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SINCE TRUMP’S VICTORY, A WAVE OF YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE JOINED Democratic Socialists of America. HERE’S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW!

ANNA HEYWARD
“[A] stirring new book.”
—The Guardian

“Gullette argues that pharma and cosmetic companies aren’t catering to the old so much as catering to the ageist idea that getting old is unbearable.”
—New Yorker

“The rallying cry that echoes throughout this book is worth committing to memory: ‘Fight ageism, not aging.’ [A] priority for social change activists.” —Tikkun

**ENDING AGEISM**

or

**HOW NOT TO SHOOT OLD PEOPLE**

Margaret Morganroth Gullette

“This is a profoundly engaged, urgent work of the humanist imagination.”
—James Clifford, author of *Returns*

### The Long Con

I wish I could muster the optimism of Richard Kreitner, Lawrence Lessig, and others regarding the theoretical progressive benefits of a constitutional convention [“Conventional Wisdom,” Nov. 20/27]. Kreitner daydreams of “lively and profitable discussion,” while Lessig writes in his book *Republic, Lost* that “The key is a simple compromise. We get to consider our proposals if you get to consider yours.”

This sounds great in theory—presuming that all sides approach the project with a good-faith willingness to consider proposals from across the ideological divide. However, this presumption flies in the face of the observed behavior of the Republican Party over the past decade. This is the party that, in opposition, obstinately said no to everything President Obama tried. This is the party that, in leadership, refuses to dialogue with the minority party. This is the party whose obstructionism baited the Democrats into scrapping the filibuster for judicial nominees and then, after refusing to hear the Merrick Garland nomination, scrapped the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees and confirmed the odious Neil Gorsuch on a simple-majority party-line vote.

Based on the evidence, it doesn’t seem likely that conservatives clamoring for a constitutional convention harbor any intentions other than gaming it for their own exclusive benefit. Any liberals who are gambling their support for a constitutional convention on the presumption that their conservative counterparts will approach the project in a spirit of constructive compromise need to be prepared for the conservatives to eat their lunch.

In his article urging the left to “embrace the movement for a new constitutional convention,” Richard Kreitner ignored the most important issue: Who would be the delegates? They would certainly not be a cross section of the American population. Instead, they would be appointed by state legislatures, and thus would be similar to party superdelegates and the members of the Electoral College. In accordance with the state-oriented voting rules, a conservative voter in Wyoming would have 80 times the representation of a liberal voter in California.

Can anyone doubt that the Koch/Wal-Mart plutocrats will be able to fill those seats, the way they have done with the House and the Senate? Can anyone doubt that they will continue to use the same bulldozer technique of “no compromise ever” that they have used in those bodies since the election of Obama? The several states that have already gone on record for a balanced-budget amendment give an indication of the ways they will enforce party unity, eliminating any possibility of a reasoned middle ground.

In the Congress, at least we can look forward to the next election to try to overturn their disastrous legislation, but what will we be able to do if they change the Constitution itself to solidify the hegemony of the plutocracy? There certainly are important liberal amendments that need to be added to the Constitution, but it is a fantasy to think that any of them would be made by a Koch convention. There is nothing in Article V that would prevent a convention from simply casting aside the current Constitution and writing a new one, closer to the desires of the reigning plutocracy, just as the 1787 convention ignored the rules of the Articles of Confederation. What an
A Tax-Cut Coup

It just so happened that as Republicans were ramming a $1.5 trillion tax bill through Congress without a single Democratic vote, Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, was finishing up a fact-finding mission in the United States. Alston visited places like Georgia, Alabama, and West Virginia, which voted for Donald Trump, but he also stopped in California, which went for Hillary Clinton, and Puerto Rico, which wasn’t allowed to vote for president at all. A veteran diplomat with tours in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Albania, Alston was nonetheless shocked by what he saw here, in the richest country in the world. His devastating report described the conditions facing the one in eight Americans who live in poverty: rotting teeth, crushing debt, homelessness, hunger, drug addiction, untreated illness, and pollution. It also identified the political choices that keep poor Americans poor: neglect, discrimination, privatization, the criminalization of poverty, and the evisceration of the social safety net. “If you want to talk about the American dream, a child born into poverty has almost no chance of getting out of poverty in today’s United States, statistically,” he concluded.

The impact of the GOP tax plan on this already miserable state of affairs was not lost on the special rapporteur. “The proposed tax reform package stakes out America’s bid to become the most unequal society in the world,” Alston said. Or, as the economist Thomas Piketty and his colleagues recently put it, the tax plan will “turbocharge inequality in America,” making it look “more and more like a rentier society.”

How the GOP bill does this is relatively straightforward. It locks in steep and permanent tax cuts for corporations, dropping their tax rate down from 35 to 21 percent. It creates new exemptions in the estate tax and for pass-through corporations that almost exclusively benefit the ultra-rich—people like the Trump family and Senator Bob Corker, both owners of pass-through corporations. As a fig leaf, the bill temporarily reduces individual taxes for most, but by 2027 the richest 1 percent of Americans will see over 82 percent of its benefits. All told, this massive upward redistribution of wealth will add $1.5 trillion to the deficit, greasing the wheels for the cuts to Medicare and Social Security that House Speaker Paul Ryan has already threatened.

How this monstrosity came to pass is a more complicated matter, one that could use a fact-finding mission or two of its own. By mid-December, less than a quarter of Americans supported the plan, and an overwhelming majority correctly observed that it was designed to help corporations and the rich, not the middle class. Not a single Democrat in Congress voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle. Only three Senate Republicans voted for the bill, including centrists up and down the aisle.

But this gamesmanship is just the tip of the antidemocratic bulwark that allowed the GOP to shove this transparently corrupt scheme through Congress. What the party-line vote reveals is that the Republicans in Congress are entirely insulated from the normal populist considerations that ought to prevail in a functioning democracy. They are captured by self-interest—whether personal, political, or both. If you were betting on Senator Lisa Murkowski to have a conscience, bet again. As Representative Chris Collins, who voted for the bill, put it, “My donors are basically saying, ‘Get it done
or don’t ever call me again.’”

Throwing these enablers of oligarchy out of Congress is an obvious first step, but changing the rules that put them there in the first place is the longer game. That’s a frustrating conclusion, because it means a lot of hard and uncertain work in areas that are often as mind-numbing as tax law itself: the census, redistricting, voting rights, and campaign-finance reform. But this past week proved that there’s no way around it. For among the root causes of poverty in the United States identified by Alston was the withering of democracy itself. “The foundation stone of American society,” he wrote, “is being steadily undermined…. The net result is that people living in poverty, minorities, and other disfavored groups are being systematically deprived of their voting rights,” and that “some political elites have a strong self-interest in keeping people in poverty.”

Deportation Nation

ICE is arresting more immigrants in the US interior:

Deportations are down. In the 2017 fiscal year, which ended in September, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported 226,119 people—14,000 fewer than the previous year. Barack Obama broke records by deporting more than 3 million people during his eight years in office. But no one should confuse a drop in deportations under Donald Trump with leniency.

There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of deportation: those people who are quickly kicked out of the country for getting caught crossing the US-Mexican border, and those who are already living in the United States and are rounded up from within the “interior.” One big reason for the decrease in deportations is that fewer people are crossing into the country from Mexico. That pool of easy stat-booster had already been drying up under Obama, and it continues to decline—though in its end-of-year report, ICE claimed that the trend could reflect “an increased deterrent effect” from the agency’s “stronger interior enforcement efforts.”

If one looks only at what are called “interior removals,” Trump has deported more people than Obama did in his final two years. In fact, in his first eight months in office, Trump deported 61,094 people from within the interior, 37 percent more than Obama did in the same period in 2016.

ICE arrests are also up under Trump. Between his inauguration and September 30, ICE arrested 42 percent more people for immigration violations than it did over the same period in the previous year. Immigration-court backlogs are key to understanding why Trump’s deportation numbers aren’t even higher: If a person has lived in the country for more than two years and has not been previously subject to a deportation order, they’re entitled to a hearing before an immigration judge. Processing those cases takes time.

As it is, Trump has authorized his agents to do things that other administrations declined to do. Obama said that he was focused on removing “felons, not families.” These days, anyone who’s deportable—from restaurant-owning, decades-long residents to DACA-approved Dreamers—is a priority. ICE is now willing to arrest people with no criminal record, people who are guilty only of immigration violations. Even ICE’s gang-enforcement operations—designed, supposedly, to capture the most hardened criminals—have netted a disturbing number of people with no criminal record. It’s an unwashing that, to immigrants, feels like a kind of terrorism.

To make matters worse, ICE agents stalk places that were once no-go areas for apprehending immigrants: churches, courthouses, even school drop-off sites. In November, dozens of public defenders gathered for an impromptu protest outside a Brooklyn courthouse just after ICE agents arrested a man who had shown up at court. That arrest was one of approximately 40 such incidents in 2017 in New York City alone—a 900 percent increase compared with last year, according to the Immigrant Defense Project. Lawyers and judges have reported similar activity in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Colorado, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and the rest of New York State. Denver City Attorney Kristin Bronson said that she’s given up on four domestic-violence cases since Trump’s election, because the victims were too afraid that ICE would be lurking to appear in court.

The Trump administration has also pressured local police forces to do immigration-enforcement work. In March, ICE began publishing a list of jurisdictions that declined to honor its detainer requests to hold immigrants in custody for the federal government. The list, intended to shame localities, has been suspended, but the spirit of it remains. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has been engaged in legal battles with multiple municipalities, from San Francisco to Chicago, over the administration’s threats to defund so-called sanctuary cities.

In the spring of 2017, Sessions also issued guidelines to all federal prosecutors, directing them to bring felony criminal charges whenever possible in immigration cases. Those felony charges come with the possibility of prison time (a boon to private prison companies, surely) and pave the way for easier deportations, as people with felony convictions have fewer rights in immigration court.

Trump has also invited the public to get involved in the process of nabbing immigrants. This year, the administration set up a hotline called VOICE (Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement), supposedly to provide services to the victims of crimes perpetrated by “removable aliens.” But an investigative report by Splinter found that the hotline was being used by people to settle family scores—one caller reported his stepson, another his mother- and sister-in-law, a third his ex-wife, and a fourth her granddaughter’s boyfriend—as well as to report suspected undocumented workers at various businesses and, in one case, people using EBT cards.

(continued on page 6)
Howell Raines is a legendary figure in journalism, an Alabama native who joined The New York Times in 1978 and served as executive editor of the paper from 2001 to 2003. He has also published a novel, two memoirs, and an unforgettable oral history of the civil-rights movement, My Soul Is Rested. —Jon Wiener

Q: A lot of people everywhere are now saying, “Thank you, Alabama!”

HR: It took us years to throw off the dead hand of George Wallace. It feels good to me—a native son who has criticized the state but always loved her—to see national gratitude raining down on Alabama.

JW: The Republican Party stuck with Roy Moore, despite his being the worst candidate in memory.

HR: They were conflicted. The Alabama Republican Party is like the national Republican Party: It’s torn by class conflict between blue-collar Republicans and blue-blood Republicans. The massive white vote for Roy Moore was the old Wallace bloc—rural people, blue-collar folk, traditional anticorporate populists, and, most importantly, people with a deeply ingrained cultural conservatism, a deep commitment to religion, and a deep reflexive racism. The people at Roy Moore rallies are the Alabamians who have been repeatedly misled for generations on the race issue. They exist with very poor jobs and poor medical care, and yet they can’t make the connection between their state in life and the bad people they put in office.

JW: Let’s talk about Trump, who endorsed Roy Moore. He carried the state by 28 points just a year ago, but the Alabama exit polls showed that Trump’s job rating is now 48 percent approval and 48 percent disapproval. Trump has lost a lot of support in Alabama.

HR: Journalists worry about “missing the lede.” In the Alabama election, the lede maybe should be the shrinking and fracturing of the renowned Trump base. It was as strong here as anywhere in the country. That 48 percent approval rating is really remarkable.

JW: The campaign that Doug Jones ran didn’t focus on the allegations of sex offenses by Roy Moore. He ran a campaign where health care was the No. 1 issue. Did Roy Moore talk about health care—or education, or infrastructure?

HR: No, just about Jesus, and God.

JW: How did Steve Bannon go over with the core Roy Moore supporters?

HR: I think he hurt Moore. He gets up among these relatively small crowds that Moore was drawing, and looks down on these 200 people, and works the room like a stand-up comic among the rubes. He boasts about getting into Georgetown and Harvard when Joe Scarborough, who attended the University of Alabama, had to settle for going to school in Tuscaloosa because he couldn’t pass the Ivy League entrance exams. Bannon radiated a kind of condescension.

The other thing that’s very striking is Senator Richard Shelby’s announcement that he couldn’t vote for Roy Moore. [Shelby, a Republican, is Alabama’s senior senator.] What that said to the average Alabamian didn’t need to be spelled out by Shelby. His implicit message was that the sophisticated business leadership of Alabama, as represented by the Mercedes and Honda and Airbus plants, wants you to send this guy away. I think that was like driving the silver spike into Dracula’s heart.

JW: There was one statistic in the exit polls that bothered me: Although 57 percent of women supported Doug Jones, 63 percent of white women voted for Roy Moore, despite the numerous women who have charged him with sex crimes and sexual harassment. Who are these white women?

HR: The facile answer is that these are the same white women who voted for Trump rather than Hillary Clinton. There are mystifying events in politics, and that is a tremendous one. Still, you’re looking at 60-odd percent rather than 80 percent of white female support for Roy Moore. That is progress. There’s a feminist energy out there. These are suburban women, and older women in the churches, who are basically defying their husbands’ political wishes.
Going From Bad to Worse

Shortly after Hurricane Maria battered Puerto Rico, President Trump told reporters that the federal emergency response on the island was “incredible... People can’t believe how successful that has been.”

This, of course, was not true. A new report by the humanitarian group Refugees International lambasted federal and Puerto Rican authorities for their “largely uncoordinated and poorly implemented” disaster-relief efforts, which have only been “prolonging the humanitarian emergency on the ground.”

And the grim news shows no signs of slowing. After recent investigations suggested that many more people—over 1,000—had died as a result of the hurricane than the government tally of 64, Governor Ricardo Rosselló announced a review of the official death count.

To make matters worse, the new Republican tax bill will treat companies with operations on the island as if they’re working in a foreign country. This imposes a 12.5 percent tax on intellectual-property income, which could spur more businesses to flee the island. “We’re pretty much just getting ready for ‘Marla part 2,’” economist Heidie Calero told CNBC.

For his part, Rosselló has taken aim at the Republicans in Congress who passed the bill. “Many senators and congressmen came to Puerto Rico and pledged their support. But when the time came to support Puerto Rico, they essentially bailed... We will analyze those who turned their back on Puerto Rico.” —Miguel Salazar

(continued from page 4)

The Trump administration has given no indication that it plans to slow down in these efforts. As of May 2016, there were more than 900,000 people with final deportation orders living in the United States. And those people have no right to see a judge; court backlogs will not delay their removal. As soon as ICE can get its hands on them and make the travel arrangements, they will be deported.

There are only so many ICE agents, and only so many immigration judges, and only so many detention beds. It’s not quite clear what the upper limit on deportations might be. But the total number of deportations is clearly not the most important metric for gauging the harshness of a president’s immigration policies.

Restoring Voting Rights

In Florida, 1 million people could benefit.

Signature-gatherers across Florida are on a last push to qualify the Voting Rights Restoration Initiative for the November 2018 ballot, a measure that, if it passes, would restore voting rights to well over 1 million Floridians. Organizers with the grassroots group Floridians for a Fair Democracy, which is pushing the proposal, are confident they will get the minimum number of signatures. If they do, the initiative could turn out to be the most important one in the country next November. The implications for how we define our democracy, and whom we include within it, are huge.

Florida is one of a handful of states, mostly in the Deep South, that make it all but impossible for felons to regain their right to vote after they complete their sentence. Currently, an individual has to petition the governor for restoration, and few such petitions are granted. The process is designed to be as byzantine and insurmountable as possible. So, for the vast majority of felons, disenfranchisement is a lifelong condition.

Florida has permanently disenfranchised felons ever since the state’s post–Civil War constitution was rewritten to prevent blacks and poor people from voting. In an age of mass incarceration, this law has created a silent epidemic of disenfranchisement. In the years immediately after the 2000 presidential election, the ACLU, the Sentencing Project, and other groups studying the crisis estimated that there were about 750,000 disenfranchised Floridians, the majority of whom had completed their sentence. Now some 1.5 million Floridians—about 10 percent of the adult citizen population, including 21 percent of African-American men—are voiceless, some because they are still serving sentences, but most because of past felony convictions.

If the initiative passes, it will automatically restore voting rights to most felons after their sentences are complete (murderers and sexual offenders are excluded). “This is about creating a more inclusive democracy,” argues 50-year-old Desmond Meade, an Orlando resident who founded the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition a few years back. Meade knows the effects of disenfranchisement firsthand: Addicted to drugs, he cycled in and out of jail and prison in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the mid-2000s, after weaning himself off drugs, Meade went to college and eventually got a law degree. Until his rights are restored, however, he can neither vote nor take the Florida bar exam in order to begin working as an attorney.

“It’s less about how a person votes, whether they vote Democrat or Republican,” he explains. “It’s about redemption, second chances. Once a person has served their time, they should be able to move on with their lives.”

If the initiative qualifies for the ballot, it will need 60 percent support in the November election in order for it to be written into the state’s constitution.

In a sane society—one, that is, with minimal respect for democratic procedure—such a reform would win near-universal support. Keeping vast numbers of people in a permanent state of sub-citizenship flies in the face of basic principles of rehabilitation and justice. Unfortunately, Florida has long resisted such reforms, and Republican Governor Rick Scott made a point of reversing his predecessor’s efforts to speed up the cumbersome application process. Similar battles around re-enfranchisement have occurred in Iowa, Virginia, and a few other states in recent years, where Democratic governors have pushed for reforms, and their Republican successors and/or Republican legislators have then attempted, with varying degrees of success, to undo the changes. But this is the first attempt to overturn disenfranchisement statutes through an initiative.

Meade says that people have been coming to help with the campaign in Florida “from Pensacola all the way to Key West, and all points in between. The most exciting thing around this is the grassroots movement.”

Hopefully, come November 2018, Florida will end the disgrace of mass disenfranchisement. It is long past time.

Sasha Abramsky, who writes regularly for The Nation, is the author of several books, including, most recently, Jumping at Shadows: The Triumph of Fear and the End of the American Dream.
WHEN THE WORLD CALLED FOR WHISKEY
WE ANSWERED RESOLUTELY WITH GIN

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Brownback in Limbo

The confirmation of Kansas Governor Sam Brownback to a post in the Trump administration is currently languishing in the Senate's backlog of presidential nominations. In July, Trump tapped him to be the next ambassador for International religious freedom, despite Brownback’s extraordinarily low job-approval ratings in his own state. As governor, Brownback has slashed taxes on corporations and the rich, privatized Medicaid, and instituted an “Office of the Repealer” to throw out regulations. The results have been disastrous; plummeting job growth, a downsized state credit rating, and meager state revenues that have triggered massive cuts to government services. No wonder Brownback is eager to leave the governor’s seat for the ambassadorship.

While these economic policies have earned him bipartisan enmity in Kansas, Brownback’s social policies are arguably worse. As governor, he’s signed at least five anti-abortion bills, repealed protections for LGBT workers, and introduced a nonsensical anti-Sharia law. The religious-freedom ambassador, a position created by Congress in 1998, is charged with promoting the protection of religious minorities abroad. The problem, as David Stacy of the Human Rights Campaign put it to USA Today, is that Brownback’s record suggests he’ll promote only “a particular brand of religion,” and that he’ll see protecting religious freedoms versus LGBTQ rights as a “zero-sum game.” —Jake Bittle

Time to Give

So many organizations are doing so much good—and they need your help.

2017 was just the worst, wasn’t it? But we got out of bed, girded our loins, and got to work—hurray, Alabama! Whether at home or in the developing world, these excellent organizations need your generous help to climb the mountain that is 2018.

§ Indivisible. There are several organizations devoted to winning back our country for Democrats and/or progressives, but Indivisible is the most grassroots-oriented, with 5,800 groups across the country. Some of you may belong to a local Indivisible group already—if not, be sure to put it on your to-do list for 2018. If Indivisible were a right-wing organization, it would be rolling in money from the Mercers, Kochs, and other reactionary millionaires—but since it isn’t, we have to fill the kitty ourselves. We can do that! secure.actblue.com/contribute/page/indivisibleproject

§ Afghan Women’s Fund. The women of this poverty-stricken, wartorn country still need education, health care, and human rights. The Afghan Women’s Fund, run by the redoubtable expatriate Fahima Vorgetts, builds and maintains schools, distributes school supplies to destitute children, runs literacy and computer classes, and provides nonviolence training for teachers and others. Donations have fallen off in recent years as new causes take the spotlight, but you can help change that. Current goals include constructing a school in Ghazni province that would be the only school building for girls in a 10-mile area. Estimated cost: $150,000. afghanwomensfund.org/donate

§ Canadian Harambee Education Society. This secular-humanist volunteer project funds school fees and support for girls in rural Kenya and Tanzania who have passed the admissions test for high school but cannot afford to go. You can sponsor a girl for $40 per month, follow her progress via letters, and change her life forever. You can also make a donation of any size, which will be combined with others. canadianharambee.ca/donate

§ Dr. Willie Parker Fund for Abortion Access in the South. Paying for an abortion is hard for low-income women everywhere, but especially so in the Deep South, due to restrictive laws, punitive social attitudes, and a severe lack of clinics. The National Network of Abortion Funds has set up a special fund for Mississippi and Alabama patients and named it in honor of Dr. Parker, one of the very few ob-gyns in the region who perform abortions. Your gift can give a woman back her life. abortionfunds.org/introducing-dr-willie-parker-fund-abortion-access-south

§ The Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute and The Nation magazine. Investigative reporting is expensive and time-consuming, and that’s why there’s less and less of it. The Investigative Fund supports journalists doing in-depth work on crucial topics and places the results everywhere from The Washington Post to Teen Vogue to The Nation, where you may have read Sarah Posner’s recent expose of Alliance Defending Freedom. And the magazine publishes hundreds of vital pieces of reporting each year. A gift to either helps to ensure that the truth gets out. Donate to the Investigative Fund at https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/1441042 and the magazine at thenation.com/eoy17-kp.

§ Americans for Immigrant Justice. Under the Trump administration, the rounding-up, jailing, and deportation of the undocumented has increased dramatically—and these people have no right to court-appointed lawyers. AI Justice is a nonprofit law firm that works to reform immigration law and provides legal services for immigrants. Bonus: AI Justice helped to kick-start the Dreamer movement as well as the push for DACA. www.aijustice.org/donate

§ Heather Heyer Foundation. Heather Heyer was the woman killed while protesting the white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August. After her death, Heather’s mother and her employer co-founded the HHF to promote her progressive ideals. This year, it will award scholarships in her name. Honor Heather’s memory with a donation and help more people be like her. heatherbeyefoundation.com/donate

§ MEDICC. This US-based organization promotes American-Cuban health cooperation and supports students at Havana’s Latin American School...
of Medicine, including 40 to 60 minority students from the United States every year, most of whom return to serve low-income communities after graduating. Cuba has a very low infant-mortality rate and a life expectancy comparable to that of more developed countries. Universal health care focused on public health works! [https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/medicalglobal](https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/medicalglobal)

§ The Bail Project. Did you know that most people in jail haven’t been convicted of anything? They simply can’t afford bail. That means they can lose their jobs, relationships, health, and more while awaiting trial. This new organization uses 100 percent of your donation to bail people out, and because it’s a revolving fund, your dollars will be reused several times a year as recipients show up for trial and their bail is paid back. In early testing, over 50 percent of recipients had their charges dropped. It’s simple, ingenious, compassionate, fair, and long overdue. [secure.bailproject.org/page/contribute](secure.bailproject.org/page/contribute)

§ Edward Said Public Library–Gaza. Earlier this year, I wrote about the efforts of two young Gazans to start an English-language library in Gaza, which has many readers of English but hardly any books. The library is now a reality. Hurray! But it desperately needs operating funds. Their crowd-funder campaign will be live until mid-January, so give right away! [indiegogo.com/projects/edward-said-public-library-gaza--2](indiegogo.com/projects/edward-said-public-library-gaza--2)

§ Rumi. Afghanistan produces some of the most aromatic saffron in the world. Saffron also happens to be the most valuable spice on earth. Started by US military vets, Rumi provides Afghan farmers with a way to better their lives without growing opium. A pretty glass jar of Rumi saffron makes a perfect stocking-stuffer—except you may just decide to keep it for yourself. [rumispice.com/collections/gift-saffron](rumispice.com/collections/gift-saffron)

If Indivisible were a right-wing group, it would be rolling in money from zillionaires—but since it isn’t, we have to fill the kitty ourselves.

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COMIX NATION

SALLY GARDNER

THE ALPHA-MALE’S GUIDE TO POWER-HAIR-STYLING

1. Shampoo daily with Head and Shoulders Dandruff makes you look weak.
2. Let your flaxen mane dry naturally.
3. Use a comb to create a jaunty left side part. Then spray along the part.
4. Wind-swept forelocks suggest vigor. Comb both forelocks toward the back of neck.
5. Pull your bangs to heaven. Then spray along hairline.
6. Drape bangs forward over forehead, then elegantly back over crown of head.
7. **VOILA!**

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SALLY GARDNER 2017
**The Misogynist Within**

You don’t have to be a creep to bolster the culture that creates them.

I’m a misogynist. I’m a black man who likes to think of himself as a feminist. I’m a progressive. I’m gay. Hopefully, I’m a relatively decent guy; I certainly mean well. Still, I’m also a misogynist.

How could I not be? I’ve spent my entire life in a society that, by every imaginable measure, devalues and dismisses women. It’s the case for politics: In the nearly 230-year history of the US Senate, we have elected just 50 women to serve; nearly half of that number are in office now. It’s the case for wages: Women still make roughly 80 cents on the dollar that’s paid to men. It’s the case for families: “Single mother” remains the catchphrase for a jezebel who’s damned her offspring by failing to get and keep a man. It’s even the case for our diversions—in sports stadiums and movie theaters and museum galleries and comedy clubs, and on and drearily on it goes.

We’ve gone so far as to organize our gods around misogyny. The evangelical South’s support for Roy Moore has drawn shocked, breathless comment. But the white South’s Christian faith has always been malleable, bending to accommodate the power of white men.

As Christine Leigh Heyrman lays out in *Southern Cross*, her study of the Bible Belt’s origin story, women and young single men initially dominated evangelical Christianity in Revolutionary-era America with a doctrine that rejected slavery. But these upstart congregations struggled to gain a mass following in the South, because their power structure threatened to undermine a society built around married white men—the lords of the South’s women, children, and enslaved workers. So by the early 1800s, Southern Baptists had stripped women and black people of all decision-making roles. Once the new faith tradition had aligned itself with a white-supremacist patriarchy, it flourished.

Our national history is full of such stories. America is rooted in misogyny, and thus so am I. I have spent most of my adult life trying to acknowledge these facts and correct the way they shape my own behavior.

It has been said that we’re living through a reckoning with sexual harassment on the job. One powerful man after another has been outed as a predator, and my own workplaces have not been spared. This reckoning with sex as a tool of male power has also generated questions about complicity: Who watched and did nothing? Who enabled such bold behavior? When the morning-show anchor turned his office into a dungeon, somebody surely noticed. Certainly, each of these men had active accomplices in management, and those people must be held accountable.

But if we’re honest, the complicity is broader. The dudes flashing their dicks at co-workers and forcing their tongues into people’s mouths are physically acting out the power structure in which they know they live. All of us who are male-identified need to ask ourselves: What role do we play in creating that structure?

We don’t have to be Billy Bush to be part of the problem (though I have let more vile objectification of women pass without challenge than I care to recall). I often think the most damaging way in which men are complicit in patriarchy is by receiving our many privileges as normal. For years, I comfortably accepted the starkly gendered division of caretaking labor in my family, allowing me a freedom of movement that my female cousins did not have. I recall managing teams in which I thoughtlessly rewarded male entitlement, while allowing equally ambitious but less aggressive women on the team to linger in support roles. Learning to undo rather than reinforce gender hierarchies is a permanent project.

As is often the case, I only made contact with the problem when I felt how much I’ve also been hurt by a society built to diminish women.

Masculinity operates like whiteness: It demands control over any space it enters. It plants itself in the center and shoves anything coded as feminine to the edges. In a man’s world, decisive is better than deliberate. Bold is strong; cautious consideration is weak. Reflection invites regret, and that’s

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*Kai Wright*
weak, too. Ditto collectivity—the rugged individual only joins a group in which he can be the reigning hero. And he keeps his emotions in check. Better to strike out in rage than sit in your sadness. I spent far too many years accepting these falsities as obvious truths, wearing them like a straitjacket around my own humanity.

And just as these ideas confine the minds and hearts of men, they corrode public life. They are at least part of the reason that we have an economy organized around greed, a culture that frames collectivity as a threat to individuality, and a politics that approaches nuanced problems with rigid yes/no debates.

Donald Trump is many things—a white supremacist, a crony capitalist, a fluent liar. We likely will be living with the consequences of all those traits for a long time. But the blunt force of Trump’s destructive impulse is drawn most powerfully from his gender identity: He is also a man’s man.

Progressives wrestled with representational politics in 2016. We fought mightily over what, if anything, the fact of Hillary Clinton’s gender should have meant for voters. Trump’s voters were clear what his gender meant for them. It meant a reassertion of patriarchy. It was morning in America for the white man: Grab ‘em by the pussy and give a rebel yell.

And so now we face a reckoning. Let it be more than a coming to terms with sexual harassment. Yes, let’s bring the abusers to justice. But let us also consider the many ways in which we’ve organized ourselves around misogyny—in our workplaces, in our families, and as individuals. Maybe then we can mount a movement larger than Democrats and Republicans, and start talking seriously instead about things like peace, justice, and equity.

DETOUR

The Trump administration has prohibited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from using seven words or phrases, such as “fetus” and “science-based,” in agency budget documents. The EPA has hired a firm to recover the e-mails of any staffers who mention Scott Pruitt or Donald Trump.

He said he’d make us great again
From shore to sandy shore.
But first one detour to the past:
It’s 1984.
Coming Up Roses

With 24,000 new members, Democratic Socialists of America is a budding political force.

ANA HEYWARD
This past October, on a Saturday afternoon in a Unitarian church in Philadelphia, about 50 people were seated in a loose configuration of folding chairs, taking turns raising their hands to speak. Most were in their mid-20s; they wore jeans, sweaters, the occasional nose ring, and backpacks decorated with pins.

The gathering was an “open strategy” session of the local Democratic Socialists of America chapter to talk through DSA’s nascent Medicare for All campaign. A poster affixed to the door showed a line representing the cardiac-rhythm strip of an ECG monitor and featured a rose, an old socialist symbol that DSA has adopted as its logo. Volunteers stood up and shared their experiences knocking on doors and explaining the benefits of single-payer health care on a canvassing trip through the Philly suburbs. One said that she’d been nervous to approach strangers in their homes, but had been surprised by the friendly responses she’d received. Another reported his method of establishing common ground with the person standing in the doorway—by discussing medical problems and costs—and then trying to tie the provision of health care to “socialism as an ideological concept.”

At the front of the room was 23-year-old Melissa Naschek. Four pieces of butcher paper had been taped onto the church basement’s clapboard walls, and each time an idea was suggested, Naschek transcribed it in slanting cursive: “Reaching out to low-wage workers”; “Contact labor unions”; “Media programs”; “How to debate.” Under a category headed “Ignore, the most prominent word was “Trolls.”

Naschek grew up on Long Island with two Democratic-voting professionals for parents. She has long brown hair, glasses, and a deliberate but nervous manner. At a bar around the corner after the DSA meeting, she described what she called her “radicalization.” She was in her final year at the University of Pennsylvania in 2016, studying neuroscience and spending her spare time in the Ivy League Model UN Club. Until that November, she hadn’t been “very political at all”; she was what she termed “a normal liberal.” Naschek voted for Hillary Clinton in both the Democratic primary and the general election. When Donald Trump won, she started questioning the analyses she’d read in her usual media outlets. She switched from The New York Times to leftist publications like The Intercept, In These Times, and Jacobin. The narratives of American politics that she found there, she told me, were “just completely different from anything I’d seen.” Within a few months, Naschek had “denounced liberalism and begun identifying as a socialist.”

She’s one of about 24,000 people—70 to 80 percent of them under 35—who have joined DSA since November 2016. After she graduated in June of that year, Naschek became a researcher and lab technician at her alma mater, a competitive job that can kick-start a career in neuroscience. She earns a little over $20,000 a year, which is enough for the essentials, including her rent, but leaves little for unexpected expenses. She had planned to go to grad school the next year, with the expectation of establishing common ground with the person standing in the doorway—but discussing medical problems and costs—and then trying to tie the provision of health care to “socialism as an ideological concept.”

For most of its 35-year history, DSA has been an obscure fringe group. Its founder, Michael Harrington, grew up in a Republican Irish-Catholic family and had aspired to be a poet. Then he had an epiphany in a streetcar in 1949, according to his own semi-mythological telling. As Harrington recalled it, after he graduated from college, his cousin set him up with a job in the Pupil Welfare Department of the St. Louis public-school system “without any idealistic thought on my part.” Making a home visit to a student one day, Harrington entered a shack in a post-Depression sharecropper dis-
In the house, he later recounted in his autobiography *Fragments of the Century*, he encountered “cooking smells and the stench from the broken, stopped-up toilets…. Suddenly the abstract and statistical and aesthetic outrages I had reacted to at Yale and Chicago became real and personal and insistent.” Riding the streetcar home, Harrington decided to devote his life “to putting an end to that house and all that it symbolized.”

In 1962, he published *The Other America*, a book on poverty that challenged the perception that America had become a middle-class country. Poverty persisted, Harrington wrote, because “the structure of the society is hostile to these people,” perpetuating disability, sickness, and self-doubt, while still “ask[ing] of the poor that they get up and act just like everyone else.” The book made Harrington famous, but it couldn’t sustain a movement. At that time and over the decades that followed, the American left was splintering, uncertain how to respond to the authoritarianism of socialist regimes abroad. Harrington joined, and subsequently quit, a handful of tiny leftist groups. To the larger US society, Harrington said, he and his fellow travelers seemed like “a small band of nuts.”

It was this irrelevance that Harrington wanted to escape when he founded Democratic Socialists of America in 1982 by weaving together the New American Movement and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, two small groups that had grown out of the antiwar movement. Harrington aimed to put aside the left’s infighting: DSA would be an independent coalition working inside and outside the Democratic Party—in other words, a kind of friendly socialist lobby.

Harrington’s slogan, “the left wing of the possible,” highlights the quixotic nature of his vision. For him, socialism in America was a direction rather than an outcome. In Harrington’s DSA, there were no revolutionary politics, but he argued that influencing Democrats could actually work, and therefore those tactics were “the most radical things we can do.”

Still, his approach rested on an optimistic view of the Democratic Party and its relationship to socialist politics. In a conversation in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1984, Harrington’s comrade Irving Howe asked him about DSA’s conciliatory approach and its interaction with centrists. “Time passed, tempers cooled, old disputes faded,” Harrington replied. “And by now practically everyone on the left agrees that the Democratic Party, with all its flaws, must be our main political arena”—a statement that would have been scandalous to Harrington’s friends in the Socialist Party, who lumped Republicans and Democrats together into one big self-serving ruling class.

One of Harrington’s crucial assumptions was that, having lost to a conservative Republican like Ronald Reagan, the Democrats would develop left-leaning policies to oppose him. If anything, the opposite proved true, and versions of Reagan’s policies—particularly on welfare—found their way into Democratic legislation. Even given Harrington’s moderate approach, Democrats rarely wanted anything to do with his project. “Socialism” retained a bad odor, even when modified with the word “democratic.” When Harrington died in 1989, his organization hadn’t grown much beyond the 6,000 aging members it had had at its founding.

Two years after Harrington’s death, a local Baltimore TV channel covered the opening of the 1991 DSA convention, where a speech was given by Bernie Sanders, an independent who had just been elected to the US House of Representatives from Vermont. Sanders opened with a crack about Marxist theory, in which “the moment in history…is never now.” In Vermont, he continued, “we’re not that smart—we’re a little bit dumber”—so he’d decided to eschew the DSA’s strategy and instead run as an independent left candidate against a Democratic opponent.

Similarly, in a 1983 profile in *The New Republic*, Jon Margolis noted that Sanders, then the mayor of Burlington, “disdains what little nationwide Socialist movement there is (the Democratic Socialists of America) for its gradualist philosophy and its ties to the Democratic Party.” Sanders, who wasn’t a DSA member then (and still isn’t), saw no point in trying to be a leftist inside the Democratic Party: “To be cooperative means to be co-opted. If I don’t do anything, what the hell was I elected for?” Still, he was in office, and American socialists didn’t really have much else. At the 1991 convention, Harris Gruman, a DSA member, told the TV anchor something that I heard almost verbatim from DSA members in 2017: “The phenomenon of Bernie Sanders is very encouraging to us.”

DSA is now frequently referred to as “the largest socialist organization in the United States,” with 32,000 dues-paying members. What that means, however, is as deliberately ill-defined as ever. DSA is not a political party, but a self-described “multi-tendency” organization. As it was under Harrington, the party’s structure is broad and mutable; the focus is on principles, not policies. Politically, it accommodates everyone from centrists who believe in public services to communists.

Bhaskar Sunkara, the 28-year-old editor of *Jacobin* magazine, joined DSA in 2007. It was the summer between high school and college for him, and he had taken
an internship at DSA in the same office that it’s located in now, on Maiden Lane in New York City’s financial district. One of the small office windows, he recalled, faced a brick wall. The organization felt “austere and bleak,” an aging remnant of old radical New York. Its activities consisted of going to events and protests that had already been planned by others, mostly just to be there symbolically, as socialists. DSA had two permanent staff- ers in the office, and Sunkara guessed that a lot of the members might have known Harrington personally. The whole thing was “pretty much unblemished,” he told me, “but also it was utterly irrelevant.” During his intern- ship, Sunkara and another junior office worker wanted a watercooler in the office; instead, they had to bring their own mugs to fill in the bathroom.

At DSA meetings, Sunkara said, organizers used to ask: “Is anyone here under 60?” The question now is: “Is anyone here over 30?” Today, the median age of DSA’s membership is 33, down from 68 in 2013. Like the organization itself, all of the events I attended were social, chaotic, and hopeful. There were icebreakers, happy hours, and scraps of paper passed around to gather e- mail addresses. The age distribution is immediately apparent at gatherings, and it gives DSA meetings a funny dynamic, like a multigenerational family get-together in which the parents have left the room.

Despite the organization’s amorphous nature, its aims over the past year have gotten explicitly more political. Chapters formed from the leftovers of the Sanders campaign’s networks—there are now more than 300 local groups—are experimenting with doing their own electoral campaigns, some with running local candidates. In the state and municipal elections across the country on November 7, 15 DSA members won their races, bringing the total number of DSA members in elective office to around 35, as high as it’s ever been. One was Lee Carter, who defeated Jackson Miller, the Republican majority whip of Virginia’s House of Delegates. While Carter received funding from Democratic Party–aligned sources, he positioned himself as an outsider, unbound- en to the party. Toward the end of the race, flyers were distributed that showed Carter’s face alongside Lenin’s and Stalin’s, which Christine Riddiough, a 71-year-old IT professional and a member of DSA’s electoral committee, described to me as an attempt at red-baiting. Riddiough, who lives in Washington, DC, joined DSA at its inception and recognized this ploy from the group’s early days. Back then, she noted, a flyer like that would have seriously damaged a Democratic candidate; but “people aren’t as susceptible to those tactics as they used to be.” The effect, if any, of this late smear campaign was minimal: Carter won 54 percent of the vote, beating the incumbent Miller by eight points. Around 50 DSA vol- unteers worked on Carter’s campaign; Riddiough estimated that they “knocked on most if not all of the doors in that district.”

The people in their 20s who now make up the bulk of DSA’s membership were motivated to join the organization by Sanders, from whom they “heard the phrase ‘democratic socialist’ probably for the first time in their lives,” Riddiough said. “They have turned to DSA probably just because of the name,” and they’re now motivated to take action at the state and local levels.

DSA’s endorsements are recommended by an 11- person electoral committee, and the criteria are loose and intuitive. The candidates should “identify as some kind of socialist” and be willing to advertise their DSA endorse- ment openly. The national body, Riddiough explained, “doesn’t say ‘You can’t do that’” or set compulsory poli- cies or beliefs, and local chapters can support whomever they wish. When I asked what might count as a deal breaker for an official national endorsement, Riddiough...
replied that this was discretionary—and mostly uncharted territory—but that “if some chapter totally goes against principles, we might talk to them.” Perhaps more stringent are the criteria that relate to the organization: It chooses candidates who have at least an outside chance of winning, in order not to symbolically diminish the value of a DSA endorsement. It also aims for those candidates whom it can help through activities like phone-banking, fundraising, and door-to-door canvassing, as well as get-out-the-vote efforts. In other words, DSA emphasizes tasks that give its members some experience in grassroots political organizing as much as they offer the chosen candidate a boost.

“We’re still working out what we’re capable of,” Riddiough said. “There are some in DSA that see it becoming a separate political party, and some who would like to make the Democratic Party move further to the left. Right now, it’s hard to imagine what it will be,” she added. “We want it to be a political force, somehow.”

LIKE MELISSA NASCHER, MANY NEW MEMBERS referred to their “radicalization” when I asked what led them to join DSA. It sometimes seemed an odd term to use for signing up as a dues-paying member in a diffuse organization with few requirements and no strict policy line. The term covered a lot of things about the lives and thinking of these new members, but the most common was a rejection of the Democratic Party. Often, that translated into diminished faith in party politics altogether; for many, the appeal of DSA is precisely that it isn’t a party. These days, there is far less interest in the soul of the Democratic Party than Harrington and his generation had; today’s new members see themselves as further left, and often favor militant ideas more than their predecessors did.

Earlier this year, Jo-Ann Mort, a former vice chair of DSA and a founding member of its feminist commission, published a statement subtitled “The American Left loses its way,” in which she detailed how foreign the organization now felt to her given “the emergence of a younger, more ‘anti-imperialist’ left that sees much a part of the problem as the more mainstream democratic leaders.” Mort wrote that it’s unlikely Michael Harrington “would have felt at home, were he alive, in the organization he founded…. [I]t’s not even clear to me that he would have been welcomed in today’s DSA.”

Joseph Schwartz, a professor of political science at Temple University who has been a member of DSA since the beginning, told me that back when he joined, people had come from the New Left—a term for the social-justice-driven activist movements of the 1970s—but also from labor groups, which are much weaker now. Today, Schwartz said, DSA is the “new New Left.”

“DSA almost doesn’t stand for anything,” he continued, “and 10 years ago revolutionaries wouldn’t have joined DSA.” It was regarded, another longtime member offered, as a place for “shills for the Democratic Party.”

When I asked Schwartz what he’d noticed about today’s new members, he replied: “ Radicalized liberals can briefly go through a phase. Now it’s hip to say you’re a Marxist-Leninist. People like the hammer and sickle; they like to wear a red star, have the postcards in their bedroom.” Schwartz, born in the Bronx in 1954, found this baffling. “I know it’s trendy: ‘Screw the bourgeoisie.’ But, you know”—he paused—“Marx wanted to expropriate the bourgeoisie, not exterminate them.”

Rahel Biru, the 29-year-old co-chair of DSA’s New York City chapter and an administrative manager for a start-up, has spent the past year “onboarding disillusioned Democrats,” as she put it. People are joining so fast, she added, that it’s hard to know what their membership might mean to them: “Right now, people are a little too comfortable saying DSA is x or y, when maybe it’s not. People are subsuming their discomfort with, say, a commune to campaign for single-payer. Marxists are swallowing their discomfort with, say, our participation in the Democratic primary.”

When we talked about recruiting people to the organization, Biru mentioned Twitter as an important resource, since so many of DSA’s new members have formed their politics online. The organization has always been largely white and male: It’s roughly 90 percent white and 75 percent male, a makeup that is impossible not to notice at meetings and gatherings. “For whatever reason,” said Biru, who is black, “socialism attracts white men. I don’t know why, but they’re really into it, and they self-recruit.”

One particular Twitter user, @LarryWebsite, is responsible for more than 10 percent of DSA’s new membership. The owner of the handle, 25-year-old Christian Bowe from New Jersey, came up with using the now ubiquitous rose emoji to indicate one’s DSA membership online, and he told me that he has carefully refined his Twitter posting into a deliberate recruiting strategy—one that includes publishing pictures of food, memes about Marxism, and references to the number 69.

Sunkara told me that many of the people joining DSA now tend to “know what they’re against” because they’re unhappy with the status quo, and that, today, “one of our main enemies is the center.” Membership in DSA offers some analysis of the world, as well as ways to participate in politics and activism. The orga-
The Nation's recent growth—much of it among a “sub-cultural left, young people in their 20s,” according to Sunkara—makes it a phenomenon, but not necessarily a meaningful one. Or as R.L. Stephens, a former campaign strategist at the service workers’ union Unite Here who joined DSA in February, told me, the risk is that DSA will become “an open forum,” a network rather than a site of political action.

This past August, the DSA national convention took place in Chicago. There were about 1,000 attendees, and several media outlets covered “the largest gathering of democratic socialists in an era.” DSA’s political priorities and strategies, as broad and nonbinding as they might be, are periodically set at the convention, where a 16-person group called the National Political Committee is elected every two years, in what has historically been a fairly calm and uncompetitive process. The lead-up to the August convention, however, was different. With DSA’s sudden growth and significance, the stakes for its members were higher; the campaigning and electioneering began in the spring with 42 candidates in all, far outstripping the number in previous years.

Over the summer, three loose coalitions formed, each bearing its own program: Momentum, Praxis, and Unity. When I asked the members of the groups how they differed, I was told that Momentum consisted of “soft Trotskyites” and was the most explicitly Marxist, oriented toward the campaign for single-payer and other overarching policy initiatives. Praxis was “Maoism lite,” with a “from-the-ground-up” approach and the heaviest focus on social justice and questions of identity. Praxis emphasized new ways of engaging people, such as the free clinic for repairing brake lights that the DSA chapter in New Orleans recently mounted. (Broken brake lights are a common reason for police stops, which can escalate into immigration or criminal-background checks, especially for people of color.)

Both Momentum and Praxis consist predominantly of young people, while the third coalition, Unity, was the least ideological, with an emphasis that was described to me as “old-DSA-ish stuff” (i.e., cooperation with the Democratic Party) and “reform and realignment.”

Even when you’re speaking directly to members of each group, clarifying their differences can be difficult, and the three blocs remain in a messy semipublic competition with one another. But as much as their philosophies might overlap, each group presents a distinct direction for DSA at a time when the organization’s primary task is helping to define what socialism might look like in the United States today.

On August 6, the afternoon the convention ended, the Twitter handle @turing_police, an account from Los Angeles that is regularly critical of DSA, posted a series of tweets about a newly elected National Political Committee member, Danny Fetonte, referring to him as an “Actual Police Officer.” Fetonte, a co-chair of DSA’s Austin chapter, had, between 2009 and 2014, worked for CLEAT (the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas), a subdivision of the Communications Workers of America and the state’s most powerful police union. Earlier in the year, CLEAT had opposed an early version of the anti-racial-profiling Sandra Bland Act; the union has a “Blue Lives Matter”-ish reputation, mostly due to accusations that it has helped to protect brutal cops.

Fetonte hadn’t explicitly mentioned his work with CLEAT in his campaign materials for 2017, instead describing his time as spent organizing “state workers.” The tweets picked up steam online, and within 24 hours things had reached a crisis level. People threatened to withhold their dues or resign their memberships in DSA unless Fetonte was expelled. Those in favor of his expulsion argued that people of color and those victimized by police brutality were alienated by Fetonte’s presence and that it symbolically reinforced white supremacy—at the same convention, a resolu-
tion had been passed advocating the “abolition of prisons,” evidence of the new politics of a younger generation with which Fetonte, who is 67, seemed out of step, if not actually at odds.

Those against Fetonte’s expulsion argued that there were procedural standards and rules that made it untenable—and also that DSA had no precedent for taking action against members based on their employment history. Fetonte, for his part, dug in his heels and got a lawyer. He claimed that he had hidden nothing (when he ran for the same position in 2015, his work with CLEAT was explicitly mentioned). Although Fetonte’s employment with CLEAT ended when he began to feel that his politics weren’t in line with those of the police union’s leadership, he became known on social media as “the DSA cop.” By the time he resigned weeks later, on September 8, Fetonte had posted several letters online, sometimes referring to himself in the third person. In one missive, he wrote that his detractors resided in “Berkeley and Brooklyn”—i.e., middle-class kids in their 20s who were mired in questions of theory and an academic conception of politics—and dismissed them as “Internet bullies who act tough behind a keyboard but have never been hit by a billy club, never been in a street fight, never fought scabs on a picket line, and never been arrested” and therefore had no “knowledge learned in life, no respect for folks who have lived real struggle and have built real organizations.”

Fetonte-gate was a conundrum for DSA, which, having been small and insignificant for so long, isn’t used to solving conundrums. During my months observing the organization, I spoke with many members who had previously worked for entities that could be considered at odds with DSA’s values: the US military, the white-shoe law firm Jones Day (which has mounted several conservative legal challenges to the Affordable Care Act), and the Democratic Party itself. Indeed, I spoke with one other person who had previously held a position similar to Fetonte’s—as a union organizer for correction officers—and who remains a DSA member to this day. For his part, Fetonte said: “The background of the dispute about me was not based totally on the police.” Instead, the antipathy from his younger co-adjuvants, he told me, was “because I want to work with progressive Democrats.”

In addition to stirring online outrage, the Fetonte controversy divided an already factionalized organization. It also showed how greatly the membership had outgrown its regulating apparatus. “Right now, the goal is achieving operational unity,” said Schwartz, the longtime DSA member. “That’s what’s being worked on as much as anything. How do we bridge personality differences? That’s what we’re thinking. It’s not like we know how to build a project like single-payer.” Projects like that, it became clear, are contingent on how well the organization works overall.

It’s hard to imagine what DSA should look like, because there aren’t many precedents. The most common political groups either work the way political parties do, requiring some adherence and loyalty to a party line, or through delegation, whereby believers pay their dues and staff members then go out and organize. DSA’s model can be disorderly, because it’s based on radical democratic participation. When every voice is amplified to the same level and everyone’s participation is weighted the same, there are moments when it’s unclear what they’re even doing together.

DSA has a newly youthful feel to it, startlingly dissimilar from the geriatric-seeming organization before 2016. Sometimes, speaking with these newly minted socialists, I wondered whether the lack of clarity could present some advantage. This generation may need a new definition of “democratic socialism,” one that departs from its previous history.

Dustin Guastella, a 26-year-old graduate student from the Philadelphia chapter who works on DSA’s Medicare for All campaign, told me that even though the organization’s politics can be a little muddled, the hope is that “things will congeal over time around strategy, around whatever ends up being the most appealing.” Much of what happened over the past year “was more moods,” he added. “Some of those are productive, some not, to put it kindly.” But politics “develop reactively over time. They don’t start coherent.” When Guastella speaks with new members at meetings—where 100 people will reliably turn up—“you get so many different answers when you ask, ‘What is the ideology?’ But you get very clear answers when you ask, ‘What are the programmatic issues that are important?’”

The great DSA upsurge came between November 2016 and February 2017, when over 10,000 people joined. Their first year’s membership is now up for renewal, and it’s an open question how many of these people, who joined in reaction to Trump and Clinton, will stay. The organization is still relatively small, and most of the day-to-day work of organizing is boring, granular, and repetitive—something that many new members have been immersed in for the first time. Christian Bowe, the recruiter known for his Twitter presence, told me he’s aiming for around 6,000, or a 60 percent retention rate.

Throughout the years of his own membership, Schwartz said, DSA has had a terrible time recruiting people. “Now these people are chasing DSA, rather than DSA chasing people. We don’t even really know what brings people out of the woodwork. But now, these young people—most of them view their new political home as DSA.”

They’ll be the ones to decide what happens next.
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“Resistence” was the watchword for 2017. Resistance not just to Donald Trump, but to a status quo that gave our most powerful bully pulpit to an actual bully. Progressives not only refused to go backward in 2017; they demand a new conversation that challenged old orthodoxies. The hashtag #MeToo became the bellwether for a national dialogue about sexual abuse, workplace discrimination, and equal rights that is opening the way for societal transformation. The stunning electoral victories of nontraditional candidates in unexpected places signaled that a new politics really is possible. What began as a frightening and frustrating year ended with Alabama voters rejecting one of Trump’s most vile allies in favor of a decent Democrat, Doug Jones, who claimed his victory in that state’s senatorial contest by citing one of Martin Luther King Jr.’s favorite quotations: “The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Here are some of the progressives who bent the arc in 2017.

**Most Valuable Senator**

**Elizabeth Warren**

When Steve Bannon declared last February that the Trump administration was working toward “the deconstruction of the administrative state,” Warren recognized precisely what was at stake. The senator from Massachusetts knew that while the Trump agenda might frequently be hobbled by GOP disarray in Congress and judicial pushback, it would be advanced by the president’s appointees to cabinet posts and regulatory panels. Warren made it her mission to challenge Trump’s picks. Her diligence (along with that of the unions) helped prevent one of Trump’s worst nominees, fast-food executive Andrew Puzder, from becoming labor secretary. Her probing questions in confirmation hearings and searing speeches on the Senate floor so rattled Republicans that they tried to shut her down.

When Warren opposed Trump’s nomination of Jeff Sessions as attorney general by reading, from the Senate floor, a 1986 statement by Coretta Scott King opposing Ronald Reagan’s nomination of Sessions to serve on the federal bench, majority leader Mitch McConnell rushed to silence her. Charging that she had “impugned the motives and conduct of our colleague from Alabama,” the Republican got his colleagues to bar Warren from participating in the remainder of the debate. “She was warned,” McConnell announced. “She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” The majority leader had unwittingly created a meme; the “she persisted” line, which now adorns T-shirts, posters, and bumper stickers, became the preeminent rallying cry of 2017.

Warren plays defense brilliantly, as was evident when she shredded administration moves to derail the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. But she’s best on offense: making monopolization of the economy a political issue, working with Senator Bernie Sanders to get Democrats on board for single-payer health care, and successfully amending the National Defense Authorization Act to require an annual report detailing civilian casualties resulting from US military operations.

**Most Valuable Reading of the Constitution**

**Kirsten Gillibrand**

Gillibrand started 2017 by opposing 20 of Trump’s 22 major cabinet and White House picks—more than any other Democrat. In a year that saw the New Yorker take more than her share of courageous stands—as scrutiny of sexual harassment mounted, she was well ahead of the curve in calling for the resignations of both Democratic Senator Al Franken and President Trump—Gillibrand bravely cast the sole vote against confirming James Mattis as defense secretary. Objecting to easing the ban on recently retired generals taking charge at the Pentagon, she declared: “I still believe that civilian control of our military is fundamental to the American democracy.” That dissent may have been lonely, but it was based on a proper reading of the Constitution that too many of her fellow senators neglect when issues of war and peace arise.

**Most Valuable Senate Watchdog**

**Sherrod Brown**

Sherrod Brown spent 2017 calling out senators who did not share—or, in some cases, even understand—his economic populism. When the Senate moved in October to prevent the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau from banning “mandatory arbitration clauses” that favor big banks and credit-card companies, the Ohio Democrat let rip. “What Congress is trying to do today is, frankly, outrageous,” he thundered. “Our job is to look out for the people we serve—not Wall Street banks.”

—Sherrod Brown
Most Valuable House Progressive

Jan Schakowsky

The Illinois Democrat finished 2017 by ripping GOP tax policies with seasonally appropriate verse (“’Twas the Night Before Tax Scam”) that concluded by warning Paul Ryan, “There’s nowhere to hide, / There’s no ‘cover your ass,’ / When you choose to take sides / Against the middle class.” A product of the Prairie State’s rough-and-tumble politics, Schakowsky knows how to fight—but she does so with a humor and humanity that’s often missing from congressional clashes. This has made her a leading figure in both the House Democratic Caucus and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. She kept her party united on votes to preserve the Affordable Care Act and to protect Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. But Schakowsky didn’t stop there; she waded into every debate, leading the charge to protect the Children’s Health Insurance Program, cut prescription-drug prices, preserve net neutrality, defend immigrants, and expand protections for women in the workplace.

Most Valuable House Newcomer

Ro Khanna

Capitol Hill’s steadiest champion of congressional oversight on war-making, Representative Barbara Lee always needs allies. She got a great one when Khanna arrived in January. Lee’s fellow California Democrat jumped into a leadership post with the Congressional Progressive Caucus (as did two other outstanding newcomers, Washington’s Pramila Jayapal and Maryland’s Jamie Raskin) and emerged as a savvy champion of net neutrality. But the law-school instructor made his boldest mark as an advocate for the restoration of constitutional checks and balances. Khanna decried the use of tax dollars to “bomb and starve civilians” in Yemen and—working with CPC co-chair Mark Pocan and libertarian-leaning Republicans—drafted legislation to block US support for Saudi Arabia’s brutal assault on that country. In November, Khanna and his allies forced a debate on the issue, getting the chamber to vote 366–30 for a nonbinding resolution stating that US military assistance for the Saudi war was not authorized by Congress. That was a small step. But with support growing for Lee’s effort to overturn the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which has served as an excuse for military adventurism, Khanna says the Yemen vote signals that the project of “re-orienting our foreign policy away from our Saudi alliance and away from neocon/neoliberal interventionism” is finally beginning.

Most Valuable House Speech

Joe Kennedy III

Infuriated by the empty statements and inaction of House Republicans after the October 1 massacre in Las Vegas that left 59 dead and more than 500 injured, Representative Kennedy took to the floor of the chamber as the grandson of a presidential contender who was murdered by a gun-wielding assassin, as the great-nephew of a president who was felled by bullets from another assassin, and as an ardent advocate for all families who have lost loved ones to guns. “Ending gun violence isn’t political. This is personal,” said the Massachusetts Democrat. “We are not powerless. We are not helpless. We are not hostages to some political organization. We are not bystanders, as bullets tear through concerts and prayer circles and elementary-school classrooms and nightclubs and military compounds and quiet neighborhoods. This is up to us—to every single American. This is our country and our home and our families. We can decide that one person’s right to bear arms does not come at the expense of a neighbor’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Most Valuable New Governor

Phil Murphy

The headlines reporting off-year Democratic election wins highlighted Ralph Northam’s important victory in Virginia’s gubernatorial contest. But Northam held a Democratic seat, while New Jersey’s Phil Murphy flipped one. And he did so by running as a progressive on a host of issues. Chris Christie’s replacement describes gun violence as “a public health crisis,” calls for “ending the era of high-stakes testing” in public schools, and promises to defend immigrants’ rights by opposing “any efforts to use state and local police to assist in mass deportations.” He also wants to create a state-run public bank. “It is time to bring the money home so it can build our future,” says the former banker. “We will do this by redirecting resources to a bank that is committed to making investments in and for New Jersey because it will be owned by the people of New Jersey.”

Most Valuable Legislators

Gilda Cobb-Hunter and Other Women Who Say “We, Too…”

“It’s apparent that leadership to address sexual violence and harassment will not come from the federal level under the current administration,” read an October 31 letter by South Carolina state legislator Gilda Cobb-Hunter, along with Colorado’s Daneya Esgar, California’s Cristina Garcia, Oregon’s Sara Gelser, Georgia’s Renitta Shannon, Rhode Island’s Teresa Tanzi, and Illinois’s Litesa Wallace. “But in the states, there are concrete steps we can take to support survivors, hold offenders accountable, and prevent this behavior in the first place.”

The legislators explained that “we, too, have experienced harassment or assault. And we are saying enough. We, too, want to see change. And we are taking action to transform #MeToo from a social media movement into real change.” They proposed specific legislative initiatives, but they also suggested an electoral response: “Today, women make up just 24.8 percent of all state legislators in the nation, but after the 2016 election, more than 20,000 women are considering running for office. We have faith that these women can win and will join those of us who are working every day to demand solutions.”

Most Valuable Mayor

Carmen Yulín Cruz

Puerto Rico is not allowed to send voting representatives to the US Congress. But after Hurricanes Irma and Maria swept through the Caribbean, San Juan’s mayor refused to allow the federal government to neglect the people of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Her objection to claims that bumbling recovery efforts were somehow going smoothly drew the ire of President Trump, but Cruz did not back down. “The Trump administration can’t handle the truth,” she declared. Addressing the president
directly, Cruz said: “Mr. Trump, do your job. Lives are at stake. This is not about politics. This is not about your ego. This is about the people of Puerto Rico and the [Virgin Islands].” Her advocacy got national attention and helped secure vital aid, as officials recognized the truth of Cruz’s assertion that “survival cannot be our new way of life.”

**Most Valuable Inside/Outside Progressive**

**Bernie Sanders**

Polls identify him as the nation’s most popular prominent political figure, and Sanders used that popularity to build movements in 2017. The Vermont senator did plenty of work in the Senate: introducing Medicare for All legislation that drew unprecedented support, and grilling Trump cabinet picks like Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, whom he asked: “Do you think, if you were not a multibillionaire, if your family had not made hundreds of millions of dollars of contributions to the Republican Party, that you would be sitting here today?” Outside Washington, Sanders rallied red-state voters against Trump’s agenda, defending the Affordable Care Act at “Care Not Cuts” rallies in Kentucky and West Virginia; barnstormed across Pennsylvania and Ohio on a “Protect Working Families” tour sponsored by MoveOn.org and Not One Penny to oppose the GOP tax bill; and helped Indiana steelworkers expose the administration’s failure to advance fair trade. Sanders also marched in favor of union rights in Mississippi with thousands of United Auto Workers activists, civil-rights campaigners, and members of the new Good Jobs Defenders coalition.

**Most Valuable Protest (National)**

**Women’s March on Washington**

January 20 was the most dispiriting day of 2017. Donald Trump didn’t just assume the presidency; he did so with an ominous rumination on “American carnage” that confirmed the worst fears about him. But within hours of his swearing-in, Trump was checked and balanced. The Women’s March—brilliantly organized and promoted by a network of activists that included co-chairs Linda Sarsour, Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Bob Bland—filled the capital’s streets with crowds dramatically larger than those drawn by the new president. Sister marches stepped off from Maine to California and from Florida to Alaska, as millions joined what political scientists called the largest single-day protest in US history. The massive, multi-city uprising so unsettled Trump that he is still sputtering about crowd sizes. Marchers maintained momentum by pulling together more than 5,000 huddles to advance their “10 Actions for the First 100 Days” agenda—putting women at the center of a nationwide resistance.

**Most Valuable Protest (Local)**

**Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba**

After his landslide election in June as mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, Lumumba announced that he planned to make his hometown “the most radical city on the planet.” He has kept that promise with an ambitious agenda that includes cooperative development, citizen budgeting, and social and economic policies inspired by the activist movements of the 1960s and ‘70s. So when Trump arrived in Jackson in December to attend opening ceremonies for the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, Lumumba was not on the dais but outside with NAACP leaders. “It is my appreciation for the Mississippi martyrs not here—the names both known and unknown—that will not allow me, that will not allow many of us standing here today, to share a stage with a president who has not demonstrated a continuing commitment to civil rights, a continuing commitment to human rights, a continuing commitment to women’s rights,” explained Lumumba, who spoke of his desire to “write a new narrative” for Mississippi, America, and the world. By refusing to appear with a president who keeps reading from the old script, Lumumba did just that.

**Most Valuable Union**

**American Postal Workers Union**

If you want to see solidarity in action, consider the response of the union that represents more than 200,000 US Postal Service employees and retirees to last summer’s Nazi violence in Charlottesville, Virginia. APWU president Mark Dimondstein explained to his members that rallying “for equality and against the hate-mongers” is essential union work. “What does all this have to do with the APWU? Everything!” argued Dimondstein. “Fascists are bitter enemies of workers and our unions. Their race and religious bigotry, intimidation, and violence are a direct threat to our unity and ability to stand up and fight back to save the public Postal Service, win good contracts, gain better working conditions, enjoy a better life, and live in a more just society.”

**Most Valuable Grassroots Activism**

**ADAPT and Disability Action for America**

The greatest credit for blocking repeated attempts by congressional Republicans to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut Medicaid goes to disability-rights activists, who rely on the ACA and Medicaid for their survival and for that of their families. They traveled to Washington at great physical and economic expense to save the ACA—and to argue for a health-care system that provides all Americans with the care and dignity they deserve. Called
to action by ADAPT, a grassroots disability-rights organization with chapters in more than 20 states, as well as Disability Action for America and other groups, and supported by passionate allies such as Ben Wikler, Washington director of MoveOn.org, they took the lead. “While it’s important to work with our allies fighting against [ACA repeal], the importance of disability-led efforts cannot be overstated,” ADAPT said. “We are the ones who will be harmed first, and most, by this bill. We are responsible for getting our message through. Nothing about us without us!” These activists were everywhere in Washington, and they never backed down. In saving the ACA, they taught us all a lesson in resistance.

**Most Valuable Arts Publication**

**Cineaste**

Founded 50 years ago, *Cineaste* provides cutting-edge commentary regarding filmmaking and smart, incisive reviews of new movies. But that’s just the beginning of the contribution this magazine makes to the broader discourse in the United States. *Cineaste* editor in chief Gary Crowdus has assembled a team of editors and writers who are determined to explore the role that films play in shaping our understanding of race, class, gender, and more. For decades, this journal has challenged the status quo in the film industry and in our culture—celebrating mavericks and independents, objecting to stereotyping and dumbed-down commercialism, and highlighting the contributions of women and people of color in Hollywood and around the film world. As the lines between entertainment and politics blur, *Cineaste* provides clarity.

**Most Valuable Media Intervention**

**Public News Service**

When journalist Dan Heyman was arrested at the West Virginia State Capitol in May after he questioned visiting Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price on whether victims of domestic violence would be protected under one of the GOP’s “repeal and replace” healthcare schemes, we were all reminded of the essential role of statehouse reporters. Heyman was able to fight back against the charge of “willful disruption of governmental processes”—which was eventually dropped—because he is part of a network of state-based reporters organized by the Public News Service. Developed to fill the void created by declining newspaper, radio, and television coverage of public-policy issues, PNS gets coalitions of organizations to fund journalism that covers neglected state issues. The reports are aired by commercial and community radio stations and often end up in print and online. PNS manages news services in 37 states, including West Virginia—where Heyman is still on the beat.

**Most Valuable Local Radio Show**

**Rose Aguilar’s Your Call**

Every weekday morning on San Francisco public-radio station KALW, Rose Aguilar hosts one of the finest hours of political and cultural discussion in the country. An accomplished journalist and author, Aguilar comes prepared with probing questions and deep analysis. This is smart, serious radio that emphasizes new voices and new issues—with regular appearances by activists, authors, and callers from around the world. Aguilar’s *Media Roundtable* program (which features many *Nation* writers) highlights the work of journalists who are on the ground from the Midwest to the Middle East, and she’s never afraid to ask why other outlets aren’t covering the stories that matter most.

**Most Valuable Song**

**“I Give You Power” by Arcade Fire & Mavis Staples**

Protest music made a comeback in 2017. Fiona Apple wrote an anthem for the Women’s March (“We don’t want your tiny hands anywhere near our underpants…”). Bruce Springsteen and former Iron City Houserockers leader Joe Grushecky ripped the new president on “That’s What Makes Us Great” (“I never put my faith in a con man and his crooks…”). Joey Bada$$ spoke truth to power with “Land of the Free” (“And Donald Trump is not equipped to take this country over…”). Eminem delivered a freestyle anti-Trump rap that declared: “Any fan of mine who’s a supporter of his / I’m drawing in the sand a line: You’re either for or against.” But there was something epic—and refreshingly optimistic—about the collaboration between Mavis Staples, who’s been singing freedom songs since the civil-rights era, and indie rockers Arcade Fire on “I Give You Power.” Released on the eve of Trump’s inauguration (with proceeds directed to the American Civil Liberties Union), the song asked, “Who gives you power? Where do you think it all comes from?” It answered: “I give you power. I can take it all away.”

**Most Valuable Book**

**Democracy in Chains by Nancy MacLean**

Donald Trump did not turn the Republican Party into the debacle it has become, and Paul Ryan did not squeeze the conscience out of conservatism. They simply took advantage of the dirty work done by the Koch brothers and their co-conspirators. *The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America*—as MacLean’s book is subtitled—puts today’s crisis in context, describing the six-decade project of the elites who have used their billions to warp academia, the media, and democracy itself. MacLean, a professor of history and public policy at Duke University, explains how the far right created the conditions in which it’s become easier for billionaires to buy elections and harder for voters to cast ballots in them. Her book is a powerful indictment—and an even more powerful call to action.

**Most Valuable Modern Pamphleteer**

**Bill Moyers**

When no one else seemed to get it, Moyers embraced and amplified the work that Bob McChesney and I have done on media issues; his support for reform was a huge boost to groups like Free Press. Countless other movements could say the same. Moyers, 83, announced in December that the last of his many media platforms, BillMoyers.com, would “go into archive mode.” It’s a good bet he’ll keep speaking out, but his decision inspired an outpouring of appreciation, reminding us that, as his pamphleteering hero Tom Paine did in the 18th century, Moyers has popularized revolutionary ideas, radical proposals, and transformational movements that will come to be seen as the common sense of the 21st century.
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(continued from page 2)

ignominious end to the much-touted “City on the Hill”!

Schlaik was right: “This is not a good century to write a constitution.” Not at the time when the plutocracy is at the height of its control over every aspect of government, both federally and in the states.

We first have to do the hard work of wresting control back to the people, against the current odds of gerrymandering, unlimited money, voter suppression, and a controlled media. And once we do regain control, a dangerous, omnipotent convention will not be necessary; we would be able to pass individual amendments through congressional action.

We should not accept the spider’s invitation to enter its web. Let us instead adopt the slogan “No Koch convention!”

Harvey Frey
Santa Monica, Calif.

Richard Kreitner Replies

My article addresses most of the points raised by these letters, so I won’t rehearse them. Others—“City on the Hill”!—are self-refuting. I do, however, want to note one particular strain of rhetoric often wielded by reflexive opponents of an Article V convention and found, predictably, here.

I stand accused by Ulysses Lateiner and Harvey Frey of daydreaming and fantasy, respectively, yet it seems to me that it must be those who believe salvation lies somewhere down the road we are currently traveling who are, in fact, the unwitting victims of their own comforting illusions. Frey looks forward to victory in the next election while nodding to “the current odds of gerrymandering, unlimited money, voter suppression, and a controlled media.” How, exactly, victory over these odds will occur is left up to “hard work.” I realize this might diminish the swelling returns of the “Now more than ever” school of fundraising, but what, dear friends, if hard work isn’t enough? The skilled marketers of the Democratic Party—those savants—may win back the Senate, the House, and perhaps even the presidency in 2020 (though, of course, there’s absolutely no reason to think the Electoral College won’t allow the bastards to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat yet again, as it has twice already in this lamentable century). But without first adopting a truly bold new program for reconstruction and renewal—which, with all due respect to Chuck Schumer’s “Better Deal,” appears to be nowhere on the horizon—what will that avail?

As I write, an act of class warfare of unprecedented scope and brutality is sailing to passage in the Senate. So much damage has been done in only the first year of Trump’s administration that I fear it’s distinctly possible, even probable, we may never recover.

In another moment of national crisis, following the deadlocked election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson called the possibility of future conventions “a perpetual and peaceful resource...in whatever extremity may befall us.” I thank the writers for their thoughts, and I recognize the risks, but I remain unmoved. A country that finds itself blown this far off course and yet forswears the only instrument available for self-correction is a country that no longer believes it is capable of self-government, and may not be, and may well deserve the entirely foreseeable consequences of that information getting abroad.

Richard Kreitner
New York City
n the winter of 1960, Mary McCarthy—the writer whom Norman Mailer once described as “our saint, our umpire, our lit arbiter, our broadsword”—gave a series of lectures in Europe sponsored by the US State Department. McCarthy was 47. Having published four well-received novels, she was struggling with a new one, about eight Vassar graduates living through the political and economic upheavals of 1930s New York.

McCarthy never knew just who would be in the audience that winter—they might be university students, children, intellectuals, retirees—so she rarely bothered to prepare a formal speech. Instead, she spoke in an impromptu fashion about the challenges of writing novels in the second half of the 20th century—after the golden age of realism, after modernism’s explosion, after Auschwitz. “The writing of a novel has become problematic today,” she declared in “The Fact in Fiction,” an essay she published based on her lectures. Novelists had turned away from the social world; they were no longer concerned “with the actual world, the world of fact, of the verifiable, of figures, events, and statistics.” They did not “stoop to gossip,” as the great novelists—Austen, Joyce, Kafka—once did. Instead, in 1960, the average writer was credentialed and professionalized; he lived in a world composed largely of “other writers and his girl friends” (and, perhaps lamentably, colleagues in a university English department). This was

Maggie Doherty is a lecturer at Harvard. The Equivalents, her first book, will be published by Knopf.
why the novel was so moribund in America. But McCarthy thought that a new generation of writers could reverse this trend: “someone may be able to believe again in the reality, the factuality, of the world.”

“The Fact in Fiction” offers the best of Mary McCarthy; her considered criticism of writers, her careful taxonomies, her bold and withering condemnations, and her impeccable, almost fastidious sentences. These were the qualities that made her one of the most respected—and feared—critics of her generation. They also reveal what she valued in fiction, both in what she read and what she wrote. Verisimilitude was paramount. Depicting a social world was more valuable than rendering a subjective consciousness, unless that consciousness was itself given to observations about the social world. A novelist could entertain, she could illuminate, but she must never swerve from the world as it is experienced. “Factuality,” her word for a precise and honest accounting of the observable world, was both McCarthy’s literary standard and her lodestar.

McCarthy’s fiction, collected by the Library of America in two new volumes, shows how her preoccupation with factuality shaped her art. “The collection includes all seven of her novels—the first published in 1942, the last in 1979—as well as collected and uncolllected stories and an essay on “the novels that got away.” Through it all, we see McCarthy’s fixation on the surface details that distinguish class and character: a middle-aged man from the Midwest who is given to wearing Brooks Brothers suits; a Yale man working at a leftist magazine who sports a “well-cut brown suit that needed pressing”; bohemian couples living on Cape Cod who drink too much and don’t bother keeping house. We learn that it was a status symbol in 1930s New York for a Vassar graduate to serve coffee with real cream.

But this emphasis on accuracy was more than just a literary aesthetic; it was a moral and political position, a principle to live by. McCarthy was allergic to groupthink in all its forms, as skeptical of the small political sects of the 1930s as she was of mass culture in the 1950s. She participated briefly in Communist Party activities and was on the left her entire life, but she never surrendered her independent mind in the name of solidarity.

In her fiction, McCarthy offered unsparing portraits of the people in her circle—thus risking, and sometimes losing, the support and affection of friends. (She shamelessly “stooped to gossip.”) For her, the responsibilities of the novelist were the same as those of the intellectual: to observe the world carefully and to discern and communicate the truth, unpopular as it may be. In her criticism, she delivered devastating evaluations of new fiction and theater. Of Eugene O’Neill, she once wrote: He “belongs to that group of American authors, which includes Farrell and Dreiser, whose choice of vocation was a kind of triumphant catastrophe; none of these men possessed the slightest ear for the word, the sentence, the paragraph; all of them, however, have, so to speak, enforced the career they decreed for themselves by a relentless policing of the beat.”

She was helplessly, hopelessly honest, even when it wasn’t in her best interest. When her biographer dropped by for an interview, McCarthy was so forthright that she later worried she could be sued for libel. After her death in 1989, her close friend Elizabeth Hardwick tried to explain McCarthy’s adherence to fact: “If one would sometimes take the liberty of suggesting caution to her, advising prudence or mere practicality, she would look puzzled and answer: But it’s the truth.” McCarthy believed in precision in all things, and she abhorred shortcuts. She tried to take in all the details of her surroundings and produced work that serves as a document of its time. Reading her collected fiction, we may marvel at how much her cold eye saw—but we may also note the things it missed.

A t least some of McCarthy’s political and aesthetic commitments can be attributed to Catholicism, the religion of her youth. Mary McCarthy was born in Seattle in 1912 to an Irish Catholic father and a half-Protestant, half-Jewish mother. Her father, Roy, was charming, a bit wayward, and devoted to his children. Her mother, Tess, was a great beauty who converted to Catholicism at the time of her marriage. She was also, as her daughter remembered it, more enthusiastic about her adopted faith: She “made us feel that it was a special treat to be a Catholic…. Our religion was a present to us from God.”

McCarthy was the first of the couple’s four children and the only girl. In the fall of 1918, in the midst of a flu epidemic, the McCarthy family moved from Seattle back to Minneapolis, where Roy’s family lived. All six were stricken with the flu; the children recovered, but Roy and Tess died. “Poor Roy’s children” went to live with two middle-aged guardians, a great-aunt and her husband, in the house that their paternal grandparents had purchased for Roy’s family.

In a series of memoirs, later collected in Memories of a Catholic Girlhood (1957), McCarthy recounted the deprivation and cruelty that marked her childhood. Whippings were frequent, and reading was forbidden. Myers, their great-uncle, spent many winter days making candy, but the children never tasted a single sweet. When McCarthy won a prize for a school essay, Myers beat her with a razor strop—to teach me a lesson, he said, lest I become stuck-up.” McCarthy and her brother Kevin took turns running away from home; they had “evolved an identical project—to get ourselves placed in an orphan asylum.” Eventually, McCarthy managed to persuade her maternal grandparents to take her in; Kevin and Preston went to their paternal grandparents, while Sheridan, the youngest, stayed with the guardians. Years later, in earlier chapters of Memories, McCarthy wondered why her paternal grandparents, who lived just two blocks away, hadn’t intervened earlier. By the time Memories was published, she’d learned that her grandfather had spent over $40,000 caring for her and her brothers, and she included this new information in one of the book’s many corrective interludes. McCarthy was the kind of writer who fact-checked her own memoir.

McCarthy attended the Sacred Heart convent school, where she experienced something of an aesthetic awakening. She was awed by the “sound of the French words…the luster of the wide moire ribbons cutting, military-wise, across young bosoms, the curtained beds in the dormitories, the soft step of the girls, the curtseys to the floor, the white hands of the music master…. The cricket played in the playground, the wooden rattle of the surveillante’s clapper.” She admired the orchestration, the precision, the school’s emphasis on doing the right things the right way. “I felt as though I stood on the outskirts and observed the ritual of a cult,” she later wrote, “a cult of fashion and elegance in the sphere of religion.”

At her high school, she fell in love with literature and got the idea of going to Vassar. There, McCarthy befriended some literary women, including Elizabeth Bishop, and
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produced a “rebel literary magazine.” She pursued an older actor, Harold Johnsrud, whom she married shortly after graduation. (McCarthy would later mine these college and postcollege years in her best-selling novel *The Group.*) She reviewed a few books for Malcolm Cowley at the *New Republic*, and a few more for *The Nation*.

But it wasn’t until she divorced Johnsrud and fell in with the intellectuals associated with the *Partisan Review* that she honed her political principles. She wrote theater reviews for the magazine and socialized with its editors and writers—Dwight Macdonald, Delmore Schwartz, and Philip Rahv—and even lived with Rahv for part of this time.

McCarthy also found herself taking sides in intra-left debates. At a party at the novelist James Farrell’s apartment, McCarthy sided with some of her new friends, who believed that the then-exiled Trotsky should be entitled to a trial; four days later, she found her name on the letterhead of something called the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky. She was furious that the committee had used her name, but once acquaintance started to discourage her from taking up Trotsky’s cause, she resolved to stay and threw herself into the cause. In “The Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man,” a chapter in *The Company She Keeps*, a “gay divorcée” committed to Trotsky is seen from the Yale man’s point of view: “She looked stubborn and angry. All at once, Jim was sure that he liked her, for she was going to fight back, he saw, and it took courage to do that.”

McCarthy didn’t turn to fiction until she married Edmund Wilson in 1938. The marriage was tumultuous and violent: Wilson drank, and he would beat McCarthy, then accuse her of delusions and psychosis. (She was hospitalized following one of these beatings, an episode she fictionalized in *The Group*. But she got two things out of the marriage: her son, Reuel, and the time and space to become a novelist. Indeed, McCarthy was by far the better novelist of the two, and the couple’s decision to move away from the hustle of New York granted her the ability to write more freely, which Wilson, to his credit, encouraged.

In her first short story, “Cruel and Barharous Treatment,” which would become the opening chapter in her debut novel, *The Company She Keeps*, an unnamed young woman—presumably the heroine of the novel, Margaret Sargent—engages in an extramarital affair in order to enliven her boring married life. Every move is made for its social effect; the protagonist thinks of her romantic life as a kind of performance—for the two men involved, for her female friends, and for herself. Acutely observed and psychologically rich, the narrative is one of McCarthy’s best. It also manages to be unpitying but not entirely unsympathetic, as it compellingly portrays the constraints in which women live. “The terror of spinsterhood hangs over [women] from adolescence on,” the protagonist muses as she travels by rail away from both her lover and her soon-to-be ex-husband:

When they do get married it seems to them a sort of miracle, and, after they have been married for a time, though in retrospect the whole process looks perfectly natural and inevitable, they retain a certain unarticulated pride in the wonder they have performed. Finally, however, the terror of spinsterhood has been so thoroughly exercised that they forget even having been haunted by it, and it is at this stage that they contemplate divorce. “How could I have forgotten?” she said to herself and began to wonder what she would do.

McCarthy never signed on to the women’s movement: “As for Women’s Lib, it bores me,” she once said. “Of course I believe in equal pay and equality before the law and so on, but this whole myth about how different the world would have been if it had been female-dominated...seems like a complete fantasy to me.” Still, in her early fiction, she offered compelling accounts of the challenges facing young, intelligent women—women smart enough to know better and yet powerless to alter sexism’s script.

Like many of her novels, *The Company She Keeps* was controversial when it was published because its characters were drawn so closely from life. (John Chamberlain, an editor and critic whom McCarthy had earlier savaged in *The Nation*, surely knew that he was the intellectual “Yale man” whose voice on the page was “that of a man in an advertisement letting another man in on a new high-test gasoline.”)

Undaunted, McCarthy continued to use her friends and acquaintances as the foundations for her characters. *The Oasis* (1949), a brief satirical account of a failed intentional community, featured her ex-lover Philip Rahv (called Will Taub) and Dwight Macdonald (Macdougal Macdernott). *A Charmed Life* (1955) is set in a place that closely resembles Wellfleet, Massachusetts—McCarthy had returned there with her third husband, Bowden Broadwater—and includes a character based on Wilson. The novel is so skeptical of the town’s pseudo-intellectualism that Broadwater was worried they’d never be able to return there once the book was published. (They did not.)

McCarthy was unapologetic about mining her life for material. This, she believed, was what novelists were supposed to do. But she was irked by readers who spent all their energy matching fictional characters to real-life intellectuals. “What I really do is take real plums and put them in an imaginary cake,” she once told an interviewer. “If you’re interested in the cake, you get rather annoyed with people saying what species the real plum was.”

Some of McCarthy’s critics have accused her of being too gossipy, but a set of overarching themes emerges clearly from her fiction: self-deceiving intellectuals and ideologies, the mixed outcomes of social progress, idylls won and lost. Many of her novels and stories focus on small, self-selecting groups: the mothers of “The Appalachian Revolution,” who scheme at ways to protect their perfect beach from human and animal invasion; the Pollys and Dotties and Lakeys of *The Group*, who experiment with book reviewing and birth control; the humanities scholars at Jocelyn College, the setting of *The Groves of Academe* (1952), who defend a colleague during a “witch hunt”; the well-meaning liberals of *Cannibals and Missionaries*, who are at the mercy of a group of bijackers. The last novel, one of her best-researched, was also her least successful: She made sure to render accurately the seating arrangements of a 747 jet, but she failed to imagine convincing interpersonal relations for its characters or a compelling conclusion to the novel. (The deus ex machina that liberates the kidnapped missionaries would be more appropriate on bad television.)

*The Oasis*, her satire of a group of utopians
who settle in Vermont, offers one of the most acute studies of the dynamics within self-styled political groups. The story—McCarthy didn’t think it was a proper novel—starts with the division between the “realist party,” who make pragmatic arguments about the survival of the colony, and the “purist faction,” who believe in upholding the colony’s principles at all costs. (These squabbles will be all too familiar to anyone on the left who has attended an organizing meeting.)

At the end of the novel, realists and idealists alike are undermined by a group of local strawberry pickers, who refuse to be dissuaded by the colonists’ gentle requests that they refrain from picking on their property. (The colonists’ socialism doesn’t seem to preclude policing the borders of their land.) Eventually, a couple of the colony’s men scare off the locals with some stray gunshots, and the colonists carry on with a strawberry picnic they have planned. As the day draws to a close, Katy—an alter ego for McCarthy—lies back in the grass and reflects on the colony’s inevitable failure. She imagines that the colony might have had a shot at enduring if it managed to produce “a commodity more tangible than morality…cheese, wine, books, glass, furniture.” “Morality,” she wryly observes, “did not keep well.”

This focus on the superficial and the tangible—on what could be seen and touched—serves as a bad foundation for McCarthy’s fiction and limited it. Her work is rich with detail: “a single silver-pink climbing rose,” plucked from a trellis; a woman wearing “bright glass-bead jewelry, her angora sweater, and shoulder-strap leather handbag, all Italian as the merceria.” These are not lyric visions but matter-of-fact observations; their aim is not to beautify or even appreciate, but to show that one is alive to the world. The worst thing, in McCarthy’s fictional universe, is to be a character lost in thought, especially to be a man given over to abstractions.

At times, these details overwhelm her fiction, making it more like sociology than art. Reading McCarthy, we learn how an upper-class urban woman dresses, where she shops, and what she cooks, but we don’t always understand why a woman might do these things, or how she feels about doing them. This partly reflects McCarthy’s understanding of the forces of history. People are shaped by their times; it’s the rare individual who is not swept along by the currents of the moment. Why someone wouldn’t conform to her time and place was perhaps not a question that McCarthy felt was worth asking. But she sometimes did write about those who resisted their era’s conformity—or at least tried to. In “The Weeds,” a woman finally leaves her marriage, only to encounter the terror of an unscripted life. “She had no plans,” McCarthy writes, in her favored close third person. “Her imagination, working (how long?) in secret, had carried her only this far; she had conceived of the future, simply, as a hand, still wearing its glove, reaching out for a hotel phone.” It’s no surprise that on her sixth day away, just as she has begun to imagine a life alone, the woman sees her husband waiting for her in the hotel lobby, and she eventually returns home.

McCarthy’s aversion to warm, ambiguous, imprecise feelings is one of her most distinguishing features. She has long been called an unsentimental or “cold” writer. Her contemporaries praised her with words that connoted a certain menace or violence: “cutting,” “sharp,” “acidulous.” The verdict is just: Not many authors would kill off their heroine in a novel’s final paragraph. (Martha Sinnott, the McCarthy figure in A Charmed Life, dies in a car crash just after she’s solved a personal crisis.) Cast a Cold Eye, the title of her short-fiction collection, could equally serve as a description of her literary technique.

Yet what made her coldness on the page all the more remarkable was that she was so warm in person. McCarthy was a good friend and a generous host: The words, produces its own kind of truth. McCarthy’s chosen aesthetic as well as her political philosophy. For her, “reality” was objective, not subjective. “I do not think she would have agreed it was only her truth,” Hardwick wrote in a remembrance of her friend. “Instead she often said she looked upon her writing as a mirror.” The right action should be as clear and incontrovertible as the sight of a blackbird on blue water. McCarthy held herself to a standard of objectivity, even when she was personally involved. Reflecting on her youthful participation in the Communist Party, McCarthy later imagined how she and her comrades appeared to an observer. “I had watched those parades in Minneapolis,” she recalled, but now she saw herself as someone marching in the parade, and she proceeded to engage in a thoroughgoing evaluation. The best way to understand political activity wasn’t to ask about the ideas motivating the people involved, but rather to look at it very closely and describe what you saw.

But there are truths that cannot be arrived at through reason alone, and that do not manifest themselves in the observable world. What McCarthy missed about communal experience is the way that feeling—imprecise and inarticulate though it may be—can reveal as much as it conceals. There is much to be gained from imagining how it feels to be a person different from oneself; the picture of the social world becomes more complete. The observer, too, comes to know herself better: She recognizes shared qualities, or crucial differences, between herself and another. Both the observer and the observed become “rounded characters,” in the terms of literary criticism—that is, believable and real. Empathy, in other words, produces its own kind of truth.

McCarthy never dispensed with her trademark skepticism. To her, the chant “FelLOW WORKers, join our RANKS!” (as she rendered it in her memoir of 1930s New York) could only be comic, as words said in unison so often are. But what she did not see, or could not hear, in that May Day parade is the force of fellow feeling, the way it brings to light certain commonalities—real, shared interests that the powerful want to erase. For better or for worse, politics, like fiction, trades upon our capacities to feel solidarity, anger, and pride, and her novels as well as her politics might have benefited from more engagement with these powerful emotions. Mary McCarthy gave us the world as it was, with all its embarrassing inconsistencies, but she left it to others to feel their way toward something new.
It’s the rare person who works for a living and can’t easily recall their worst boss. In October, The New York Times and The New Yorker reported that for dozens of women in Hollywood, that boss was Harvey Weinstein. The revelations prompted a surge of women in other industries to come forward with their own accounts of sexual misconduct by their professional superiors. Among the still-ballooning roster of prominent men accused of lecherous or predatory behavior were Amazon Studios executive Roy Price, celebrity chef John Besh, and a number of high-status media personalities, including former Today host Matt Lauer, former talk-show host Charlie Rose, former New Republic literary editor Leon Wieseltier, and former NPR and New York Times editor Michael Oreskes. All of these men, multiple women have alleged, exploited their positions of authority to sexually harass, coerce, or even assault their female subordinates.

Because the vast majority of the individuals reporting the misconduct have been women, it’s easy to see how sexism and misogyny shaped their treatment in the workplace. It’s also easy to offer “rape culture” as a shorthand explanation for why men like Weinstein were positioned to harass and assault women with impunity, sometimes for decades. But there’s another dimension to these cases of harassment and assault that has been somewhat less discussed. In the majority of the incidents that have come to light, the victims’ second-class status as women has been deeply entangled with their second-class status as employees.

Many of the incidents, as the journalist and Nation contributor Bryce Covert notes, expose loopholes in our federal labor laws, which currently deny sexual-harassment protection to independent contractors, a category that includes actresses and other freelance workers in the arts and entertainment industries. But even beyond that, these cases demonstrate the fundamental inequality of the employment relation itself. While most people understand that the predations of longtime abusers in the workplace are the result of those abusers’ inordinate “power,” it’s crucial to unpack exactly how that power operates and why it exists at all, if we’re to have any chance of contesting it.

This particular power dynamic is the subject of Private Government, the new book by Elizabeth Anderson, a professor of philosophy and women’s studies at the University of Michigan. In it, Anderson argues that employers today exert a degree of authority over their employees that, in many cases, is more restrictive than the authority that the state wields over its citizens. Employers can dictate how we dress, what we’re allowed to say on social media, even what we do with our free time. It is perfectly legal, Anderson notes, for Tyson Foods to refuse its poultry-plant workers bathroom breaks, or for Apple to rifle through the belongings of its retail staff on a daily basis, causing them to lose up to half an hour of their unpaid personal time waiting to be searched. It is also perfectly normal for employers to surveil workers’ communications, to order them to undergo medical testing, or to punish them for their political preferences. And yet, as Anderson points out, “if the U.S. government imposed such regulations on us, we would rightly protest that our constitutional rights were being violated.”

In part, this is because we are subject to more than one kind of government in our lives. Government, by Anderson’s definition, “exists wherever some have the authority to issue orders to others, backed by sanctions, in one or more domains of life.” Federal
and state governments are, at least in theory, public—that is, constrained by democratic norms and law—and therefore we expect a degree of transparency, and also to have some say in the decision-making. Those in charge of corporations, however, make and execute rules privately and therefore exert total domination over their subjects. For subjects under private government, how the rules are crafted, or when and how they’re applied, is simply none of their business. Today, many of those rules are also deemed to be none of the public government’s business, either. “Private government,” Anderson writes, “is government that has arbitrary, unaccountable power over those it governs.”

Anderson’s book isn’t explicitly about the recent wave of scandals in Hollywood and beyond, and yet her notion of corporations acting as private governments nevertheless seems an accurate characterization of Weinstein’s singular control over his company, where he regularly terrorized employees—even those who escaped his sexual advances—with vicious outbursts and temper tantrums. It also characterizes the other workplaces that have harbored high-level harassers, such as the New Republic offices during Wieseltier’s tenure there—who, in addition to sexually inappropriate behavior toward women, reportedly used his status to bully and belittle underlings of any gender with impunity. The expression “open secret,” which has been repeatedly invoked over the past few months to describe the behavior of prominent men who harassed their subordinates, suggests it wasn’t that no one believed the women reporting the harassment, but that few were interested in stopping it—or, more likely, that they simply lacked the ability to do so because of the far-reaching authority these bosses held.

What’s most troubling about these instances is not that they’re wild outliers, but rather that they are highly visible variations on the power asymmetry that structures the majority of American workplaces. As many as 80 percent of workers in the United States, Anderson claims, are “subject to dictatorship at work.” About a quarter already explicitly describe their workplaces as such, and those who don’t are “one arbitrary and oppressive managerial decision away” from understanding how painfully thin their rights at work are. The discretion exercised by managers daily ranges from the mundane (your supervisor screaming at you for not responding to his e-mail within minutes, but taking days to respond to yours) to the deranged (the foremen at an Amazon warehouse in Pennsylvania who refused to open the doors and allow air circulation on a hot day for fear of theft, preferring instead to let assembly-line workers collapse from heatstroke).

Why do bosses wield such power, and employees none? According to Anderson, the primary source of employers’ absolute control over workers is the at-will employment contract, which has been the norm in the United States since the late 19th century and is enshrined through a dense network of laws. At-will employment allows bosses to fire workers at any time for any reason, barring only a handful of exceptions explicitly prohibited by law, such as racial or gender discrimination and union activity—which, incidentally, are protections that are usually difficult and costly to prove have been breached.

The at-will employment contract “grants the employer sweeping legal authority not only over workers’ lives at work but also over their off-duty conduct,” Anderson explains. If bosses need not give any reason at all for firing a worker, then what’s to stop them from sacking someone for smoking off the clock or having premarital sex? (Both cases have happened in the United States.) As Anderson notes, very few workers grasp how comprehensive and punishing at-will employment is until it’s too late, and assume instead that they can’t be fired for things like their activity outside of work or their political beliefs. (Juli Briskman, who found herself swiftly out of a job after informing her supervisor that she was the woman shown raising a middle finger to President Trump’s passing motorcade in a viral photograph, is just the latest example to demonstrate otherwise.)

Libertarians argue that because at-will employment stipulates that employees can also quit for any or no reason, and because employees and employers both willingly agree to enter into the employment contract, workers enjoy as much freedom and choice as their bosses. But for Anderson, this is a “superficial symmetry.” Quitting a job decidedly does not amount to firing your boss, as some free-market enthusiasts like to claim; you may no longer have to work with him, but you will also lose your source of income, your employer-sponsored benefits like health care, and your eligibility for unemployment insurance.

In fact, at-will employment so tilts the playing field in favor of employers that sociologist Arne Kalleberg, who studies precarious work in an international context, suggests that one reason the rates of temporary work remain lower in the United States than in Europe is that the pervasive nature of at-will employment in the United States essentially renders even “permanent” workers temporary in practice, since they can be dismissed at any moment and without any specific cause.

Even after workers leave a job, they often remain tethered to the whims of their former bosses. This is particularly true in white-collar and creative professions, where references from past employers are usually required for securing new employment, and workers are therefore obligated to maintain friendly relationships with former bosses. Professional networks built on recommendations (or a lack thereof) are precisely what allowed a number of men in media and entertainment to keep former subordinates in line even after subjecting them to horrendous treatment. Weinstein, as we now know, toyed with the careers of his chosen victims, cajoling sex from them with the promise of stardom and punishing those who refused by blacklisting them from the industry. Likewise, Wieseltier’s perch at the New Republic allowed him to modulate between tyrant and mentor without censure: As a former staffer told The Huffington Post, “He was perceived as the person who capped editors, who created editors, made careers.”

Though Anderson doesn’t explore in depth how the structure of private government exacerbates gender and racial inequalities in the workplace, one can surmise that because male and white workers are more likely to hold managerial positions, female and nonwhite workers suffer disproportionately under workplace hierarchies that permit or enable maltreatment. While harassment because of race or gender is among the few types of workplace abuse prohibited by law, the burden of proof in such cases rests entirely on employees, who often lack the time or the means to seek redress. This inevitably means that most of these violations go unpunished, particularly in low-wage sectors like domestic and service work, where the rates of sexual harassment and assault are much higher than they are in the newsrooms and studios that have recently fixed the media’s attention.

The #MeToo stories that flooded social media after Weinstein’s downfall injected new urgency into the call for gender equality in the workplace. Subsequently, the common (perhaps commonsensel?) solution proffered by many has been for companies to install more women in higher positions.
“Real change will require the willingness of men to promote women and share power,” the journalist Marin Cogan wrote in *The New York Times*. Anna North at *Vox* argued similarly: “Representation is critical for preventing sexual harassment and creating an environment in which women can thrive.”

Yet when the problem is glossed as “men” but not “bosses” as well, something critical goes missing. It’s probably true that more women managers would lead to a reduction in workplace sexual harassment (although it’s not guaranteed; just this year, Miki Agrawal, the self-styled “She-E-O” of the menstrual-underwear company Thinx, was accused of harassment by a former employee). But in order to undo the power differential that facilitates abuse without consequence, we should think of sexual misconduct as one part of a long continuum of worker abuses that occur under private government. As Anderson points out, even absent sexual offenses, employers can and often do “deploy employees; cut their pay; assign them inconvenient hours or too many or too few hours; assign them more dangerous, dirty, menial, or grueling tasks; increase their pace of work; set them up to fail; and, within very broad limits, humiliate and harass them.”

Separating sexual harassment from other forms of worker mistreatment can also function as a sleight of hand that allows potentially unsavory employers to claim the high ground. For instance, in the wake of #MeToo, Sophia Amoruso—the high-profile founder of the online retailer Nasty Gal and the author of the pop-feminist career-advice book *#GIRLBOSS* (now also the name of her online women’s magazine)—posted a photo to Instagram of a marquee reading “Rape culture ends now—Girlboss.com” and the caption “Just another day at the office.” The implication, of course, was that when women run businesses, even those who don’t stand to make social gains. Yet, in 2014 and ‘15, Nasty Gal was beset by allegations of ill treatment from former employees. Two filed lawsuits claiming that they had been abruptly fired after becoming pregnant or disclosing health issues. A number of others called the work environment “toxic.”

In other words, the key to reducing workplace injustice of all types is to find ways to constrain the sweeping power of employers, as opposed to simply allowing a different set of people to wield it. To that end, journalists Sarah Leonar (features editor at *The Nation*) and Judith Levine (co-founder of the National Writers Union) have advocated unionization and other forms of collective organizing, which has been one of the few ways that women have successfully fought gendered workplace exploitation, often alongside their male co-workers.

Anderson, too, notes that labor unions have historically been the primary method by which workers in the United States have asserted their voices on the job. She includes unions among other suggestions for increasing workplace protections, such as a federal bill of rights for workers and European-style works councils. But she also expresses some skepticism over their efficacy for today’s workforce; in her view, unions often “take an adversarial stance toward management—one that makes not only managers but also many workers uncomfortable.” While this may be true enough, Anderson’s concerns feel somewhat at odds with her provocative and convincing thesis that most American workplaces operate as dictatorships. Dictators rarely cede their power and, more often than not, must be toppled by force.

When it comes to confronting deeply entrenched power, a certain degree of hostility tends to be useful. Lately, this seems very much on display: Over the past few months, as more and more stories of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace have flooded forth, women’s anger has swelled without apology. Women who have been assaulted, groped, propositioned, or harassed by their bosses are angry; women who have suffered at work after rejecting sexual advances from their professional mentors are angry; women who have escaped such situations but hear these stories are angry. “The anger window is open,” the journalist Rebecca Traister wrote. Under our current employment arrangements, anyone working for a boss—whoever they may be—has cause to be angry, too. The difficult task ahead of us, as ever, is figuring out what to do about it.

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**It’s a Daisy**

Bats twin the sky
drowsy from billowing home
to watch Night Court.

I, Nikki, as a contemporary woman: is bound to ask
who’s spiraling in the faucet.

If you keep no-lye relaxers
on your hair past the
suggested time frame,

the original crimple pattern
becomes more defiant.
Memories won’t comfort me,

perhaps it’s best not to trust
the politics of people who
haven’t washed their own
dishes in twenty years.

O missile management,
I request a transfer 4 the masses
a happy howling cocktail showing

instead of telling this country

A freed daylight may be possible,

the revolt in us, I mean. Stems
are still holding like a grown up
but they snap. You pick me up,

pour me another bath, a glass
of something dry for the blisters,
read Ted Joans’ Hand Grenades

remember that
I’m not the only one and cry.

NIKKI WALLSCHLAEGER
In the 1930s, Romare Bearden contributed political cartoons to publications like The Crisis, the NAACP's journal, then edited by W.E.B. Du Bois. In the 1940s, he began to enjoy some success as a painter—especially after joining New York City's Samuel Kootz Gallery in 1945, which also represented such well-known artists as Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, and Robert Motherwell. But then Kootz dropped him, and in the 1950s, as often happens to middle-aged artists, Bearden's career seemed to fall into the doldrums. Bearden was one of what Mary Schmidt Campbell describes as "a significant number of black artists...working in isolation, for the most part, from one another"—a very different situation from the prewar years, when black artists were forming collectives and the Works Progress Administration was bringing artists of all ethnicities into closer contact.

As far as wider mainstream recognition goes, things began to change dramatically for Bearden with his 1964 exhibition at the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York, which sparked an unusually enthusiastic response. Soon he had become arguably the country's most prominent black artist, or in any case a contender for that position along with Jacob Lawrence and Norman Lewis. The story of what changed in Bearden's art—along with the wide-ranging consequences of those changes, not just for Bearden himself—has been often told since then. It's recounted again, for instance, in the catalog for the recent Tate Modern exhibition "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power"—in fact, it's the starting point for the show, which will travel next year to the Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, and then to the Brooklyn Museum.

That exhibition's curators, Mark Godfrey and Zoë Whitley, explain that "Soul of a Nation begins in 1963 with the formation of Spiral, a 'group of Negro artists' as they called themselves, who assembled in New York to work out a shared position on what it meant to make art within the wider context of the Civil Rights Movement." Galvanized by events like the August 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, the 15 artists of Spiral were moved to overcome their sense of marginalization and find a collective way forward. Convening in Bearden's studio on Canal Street, they traded ideas. Bearden's was to try working together on collages. He'd already begun gathering materials. The proposal was rejected, so Bearden decided to go ahead with the collages on his own, and then to enlarge them as photo-stats, which he exhibited the following year. The rest, as they say, is history.

Perhaps understandably, the work Bearden made from 1963 until his death in 1988, at 75, has overshadowed all that came before it. One could get the impression that the preceding 30 years amounted to little more than a long period of preparation. That's why the recent exhibition at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York, was such an eye-opener. On view through December 22, the exhibition was somewhat misleadingly titled "Romare Bearden: Abstraction." Much of the work on view was abstract, and that's what might have been most surprising to viewers who knew only the later stages of Bearden's
career. But most abstractionists of his generation—Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock, for instance—came fairly late to full abstraction, and Bearden was no exception. Before that turn, he was exploring a kind of stylized, semi-abstracted figuration, also on view at the museum. In that sense, the Neuberger exhibition, curated by Tracy Fitzpatrick, had a broader scope than its title let on.

In the 1940s, Bearden was particularly drawn to religious imagery. Carl Van Vechten pronounced him “the Negro Rouault,” referring to the French painter then renowned for his rough-hewn images of Christianity. But Bearden’s treatment, in a work like the Madonna and Child (1945), hardly seems as deeply imbued with fervent spirituality as a typical Rouault. One of Bearden’s “hieroglyphic paintings,” it is more analytical—and less concerned with religious faith than with trying to work through the European art-historical tradition while homing in on a distinctly modern style. In particular, Bearden seems to have been interested in exploring the potential for narrative sequences, which his somewhat younger contemporary Jacob Lawrence had been doing with great success, most notably in the 1940s “The Migration of the Negro.” In this work, Bearden also makes use of literary sources: Federico García Lorca’s “Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter” (his Kootz Gallery colleague Robert Motherwell was also painting works on Spanish themes at this time) and Rabelais’s Gargantua and Pantagruel.

Could tradition and contemporaneity be reconciled? The highly stylized, semi-abstracted Madonna and Child succeeds on its own terms; its colors glow with joyful clarity, and the heavy black outlines in which the artist encloses them seem to update the leading religious faith than with trying to work through the European art-historical tradition while homing in on a distinctly modern style. In particular, Bearden seems to have been interested in exploring the potential for narrative sequences, which his somewhat younger contemporary Jacob Lawrence had been doing with great success, most notably in the 1940s “The Migration of the Negro.” In this work, Bearden also makes use of literary sources: Federico García Lorca’s “Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter” (his Kootz Gallery colleague Robert Motherwell was also painting works on Spanish themes at this time) and Rabelais’s Gargantua and Pantagruel.

1950 visit to Paris apparently did not provide the inspiration that Bearden might have wanted. Without a studio, it’s no surprise that he didn’t paint there. But the same was true when he returned to New York. He dabbled in songwriting, not without success. It was Heinrich Blücher—the philosopher better known as Mr. Hannah Arendt—who confronted him in 1952. “You’re just wasting your time being a songwriter,” Blücher warned, “and, if you keep on at this, you’ll just go to pot and you’ll never paint again.” Instead of following his friend’s advice, Bearden had a nervous breakdown.

By the summer of 1952, he was painting again—in a very different mode. Mountains of the Moon (circa 1955) shows him working with paint in a far more full-bodied manner than had ever been the case before, laying it on in big, heavy brushstrokes. It’s all about color and texture—a weave of blue marks with other hues peeping through. The bluntness of his physical attack and the thick, dragged paint surface have a lot in common with the “action painting” of the time, but Bearden’s approach is more architectonic than that of most Abstract Expressionists. The brushstroke is not posited as a bravura expression of the painter’s subjectivity; it’s an element in the overall construction of space.

Mountains of the Moon is pure abstraction. But this wasn’t a definite commitment on Bearden’s part. Painted at around the same time, Blue Lady retains its unmistakable figurative references, but its emphasis on color and texture for their own sake is just as compelling. The lady is there, but evanescent—yet her ethereal state is counterpointed by the corporeality of the painting itself. Bearden was exploring, without preconceptions, the fundamentals of his art, rediscovering it on new terms. This is abstraction in the best sense, not an eschewal of representation on ideological grounds but a search without presuppositions. I like a phrase that Richard J. Powell once used with regard to this phase of Bearden’s work: “chromatic emancipation.” As Bearden put it, “I am trying to find out what there is in me that is common to, or touches, other men. It is hard to do and realize.”

Abstract collages made in the mid-1950s show Bearden working freely with paper of various sorts as well as with paint. Some of them were done on top of old watercolors— reclaiming his own history and rendering it recognizable in the process. Bearden also began studying Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. Thinning his oil paint, he taught himself how to use it with the same sense of fluidity that he’d known with watercolor and that he was learning to experience with ink. The heavy materiality of Mountains of the Moon had enabled a diaphanous chromatic lightness, but around this time he began to explore much subtler interusions of hue in paintings like Snow Morning (1959) and Golden Day (1960), which seem to anticipate color-field paintings such as Jules Olitski’s works of the mid-’60s.

In these works, the artist seems to stand to one side and let nature (perhaps chemical) processes take over. The paintings feel like landscapes, but not because of any representational residues; rather, they feel like the results of an exposure to the elements. The painting Eastern Gate, from around 1961, more overtly alludes to Bearden’s interest in Chinese calligraphy. That year, Brian O’Doherty reviewed an exhibition of such canvases in The New York Times, saying:

He paints thinly, so thinly that at times the substance of the paint seems to have evaporated, leaving behind ectoplasmic stains scored and etched and veined with lines or dotted with evaporated bubbles, which, like collaborating atoms, move to create lines of force. This intemperate makes each canvas a complex of highly evocative suggestions.

As Fitzpatrick points out in the Neuberger catalog, the show that so moved O’Doherty “would be the last exhibition to focus on Bearden’s abstractions during his lifetime.” Perhaps as a result, the most powerful of his abstract paintings may be among his least-
known—works made, presumably, after the 1961 show of abstractions but before the fateful meeting of the Spiral group in 1963, after which Bearden returned to figuration. I’m referring to a group of mostly untitled abstract works—many of them undated, though some are specifically dated 1962 or 1963—in which cut-out pieces of painted canvas have been collaged onto board.

Some of these are almost shockingly powerful. They combine the “ectoplasmic” chromatic atmospheres of Bearden’s color-field paintings with sometimes more or less rectilinear, often virtuosically arabesque drawing accomplished by cutting. Bearden was surely inspired by the paper cutouts of Henri Matisse; but the weight of cut canvas compared with paper, plus the rather overripe juiciness of his rich chroma—often very earthy, and so different from Matisse’s pure, uninflected, and typically astringent hues—have a much different effect. Whereas Matisse’s paper cutouts convey a wonderful sense of ease (no matter how intricate they are, they feel like they somehow came together all at once), Bearden’s canvas cutouts more often display a sense of struggle triumphantly overcome. One of the great strengths of many of these cutout works is their use of outline. Rather than employing painted lines, as he did in the ’40s, Bearden collaged his painted pieces of canvas on top of a dark-painted board, and the outlines emerge as the seemingly accidental by-product of the canvas’s placement, of the varying gaps between the affixed elements. Paradoxically but powerfully, this gives the dark outline all the more fluidity and plasticity.

It’s true that, at least once, in an undated piece referred to as Untitled (green)—though green is only one of its colors and not the dominant one—Bearden comes close to Matissean grace, but much more typical and just as fine is a work like River Mist (circa 1962), with its juxtaposed vertical areas that I somehow want to call slabs of sky, vistas of stone. Finally, three small works from 1962 and 1963, very short and wide (two of them are just under three by 12 inches; the third, seven by 25 inches), would appear to be studies for murals. There is a grandeur to their forms that suggests they’d work perfectly at seven by 24 feet. One could imagine their maker on the verge of a great expansion.

Instead, Bearden moved forward by turning inward. Evidently, his works with collaged canvas—like his experiments in the mid-’50s with abstract paper collage—would feed into his turn to figurative collage-making in 1963. So, of course, would his familiarity with the photostat machine, and the socially conscious Expressionism he’d imbided from George Grosz at the Art Students League in the 1930s. As usual, the great turn was also a great synthesis.

Just as “Romare Bearden: Abstraction” started not from the artist’s first abstractions but with the figurative, narrative works that paved their way, it contained several of the “Projections,” as Bearden called the photostat works of 1964, and ended with some other figurative collages from 1967—thereby acknowledging that abstraction turned out to be, for Bearden, not an end but a method of discovery. Still, the question lingers:

What made the change necessary? Was Bearden acceding to a demand imposed by the times? Was it an inflection of the inner logic of his artistic development? Or was this one of those happy cases where an artist’s inclination and the historical moment were magically in sync?

Those last three abstractions I mentioned, the ones that I take as pointing toward the possibility of expanding to environmental scale, suggest that Bearden had come to a crossroads. The whole decade that he’d spent exploring abstraction—working restlessly without quite settling on a signature style; plumbing the resources of paint as material and letting go of his old, ingrained dependence on linear design; coming to terms with what he’d learned of Chinese art (which I suspect was influenced by the principles of the Southern Sung period, with its emphasis on atmosphere over detail, spontaneous expression over control, in order to generate what one scholar sums up as a “landscape of the mind”—all this had led Bearden to a point at which he was clearly prepared to commit himself to an abstract art of rare grandeur.

But he decided not to go there and, in a sense, made a strategic retreat from the cosmic-nature dreamworld to which his abstraction seemed to be leading him, in order to recoup a different area of his inner life, one that was still mythic in nature but in which mythic beings were incarnated as figures and faces rather than impersonal natural forces. I’m reminded of the pianist Cecil Taylor’s observation that, at a certain point, he “had put a lot of things into music that the music itself was not able to resolve,” leading to “a kind of personal isolation.” The conceptual artist Charles Gaines later diagnosed Bearden’s problem (and Taylor’s might have been similar) this way: “How does the language of modernism allow minority artists to make art that also reflects the reality of the social space?” Taylor’s solution was to seek an outside witness to catalyze the resolution he sought. For him, that came through psychoanalysis; I suspect that Bearden was looking to his friends in the Spiral group to help him resolve the dilemmas in his art.

When they didn’t respond, he continued on his own.

It’s important to remember that although Bearden’s ostensible reason for the move to figurative collage-making was to register a response to the civil-rights crisis in America that had necessitated the March on Washington, most of his collages—and the photostat “Projections” that he made from them at first—were far from topical in substance. His emphasis was on what the titles of some of the projections call “the prevalence of ritual”—that is, on the mysteries of the inner life, not of an isolated individual but of a society. The darkness of the black-and-white photostats, in particular, seems a direct reflection of the dreamlike night world into which Bearden plunged his art.

And the society with whose rituals he identified was not the one in which he was living—the urban world of New York City—but the one from which he had come: His new art would trace the resonance in his own memory of the folkways of the rural black South. Still searching for “what there is in me that is common to, or touches, other men,” he began doing so by way of the myths and memories woven into his own sense of identity—a side of Bearden’s work manifest, for instance, in the sultry, chromatically rich 1979 “Bayou Fever” collage series that was shown last spring at the DC Moore Gallery in New York. As James Joyce had found the universality of Dublin and Picasso that of a mythic Spain, Bearden had arrived at a point where he felt confident that “the validity of my Negro experience could live and make its own logic.”
Puzzle No. 3452

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1 Ultimately, saddest tear to go viral (5)
4 Those who aren’t expert mostly gather to admit true failing (8)
9 “Looking at the eyes of a cat” in slightly rewritten poetry (9)
10 Branch following Celsius scale (5)
11 Fifty-nine shredded sheets (5)
12 Pitiful distance holding back shows (9)
13 Proponent of government control “fudged” (sic) data (10)
15 Ford model accompanied by short fool (4)
17 Incapacitate a demonstrator, perhaps, in just a second (4)
19 Premium stocks (or, the thing I consider most important) (10)
22 To start diesel vehicle in South American country is a family responsibility (5,4)
24 Leaders of all the service economies are confused (2,3)
25 Contract rebel to smuggle arsenic (5)
26 When returning resinous substance the first time, to complain is useful (9)
27 Astonishingly, Chelsea swallowed a ring and a string (8)
28 Steer badly and start over (5)

DOWN

1 Locates characters up to four times in an election-night report (3,5,2,4)
2 Home for some Europeans drifting into sea (7)
3 Intended to rise up and corral man losing head to Alzheimer’s, perhaps (8)
4 Pilot’s instrument to measure duration and make changes outside (9)
5 15 circling around near deep hole (5)
6 Extra performance before capturing military figure (6)
7 Outspoken rule: “Male lover is a gay symbol” (7)
8 Notable’s constituents repeatedly used a traveler’s official paper (8,6)
14 Barrel maker took in work with others (9)
16 Denigrate flower: “It’s a catastrophe” (8)
18 Leaves church after terrible pains (7)
20 Fashionable religions? They might be creepy (7)
21 Stick your ____! (Contact classifieds@thenation.com) (6)
23 I understand: Keeping record is the beginning (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3451

ACROSS 1 RED + CARP + ET 6 hidden
9 MON + SOON 10 GA + VOT (anag.)
11 DRAGOMAN + 12 BOGOTA (rev.)
14 O + KAY (rev.) 15 HA + IRS + TYLE (anag.)
17 rude aug. 19 aug. 21 rev. hidden
22 SNOW + PILLOW (anag.)
24 AVER + AGE 25 ISP (anag.)
26 E + CLAT (rev.) 27 HE + ADDRESS

DOWN 1 REMEDY
2 DON’STKID + ONT (anag.) + TELL
3 (POLLO) + Gl듯Y 4 PEN + TATF (anag.)
5 TO GO + ENVY (anag.) + O
6 US 7 TAN + HON-[-e-]Y + TROLLOP-
8 E + [RHEAVE]
13 [M] + CRONESIA (anag.)
16 SWAN + E + 18 GALL + [e] + ANT
19 [RA]N
20 hidden 23 initial letters
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