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WHAT WE DON’T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT...

#ME TOO

by JoAnn Wypijewski
Letters

Heartbreaking Foresight

How prescient was Patricia J. Williams in her column “Shooting Students” [Feb. 26]? Or perhaps it wasn’t a matter of prescience, given the mind-numbing, soul-crushing frequency of school shootings and the legislative stasis caused by the GOP’s NRA-backed obstructionism. In the current atmosphere, it wasn’t even surprising to hear Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, after the Parkland massacre, tell conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt that states “clearly have the opportunity and the option” to allow teachers to carry guns on campus.

As Williams points out, this notion is the quintessence of lunacy. The GOP fulminates, hypocritically, about burdening the nation’s children and grandchildren with debt, yet it seems content not only to watch today’s youth be shattered physically and spiritually by gun violence, but then also to leave any solution to the very same generation. Sensible regulation of firearms must be a voting issue in November.

David Routt
Richmond, Va.

What never ceases to amaze me about these “solutions” is the assumption by gun activists that you can somehow separate the good guys from the bad guys. The first time a stressed and disrespected teacher pulls a gun on her students, will they be advocating for arming the kids?

NANNETTE CROCE

I’m way behind in reading my issues of The Nation, so when I turned to this article the day after the Parkland massacre, its headline was jarring. I have two comments:

First, with regard to Williams’s observation that our nation is at war with itself, I would more pointedly observe that it is the moms and dads of students who are at war with the gun industry, the NRA, constitutional-carry types, and other backers of permissive firearm laws. Parents are losing; we must acknowledge this fact and take action.

Second, I hesitate to accept that this is the end of civilization, but I sure hear Williams’s cry of anguish. Then again, perhaps civilization ended in the United States when it entered the 17th year of the War on Terror (or choose your year). These responses to violence share an outlook that crosses the line.

Tom Hardenbergh

The article “A New Day for Justice” [Nov. 20/27, 2017] contained a statement about the writer Matt Taibbi that was inaccurate. The Nation has reached a settlement with Mr. Taibbi pursuant to which the inaccurate statement, as well as the rest of the passage regarding him, has been removed from the online version. That version is titled “Are Sexual Predators in the Workplace Finally Facing Justice?” We apologize for the error.

“America’s Favorite Monopolist” by David Dayen [March 12] claimed that Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway is invested in the aerospace company TransDigm and cited TransDigm’s alleged price gouging as an example of the way that Buffett benefits from monopolistic practices. Regrettably, we confused Berkshire Hathaway with Berkshire Partners, a firm unrelated to Mr. Buffett. It is Berkshire Partners that is invested in TransDigm. We apologize to our readers and to Mr. Buffett for the error.

The book review “Rule by Fear” [Feb. 26] mistakenly cited 1932 as the year Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. The correct year is 1933.

Comments drawn from our website
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How to Beat the BS

The Parkland shooting unfolded with a grim familiarity. News alerts that shots had been fired at a Florida high school quickly gave way to reports of multiple casualties and then a final, horrible number: 17 dead, students and teachers. Republicans offered their thoughts and prayers as ambulances pulled away from the school, and they also warned against any “knee-jerk” reactions to the killings, in the words of House Speaker Paul Ryan.

But then something rare happened: The students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High got angry and declared war on inaction. “Every single person up here today, all these people, should be at home grieving. But instead we are up here standing together, because if all our government and president can do is send ‘thoughts and prayers,’ then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see,” said student Emma Gonzalez at a rally, speaking through her tears and while still holding notes for her AP Government class. “Politicians who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA telling us nothing could have ever been done to prevent this—we call BS.” Video of her speech quickly went viral, and “We call BS” became a new rallying cry for the gun-control movement. In short order, plans came together for a nationwide student walkout and a march on Washington.

Fatalism about what these young people—and the larger gun-control movement—can achieve is unwarranted and self-reinforcing. Last November in Virginia, the National Rifle Association backed 13 State House candidates in competitive races and Republican Ed Gillespie for governor. Twelve of those candidates lost (the 13th won on a coin toss), and Gillespie got trounced. At the state and local levels, gun-control advocates have been able to pass measures that Congress has failed to enact, like assault-weapons bans and expanded background checks. It’s worth remembering that the movement didn’t really exist in its current form before the Sandy Hook massacre in 2012. Most of the major gun-control groups today were formed in response to that shooting, and Democrats rarely advocated for gun control in the decades prior to that. Given time, this movement can grow—and win—if it has confidence in itself and its arguments.

That’s not to discount the immediate limits of our ossified political system, especially with Donald Trump in the White House after getting over $30 million from the NRA. Trump will never sign significant gun-control legislation, and a Congress that couldn’t even ban bump stocks after the Las Vegas massacre won’t pass it anyway. But as the movement works to elect a different Congress and president, there’s another thing it can do. It can go after the one thing that gun manufacturers value above all else, including human life: money.

These days, the gun titans are loaded with debt and facing declining consumer demand. In the same week as the Parkland shooting, Remington Outdoor Company, one of the largest gun manufacturers in the United States, announced plans to declare bankruptcy. Signs abound that other parts of the gun industry are in danger, too: According to an SEC filing, a $140 million loan to United Sporting Companies, a major middleman between manufacturers and retailers, lost half its value in 2017. Gun retailers aren’t faring much better: Gander Mountain, a big-box sports retailer that sold guns in most of its stores, went belly-up in 2017 and began to liquidate locations nationwide.

Activists can help deliver a knockout punch to these merchants of death. Divestment is one route, by making guns as radioactive as fossil fuels. In 2013, the California State Teachers’ Retirement System voted to divest itself of millions of dollars’ worth of shares in gun manufacturers. New York City’s employee pension fund did the same in 2016 and also pulled money from sporting stores like Cabela’s and Dick’s that sell guns. College students nationwide should ask their endowment offices
whether they have holdings in gun stocks—and if so, challenge their colleges to dump them.

Divestment can happen at the personal level, too. Thirty-five percent of US stock funds include investments in gun and ammunition manufacturers—a staggering $17.3 billion invested in 2,120 funds. At GoodbyeGunStocks.com, you can learn whether your investment fund owns shares in gun companies. If it does, a tool on the website allows you to find gun-free funds.

Letitia James, New York City’s public advocate, has put considerable pressure on banks to stop lending to gun manufacturers, and suggests the city shouldn’t do business with them if they continue to make those loans. PayPal, Square, Stripe, and Apple Pay already don’t allow payments for firearms to be processed—what if the major banks and credit-card companies did the same?

If Congress managed to repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act of 2005, gun manufacturers would no longer enjoy broad immunity from civil claims. The families of people hurt or killed by guns could finally hold manufacturers responsible for the damage they caused, with the lawsuits against Big Tobacco serving as a model. Both industries sold things that, when they worked as intended, ended countless lives.

The NRA’s power in Washington is fueled by money from the gun industry. It’s time to turn off the spigot and make it unprofitable to sell death.

$1.27M
Median price for an existing single-family home in the San Jose, California, region—a record for metro areas in the United States

89%
Percentage of Bay Area counties with homeless populations that are more unsheltered than sheltered

80%
Increase in Bay Area commute times between 2010 and 2016

I
The Bay Area’s ranking among US regions with the highest percentage of “mega-commuters,” defined as those whose one-way commute takes 90 minutes or longer

4.3
Average number of months spent sitting in traffic for drivers in San Francisco over the course of a 40-year career

—Madeleine Han

The Iraq Catastrophe
The Middle East is still suffering from our war.

Fifteen years ago, on February 15, 2003, the world said “No to War”: Some 10 million to 15 million people, in hundreds of cities and dozens of countries all over the world, embraced the same slogan, made the same demand, in scores of different languages. A war against Iraq was looming, with Washington and London standing virtually alone in their false claims that Baghdad had amassed stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction.

As we look at the consequences of that war today—Iraq still in flames, wars raging across the region—we need to remember.

Throughout 2002 and into 2003, while George W. Bush’s “Global War on Terror” raged across Afghanistan, Washington continued to build support for a war against Iraq. We need to remember how the mainstream media obediently fell—or eagerly jumped—into line with the propaganda churned out by the Dick Cheney–Donald Rumsfeld policy shops. The most influential papers, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, led the way, helping to legitimize the spurious predictions of Iraqis welcoming US troops with sweets and flowers, of yellowcake uranium from Niger, of aluminum tubes that could “only” be used for nuclear weapons. Some among the liberal and independent media collaborated as well. Even Patrick Tyler of the Times (who coined the term “second superpower” to describe the February 15 mobilization) acknowledged years later the “grand deception in which we all share in the responsibility.…The military-industrial complex has its analogue in the press, the media-industrial complex.”

Bush had identified Iraq as part of his “axis of evil,” claiming that it, along with Iran and North Korea, was “arming to threaten the peace of the world.” Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, just 10 days before the massive global protests, lied to the United Nations Security Council and the world regarding the so-called “WMD” claims, with CIA director George Tenet sitting behind him stone-faced and silent. The day before the protests, the UN’s weapons and nuclear inspectors told the Security Council directly that they had seen no evidence of such weapons. We need to remember that the UN refused to endorse the war, aligning instead with the global protesters.

As millions of Iraqis remember so clearly, a little over a month after the protests, US bombers tore through the skies over Baghdad, laying waste to a vast modern city and its sanctions-devastated population. “Shock and awe” was under way. We need to remember how the overthrow of Iraq’s government, the dismantling of its military, and the eradication of its civil service set the stage for years of military occupation, imposition of a US-controlled sectarian political system, and 15 years of death and devastation for the Iraqi people. We need to remember that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians, perhaps over 1 million, died in the US war and occupation—and that doesn’t even count the hundreds of thousands already dead from the 12 years of brutal sanctions that preceded it.

We need to remember not only because we still owe an enormous debt to the people of Iraq. We need to remember because the war’s goals remain in place: expanding US military domination, controlling oil and pipelines, building an empire of military bases. And because the wars raging across the Middle East today find their origins in the Iraq War.

We need to remember that it was Bush’s occupation of Iraq that gave rise to ISIS. The terrorist organization germinated in the cells of Camp Bucca, one of the myriad US prisons holding thousands of Iraqi detainees. In 2004, when the torture scandal in Abu Ghraib, another US prison, became public, there were 140,000 US troops occupying Iraq. We need to remember that fact as we work to end the Global War on Terror, now expanded beyond Afghanistan and Iraq to envelop Yemen, Libya, Syria, and beyond. Drones, air strikes, and special-operations forces have replaced the massive numbers of ground troops, but we need to remember that the wars, and the killing, continue.

In Syria, the civil war has become the occasion for a regional and global struggle involving multiple conflicts: Saudi Arabia versus Iran, Turkey versus the Kurds, the United States versus Russia, Israel versus Iran, the United States versus Turkey, and more. These battles are being waged over resources, military bases, the expansion of power—but what they all have in common is that it is mostly Syrians who are doing the dying. Washington

(continued on page 8)
Dear Liza,

My daughter joined the high-school varsity tennis team. The tennis coach told her that she should take “privates” (paid lessons with him at the local tennis club at $45 an hour) if she wanted to “go far.” My daughter had no interest in lessons as she was already going to team practices eight to 10 hours a week. The coach gives no instruction to players at practice, reserving it for these “private lessons.” My daughter was replaced on the varsity singles team by another player who did take private lessons with the coach. This player—let’s call her Isabel—was moved up to the varsity team, and my daughter was relegated to junior varsity without a “challenge match.” Such matches are required by high-school athletic-association rules, but the rules were not followed. My daughter had beaten Isabel three times. We found out that this coach and others had been promoting players who took private lessons with them for years. What should we do?

—Tennis Dad

Dear Tennis Dad,

Such corruption is rampant in youth sports. The coach is grotesquely abusing his power. If your daughter wants to fight this, you must help her do so. Try pointing out to the coach (in writing) that he broke the athletic association’s rules and ask for a match between your daughter and Isabel. If he refuses, try to persuade your daughter to let you intervene further. A complaint to the principal and your state’s high-school athletic association could force the coach to change his ways or lose his job. It’s crucial for kids to see their parents standing up for them and against injustice.

But your daughter wants to keep playing tennis, and she may fear retaliation from the coach and the rest of the team. So she may not want you to go over his head with these complaints. Since she’s nearly a young adult and it’s her problem, she gets to decide how it’s handled. If she won’t protest, she must make the best of the JV squad. But please do write detailed and blistering letters to all the relevant authorities after she graduates.

Even without such direct extortion, the amount of parent involvement and money entailed in becoming a serious youth athlete in this country is a scandal (writes this columnist from the soccer field where her son practices three times a week, not counting week-end travel that sometimes involves hotel stays). As parents, we have a responsibility to resist, at the very least, the worst excesses of this system.

Dear AgainstAgeism,

While no one would claim that being harassed or assaulted at work is a privilege, it’s true that when straight men hold power in an industry, being sexually appealing to them can help women’s careers. Over lunch last month, a colleague and I—both of us middle-aged female journalists—discussed a male editor we knew who had recently been fired for #MeToo reasons. I knew this

Questions? Ask Liza at TheNation.com/article/asking-for-a-friend.
Teens Versus Guns
After Parkland, a new generation boldly decides to take on the NRA.

It was all set to write a column about the paralysis of progressives around guns: how even the ghastliest school shootings rouse few of us to more than hand-wringing and despair. After each massacre, I was planning to say, we go through the motions, writing letters to the editor, making donations to gun-control groups and politicians who promise to fight to stem the tide, but, except for the most dedicated activists, our involvement is pretty small-bore and low-key. The Million Mom March was the last major national mobilization, and that was back in 2000. A majority of Americans support gun control, but the passion—and the money, and Congress—is with the National Rifle Association.

The students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, aren’t having any of that. Survivors of a horrific rampage by Nikolas Cruz, a former fellow student who murdered 17 and wounded more than a dozen, they’re speaking out—screaming out—in a way we haven’t seen before, confronting the politicians who have failed them.

They’re all over TV. Twitter is exploding with their rage: “You are the President of the United States, and you have the audacity to put this on Russia as an excuse. I guess I should expect that from you," one student tweeted at Donald Trump. Senior Emma Gonzalez may have made history with her blistering speech at a rally three days after the massacre: “Politicians who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA telling us nothing could have been done to prevent this—we call BS. They say tougher gun laws do not decrease gun violence. We call BS. They say a good guy with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun. We call BS. They say guns are just tools like knives and are as dangerous as cars. We call BS. They say no laws could have prevented the hundreds of senseless tragedies that have occurred. We call BS.”

Plans are afoot for marches: The Douglas students are organizing a “March for Our Lives” in Washington on March 24, and others may be in the works as well. Students at a high school in Boca Raton have already staged a walkout, and maybe you saw the coverage of the students who staged a die-in outside the White House. Meanwhile, wags are writing checks for “thoughts and prayers” to NRA-funded pols. Silly, but better than rolling your eyeballs and sighing.

Maybe the kids will save us in the end—and not a moment too soon. Because too many of us well-meaning liberal/progressive adults have been cowed by the gun lobby. We’ve resigned ourselves to quasi-defeat and accepted the NRA’s framing, the mythological sanctity of “gun rights.” So we speak of “responsible” gun owners. Proud rural folk taught to shoot by Granddad. “Commonsense” gun laws. Respect for the Second Amendment. We say, “We don’t want to take away anyone’s guns.” For progressive politicians like Bernie Sanders and Kirsten Gillibrand, deferring to the NRA was, at one time, not just a perceived political necessity but also a way of signaling respect for the values of (white) rural voters. Even saintly Paul Wellstone, longtime gun-control advocate, introduced a 1997 bill watering down a ban on guns for those convicted of domestic violence.

Meanwhile, for the pro-gun crowd, it doesn’t seem to matter how many people die (over 35,000) or are injured (over 81,000) per year; or that you are vastly more likely to kill yourself or others if you have a gun in the house; or that, on average, one to two women are shot and killed each day by a past or present partner. Each atrocity is just another reason for more guns. Rush Limbaugh called just the other day for guns to be allowed in classrooms, while Education Secretary Betsy “Grizzly Bear” DeVos argued that arming teachers is an “option.” Because kids are never shot by accident when a gun falls out of a purse or pocket, and not one of the 3.6 million teachers in the land would ever use a gun to threaten a student.

The commentariat hasn’t always been much help, either. In the mainstream media, playing the pundit who takes weird and contorted “contrarian” positions is good for your career. A few years ago, libertarian writer Megan McArdle wrote a piece in The Daily Beast claiming that nothing much could be done about guns, so kids should be taught to rush the shooter: “If we drilled it into young people that the correct thing to do is for everyone to instantly run at the guy with the gun, these sorts of mass shootings would be less deadly, because even a guy with a very powerful weapon can be brought down by 8-12 unarmed bodies piling on him at once.” Let the kids handle it! McArdle, by the way, just got a column in The Washington Post.

In The New York Times, meanwhile, David Brooks worried, post-Parkland, that gun-control advocates don’t show enough “respect” to red-staters, while Ross Douthat tied himself in knots explaining why guns should be permitted but abortion banned. Douthat also defended the paranoid right-wing fantasy that guns let us resist the state “when it imposes illegitimately” (good luck with that!) and proposed to reduce gun violence by delaying the age at which citizens can buy AR-15s to 30 (for semiautomatic pistols, he suggests waiting until 25). It’s as though 64-year-old Stephen Paddock never killed 58 people in Las Vegas (and injured another 851) less than five months ago. It’s as though the vast majority of killings with guns, including mass murders, were not committed by grown-up men. Well, at least they’re not having abortions.

Enough with the craziness, and enough with the clever pundits and the quiet politicians and the defeatist citizenry, too. There’s no reason why anyone—of any age—needs to own an AR-15. In fact, maybe I shouldn’t say this, because we progressives seem to be all about winning the MAGA-hat-wearing white working class, but I don’t believe you have a right to own a gun, period. So show up for the gun-control marches and bring your friends. Follow the money—the NRA money—and work like heck to elect anti-gun candidates. The Douglas students have changed the conversation. It will take a whole lot of us to keep it going.

Maybe the kids will save us in the end. Too many of us adults have been cowed by the gun lobby.
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**POLICE ABUSE**

**The Rape Loophole**

A Brooklyn teen’s assertion that she was raped by two NYPD detectives after being taken into custody has spurred New York State lawmakers to close a legal loophole that allows cops to claim consent in cases of sexual assault.

According to BuzzFeed News, an 18-year-old woman and her two male friends were stopped last September by Detectives Eddie Martins, 37, and Richard Hall, 33. When the detectives discovered marijuana in the woman’s vehicle, they proceeded to handcuff her but released the two men. After that, the woman alleges, the detectives took her to an unmarked police van and raped her.

While New York State law prohibits sex between inmates and prison guards, that doesn’t apply to police and the people they arrest. The two detectives, who were charged in October with kidnapping and rape, have pleaded not guilty, and Martins’s lawyer claims “there was no non-consensual sexual encounter.”

On February 5, the State Assembly passed a bill that bars sexual contact between police officers and individuals in their custody. (The measure is now awaiting confirmation in the Senate.) But 34 other states still have no laws explicitly classifying sex between a cop and a person in custody as nonconsensual. A 2015 Associated Press investigation found that over a six-year period, about 1,000 officers across the country lost their badges after accusations of rape, sodomy, or other sexual crimes and misconduct. —Safiya Charles

(continued from page 4)

continues to escalate its threats against Iran and also North Korea. We need to remember, even as we work to defend the rights of the refugees fleeing these wars, that the most important thing we can do is to prevent and end the wars that create refugees in the first place.

We can’t afford to leave behind the lessons of Iraq. Our multimillion-strong global protest in February 2003 wasn’t able to prevent one war. But it’s part of the reason we’re not at war with Iran already, and it taught a generation that global protest is actually possible. It helped inspire uprisings and resistance around the world. Today’s wars don’t look just like the Iraq War, and future protests won’t look just like the one in 2003. But as we build new movements for peace, we need to remember.

**Phyllis Bennis**

Phyllis Bennis directs the New Internationalism Project at the Institute for Policy Studies and is a fellow of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam.

(continued from page 5)

man well; when I was in my 20s—two decades ago—he used to invite me to drinks and to parties. He would also call me at home in the evening and attempt to flirt. At one point, he hinted strongly that I should visit him in the tropical locale where he had a second or third home. I received many assignments from this man. “What’s so galling to me,” my friend mused, “is that while he was calling you at home, he was ignoring my pitches. I wasn’t his type!” I noted that after turning 30, I never got another call—or assignment—from the guy again. My friend and I laughed, but also reflected that there was something serious here that isn’t discussed often enough. The economist Joan Robinson once observed that, under capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited at all. Similarly, erotic attention, as a form of professional capital with material consequences, can be troublesome—but so can its absence.

What to do? Of course, we all need to build women’s social and economic power and fight the ageism in our culture. But you must also take control of your own situation, AgainstAgeism. Our long-term professional relationships help, since those tend to be based on what we’ve done rather than whose eyes we’ve caught. (Besides, if veteran colleagues once shared a pleasant, mutual erotic vibe, a few wrinkles won’t tend to diminish it.) Focus on strengthening such connections. While the problem you describe is real, it’s greatly alleviated when we seek out female collaboration, befriend female colleagues, and mentor young women. Many professions have formal networking groups specifically for women. I’d also recommend queering your networks; connect with people in your profession who are trans, genderqueer, gay, or lesbian. Such circles are not free of ageism (far from it), but it would be naive not to acknowledge that, as fond as we are of many of them, straight men are more likely than our other colleagues to (unconsciously or not) punish us for no longer being vulnerable, smooth-skinned sylphs who look like (and can make) babies. Unless your industry is completely male-dominated, there is plenty of delightful socializing to be done without men. And when heterosexual male co-workers forget to cc you on invitations, they’ll soon be the butt of your laughter over lunch, where an alternative source of power is taking root.

**COMIX NATION**

PETER KUPER

"So, what's your point?"
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- HEALTH

Bill Miller is an accredited journalist at the UN for the Washington International and has written extensively on UN issues.

He is the Principal of Miller and Associates International Media Consultants, which created the Global Connection Television concept.

Bill developed an interest in international issues and the UN when he served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. In his first year he worked as a community developer in a remote rural area; his second year he was Professor of Social Work at the Madre y Maestra University in Santiago, the country’s second largest city.

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This Time Is Different
After the Parkland shooting, young people are leading the push for gun control.

There is a learned hopelessness about mass shootings in America that creates the foundations for an emotionally hollow, politically impotent, media-saturated response. Conservatives offer prayers for those who have died and oppose any action that will prevent more deaths. Liberals offer outrage at the carnage and demand that something must be done, but then go on to do relatively little. (Gun owners are almost twice as likely as non-gun owners to have contacted a public official about gun policy, and almost three times as likely to have donated to a group that takes a position on the issue.) The rest of the world looks on aghast that an ostensibly mature democracy could witness such a tragedy and decide to do nothing to prevent it from happening again. Cable-news channels screen mawkish portraits of the dead and arm’s-length, usually posthumous profiles of the killer. Talk of evil is “balanced” by calls for legislation. Then, after a few days, the talking and the calling stop—until the next time.

With nothing changing but the name, place, and number of victims, what some call “compassion fatigue” sets in. But as Susan Moeller, a journalism professor at the University of Maryland, argued in her study of the responses to the media’s reporting of such atrocities, the problem isn’t so much fatigue as it is the cycle of avoidance that causes people to avert their gaze. She writes, “We’ve got compassion fatigue, we say, as if we have involuntarily contracted some kind of disease that we’re stuck with no matter what we might do.”

There is reason to believe that the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in which 17 people were killed by a single shooter, has the potential to break that cycle. Students, including those from Parkland, have spoken out in ways that are difficult to ignore, calling for youth-led activism against political complacency in general and the National Rifle Association in particular. Piercing through the “Now is not the time for judgment” rhetoric, these students leveraged their vulnerability to political effect. They have held a press conference and called a national demonstration. The issue isn’t fading from the news as quickly as mass shootings tend to do, with interest in the term “gun control” enjoying a sustained high in Google searches a week later.

There are, nonetheless, grounds to be pessimistic or even cynical. We remember Sandy Hook. The kids were younger, the outrage greater; the president even cried—and still, many insist, nothing happened.

But there are three main reasons why we might see progressive possibilities in this moment. The first is that something did happen after Sandy Hook: President Obama spoke up. Five months before that atrocity, James Holmes went into a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, and shot 12 people dead during a midnight screening of The Dark Knight Rises. The next morning, at a scheduled event in Fort Myers, Florida, Obama said what presidents white and black, Republican and Democrat, have said for the best part of a generation: “There are going to be other days for politics. This, I think, is a day for prayer and reflection.” But after Sandy Hook, he said something else: “We can’t tolerate this anymore. These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change.” Belatedly, Obama set a new tone. We shouldn’t be too surprised that, after years of presidents and congressional leaders refusing to bring the issue of gun control into mainstream political debate, this new tone did not result in legislative change the first time. You can’t fatten a pig on market day. It takes time.

Second, this time the challenge is being led by young people who are motivated in a way that the mostly white, suburban gun-control movement has not been. “Maybe the adults have got it wrong,” said 18-year-old Emma Gonzalez, who was in the school when the shooting happened. “But if we students have learned anything, it’s that if you don’t study, you will fail. And in this case, if you actively do nothing, people continually end up dead.” Parkland was the eighth school shooting and the 30th mass shooting
of the year—and it was only Valentine’s Day. In the four

days afterward, there were four more mass shootings.

Finally, and crucially, this fight comes at a moment of

heightened consciousness about the nation’s political tra-

jectory and with a new critical mass determined to correct

it. As a result of Donald Trump’s victory, many liberals

and progressives have been doing things over the past

year—campaigning, marching, phone banking, running

for office—that they hadn’t done for a long time, if at all.

In the course of this activism, many are now real-

izing that the issues that energize us most—whether

it’s immigration, sexual harassment, racism, or health

care—are not isolated. In the past, campaigning around

a tragedy like Parkland would have concentrated solely

on gun control. That doesn’t go far enough. Avoiding

the more enduring American pathologies that allow

the gun culture to flourish—the obsessions with conquest,

domination, force, power, masculinity, and rugged in-
dividualism—means failing to explain why a racist, anti-

Semitic teenage boy with a grudge and an easily available

weapon of war can go to school and kill others at will,

and what might be done to prevent it. It means failing to

recognize that America’s gun culture is deeply embedded

in its general culture.

The Trump agenda is a broad and unrelenting assa-

ult on equality and human rights. But it did not come

out of nowhere, and it did not invent the divisions that

it exploits. For the resistance to be effective, it cannot

be narrowly focused. It must, instead, shed light on

how these various struggles are connected. The young

campaigners have a stake, an audience, a platform, and

allies. That may not be enough to stop the next school

shooting. But it’s more than gun-control advocates have

had for some time.


RUSSIAN MEDDLING

Their cyber-warfare’s in the spotlight’s glare.
The proof is there. Our government’s aware
They mean to tear apart the trust we share
That votes we cast are counted, fair and square.
Democracy’s at stake in this affair.
The president, though, doesn’t seem to care.
WHAT WE DON’T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT... by JoAnn Wypijewski
AMID THE CHORUS OF STORIES THAT DEFINE THE #METOO PHENOMENON, THERE REMAIN OTHER, unattended stories. These others do not displace the chorus. They do not say, “You are wrong, shut up.” They do not exist in the world of “Keep quiet” or “Be good.” They do not deny the reality of men’s age-old power over women, or conformity as a silencing force. They say power is cunning, power is a hydra; it has more heads than any story or group of stories can describe. They say history does, too. They invite us to inspect the hydra.

What follows is my invitation.

We both were young, 20s, but I was older. We worked for the same outfit, but I was paid. We kissed while walking home from a party, and then at the back of a bus, and then in his stairwell. He had made the first move, but only I could say, in the midst of our distraction, “Of course this means I can’t hire you.” He was an intern, I a department chief. The declaration astonished him—whether because he sensed I underestimated him, I cannot say. Ultimately, he so surpassed the qualifying test’s requirements that not hiring him would have been absurd. Years later, a catty friend would say ambition alone drove the boy’s kisses: “After all, he was gorgeous, and you…” I was his boss and lover, he my assistant and lover, each of us on the seer’s of power and weakness that those dual roles implied until, over time, the temperature changed.

That is a true story, true to me, and the telling, I suppose, encourages you to believe it. But what do you know? Say I were a man and the intern a woman. Say I called her a girl and someone said her desire for a job figured in the encounter. Say you knew nothing of her side of the story, as you know nothing of his—as, actually, you know only the barest details of mine. Say, finally, that she knew the value of her kind of beauty in seduction and social competition—how could she not?—but also its curse. Does that imaginative exercise open what for me is a sweet, if complicated, memory to sinister interpretation? Is the intern now a victim? Am I a predator? And yet the information is unchanged, as revealing and partial as it was at first telling.

The story, like any told from a single point of view, raises an unnerving question about certainty: How can we determine the truth from what we cannot know? In his Histories, Herodotus tells readers that x is what he heard but could not confirm, that y is what his informants say they believe, that z is something he highly doubts but is, in any event, a cultural consensus. Readers might not have verifiable fact, but they are invited to interpret what those views might say about the people who hold them (or the writer who chose to record them). At the detective’s desk, a story of crime is pieced together from multiple sources, but even then, a charging document is not the truth; it is subject to challenge. In literature, truth is an investigation, not an end point, so the story is an instrument for revealing the complexity of being alive, and wisdom, rather than certainty, is the hope.

In politics, truth tends to be whatever those holding

The Nation.

JoAnn Wypijewski has been reporting and speaking on sex, scandal, work, and political culture for over 20 years.
could be read narrowly to represent Harvey Weinstein’s accusers and the Times’ role in his fall. It is now accepted fact that Weinstein is a violent criminal. He may be, but in actual fact we don’t know. Saying that should not be controversial; review enough cases brought on the basis of multiplying accusations in periods of high emotion, and you resist trial-by-media. That it is controversial indicates just how much people are willing to trade for certainty—also, how sheltered some are from the idea that they could ever find themselves on the wrong side of a police investigation. Weinstein basked in the bully role, and his descent would be more satisfying if it did not rely simultaneously on conviction by say-so and generalized agreement that he disempowered every man and woman who wasn’t on his security detail, from assistants to actors to journalists.

Affirmations of powerlessness are more telling than sordid details. Not because the latter might be untrue, but because the former reduce a many-layered story of sexism and human weakness to a bleached tale of monstrosity and cowering. If some of the most privileged people on the planet were paralyzed by fear, this story implies, what defense do the rest of us have against the Bad Man?

As Natalie Portman explained, we are helpless:

It’s only some men who do the harassing, but it’s all women who fear the violence and aggression. It has an effect like terror...everyone is afraid to walk down the street alone at night.*

Desperate situations demand desperate measures. After the terror of 9/11: war, torture, mass surveillance, the gulag. After the terror of Weinstein, to what ends must we go to feel safe?

That is not a glib question, nor is the “terror” reference insignificant. It points to a broader politics of fear structuring our time. Rage, revenge, the frisson of freedom as the list of accused men grew—these emotions reigned as MeToo burst into the air-conditioning system of the culture. Notwithstanding thoughtful essays, commentaries, and critiques, fury has led. And, as after 9/11, why wouldn’t it? Who is not moved by suffering, or does not want to be resolute in opposing violence?

There is a rub, though. Strip the veneer of liberation, and an enthusiasm for punishment is palpable. Look beyond declarations of revolution, and there is an underanalyzed conception of patriarchy. Take seriously the argument that any social conflict will have winners and losers, and there remain cavernous, unplumbed realities of loss. Look squarely at the presumption of guilt in light of experience, at the bundling of diverse behaviors under the rubric of sexual abuse, at emboldened efforts to drop statutes of limitation, and the zeitgeist feels like sex panic.

Exponents of MeToo bridle at the term. After Daphne Merkin worried in the Times over waves of accusation, and Mimi Kramer called her “a beard for covert anti-feminism” probably put up to it by a man (“That’s Dean Baquet [Times executive editor] trying to muddy the waters, no?”), other voices rose to preempt talk of sex panic, which they promptly mischaracterized. So, a definition: A sex panic, or moral panic, is a social eruption fanned by the media and characterized by alarm over innocence (stereotypically, white women and children) imperiled. The predator is a lurking, shape-shifting social presence, a menace against which the populace must be mobilized—and has been since at least the “white slavery” panic of the 1880s–1910s, but almost continuously since the mid-20th century.

That politics of fear has not been trivial. Examples range from the fever over (homo)sexual psychopaths (1950s) to serial rages since the late 1960s against: sex education; gay “sex rings,” teachers, and threats to family; “stranger danger”; Crime!; Porn!; satanic ritual abuse in day care; sexual abuse dug up from “memory”; AIDS predators; “superpredators”; Internet predators; Sex Offenders as a separate category of human being; “pedo-phile priests”; campus date rape.

Whether formulated for political organizing (the right’s “Save Our Children”), or inflated/concocted from real claims (the priest scandal), or entirely concocted (the day-care frenzy), or fueled by exaggerated statistics and unstable definitions (the college “hunting ground”), these panics have shared features. Sex figures as a preternatural danger, emotion swamps reason, monsters abound, and protection demands any sacrifice. Sex panic reverses the order that governs law, where, formally at least, innocence is presumed. In panic, the stories are all true, and the accused are guilty by default. Law having been declared a flawed tool for achieving justice—as, indeed, it is—“naming and shaming” takes its place. Garbed as justice, accusations become moral lessons of Good’s triumph over Evil; they thus become increasingly difficult to question. Their proliferation becomes proof of legitimacy. Victims are encouraged to “Speak your truth.” Everyone else is commanded, “Believe.”

Typically, panic generates another story, written in the language of law, resuscitated as a sturdy instrument of justice, reinforcing repressive power but protecting the rest of us from monsters… until the next panic.

In Sex Panic and the Punitive State, anthropologist

*Portman credits this now-widespread idea to Rebecca Solnit, who argues that all women are “groomed to be prey” and live in “pervasive fear.” Roxane Gay argues that women who escape violent or harassing male attention “escape because they are lucky.” Stephen Marche condemns all men for “the grotesquerie of their sexuality,” exhuming Andrea Dworkin to say that the only nonviolent hetero sex is “sex with a flaccid penis.” What’s relevant here is language that requires no qualification. On terrorism, anyone may decry monstrosity in the most sweeping terms; appeals to complexity must first acknowledge terrorism is awful.
Roger Lancaster examines these mass convulsions alongside the expansion of state violence. That hydra’s head is unpleasant to behold, more so when cries of the oppressed have been used to feed it. Liberals and feminists stirred many of these panics and have deployed an inflammatory language that they would mock were it coming from the right. Here, Oprah’s emergence as presidential dream prospect was overdetermined. There “is a dark evil pervading our country,” she railed in 2008 over Internet strangers lurking to destroy children. “What you are going to see will shock you to the core.” Earlier she had launched Oprah’s Child Predator Watch List. During the satanic panic, her show entertained hair-raising lies about day care, and in 1991 she pushed the “Oprah Bill” while, based on such lies, scores of blameless souls languished in prison or clung to the wreckage of their lives. President Clinton signed the bill, which established a national database of convicted child abusers for checking up on day-care providers.

The language, the lists, the insouciance about false accusations… As a nation we have been shocked to the core, only to be shocked repeatedly, and to feel as fearful and powerless as ever.

The repetition should disturb us. As citizens of the biggest prison state, the leading exporter of violence, we should consider how even arguments against violence may be colonized by it. When Wendy Kaminer, Zephyr Teachout, Masha Gessen, and others warned about the indifference to due process, women from Socialist Worker to The Washington Post scoffed. Ana Marie Cox in the Post: “The courts aren’t where our national conversation is taking place so let’s not dither about the dangers of proclaiming guilt or innocence.”

That ignores the way culture and social attitudes bleed into the law, shape policy, define guilt and innocence, and determine punishment beyond the borders of any particular discussion. It ignores the crippling of due process and the ratcheting up of criminalization in all contexts across decades of serial panic. Clinton’s grotesque 1994 crime bill did not occur in a vacuum; folding the Violence Against Women Act into it was calculated co-optation. Michelle Alexander is right; no claim to conscience can ignore the realities of carceral politics. Sex panic ignores them all the time.

Some 70 million people, nearly one-third of US adults, have a criminal record, by FBI statistics. Since the 1980s, the rate has spiked. Some 50 percent of black men and 40 percent of white men are arrested by age 23. Women and girls are hardly immune. As the Brennan Center for Justice puts it, “If all arrested Americans were a nation, they would be the world’s 18th largest…. Holding hands, [they] could circle the earth three times.”

The War on Drugs accounted for much of this. The War on Sex (as noted in an excellent recent anthology by that name) now drives the fastest-growing imprisoned population. That war has standardized irredeemable existence. Some 860,000 people who have completed their sentence are Registered Sex Offenders, social exiles for whom daily life is absorbed by punishment and shame. Many were put on the list as juveniles.

Progressives used to distrust “zero tolerance,” a term that just got a face-lift. Some snapshots of its real face are in order. In 2008, police were called because Randy Castro, 6, had swatted a female classmate’s butt; sexual harassment was written into his school record. In 2015, a school threatened to press sexual-harassment charges against a 9-year-old boy for writing notes to a classmate; one said “I like you” in a scrawled heart. In 2010, Palm Beach County police arrested a 5-year-old boy for sexual battery because he kissed the buttocks and penis of another 5-year-old.

Nothing says patriarchy like the police state.

“We had adjoining rooms at a hostel and didn’t lock the doors. We had talked for years about politics, race, earthly pleasures too. We had never spoken about our mutual attraction, but when I went to his bed one night unbidden I felt certain he would not object, and he did not. In a thousand ways we had signaled desire, and I would not have thought him presumptuous if he’d come to my bed. But only I could feel so unthinkingly insulated from the risk of miscalculation, being young and female and white, whiter than than now.

Young activists raising the banner of #MeToo did not make this world of punishment and fear. But every human being is responsible to history. We inherit it, and will bequeath whatever it is we do with it.

It should be impossible to think of sex and accusation and not think about race. History grabs back. White America lynched some 4,000 black people, mostly men, from 1877 to 1968. Ida B. Wells documented the worst years. The rape of a white woman rationalized all vigilantism, but, she reported, two-thirds of those killed was overdetermined. There “is a dark evil pervading our country”: in October 2005, Oprah Winfrey launched her Child Predator Watch List.

We should consider how even arguments against violence may be colonized by it.

Murder was a more frequent accusation, but lynching’s apologists did not shout, “They’re killing our men!” One might consider how unstable the white man’s sense of his worth must have been; also how anti-miscegenation law emboldened this weak but vicious whiteness to become its enforcer. Any affectional alliance between a white woman and a black man was an outrage. A white man’s rape of a white woman was not, and black women had no rights that anyone need respect.

Wells determined that black power, not sex, was the real outrage: growing prosperity after Reconstruction, and the suspicion that a black man’s control of his own property and family and destiny might impinge on the white man’s destiny, power, and property, including his woman. The woman was hemmed in but not entirely powerless. She had only to say she’d been touched, as with Emmett Till. For the man or boy condemned, the accusation was the ultimate power; for the woman, in terms of what she could make of her own life, it was largely an illusion of power.
I expect that progressives today presume that all those white women were lying. Carolyn Bryant was in the Till case; she admitted it, as we learned last year. At her husband’s trial, Bryant had testified, “I was just scared to death.” Young Emmett didn’t scare her, but her husband may have.

It’s understandable that we should now not only disbelieve every accuser from that time but recoil at the suggestion of individual complexity. Discernment vanishes in a context where every accusation led to death.

So, here’s a problem: What if even one white woman was telling the truth?

It is a terrible question, not because it would justify the punishment—nothing could do that—but because it wouldn’t matter. Where every black man was guilty, truth was irrelevant; falsehood was irrelevant; justice was impossible, whether delivered by a court or a mob. It is reckless to forget that logic now, even if the stakes for the accused bear no resemblance, even if the headline predator is white and high on the hog.

And what was justice for the black woman whom nobody believed? What is it now wherever the hydra-head of violence is interpersonal, is racial, is economic, is state policy? One in four women, one in two black women, loves someone in prison. One in eight women, one in five black women, lives in poverty—economic violence that makes every other kind more likely. It’s not an accident that experiments in restorative justice emerged from these communities.

That freed hundreds of slaves.

Mildred’s speech captures the wild agony of a parent whose child has been annihilated. The audience reaction was a souvenir of how much society has abdicated its responsibility to history requires that we attend to its surprises. South Carolina’s anti-lynching law was supposed to target racist violence; in 2003, 69 percent of its targets were black men.

When I saw Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, people in the theater voiced approval as Mildred Hayes, the antithero seeking the resolution of her daughter’s rape and murder, tells the police chief:

If it was me, I’d start up a database, every male baby was born, stick ’em on it, and as soon as he done something wrong, cross-reference it, make 100 percent certain it was a correct match, then kill him.

Mildred’s speech captures the wild agony of a parent whose child has been annihilated. The audience reaction was a souvenir of how much society has abdicated its responsibility in bowing to revenge.

I was a temp, sharing the office with the secretary of my boss’s second in command. She had been there for years. Her boss screamed from across the ball, “Get in here, you old cow” or “fat sow.” Farm-animal slurs. I told him his language was vile and complained to my boss, who must have stifled him,
Humiliation was the secretary’s daily work experience. Her boss was a sexist, but his cruelties were not sexual; they were part of a terribly ordinary structure. In that structure, a hand on the butt or an explicit joke or even the boss flashing his dick is the least of it. That is an indictment, not a justification. In that structure, three days to grieve is a blessing. What do we see when we inspect the hydra-head of the working day? When we look unblinkingly at the embodied experience of people—men, women, trans—whatever they belong to a workforce under control?

For the boss who does the controlling—who need not be a man—sexual harassment is one tool. Humiliation, inventively variegated, is another. Physical danger, overwork, layoffs, are others. Their aim: discipline, profit. Their form: assaults on body, mind, spirit.

An insurance adjuster is assigned to train the low-wage worker who will displace him. An electrician who smokes reefer picks up a flask of urine from his brother each morning and straps it to his body to keep warm in case he’s picked for a random drug test. A farmworker prunes citrus in the heat with no water, no shade, no toilets or washing facilities. An industrial-laundry worker sorts sheets stained with semen, blood, and shit, then must suffer captive-audience harangues because she wants a union. An office cleaner must work so fast “you can’t work anymore.” A nanny is raped, then fired by the rapist’s wife. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 4,970 workplace rapes and sexual assaults a year.) A mechanic is ordered to crawl into a toxic-chemical tank to make a repair for which he’s not trained; he dies. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 5,190 fatal workplace injuries in 2016, up 7 percent from 2015.) An exotic dancer walks barefoot down a stairway strewn with glass. A 14-year-old ballet dancer works in pain. (The BLS reports 2.9 million nonfatal injuries and illnesses for 2016.) A food co-op manager is murdered by an enraged worker. A beautician is murdered by her husband. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 43,380 workplace rapes and sexual assaults a year.) A mechanic is ordered to crawl into a toxic-chemical tank to make a repair for which he’s not trained; he dies. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 5,190 fatal workplace injuries in 2016, up 7 percent from 2015.) An exotic dancer walks barefoot down a stairway strewn with glass. A 14-year-old ballet dancer works in pain. (The BLS reports 2.9 million nonfatal injuries and illnesses for 2016.) A food co-op manager is murdered by an enraged worker. A beautician is murdered by her husband. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 43,380 workplace rapes and sexual assaults a year.) A mechanic is ordered to crawl into a toxic-chemical tank to make a repair for which he’s not trained; he dies. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 5,190 fatal workplace injuries in 2016, up 7 percent from 2015.) An exotic dancer walks barefoot down a stairway strewn with glass. A 14-year-old ballet dancer works in pain. (The BLS reports 2.9 million nonfatal injuries and illnesses for 2016.) A food co-op manager is murdered by an enraged worker. A beautician is murdered by her husband. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 43,380 workplace rapes and sexual assaults a year.)

I don’t think I was lucky my professor was not a rapist, and I was not alarmed. College women were not naïve to the risk of violence in those days, the mid-1970s. We walked together at night, and either signed up for self-defense training or shared tips on kicking, gouging, or otherwise disabling assailants. We’d come up watching westerns—also rebellions that exposed a nation hooked on violence and inequity. We were living at the cusp of the liberationist ’60s and the fear-jacked backlash. We understood independence brought risk. I gravitated to classes taught by women and men for whom freedom and the guises of unfreedom were weighty questions. Sexuality was part of the political territory everyone was negotiating. We were encouraged to explore desire, not to say yes. I was stupid to get drunk that night, as was the professor—as are people generally—but we weren’t playing a game of blindman’s buff.

He was my professor. He kissed like a dream. I met him at a bar. I agreed to go to his house. I recall aquavit, “San Goddess” on the stereo. I was too drunk to walk home, and too drunk to drive. I was surprised to wake up beside him because I had gone to bed alone. He offered to make breakfast and then to make love. It was tempting, but I was too hungover virgin and the room was ringed with photos of his estranged wife. Maybe she was not so estranged. Breakfast sounded nice. I learned recently that he still teaches, and wondered, dismally, “Were I to tell this story differently, might I ruin him?”

As for me and myð glamorous, I have no idea. There were no provisions to explore, no consent. I was 20 and he was 45. I met him at a bar. I agreed to go to his house. I was too drunk and too hungover to walk home, and too drunk to drive. I was surprised to wake up beside him because I had gone to bed alone. He offered to make breakfast and then to make love. It was tempting, but I was too hungover virgin and the room was ringed with photos of his estranged wife. Maybe she was not so estranged. Breakfast sounded nice. I learned recently that he still teaches, and wondered, dismally, “Were I to tell this story differently, might I ruin him?”
social context. There, reality has many dimensions. People are worked by orders but also make decisions, and sex (not just for heterosexuals, who have dominated this discussion) is complicated: by personality and socialization, by class and race, by concepts of what is “normal,” what is “dirty” or “hot,” and by anyone’s experience of repression and desire.

What doesn’t alarm one might alarm another, but before asserting, “This isn’t about sex, it’s about power,” let’s confront that cliché’s central evasion. Because, clearly, while a boss imposing sex is about power, and rape is about power, what keeps tumbling out of the closets is also some pretty bad sex. And because bad sex often involves unsorted anxieties and lacunae about who we are and how we engage with others, to say that it’s beside the point is to say that we, storm-tossed persons, are, too.

Why, in these ambiguous stories, are the men so insecure and inept? Why are the women so pliable and prone to freezing in place? Sex therapists say temporarily freezing is a common human response, but going limp is no more desirable than being a self-centered clod. Speaking up can be arduous. That isn’t the answer, it’s the question. How do people practice sexual consciousness, confidence?

The monster/victim script forecloses that conversation. The personal story as public fodder does, too. Cornered in a false debate between belief and blame, it leaves room for nothing but silence or rage.

Being fiction, Kristen Roupenian’s popular, if superficial, story from The New Yorker, “Cat Person,” at least allows interpretation. The male character is a cardboard monster by the end. Before that, he is mainly awkward, fat, hairy—an ugly man like Weinstein, like so many men in the initial lineup of monsters—traits the reader is enlisted not to ponder but to rebel against. Why? One could scarcely imagine that such “ugliness” could be beauty for a vast gay subculture, or that the beauty trap might also stunt men. The woman is lithe, aware of her perfect body if nothing else. Neither sees the other. Sexually aggressive, she is also terrified. Sexually obtuse, he is a boor. Post-coitus, she wants to slither away; he wants to watch TV. The story should have ended at their first awful kiss. Simply asserting that women are conditioned to say yes—a response to similar, nonfiction accounts of bad kisses, bad dates, bad sex—skirts the problem that neither person seems equipped with sensual intelligence. Why? Is virtual communication anesthetizing? Has the long night of sex panic—shadowing generations, along with 9/11 and war—begot a kind of sexual nihilism?

Sex exists in personal and political time. Perhaps the hydra-head of fear looms larger, and more insidiously, than public discussion so far has allowed.

My stories here, vestiges from a time before sex panic became permanent, are messy, not simple. What besides backlash happened to the sexual revolution? Capitalism bit down, absorbed the liberationist impulse, mass-produced the sex but everywhere devalued education, manifold reality; and liberationist forces were too besieged or internally at odds to withstand it. What remains is a simulacrum of freedom: at one end, the ultimate symbols of marketable feminine sexuality protesting objectification; at the other, legions of ordinary joes opening e-mails urging, “Get bigger, last longer, become the beast she always wanted.” In between is only more dissonance, including TV sex as no-foreplay gladiatorial combat initiated by powerful female characters created by a powerful female producer.

As a dream-path to a world of peace and equality, the sexual revolution would always be constrained by the contradictions of the society that birthed it. The great diversity of human personality could be forgotten in assumptions about how “freedom” should feel. Yet getting free was a serious project. Gay liberation seized on it. Women’s liberation did too, until anti-sex feminists marched into a cul-de-sac, and radical analyses of pleasure and danger were sidelined. Straight men as a group never challenged the snare of masculinity; like others, they got what the activist sex therapist Leonore Tiefer calls “permission without real knowledge, real understanding, like people have in other domains of their life.”

So much of what we call sex, Tiefer says, is actually “about training, common sense, attention. Sex glamorizes things that are everyday. It makes something the best or worst experience, but the doing of it and the script in your head make it so. It’s not the thing itself, it’s the meaning of the thing. It exists in consequences of actions. It exists in interpretation. So when does coercion come in? As opposed to persuasion, as opposed to opportunity. It’s not so easy. If we could figure that out without calling it ‘sexual,’ we’d be getting somewhere.”

It’s been a long time since we’ve practiced what Dr. Herukhuti calls “grassroots organizing in [the] bedroom.” Since we’ve dug into the sensual. Since we’ve studied songs of freedom. So much of the culture teaches us to be afraid or ashamed, instead. Sex can’t be abstracted from that culture, any more than sexual violence can be abstracted from other systems of violence. Consequences of action, all of them, matter. The politics of Good and Evil leaves only righteousness and shame. Complex humanity evaporates in shame, and we’re back in the Garden, stitching fig leaves into garments.
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—Carol, Washington, DC (Russia 2017)

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LIBRARIES ARE ESSENTIAL TO DEMOCRACY

They help everyone to participate fully in society—and they’re under siege.

SUE HALPERN
Among the disappeared in Donald Trump’s fiscal-year 2018 budget was something most of us didn’t notice at first: the dissolution of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Take that away and virtually all federal support for public libraries disappears. While the institute doesn’t represent a massive amount of money—by one accounting, its $230 million was 0.006 percent of the federal budget in 2016—it has been crucial for sustaining libraries, especially those in struggling urban neighborhoods and rural areas.

I was living in one of those hardscrabble outposts—Johnsburg, New York—when the monthly bookmobile ceased to operate. The nearest library was at least an hour away, and that was when the roads were clear. Books, already a limited resource, became even scarcer. But when the town board proposed a small tax increase to fund a local library, residents balked. This was one of the poorest regions in New York State, and people were already living at the margins. A library was a luxury. What about the frost heaves and potholes? What about the rusted fire truck?

A few years later, the town board came up with a new spirit, spurred by one of its members, a man who worked at the lumberyard during the week and was a lay minister on weekends. Digging deep, the board found $15,000 in the town budget and assigned me and two retirees to figure out how to turn it into a library.

Seventy-seven years after Andrew Carnegie built his last public library, our town opened its first. We had 3,239 books, all on loan from the regional library consortium; a rack of movies purchased when the local video store went bust; tables and chairs culled from discards we found in the town shed; and a librarian who, much like that $15,000—which also had to cover his salary—seemed to have materialized out of nowhere. We ordered 500 library cards, expecting to go through them in about a year. Three weeks after we opened, we had to order 500 more.

Six months and an additional 500 cards later, we went back to the board to request more money. The Town of Johnsburg Library was thriving, but that was a big ask, so we went in with pages of testimonials and a stack of statistics. We planned to tell the board how Head Start brought its preschoolers to story hour, how high-school students were using the library as a homework hub, and how people were gathering to watch movies and talk about them afterward. But our preparations turned out to be unnecessary: We hadn’t even presented our case when the board voted—unanimously—to double our budget. “You don’t need to say anything,” the town supervisor told us. “We can see it for ourselves. The library is the best thing that has happened to this town.”

Two years ago, our formerly little library celebrated its 20th anniversary. Its one room is now three. Its library cards are computerized. It has over 40,000 items in its collection. In 2015, the last year for which I could find statistics, there were close to 30,000 library visits. That’s more than 10 trips for every person in town. There were 130 events—lectures, discussions, play readings, art shows. There’s a book group, fast Internet, and a weekly knitting club.

It’s a quaint image, that intergenerational crew—mostly women—sitting amid the books and computers, needles clacking, sharing patterns, trading stories. But when the Trump administration looks in on the scene, it’s the metaphor they see, and it scares them. Libraries knit individuals into communities. They are the shared space where anyone and everyone belongs. They are the commons that persist even after the town green gets paved over and schools are regionalized and Main Street is boarded up. Libraries are not only built on the open and egalitarian promises of democracy; they exist to promote them. As Frederick Stielow wrote in Libraries and Democracy: The Cornerstones of Liberty, “At the local level, [the public library] would evolve into the most visible civic statement and monument to a democratic way of life. Internationally, the concept of the American library would come to serve as a powerful cultural symbol and visible goal for all democratic societies.” No wonder the Trump administration would like to shutter them.

Ironically, it was Carnegie, one of the richest people in the world, who put the “public” in “public library.” Prohibited from using a local library when he was a young workingman because he couldn’t afford its fee—like other libraries, this one was modeled on Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia “public” library, which operated on a subscription basis—Carnegie argued in a letter to The Pittsburgh Dispatch that libraries should be open to all comers irrespective of means. You can hear this philosophy echoed in the Public Library Association’s statement of principles, written in 1982, one year shy of the centennial of Carnegie’s first public library (he’d go on to fund 2,508 more): “Public libraries freely offer access to their collections and services to all members of the community without regard to race, citizenship, age, education level, economic status or any other qualification or condition.” And, the statement continues, “Free access to ideas and information, a prerequisite to the existence of a responsible citizenship, is as fundamental to America as are the principles of freedom, equality and individual rights…. Public libraries continue to be of enduring importance to the maintenance of our free democratic society. There is no comparable institution in American life.”

Let me repeat: Of course the Trump administration is gunning for them.

In my new novel, there’s a scene in which a group of newly arrived immigrants are told by a librarian that they can take as many books as they’d like for free, and it confirms everything they’ve heard about America: that it’s the land of abundance and opportunity. I wrote the book before Trump was elected, and before we watched ICE staging raids at places where immigrants are likely to congregate, and before govern-
FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE ANNIVERSARY OF DONALD TRUMP’s inauguration, voters in western Wisconsin sent a devastating message to the president’s party. In a State Senate district that Trump won by a landslide in 2016, voters replaced a conservative Republican with a progressive Democrat. The district had been electing Republicans for the better part of two decades, and their nominee, Adam Jarchow, was a prominent member of the State House who had won previous elections in parts of the district. Republicans poured money into the contest. But in the end, it wasn’t even close. St. Croix County medical examiner Patty Schachtner won some 55 percent of the vote, swinging the district to the Democrats by almost 18 points.

It was a stunning setback for Governor Scott Walker and a state Republican Party that had been on a winning streak since the “GOP wave” election of 2010. So stunning, in fact, that Walker tweeted: “Senate District 10 special election win by a Democrat is a wake-up call for Republicans in Wisconsin.” With the “Trump factor” damaging the GOP brand across the country, and with Walker’s own reelection prospects looking increasingly uncertain, the last thing he needed was this bad news. If Democrats could win in such a seemingly red district, there was no telling where else they could triumph. Two other Republican-held legislative seats were open in Wisconsin; losing either of them would confirm that the Republicans were vulnerable and strengthen the hand of Democrats in the Legislature and on the fall campaign trail.

Luckily for Walker, he had that problem covered. The governor had already announced that he would not call special elections to fill those vacancies. That was a good thing for Walker and his party—but it was bad for representative democracy, as the 229,904 people living in those districts will go unrepresented for almost a full year.

Governors in half of all states are empowered to call special elections to fill vacant state legislative seats. A number of them also have the power to call special elections to fill vacant US Senate seats, and all of them are supposed to call special elections to fill vacant seats in the US House. Historically, this awesome authority has been considered a duty that is best exercised quickly and without partisan calculation. But that’s not how the system works these days. Governors like Walker are leaving legislative seats open for months longer than need be—and, in many cases, for as much as a year. In Michigan, Republican Governor Rick Snyder is leaving a US House seat in a heavily Democratic district open for almost the entire second session of the 115th Congress. In Alabama, Republicans are busy rewriting election laws so that there will never be another special election like the one in December that handed Democrat Doug Jones the Senate seat once held by Jeff Sessions.

“If you’re a Republican governor, what do you do when you can’t seem to win special elections?” asks Carolyn Fiddler, who follows legislative races with the Statehouse Action project. “You stop having them, of course!”

That’s not a calculus that Republican governors like Walker or Snyder or Florida’s Rick Scott would ever admit to. They gripe about the cost of organizing special elections; Snyder has also claimed that special elections don’t provide enough time for prospective candidates to prepare to run and be seated. Republicans note, correctly, that there have been Democratic abusers of this process as well. For the most part, however, it is Republican governors—the same officials who have embraced extreme gerrymandering, purged voter rolls, restricted same-day registration, narrowed the hours for early voting, and otherwise suppressed popular sovereignty—who are taking advantage of imprecise special-election laws to tip the balance in their favor. For example, when a state statute insists, as Wisconsin’s does, that a vacancy must be “filled as promptly as possible by special election,” what exactly does “promptly” mean?

THERE’S NO QUESTION THAT SPECIAL ELECTIONS are the outliers of American electoral politics, as they often require state and local officials to fire up the machinery of democracy at unexpected times. It can cost a lot of money to organize balloting for a relatively small number of voters, notes election-law expert Rick Hasen. With that said, however, special elections are a fundamental part of the infrastructure of representative democracy. They ensure that Americans retain a steady voice in the corridors of power when elected legislators resign or die. Unfortunately, as Hasen explains, “just like any other
discretionary election-related decision made by partisan actors, the scheduling of special elections can be subject to abuse.” That’s always been true. But in the new era of anything—goes, winner-take-all politics, the abuses are multiplying—especially now, when the political volatility of the moment has endowed special elections with statewide and even nationwide consequences.

The most powerful signal that Donald Trump and his congressional enablers are ruining the Republican brand—not just for themselves, but for allies in statehouses across the country—has come from special elections in which traditional voting patterns have been upended in favor of the Democrats. Jones’s win in Alabama is the most high-profile example of this—and the most devastating for Republicans.

So it should come as no surprise that the most aggressive assault on the guarantee of special elections is happening in the state where voters rejected Judge Roy Moore, embarrassed Trump—Moore’s most prominent backer—and narrowed the Republican advantage in the Senate to a razor-thin 51–49.

What to do? The Republican-controlled Alabama House of Representatives voted on January 23 to overturn the state law that allows the governor to make a temporary appointment for a Senate vacancy but requires that a special election be held “forthwith” to fill the seat for the remainder of the term. Under the new proposal that the State House backed, the governor would appoint a senator to serve until the next general election.

This means that a vacant seat could be filled with an appointed crony of the governor for almost one-third of a Senate term before voters are allowed to weigh in. As Alabama statehouse reporter Mike Cason explains it, the bill “says the election will be held at the next general election unless the candidate-qualifying period for that election has already started. In that case, it would move to the next general election, two years later.”

Alabama Republicans claim that their plan brings the state into alignment with most others. Regrettably, there is truth in what they say: Two-thirds of American states allow Senate seats to be filled without a special election. But as former senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) explained in 2009, when he proposed a constitutional amendment that would require all US senators to be elected, allowing any senators to serve by appointment is “anti-democratic.” Former House Judiciary Committee chairman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) supported the idea, saying, “Elected senators have a mandate from the people. Appointed senators have a mandate from one person: the governor.”

Feingold and Sensenbrenner were seeking to bring the Senate into alignment with the House, where vacant seats can only be filled via special elections. “That’s the way it’s been for the House since the Constitution was written, and I don’t think the Senate should be any different,” Feingold explained.

Unfortunately, governors are now meddling with House elections. In Michigan, Snyder chose to delay a special election to fill the Detroit-area seat of former congressman John Conyers Jr. until the already scheduled November 2018 election. “Most of Detroit to go 11 months without rep in Congress,” read the Detroit News headline after the governor announced his plan to abandon the historical model for filling congressional vacancies with punctual special elections. Some local Democrats accepted Snyder’s assault on representative democracy. But former Michigan Democratic Party chair Mark Brewer ripped into the governor. Referring to high-profile controversies over the takeover of Detroit and other Michigan cities by gubernatorial appointees as well as the water crisis in Flint, Brewer argued that Snyder “continues to give the back of his hand to urban areas whether it’s emergency managers, poisoned water, [or] now being denied representation in Congress for nearly a year.”

Snyder’s move was particularly egregious given that Michigan has a long history of holding special elections for open US House seats—many of which have had national consequences. For example, when a Republican congressman from the Saginaw area resigned in February 1974, a special election to fill that seat, which had been held by the GOP since the 1930s, was set for April of that year. Everyone knew the race would be a referendum on President Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, and when Democrat Bob Traxler won, the story appeared at the top of page one of The New York Times.

Nixon wasn’t pleased, but Republican Governor William Milliken never attempted to delay an election to fill a vacancy that occurred later in the term than Conyers’s did—just as Milliken didn’t hesitate to call an immediate special election to fill the seat vacated by Michigan Congressman Gerald Ford when he became Nixon’s vice president. A Democrat won that race as well, making even more news and sending a powerful signal about the shifting mood of the country.

Snyder isn’t leaving only the Conyers seat vacant for 11 months; he’s also leaving open a reliably Democratic seat in the State House, representing the capital city of Lansing, for the same amount of time. Lansing voters were sidelined as the Republican-led Legislature engaged in a highly contentious session during which it overrode Snyder’s veto of a tax measure and held intense debates over how officials at Michigan State University in East Lansing handled sexual-abuse charges involving the gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar.

But even when special elections don’t make national news, even when they don’t shift control of legislative chambers, they provide voters with representatives in government when decisions that matter to them are made. That’s why there was such an outcry in New York, where Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo failed to schedule prompt elections to fill 11 vacant State Senate and Assembly seats before this spring’s budget deliberations. Blair Horner, the executive director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, calculated that Cuomo’s delay would leave 625,484 people unrepresented in the Senate, and more than 1.1 million in the Assembly, during the budget debates.

“The governor has a responsibility to his constituents to call a special election immediately,” Susan Lerner, the executive director of Common Cause New York, said in January. “There’s no excuse to delay.” Actually,
Legislature 25 years ago. Some of the governor’s allies claimed at his own political career began with a special election to the State Legislature, which they sued the governor last fall to force him to arrange votes to fill two seats vacated by Democratic legislators. Scott finally relented, but now he’s refusing to move to fill a pair of Republican-held seats that went vacant in December 2017 and January of this year. The governor maintains that election supervisors told him it would cost a lot of money to hold prompt special elections. So, he announced in January, “we’re not.”

But organizing fair and functional elections will always be expensive, so that’s an awfully lame—not to mention disturbing—excuse for refusing to fill vacancies for most of a year. The same goes for the claim that seats can be left open because nothing much happens in legislative chambers during an election year, which was Walker’s excuse in Wisconsin—despite the fact that his own political career began with a special election to the State Legislature 25 years ago. Some of the governor’s allies claimed at one point that he didn’t have to call elections because of confusing language regarding the need to fill vacant seats if the Legislature wasn’t in special session. But then Walker called a special session to deal with welfare reform. And as the regular session chugged along through January and February, the Legislature weighed tax policy, toll roads, and, ironically, a Republican-led effort to remove the head of the nonpartisan state election commission. The truth, says Wisconsin Senate minority leader Jennifer Shilling (D–La Crosse), is that “Governor Walker is running scared and is playing politics with people’s right to be represented in the State Capitol.”

By contrast, the evidence from neighboring Minnesota is pretty compelling. Even as Walker was refusing to call special elections for seats vacated in December, Minnesota’s Democratic governor, Mark Dayton, scheduled a special election for a State Senate seat that went vacant the same month and had it filled by February 12—in time for the legislative session that started a week later.

Shilling says Wisconsin should have done the same. Along with Assembly Democratic leader Gordon Hintz, she’s sponsoring legislation that would require Wisconsin’s governor to schedule a special election within 60 days after a legislative seat becomes vacant. Hintz says “this bill safeguards our electoral system from the short-term political motives of any sitting governor.” Actually, it does more than that: It safeguards representative democracy, which will remain under threat so long as governors abuse their authority and leave Americans unrepresented in state legislatures and in Congress.

(continued from page 21)
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The Nation Cruise 2018
There are many mechanisms of expression more private than a diary. Thinking is invisible, and talking is impermanent. A diary, however, has public aspirations: All writing is to some degree expectant of an audience. The preface to One Day a Year, the meticulous yearly record that the East German writer Christa Wolf maintained from 1960 until 2011, concedes this point. At first, Wolf claims that her notes represent “pure, authentic” life with “no artistic intentions.” But only a few lines later, she admits that “the need to be known, including one’s problematic characteristics, one’s mistakes and flaws, is the basis of all literature and is also one of the motives behind this book.” We amass days, Wolf suggests, in the secret hope that someone else will witness and redeem them. The price we pay for our exhibitionism is a life conducted under observation.

One Day a Year
2001–2011
By Christa Wolf
Translated by Katy Derbyshire
Seagull Books. 128 pp. $21

At the First Congress of Soviet Writers, Gorky proposed that authors from around the world contribute descriptions of an ordinary day, collectively capturing a richly heterogeneous moment in global history. His suggestion resulted in One Day in China, compiled in 1936, and One Day in the World, published in Russian in 1937. But Wolf’s take on the project was

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much more personal. Her efforts chart not many lives at a single moment but a single life at many moments, memorializing not a shared world but a viciously divided country that was, by turns, ferociously nationalistic, war-torn, optimistic, disillusioned, and, finally, uneasily unified. Her chosen day was September 27, and she faithfully observed her annual ritual for more than five decades, mapping her ascent to literary prominence with the 1968 publication of her best-known work, *The Quest for Christa T.*, and the 1983 publication of her daring novel-cum-essay *Cassandra*, a feminist reimagining of the story of Helen of Troy that doubled as a critique of East Germany (officially the German Democratic Republic).

Throughout, Wolf's journals bear moving witness to the personal and political landmarks that constitute the bulk of her life: her struggle to come to terms with communism's quick devolution; her despair over the gender inequalities that belied the GDR's promise of egalitarianism; the marriages of her daughters, Annette and Katrin (“Tinka”); her tenderness for her husband, Gerhard (“Gerd”), who was her most devoted reader and so her hardest critic; and the shocking revelation, in 1993, that she'd served as an informant for the Stasi, the East German secret police, from 1959 to 1962—a collusion that she claimed she’d forgotten or suppressed.

Long before the publication of *One Day a Year*’s first volume, Wolf predicted that her tendency toward self-observation would warp her private life. “This entire observed day falls under the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. It is deformed by my constant viewing of it,” she worried as early as the late 1970s. Even in her diaries, Wolf was induced to spy on herself.

Wolf grew up under surveillance. She was born in 1929, in the then-German city of Landsberg an der Warthe, and her youth was carefully standardized. Her father joined the Nazi Party, and Wolf became a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the League of German Girls, in her early youth. The title of her lightly fictionalized memoir *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) emphasizes the violent regimentation that defined her infancy. 

It describes the brutal homogenization that Germans faced under the Nazis and Wolf’s subsequent struggle to recover the individuality she’d forfeited. “Statistics are too coarse for your purpose,” she writes of herself in the second person. “Even in the face of exact figures, you’d still want more information, and it’s unobtainable in this world.”

The information that Wolf sought was unavailable in part because Landsberg an der Warthe, the site of her childhood recollections, no longer existed; it had become the Polish city of Gorzów Wielkopolski. What remained of Germany was scarcely more recognizable. Wolf and her family fled the Red Army and found themselves in Mecklenburg, a province in what would shortly become East Germany. In *Kindheitsmuster*, the narrator’s daughter recoils from understanding “how one could be there and not there at the same time, the ghastly secret of human beings in this century.” It was a secret that colored much of Wolf’s life as she passed from one authoritarian regime to the next, shutting from one country to another without ever settling into a more situated self.

Wolf wrote to locate herself more completely, but she rarely succeeded. What emerged instead were ill-fated efforts to extricate a single person from the tangle of an intrusively collective world. *The Quest for Christa T.*, an experimental work about the precariousness of identity under fascism, examines Wolf's desperation to lay claim to the word “I.” The book’s bereaved narrator is devastated by the premature death of Christa T., a character roughly modeled on Wolf’s childhood friend Christa Tabbert. Christa resists posthumous recovery because she failed to recover herself, and the narrator rifles through her friend’s journals and writings to no avail. “Among her papers are various fragments written in the third person,” the narrator complains. But she sympathizes with Christa’s confusion, in which she recognizes echoes of herself: “I understand the secret of the third person, who is there without being tangible and who, when circumstances favor her, can bring down more reality upon herself than the first person: I.” She continues in a broken staccato, as if gasping or stuttering, “The difficulty of saying ‘I.’”

Troubling, garbled homage, *The Quest for Christa T.* was initially banned in East Germany: The government denounced it as an illicit “attempt to replace Marx with Freud,” but later reluctantly allowed it to be published in a limited edition. Matters intensified beyond endurance for Wolf in the fall of 1976, when the singer Wolf Biermann was expatriated and the Wolfs joined a group of prominent East German writers to pen an open letter opposing his exile. “Bearing in mind Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*, according to which the proletarian revolution is constantly self-critical,” it reads, “our socialist state should, in contrast to anachronistic social forms, be able to tolerate such discomfort in a calm contemplative way.” Shortly thereafter, Gerhard was expelled from the Socialist Party. Wolf, who was reprimanded but allowed to remain a member, was compelled to resign from the executive committee of the Writers’ Association.

In the aftermath of the incident, Wolf became a symbol of dissent. In the West, she was a hero; in East Germany, she was a threat. Her difficult, theoretical books, more like fictional essays than essayistic fiction, were a formal rebuke to the GDR’s insistence on conformity—and their content was just as disruptive, often explicitly. In *Cassandra*, the book’s namesake and narrator bemoans the “language war,” a Trojan campaign that allows to authoritarian censorship no less than the systematic silencing of women.

Wolf openly criticized the GDR’s sanitized legalese and resented the rampant sexism that the government tolerated and abetted. In *One Day a Year*, she complains that she is “once again” the only female speaker at event after event. But despite her typically veiled and occasionally overt criticisms of East German policy, she made no effort to leave the country that so chronically disappointed her. Even when her life there became unbearable, she refused to disavow her socialist convictions, for she remained hopeful that the flawed regime could be salvaged, that true equality would prevail.

Her loyalty was a feat in the wake of the Biermann affair, when Wolf and her husband were subjected to continuing surveillance. In the 1977 entry for *One Day a Year*, Wolf writes of her longing “for a corner in which they could be infiltrated by totalitarian logic from the first. It was a secret that colored much of Wolf’s life as she passed from one authoritarian regime to the next, shutting from one country to another without ever settling into a more situated self.”

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Wolf continued to work during these years, but many of her texts went unpublished, and she found it more and more difficult to write without anticipating the reaction of the censors. In *What Remains*, a novella that she had written in 1979 but refrained from publishing until 1990, Wolf describes a day under Stasi surveillance. Through her window, she identifies the car where the officers keep tabs on her. She laughs for the benefit of the presumed listener during a phone call with a friend. “But what if no one was listening in? What if all our hubris and preening were directed at emptiness?” she wonders. She concludes that “it wouldn’t make the slightest difference,” for she has forgotten how to speak without imagining that she is being overheard. “Don’t panic,” the narrator of *What Remains* tells herself. “One day I will even talk about it in that other language which, as of yet, is in my ear but not on my tongue. Today I knew would still be too soon. But would I know when the time was right? Would I ever find my language?”

For years, Wolf lacked her language and the privacy in which she might have developed it. Instead, she turned to documentation—the language devised for her by her cruelest spectators, the Stasi. “How does life come about?” begins her preface to *One Day a Year*. While we are living, Wolf hypothesizes, we are too absorbed by the experiences of life to witness them. We can reconstruct them afterward, but “we can never catch [life] in the act.” The stated purpose of Wolf’s yearly record is therefore evidentiary, and Gerd goes so far as to include facsimiles of his wife’s handwritten notes at the end of the most recent volume. These images are proof of the past, additional insurance against forgetfulness. But it’s not clear whether they challenge the official record or internalize it—whether she policed the words she wrote in her journal the way she policed the words she spoke on the phone.

It’s clear enough that documenting can displace doing, and reading *One Day a Year*, one can easily get the sense that Wolf lived solely in service to assembling material to write about. What began as evidentiary quickly became distortive, and Wolf often worries that she is sacrificing life to its chronicle. On September 27, 1993, she admits:

I know that at the very moment when I, at eleven in the morning, begin to describe this day, the question will arise as to whether this text will swallow up the day, whether it determines its course, whether the day is lived for the sake of the text and the text is written for the sake of the day. In brief, whether self-observation leads to falsification.

At times, Wolf openly confesses to having written the book’s various entries whole days or weeks after the 27th. But she usually writes in the present tense, necessarily disingenuously: How can she be eating or cooking or showering if she’s writing? Wolf’s day-to-day life always capitulates to art and artifice. As she explains in an entry about a rainy trip to Bulgaria in 1970, she was “saved...by the idea that I ought to pay close attention to all external conditions, to remember them and note them down.... The only interesting thing in life is writing, I said. Gerd does not like to hear that.” Whatever Gerd would have preferred to hear, the parts of Wolf’s life that did not make it into her writing were negligible to her. “You forget what you did three days ago if you don’t make an obedient note of it every day,” she wrote in 2005.

Wolf must have had an exceptionally shoddy memory for her own behavior: The most devastating fact of all slipped her recollection for years. In 1993, while perusing the 42 volumes of surveillance files that the Stasi had assembled about her, she discovered a “Perpetrator File” revealing that she had worked as an unofficial collaborator—in Stasi parlance, an “I.M.,” or inoffizielle Mitarbeiter—from 1959 to 1962. Wolf insisted that she had repressed all memory of her complicity. “It horrifies me that there is a language in these files, a sort of Stasi language, that I myself was speaking, and that I can no longer identify with at all,” she said in a 1993 interview with *The New York Times*. Perhaps she forgot about her betrayal because she didn’t write it down. No mention of her activities as an informant appears in *One Day a Year*—so Wolf had to learn what she had done from the more thorough recordkeepers.

But what she could not redeem politically, even in her writing, she could sometimes salvage interpersonally with family and friends. For all its faults, her life proved rich in love. September 27 is the day before her younger daughter’s birthday, and it always involves careful preparations. The household is forever doting on its tomcat, Maxel, and Wolf and Gerd often enjoy a nap together in the afternoon.

Still, Wolf hoped to subordinate her life to her writing. Her fiction remained her foremost preoccupation, and she was consistently self-punishing about its quality. In her 1961 entry, she wrote that she had produced a single typewritten page that day—“a meager result, I tell myself almost every day while I walk to the nursery school to pick up Tinka.” In 1976, she opines with breathtaking severity that “what I write is...not very good, I believe.” It was not until the end of her life, when she was recovering after a 2008 knee surgery, that she found more charitable words for herself. She read her books “as if for the first time, couldn’t remember having written them, and to my amazement I found them ‘not bad.’”

Her marriage, at least, was better than “not bad,” and *One Day a Year* is worth reading for its account of Gerd and Wolf’s 51-year conversation alone. The couple never stopped arguing about books, and Wolf always notes what Gerd is reading and what he thinks of it. For his part, Gerd continued commenting on Wolf’s manuscripts for the rest of their days together. In 2005, six years before her death, Wolf became grudgingly sentimental: She stopped Gerd in the kitchen after he served her some homemade soup and said, “Shall I tell you something? I love you.” “The feeling’s mutual” was “his dry response.” In 2010, Wolf wrote with sharp sweetness:

Many times a day I look at Gerd, what he’s doing, his facial expression, his posture, how he says something. The way he brings in a surprising dish for dinner, sometimes triumphant. I listen for the sound of his breathing. I can’t very well wake him to tell him how much I love him.

She died a little over a year later. In her diaries more than her fiction, Wolf emerges as exquisitely human, exquisitely tentative. She never quite manages to carve herself out as exquisitely human, exquisitely tentative. Her marriage, at least, was better than “not bad,” and *One Day a Year* is worth reading for its account of Gerd and Wolf’s 51-year conversation alone. The couple never stopped arguing about books, and Wolf always notes what Gerd is reading and what he thinks of it. For his part, Gerd continued commenting on Wolf’s manuscripts for the rest of their days together. In 2005, six years before her death, Wolf became grudgingly sentimental: She stopped Gerd in the kitchen after he served her some homemade soup and said, “Shall I tell you something? I love you.” “The feeling’s mutual” was “his dry response.” In 2010, Wolf wrote with sharp sweetness:

Many times a day I look at Gerd, what he’s doing, his facial expression, his posture, how he says something. The way he brings in a surprising dish for dinner, sometimes triumphant. I listen for the sound of his breathing. I can’t very well wake him to tell him how much I love him.

She died a little over a year later. In her diaries more than her fiction, Wolf emerges as exquisitely human, exquisitely tentative. She never quite manages to carve herself out from her circumstances, never quite pieces her own motivations together. The last entry of *One Day a Year* breaks off in mid-sentence. Like every effort to become an “I,” it remains grossly incomplete.

In a 1993 article in the *Berliner Zeitung*, Wolf wrote that she had “absolutely no hope, in view of the hysteria that is unleashed by the two magical letters I.M.,” that she could explain “the real relationship of this file to my life. I had to fear being reduced to these two letters.” She faced a
perverse punishment—one that committed the crimes she’d committed against her in turn. In her writing, she tried and failed to spare her characters the cruelties of generality, to attest to their absolute specificity. But she received a public shaming that dispensed with nuance in its haste to turn her into an example, an effacement that only reiterated the spirit of her offense.

Sometimes One Day a Year works against her. It is often curiously impersonal. Wolf listened to the radio obsessively and read multiple daily newspapers, and she includes reliably bleak catalogs of current events in her entries. In 1988, for instance, “in Teltow a new kind of rabbit plague has appeared. One third of the citizens of Schwerin are too heavy. Consumption of alcohol and abuse of medicines are continually increasing.”

Often, however, Wolf displays a harrowing honesty about her doomed efforts to describe the world as she experienced it, or even to access experiences that truly belong to her. “It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to write in a way that in the process you do not think of an audience. That you only write ‘for yourself.’ That would be the right way to write,” she concluded in 1964. She failed at the task she set for herself, at least by her own lights, for the simple reason that she was too afraid. In the year 1969, she buckled under the pressures of Stasi surveillance and debated whether to ask her therapist, “Do you have something for fear?”

In Cassandra, Wolf writes from the perspective of the famous prophetess. The myth has it that Cassandra promised to sleep with Apollo in exchange for the gift of foresight. When she failed to uphold her end of the bargain, she was cursed to speak the truth without being believed. For Wolf, Cassandra is indeed prophetic: She is one of the earliest women on record to resist male violence and find herself dually dismissed, first by the violence itself and second by an audience unwilling to believe her testimony. For all her outsize and frequently overblown eloquence, she was relegated to the role of impotent observer. Like Cassandra, Wolf was a consummate watcher; like Cassandra, she was doomed to a borrowed lexicon, one bestowed on her by the very figure she set out to resist. But if Wolf never found a voice that wasn’t secondhand, her writings nonetheless help us to restore her violated life. We can read her journals not as the sum of her worst lapses and most public mistakes, not as a political symbol or a work of history, but as a testament to her haltingly singular self.

\[\text{THE CUBAN SPHERE}\]

Two new histories capture the role Cuba played in the revolutions and counterrevolutions of Latin America

\text{by PATRICK IBER}\

February 1962, Fidel Castro spoke the words of the Second Declaration of Havana before a crowd of nearly 2 million in the Plaza de la Revolución: “To the accusations that Cuba wants to export its revolution, we reply: Revolutions are not exported, they are made by the people.… What Cuba can give to the people, and has already given, is its example.” Castro led a country of only 6 million in the process of building a more egalitarian society and economy. But his ability to carry out those plans depended on successfully managing and defeating external and internal threats.

\text{Cuba’s Revolutionary World}\
By Jonathan C. Brown
Harvard. 581 pp. $35

\text{Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America}\
An Oral History
By Dirk Kruijt
Zed. 300 pp. $27.95

Already in 1959, Cuba had sponsored expeditions to try to topple hostile dictatorships. In the decades to come, it would begin to operate with the ambitions of a great power. Sometimes it did inspire other Latin American revolutionaries by its example. It also—contrary to Castro’s declaration—trained and exported soldiers throughout Latin America and Africa in an effort to spread
its vision of revolution around much of the southern half of the world.

For some, Cuba in the 1960s and ’70s is the very model of anti-imperialist internationalism and revolutionary solidarity. For others, its efforts to expand revolution beyond its borders helped to destabilize Latin America and strengthen counterrevolutionary forces, clearing a path for many of the region’s right-wing dictatorships. Two new books, Jonathan C. Brown’s *Cuba’s Revolutionary World* and Dirk Kruijt’s *Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America*, grapple with this complex legacy. But while Brown and Kruijt start with the same set of questions, they reach essentially opposing conclusions: Brown finds that Cuba’s foreign policy damaged democracy throughout the hemisphere, while Kruijt argues that it helped sustain it.

Scholars working to understand the international legacy of the Cuban Revolution face two related challenges. The first is that the subject is highly politicized: Both the US and Cuban governments have self-serving stories to tell about their role in Latin America’s wave of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. Even before Castro came to power, the United States saw the Cuban Revolution as a threat to its national interests, and it often sought to delegitimize other guerrilla struggles by claiming they were merely the result of Cuban meddling. Cuba, meanwhile, has sometimes gone to great lengths to deny its involvement in these uprisings, but it’s clear that the country did indeed play a role in many of the insurgencies that sprang up throughout Latin America in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. For Cuba, it would have been a breach of solidarity for the country not to have been active across the region.

This politicization of Cuba’s foreign policy leads to the second problem: Neither the US intelligence apparatus nor the Cuban government has fully released the documents relating to its actions in Latin America. Scholars, therefore, need to work without the full range of sources they would normally like to consult for such a complex and contentious topic. It also makes Cuba scholarship something of a Rorschach test, because the lack of documentation means that people often fill in the gaps with their own assumptions about the international legacy of the revolution.

Brown and Kruijt have solved the problem of this absence in entirely different ways. Brown relies primarily on the US government’s documentation of Cuba’s revolutionary actions—which is more readily available than the CIA’s accounts of its own covert actions to counter Cuban influence. Kruijt, by contrast, relies on interviews: roughly 70 with Cubans, and 20 with revolutionaries from other Latin American countries. In spite of their fundamental disagreement over Cuba’s contributions to democracy in the hemisphere, their books are complementary, each adding to our understanding of the dynamics and consequences of Cuba’s foreign policy. Their differences owe primarily to their underlying understandings of democracy, with Brown’s analysis resting on a fundamentally liberal-democratic framework, and Kruijt’s proving more sympathetic to radical redefinitions of the democratic idea.

Cuba’s revolution was a profound disjuncture, in both Cuban and world politics. After Cuba became independent from Spain in 1898, the country’s sovereignty was compromised by the Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution, which gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs to quell threats, including threats to property. Even after the amendment was abrogated in 1934, US diplomatic pressure prevented dramatic economic reforms in the country. Cuba’s elected governments were venal and corrupt, and were finally replaced by the brutal dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1952. American ownership of key infrastructure crowded out Cuban businesses, while vice tourism, especially from the United States, shaped the urban landscape of Havana. Cuban revolutionary nationalism emerged to counteract all of these overlapping problems; equality at home required Cubans to break from their unhealthy relationship with the United States.

It was not immediately clear, however, that Cuba’s revolution would be a socialista, much less a Marxist-Leninist, one. A multiclass alliance fought Batista’s repressive government in the name of Cuban nationalism. Some fought via strikes; some by bombings in the cities. But when Castro and his allies came down from the mountains and made their way across Cuba in January 1959, it was clear that his movement had become the most important symbol of Cuba’s new national ambition, and that he held the power that would determine its direction.

From the start, the consequences of the Cuban Revolution were not just domestic but international. The revolution produced what Brown describes as “a powerful wave of political change that the capitalist West could not escape and the Eastern Bloc could not ignore.” Both sides saw that a revolution could succeed in the United States’ backyard. It was an unprecedented opportunity for the Soviet Union, and it came to be seen as an unprecedented threat by the United States—and this dynamic unleashed a fury of both revolutionary and reactionary politics in the region.

When Castro came to power, there were only four dictatorships left in Latin America: Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. Yet starting in the 1960s and cresting in the ’70s, military rule began to replace democratic systems in much of Latin America, and would eventually govern a majority of its citizens. While this was not the intention of Cuba’s revolutionaries or its foreign policy, Brown argues that the counterrevolution that Cuba sparked brought an end to democracy in country after country. “It is no exaggeration,” he writes, “to say that the Castro regime exported both its revolution and its counterrevolution.”

To make his argument, Brown begins with the first months and years of Castro’s government to make clear not only how contingent the revolution’s victory was, but also how the early challenges that Castro faced helped create the regional counterrevolution. Castro was undoubtedly popular in 1959, but his power did not go uncontested at this early stage. Those who had set out to overturn Batista’s dictatorship constituted a broad coalition, including many who were not communists. Indeed, Cuba’s communist Partido Socialista Popular joined the guerrilla struggle quite late, and Castro’s own political affiliations were the subject of much speculation in these years.

But in the year after his triumph, Castro began consolidating his rule around a group of loyal communist revolutionaries, and he also began exiling or jailing many of the anticommunists who had supported the
anti-Batista struggle and had even fought alongside Castro, but whom he now viewed as a threat. Castro also found himself in conflict with a part of the country’s peasant population that had collaborated with the revolution but whose members were now being passed over for jobs in favor of party bureaucrats, or who objected to being moved to new collective farms. Faced with these challenges, Castro began bolstering his counterintelligence services to fight off any encroachments at home or abroad.

The threats from abroad and from within made things difficult for the new Cuban government, and the internal insurrection—most significantly in the central Cuban mountains of the Escambray—as well as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 led Castro to develop an expansive view of the connections between those threats. It also turned him into a counterinsurgent commander, as much as he had been an insurgent one. And if the threats were international, then Cuba’s politics would be too. The forces of imperialism would have to be stretched thin.

As Brown discusses, the fighting in the Escambray served as useful field training for the Cubans and for foreign volunteers seeking to bring revolution to their own countries. Over the years, thousands were recruited from many Latin American countries for this purpose. Though some recruits were turned away as unreliable, Cuba unquestionably became the center of a regional effort to spread revolution by the use of violence—not merely, as Castro had said in the Second Declaration of Havana, by the power of example. Cuban-trained fighters (and sometimes Cubans themselves) appeared in the conflicts in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and as far away as Angola.

The great strength of Brown’s book is that, in exploring the dynamics in each of these places, he is able to reveal common patterns. Elected presidents in Latin America faced considerable challenges. Responding with brutality to Cuban-backed insurrections undermined their legitimacy, but refusing to confront them forcefully undermined their standing with their own militaries, who sometimes stepped in and overthrew them.

Over the years, the United States had developed close ties to many of these countries’ military officers, some of whom had trained in the United States, and it encouraged them to force this impossible position upon their countries’ elected representatives. “The thing was equitable,” said one Argentinean guerrillero training in Cuba. “The Yankees promoted the counterrevolution and the Cubans, revolution.”

But the balance of power was not equitable. Except in very special circumstances, the counterinsurgency wiped out guerrilla groups and engaged in broader repression. Most often, military forces were deeply reactionary and were committed to extirpating leftist ideas from the body politic once they seized power. In a few cases, most notably Peru, military governments oversaw land and social reforms that civilian presidents had been unable to carry out. But in general, while the forces of imperialism were stretched thin, they also grew taut and strong.

It would be unfair to place the blame for the results of the counterinsurgencies on Cuba, and this is not Brown’s argument. Instead, he wants to show how Cuba’s revolution led Cubans and other Latin Americans to make choices about their alignment in the Cold War that would lead to American involvement. For the most part, this restoration of Latin American agency is welcome. The political rhetoric of both the Cuban government and of counterinsurgent leaders, including the United States, too often seeks to cast the choices of their opponents as the result of manipulation rather than legitimate grievance.

But the main risk in restoring agency to everyone is that it comes at the expense of explaining larger structures of power and geopolitics. People make their own history, after all, but not exactly in the circumstances of their choosing. Especially in a book relying on the US government’s documentation, there is a danger that emphasizing the agency of counterinsurgent and revolutionary groups will obscure how US power did shape Latin America’s politics. Nevertheless, Brown is convincing that the Cuban-trained and -inspired guerrillas posed a challenge for democracies in Latin America that was difficult for their elected leaders to solve and that, as a result, created conditions favorable for the right to take dictatorial control.

n a way, this should hardly be surprising. Democracy, Castro said, is the fulfillment of the will of the people. He did not mention elections or the balance of power. Marxist guerrillas argued that they would help “democracy” deliver the will of the people. Krujt, working from interviews with guerrillas, helps us understand this view of the world. His interview subjects, of course, are hardly representative: Those he could speak with are precisely those who survived the intervening decades, both physically and ideologically. But with that in mind, Krujt’s work offers rare insight into the psychological experiences of those who participated in the middle to upper bureaucratic ranks of the Cuban Revolution, and who then tried to export this vision to much of Latin America and parts of Africa.

“Revolutions are achieved by generations engaged in collective action, subject to collective suffering and motivated by collective sentiment,” Krujt writes. Those who fight in them share moral commitments, form strong fraternal bonds, and remember their work as a kind of special “calling,” animated by the desire to serve a higher morality. When it comes to the act of governing, however, these emotional bonds may also produce resentment and dogmatism, and the interviews show that the privileges Castro gave to communists early on produced serious strains—though Krujt’s subjects stuck around long enough to feel that their grievances were eventually heard.

Krujt is also able to provide a detailed history of the internal developments of Cuba’s extraordinarily high-quality intelligence apparatus under Manuel Piñeiro, who became one of the most important figures in the Cuban government and one of the few who could speak plainly to Fidel. Piñeiro “was anti-dogmatic, he wasn’t a sectarian,” Krujt says. He reportedly instructed his agents: “If we always and only talk to the left, we are wrong. We have to talk with everyone. And remember that between black and white, there are many nuances and many shades of grey.”

Krujt and Brown agree that Cuba’s contribution to the repertoire of revolu-
tionary tactics—the guerrilla foco—was a failure. The idea, closely associated with the romantic image of Che Guevara, was that a tiny guerrilla force could gather strength and, through asymmetric warfare, eventually overcome a powerful state. This faith in guerrilla warfare led to a variety of strategic blunders on Cuba’s part, making the spread of revolution to the rest of Latin America more of a matter of will than of strategy. US counterinsurgency planners read Guevara carefully and decided that the solution was to try to wipe out the focos as they appeared—a policy applied with bloody consequences throughout the continent.

But despite agreeing on the focos’ ultimate failure, Brown and Krujt disagree on why they failed. Krujt argues that part of the problem was the “trepid support” of the Soviet-oriented communist parties in the rest of Latin America, which preferred to practice “political abstinence.” But this argument misses how this was also the case in Cuba itself, where communist support for Fidel remained limited until after his victory. Brown argues, by contrast, that the communist guerillas supported by Cuba never had the broad coalition behind them that had made revolution work in Cuba. Guerrillas “were doomed in the 1960s to make the insurrections in their own countries as Marxist–Leninists—not as the democratic nationalists Fidel’s guerrillas had been in the late 1950s.” This is closer to the mark, for the Cuban Revolution itself was not an example of a successful foco.

Cuba did adapt its foreign policy over time. In 1975, it sent 30,000 conventional troops to fight in Angola, helping to repel US- and South African–backed forces. In Nicaragua’s successful armed revolution in 1979, rural guerillas triumphed for the same reason that Cuba’s guerrillas had: because they were a part of a broader multiclass military and social struggle against a dictatorship lacking internal legitimacy and international support. Central American guerrilla struggles—along with Reagan’s support for counterinsurgency forces—marked the 1980s.

Krujt’s interviewees help open a window onto the experience of having participated in these struggles. Fedora Lagos, a Cuban-Chilean radio specialist with El Salvador’s guerrillas in the 1980s who also worked in a guerrilla-run school for children and orphans, shares a heartbreaking memory that stands out in a book that takes a generally admiring view of the actions of the revolutionaries (and makes me wish Krujt had quoted his sources at length more often). The US-backed Salvadoran Army had just killed several guerilla fighters, and offered children at the school candies in exchange for information about the location of the guerrilla camps. Hungry, some of the children gave in, meaning that the guerrillas would have to punish them. As Lagos recalled:

There were children who had to be interrogated and sanctioned. That means killing a child of twelve, thirteen years. It was an absolute disaster. Some of them were children of my school. I had to speak with them. I said that they were children but they told me: “No, they aren’t children any more, they are combatants.” With a lump in my throat I couldn’t speak, [the children] spoke to me. They said to me: “We know that they are going to kill us, but please tell them that we will never do it again. We don’t want to die.” Then my favourite girl, fourteen years old, gave me a kiss on my forehead and said: “The only thing they gave us was a sugar bag and three coffee packages. And therefore I have to die.” How can you kill children of eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen years who sold themselves for coffee and sugar because they were hungry? There were months that we didn’t have anything to eat; we ate roots, lizards, snakes, iguanas.... “I am not bad,” she told me. For sure, they weren’t bad, but through their fault an entire squad was killed. That is the war.

“Were they shot?” Krujt asked. Lagos answered, in tears: “No, they couldn’t waste bullets.”

One anecdote, however brutal, should not distort the overall picture. The truth commission in El Salvador held the state agents responsible for 85 percent of the acts of violence and the guerrillas approximately 5 percent. But it’s a reminder of the trauma and the human toll that working to change the social order through violence imposes—and not only on the combatants.

Krujt, carrying the story of Cuban foreign policy forward into the 1980s and ’90s, describes Cuba’s turn away from supporting insurgency and the role that it sometimes played in negotiating peace accords. Although none of the leftist governments of the “pink tide” of the late 1990s and early 2000s replicated Cuba’s political or economic model, Krujt argues that they owe some part of their achievements to Cuban solidarity, development aid, and the harboring of exiles from dictatorship. “The Cubans kept the flame of resistance burning through decades of dictatorial persecution and civil wars in the region,” Krujt concludes. “Most governments in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot say the same.”

Both of these books add in important ways to our understanding of the world that Cuba created; neither can be the last word. Whereas Krujt ends on a note emphasizing Cuba’s contributions, Brown ends by stressing the costs of its actions. Part of the difference is simply chronological: Brown covers the 1960s, during which many democracies fell, while Krujt pushes on to the present, when many have been restored. But part of the dispute lies in irreconcilable differences regarding whether it’s the loss of the structures of liberal democracy that is most to be lamented, as Brown assumes, or whether the failure of radical efforts to supplant them constitutes the real tragedy, as Krujt prefers.

There is no easy answer, or even easy generalizations. The world that the Cuban Revolution helped create, in both the revolutions and the counterrevolutions it inspired, was demanding and austere. Many good lives were lost by way of a revolutionary fervor that believed the world could be made better through violent insurgency. Even knowing the cost, it is hard not to be moved by the conviction. But on the question of democracy, the record is mixed: Sometimes violent insurgencies made dictatorship possible; at other times, they made democracy, even of the liberal type, possible.

But if Cuba’s achievements are ambiguous, the failure of armed revolution to transform Latin America for the better is clear enough, and it leaves the question hanging: How can the cycle of injustice, inequality, corruption, and democratic governments that seem incapable of functioning for the benefit of all citizens be broken? The Latin American governments of the pink tide have made some real progress. Some of these gains have been reversed by government mismanagement, by economic crisis, or by losses to the right, but some of the steps toward social inclusion and meeting human needs will last. When I lived among former guerrillas in El Salvador, I remember hearing the verses of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: “Caminante, no hay camino / se hace camino al andar.” (“Traveler, there is no road / the road is made by walking.”) The goal of a meaningfully democratic society—a society in which people have equal worth and equal power—remains in the distance. But we are still walking.
EVER WANTING

The ambiguities of Daniel Joseph Martinez’s blunt statements

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

like a lot of people on the East Coast, I had my first encounter with Martinez’s work at the 1993 Whitney Biennial. His contribution included a piece that had another of what I now realize are his typically cumbersome (and partly self-contradictory) titles: Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture); or, Overture Con Claque (Overture With Hired Audience Members). This was an example of what had been dubbed “institutional critique,” though artists had been doing things that could be plausibly categorized as such since at least the late 1960s—art that takes the operations of the art world, including aspects that are generally overlooked or taken for granted, not just as subject matter but as raw material. For example, Michael Asher, one of Martinez’s teachers at CalArts and generally counted among the pioneers of this kind of work, contributed to a later Whitney Biennial, that of 2010, by playing with the museum’s working hours, proposing that it be kept open 24 hours a day for a week. (Pleading budgetary constraints, the museum agreed to do it for three days rather than seven.)

Martinez’s intervention in 1993 was a little more confrontational, albeit easier to put into practice, than his erstwhile teacher’s 17 years later. He commandeered those little tags you’re supposed to wear in the museum to show you’ve paid your admission; but instead of bearing the museum’s name or logo, some were printed with the legend I can’t imagine ever wanting to be white, while the rest bore fragments of that sentence: I can’t; imagine; ever wanting; to be white. It was hard not to be taken aback by the statement. Was it somehow anti-white? Or just—as one critic thought—one of those not-uncommon “exercises in self-gratification and self-promotion ostensibly designed to push social buttons”?

As a white person wearing a tag with the whole sentence, one might have reflected that it was probably just the literal truth: One had never had to imagine whiteness as an object of desire. On the other hand, I suppose that someone who isn’t white could have enjoyed Martinez’s piece as a badge—literally—of his or her happy exemption from envy or resentment, a contentment with one’s identity. And what’s wrong with that?

But those tags with the one- or two-word fragments of the text, each on a differently colored background, somehow complicated things. Each one seemed to evoke a different attitude: I can’t—refusal, evidently; imagine—optimistic idealism à la John Lennon’s anthem; ever want—
ing—romantic longing (my favorite); to be—Hamlet-esque doubt. Only the last of the fragments—simply white, followed by a full stop—leaves a blank: a single syllable, without any evident subjective content, into which one might read anything or nothing; here an autotelic word, since it exemplifies what Roland Barthes once called “white writing,” neutral and inexpressive. I remember walking among the crowd at the Whitney and thinking that we had all become a kind of recombinant megapoem, constantly combining and dispersing, composing and decomposing Martinez’s sentence.

But what about that use of the first person? Was it really just a linguistic shifter, applicable to anyone who happened to be wearing the tag? In retrospect, I wonder. I haven’t had the opportunity to see very many of Martinez’s works, but one thing I’ve come to know since 1993 is that self-portraiture has been recurrent in his art—for instance, in a group of color photographs he exhibited in 2012, in which he posed, shirtless and wearing an oversize mask, as a hunchback. Hiding his face while exposing his body—though attributing to it a disability that is not his—he personified the question of self-representation. Was Museum Tags an earlier example of this kind of shape-shifting self-portraiture?

Martinez, a Mexican American born in the Los Angeles area, told an interviewer in 1994 that he’d never learned Spanish growing up, since his parents would speak only English to him and “Spanish was strictly forbidden by my teachers.” His identification was with the majority culture: “The orientation of my world was toward whiteness. Mexican music was not played in my household. Spanish was never spoken. For me, white meant better. It meant privilege.” With that in mind, Martinez’s ever-changing text-in-motion at the 1993 Whitney Biennial might have been a heartfelt testimony to a sort of conversion experience—actually to a kind of blessed forgetfulness, the liberating inability to imagine one’s former sense of marginalization.

As Martinez’s Museum Tags suggests, it is when the question of identity hits close to home, rather than when it takes the abstract form of an indexical symbol, that (as Rimbaud said) “I is another.” Or perhaps it is better to put Rimbaud’s declaration into the form of Samuel Beckett’s interrogative: “Who says this, saying it’s me?” The one who says “I” and the one whom the word designates are logically two different people.

At least that’s the case when Martinez says, “I am Ulrike Meinhof.” Of course, Martinez is not the German journalist turned Red Army Faction terrorist who, at least according to the official verdict, committed suicide in Stuttgart’s Stammheim Prison in 1976. But who, in fact, was that? Meinhof has been called an “empty vessel” into which anyone’s ideological presuppositions can be poured. She’s been the subject of any number of more or less fictionalized accounts, including films and novels, as well as theater pieces by two Nobel Prize-winning writers, Elfriede Jelinek and Dario Fo—the latter (written in collaboration with Fo’s wife, Franca Rame) has a first-person title similar to Martinez’s: Moi, Ulrike, Je Crie. A Berlin-based “electro-punk pop rock” duo calls itself Prada Meinhoff (two Fs), reflecting the fact that the RAF (better known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang) has, like Che Guevara and other revolutionaries, passed into the realm of radical chic.

But even better known than Meinhof’s story may be her image, at least among art lovers. That’s thanks to Gerhard Richter, whose renowned 1988 painting cycle October 18, 1977, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, is based on black-and-white news photographs of Meinhof and three other members of the RAF who subsequently committed suicide in prison. Three of Richter’s paintings are titled Tote (Dead) and depict Meinhof after her hanging; a fourth, Jugendbildnis (Youth Portrait), shows her, looking rather gentle and innocent, in 1970, around the time of the RAF’s formation.

Emphasizing her youthfulness, Richter implies that Meinhof’s propensity for violence—at the time of her death, she was on trial for four counts of murder and 54 counts of attempted murder—was rooted in her naïveté and idealism. The paintings express sorrow over the waste of life that her story implies, without according any real substance to her political ideas. But the cycle as a whole suggests that the RAF was symptomatic of social ills that have never been resolved, perhaps not even seriously faced, and therefore that neither mourning nor the refusal to mourn can yet come to an end. The film theorist Peter Wollen connected Richter’s technique of obscuring his imagery to a kind of “conceptual blurring”—that is, “the difficulty we have in comprehending or evaluating” the protagonists’ actions and their deaths.

Four decades on from the death of Meinhof and her comrades, 30 years after Richter’s great painting cycle, what does it mean for an American artist to go to Berlin to make a cycle of photographs using images of Meinhof, including the one Richter used three times, of her corpse? It’s not only Martinez’s imagery that recalls Richter; so does the doury, low-contrast grisaille of his pictures, redolent as well of the leaden atmosphere that typifies memories of the era of European ultra-left terrorism. (The German title of Margarethe von Trotta’s 1981 film inspired by the RAF is Die Bleierne Zeit, literally The Time of Lead, though it was released in English as Marianne and Juliane.) And like Richter, Martinez puts the historical photos of Meinhof at a distance, though not by painting them, as Richter did; instead, he embeds them in his own photographs, juxtaposing his self-portrait with her image.

Martinez shot the photos during a 2016 residency at the American Academy in Berlin. Some viewers might recognize the setting of some of the images, but in many cases the background is a nondescript bit of parkland or fairly anonymous modern architecture that even people who know Berlin are unlikely to recognize. For most of us, it’s the press release that confirms the scene as the formerly divided city—and, even more to the point, that each photograph was taken at a spot somewhere along the former Berlin Wall. In one of the images, there is a wall behind Martinez adorned with a socialist-realist mural of happy workers on the march, mainly women—a work painted by Max Linger in 1953, just before the violently repressed workers’ uprising of that June.

In each of these “geographically specific yet seemingly ambiguous locations,” as the press release puts it, Martinez, bundled up against the Berlin winter and wearing a heavy wool cap, poses holding a pole bearing a sort of banner imprinted with Meinhof’s image. We see her in close-up, in one picture, looking burdened, almost mournful; in another, wearing a turtleneck, she cocks her head to the side—it reminds me of a yearbook photo. A third shot shows her reclining, a cigarette in her mouth, with a necklace over her closed collar; this one could almost have been in a fashion magazine. Seeing her behind big, dark glasses, one can imagine her as the fugitive on the run; and then there she is, dead, with the dark line around her neck where the rope had been.

As for Martinez, his appearance in the photographs is more consistent—naturally enough, since, unlike those of Meinhof,
they were taken around the same time and using the same clothes. But it's also his expression that's consistent: grave, self-contained, pensive. He stands, usually, at a distance from the camera, and in no case does his figure dominate the composition. Hardly ever does he look at the camera, as though preferring to avoid the gaze of others, the better to follow his own thoughts. In each photograph, the scene is empty of people other than Martinez; I suspect they were taken in the early hours just after dawn, when few are about.

The emptiness of the scenes is striking, all the more so because, at least to me, Martinez seems to be presenting himself as something like one of those secondary figures in Renaissance paintings, “staffage” as they're called—for instance, those men in a background procession while some momentous event, a miracle or a crucifixion, is happening front and center. To what history is Martinez a bystander? His photographs refer us to a past whose traces are mostly hard to make out, yet somehow inexpungible. Meinhof, too, was part of history's staffage, but in a different way: She wanted to take charge of the course of historical change, but achieved nothing. All the theorizing, the plotting, the robberies, the killings—none of the RAF’s activities, as Wollen said, had as much impact as their suicides.

Nor, I might add, could the wall’s fearsome and glaring presence erect a permanent division in the heart of the city. Taking its ghostly footprint as his pathway through Berlin, Martinez also touches on some key passages in contemporary German art. Along with their overt allusion to Richter, his photographs quietly seem to echo, whether consciously or not, works as different as Thomas Struth’s unpeopled photographic cityscapes (he called them “Unconscious Places” and, after the fall of the wall, extended his study to sites in the former East Germany, including Berlin) and Anselm Kiefer’s predominantly gray landscapes, divided by roads pulling the eye deep into the distance. I can imagine Martinez brooding as he made these pictures: What would it feel like not to be Meinhof herself, but rather to be a German, not an American, artist—to have to contend with this particular burden of history (no heavier, in fact, than our own, which is equally soaked in blood)? And in that way, he might almost be making a sort of confession: No matter how much I want to, I can’t imagine being German. Or maybe: I can’t imagine ever wanting to be German.

In other words, these photographs ask how we are made by history, and what it means, in turn, to hope that we can make history. Martinez’s subtitle puts the notion that “time is a flat circle”—in other words, that we are destined merely to repeat the past, and that it is impossible to rise to a higher level—into the mouth of someone else unnamed; he acknowledges the idea but does not declare it as his own. Instead, by identifying himself with the tragically deluded figure of Ulrike Meinhof—though each and every one of his images testifies that they can’t be the same—he stands by the claim that individuals can change history, even if they usually fail to do so.

In a separate room, Martinez showed an older work, previously included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial, that is much less resonant than the Meinhof photographs but that serves as an apt footnote to them. Divine Violence is a set of more than 100 wooden panels—hand-painted signs, essentially, with black lettering on gold automotive paint—bearing the names of organizations that used violence to achieve political ends. These names tell us something about the organizations’ motivations, but nothing of their justification or efficacy. The phrase “divine violence” comes from Walter Benjamin’s early essay “Critique of Violence” (1921), and we can perhaps give him the last word, or the next to last: Such violence is “unalloyed,” or ethical, because it is revolutionary—quite unlike the state’s violence in service of enforcing the status quo. Benjamin concludes, however, that it is often unclear when such divine violence has actually occurred. In retrospect, it seems easy to understand that Meinhof’s violence was not of this sort, whatever her intentions. To say, more than 40 years after her death, “I am Ulrike Meinhof” is to say that I know what she could not know or could not admit: that divine violence is possible, but not for us.

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**Where the wall meets the river**

the neighbors who begged it built are astonished

they can no longer see the river
taste it sweeten it for the fevered child

Where the wall meets the river
the neighbors cease to be neighbors

they can no longer see beyond themselves
their hands in front of their own faces

Where the river meets the wall
the river doesn’t care

goes on being river thrusting itself against
all obstacles carrying whatever needs carrying

When the general gall threatens to leak
into my hoarded throat I remind myself

the bitterness is on the public tongue
the salt sown into some other earth not mine

SHANNA COMPTON
Puzzle No. 3458

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3457

ACROSS
1 Mixture made from tonic ingredients, in various proportions (10)
6 Eisenhower almost backed up religious leader (4)
10 Without force, battled an obligation (5)
11 Evaluates program increases (9)
12 Contrived bird design (7)
13 Drink in mountain paradise without the leads in Lost Horizon (7)
14 Best of three units (6,2,4)
19 Bits of tacos are all you need to get all over the country (5,2,5)
22 In secrecy, clerics use a composting bin, perhaps (7)
24 Lose hope when changing diapers (7)
25 Meddle and creatively reinvent wheel’s hub (9)
26 Force British politician to wear garland backward (5)
27 The ultimate in typography: one pica, flush right (4)
28 Crazy May’s gotten together with Perry—for the most part, that’s irregular (10)

DOWN
1 Rough and cold, like some beers (6)
2 Deny the existence of an entrance opposite the southwest corner (6)
3 June, for instance, doesn’t start to feel seasick before beginning to tack to port (2,3,4)
4 Former carrier favored writer (5)
5 New pope stood against… (7,2)
7 …spread of schmaltz capacity (8)
8 Wrong answer to a down clue (DREA), if ______ (8)
9 Ache for French bread (4)
15 Head into messy store for car parts (9)
16 Horrible Bosses 4 finally became fanatical (9)
17 Shortage in Traumaville? (8)
18 Western university laid off teaching assistant in Indian center, once (8)
20 Vocalist’s cover on the radio (6)
21 Amphibian and insects both curtailed fun (6)
23 Fish make a stink (4)
24 Northwest road reverie (5)

BUS + STOPS (rev.)
S(PIG)OT
anag. (&lit.)
BA(RBA(RASTA)NWY)CK (brawny anag.)
B(ED)ROOMS + ET
&
ROOM + BURIALSITE
P~E~R
P~~~E~~~S
ROM BURIALSITE
BEDROOM SET PER
E~R~E~S
P~E~R~E~S
B~U~T~E~R~N~U~T~S~S~Q~U~A~S~H
B~A~T~H~S~A~L~T~S~S~A~D~I~O~N
L~E~O~D~A~N~P
E~N~D~I~N~G~I~N~I~T~A~L~S

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