuni-
cations network changed the inner dynamics of business,
evergreen future: Vegetables from Food Commons Fresno ready for delivery.

Emulation and federation: These are the means by which a new participatory sector will expand.

This land is our land: Civil-rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer purchased farmland so that poor blacks could grow their own food.

But, skeptics ask, can these countless small, irregular initiatives scale up? The question carries the false premise that some form of centralized management or hierarchical control is needed. As a creature of open networks and sharing, the new social economy will not be directed by a political headquarters or a federal program. That kind of control would kill it.

The participatory local economy will expand only by engaging a diverse base of American pragmatists. That just might be possible, since it offers something for everyone. As my colleague Silke Helfrich puts it: “Conservatives like the tendency of commons to promote

(continued on page 25)
On an April morning 10 years ago, I set out to speak at the Indiana General Assembly. I was a graduate student then, green and greedy for any sort of opportunity that would lift me above all of the other sharp and competitive students in the political-science department at Indiana University. The invitation fit that bill grandly, even though I’d been given only some vague guidelines regarding the topic of my speech. I learned soon enough when I was greeted warmly by the very nice state representative who had asked me to come. “Just speak for a few minutes about your work on honor killings,” she whispered with a smile.

The venue was not the Assembly itself, but a luncheon for the Women’s Caucus of the Indiana House of Representatives. I did speak about honor killings that afternoon, after I received a tour of the Statehouse, stood beneath the hushed and high rotunda, and had my picture taken with my host, the two of us standing by the flag behind the podium. I spoke about the work my small organization of expat Pakistani-American women was doing on the issue, of the cruelty of the crime and the helplessness of the victims. It was the first time I had spoken on the issue for a mainly white and exclusively American audience—and a largely conservative one. There was raucous applause when I was done. A resolution officially commending my work on honor killings in South Asia was passed. I received it in the mail and had it framed.

Ten years later, I can barely look at it. A miserable mix of remorse, guilt, and shame follows when I force myself to do so or to recount the moment it commemorates. I realize now that the resolution had very little to do with me. Instead, my presence as a Pakistani woman served to confirm a group of other women—predominantly white women—in their role as saviors of brown women and, by extension, harsh critics of that supposedly woman-hating religion, Islam. These were still the early days of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the former of which had been described by then-first lady Laura Bush as a “fight for the rights and dignity of women.” This argument appealed not just to conservatives but to liberals, some of whom were persuaded that an American war really could liberate these women, who seemed unable to liberate themselves. Few things helped to fuel war and Islamophobia more successfully in those days than the stories of women being killed by the men who’d fathered them or married them or were related to them, and whose murderous acts went unpunished in a society that sanctioned them. I was a representative of those women and that society filled with lesser feminists, brown or black or Muslim, the foil against which American feminists (or, for those who quibble with the label, empowered American women) continued to define themselves. Even just listening to me speak—on a topic selected to fit this role—was an act of benevolence bestowed on a lesser sister, my testimony against the brutality of my own people creating the stark contrast against which their own superiority shone and glistened.

The preexisting appetite for native informers has grown gluttonous in the dismal first days of the Trump administration. If the expansionist agenda of the Bush administration and the pragmatic lassitude (at least by comparison) of the Obama administration utilized the

White Women and the Specter of Islam

by RAFIA ZAKARIA

Saving Muslim women from Muslim men was used to buttress the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Today, this idea is being redeployed in a cultural war at home.
brown Muslim woman as a foil to be brought out at choice moments, the Trump administration requires her to define its core agenda. Her oppression shows why good, white, patriotic American women must be protected from bad, violent Muslim men. Executive Order 13780, issued by Trump during the week of the first International Women’s Day of his presidency, demands that “information regarding the number and types of acts of gender-based violence against women, including so-called ‘honor killings,’ in the United States by foreign nations” be collected by federal agencies. Just like the premise that justified intervention in Afghanistan under the guise of saving Afghan women from Afghan men, the order insists that Muslim men must be banned from the homeland to save American women at home. President “Grab Them by the Pussy” Trump was suddenly concerned with domestic violence.

Similarly, a cabal of conservative white women—rage-filled Trumpistas—have forged a sort of right-wing feminism that claims to protect American women by preventing immigration. In order for this Fox News feminism to function, it needs stories of bad Muslim men. Among its leading lights is Pamela Geller, whose personal website the Geller Report issues an almost daily mega-dose of anti-Muslim vitriol, including frequent stories about honor killings and female genital mutilation. “The Phenomenon of Honor Killings Rooted in the Culture of Islam,” screams one post, its contents a mash-up of selective statistics, fake reports, and ludicrous claims. Nationalist media maven Ann Coulter is Geller’s sister in hate, eagerly constructing an image of the empowered but conservative American woman as one archly opposed to the admission of brown men into the polity. In one appearance on Fox News following the signing of Trump’s second travel ban, Coulter declared that immigrants from the Middle East were “terrifying” and “having a very difficult time not to rape women.”

Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway has toed the same line. Some of her work as a pollster underscores just how these women have enabled a systemized demonization of Muslim and brown others to grab power for themselves. In a radio interview last year, Conway said that her company had conducted a poll showing that 27 percent of Muslims view jihad—defined as either punishing non-believers or undermining non-Muslim states—as part of their faith. The Paris attacks happened not long after, and candidate Trump announced, citing Conway’s poll, that he would impose a blanket ban on all Muslims. It was only later that the poll’s methodological problems were exposed. A little over a year later, Conway was installed at the White House.

The rise of the nationalist white feminist, the Coulters and Conways who now command the attention and affections of the voters wooed by Trump, relies centrally on those brown Muslim women willing to serve as native informers. The made-to-order “Islam reformers,” who gained notoriety in the Bush era by buttressing the US agenda for war with their pleas for intervention, are now retooling themselves to cash in on America’s nationalist moment. Two women most adept at demonizing Muslims on demand recently made an appearance in the US Senate, at a hearing titled “Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics and Techniques of Violent Extremism.” On June 14, 2017, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-born former Muslim Islamophobe who once called for Christians to convert Muslims by building “Christian centers” next to every mosque, testified vehemently on the need for an even more aggressive stance against Islam and Muslims. Hirsi Ali, who has stated unequivocally that “we are at war with Islam” and that it must be “defeated,” has been labeled an anti-Muslim extremist by the Southern Poverty Law Center. A New York City resident, she charges $40,000 to $60,000 for a single speech, billing herself as an expert on security and gender and as an “Islam reformist.” Business seems to be booming in the age of Trump.

Hirsi Ali was flanked at the hearing by Asra Nomani, a gleeful Trump champion whose Election Day selfie proclaiming her support went viral. Nomani has long billed herself as a terror expert based on the happenstance that she was in Karachi with Mariane Pearl when the latter’s husband, Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, was abducted and killed. (It is notable that Mariane Pearl has criticized the War on Terror and never appeared with Nomani.) She is also one of the founders of the so-called Muslim Reform Movement. Revved up to revile, Nomani and Hirsi Ali did what they usually do, making vehement demands for a unified march against the existing, dangerously flawed Islam, a march they said was thwarted by the naïveté of American liberals duped into a masochistic multiculturalism.

However, the pair encountered an unexpected problem at their June 14 Senate hearing. Coming as it did hours after Representative Steve Scalise and several others were shot while practicing for the congressional baseball game, the hearing received neither the media attention nor the general attendance that it would have otherwise. The New York Times came to the rescue: On June 22, the paper published an op-ed in which Hirsi Ali and Nomani took aim at Kamala Harris, the black female senator who had been unduly silenced by other senators at a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing. In “They Brushed Off Kamala Harris. Then She Brushed Us Off,” the duo alleged that Harris and the other Democratic female senators at the hearing had rendered them
“invisible,” just like “the mullahs at the mosque” did, by not asking them a single question. They then expanded this fact into an indictment of all progressives, who in ignoring these two women had failed to “march against honor killings, child marriages, polygamy, sex slavery or female genital mutilation.”

It was a clever trap, and the comments poured in, with the Times going so far as to afford Hirsi Ali and Nomani a follow-up question-and-answer session. The women had won again, capitalizing on an expert baiting of liberals terrified of being seen as lax on honor killings, polygamy, and the like. What it proved was that all of the brands of “empowered” American feminism, liberal or nationalist, circle around the “other” woman and the project of liberating her. For those native informers who can successfully serve this project, as Hirsi Ali and Nomani do, there are great rewards in store, both from the right that adores them and the left that fears them.

The story, however, is not simply a tale of enterprising native informers posing as reformers and cashing in on American feminist confusions and the seductions of a fake solidarity built on saviorism. What led The New York Times (which has otherwise positioned itself as a journalistic vanguard against the Trump administration) to give a platform to women whose views line up with Geller’s and Coulter’s is reflective of a wider liberal-feminist ambivalence about identity politics in general, and of its own proclivities for savior feminism in particular.

It is just this trend that has come into view in the dark morning after of Trump’s victory. Susan Faludi, in a symposium for the journal Democracy, contributed a piece titled “Where Is Feminism Now?” In it, Faludi criticizes “progressive women in the academy” for patting themselves on the back too much for “how ‘intersectional’ we are these days.” A better direction for American feminism, in Faludi’s view, would have been orienting the movement toward the 53 percent of white women who voted for Trump. It is these white female voters, the ones ignored by the “feminist blogosphere,” who make up “that vast demographic of women” who must be won over. “Did white working-class women betray feminism,” Faludi asks, or “did feminism betray them?”

Faludi was hardly alone in ringing the death knell for identity politics and turning to redistribution as a panacea for Hillary Clinton’s loss in November. Many others, such as Columbia University professor Mark Lilla, sounded the warning. It is this trend that has come into view in the footsteps of other silences. In the past decade and a half, feminists have remained largely silent as an ever-expanding surveillance state has normalized the widespread suspicion of American Muslims and encouraged reporting on their activities as an act of patriotism. Not one feminist, for example, has taken note of the fact that nearly half of the women currently being prosecuted for alleged ISIS-related offenses in the United States are merely the wives, sisters, or household members of the accused men, with little or nothing in terms of actual evidence against them. Nor has there been much liberal-feminist outrage over the fact that hate crimes against Muslim Americans have risen 91 percent since last year, or that a head scarf was listed as a trigger in 15 percent of them. But even before these sins of silence came the sin of collusion, in which feminists, including groups like the Feminist Majority Foundation, allied themselves with military invasions under the pretext of “liberating” Muslim women in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Faludi, notably, opposed the war.) Then as now, they believed that interventionist (rather than intersectional) feminism—bombing and occupying a country—is part of the project to “decrease violence against women and girls in Afghanistan.”

I recall this sorry history only to underscore the particular bind that an identity-blind, war-prone liberal feminism presents when it turns even further away from the politics of recognition and inclusion. In their silent complicity with the expanded reach and marginalizing rhetoric of the terror-industrial complex, these liberal feminists have displayed a damming ambivalence at best, and indifference at worst, toward those belonging to the most marginalized group in America. Add to this the fact that many still believe in military intervention as a means to deliver liberation, and there is precious little to distinguish the politics of liberal feminists from their counterparts on the right. For both, the Muslim woman remains the synecdoche, a tool of self-definition, a homogenizing figure representing all non-Western women, all “other” women against the white woman.

The confluence of the liberal agenda of saving Muslim women from Muslim men with the conservative agenda of keeping Muslims out altogether so as to protect white women is a growing phenomenon throughout Europe as well as in the United States. It is just this phenomenon...
that scholar Sara Farris isolates with the term “Femonationalism,” which she uses to describe “the contemporary mobilization of feminist ideas by both nationalist parties and neoliberal governments under the banner of the war against the perceived patriarchy of Islam in particular and of migrants from the Global South in general.” Written in 2012, Farris’s piece considers European politics and points to the congruence between the liberal-feminist deployment of “equality,” in which Islam is judged as deficient, and the radical right’s effort to “protect” white women against the misogyny of Islam.

Farris notes that attitudes toward Islam have caused major rifts among European feminists. Some, like Alice Schwarz of Germany and Elisabeth Badinter of France, have declared all of Islam to be fundamentally misogynist. Other European feminists, like Christine Delpy, have warned of the racist implications of such characterizations and how they might strengthen xenophobic nationalist parties like Marine Le Pen’s National Front. This intrafeminist split mirrors the one in the United States. The Times’s decision to publish the Hirsi Ali and Nomani op-ed taking female Democratic senators and progressives to task for refusing to intervene to protect Muslim women from polygamy and female genital mutilation is an example of America’s own femonationalism.

While the liberal-feminist position may focus on the liberation of foreign women, it is difficult to distinguish in content and consequence from the conservative position that emphasizes a blanket exclusion of the same Muslim and/or immigrant other to protect white women. Conservative women like Geller, Coulter, and Conway seek to use the same substance—the failure of Muslim men to respect gender equality—as the basis for excluding them altogether, citing their alleged propensity for violence and inability to assimilate, and thereby justifying the right wing’s own Islamophobic and anti-immigrant political positions.

The reason I cringe when I look at my framed copy of that Indiana House resolution commending my work on honor killings is that I couldn’t realize then how I’d been used to testify against myself. The figure of the Muslim woman speaking up against the Muslim man, the Muslim faith, Muslim culture, Muslim civilization, is the glue that draws white women, the really empowered, together and gives them something to agree on. While the liberal feminist (or at least a number of them) sees herself as a rescuer of Afghan and Iraqi women, the conservative feminist seeks to protect the homeland from those misogynist others that the neoliberal feminist seeks to eliminate overseas.

Each of these groups aims to protect gender equality, a value they imagine as inherently and essentially belonging to white and Western society, and which they see as now under threat from both Muslims in particular and migrants from the Global South in general. With these parameters for the debate firmly in place, the only Muslim women who may speak are those who affirm Islam’s guilt. Talking about honor killings, then, has very little to do with honor killings and far more to do with justifying neoliberal military interventions and legitimizing conservative xenophobia—all of the meddling and purifying conservative xenophobia—all of the meddling and justifying the right wing’s effort to “protect” white women against the misogyny of Islam.

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they feel their candidates’ frustrations. “We wish we had unlimited resources,” Delegate David Toscano tells me. Charniele Herring, chair of the House Democratic Caucus, takes a harder line. “We teach our candidates to fish,” she says. “We know how hard it is. We really do.”

“This moment has the potential to change the face of power for years to come,” says Schriock, who insists that Emily’s List can stay true to its founding mission of electing women to Congress but also seize the opportunities in Virginia. “The responsibility of this moment is so great, because the hopes of these 16,000 women who’ve stepped up… it could disappear as quickly as it materialized.”

Fiddler, who has worked to turn statehouses blue for a long time, thinks the national Democratic Party organizations may be missing a big opening. There will be 45 statehouse elections in 2018; the national party ought to be learning from what Virginia Democrats are doing right and where they are struggling. “If national Democratic resources don’t begin actually finding their way to these down-ballot races, the party will wake up on November 8 with fistful of dollars and truckloads of regret.”

Lisa Turner, who used to work for the DLCC and is now a consultant for Kelly Fowler, is happy to raise the threat level. Virginia Democrats have to make the most of 2017, she says, because with races for governor, lieutenant governor, and other statewide seats, the turnout will be higher this year than in 2019. “I’m concerned that using the same old templates will not help many of these women—women who marched, who stepped up, who’ve left their families, who are working so very hard—to win.”

(Bollier, continued from page 19) responsibility and community; liberals are pleased with the focus on equality and basic social entitlement; libertarians like the emphasis on individual initiative; and leftists like the idea of limiting the scope of the market.”

To be sure, a constructive rapprochement with state power will have to be negotiated at some point, and in the meantime supportive laws and infrastructures would certainly help. But the success of the commons sector will hinge on the independent vitality of its projects, the integrity of its bottom-up participation, and the results it produces.

Emulation and federation—these are the means by which a new participatory sector will expand. The point is to create the conditions for grassroots initiatives to self-organize and grow. It helps to recall that the New Deal didn’t spring fully grown from the brain of Franklin D. Roosevelt, but emerged over time as the policy’s many precursors nurtured brave experiments for years. We need to plant a field of new seeds today if we are going to have anything to harvest in the years to come.

In defense of the neoliberal revolution in the 1980s, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously thundered a phrase that is often shortened to its acronym, TINA: “There is no alternative!” The result has been nearly 40 years of privatization, deregulation, austerity, and corporate governance, now reaching their farcical, destructive extremes. For those seeking to overcome this awful legacy, along with the oxymoron of “democratic capitalism,” it is time for a rejoinder: “There are plenty of alternatives!” The only question is whether the Democratic Party and mainstream progressives have any use for them.
Letters

(continued from page 2) The answer to Wright’s final sentence—“The question now for serious, responsible Republicans is this: Are they more dedicated to their party leadership’s jihad against that idea, or to the citizens they actually represent?”—is, alas, the former.

Now that Republicans have deviously seized unchecked power, they are going to do as much of this as possible. When the problems they cause reach critical mass, I assume we’ll be taking to the streets en masse, because it doesn’t look like there are any real checks on their power at this moment. The so-called filibuster is a thing of the past, and Supreme Court justices can only be considered and confirmed if they are to the right of a brand-new line that’s been recently drawn. The two-party system is set in stone, with state-by-state laws punishing any attempt at starting new parties. What’s to be done besides resist, resist, resist? Now that Republicans have considered packing this august structure, what we are now faced with. Take down Trump and then, if need be, Pence.

RAYMOND YOUNG
AUSTIN, TEX.

It is precisely the politics of fear and caution that Jeff Alson and David Maxwell espouse in their letters to the editor that has brought us to where we are now. Fight the dragons that stand before you. Take down Trump and then, if need be, Pence.

RoNAYD YOUNG
AUSTIN, TEX.

Blind Injustice

So much for the law, at the highest level, being purely a matter of objective reasoning based on fundamental principles, precedent, and contemporary extension by enlightened analogy [“The Court Moves Right,” by David Cole, July 17/24].

No wonder FDR once considered packing this august institution. Soon it will be hack careerists all—pathetic, retrogressive, and deplorable.

STEVE HARRIS

Inquiring Minds...

If we can make “smart bombs,” why can’t we make “smart politicians?”

PAUL MARIONI
SEATTLE

The Nation
On April 5, President Trump apparently saw some disturbing images on TV of Syrian children poisoned by chemical weapons, and decided on that evidence alone to completely reverse his policy toward Syria and that country’s embattled dictator, Bashar al-Assad. He went from scoffing at the idea of the Syrian forces gassing civilians to lobbing 59 cruise missiles at the airfield from which the chemical-weapons attack was allegedly launched. This happened in roughly 63 hours.

It was just one more day in the horrifying reality-TV presidency of Donald Trump: Tune in next week to find out which country we’ll be bombing next! But remarkably, a great number of Democrats were mostly supportive—including Hillary Clinton and most of the Senate Democratic caucus. Even Bernie Sanders mustered a relatively mild critique, carefully foregrounding the inhumanity of the chemical-weapons attack before calling on Trump to come to Congress for an authorization to use military force.

The Democrats’ majority support for Trump’s cruise-missile strike is emblematic of their party’s weakness in the face of a president intent on reversing his predecessor’s policies, even at the cost of accelerating his country’s involvement in Syria’s civil war.


The Rise of a Prairie Statesman
The Life and Times of George McGovern
By Thomas J. Knock
Princeton University Press. 553 pp. $35

atic of just how at sea they are in terms of foreign policy. The party’s conservatives and moderates remain in thrall to a liberal internationalism that has, at times, not looked much different from Republican hawkishness, while its left wing—still marginalized after decades out of power—has failed to put forward a compelling alternative.

One perspective worth dusting off in this context is that of George McGovern, who is the subject of a new biography by Thomas J. Knock, The Rise of a Prairie Stateman. McGovern’s foreign-policy ideas not only offered a critique of an earlier era of hawkish liberalism; they also provide an excellent foundation for a badly needed new approach by the American left.

George McGovern has long been known as the man who got steamrollered by Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election—the fourth-worst loss by popular vote in American history. McGovern’s popular image these days is as the avatar of a bunch of deluded leftists who seized the Democratic nomination, ran a far-too-left-wing race, and paid the price. His crushing defeat became the catalyst for a whole generation of Democratic politicians who rejected both the basic elements of New Deal liberalism and the doves foreign policy of the New Left. From the 1970s through the Obama years, the Democrats would make their peace with many elements of the conservative economic and social agenda, from the War on Drugs and “tough on crime” laws to financial deregulation. In the 1990s and 2000s, they would also come to embrace a more hawkish foreign policy, often advocating the use of force as a way of solving various geopolitical and humanitarian crises.

This rightward swing in domestic and foreign policy was often justified by McGovern’s loss; if the Democrats were to rebuild a majority, the argument went, they would have to move the party back to the center. In retrospect, this strategy may have had the opposite effect, laying the groundwork for the numerous future crises—outsourcing, deregulation, inequality, mass incarceration, the spectacular decline of unions—that clipped away at what was left of the party’s electoral base.

Knock’s excellent, polished book is the first in a two-volume biography, and it ends in 1968, just as McGovern was hitting his peak years in politics. By doing so, it avoids framing his career in the context of that crushing 1972 defeat, thereby reminding us that in his prime, he was both a moral exemplar and a highly effective politician.

McGovern’s early life was quite extraordinary: Starting with his childhood in the Great Depression, he could almost be the saccharine hero in a Frank Capra film. The child of a South Dakota Methodist minister, McGovern witnessed firsthand how the economic calamity of the 1930s devastated neighboring farmers, and he also saw their recovery because of the policies of the New Deal. In high school and in college, he became a renowned debate champion, but his college career was interrupted once the country entered World War II.

McGovern’s wartime service was astonishingly heroic. “Among presidential candidates in the twentieth century, none save Eisenhower could boast of a more impressive combat record,” writes Knock, and his case is compelling. McGovern was one of the finest pilots of the B-24 bomber—a physically and technically demanding airplane to fly—and he saved the lives of his crew several times with brilliant feats of flying. On one notable occasion, he landed his plane on a dangerously short island airstrip in the Adriatic after it had lost two engines, for which he was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

This wartime experience also left scars. On one mission, a bomb got stuck in the bomb bay’s doors, and just as the crew finally managed to free it, the plane flew over a remote farmhouse. It “looked like it went down the chimney,” one of the crew members recalled; the explosion obliterated the building. The incident haunted McGovern for years: It was almost noontime, and he knew from his own childhood that the family would likely have been at home for lunch. The incident helped sharpen his future skepticism about military interventions—particularly those that depended on attacks from the air.

After the war, McGovern returned to South Dakota and finished his degree at Dakota Wesleyan University. He tried his hand briefly at being a minister like his father, but he quit not long after and decided to attend graduate school at Northwestern University, where he earned a PhD in history. His thesis was a landmark study of the Ludlow Massacre, a gruesome slaughter of striking mine workers and their families in Colorado. After graduation, he considered a career as a professional academic.

However, politics had always held a magnetic attraction for McGovern. In 1948, he backed Henry Wallace’s third-party bid for the presidency. For the whole of the New Deal era, Wallace had been one of President Franklin Roosevelt’s most loyal and idealistic deputies, serving as secretary of agriculture from 1933–40 and as vice president from 1941–44. But he clashed with the party’s conservative wing, especially over his advocacy for a restrained diplomatic approach toward the Soviet Union, and he was replaced on the Democratic ticket by Harry Truman in the 1944 campaign, serving as commerce secretary until Truman sacked him in 1946.

Alarmed by the growing bellicosity of postwar America, Wallace mounted a somewhat erratic third-party run under the Progressive Party banner and argued again for a less hard-line approach to the Soviet Union—a big part of what attracted McGovern to his campaign. For their trouble, Wallace and his followers were viciously red-baited by Republicans, Democrats, and the national press. He ended up with a mere 2.4 percent of the popular vote and zero votes in the Electoral College.

McGovern concluded from this that third-party campaigns were futile. But he never abandoned his belief in the basic correctness of Wallace’s domestic- and foreign-policy ideas, and he suspected—correctly, it turned out—that Truman’s red-baiting would come back to haunt the party.

By 1955, soon after McGovern had finished his doctorate, the seat in the House of Representatives held by Republican Harold Lovre beckoned. Running as a Democrat in South Dakota—a rural, agricultural state that leaned heavily Republican—was a steep uphill climb. Then as now, however, conservative policy proved to be none too beneficial to the state’s voters, especially its farmers. Ezra Taft Benson, Eisenhower’s secretary of agriculture, was a reaction-ary who considered Wallace’s New Deal program—which had saved American agriculture during the Depression years—creeping communism. The policies of Benson’s Department of Agriculture led to huge price-crushing surpluses that reduced farm income and drove thousands of small family farms into bankruptcy. (Though to be fair, the surpluses weren’t entirely Benson’s fault: Increasing agricultural productivity had been the bane of American farmers for generations and had reached a new crescendo in the early postwar years.) This was an opening for McGovern, who tied the hated Benson around the neck of his opponent. In addition to his deep roots in the state, McGovern offered an intelligent articulation of how a populist government
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–David and Abigail, Mich. (Cuba 2016)

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policy could help farmers: He favored a Wallace-style mix of production restrictions and subsidies that would help bring farm income up to "parity" with the rising incomes of industrial workers.

As he gained ground on Love, the state Republican machine, coordinated by South Dakota Senator Karl Mundt, mercilessly red-baited McGovern for supporting the diplomatic recognition of communist China and for having participated in Wallace’s 1948 campaign. But McGovern refused to back down, skillfully weaving his advocacy of peaceful diplomacy with the problem of agricultural surpluses at home, thereby offering South Dakotans a radical, populist policy line that ran from postwar foreign policy to domestic economics. He argued that South Dakota’s grain could be used overseas to feed the hungry, both on moral grounds and as a soft-power counter to the Soviet Union. The United States, he insisted, could “wisely use a small fraction of that amount to fight the hunger which breeds communism.” He also leaned on his war record and his personal contact with voters and made the red-baiting look dishonorable and cheap.

In the end, McGovern won by a good margin. It was the first time a South Dakota Democrat had been elected to Congress since 1936, and McGovern had had to rebuild the state party from the ground up, virtually on his own, to do it.

After four years in Congress, McGovern next decided to challenge Mundt for his Senate seat. He put up a decent showing but still lost, likely in large part due to the anti-Catholic sentiment stirred up by John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign. After the 1960 election, however, President Kennedy offered McGovern a position in the administration running a reconfigured and expanded “Food for Peace” program that would put his idea about using surpluses to help poor nations and fight communism into action. The program quickly ran into a problem: Some countries, like Argentina, didn’t necessarily want cheap American food, lest they undermine their own farmers. But others, like South Korea, did make good use of the program.

McGovern always knew that the Food for Peace program couldn’t fully escape Cold War politics, but he still did his utmost to stress its humanitarian mission. In practically no time, he got the program off the ground, and it helped to jump-start the economy of India in particular. “By mid-1962, some thirty-five million children worldwide were receiving daily Food for Peace lunches,” Knock writes. “McGovern had anticipated the single greatest humanitarian achievement of the Kennedy-Johnson era.”

In 1962, McGovern attempted another Senate run—this time for South Dakota’s other Senate seat—and won. His “perception about the indivisibility of politics and foreign policy was to become his central mode of political analysis,” Knock observes—and just in time for Vietnam. McGovern decided that the budding US military intervention was a tragic waste of lives, resources, and money, and on September 24, 1963—two months before Kennedy’s assassination—he called for the withdrawal of all US troops, warning that “the trap we have fallen into there will haunt us in every corner of this revolutionary world.”

After the assassination of Kennedy, President Lyndon Johnson steadily escalated the conflict. Though McGovern did vote for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution—we learn from Knock that he was talked into it by Senator J. William Fulbright—he quickly distinguished himself as one of the Senate’s most eloquent and respected critics of the war. He readily and correctly discerned the basic shape of the conflict: that it was fundamentally a civil war, not a conspiracy by Chinese communists; that the brutal police-state regime in South Vietnam had virtually no popular support; that propelling it up was morally hideous and profoundly damaging to America’s reputation; and that US troops would be perceived as little different from the French colonialist forces. American soldiers would thus get stuck in an unwinnable guerilla war, just as the French had. The domino theory—the notion that a communist victory in Vietnam would lead to the communist takeover of Southeast Asia—was, he argued, ignorant and paranoid. Military intervention would do little to deter the communists from taking power in Vietnam; it might even embolden and empower them. Knock dryly notes that when McGovern attempted to make this case to Johnson, the president interrupted: “God-damn it, George, don’t give me another history lesson!”

What made McGovern’s antiwar politics so compelling—and why, one suspects, infuriated Johnson—was that McGovern not only had a critique; he also had a practical alternative. The United States should recognize the limits of military force, negotiate a withdrawal from Vietnam, and use humanitarian programs (especially agricultural ones) to shore up Western democratic capitalism against communist influence. Such a strategy had arguably worked in the past, when McGovern was running the Food for Peace program, and it would greatly strengthen the rhetorical claims of American freedom versus Soviet tyranny.

A visit to Vietnam in 1965—his first—confirmed all of McGovern’s suspicions. He met several dignitaries and military commanders there, including a cordial but ineffectual session with Gen. William Westmoreland. He made a heart-wrenching visit to a military hospital, where he saw dozens of mutilated American soldiers, and a horrified visit to a severely under-equipped Vietnamese hospital, where the injured villagers—many of them wounded by American munitions—were packed together in unsanitary conditions.

McGovern took the mounting atrocities personally, and as the war progressed, he tried with increasing anger and desperation to stop the war. The later sections of Knock’s book are undeniably poignant, a moving account of how one of America’s ablest politicians attempted to pull the country out of a gruesome, pointless, self-inflicted catastrophe, and how little difference it made in the end.

The remarkable thing about McGovern’s antiwar arguments is that they were all really quite obvious. Historical hindsight is one thing, but the sheer number of things missed by the elite Harvard liberals who ran the Kennedy and Johnson administrations is simply staggering. For example, Knock cites historical work arguing that “neither Kennedy’s nor Diem’s people ever understood the central issue behind the revolt,” namely agricultural policy. The Vietminh
earned widespread support among the peasantry by outstaging brutal landlords and slashing rents; the Diem regime attempted to reinstate them. But “Kennedy’s advisers could not grasp why peasants might side with communists,” and instead of land reform, they herded millions of peasants into “strategic hamlets,” merely deepening the resentment.

Having spent decades concerned with American agriculture, McGovern instinctively understood this—and he kept returning to the point in order to persuade Johnson to change his policies. (Johnson did the opposite, cannibalizing half of the Food for Peace program’s funding to prop up the South Vietnamese war effort.)

One of the key reasons that Kennedy’s and Johnson’s advisers—and, for that matter, many of the intellectuals sympathetic to Cold War liberalism—failed to grasp this was their profoundly entrenched anticomunism. By capitulating to conservative fearmongering—or, indeed, embracing it, as Truman and other prominent Democrats did—liberal hawks rendered themselves incapable of understanding much of the world.

Johnson was paralyzed with fear that he’d be remembered as the president who “lost” another Asian country to the communists (China being the first). As a result, he became the president who is remembered for starting a major unnecessary conflict, which resulted in over a million South Asians and over 58,000 Americans being killed.

Many Americans would come to agree with McGovern’s analysis of the war and of Democratic foreign policy more generally. In 1972, he won the Democratic primaries (albeit at the cost of deep divisions in the party, mainly over Vietnam) and was crushed by Nixon. Badly stung by the epic defeat, he went back to the Senate, serving the remainder of his term and getting reelected once more in 1974, until he lost during the Reagan revolution in 1980. McGovern spent most of his remaining years teaching, touring the lecture circuit, and dabbling in business and various side projects. He ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984, again to boost up the party’s left flank, and received a respectful hearing. In 1998, President Clinton appointed him as ambassador to the United Nations’ agricultural program, and he worked with Bob Dole on a Food for Peace–style program to feed the hungry around the world—much smaller than the original, but still a quiet success.

Despite his bruising defeat in 1972, McGovern’s vision of an integrated domestic and foreign policy offered the Democrats a useful perspective about how to serve the country’s interests, both at home and abroad. Even when red-baited, McGovern refused to give up his advocacy of diplomacy, nor the use of humanitarian aid to advance the interests of the United States—and in the case of Vietnam, that courage turned out to be politically astute. President Johnson would have been far better served by suing for peace the moment he took office—indeed, if he had, he almost certainly would have won reelection and would be remembered today on a par with FDR. Instead, the war devoured his presidency and besmirched his legacy. Similarly, Hillary Clinton would likely have been elected president in 2008 had she not voted for the Iraq War; but instead of assimilating the lessons of her surprising loss to Barack Obama, she has continued to support hawkish policies and interventions in Libya, Yemen, and Syria—even when, several months ago, it was President Trump firing the missiles.

The tendency of Democrats to want to show they’re tougher than Republicans when it comes to foreign policy and the use of force has been crippling the party ever since McGovern’s dissent against the Vietnam War back in the mid- to late 1960s. Even in the wake of the Cold War, liberal internationalism has almost always involved various forms of military intervention, as opposed to the diplomat and humanitarian policies that McGovern advanced as an alternative. After 9/11, this hawkishness merely mutated into a militarism that was directed toward defeating Islamist terrorism in the Middle East.

But there is a critical difference between the current moment and the Cold War. McGovern ultimately failed to convince his party because, in the Cold War era, a hawkish liberalism was at least intuitively plausible. The Soviet Union really was a credible threat: a repressive and powerful police state with thousands of nuclear weapons and spies all across the globe. Today, by contrast, neither the Assad regime nor Islamist terrorism is even in the same time zone as the Soviet Union was in terms of power, and the interventionism of Hillary Clinton, Bill Nelson, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, among others, becomes more obviously a fig leaf for the desire to expand American dominance over the rest of the world.

As demonstrated by the Sanders campaign, the left wing of the Democratic Party and the left more generally have struggled to create an alternative. Clinton’s biggest weakness was foreign policy, but Sanders barely pressed her on it. This was due, in part, to a left that is much better at opposing disastrous wars of aggression than at formulating an alternative perspective that can win over ideologically sympathetic politicians.

Some leftists simply end up concluding that the United States is fundamentally and unchangeably imperialist. Given the seemingly endless wars over the past 15 years, one can understand why they might reach that conclusion. But the terrible harm done to American interests by the Iraq War—which has cost trillions of dollars, killed nearly 4,500 American soldiers, and maimed tens of thousands more, for no strategic benefit whatsoever—demonstrates that the war was stupid as well as evil. And in any case, American politicians can’t be expected to govern the nation on an “America is bad” basis. If the left can’t propose an argument that is critical of excessive military force but also serves the national interest, it ends up ceding political ground to the interventionists.

In this context, McGovern’s vision of a humane internationalism that serves American interests is of particular value. In these troubled times, the world hardly needs more American guns and bombs; but what the left still lacks is a persuasive alternative vision of internationalism that can counter the hawkishness of both Beltway parties. If we are to exercise leadership in the world, let it be by setting an example and relieving humanitarian crises where we can—taking in refugees, treating the sick, feeding the starving. And while the specifically agricultural mechanism of McGovern’s humanitarian vision isn’t quite as plausible as it was in 1962, the fact is that, right now, there are famine or near-famine conditions prevailing in South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, even as gigantic agricultural surpluses pile up in the United States for lack of a buyer. That might not be the most efficient way to relieve hunger, and it’s certainly not the only way to frame an internationalist politics that can also be justified by the way it serves our national interests. But it certainly merits a look—and, just as important, it offers the left, both within and outside of the Democratic Party, a basic template for a different kind of foreign-policy program that it can pursue. If nothing else, such policies will at least do a thousand times better in promoting our interests than burning through trillions of dollars to create yet another sucking chest wound in the Middle East’s political order.
never forget that you could go crazy: At parties, you could confess to stranglers. At dinner, you could upend your plate. The English novelist and playwright Deborah Levy specializes in just this sort of domestic derangement. One of her characters plants pokers in the garden. Another leaves eggs to rot in the kitchen. A third plots to murder the rats that plague the pantry. Levy’s fiction usurps the most familiar furniture, haunting our houses with quiet horrors.

Levy herself is of uneasy origins. She was born in South Africa to a Lithuanian Jewish father and a “posh, English Colonial” mother, as she put it in an interview. Her father, a staunch opponent of apartheid and a member of the African National Congress, was briefly imprisoned for his political affiliations. He was released when his daughter turned 9, and the family immigrated to England shortly thereafter. When Levy made a name for herself in the early 1980s as an “experimental” playwright, she took up the questions of nationality implicit in her biography. In one of her most celebrated early pieces, The B-File: An Erotic Interrogation of Five Female Personas, a handful of women from different countries recite monologues in their native languages, dressed only in bikinis.

When Levy turned to fiction at the end of the 1980s, her novels were just as provocative and cacophonous—just as reminiscent of the jumpy, jumbled New Wave films and psychoanalytically charged surrealist art that she admired as a drama student. Like The B-File, her novels were populated by women who reveled in nudity, both figurative and literal. Her characters confessed their anguish out loud, making scenes that alarmed even the most polite company.

In Levy’s Swimming Home, published in the United States in 2012, the disturbed Kitty Finch rides a pony onto the balcony of a restaurant, where she startles the patrons by feeding her mount sugar cubes off the tables. Before this outburst, Kitty was institutionalized after she was found shivering naked in the streets, claiming she had lost her clothing. Both images are weird, and at once erotic and unsettling. The man Kitty loves obsessively “couldn’t work out why he thought someone as sad as she was might be dangerous.” Kitty is as beautiful as she is scary, and the nudity in Levy’s writing doesn’t strip away the confusions. Her novels teem with non sequiturs as startling as a horse at a luncheon or a naked girl in the street. Sometimes they dip into verse or scripted fragments; often they veer from speaker to speaker or from reality to dream without warning or explanation. Narratives multiply to bewildering effect. Completely absent are the familiar garments of contextualization. But despite its difficulty, Levy’s work has developed a loyal following, and she has emerged as one of England’s best-loved authors: At 58, she has reached the apogee of mainstream recognition with two appearances on the Man Booker Prize shortlist, one for Swimming Home in 2012, and another in 2016 for Hot Milk, which came out in the United States that same year. Both works retain traces of Levy’s early rawness, but they go in for a more muted lyricism. Their oddity is subtle and slow to surface. Reading them is like walking off into the fog and getting lost there.

By contrast, the brazen sounds of the bizarre go unabated in Levy’s first three novels—Beautiful Mutants (1989), Swallowing Geography (1993), The Unloved (1994)—
which have now been assembled in a single volume, The Early Novels, and published by Bloomsbury this year. All three of these earlier books are uneven and careening, and at her worst, the early Levy is unreadably messy. But at her best, she is a connoisseur of the ways that strangeness can start to take root. In none of her fiction do we ever find ourselves fully at home.

Vacations are a voluntary loss of home, and Levy is fascinated by them. She’s also often taking them. In Things I Don’t Want to Know, her monograph on writing and femininity, she jets off to Majorca as early as the third page. Her life is a place she no longer likes, so she reasons: “Why not book a flight to somewhere I actually did want to go?”

Many of her books begin in transit, and most of her characters are émigrés or exiles. Her most recent novel, Hot Milk, is set in Spain, where a half-British, half-Greek heroine named Sofia is always apologizing for the unpronounceability of her last name (Papastergiadis). Swimming Home takes place on the French Riviera, where two British families go on a joint holiday—and where one melancholy vacationer, a poet by the name of Joe Jacobs, represses memories of his escape from wartime Poland on the Kindertransport. Both novels center on characters whose “native” countries are not quite their homes; they are natives of nowhere.

The Unloved, by far the best of Levy’s early novels, unfolds at a château in Normandy, where a diverse roster of international travelers find themselves caught up in a murder. Luciana, a glamorous Italian housewife and clandestine heroin addict, resents her fat German husband, Wilhelm; Philippe, a flamboyant Frenchman, dotes on his wife Nancy, who is a suspiciously jovial American and whose mother shot herself when Nancy was a child. Monika, a Pole who is deserted by her aristocratic lover, mopeds around the château, while Yasmina, an elderly Algerian woman, sustains a taciturn silence. Two little girls squeal and scamper at the margins. And Mary, pale and English, wanders fully clothed into the freezing winter ocean, from which her concerned boyfriend struggles to extract her. Everyone plays parlor games and makes polite conversation, ignoring how badly the sad, maimed Mary wants to die. At the end of The Unloved, she’s finally gratified—and during a game of Murder in the Dark, no less.

Vacations are supposed to be breaks from normalcy, but all too often they reinforce our habits. Levy is bent on exposing the hypocrisy of holidays that are mere continuations of the lives we left behind. In Swimming Home, the Jacobs family shares a villa with Mitchell and Laura, a feverishly cheerful couple who devote themselves to sunbathing and learning about the local cuisine. The melancholy poet Joe Jacobs eventually snaps: “It’s rude to be so normal, Mitchell. Even you must have been a child once. Even you might have thought there were monsters lurking under your bed.”

The same sorts of niceties intrude and prevail at the château in The Unloved, where life retains its anesthetizing rhythms. Lulling, Levy outlines the shape of the days there:

There are baths and the cleaning of the bath. Shopping and the carrying of shopping back home. Meals and the preparation of meals, washing up and putting away. The keeping of the fire going, the sweeping of the floor, the washing down of the plastic table-cloth, the pouring of oil into the central-heating system, the rinsing of clothes, the reading of books, the changing into walking boots. The quiet times of people alone, thinking, sleeping, peeling apples, gutting fish.

The setup is comforting: Even the promise of murder evokes the old trope of the detective novel, where the culprit is always the butler and the weapon is always the candlestick. The Unloved embraces and exaggerates this canned theatricality. At times, the scenes are literally scripted. When Monika’s ex-lover comes to dinner with his too-young new girl friend, dialogue in script form is interspersed among the stage directions and scene-setting. Monika’s face “is powdered into a paler version of herself” so that it “looks like a Noh mask,” for she is “the star player in a drama.” But the script exists only to advertise its own limitations. Monika is “badly, fatally hurt.” Levy knows that “there is no love without rage, that is why the script is ridiculous.”

One of the choreographies that crumple most frequently in the château is that of femininity. During police interrogations with the sadistic Inspector Blanc, Luciana explains that heroin addiction abounds in Frankfurt’s “Hausfrau” circles. What starts out as a standard interview becomes more and more like therapy or confession. When the detective asks if she considers herself a housewife, Luciana gazes off into the distance and replies:

There are days...when I stare into the carpet. We have a lot of carpet in our house in Frankfurt because it is very big. I imported it from Rome. It is blue, the blue of the Mediterranean... There are days...when I do nothing but stare into the carpet. There are places, near the television set for example, where the blue deepens and I am sucked, abducted, into its dark centre. I am an alien in my own home, floating through the hypervisibility of one hundred per cent wool.

The usual questions about alibis and motives yield philosophical meditations on the nature of love and loneliness. When Inspector Blanc asks if Mary’s boyfriend loved her and Luciana responds that “he was attentive,” the policeman “smiles bitterly” and asks, “All of us can imitate love, don’t you agree?” The Unloved delivers a true vacation. But it is also a failed escape, for its characters cannot avoid the traumas they left their homes to outrun.

For many of Levy’s characters, homelessness is a state so familiar that it becomes a kind of home. Lapinski, the protagonist of Beautiful Mutants, is shipped off to London when her parents die in a freak accident in her native Russia. In her new country, she befriends other estranged expats, including the Poet, who speaks in verse, and Martha, whose hand is severed in the machinery at the hamburger factory where she works. “A whole batch of hamburgers will consist of me,” she muses as her blood trickles into the patties.

Beautiful Mutants is a tangled and largely plotless patchwork of voices. It swerves from Lapinski to her faithless lover Freddie, to her bawdy, unnamed male neighbor, to a prostitute who calls herself Tremor, to a heartless female financier known only as the Banker, who proclaims herself “witch, mother, sister, mistress, maiden, whore, nun, princess.” The Banker is one of Levy’s least believable conceits, a scrunching effort to capture the manic pitch of the 1980s. She languishes in a blizzard of cocaine and sets fire to the London Zoo, killing the animals in a murderous blaze. “In my prestige apartment,” she proclaims, “I am Madame de Sade.”

Beautiful Mutants trades in interpersonal evictions—intimacies that shade into estrangements. In one striking scene, Lapinski lets Freddie stroke her body with pepper: “I begin to sting and smart. The red hot pepper on his fingers and the possibility of love, yearned and dreamt for, the possibility of great love for ever and ever two inches away...
from my roaring heart.” But Freddie cannot muster up a love that will function as a homecoming for the displaced Lapinski, and he leaves her soon after he seduces her. Beautiful Mutants is likewise disappointing: The tumble of its prose can grow unkempt. The Poet “held onto the bloody threads of each day,” and Levy would do well to emulate her creation; her writing is best when it tracks the strangeness of our world, rather than spinning off into the almost unrecognizable.

But even in her first splintered effort, Levy occasionally achieves beautifully subdued disorientations. The most captivating scene in the early novels appears in Beautiful Mutants, when the Banker and her economist husband are at dinner with a famous pianist and his socialite grandmother. The elderly woman attempts to relate an anec
dote about her morning commute but drifts off into reminiscence. It’s as though she’s forgotten that she isn’t talking to herself: “Of the world I grew up in,” she recalls.

The woods a haze of bluebells, oh they looked like a Monet, and the light…if you appreciate light…early-morning mists, cuckoos in spring, the woodpecker, pheasants, wild rabbits. That rose made me think of my own mother in her gardening gloves, pruning her rose bushes; she planned her roses every year and people who visited from the city always took one or two back with them….

Such sincerity is sweet, wincing, and softening, and Levy forces us to wonder what would happen if we allowed ourselves such tender evocations in the presence of near strangers. Would we dissolve into each other? Would the usual borders collapse?

At one of the group dinners in The Unloved, someone casually asks Monika if she has children. Yes, Monika replies, “In Gdansk, I worked in the shipyard…. I was not happy but this is normal. It is normal to be unhappy.” She goes on to recount her brutal rape at the hands of one of her co-workers, as impersonally and matter-of-factly as if she were discussing the weather: “He pulled up my dress and overalls and I knew it was a man. He raped me.” The scene is bracing; it is difficult to read about someone telling the truth in all the ways she isn’t supposed to. And yet the truth that surfaces in Monika’s story doesn’t discomfit her audience because it is unexpected, but because they know it all too well. Of course it’s normal to be unhappy—most of us are. This is what our homes are supposed to protect us from.

In his iconic 1919 essay on the uncanny, Sigmund Freud emphasized that there is a close relationship between possession and dispossession: “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once known and had long been familiar.” In German, the word for “uncanniness” is Unheimlichkeit, literally “un-at-home-ness”—but the uncanny is an extreme brand of un-at-home-ness, one that assails us at home and makes us un-at-home even there. Its power comes from its repetition, that sense of inescapability we experience in nightmares where we pass through a door only to enter, sickened, into the same room we just left. It makes our closest comforts unsafe again.

Levy, who has adapted two of Freud’s case studies into radio plays for the BBC, trades in this kind of uncanniness: She roots us to her worlds by uprooting us, converting our homes into unfamiliar houses. When, in Swimming Home, the troubled Kitty Finch appears at the Jacobs family’s villa, she disrupts their seaside holiday and seems to invent a new place. In the guest room, she makes “a small, hot, chaotic world, full of books and fruits and flowers.” It quickly emerges that she is mad, that she has followed Joe and his family to the beach because she’s convinced that his poems were intended for her alone. Kitty’s passion is unbearable: “Every moment with her was a kind of emergency, her words always too direct, too raw, too truthful.”

But with her shaky hands and her courageous capacity for suffering, Kitty reminds Joe of his own sadness. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud half-mockingly quotes the popular maxim that love is “a longing for home,” and the new place that Kitty constructs turns out to be a place that Joe already knows: “to have been so intimate with her had brought him to the edge of something truthful and dangerous.” For her part, Kitty resists the comforts of homecoming and opts for the precariousness of Joe’s homesick poems. And she reads Joe the way we should read Levy: as a call to disorientation, and a reminder that when we return from vacation we will always find the old house altered, the windows a little wider, and our tired lives at least a little different.

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**The Deep Heart’s Core**

We must stop feeling things in the deep heart’s core. That’s where the lies live.

If you would see what’s behind you, close your eyes. Shut your mouth if you want to send people to hell.

You have to want to go to hell. Deserve’s got nothing to do with it. Yet hell has a waiting list.

Well, that’s how dumb I am, feeling my way to hell one name at a time.

MICHAEL ROBBINS
This spring, a mere 172 years after his death, Andrew Jackson was back in the news. In March, Donald Trump made a quick visit to the Hermitage, the once-sprawling plantation that our seventh president had outside of Nashville. Jackson, Trump declared, was “the People’s President,” a man who “shook the establishment like an earthquake.” Several weeks later, Trump gave an interview in which he made the bizarre claim that Jackson “was really angry that he saw what was happening with regard to the Civil War,” and went on to tweet that Jackson “would never have let it happen” if he’d still been sitting in the White House.

Notwithstanding Trump’s ignorance of a historical time line that he should have learned in middle school, his choice of a favorite predecessor is rather fitting. Like Trump, Jackson viewed himself as the direct representative of “forgotten” Americans and tended to scorn the other two branches of government as potential usurpers of popular sovereignty. And one would not dispute the historian Richard Hofstadter’s description of Jackson if it were made of our sitting president: “He was a simple, emotional, and unreflective man with a strong sense of loyalty to personal friends and political supporters.” While Trump, the born-again Republican, lauds Jackson and hangs his portrait in the Oval Office, Democrats shun the memory of the man who was long an icon of their party. Treasury Secretary Seth Mnuchin shows no sign that he’ll reverse the Obama administration’s decision to replace Jackson with Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill, but there’s little doubt what his boss would have him do.

For contemporary historians, Jackson poses—or at least ought to pose—an interpretive dilemma. Beginning in his lifetime and stretching into the middle of the last century, prominent historians like Francis Parkman, Charles Beard, Vernon Louis Parrington, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. heralded Jackson as a virtual avatar of American democracy: someone who, in Schlesinger’s words, “came, like the great folk heroes, to lead [the people] out of captivity and bondage” to the greedy bankers and haughty neo-Federalists. Yet today, hardly any member of our clan would echo their view of Jackson as a fearless champion of ordinary Americans. Schlesinger’s *The Age of Jackson*, a best seller that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1946, failed to mention that his hero actively supported “bondage” of the most literal kind: Jackson owned more than 100 slaves and favored expanding the “peculiar institution” into Texas and beyond. While arguing that Jackson was a proto–Franklin Roosevelt fighting “to restrain the power of the business community,” the great liberal historian also entirely neglected Jackson’s policy of forcefully removing the Cherokees from their ancestral lands in Georgia, coveted by whites, to the mostly uninhabited plains of what would become Oklahoma. Thus, in the wake of a more sober, post-1960s understanding of the centrality of race and empire in the antebellum era, historians have come to seriously reconsider the image of Jackson as a fearless champion of ordinary Americans.

But to view “Jacksonian democracy” as nothing but a dangerous myth or the facade for a violent racist order is equally myopic and
north to Tennessee, much of which was then a "reading law" and was admitted to the North American jurisdiction of a self-made man bent on conquest—a man of land, fame, and political power.

Jackson's rise also marked the onset of a political system in America based on mass parties. The shrewd creators of "the Jackson Party," soon renamed "the Democracy," assembled a broad coalition that stretched from Walt Whitman and white radical artisans in the urban North to Jefferson Davis and his fellow defenders of slavery in the agrarian South. With majorities among small farmers and European immigrants, the Jacksonian Democrats controlled US politics for most of the next three decades, building disciplined party machines in many cities and states; only the coming of civil war exposed the folly of believing that the nation could, as the Whig turned Republican Abraham Lincoln put it, "endure, permanently half slave, half free."

In his new book, *Avenging the People*, J.M. Opal doesn't strike a balance between these two Jacksons, though he does capture the first one well. Concentrating on his subject's relentlessly ambitious, often violent life before he moved into the White House at the age of 61, Opal presents us with a Jackson who has very little in common with Schlesinger's: not a champion of ordinary Americans, but rather the ruthless exponent of policies that expanded slavery and pushed Native Americans out of their homelands. For Opal, the key to understanding Jackson and his influence lies in the relentless ambition of a self-made man bent on conquest—of land, fame, and political power.

Born to poor Scotch-Irish immigrants and orphaned at the age of 14, Jackson began his climb in a frontier region that was almost constantly at war. The teenager enlisted in the patriot forces during the Revolution and was captured by British troops. In the first of many battles with authorities he considered illegitimate, Jackson earned a scar on his forehead when he angrily refused to clean the boots of a red-coated officer of the crown. No one else in his immediate family lived to see the end of the war.

In 1787, the year the Constitution was written in Philadelphia, Jackson finished "reading law" and was admitted to the North Carolina bar. The next year, he moved to Tennessee, much of which was then a terrain of brutal, if intermittent, combat between white and Native Americans. Opal vividly describes how, in the 1790s, Jackson, acting both as a judge and militia leader, participated in the slaughter of Native men, women, and children.

Jackson's image as a man "who had served well during the most trying times" helped him launch a political career. It didn't hurt that he was also a protégé of the territory's governor. Jackson got himself elected to the House of Representatives and then to the Senate before returning to Tennessee with hopes of getting rich. He speculated on plots of land, selling some at a healthy profit and growing cotton on the rest. Naturally, Jackson purchased black men and women to do the actual labor; he never seemed to regard them as anything other than useful and hard-working commodities. In 1804, Opal writes, one of his business partners "made at least one trip to the downriver slave markets, looking to 'carry on negroes in exchange for groceries,' as Jackson put it."

All this occurred before Jackson vaulted to national renown in 1815 as the commander of a volunteer army that defeated British soldiers at the Battle of New Orleans, the final confrontation in the War of 1812. He had earned a reputation for tenacity and decisiveness as a major general in the Tennessee state militia—for which his troops fondly dubbed him "Old Hickory." But the 1815 battle at the mouth of the Mississippi, while epic, was also unnecessary: The combatants were unaware that a peace treaty had already been signed in far-off Ghent. Yet millions of Americans longed for a military hero, and after New Orleans, Jackson fit the bill.

For all its richness, Opal's narrative adds little to the scholarship produced by the regiment of Jackson biographers and historians who preceded him. But he certainly has an eye for the telling anecdote and a knack for capturing in a few words the essence of Jackson's vengeful character: "He imagined the worst about his enemies, and then let the excruciating images spin around his mind, tormenting him until either he or they had to die."

Opal also offers a big idea to frame his lively prose. Jackson, he argues, was hardly the thoughtless figure Hofstadter described, who believed that might always made him right. Instead, Old Hickory had a more sophisticated view of power: He legitimated his aggression in politics and war by invoking the concept of the rights of sovereign nations, which Opal claims Jackson derived from prominent 18th-century works by the English jurist William Blackstone and the Swiss philosopher-diplomat Emer de Vattel. Both drew a bright line between "civilized" societies and "savage" ones. Blackstone thought it was the duty of the former to "force" the latter "to respect the laws of humanity." If, as on the Tennessee frontier, the state couldn't do the enforcing, then, Opal writes, "lawful people in lawless places"—figures like Jackson—"should do what had to be done, becoming in effect their own sovereigns."

That Jackson leaned on such prominent thinkers as Blackstone and de Vattel does help make his own popularity among some of the leading intellectuals of his day, including the historian and statesman George Bancroft, more understandable: After all, the fiery general who defeated a British army and exterminated thousands of indigenous people had also been a successful attorney and judge. But Opal fails to adequately demonstrate how the "law of nations" consistently animated Jackson's behavior; nor does he explain why a good many other Americans who read Blackstone and de Vattel belonged to opposition parties and protested the policy that led to the Trail of Tears.

Perhaps one reason why Opal doesn't develop this theme is that his narrative arrives at Jackson's presidency only at its conclusion. As a result, his book scants the major decisions—Jackson's veto of the recharter of the Second Bank of the United States, in particular—that once led generations of Democrats to hold dinners in his honor and helped land him on the $20 bill in the first place. In his time, Jackson was hardly a scourge of "the business community," which included many Southern planters and men of commerce in the North who shared his zest for trade and acquiring land. But he did have an abiding antipathy toward the captains of high finance and toward powerful men who, unlike him, were born to wealth and had attended college.

During the 1830s, Jackson turned his refusal to recharter the Bank of the United States into a grand populist drama, the language of which now sounds remarkably familiar in the wake of the Great Recession. "It is to be regretted," he thundered in 1832, when vetoing the bank's recharter, "that the people are not familiar with the doctrine of government to their selfish purposes." Unlike the Wall Street moguls whose risky investment schemes crashed the economy in 2008, the Bank of the United States did spur needed development and was intelligently run. But Jackson argued successfully that it was unjust for a publicly created institution to grant loans and invest capital wherever its well-to-do directors decided to do so. Among antebellum Democrats, the suspicion of financial institutions ran so deep that many even opposed the
issuing of paper money, then the province of banks, instead of relying on specie—coins made of silver, gold, and other metals. The economic logic of their position was shaky at best. It assumed the superior virtues of a preindustrial nation of small farmers that was rapidly receding into memory and myth. “Here, the democrat is the conservative,” the novelist James Fenimore Cooper reflected in the 1830s. It also enraged urban businessmen, who relied on easy credit, and emboldened anti-Jackson politicians to organize the new Whig Party to oppose what they considered the tyranny of “King Andrew the First.” But the class-conscious sentiments behind Jackson’s “Bank War” also became one of his most significant legacies, helping to fuel the progressive campaigns of William Jennings Bryan, Robert La Follette, and Franklin Roosevelt, as well as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders.

Bashing Wall Street and its government cronies in the name of the hardworking majority also did much to build popular support for a progressive income-tax amendment and the Wagner Act; it was this part of Jackson’s legacy that earned the Democrats the title of “the party of the people.” The party’s founders in the 1830s believed that the federal government needed to stay out of most economic matters; but unlike conservative Republicans today, they did so because they thought that an interventionist government benefited the rich and the well-connected. What Opal calls “the glorious absence of a powerful state” also appealed to many of Jackson’s constituents, including Irish and German immigrants who had fled monarchies that imposed onerous taxes on the poor, and crushed them when they protested. In keeping with this tradition, the Democrats have pursued policies (more often than not) that sought to protect the interests of working Americans, even if it has meant reversing the view of the federal government held by Jackson and his disciples.

To fully understand Jackson’s legacy, we cannot neglect the parts that might still please us in order to emphasize the parts that we abhor. In the service of pursuing Jefferson’s vision of the United States as an “empire of liberty,” Jackson conquered lands occupied by people of another race and built the world’s first mass political party on a coalition that preserved chattel slavery. Yet as a self-made man who railed against the well-born elite, he also persuaded many white farmers and wage earners—both immigrants and the native-born—that a lack of privilege should not prevent them from thriving.

Instead of splitting the two Jacksons, we should be figuring out how to understand them together—as they were in reality. Jackson’s “democracy” was clearly liberating for some and repressive for others. It was also popular: A majority of Americans supported slavery and shared his choice of adversaries and friends. In 1819, Congress held a long debate about whether to censure Jackson for his rogue invasion of what was then Spanish Florida. Here’s why, according to Opal, the lawmakers in Washington decided to back off: “Rooted in the extreme devotion of white households from enemy [Native American] country and the proliferating institution of slavery, [Jackson’s support] reached into the raucous seaports of the east coast, the camp meetings of frontier towns, and the officer corps of the U.S. Army and Navy. It included women as well as men, children as well as parents. It was…largely southern and western but also urban. It was, in a word, Jacksonian.”

One cannot appreciate Jackson, the tough-talking populist and partisan, without understanding that his popular appeal was as much due to his defense of slavery, his years of killing Native Americans, and his simplistic grasp of economics as it was to his rhetorical defense of white workers and small farmers. In truth, much of American history has epitomized this dilemma: freedom built on the backs of the enslaved and exploited, justice and injustice bound together in the hearts of the same people and institutions. Trump will never truly understand the nature of this bedeviling paradox, even as he embodies it.

The same might be said about a onetime hero of anti-plutocratic populism who was fond of invoking Jackson’s vision of mass democracy. In 1892, Thomas Watson—the white Georgian who was one of the leaders of the Populist Party, which campaigned on freeing the US economy from the grip of the “money power”—lamented that American politics would have been different if Old Hickory were still around: “Oh, for an hour of that stern old warrior before whose Militia Rifles the veterans of Waterloo melted away, and before whose fiery wrath the combined money-kings bit the dust!”

In his admiring reference to the Battle of New Orleans, Watson got his chronology wrong: The confrontation at Water-loo, Napoleon’s final defeat, occurred six months after Jackson’s victory at the mouth of the Mississippi. But in the years to come, Watson would accurately represent the dual nature of Jackson’s appeal. Still railing against big business as a member of the Democratic Party, he had also become, by the early 20th century, one of the country’s most notorious haters of Catholics, African Americans, and Jews.

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**Untitled**

Her heart is full of bees
the doctor said to me,
and I heard the low thrum
of her ventricles swarming
With forceps he opened
Her little hive heart to me
Is there a good side to this?
Will they fill her heart with honey?
The bees are dying we all know that
Perhaps she means to keep them safe
Perhaps she invited them home
My daughter perhaps I told her
I told her the bees were dying
Perhaps she offered her young body
Yanked her dress off her shoulders
Pointed between her new breasts

TOM PAINE
Puzzle No. 3439

ACROSS
1 1D spilled wine (7)
5 Color over 1A haphazardly (7)
9 Account with zeros is not allowed (5)
10 Composer revised roles for single men (9)
11 “Visionary!” is what a bridge player might say first (8)
12 Indian leader’s three letters in alphabetical order (6)
14 Returning crazy knife thrust (4)
15 Hip fad: rent parties for pioneer (10)
18 Father wrecked what we have when the business is closed (5,5)
19 Listening to apology for clothing item (4)
22 Bangkok resident, angry when speaking with transcriber, perhaps (6)
24 Inflammation of the joints entails a terrible reversal for social butterfly (8)
26 Incorporated, er… crooked officeholder (9)
27 It’s essential to Baha’i faith! (5)

DOWN
1 Keeps 18D hopping (7)
2 Eliot accepts intelligent alternative for seasoning (5,4)
3 One insect taking over? I wish (2,4)
4 Doctors’ organization catches fish, lifting rod for diplomat (10)
5 Grain cost is initially cut (4)
6 Plot involved car noise (8)
7 Audibly in Arabic, “the stringed instrument” (5)
8 Comparatively mean and ugly 5A (7)
13 From that point on, energy is absorbed by the roof beam (10)
16 Harsh Scottish man supports no joker from the south (9)
17 Is Her Majesty acting as Iran’s hostage with Wilde, say? (8)
18 28 is jittery and more on edge (7)
20 8 breaks down sobbing (2,5)
21 In Connecticut, long for prestige (6)
23 Fronts of petticoats include curlicues outside tiny loop of thread (5)
25 It helps to see senselessness reduced to its basic components (4)

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In his pandering commencement address to graduates at Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University, President Trump proclaimed, “America is a nation of true believers.” Such exclusionary remarks denigrate the quarter of the U.S. population today that is nonreligious — “true nonbelievers.” The United States is not a theocracy and there is no religious test for citizenship. It’s never been more crucial for those of us who dissent from religion to stand up for the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

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