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Meet Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Iceland’s Left-Wing, Environmentalist, Feminist Prime Minister

JOHN NICHOLS
No Magazine Is an Island

This is less a letter to the editor and more a note of concern about the decline of international news in *The Nation*. In the March 5 issue, there were precisely zero articles or columns on foreign affairs, unless you count the review by Stuart Klaws of several foreign films. I guess the age of foreign correspondents is long gone when magazines are so financially strapped.

The issue was still full of good content, but *The Nation* is increasingly turning away from the rest of the world.

Laird Okie
Columbia, Mo.

Never Mind Armageddon

Re “How to Get to a Fossil-Free USA,” by Bill McKibben [March 5]: Wind and solar power are not robust sources of baseload energy; nationally, they supply less than 8 percent of our demand. Across the country, about 65 percent of our electrical grid is fueled by natural gas and coal.

The best way the world can reduce its carbon footprint is to replace fossil fuels with nuclear power. There is no practical way to reduce or capture the CO$_2$ generated by burning coal and natural gas, and the problems with nuclear power are solvable. Dr. James Hansen, the retired NASA scientist who first alerted us to the danger of global warming caused by greenhouse gases, believes that the solution is to power the grid with nuclear energy. McKibben has done a great job of highlighting the problem with fossil fuels, but his solutions are inadequate and unrealistic.

Jim Padden
Bradenton, Fla.

Executive Dysfunction

Re Karen J. Greenberg’s review of Jeremi Suri’s *The Impossible Presidency* [“Policy Overload,” March 5]: To me, the system of checks and balances envisioned by the founding fathers assumes that each branch of government will continually vie for power and be checked by the other two. While I agree that our system has become ever more top-heavy, this has been exacerbated by a Congress that is all too happy to abdicate its powers, causing the president to step in with executive orders, as Obama did with DACA, net neutrality, and parts of the Affordable Care Act, to name a few. Those who were all too happy to see Obama take such measures now see the folly of such a system, when the next president simply rolls it all back and issues new orders of his own.

Given the amount of attention that has been lavished, until recently, on presidential elections at the expense of all others, I wonder if this isn’t how most Americans think it should work.

Nannette Croce

Behold the Nothing That Is…

Re Stuart Klawans’s review of Abbas Kiarostami’s *24 Frames* [March 5]: The inadvertent transposition of the words “a” and “cold” in line four of Wallace Stevens’s “The Snow Man” effects its own strange trick of perspective, reducing the already vestigial consciousness in the poem to mere duration, unlikely to personify anything. Or could this have been deliberate? Is Klawans making a graphematic incursion into Stevens’s poem, analogous to Kiarostami’s animated manipulation of Bruegel’s *The Hunters in the Snow*?

Eileen M. Brennan
Augusta, W.Va.
When the DCCC Attacks

If you’ve ever donated money to a Democrat, you’ve probably ended up on the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee’s list. If you’ve been pestered by robocalls for candidates you don’t know, from districts you don’t live in, you definitely have. Currently chaired by Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), the DCCC describes itself as the “official campaign arm of the Democrats in the House of Representatives.” Which sounds pretty innocuous.

That’s what Laura Moser thought, too. The founder of Daily Action, a #Resistance text-messaging service that sends out one call to action per day, Moser is a fifth-generation Houstonian who recently moved back home from Washington to run for Congress. Although Texas’s Seventh District has been in GOP hands since it elected George H.W. Bush in 1966, the wealthy suburbanites who compose a large portion of its voters favored Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump, making incumbent John Culberson look vulnerable.

One of seven Democrats in the primary, Moser was at a campaign event last month when an aide pulled her aside and said, “You have to see this.” “This” was an article in The Texas Tribune reporting that the DCCC had posted an attack on Moser on its website, calling her “a Washington insider” who had once said she’d rather have her “teeth pulled without anesthesia” than live in Texas, and implying that she had put her husband on the campaign’s payroll.

Moser’s comments were actually about moving back to her grandparents’ home in Paris, Texas, a small town hundreds of miles from Houston. Moser’s husband, Arun Chaudhary, served as official videographer in the Obama White House before becoming a partner in Revolution Messaging, a firm that has also done work for the Teamsters, MoveOn.org, Daily Action, California Senator Kamala Harris—and the Bernie Sanders campaign. When I spoke with Moser by telephone, she said there’d been “a lot of relitigating of the 2016 campaign” and that the attack on her may have been connected to her own support for Sanders. “But I was very active supporting Hillary Clinton in the general election,” she added.

“I rang hundreds of doorbells for Hillary.”

The DCCC wasn’t the only establishment group attempting to sideline Moser. Even though she’s a pro-choice woman, Emily’s List endorsed one of Moser’s primary opponents, Lizzie Pannill Fletcher—a corporate lawyer whose firm recently won a $5.3 million lawsuit against the SEIU’s “Justice for Janitors” campaign. Fletcher was opposed by the Texas AFL-CIO but had the strong backing of Sherry Merfish, a longtime supporter of Emily’s List who, according to OpenSecrets.org, also bundled more than $250,000 for Clinton.

Moser and Fletcher are set for a runoff on May 22, so the contest is likely to remain bitter. The DCCC shows no sign of backing down, while Moser has been endorsed by Our Revolution. And while the Working Families Party hasn’t formally endorsed Moser yet, it has run ads critical of Fletcher—and plans to run more. With Culberson polling more than Moser and Fletcher combined, any nominee faces an uphill fight.

And Moser isn’t the only progressive Democrat to get blindsided in a primary. Jess King, an activist in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, saw Emily’s List, former governor Ed Rendell, and the party establishment back her primary opponent, Christina Hartman, even though King raised more money in the final quarter of 2017. She received the county organizer’s nod only after court-ordered redistricting made incumbent Lloyd Smucker’s district even more Republican, leading Hartman to switch to an independent run. Moser and Fletcher are set for a runoff on May 22, so the contest is likely to remain bitter. The DCCC shows no sign of backing down, while Moser has been endorsed by Our Revolution. And while the Working Families Party hasn’t formally endorsed Moser yet, it has run ads critical of Fletcher—and plans to run more. With Culberson polling more than Moser and Fletcher combined, any nominee faces an uphill fight.

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When DCCC Attacks
D.D. Guttenplan
The New Cold War
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Russiagate, for Real
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Jared Kushner,
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Meet Katrín Jakobsdóttir
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The prime minister of Iceland is part of a new generation of left-wing women coming to power around the world.

Caroline Preston
A growing movement is finding creative ways to educate teens about economic justice.

Barry Yeoman
Rep. Walter Jones Jr. is following his conscience in standing up to the US military—and his own party.

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A Voice of Dissent
Ismail Muhammad
Films: Black Panther • Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun? • Crossing Borders
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incumbent Scott Taylor. And in Nebraska, the DCCC is backing Brad Ashford, another former Republican who served a single term in the House after switching parties.

The Democratic Party’s Unity and Reform Commission has made detailed proposals that would help take big donors’ thumbs off the scale—and might make the DCCC more than just an incumbents’ protection racket. If the party adopts those recommendations, maybe it will deserve a second chance. Until then, progressives would do much better to donate directly to candidates they support, or to groups like Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, and the Working Families Party. And when the DCCC calls, just hang up. D.D. GUTENPLAN

The New Cold War

A climate of suspicion and bellicosity now reigns.

We all can recall some of those defining moments that mark the beginning or the end of major historical epochs: the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945; Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech of March 5, 1946, heralding the onset of the Cold War; the tearing down of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, signaling the Cold War’s end; and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, precipitating our never-ending War on Terror. To these, we now must add a new inflection point: the escalation of the New Cold War this February.

Three interconnected events have given February this distinctive status. First, the release of the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, a blueprint for an expanded nuclear arsenal and a more permissive policy regarding nuclear-weapons use. Second, the decision by Chinese officials to eliminate term limits for the country’s president, paving the way for Xi Jinping to remain in office after his next five-year term ends in 2023. And third, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s state-of-the-nation address on February 28, in which he announced the development of a new family of nuclear weapons intended to foil US anti-missile systems and strike the heart of America.

Trump’s Nuclear Posture Review is a game changer because it repudiates the logic that had governed nuclear weapons under President Obama—whose stated goal was to limit their use to retaliation for an enemy’s nuclear assault—and instead envisions their use for a wide range of purposes, including to blunt a Russian advance on NATO forces or to retaliate against a cyber assault on critical US infrastructure. China’s decision on term limits is equally significant because it will enable Xi to proceed with his plans to restore China to its historical role as the dominant power in Asia—a drive that is bound to provoke stiff resistance from Washington, which is reluctant to surrender the United States’ own hegemonic role in the region. Putin’s speech completed the trifecta of pivotal events by signaling Russia’s determination to counter US nuclear advances with equally terrifying measures of its own. Asserting that the United States seeks to incapacitate Russia’s retaliatory capacity by installing advanced antimissile systems, Putin announced plans to deploy nuclear-powered cruise missiles and unmanned submarines designed to overcome any such capabilities.

Taken together, these three events have done much to create an international environment of suspicion, hostility, and bellicosity, not unlike the nightmarish climate of the early Cold War. As was true back then, assertions by one side regarding weapons development by the other are being used to justify yet more new weapons, inevitably sparking reciprocal action in a perpetual arms race. As in that era, moreover, military measures are being accompanied by a slide toward authoritarianism and suppression of dissident views. But this era is different because there are three, rather than two, major powers involved, increasing the space for miscalculation, and because the world contains more potential flash points than ever before, including some involving other nuclear-armed states, such as India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea.

To preserve peace in this new era, it will be necessary to revive many of the disarmament initiatives of the original Cold War era, while also reinvigorating them with the organizational and communications advances of more recent years. During that earlier era, peace advocates operated on two levels: mounting massive campaigns to put public pressure on political figures (think, for example, of the nuclear-freeze campaign); and working with the scientific community to devise arms-control measures aimed at reducing the risk of a nuclear Armageddon. Today’s activists must pursue a similar strategy, seeking to mobilize greater public involvement on nuclear issues while simultaneously lobbying for specific measures that might halt the slide to disaster.

Working to reverse—and then, finally, to end—a revived arms race must be the overriding goal of these efforts, with all nuclear states admonished to refrain from pursuing new weapons systems that will invite equally threatening acquisitions by rivals. In the short term, however, the priority must be prevention of war (very possibly involving the use of nukes) with North Korea. Only a few weeks remain before the United States is scheduled to conduct another round of aggressive military exercises in the region, a move that is likely to spark more missile tests by Pyongyang and scuttle South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s peace initiative. War would be the likely outcome—perhaps within a matter of months, or even weeks. The recent breakthrough by South Korean negotiators in winning North Korean strongman Kim Jong-un’s agreement to hold talks with the United States on the North’s denuclearization could help avert war, but only if Washington responds in a conciliatory fashion. Readers can help forestall precipitous action by urging their members of Congress to support the No Unconstitutional Strike Against North Korea Act. We can survive this New Cold War, but only through the same sort of activism that helped to end the first one.

D.D. GUTENPLAN

100
Number of mass shooters (defined as individuals who indiscriminately kill three or more victims in a public place) in the United States since 1982, according to Mother Jones

97%
Percentage of mass shooters who have been male

57%
Percentage of mass shooters who have been white and male

69%
Minimum percentage of guns used by these shooters that were purchased legally

816
Number of people killed by mass shooters since 1982

1,275
Estimated number of people injured by mass shooters since 1982

—Joseph Hogan
Last year, as soon as Ngugi wa Thiong’o entered a packed auditorium in Johannesburg, South Africa, to deliver a public lecture, he received a standing ovation. The audience whistled and cheered, jabbing their fists in the air as they chanted: “Ngugi! Ngugi! Ngugi!” More than 50 years after *Weep Not, Child*, the first novel published in English by an East African writer, the Kenyan remains a literary superstar and perennial favorite for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A fierce critic of Western imperialism and neoliberalism, Ngugi has largely abandoned writing in English, turning instead to his native Kikuyu.

**RI:** In 1977, you published *Petals of Blood*, about a peasant uprising in a neocolonial Kenyan society, in English. Immediately after, you published the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) in Kikuyu. Did you write the play in Kikuyu because *Petals of Blood* failed to connect with the people you were writing about?

**NWT:** It’s true. In Africa, 90 percent of the population speaks different languages. When you write a novel in English—no matter how radical, no matter how progressive—it can only reach people in a trickle-down fashion.

**RI:** Were you hoping for an uprising after its publication?

**NWT:** No, never. Art does not incite. Art has to do with imagination. The problem with repressive regimes is that they like to starve the imagination. They don’t want you to imagine the possibilities of a different future. They want you to think this is the best of all possible worlds. By writing in English, or making sure that literature is only available in English, you are helping to starve the imagination of a majority of people.

**RI:** While imprisoned in the Kamiti maximum-security prison in 1978, you wrote one of your most famous books, *Devil on the Cross*, in Kikuyu—on toilet paper. How difficult was it to write an entire book on toilet paper?

**NWT:** I was put in prison because of *I Will Marry When I Want*, which was published in Kikuyu and acted by peasants. In prison, I was thinking very seriously about the language question. I realized that when I looked at the history of colonialism, the colonizer not only imposes his language, but he denigrates and represses the languages of the colonized. The condition of learning English was the unlearning of our language, and this continued in the postcolonial era. I decided that since I’d been put in prison for writing in a national language and put there by an African government, I would, as part of my resistance, write in the very language which had been the basis of my incarceration. A fierce critic of Western imperialism and neoliberalism, Ngugi has largely abandoned writing in English, turning instead to his native Kikuyu. Did you write the play *I Will Marry When I Want* immediately after, you published *Petals of Blood*, about a peasant uprising in a neocolonial Kenyan society, in English. Immediately after, you published the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) in Kikuyu. Did you write the play in Kikuyu because *Petals of Blood* failed to connect with the people you were writing about?

**NWT:** It’s true. In Africa, 90 percent of the population speaks different languages. When you write a novel in English—no matter how radical, no matter how progressive—it can only reach people in a trickle-down fashion.

**RI:** You have called language a “war zone,” and you described yourself as a “language warrior.” Can you briefly talk about that?

**NWT:** Look at the Irish situation with the British, or how the languages of Native Americans were denigrated. In Africa, of course, we were forbidden to speak in our mother tongues. Japan imposed its language on the Koreans. Wherever you look at modern colonialism, the acquisition of the language of the colonizer was based on the death of the languages of the colonized. So it is a war zone. In the case of India, [the British historian and statesman Thomas Babington] Macaulay was brutally honest about wanting to create a class of Indians with English on their minds. The English wanted them to play a role in governing the rest of the population. Language was a very important element in the conquest and maintenance of colonial rule, because it was likely to bind the minds of the middle class.

**RI:** Do you think that in postcolonial societies, a writer has an obligation to write about political oppression and historical injustice, as opposed to writers in free and developed societies, who can pursue writing for the sake of art?

**NWT:** I don’t really believe it when a writer says, “Oh! I’m not writing about politics.” Really, they are, because they are espousing a view of the world, consciously or unconsciously. Writers need to be aware that they are not neutral agents, that they are products of a certain history and class position. The scars of history are on every writer.

Writers need to be aware that they are not neutral agents, that they are products of a certain history and class position.
SHAM RESEARCH

Publishing Science Fiction

Climate-change deniers are taking advantage of little-known "open-access journals" with minimal quality control to publish their questionable research. One prominent denier, Nils-Axel Mörner, has produced multiple articles claiming that sea levels aren't rising around low-lying Pacific islands.

According to The Guardian, one of Mörner's pieces was issued by Juniper Publishers, which once accepted onto its editorial board a "Dr. Olivia Doll"—an invented character based on a university professor's Staffordshire terrier.

To highlight the problem of these open-access journals, a biologist recently submitted research about the effects on the human body of crossing the warp-10 boundary. Fans of Star Trek would likely recognize that the paper, "Rapid Genetic and Developmental Morphological Change Following Extreme Celerity," resembled the plot of a much-maligned episode in season two of Voyager.

The anonymous researcher submitted the paper to 10 journals. Four accepted it, with two even providing what they called peer review, according to Space.com. Similar fake papers, including one called "Get Me Off Your Fucking Mailing List," have been accepted by open-access journals in the past.

With their official-sounding names, these sham journals—which number in the hundreds—are dangerous. They undermine science and give climate-change deniers a platform, publishing another form of fake news for a small fee.

—Emmalina Ginski

Katha Pollitt

Rusiagate, for Real

Some on the left are still waving away the inconvenient facts.

When will we really know what happened with Russia and the 2016 election? The story lines proliferate so quickly that it's a full-time job following them all. Quick: How did the Democratic memo refute the Nunes memo? Identify: Carter Page, George Papadopoulos, Felix Sater, Aras Agalarov, Reality Winner. Only a handful of diehards still maintain that Russia didn't meddle in the election—OK, try to meddle. It does seem that evidence for Russia's involvement is becoming stronger rather than weaker, a conviction hardly limited to fans of Hillary Clinton. Bernie Sanders himself said, "It is now clear to everyone that agents of the Russian government were, in a disgusting and dangerous manner, actively interfering in the 2016 elections in an effort to defeat Secretary Hillary Clinton." But we still don't know—and may never know—how much it mattered, or whether the Trump campaign actually colluded with the Russian government, or whether the Russians wanted Donald Trump to win or just intended to sow chaos or what.

Nonetheless, it's vital that we understand as much as we can about what happened, and that the Mueller investigation continue. I'm troubled by arguments on the left that wave away inconvenient facts because they don't fit some desired outcome. That's what I want to take on here.

1. Focusing on Rusiagate means neglecting more important things. Look at Rachel Maddow—it's all she talks about! I grant you that Rachel does seem a bit obsessed. But most news media—and most people—can think about, report on, and act on more than one issue at a time. And there are times when one issue deserves a lot of attention; no one's complaining that #MeToo or gun control is getting too much ink. Behind this argument is another: that Rusiagate is trivial. But how do we know it's trivial before we know exactly what it was? People seem to be leaping to conclusions here, based on their political priors and what they want to believe.

2. Democrats are concentrating on Rusiagate to avoid facing their failures, especially Hillary Clinton's campaign and the centrist it supposedly represents. But maybe the party is both promoting Rusiagate and acknowledging its problems. Somehow it's racking up an awful lot of wins, in Virginia, New Jersey, Washington State. Democrats have won around 40 state and federal legislative seats that were previously held by the GOP; Republicans have only flipped four. Democrats are competing in red states like Texas they'd conceded long ago. Maybe some elements in the party got the message. Maybe "the resistance" is real. Maybe Rusiagate isn't a distraction but a kick in the pants.

3. Ob, come on, stop being so hysterical and McCarthyite. As I wrote a few months back, these words are virtually meaningless and rely for their emotional force on the political alignments of a vanished age. "Hysterical" (and can we retire this sexist term for "irrationally overwrought," please?) assumes nothing happened, which is the very thing at issue. "McCarthyite" assumes that Rusiagate skeptics are being demonized, instead of appearing on Tucker Carlson and CNN, like Glenn Greenwald and some of my Nation colleagues. Masha Gessen, who has argued against inflating the importance of Russian interference from the beginning, is one of the most admired journalists in the country, and justly so. But while on the subject of overwroughtness, what about the belief that accusing Russia of meddling in our election is escalating tensions and possibly provoking a new Cold War, or even a hot one? Or that Rusiagate is a deep plot by liberal Democrats and the intelligence community to bring down Trump and prevent a détente? Strangely, just the other day, the intelligence community was busy destroying the hawkish candidate Clinton—the Comey letter was what caused her poll numbers to cave. But memories are short.

4. Those Facebook posts and Twitter bots cast next to nothing and were barely seen by anybody. Columbia University social-media analyst Jonathan Al‐bright argues that their "organic reach" was actually huge—potentially billions of shares. But even if critics are right and the social-media campaign was a flop, the more consequential move was the mass release of e-mails from the Democratic National Committee and John Podesta by WikiLeaks. Those
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“An essential and groundbreaking text in the effort to understand how American criminal justice went so badly awry.”
—Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of Between the World and Me

“[Hayes is] the young left's most erudite and urgent interpreter.”
—Rachel Maddow

“Hayes's forceful analysis... compel[s] readers to wrestle with some very tough questions about the nature of American democracy.”
—Khalil Gibran Muhammad, New York Times Book Review

Chris Hayes
A COLONY IN A NATION
With a New Afterword on Law and Order in the Trump Era

W. W. NORTON Independent publishers since 1923
e-mails got mass publicity for months in the run-up to the election and solidified the narrative that the primary was fixed, the party was corrupt, and Clinton and everyone around her were dishonest schemers. We don’t know for a fact that the Russians were behind this—yet—but the view that it couldn’t have been a Russian hack and must have been a leak from the inside has been pretty successfully debunked on technological grounds.

5. If Russia meddled in our elections, it’s nothing we haven’t done in other countries ourselves. Ah, so you admit that Russia meddled, then? As a fallback position, this leaves much to be desired, because it’s not as if the Russians interfered to avenge our overthrow of Mossadegh and Allende and others. They did it to achieve their own ends. The proper answer for leftists should be that major powers should never interfere in other countries’ elections, not that it’s OK for our elections to be manipulated by a rival nation that happens, moreover, to be an autocratic kleptocracy.

6. Nothing revealed so far proves that Trump and Putin colluded to swing the election. This is true. But every day the evidence mounts that Trump’s campaign and the Russians were reaching out to each other about something. Do you really believe the Trump Tower meeting was about orphans? And what about George Papadopoulos’s drunken boast that the Russians had dirt on Clinton, followed by his guilty plea for making false statements to the FBI? An awful lot of people close to Trump turn out to have been far more involved with Russia than they initially let on. Maybe it was less about the election than shady finances. Trump has been a grifter his whole life, so maybe the Russians are blackmailing him—although it’s hard to imagine his fans caring.

If you’re a skeptic, ask yourself what could change your mind. If the answer is “nothing,” you may be in for an embarrassing time.
Costly Joint-Pain Injections Replaced By New $2 Pill

New pill boosts the same lubricating joint fluid as expensive and painful injections - without using a needle. Users report dramatic relief from swelling, pain and stiffness without side effects and expense.

By Jack Isler, M.D.
Health News Syndicate

HNS—A popular needle injection for people with joint pain is now available in an inexpensive nonprescription pill. The breakthrough came when researchers discovered a way to deliver the injected “relief molecule” through the digestive system.

Top US clinics have used these needle injections for years because they deliver powerful relief. Unfortunately, the shots are painful and expensive. They also only work on the joint being treated.

The new pill, called Synovia, delivers the same “relief molecule” as the injections. However, it has some impressive advantages. First, it’s inexpensive and nonprescription. Also, relief is delivered to every joint in the body because it enters the bloodstream through the digestive system.

This gives it the ability to reduce a much wider variety of pain. Users report greater flexibility and less stiffness in their knees. Hands and shoulders move pain-free for the first time in years. Even neck and lower back pain improve dramatically.

All this without spending over $600 on needle injections and taking trips to the doctor every week.

The medical community is very excited about this new breakthrough. Dr. Jacob Moss says, “Synovia is a great option for those suffering from joint pain. Injections are usually a last resort because of the pain and expense. However, Synovia should be taken at the first sign of discomfort.”

New Discovery

The needle injection procedure has been given to hundreds of thousands of patients over the last several years.

Doctors use the shots to boost a critical element of the joint called synovial fluid. This lubricating fluid is found between the cartilage and bones of every joint.

According to the firm’s head of R&D, Mike McNeill, “Researchers have been working for years to find a way to boost this fluid noninvasively. The problem was the molecule used in the injections was too large to absorb into the bloodstream.”

Top scientists conquered this obstacle by finding a smaller form of the same molecule. This new glucosamine form is easily absorbed by your stomach and intestines!

Now those who suffer from joint pain can get relief without painful injections. At less than $2 per day, early users like Steve Young are impressed. He says, “I’ve tried more pills than I can count, without any luck. Synovia is different. My knees and hands haven’t felt this good in years!”

Impressive Clinical Results

Leading clinics use injection therapy because it works. Recent clinical trials show the pill form also delivers major relief.

One example is a landmark study out of Europe. In the study the active ingredient in Synovia was compared to a popular NSAID pain reliever. The goal was to see if it could reduce pain and swelling around the knee. The results were incredible!

After just 3 days, more than 8 out of 10 people who took Synovia’s active ingredient had NO swelling. However, only 2 out of 10 people who took the NSAID experienced reduced swelling.

The study also looked at cases of severe swelling. Amazingly, zero cases of severe swelling were detected in the group taking the active ingredient found in Synovia. This means it was 100% effective for the cases of severe swelling!

In contrast, 9 out of 10 people taking the NSAID still had severe swelling. McNeill points out, “The impressive thing about this study is the active ingredient wasn’t tested against a fake pill. It was up against one of the most popular NSAIDs people use every day. It’s easy to see why people in pain are excited to get relief without an injection.”

The New Way It Delivers Relief

Getting relief without injections has big advantages. The most obvious is avoiding being stuck by a large needle every week for 5 weeks. Another downside of injections is the doctor can “miss”. The needle needs to be inserted into a precise spot in the joint to work. Otherwise, you risk the treatment being ineffective.

However, boosting your lubricating joint fluid by taking a pill delivers relief to all your joints, not just one.

There’s an additional reason the active ingredient in Synovia works so well – it nourishes the cartilage.

McNeill says, “This is vital because cartilage does not have blood vessels. The fluid in the joint serves two very important pain-relief roles: lubrication and giving the cartilage the nutrients it needs to start re-growing.”

Approved By Leading Doctors

The new delivery system for this molecule has caught the attention of leading medical doctors.

“Needle injections for joint pain have been around for years because they work. Being able to get the same relief molecule through a pill is amazing. Injections may be a last resort, but I’d recommend Synovia at the first sign of pain,” said Dr. Marie Laguna.

Dr. Gerardo Pereira, a renowned surgeon from Florida says, “Injections aim to boost synovial fluid, which lubricates the joint. Those suffering from joint pain usually have very little of this fluid. Synovia helps relieve pain by boosting this key lubricant without needles.”

Dr. Moss adds, “The research behind the active ingredient in Synovia is very exciting. This product is a great choice for those who haven’t had success with other joint pain treatments.”

110% Money Back Guarantee

Amazing feedback from users of Synovia has generated a wave of confidence at the company. So much so that they now offer Synovia with a 110% money back guarantee.

The company’s president, Michael Kenneth says, “We’ve seen how well it works. Now we want to remove any risk for those who might think Synovia sounds too good to be true.”

Simply take the pill exactly as directed. You must enjoy fast acting relief. Otherwise, return the product as directed and you’ll receive 100% of your money back plus an extra 10%.

How To Get Synovia

Today marks the official nationwide release of Synovia. As such, the company is offering a special discounted supply to everyone who calls within the next 48 hours.

A Regional Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This is the only way to try Synovia with their “110% money back” guarantee.

Starting at 6:00 am today the order hotline will be open for 48 hours. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE 1-888-770-3412 and provide the operator with the special discount approval code: SYN18. The company will do the rest.

Current supplies of Synovia are limited, and callers that don’t get through to the order hotline within the next 48 hours may have to pay more and wait until more inventory is produced. This could take as long as 6 weeks.
OPIOID CRISIS

Executing a Strategy

The most incendiary news to come out of the opioid summit at the White House on March 1 was no doubt President Trump’s suggestion that killing drug dealers would help to solve the country’s addiction epidemic. “Some countries have a very, very tough penalty—the ultimate penalty,” he said. “And, by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do.” This appalling comment continues Trump’s well-established pattern of emphasizing harsh and punitive law enforcement, rather than treatment, in response to the opioid crisis.

But other proposals took a different tack. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said the administration is considering allowing states to expand treatment at Medicaid-funded centers. Trump also said the government would consider suing drug manufacturers for deceptive marketing practices and for failing to take action following indications that their products were being diverted for illicit use. Hundreds of lawsuits have already been brought by states, counties, and cities.

It remains to be seen if and when these plans will be acted upon. As Congresswoman Annie Kuster, founder of the Bipartisan Heroin Task Force, wrote in a statement after the summit, “We’ve unfortunately seen more words than action when it comes to the White House’s handling of the opioid epidemic.”

More than 42,000 people in the United States died from opioid overdoses in 2016 (the last year for which there is publicly available data), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. —Sophie Kasakove

Patricia J. Williams

Encounters With Ghosts

Mythmaking can connect the past to the present, and reveal a promised future.

Some time ago, I discovered a trove of boxes stashed away in my late parents’ attic, and, ever since, I’ve been working my way through this archive of family photos, letters, scrapbooks, and other ephemera, which extends back almost 150 years. Two of the most precious things I’ve found are photos of my paternal great-grandfather and my maternal great-grandmother, both born into slavery. I am fortunate enough to have grown up with lots of stories passed down about both of them, but I had never seen either of their faces before. The sudden apparition of their oddly familiar features has been so startling, so jolting, so magical that I often feel as though I’m hallucinating. It is almost as if their images had coiled upward from the scrapbook, like smoke, and entered my body.

Their presence has bloomed within me, but also beyond me, like a gentle aura. There is something dark and inexplicable yet entirely illuminating in the eeriness of this encounter with ghosts. It is like looking at a jigsaw puzzle you thought you’d finished, but suddenly there are thousands of extra pieces, and you realize it’s an assemblage with no borders and an endless number of combinations. I try to read their lives from the fragments, the tea leaves of their long-gone presence.

I have always thought of reality as a present tense. But in this family archive, reality has leached all over the geography of time. I feel porous, unsettled in the coherence of an identity I had thought of as my own. It brings felt meaning to the koan that the novelist and Zen master Ruth Ozeki frequently cites as her meditative inspiration: “What did your face look like before your parents were born?”

This intimate encounter with images of my family’s past has overlapped with my visit to a museum exhibit featuring 150 black dolls from the collection of Connecticut lawyer Deborah Neff. The dolls were handmade by African-American women, most of them enslaved, and intended as toys for both their black and white charges. The show is on display at La Maison Rouge, a small museum in Paris, through May 20. Beautifully curated by the French filmmaker Nora Philippe and the American art historian Deborah Willis, these gathered dolls are a quiet army, the careful craft of women who left little other trace, whose names and lives were otherwise erased.

The dolls were fashioned from whatever materials lay at hand—scraps of sackcloth, gingham and silk, bits of leather and wool, coconut shell, hardwood, seeds and beads—but it’s the scripture of their faces that I found most arresting. Their wordless witness invites a kind of guessing game about who their makers were and for whom they were intended. I pore over the smallest stitches and details of style and color, as though I could decipher a grammar in each placement of a ribbon; I search for meaning in their button eyes.

The philosopher Emmanuel Leivas wrote that it is the face-to-face encounter that inspires one to serve and to give to others, for it “involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in face of the other...”

In my meditations on those photos of my great-grandparents, imagining what my face looked like before my parents were born has merged with the mute inscrutability of those collected black dolls’ faces into a field of unconfined mythmaking. Thinking mythologically is comforting, I suppose: It signifies something beyond quotidian concerns and invites a sense of belonging to a grand narrative or idealized creation story. In supplying archetypes that are foundational and originary, myths connect the generationally disconnected, providing a sense of continuity from the past to the present, and then on to a promised—or even destined—future.

At the same time, the yearning for creation stories can be born of discontent, displacement, and despair. Mythmaking can sometimes risk generating a too-romantic sense of nostalgia for times-that-never-were and for the purities of
blood-and-soil belonging. (The tension between these two visions—utopia and the exile therefrom—are on full display in the furious online debates about cinematic representations of home, loss, and heroism in *Black Panther*. Indeed, the central challenge of Afrofuturism, the sci-fi/fantasy genre of which *Black Panther* is a prime example, is how best to imagine a future in which children of the African diaspora survive, make the temporal crossing safely, and endure.)

The word “utopia” literally compresses into its etymology a good place that is also a nonexistent place. Therefore, when I search the photos in my family archive or the dolls in the museum for signs of who I ought to be, I have to remind myself that I am not only trying to reconstruct the precise facts of particular lives. Like Wakanda, the idyllic setting of *Black Panther*, these objects are imaginative spaces, fields of psychic desire. Their insistent traces offer a resistance to ultimate effacement as well as room to dream theories of the possible.

In this sense, these complex visual effigies have taken up residence within me like marvelous secret agents of love, sadness, healing, and heroism. Their shapes have insinuated themselves as armatures for carrying on, brave imaginaries for the mind and heart. They are surely available as well to be mined for all sorts of direct connections within unbudging political frames, but, while the dolls are singular in form, I experience each unique depiction as expressively unbounded. Thus they have become ethical reference points in the seeping disfigurements of trauma, rage, cruelty, and death. They speak figuratively. The echo of their voices is an epiphany of repair, an assurance to lost children of their place in worlds to come.

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**SNAPSHOT / SIMON DAWSON**

**Suffragette City**

A girl dressed as a suffragette is one of thousands of demonstrators to join the March4Women, a rally calling for gender equality, in London on March 4. This year marks the 100th anniversary of some women getting the right to vote in the UK.

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**Jared Kushner, White House Real-Estate Developer**

Young Jared Kushner thought that he could mix His job with getting cash for 666. (That debt-stuffed building on the River Styx Was not among his most inspired picks.) It looks as if he tried some shady tricks. So now young Jared Kushner’s in a fix.

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**Calvin Trillin**

Deadline Poet

*Suffragette City*
Meet Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Iceland’s Left-Wing, Environmentalist, Feminist Prime Minister
Another storm is sweeping into Reykjavík on this dark and cold late-winter evening, but in the downstairs hall of the century-old Hannesarholt cultural house, several dozen Icelanders are basking in the warmth of their country’s rich literary heritage. The lecturer tonight is a small woman with a large personality. Her enthusiastic two-hour presentation, punctuated with dramatic readings, wry humor, and songs, traces the evolution of the love story across the centuries. The emphasis is on the evolving role of women and the emergence of feminist sensibilities. The crowd is thrilled by the literary depth and intellectual breadth of the evening and rewards Katrín Jakobsdóttir with a standing ovation, which she graciously accepts before heading back to her day job—as prime minister of Iceland.

Energetic and impassioned, determined to lead not merely with legislation but with lessons, Jakobsdóttir is the first elected head of state who comes from a new breed of Nordic left-wing parties that link democratic socialism, environmentalism, feminism, and anti-militarism. She is, as well, one of a number of young left-leaning women who have emerged as prime ministers and party leaders in countries around the world at the same time that the United States has been coming to grips with the defeat of Hillary Clinton and the election of Donald Trump. While the United States wrestles with retrograde leadership—and the fantasy that a country can only be made great by doing something “again”—other countries are electing women who, in the words of Laura Liswood, secretary general of the Council of Women World Leaders, are “channeling today’s zeitgeist.”

“Women represent change, because they’re from a historically unrepresented group, and younger women represent a generational shift as well,” says Liswood, who for decades has studied the role of women in politics and government. “It’s almost as if everyone has permission to step away from the traditional ways of thinking. Society has changed sufficiently to talk about what is possible.” That embrace of possibility stands in stark contrast to the hidebound and reactionary messages sent by Trump's election and his approach to governing. It also offers perspectives on how to forge a new politics that might give the United States permission to step away from its own traditional ways of thinking. There will always be those who embrace an American-exceptionalist dogma that insists there is nothing to learn from the rest of the world—and even less to learn from a remote island nation with a population that’s dwarfed even by small American states—but Iceland has captured a lot of imagination.

When I tweeted about the new prime minister’s left-wing politics and agenda after she assembled her coalition government last fall, I got 72,000 likes—and a lot of responses from Americans asking “How can I move there?” or, better yet, “Can we have one of these please?”

Settled into a chair in the modest conference room outside her office in the former Danish prison that serves as Iceland’s Stjórnarrad (Cabinet House), Jakobsdóttir acknowledges the sudden interest in the country’s political progression. “I can understand,” says the literary critic who became prime minister. “It’s a little different.”

The international press has referred to Jakobsdóttir as “the anti-Trump.” And as she races to implement Iceland’s sweeping pay-equity law (quoting John Stuart Mill and talking about “the inequality that has the deepest roots in us all”); charges the head of Iceland’s largest conservation NGO with running the environment ministry; and discourses knowledgeably about the economic and social changes that will extend from automation, it’s easy to understand why.

But the “anti-Trump” label draws an eye-roll from Jakobsdóttir. She isn’t preoccupied by a desire to square off against the US president, either on Twitter or on the global stage. She’s much more interested in showing what Iceland can do, and in establishing a new model for what a leader might look and act like in the 21st century. When she appeared at the One Planet Summit in Paris last December—just months after Trump announced that he would withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement of 2015—Jakobsdóttir didn’t spend her time griping about US obstructionism; she came to announce her country’s plans for “going further” than the goals of the accord. Promising “a carbon-less Iceland in 2040,” she cheekily proposed a race to ditch fossil fuels: “There are other nations making such goals, but our time schedule is ambitious, and we are going to be five years ahead of our neighbors in the Nordic countries.”
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or Jakobsdóttir, politics is the art of the imaginable. Not of sweeping assertions and empty-headed certainty, mind you—she knows she’s the leader of a small country that has seen wild political mood swings since 2008, when it experienced the largest systemic banking collapse (relative to the size of its economy) of any nation in history. And she knows that the coalition government she now leads—which aligns her proudly socialist, environmentalist, feminist Left-Green Movement with a pair of center-right parties that are not particularly popular among her own party’s activist base—is an unprecedented project that is held together in no small part because of her status as the most trusted political figure in Iceland. She recognizes that politics in Iceland, and perhaps internationally, must produce smart, forward-looking alternatives to the toxic mix of right-wing populism, yearning for an unenlightened past, and lies about the future that has emerged in an age of desperate but often ill-focused anger over dead-end neoliberalism.

“We are trying to do things differently,” Jakobsdóttir says. In a world where most leaders of countries are still men, and where a good many of those men root their understandings in decades-old political models and practices, it’s worth noting that a 42-year-old feminist who embraces the #MeToo movement, recalls that “I began my political participation through demonstrations,” and gets excited about the way that grassroots movements can change politics and society is still a rarity on the global stage. “I’ve gone to one international meeting, which was the global summit in Paris,” Jakobsdóttir says. “And I noticed that there were a lot fewer women than men. So I was like, ‘OK, the numbers are not too high for us right now. We’ve got to change that.’”

Will we? “Oh, yes, I think that’s doable.”

Jakobsdóttir has a thing for the word “doable.” She uses it a lot—and with a refreshing confidence that not just her own small country but the world can and will be transformed, politically, socially, and culturally, for the better.

Mobilizing Iceland to address climate change and then leveraging that mobilization to influence the rest of the world? “It’s huge, but it’s doable,” Jakobsdóttir says. “I can already see that the other Nordic countries are saying [that they want to be] carbon-neutral by 2045—so it’s a little bit of a race. And you can’t do this just by reducing emissions. We also have to change the way we are using lands, restoring wetlands—really change the way we think. But, yes, we can do that.”

Jakobsdóttir is, in fact, doing just that: not merely capitalizing on Iceland’s wealth of renewable resources, which she admits provide “a head start,” but also organizing unexpected groups to be part of this new thinking—such as the Icelandic sheep farmers who propose to offset carbon emissions by investing in topsoil and wetlands reclamation, planting trees, and switching to renewable fuels. “The sheep farmers are ready, really, to cooperate with the government on how we can make sheep farming carbon-neutral in Iceland in a few years,” Jakobsdóttir says. “You never know if you’re going to achieve a goal or not, but I’m really excited about this, because I think it’s doable.”

What else is doable? “Closing the [gender] pay gap is doable,” she replies. “We have said that we are going to implement the equal-pay standard in five years.”

Putting Iceland’s money to work “for the people in this country”? Yes, that’s also “doable.” When talk turns to economic issues, the prime minister cites Thomas Piketty, the French economist and author of the 2013 book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, and holds forth on the connections between austerity policies and inequality. Jakobsdóttir’s party campaigned on a promise not just to hike taxes on large companies and the rich but to make the country’s financial system more responsive to human needs. The Left-Green Movement wants to establish Iceland—which had a prime minister step down in 2016 after his family’s secret offshore holdings were revealed in the Panama Papers—as one of the “pioneering countries in which currency speculation and short-term profiting off of capital flows is taxed, thus discouraging speculative capital transfers.” Doable? “Yes, well, we of course are in this unique position [where the government owns] two out of three banks,” explains the leader of a country that responded very differently to the global financial and economic meltdown of 2007–08 than did the United States—by jailing bankers and taking a stake in major financial institutions.

“That certainly helps,” I admit. “That certainly helps,” Jakobsdóttir repeats, with robust laughter, but then she adds that Iceland, by taking advantage of its renewed economic vitality, can get to work “restoring or rebuilding this public infrastructure.” That’s a big deal, because, after too many punitive cuts during the turmoil that followed the banking crisis, the government she leads is “really founded on the mission to rebuild the public structure in Iceland.”

Jakobsdóttir argues that a lot of things are “doable” if political leaders decide to break long-established patterns. In many countries, people have been beaten down by neoliberal austerity policies that have blurred the lines between the traditional parties. There’s a search, Jakobsdóttir insists, for a politics that addresses human needs rather than always bending to the demands of bankers and distant investors. Even the more conservative parties in her unlikely coalition government recognize this, she insists, which is why they’ll be able to keep working together.

Jakobsdóttir sounds a little like Bernie Sanders when she starts talking about pulling together people of varying political views and ideologies to achieve fundamental goals.
And that's no coincidence: When I mention that Sanders has been talking about the changes in Iceland (“We must follow the example of our brothers and sisters in Iceland and demand equal pay for equal work now, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality or nationality,” the Vermont senator wrote on Facebook in January), the prime minister lights up. “I’m a fan of him. Yes, yes, of course I’m a fan,” she says. “I really liked his message when he was campaigning, trying to become the presidential candidate for the Democrats. He was talking, really, about Nordic welfare. It was not what we would call ‘radical left’ in Iceland; it was traditional Nordic left-wing welfare that he was talking about, with the emphasis on equality—which I have been talking about for years. For years.”

Jakobsdóttir may be the youngest female leader in Europe, but she is not new to politics. “I’m a left-wing person. My parents were left-wing; my grandparents were left-wing. So there’s a strong left-wing tradition in my family,” she explains. “But I was never registered to a political party until I found this party that was also environmental.”

The Left-Green Movement emerged in the late 1990s, following one of the endless reshufflings of political parties in this true multiparty democracy (even Iceland’s Pirate Party, one of the most robust of the world’s new wave of tech-savvy political groupings, has a parliamentary presence here). The Left-Greens merged old-school socialists with young environmentalists, a combination that drew the party into a bitter battle against a massive, wilderness-threatening Alcoa smelter project in the early and mid-2000s. Steingrímur Sigfússon, the first Left-Green leader, condemned the corporate-friendly, center-right government in Iceland during that period for “crawling on their knees in front of American aluminum moguls.”

Jakobsdóttir, then a young scholar developing a reputation as an expert in Nordic crime fiction, was inspired to battle a multinational corporation on behalf of Iceland’s rivers and streams. “I wouldn’t say I was the most radical activist in town, but, yes, I began my political par-

A New Generation Comes to Power

On the morning after Jacinda Ardern became the youngest leader in the history of New Zealand’s Labour Party and launched her uphill campaign to become the country’s next prime minister, she was confronted with one of the most archaic complaints about women moving into positions of power. On the nationally broadcast AM Show, sports commentator Mark Richardson opined that New Zealanders had a right to know whether a contender for the country’s top job might become pregnant and take maternity leave. “If you are the employer of a company, you need to know that type of thing from the woman you are employing,” Richardson said. “Is it OK for a PM to take maternity leave while in office?”

The 37-year-old Ardern told the show’s host, Duncan Garner, that she was willing to answer the question “because I opened myself up to it. But you…” she added, pointing an admonishing finger at Richardson. “It is totally unacceptable in 2017 to say that women should have to answer that question in the workplace.”

The exchange went viral, as did Ardern’s fiery advocacy for gender equality in the New Zealand Parliament and on the campaign trail. “Jacindamania” ensued, as the Labour Party surged in the polls and thousands of volunteers—most of them women—signed up to support the campaign of the amateur DJ and former president of the International Union of Socialist Youth. The September 2017 election produced no clear winner, but then, to the shock of pundits, Ardern forged a coalition with the Green Party and the populist

New Zealand First Party and became the world’s youngest female head of government. Declaring that the market economy had “failed our people in recent times,” Ardern pledged an interventionist agenda to raise wages, reduce child poverty, and achieve pay equity for women. Ardern isn’t the only one shaking things up. In recent years, notes Laura Liswood, secretary general of the Council of Women World Leaders, a new generation of female leaders has come to power. In Namibia, Saara Kuugongelwa, who spent her youth in exile with the insurgent South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), became prime minister in 2015, at age 47, and has emerged as an outspoken advocate for gender equality and closing pay gaps—not just in Namibia but across Africa. In Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon became deputy leader of the pro-independence Scottish National Party in the devolved Scottish Parliament in 2004, at age 34, and, a decade later, became the country’s first minister. Sturgeon led her party to a sweeping victory in the 2016 Scottish elections as an advocate for gender equality (she has addressed the UN on the issue), a supporter of nuclear disarmament, and a sharp critic of austerity economics, which she has denounced as “morally unjustifiable and economically unsustainable.” Last year, Sturgeon met with California Governor Jerry Brown and cut a deal committing California and Scotland to work together to combat climate change.

Liswood says the growing number of women serving as party leaders and government ministers is notable. “Younger women are more often the leaders of opposition parties,” she explains. “They are then positioned to become key coalition partners and prime ministers. We are increasing the pool of potential leaders.” For example, in Denmark, 40-year-old Mette Frederiksen has led the Social Democrats for three years and is a serious contender to become the next prime minister. In Finland, the head of the Left Alliance—an ally of Iceland’s Left-Green Movement in the Nordic Green Left Alliance—is 31-year-old parliamentarian Li Andersson. The Left Alliance, which has helped form governments but never led one, is on the cutting edge of new thinking about building a more humane society, arguing in its “Red-Green Future” manifesto: “Life is not a race. There is no need for us to run any faster and collapse under pressure for more efficiency or [to] consume more. Instead, we can concentrate on having a good life, learning new things and enjoying the company of others. We can exchange hoarding more unnecessary things for the luxuries of creativity, humor, and leading a civilized life.”

Part of that civilized life requires a broad acceptance of paid parental leave, as Ardern explained during last year’s campaign. When she announced early this year that she and her partner were expecting a baby in June, Ardern added that she planned to take a six-week break—without pay. Ironically, elected officials in New Zealand don’t qualify for paid parental leave. But many other women and men will benefit not just from the prime minister’s example, but from her policies: On July 1, a plan that will eventually increase paid parental leave to 26 weeks kicks in—thanks to one of the first pieces of legislation enacted by Ardern’s government.
ticipation through demonstrations because of a big hydroelectric plant in the east of Iceland. It was probably the most controversial project that we have had in environmental issues in Iceland. That was the reason why I entered the Left-Greens, because of this struggle.”

Pushed into leadership by the party’s youth wing when she was still in her 20s, Jakobsdóttir became a member of Iceland’s parliament at 31, a high-ranking government minister at 33, and the party’s leader at 37. “You can do new politics in old parties, and you can do old politics in new parties,” she says, but her emphasis has been on the new. In particular, “this whole ideology of the sustainable element: That really was a key factor for me. Looking at things from the side of the environment, from the social side, from the economic side—I thought, ‘This is something new and important for me.’” She was also drawn to the Left-Greens’ embrace of feminism as a defining element of their politics. “I think women work differently in politics than men,” Jakobsdóttir says. “They use different methods, usually. Of course, you can’t generalize too much. But, still, at least I—as a great enthusiast when it comes to gender equality—I have said I don’t want to [mimic the approaches of men] in order to achieve something in politics.”

Iceland has had women leaders before. In 1980, theater director Vigdis Finnbogadóttir became the world’s first directly elected female president, surfing a wave of feminist energy that extended from an epic 1975 strike, in which 90 percent of Icelandic women walked off their jobs to teach a lesson about the contributions they were making to society. In 2009, Jakobsdóttir and the Left-Green Movement joined a coalition government led by the center-left Social Democratic Party’s Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, Iceland’s first female prime minister and the first openly lesbian head of government in the world. The country, which in the 1980s and ’90s had a politically influential Women’s List party, has a long history of enacting “policies that have actually changed the culture here in Iceland,” says Jakobsdóttir. The prime minister, the mother of three young children, also makes note of Iceland’s well-established “legislation on parental leave—where the father is obliged to take three months, and the mother is obliged to take three months—and it really changed the attitude of fathers toward their role in the bringing up of children.” Indeed, in December The New York Times referred to Iceland as “the most gender-equalitarian country in the world.”

A relentless champion of her country, Jakobsdóttir can recount all the history and all the statistics. She admires her predecessors, especially Finnbogadóttir: “I was 4 years old when she was elected in 1980. When she left office in 1996, and then there was a man elected, I heard a kid asking, ‘Can a man become president?’ Think of the culture change in that!” For her part, Finnbogadóttir delights in the progress; when we met, she told me that “now it is becoming natural that women serve as prime ministers. It is natural that they become ministers. This is a step forward, for your daughter and for my granddaughter.”

“This is true, Jakobsdóttir says, but it is important to understand that the cultural change is still in its early stages. “I could sense that when I said that I wanted to become prime minister. A lot of people said, ‘Whoa! Aren’t you being too pleased with yourself?’ Nobody would say that to a man.”

Always on the lookout for a teachable moment, the new leader of Iceland has a ready response for those who read too much into her rise to power. “When people say to me, ‘Now you’re prime minister, and isn’t that a sign that Iceland is just a paradise north for gender equality?’, I say, ‘Well, we would need 30 women, at least, in a row to become prime minister if I were to say yes to that’—because we had 30 men before me. I’m just number two.”

Even so, the woman whose appearance in an old rock-music video still circulates on the Internet—the musicians she appeared with in the group Bang Gang went on to become some of the most influential figures in Icelandic music—acknowledges that it’s kind of a big deal that she’s now prime minister. “My party has a very strong work ethic,” she explains. “Even though nothing is happening, when we’re in opposition, we still say, ‘OK, we’re going to organize 14 meetings around the country during January, where we will probably be stuck in the snow for most of the time.’ And then we go and do it. I didn’t really realize [the importance of] this until I listened to my husband saying, ‘You can’t really run a party unless you have the patience to go out there and go to a zillion meetings where there are only five people and you are always very happy about it.’”

In the past, Jakobsdóttir was always very happy about organizing rallies and election campaigns and speaking truth to power. But now that she’s the one in power, she’s hoping to apply that work ethic not merely “to change something” in Iceland but to set an example of how politics could evolve in the 21st century. When I suggest that going from getting stuck in snow on the way to a meeting with five people to implementing a pay-equity law, overcoming austerity, and unveiling ambitious climate goals as the nation’s chief executive isn’t too bad, a broad grin crosses her face.

“Not too bad,” she echoes, laughing. Then she pauses, reflecting back to the start of a long conversation. “You began by asking, ‘Can you learn something from a small country?’” she reminds me, looking around the office where so many men—most of them older and much more conservative than she—once held sway, and where Katrín Jakobsdóttir is now the prime minister. “I think this is something you can learn from a small country: Sometimes, we can do this.”
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[6 small images of speakers]

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL  DAVE ZIRIN  LAURA FLANDERS  RUTH MESSINGER  LAILA LALAMI

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Labor history is largely missing from our schools, but a growing movement is finding creative ways to educate teens about economic justice.

by CAROLINE PRESTON
Skokie, Ill.
The young woman in the black sweatshirt was indignant. Across the negotiating table, a stern, occasionally sharp-tongued adversary was refusing to budge—first on wages and then on the organization’s social-media policy. “We’re a hospital,” the woman said with marked intensity. “Don’t you agree that our first responsibility is to our patients?”

Nearby, a cluster of people were engaged in a fierce debate on the fairness of random drug tests for employees. Over in a far corner, a third group traded opinions on whether to accept management’s proposal to offer new hires 401(k)s instead of pensions. “It’s just for new employees,” said a guy in a purple T-shirt. “But we have to think about solidarity,” replied a young woman in clear-framed glasses.

The speakers weren’t impassioned union representatives or managers concerned with the bottom line. They were juniors at Niles West High, an economically diverse school in the Chicago suburbs serving approximately 2,500 students. The collective-bargaining simulation was organized by the DePaul University Labor Education Center, which runs the exercise in 10 high schools to introduce students to economic justice and the negotiating power of unions.

For most of the teenagers, it was the first time they were exposed to what unions do—not to mention their first encounter with terms like “HR,” “401(k),” and “union security.”

Lessons like these help students gain critical-thinking skills and give them an opportunity to learn about workers’ rights and labor history—subjects that are often missing from classroom discussions, educators say. And with a stack of studies suggesting that the decline of unionized labor since the 1970s has deepened America’s economic inequality, some argue that teaching students about or organizing might offer a chance of preserving the country’s middle class.

“Many of the gains made by the labor movement, people just take for granted,” says Matthew Hardy, communications director for the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), which hopes to introduce labor history and bargaining exercises in five school districts this fall. “From things like workplace-safety laws to child-labor laws to vacations, holidays, civil rights, Medicare, Social Security, you name it—these didn’t appear out of thin air…. Working people standing together did that.”

CFT, which represents roughly 120,000 educators, is lobbying for $2.7 million in state funds for a three-year pilot program that would incorporate labor history in civics, economics, and history classes, along with simulations like those run by the DePaul center.

Students aren’t likely to learn much about the way that unions have shaped economic and social policy if they stick to traditional textbooks, according to a report by the Albert Shanker Institute, a pro-labor group named for a longtime leader of the American Federation of Teachers. The 2011 study of four popular textbooks on American history found that coverage of the labor movement was “narrow and sometimes seriously misleading.”

“Textbooks tend to be tilted to the perspectives of the Rockefellers and the du Ponts and the Morgans, and don’t do a fair job in terms of representing the conditions that working people were toiling under, or the often difficult struggles they had to engage in to establish basic rights,” says Leo Casey, the Shanker Institute’s executive director.

Striking workers, for example, are often portrayed as menacing and violent. In its treatment of politics during the mid-20th century, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook The Americans downplays the concerns of steel and railroad workers about their wages and celebrates President Harry Truman for threatening to draft striking workers into the Army. Truman, the book declares, refused to let organized labor “cripple the nation.”

But the textbooks mostly minimize or ignore the role of unions. One reason for this, according to Casey, is the outsized influence of Texas on the country’s textbook market. The state’s Board of Education meddles more than most in the process of approving textbooks, he says, and looks
unfavorably on progressive so-
cial movements. As a result, pub-
lishers have tended to gear
their textbooks toward pleasing
this deep-pocketed buyer.

Adam Sanchez found this
to be the case when he started
teaching US history, first in
Portland, Oregon, and later
at Harvest Collegiate High
School, a small public school
in New York City. “You might
have some mention of the la-
bor movement in a chapter on
industrialization, or, in a decent
textbook, they might talk about
the labor movement a bit in the 1930s,” he says. “But, re-
ally, it is totally ignored.”

Eager to help plug these gaps, Sanchez began sharing

course materials on labor through Rethinking Schools,
a publisher that co-launched the Zinn Education Pro-
ject to develop curriculums on workers, women, people
of color, and social movements. To date, some 75,000
teachers have signed up to download its materials, in-
cluding the lessons on labor, says Deborah Menkart, co-
director of the Zinn project.

Sanchez’s favorite lesson (not one he authored) is
the “Organic Goodie Simulation.” In the exercise, the
teacher owns a “goodie machine” and pits the students—
divided into employed and unemployed—against one
another. The teacher tries to drive down workers’ wages
by offering lower-paying jobs to the unemployed, who
face starvation because they can’t afford enough “good-
ies.” Eventually, some students recognize that it’s in their
collective interest to organize, and they may strike or
seize the goodie machine. “It’s an interesting flip of the
typical classroom,” Sanchez says. “This is a lesson that
rewards rebellion, and it’s often the rebellious classes
that do well.”

At Niles West High, 70 students hustled into a large
classroom shortly after 8 AM on a recent Friday for the
start of the collective-bargaining simulation. In prepa-
ration for the exercise, they’d received handouts on the ficti-
tious Getswelle Hospital and its protracted labor negotiations
with the nurses’ union. After being cast as union members or
managers, the students were assigned “coaches,” who included
a Service Employees International Union researcher and an
organizer with a local mechan-
ics’ union. The DePaul center
strives for verisimilitude: When
the students’ contract deliber-
ations stalled, it even brought in
two mediators from the Fed-
eral Mediation and Conciliation Service, the government
agency that helps resolve worker-manager conflicts.

At table one, Hana Frisch, the young woman in the
clear-framed glasses, took the lead in negotiating for the
union. Her opening bid: wage increases of 7 percent the
first year, then 4.5 percent and 4 percent in years two and
three. Frisch’s counterpart on the management side, Lily
Gussis, returned to an earlier union proposal on employee
health care. The hospital was willing to shoulder a slightly
higher share of insurance costs, she said.

The two groups hustled back to their corners. Man-
gement hammered out a counterproposal on salary in-
creases. The nurses’ union began to consider overtime
pay. “Any Rolling Stones fans out there?” asked Jerry
Hughes, a retired federal mediator and coach for the
union side. “You can’t always get what you want, but
you get what you need.” That’s the whole point of col-
lective bargaining: You go for what you want to get what
you need.”

Steve Grossman, a social-studies teacher at
Niles West High and the DePaul center’s associ-
ate director, says that few high schoolers know
anything about unions before the simulation. He
tells them to seek the best deal for their side, but
it also has to be a fair deal. If the union tricks manage-
ment into accepting exorbitant wages, for example, that’s
in no one’s best interest. “The kids understand why—the
hospital might go out of business,” Grossman says. At the
end of the exercise, he asks students to consider what the
contract would have looked like if they’d had no right to
bargain. “It’s kind of like a switch goes off.”

At least two states have tried to ensure that students
receive an introduction to labor history. In 2009, Wiscon-
sin passed a law incorporating the “history of organized
labor and the collective bargaining process” into the state’s
social-studies standards. The rollout of those lessons has
been slow, but the Wisconsin Department of Public In-
struction released a draft of the new standards in January.

In 2015, Connecticut approved legislation requiring the State Board of Education to distribute course mate-
rials on labor history and law, collective bargaining, and
workplace rights. The labor-backed bill proved contro-
versial, however, with critics alleging that it was merely a
way for unions—which today represent just 10.7 percent
of US workers—to reach young people in order to attract future members.

“I don’t think there’s anybody here that will deny that our education system does indoctrinate our kids,” State Representative Charles Ferraro, a Republican, said in a hearing on the legislation. “It does give me pause as to why this bill was supported by unions primarily…. I don’t see how this particular bill is gonna give a fair, balanced approach in teaching our children.” Some teachers, meanwhile, objected to the measure’s top-down approach and said decisions about what to teach were best left to them. The measure ultimately passed only after compromise language was added that mandated making information available on “the history and economics of free market capitalism and entrepreneurialism” as well.

Labor historians and progressive educators shrug off the accusations that they’re trying to brainwash students. “There’s a lot about free-market capitalism that’s already out there,” said Steve Kass, president of the Greater New Haven Labor History Association, which supported the bill. “The idea with this was to rebalance the scale.”

In some places, groups affiliated with unions have tried to educate young people about collective action by helping them organize around perceived injustices in their own lives. AiKea, an offshoot of Unite Here Local 5 in Honolulu, helps teens operate “justice clubs” in their schools; the students have successfully campaigned for funding for air-conditioning in their classrooms and against a dress code they felt was sexist. “Schools can be a great way to inspire young people and teach about economic justice,” says Lisa Grandinetti, 22, who was active with AiKea as a student at Honolulu’s Mililani High School and now works for the group. But, she adds, because of overtesting and standardization, “that’s not what they are doing now.”

In Illinois, there’s no requirement that high schoolers learn about labor history, but the state recently started requiring that students pass a civics class in order to graduate. Jessica Cook, director of the DePaul center, says she hopes this will prompt more teachers to incorporate the collective-bargaining simulations into their lesson plans. Over pizza toward the end of the four-hour session at Niles West High, Cook told the students: “If there’s one thing I hope you take away from this, it’s that it’s easier to have a voice in your working conditions when you’re together.”

One of the students, Muhammad Afzal, said he hopes to be a nuclear engineer and will probably wind up working for a big corporation. The collective-bargaining simulation, he said, helped him consider how he might negotiate for better pay and working conditions when he’s older. “I learned about how to communicate and how, if you’re more civil, you get a better deal.” Before this day, he added, “I didn’t realize there was a system [for this] where you try to be fair.”

This story was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.
Haunted by his vote to authorize the Iraq War, Republican Congressman Walter Jones Jr. is standing up against US military actions and his own party.
On the day in late January that I interviewed Walter Jones Jr. in his office in Greenville, North Carolina, the Republican congressman was feeling particularly apocalyptic. He had just read a Fox Business story detailing how three Wall Street private-equity firms, whose members had ponied up $1.3 million for GOP lawmakers in 2017, persuaded Congress to preserve a tax loophole for high-end money managers. On Jones’s desk, awaiting his signature, was a condolence letter to the family of US Army Spc. Javion Shavonte Sullivan, who had died two weeks earlier in Iraq. And on the muted TV, a chyron stated that President Donald Trump had ordered the firing of special counsel Robert Mueller last June, only to be foiled by the White House counsel.

Jones, 75, is a religious man. Brought up Southern Baptist, he converted to Catholicism as an adult, breaking from a denomination that still questions whether Catholics’ devotion to the Virgin Mary disqualifies them from entering Heaven. Jones prays for the country regularly, but his deep faith and his “child’s view of Heaven” don’t protect him from despair.

“I am at a point where I just wonder: Are we in the final days of a great nation?” he told me. “I’m thinking that, going back to the Bible, we’re on the verge of Revelations.” He was referring to the New Testament Book of Revelation, which—in the language of beasts, horsemen, and fire—foretells the destruction of a wicked world before the Second Coming of Christ. “The nation that has been blessed in so many ways has forgotten the blessings,” Jones said.

He paused for a few seconds. “That’s, I guess in a way, why I’m kind of an independent.”

In 2005, Jones renounced his vote authorizing the invasion of Iraq, and ever since he’s been a dissenting voice within the Republican Party. He has challenged three presidents on their use of force, calling on his congressional colleagues to increase their military oversight. And he has long decried the corrupting effect of big-dollar campaign contributions. “Whatever happened to honesty and integrity?” he asked me, almost as soon as I stepped into his office. “It’s gone, and it’s all because of the influence of money.”

The nonprofit newsroom ProPublica ranks Jones first among House members in voting against their own party—he’s done so almost 40 percent of the time since January 2017. That independent streak has been all the more conspicuous during the Trump administration, as his fellow Republican lawmakers scramble to make a show of party unity.

Since Trump’s inauguration, Jones has joined with Democrats in advocating for an independent commission to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election. He was the first Republican to demand that House Intelligence Committee chairman Devin Nunes, a Trump surrogate, recuse himself from his panel’s Russia probe. He voted against both the tax overhaul and the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act. He was the lone House Republican to oppose the Financial Choice Act, which, if enacted (the measure passed in the lower chamber and awaits a vote in the Senate), would strike down key provisions of the Dodd-Frank financial-reform legislation. He has protested Trump’s military escalations in Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen. And he has called on Congress to demand disclosure of the president’s tax returns.

None of this makes Jones a liberal, as some of his adversaries have claimed. A religious traditionalist, he opposes abortion and has crusaded to get pornography off federal-government computers. He also opposes same-sex marriage, saying, “There’s some documents that you can’t rewrite, and truthfully one of them is the Bible.”

But Jones is disgusted with DC politics and willing to join forces with any reform-minded official. That includes liberal Democrats like Representative Eric Swalwell of California, who introduced the bill calling for an independent panel to investigate foreign interference in US elections.

“There’s a courage shortage right now among Republicans. There’s not many who are willing to stand up to the president,” Swalwell told me. Jones, he said, is an outlier—a model as to how you conduct yourself when you don’t worry about scoring political points. I put him on one hand of the truly decent people who walk the halls of the Capitol.”

Jones was once a Democratic state legislator, self-effacing and determined to reform North Carolina’s campaign-finance and lobbying laws. Then, rebuffed by his own party when he ran for the US House seat that his father had held—a district redrawn to favor an African American candidate—Walter Jones Jr. switched sides, ran in a different district, and was elected to Congress as part of the 1994 Republican surge. He stayed out of national headlines until 2003, when he persuaded the House cafeterias to rebrand french fries as “freedom fries.” It was his way of protesting France’s opposition to US policy during the buildup to the Iraq War.

For all the patriotic bunting of the “freedom fries” stunt, Jones said that he had long harbored doubts about President George W. Bush’s plans to invade Iraq. “After the towers were destroyed,” he told me, “there seemed to be this effort to justify a war against Saddam Hussein, because the neocons wanted to have an American military presence somewhere in the Middle East.” At hearings, Jones listened to officials like Vice President Dick Cheney defend the call to arms, feeling unconvinced but afraid to say so. “Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator, but I never could believe he was funding the hijackers,” he recalled.

Jones now describes his vote to authorize the war as an act of “weakness in not voting my conscience.” His district includes two major Marine Corps facilities, Camp Lejeune and Air Station Cherry Point, and is home to numerous military retirees. “The people who wore the uniform, they were buying into the Bush-Cheney sell of...
the war,” he said. “I told my chief of staff that I don’t believe the war is justified, but I’m going to vote for it with the hope that Mr. Bush will not use the authority. I was very naive, obviously.”

The vote still haunts him. “In my heart, I believe that I let God down,” Jones said. Those feelings intensified on a warm spring day in 2003, when he attended a memorial service at Camp Lejeune for Marine Sgt. Michael Bitz, who was killed in an ambush in Iraq. At the outdoor ceremony, one of Bitz’s sons dropped a toy—Jones remembers it as a rubber ducky—and a Marine captain walked over to retrieve it. “It was like he was walking on clouds, it was so gentle,” Jones said. He watched Bitz’s son look up at the captain and thought about how the boy would grow up without knowing his father.

Seeing the war’s effect on families like Bitz’s tortured Jones. “It was tearing him apart,” said Father Justin Kerber, a former pastor of Jones’s. “He said their lives are being wasted. He said, ‘This is crazy—we’re never going to get out of this, and I can’t keep OK’ing this and acting like I’m going along with it.’”

So Jones changed course. “Catholics have this sense that, if you do something wrong, you have to do penance to make up for it,” said Carmine Scavo, an East Carolina University political scientist who has followed Jones’s career. What followed was a penance that has lasted for 15 years. Jones listened to an audio version of James Bamford’s The Pretext for War, which chronicles how the Bush administration used faulty intelligence to sell the invasion. He invited the author to meet with his colleagues at the Capitol. He met with others too, including peace activist Cindy Sheehan, whose son, Army Spc. Casey Sheehan, died in Iraq. “He was very welcoming, and he gave me a big hug,” Sheehan said. “I felt that he was struggling…. I’ll never forget him and his kindness.”

Over time, Jones amped up his criticism of US military aggression. In 2013, he told a libertarian group in Raleigh, “Lyndon Johnson’s probably rotting in hell now because of the Vietnam War. He probably needs to move over for Dick Cheney.” Jones also took on President Barack Obama—teaming up, for example, with then-Representative Dennis Kucinich, an Ohio Democrat, to sue the administration for invading Libya in 2011 without congressional approval. (A federal judge dismissed the case.)

At the core of Jones’s dissent is his support for the War Powers Act, a post-Vietnam reform that requires the president to consult with Congress before sending US troops into actual or imminent hostilities. Jones feels so strongly about the proper role of lawmakers that he recently sponsored a theater performance about the founding fathers’ intention to place war decisions in congressional hands.

When the Trump administration deployed US Marines to Syria last March as part of a campaign against ISIS, Jones signed on to a bill introduced by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) that would bar the expansion of combat troops there. He was the only Republican to do so. “Regardless of the circumstances, no American president has the constitutional right to commit acts of war against a sovereign nation without approval from Congress,” he said in an April statement after the United States began air strikes in Syria.

In September, Jones co-sponsored a bill to pull US troops out of Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is waging a brutal war against Houthi rebels who toppled the government of Yemen’s Saudi-supported president, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Jones then co-authored a New York Times op-ed, with Democratic Representatives Ro Khanna of California and Mark Pocan of Wisconsin, decrying the coalition’s “grotesque” tactic of starving civilians. “There’s a good reason that the Constitution reserves for Congress the right to declare war,” they wrote. “Clearly, the founders’ intent was to prevent precisely the kind of dangerous course we’re charting.”

Khanna, the Yemen bill’s principal sponsor, said Jones didn’t lend his support immediately. “He asked for a lot of facts. He wanted to know the details of the conflict. He wanted to study the issue. And it took a month or so to convince him. When you think of Walter Jones, you think of what our framers intended Congress to be: people who are well-read—he’s got a great knowledge of history; people who are deliberative and thoughtful, who aren’t just given talking points from their staff or the leadership but make an independent judgment.”

Jones has rebuked congressional leaders, particularly House Speaker Paul Ryan, for refusing to use their authority. More often, though, his criticism has turned inward; he never stopped chastising himself for the Iraq vote. To this day, he sends letters to the relatives of troops who die in Iraq or Afghanistan—almost 12,000 messages so far, by his count. “That’s my apology every time I sign one,” he said. “But that’s also my apology to God.”

Jones’s reckoning extended well beyond war-and-peace issues, and it has fostered in the congressman a distrust of other politicians and a distaste for DC political culture. Partisan loyalty lost its importance for him, even though he knew the risks of not playing along.

“It was like a puppy being weaned from his mother,” said his friend Thad Woodard, the retired president of the North Carolina Bankers Association. “He knew that the mother’s milk of politics comes from fund-raising and from working with the party leadership. So he took a big chance. And once he crossed that line and made that decision, I don’t believe he ever looked back.”

Jones’s disdain for party discipline has never been as salient as it has been during the current presidency. The congressman doesn’t issue blanket condemnations of Trump; he has praised the administration for specific stands, like its support for businesses that don’t want to serve same-sex weddings. He also concedes that “the economy seems to be doing reasonably well.” But Jones has been quick to denounced Trump, and to vote against his party, on other issues.

Part of Jones’s antipathy is sty-
listic: He bristles at Trump’s vulgarity, including his mockery of disabled journalist Serge Kowaleski and his reported reference to “shithole” countries. Jones doesn’t understand Trump’s inability to apologize. And he worries about how Trump’s language is received abroad. Jones told me about a recent meeting he had with a South Korean politician, during which the two men discussed economic and military issues. Jones asked his counterpart what he thought of Trump’s nicknaming North Korean leader Kim Jong-un “Little Rocket Man.”

“You know what he said to me? ‘Not helpful. Not helpful.’ That’s all he had to say.”

But it’s not just style. Jones’s penchant for good government dates back to his days in the North Carolina Legislature, when he advocated for campaign-finance and lobbying reform. He’s offended by the possibility of Russian interference in the 2016 election, by Trump’s apparent efforts to muzzle special counsel Mueller, and by Nunes’s secret trips to the White House while he was overseeing the Intelligence Committee’s Russia investigation. To Jones, Swalwell’s call for an independent panel seemed like a step toward restoring electoral integrity.

Likewise, even though he wants to see “significant changes” to the Affordable Care Act—mostly to lower premiums—Jones was troubled by the speed with which his colleagues tried to pass repeal-and-replace legislation. (He was one of 20 House Republicans to vote no; the bill failed to pass the Senate.) Instead of a rushed and partisan process, Jones envisioned a half-year’s worth of public hearings around the country to get feedback from consumers and the industry before any legislation was introduced.

“We could have been the biggest heroes if, after six months, the House would announce, ‘We have a fix to the problems of the Affordable Care Act; these are the bills we are putting in,’” Jones said. “I think you would have had Democrats’ support. More important, you would have the American people’s support.”

The vote that garnered Jones the most recent attention was his rejection of Trump’s single congressional victory, the December tax overhaul. As The Washington Post’s “Wonkblog” pointed out, Jones was the only Republican “nay”-voter who didn’t come from a high-tax state. The other 11 GOP opponents, all in the House, came from New York, New Jersey, and California, where taxpayers are more likely to be hurt by deduction limits on state and local taxes. Jones, by contrast, opposed the bill because he’s a small-government guy, and the new law is expected to swell the national debt.

“If this was a Democratic bill, the same language, do you think any Republicans would have voted for it?” he asked. “I doubt it. That’s what’s missing: doing what is in the best interest of the people, not the parties.”

During our interview, Jones pulled out a letter he sent Trump last July, in which he tried (unsuccessfully) to head off a troop increase in Afghanistan. In the years leading up to the election, Trump had often called for the troops to come home, describing the war effort as “a complete waste.” But Trump changed his mind after reaching the Oval Office. “You could say that I am disappointed,” Jones wrote. “Disappointed because almost $1 trillion of taxpayers’ money has been spent with no direct goal or strategy. And most importantly, I am disappointed because we continue to lose American lives.”

A few months earlier, Jones had introduced a bill cutting off all funding for US activities in Afghanistan (except for embassy operations and intelligence gathering) unless Congress expressly approved the money. The bill has 14 co-sponsors—nine Democrats and five Republicans—but hasn’t moved out of committee. “We’ve written probably 12, 13 letters to Paul Ryan asking him to authorize the debate,” Jones said. “I don’t think there’s a more sacred responsibility for a member of Congress than to vote to send a young American to die for this country. And yet we can’t even get a debate.” (Ryan’s staff did not respond to requests for comment.)

This criticism of fellow Republicans does not endear Jones to them. In 2012, he was booted off the House Financial Services Committee, and he’s been routinely passed over for a subcommittee chair within the Armed Services Committee. Closer to home, he endures criticism from local conservatives. The day of my visit, Greenville’s Daily Reflector published a letter from a Republican voter saying that the congressman’s opposition to Trump made him “sick.” “If you want to know what’s wrong with Washington,” he wrote, “it’s people like Walter Jones, who put the knife in the backs of the leaders that are trying to make things better.”

Jones has faced election challenges from the right, and will again this year. In the 2014 primary, he finished just six points ahead of his main Republican challenger. (Jones’s margin was much wider in 2016.) The threat of a primary knockout doesn’t seem to faze him. “There’s no belief that he’s going to run for Senate or governor,” said Scavo, the political scientist. “To be defeated in running for reelection in any state, he’s going to run for Senate or governor.”

Jones has faced election challenges from the right, and will again this year. In the 2014 primary, he finished just six points ahead of his main Republican challenger. (Jones's margin was much wider in 2016.) The threat of a primary knockout doesn’t seem to faze him. “There’s no belief that he’s going to run for Senate or governor,” said Scavo, the political scientist. “To be defeated in running for reelection to the House would certainly be a blow to him. But it’s not like, ‘Well, I’ve got to run up these big votes to show that I’m attractive for the next highest office.’ So he’s really got some freedom in the positions that he takes.”

Jones told me the 2018 election will probably be his last and that even if he wins, he’s thinking about retiring after the next term. “If I win or lose, it’s God’s will,” he said. “I am at the age of life that, if the voters want a representative that cares more about the people than he does himself, then we’ll be OK. If not, I’m willing to come home and rake the yard.”
“As the Soviet freighters advanced toward the blockade, I recall the extraordinary crack in the voice of the BBC news announcer...”

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“A thinker at home on both sides of the Atlantic. He provides us with unique and vivid sketches of the movements and persons he has influenced. His vocation as a teacher who takes the world as a classroom is a gift across the generations: he influences us still.”
—Gerhard Schröder, Former Chancellor, the Federal German Republic.

“There has been no public American intellectual like Norman Birnbaum, no one who has taught, done research, and entered public struggles in every major European country while also connecting with oppositional groups in New York and Washington D.C.”
—Robert Jay Lifton, winner of the National Book Award for Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima

Norman Birnbaum, editorial board member of The Nation and a traveler in 20th century history, relates critical events and personalities with personal insight. The memoir includes portraits of Harvard contemporaries Henry Kissinger and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and a spectrum of European figures from Willy Brandt to Isaiah Berlin, Henri Lefebvre to Iris Murdoch. Drawing on three generations of experience, these detailed mis/adventures of European and U.S. intellectuals will be fascinating for all readers of The Nation.
I
s Steven Pinker a modern Enlighten-
ment philosophe? In some ways, the
comparison seems reasonable. Like
the French philosophes, but unlike
most contemporary intellectuals,
Pinker writes with enthusiasm about a
wide range of human knowledge, from
the humanities to the social sciences
to physics and biology. He is himself
an eminent experimental psychologist.

Like the philosophes, but again un-
like most contemporary intellectuals, he
knows how to appeal to a broad general
audience. Enlightenment Now is only the
most recent of his best sellers, following
on the heels of his defense of evolution-
ary psychology in The Blank Slate and
his argument that we are witnessing a
centuries-long decrease of human vio-

But as Enlightenment Now clearly
shows, Steven Pinker is no philosophe.
The great writers of the Enlightenment,
contrary to the way they are often cari-
catured, were mostly skeptics at heart.
They had a taste for irony, an appreci-
ation of paradox, and took delight in
wit. They appreciated complexity, rarely
shied away from difficulty, and generally
had a deep respect for the learning of
those who had preceded them.

Enlightenment Now has few of these

David A. Bell teaches history at Princeton
and is the author, most recently, with Anthony
Grafton, of The West: A New History.
qualities. It is a dogmatic book that offers an oversimplified, excessively optimistic vision of human history and a starkly technocratic prescription for the human future. It also gives readers the spectacle of a professor at one of the world’s great universities treating serious thinkers with populist contempt.

The genre it most closely resembles, with its breezy style, bite-size chapters, and impressive visuals, is not 18th-century *philosophie* so much as a genre in which Pinker has had copious experience: the TED Talk (although in this case, judging by the book’s audio version, a TED Talk that lasts 20 hours).

**L**ike a TED Talk, *Enlightenment Now* is easy to summarize. Despite all the doom and gloom bandied about today, Pinker argues, things are good—in fact, the best they’ve ever been. More specifically, human beings today lead longer, safer, healthier, wealthier, and indeed happier lives than at any point in recorded history, and they do so thanks to the Enlightenment. The nay-saying that is so prevalent in our culture is simply an error, the product of cognitive biases compounded by the influence of foolish intellectuals and ignorant politicians.

It is not entirely clear what Pinker means by “the Enlightenment.” At one point he calls it “a cornucopia of ideas, some of them contradictory,” but at another a coherent “project.” He locates it in the last two-thirds of the 18th century but makes little reference to the actual thinkers and writers of the period. Instead, he points to four “themes” that he highlights in his book’s subtitle: reason, science, humanism, and progress. Some of these terms he defines very broadly: Science is “the refining of reason to understand the world.” But by “humanism” Pinker essentially means a rigid, Richard Dawkins-style atheism. He calls a belief in the existence of an immaterial soul “factually dubious and morally dangerous.”

But the book isn’t really about such definitions. Pinker devotes two-thirds of *Enlightenment Now* to surveying the stupendous advancements that the human race has made in modern times according to a dizzying range of metrics: life expectancy, hate crimes, famine deaths, leisure time, nuclear proliferation, pollution, democracy, human rights, “liberal values,” literacy, levels of extreme poverty, “life satisfaction,” and much, much more. He previewed some of this material in *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), in which he argued that the world has seen a decline in violence and war, but now he’s attempting to generalize about virtually all of modern existence, complete with more than six dozen charts to visualize his flood of data. “The Enlightenment has worked—perhaps the greatest story seldom told,” Pinker proclaims. We still face many challenges, he continues, but if we trust scientific experts, we can overcome them.

To be fair, Pinker is right that much good news today tends to be underreported, even unreported. Most Americans probably don’t realize that rates of extreme poverty worldwide have fallen over the past few decades, along with the worldwide rates of battle deaths and deaths from infectious disease. Pinker is also right that many prominent observers in the past grossly underestimated the ability of the human race to extract more resources from the environment and grossly overestimated the odds of imminent apocalypse. He quotes, to comic effect, a long string of mid-20th-century Cassandras who confidently predicted that civilization would come to an end long before now thanks to nuclear war, overpopulation, or environmental catastrophe. (Of course, one could also point to a long string of intellectuals, from the Enlightenment onward, who predicted the imminent arrival of paradise upon earth—but no matter.) And he is right that even if some of the predicted disasters do come to pass, humanity will probably not be reduced to fighting for survival in a *Mad Max*-style dystopia. “Even Hiroshima continues to exist,” he points out, though the statement is not quite as comforting as he seems to think.

If Pinker had simply made these points, *Enlightenment Now* would have its uses. But he wraps his arguments up in such a thick cloak of selective data, dubious history, and, when all else fails, a contempt for “intellectuals” straight out of *Breitbart*. Pinker might not have intended the book to do so, but it will bolster the claims of populist politicians against intellectuals and movements for social justice while justifying misguided, coldhearted policy choices in the name of supposedly irrefutable scientific rationality.

**L**et’s start with the exaggerations. For all of Pinker’s apparently exhaustive command of statistics, the situation of humanity is hardly as rosy as he claims. The number of refugees worldwide, for instance, has climbed vertiginously over the past few decades, and is now approaching levels not seen since World War II. Pinker dismisses concerns about rising economic inequality with the blithe assertion that inequality matters less than actual levels of income and comfort. He barely raises the question of what it might mean for a society to have the lion’s share of its economic resources and power concentrated in a tiny number of super-wealthy hands. He acknowledges only in passing that real wages in the United States and many other economically advanced countries have stagnated for several decades, and he has even less to say about the increasing precariousness of employment for millions of workers.

Pinker uses IQ tests—whose biases, especially with regard to data from the early 20th century, are well-known—to make this incredible statement: “An average person of 1910, if he or she had entered a time machine and materialized today, would be borderline retarded by our standards.” He spends considerable time pronouncing about the state of contemporary democracy and liberalism, claiming that two-thirds of the world’s population now lives in “free or relatively free societies.” But he takes his data here from a source that gives Hungary and Poland perfect scores and counts Russia as more democratic than not. Most experts on Russia would argue that it has grown more repressive over the past two decades. The same is true of China, an even larger and more powerful country.

But even if we grant that in many domains human life has indeed improved enormously over the past two centuries, there remains a simple question: Can we count on the progress continuing? What, for instance, about climate change?
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is no climate-change denier, and admits that “the challenge is daunting.” But then he quickly pivots from his position that things are getting better and better to say that we can avoid the looming doom if only we start taxing carbon emissions, increase the use of nuclear power, and engage in de-liberate climate engineering to lower global temperatures. He largely disregards the fact that the political will to move in any of these directions is wholly lacking and will remain so as long as the party that controls the White House and Congress refuses to admit that a problem even exists. When it comes to his favored technological solution, nuclear power, Pinker also seems determined to ignore the problem that the people who manage plants do not always follow their own safety procedures and cannot plan for every possible natural disaster (as Fukushima showed all too dramatically). The industry, he insists, has learned from its mistakes. But has it?

Then there is the matter of Pinker’s version of history. Why did the indisputable improvements of the past several centuries take place? What does it mean to attribute them to “the Enlightenment”? In his account of progress, Pinker singles out for particular praise the inventors of vaccines, the developers of chemical fertilizer (two of whom “saved the greatest number of lives in history, with 2.7 billion”), and the “unsung cadre of inventors, engineers, policy wonks and number-crunchers” who have made daily life safer. Occasionally he also invokes “paternalistic legislators” and “humanistic moral campaigns,” and he gives a quick shout-out to Nobel Peace Prize winners like Malala Yousafzai. But when it comes to issues like “democracy” and “equal rights,” Pinker seems to believe that progress has occurred almost by itself, as a result of whole social movements that for centuries fought for equal rights, an end to slavery, improved working conditions, a minimum wage, the right to organize, basic social protections, a cleaner environment, and a host of other progressive causes. The arc bending toward justice is no mystery: It bends because people force it to bend.

Pinker’s history is just as problematic when it comes to the Enlightenment itself. Since he does not engage in any serious analysis of Enlightenment authors, he avoids having to contend seriously with the awkward fact that by far the most popular of them, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was a fierce critic of most forms of progress, and that Denis Diderot, the editor of its single most important publication, the Encyclopédie, had some pretty severe doubts about the subject as well (read his “Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville”). Pinker might also have to concede that, especially outside of France, most Enlightenment thinkers did not oppose reason to religious faith, as his book implies. They certainly did not consider forms of belief “generators of delusions” or consider a belief in the existence of the soul dangerous. He might have to admit that it was not just brave atheists, but devout Christians, above all Quakers, who were among the first who organized to fight the most barbaric European practice of all, namely slavery.

Historians know that there was in fact no single, monolithic “Enlightenment project,” and that the Enlightenment can be generalized about only with great caution. Throwing this caution to the wind, Pinker has taken his own 21st-century values and projected them back onto the intellectual scene of the 18th century. He has described his work as an “evidence-based take on history,” but by “evidence” he clearly means numerical data. Aren’t books evidence as well?

Meanwhile, Pinker fails to acknowledge how very closely his own radical optimism echoes some of the wilder—and more misguided—pronouncements about the human future from the Enlightenment itself. “The human species…is capable of…unbounded improvement…mankind in a later age are greatly superior to mankind in a former age.” This is not Pinker, but Joseph Priestley, writing in 1771. “No bounds have been fixed to the improvement of the human faculties…the possibility of man is absolutely indefinite.” This time, the words come from the Marquis de Condorcet, in 1793–94. Even as Rousseau denounced progress, and Diderot and Voltaire cast a skeptical eye toward it, many other philosophers confidently predicted the end of war, the eradication of disease, and the worldwide spread of liberty. That few of these things have been fully realized after more than two centuries should, perhaps, have given Pinker pause. So, too, should the enormous spread of imperialism, the exploitation of indigenous peoples around the globe, the slaughter of world wars, the Holocaust, atomic weapons, and anthropogenic climate change, all of which followed the Enlightenment. A few months after writing his paean to human perfectibility, Condorcet committed suicide in prison during the Reign of Terror.

Pinker’s problems with history are compounded even further as he tries to defend the Enlightenment against the many scholarly critics who have pointed, over the centuries, to some of its possible baleful consequences. Did Enlightenment forms of reasoning and scientific inquiry lie behind modern biological racism and eugenics? Behind the insistence that women do not have the mental capacity for full citizenship? Not at all, Pinker assures us. That was just a matter of bad science.

Indeed, it was. But Pinker largely fails to deal with the inconvenient fact that, at the time, it was not so obviously bad science. The defenders of these repellent theories, used to justify manifold forms of oppression, were published in scientific journals and appealed to the same standards of reason and utility upheld by Pinker. “Science” did not by itself inevitably beget these theories, but it did provide a new language and new forms of reasoning to justify inequality and oppression and new ways of thinking about and categorizing natural phenomena that suggested to many an immutable hierarchy of human races, the sexes, and the able and disabled. The later disproving of these theories did not just come about because better science prevailed over worse science. It came about as well because of the moral and political activism that forced scientists to question data and conclusions they had largely taken for granted. Again, progress did not just occur because the ideals of the Enlightenment mysteriously percolated out through society. It occurred because men
and women fought, and sometimes died, for progressive moral values.

It is the critics of science who most greatly annoy Pinker, and they drive him to the sort of populist anti-intellectualism more usually found on Fox News than at Harvard University. “Intellectuals hate progress,” he declares, apparently forgetting about the many generations of socialist and liberal intellectuals who could more easily be accused of fetishizing it. “A loathing of industry has been a sacred value of...literary intellectuals,” he continues, disregarding those many writers and artists whose hearts leapt at the sight of Soviet smokestacks. And he repeatedly accuses “intellectuals” of treating the ideals of the Enlightenment “with indifference, skepticism, and sometimes contempt,” as if a long, long tradition of intellectuals, from the 18th century to figures like Jürgen Habermas, had not devoted their careers to defending those ideals.

But Pinker is not exactly reliable when it comes to the intellectuals and their ideas. He takes as his guide to intellectual pessimism a book titled The Idea of Decline in Western History by Arthur Herman, a far-right author whose most well-known book is a rapturously favorable biography of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Pinker credits Friedrich Nietzsche with the idea that “all statements are paradoxical” and that “works of art are tools of oppression,” raising the question of whether he has actually read Nietzsche or just relied on the summaries by Herman and others. (He also dismisses Nietzsche as “repellent and incoherent.”) Pinker rightly criticizes those who issue blanket condemnations of modern science without bothering to understand it. But he himself has not taken the trouble to understand serious and difficult writers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, since he lumps them together into the “disaster of postmodernism” and seems to think they may be accumulating in the process. And if this coverage then gives readers the impression that the problem is more widespread than it actually is, the “bias” might still have useful consequences. It might, for instance, encourage the formation of citizens’ groups to monitor the chemical industry and prevent further abuses. Running a story proclaiming that 99 percent of the chemical factories are doing just fine, on the other hand, might just encourage some factories to start skimping on their own observance of regulations.

Given Pinker’s scorn for intellectuals and disregard of social movements, it is no surprise that his politics, and his hopes for the future, can best be summed up as technocratic neoliberalism. He puts his trust in free markets and the guidance of enlightened scientists and moguls (is it really a surprise that Bill Gates calls Enlightenment Now “my new favorite book of all time”?). Let the rich get very, very rich, as long as everyone else’s income is rising, and don’t worry about the power they may be accumulating in the process. And when it comes to public policy, trust an expert class that proclaims its allegiance to science and progress alone and believes it is beyond politics. “To make public discourse more rational,” Pinker proclaims, “issues should be depoliticized as much as is feasible.”

If protesters start to march and shout in the streets, calling for politicians to respect the will of the people, then what is called for is “effective training in critical thinking and cognitive debiasing” so the people will respect the will of the experts. And, Pinker continues, “When people with die-hard opinions on Obamacare or NAFTA are challenged to explain what those policies actually are, they soon realize that they don’t know what they are talking about, and become more open to counterarguments.” It’s a revealing sentence. Why do people with “die-hard opinions” not know what they are talking about? Are the “experts” always right? Enlightenment Now is not a book that deserves a wide readership, but much like Dan Brown’s new novel, Origin, piles of it loom wherever books are sold. Oddly, Enlightenment Now has several points in common with Origin. They both, for instance, have long, windy passages musing about the relationship of the second law of thermodynamics to the meaning of life. Brown, riffing on the work of Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Jeremy England, proposes that life is “the inevitable result of entropy. Life is not the point of the universe. Life is simply what the universe creates and reproduces in order to dissipate energy.” Pinker, alternately, believes that the “ultimate purpose of life” is “to deploy energy and knowledge to fight back the tide of entropy.” The principal male characters in Origin are a wise Harvard professor and a farsighted tech mogul, and the climax is a TED Talk–like lecture in which the mogul reveals the destiny of the human race. But while Origin does little more than provide transient entertainment, Enlightenment Now may well have real influence.

In a 2004 profile, Time magazine suggested that Steven Pinker “crystallizes an intellectual era.” Fourteen years later, what Pinker has actually crystallized in books like Enlightenment Now is our anti-intellectual era, one in which data and code are all too often held to trump serious critical reasoning and the wealth of the humanistic tradition and of morally driven activism is dismissed in favor of supposedly impartial scientific and technological expertise. These attitudes in no sense stem from the great movement of thought of 18th-century Europe. They are not “progress,” as the philosophers understood the term. The philosophers, in fact, would have condemned them. They are not enlightened. They are benighted.
CROSSING BORDERS

Zadie Smith’s Dream City
by ISMAIL MUHAMMAD

In her first essay collection, 2009’s Changing My Mind, Zadie Smith made an art of ambivalence. In essays whose subtlety of thinking evoked the work of Henry James, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Virginia Woolf, Smith squirmed out of given categories in search of something to accommodate the multiplicity that she takes to be every person’s basic state. Although the collection dealt only sparsely with politics, it was telling that among the procession of figures she examined as exemplars of this art, she included Barack Obama. Her essay “Speaking in Tongues,” adapted from a talk that she gave shortly after Obama’s election in 2008, reveals in the emergence of a president for whom “cross[ing] borders and speak[ing] in tongues” was a necessity for expressing the multiplicity of his experience.

For Smith, Obama’s most important attribute as a historical figure wasn’t necessarily his blackness, but his status as a man who must negotiate allegiances to different worlds—for example, those of his white Midwestern mother and black African father, or of black America and a broader national audience. With Obama, the fact of human multifariousness had migrated from the realm of art into the halls of power. A representative of what Smith calls “Dream City”—a heterogeneous world of overlapping and slippery identities—had taken over the White House.

Obama’s ascent also seemed like the validation of an idea that Smith has spent her entire career as a fiction writer mining. In White Teeth, On Beauty, and Swing Time, she has dedicated herself to describing the constant, churning exchange of cultures that renders any concept of identity ultimately unstable. To Smith, identity will always lapse into the impurity of cultural exchange. The hard work is to construct meaning out of that disorder once you realize that the myth of cohesive identities is a crutch. “You can’t live by slogans, dead ideas, clichés, or national flags,” she wrote in 2005’s On Beauty. “Finding an identity is easy. It’s the easy way out.” “Speaking in Tongues,” then, read like a victory lap: With Obama, the in-between space that Smith had previously been able to envision only in fiction had migrated from the margins to the center of political culture.

It was a nice dream while it lasted. Smith’s new collection, Feel Free, arrives amid a reactionary upheaval whose explicit goal is to uproot this vision. Though the assumptions that Smith took to be true are under assault, she’s responded with a collection that reiterates her belief in what she calls life’s “radical contingency.” In part, this is because most of these essays appeared over the course of Obama’s tenure, and the world they take for granted is very different from the one we live in. Smith’s consistency is also a testament to the strength of her intellectual commitments: For her, the one given in our world is that human beings and the world we live in are constantly shifting, forever subject to change.

Because of its timing, the result is a book that is intriguingly out of step with contemporary cultural criticism, a collection whose value lies in its belatedness. “I realize,” Smith admits in the book’s mock-sheepish foreword, “my somewhat ambivalent view of human selves is wholly out of fashion. These essays you have in your hands were written…during the eight years of the Obama presidency and so are the product of a bygone world.” Feel Free offers us an anachronistic provocation. In a moment when ideological surety is the order of the day, it asks us to remember that another mode of thought is possible.

Loosely divided into sections on politics, film, art, reading, and philosophy, Feel Free finds Smith applying her skills as a literary critic to a variety of cultural objects. Whether she’s writing on her students’ obsession with Facebook, the disconcerting experience of time in Christian Marclay’s art film The Clock, the black queer camp of Mark Bradford’s video installation Niagara, or the creative process behind the sketch-comedy show Key and Peele, the diverse sweep of Smith’s interests and knowledge is never less than riveting. She ranges across cultures, histories, genres, and media without regard to the boundaries that partition them. In “Mark Bradford’s Niagara,” she turns her eye to the artist’s 2005 installation, pondering what it might mean to watch a black man swishing down a South
Los Angeles street, his hips swaying back and forth—but she can’t look at Bradford’s subject without taking a detour into a brief discussion of Frank O’Hara. Meanwhile, her essay “Meet Justin Bieber!” sits the Canadian pop star down for a meeting with the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber.

And why not make such connections? For Smith, anything is a potential text that she can subject to her talent for keen observation. She homes in on her subject’s most minute details, unspooling layers of meaning in a way that perhaps only a literary critic can do. Sometimes this means her essays are prone to thinking about vernacular language and pop culture in terms of literature. In one essay, she compares the euphemisms we deploy to talk about climate change (“the new normal” being the most egregious) to elegies; in another, hip-hop’s tendency to fixate on material goods becomes a formal condition akin to ekphrasis in epic poetry. But thinking about the world in literary terms also allows Smith to treat her subjects with an intricacy and intensity that we normally reserve for literature alone.

In “The House That Hova Built,” her 2012 profile of the hip-hop elder statesman Jay-Z, Smith contemplates the mechanics of the cipher, a practice in which two or more rappers trade improvised verses. Before long, she’s fixated on the word “cipher,” reveling in how much grist it provides for interpretation—in particular, when it comes to understanding Jay-Z’s collaborative 2011 album with Kanye West, Watch the Throne.

“What a word!” she exclaims before enumerating its meanings, moving from its literal definitions—a secret code, the key to that code, an individual of no consequence—to a reading of how the cipher in hip-hop endows its black practitioners with a sense of collaborative agency in a society that tells them they’re worthless. “Watch the Throne celebrates two men’s escape from that circle of negation,” she argues; blackness is “no longer the shadow or the reverse or the opposite of something but now the thing itself.”

When it comes to politics and identity, Smith uses close observation to contrast her preference for contingency to ideological thinking’s tendency to reduce the world’s complexity. Speaking of her white British father in “On Optimism and Despair”—an essay adapted from a speech she gave after Donald Trump’s election—Smith presents us with the case study of a man who operates with an open-ended view of life, which she notes is the near-antithesis of the current political climate. “He was, I realize now, one of the least ideological people I ever met,” she remarks. “Everything that happened to him he took as a particular case, unable or unwilling to generalize from it.” For Smith, her father’s resistance to systemic thought, and the cultivation of a sensitivity to the world’s specifics, is a way of thinking that resists dogmatism’s dangers. The desire to preserve this sensitivity is as close to a mission statement as Smith comes. Her commitment to contingency is as much political as it is aesthetic: If humans are capable of intellectual suppliance as well as dogmatism, one of a writer’s duties is to model what it’s like to linger on the ambiguity of a particular case.

Smith’s 2017 essay “Getting In and Out” is perhaps her most direct challenge to what she believes is dogmatic thinking. Weaving together a discussion of Jordan Peele’s race-horror film Get Out, Dana Schutz’s controversial 2016 painting of Emmett Till’s corpse, and the British artist Hannah Black’s criticism of it on the grounds of cultural appropriation, Smith’s essay is a risky exploration of racial proprietorship, as well as an attempt to figure out what belongs to one racial group or another. Smith finds Black’s argument about the ownership of black suffering by black people to be insufficient. She demands that we leave aside our predetermined and actually look at the artwork—no matter how painful this act may be—in order to account for its intricacies, rather than thinking about blackness and Schutz’s painting in the simplistic terms of identity and appropriation.

“Each individual example of appropriation has to be thought through,” Smith insists, and so she casts her eye over Schutz’s canvas and sees a work guilty of the same mistake that Black makes: not fully reckoning with black life’s considerable nuance. In the end, Smith also dismisses Schutz’s painting, not because of Black’s arguments but rather because she believes that the painting is an aesthetic failure, an “abstraction without much intensity” that doesn’t grapple fully with the racist violence that claimed Till’s life. In the end, Smith agrees with Black that the painting doesn’t effectively engage with black suffering; but unlike Black, she chooses to withhold judgment until she’s had time to parse the image—and her own feelings. “When I look at Open Casket,” Smith confesses, “the truth is I don’t feel very much.”

Feel Free’s chief (if unstated) concern is that the kind of intellectual rigidity that lacks interest in aesthetic detail translates easily into intolerance and disregard for human complexity. To guard against such sloppiness, Smith guides her readers through a dizzying array of perspectives. But for all her concern with illustrating what this intellectual approach might look like, one wonders if Smith’s insistence on contingency might also rise to the level of ideology. Her call to dwell in ambiguity assumes a certain kind of individual: one with the luxury of detaching herself from the world’s flux in order to better observe its dynamics. It also assumes a certain freedom to feel, think, and express oneself that is not hemmed in by structures of power and economy. This is a stance perhaps more readily available to a person like Smith, who splits her time between two countries, studied at Cambridge, and is currently a professor at a private university in the United States. As much as she rails against generalization, these essays are sometimes guilty of generalizing her own context—a multiracial woman of privilege—as the essential condition of human life. While she can look upon Schutz’s abstracted image of Till’s mutilated face and feel unmoved, perhaps a poor black American more ensnared in oppression’s web cannot. While her white British father might be able to resist generalization, perhaps this is not a luxury that a South Asian British citizen can afford in contemporary England. While we may all be sympathetic to Smith’s desire for us to be comfortable with ambiguity, there are obstacles to achieving the kind of openness that she champions. These essays occasionally leave one wishing she’d consider these hindrances. How do poverty, racism, misogyny, and homophobia structure our thought? How can we work around them, if at all? The point is that not all of us can, from our current vantage point, feel free.

But perhaps our limitations are exactly why Feel Free is an important contribution to contemporary conversations around culture and identity. It’s an invitation to join Smith as she does what many of us cannot: meander through the world, subjecting it to rigorous examination. That a black woman is insisting on casting her eye upon whatever she wants in itself represents defiance, a reckless eyeballing that was once unavailable to black people. More importantly, though, Feel Free reminds us that freedom isn’t something to be bestowed upon or taken away from us by whoever happens to hold the reins of power; it is something that we can and must take on our own. Freedom, Smith seems to tell us, is first and foremost a practice that we craft in conjunction with one another, through intellectual and cultural back-and-forths as dynamic as a rap cipher. If we refuse such exchange, then our freedom has already been lost.
Wakanda! Land of pastoral futurism, where herdsmen wave cheerfully at spaceships zooming above the umbrella-thorn acacias, and earth-toned skyscrapers rise from the savanna like David Adjaye versions of the Watts Towers. Wakanda! Rich and peaceful land of unbroken spiritual traditions and ancient African high tech, kept secure by its invisible force-field border and the self-satisfied ignorance of white colonialists.

Here, cleverly concealed across the ocean, is the dream of so many African Americans: a beautiful homeland of wise kings, strong women warriors, and market streets that are at once charmingly old-fashioned and busily hypermodern—much like the ones in Blade Runner, you’d think, except for being sunny, well-kept, and frequented exclusively by black people.

Several generations of Marvel comic books featuring Wakanda and its superhero king T’Challa have now given rise to the Disney release Black Panther, the most recent pop movie that is said to have Changed Everything. To the studio marketers, op-ed writers, and puff-piece journalists who have been making this claim, it’s all a matter of positive images and relatable characters. Except for Will Smith in Hancock, and Samuel L. Jackson as Frozone in The Incredibles, and of course Halle Berry and Anthony Mackie in other Marvel Universe pictures, plus Wesley Snipes in Blade (if you want to press the point) and Robert Townsend in The Meteor Man (which should not be forgotten), there simply have been no black superheroes in the movies. Not enough, anyway, even if you count Muhammad Ali starring as himself in The Greatest and When We Were Kings. Now black audiences have a special-effects blockbuster all their own, set mostly in Africa, which, I admit, is newsworthy—although it’s not the most interesting aspect of Black Panther.

What’s really intriguing is the way that an Africanist myth invented in 1966 by two Jewish guys in New York, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and later elaborated upon by the likes of Reginald Hudlin and Ta-Nehisi Coates, has now been taken over by Ryan Coogler, the writer-director who previously made the very good social-realist drama Fruitvale Station and the first-rate genre-revisionist Creed. With the help of his co-writer, Joe Robert Cole, Coogler has thought to delve into the deep sorrow implicit in this fantasy: the nagging idea that the Wakandans, those happy people across the ocean, could have rescued America’s Africans but instead abandoned them, leaving them poor, traditionless, and playing basketball on concrete lots.

The feelings of loss and envy running through the film—feelings of anger and betrayal as well, which a representative of black America directs squarely at the inhabitants of this imagined homeland—add a level of emotional complexity to Black Panther beyond anything you might reasonably have expected. Certainly you couldn’t have predicted this trait as easily as the standard-issue plot (the usual stuff about smugglers, superspies, and madmen bent on revenge), let alone the checklist of fistfights, spear fights, gunfights, chase scenes, and scenery-wrecking battles. Coogler has met these requirements in full and then some; but also, astonishingly, he has brought an identifiable personal touch to the film, despite its zillion-dollar budget and obligatory cameo appearance by Lee.

The signs of Coogler’s authorship are his true homeland, Oakland (the setting of several key scenes), and his signature actor, Michael B. Jordan, cast as a mysterious but unmistakably dangerous adventurer who gradually snakes his way toward Wakanda, bringing a headful of finger dreads and a “Wussup?” vocabulary into the African Eden. Functionally, Jordan’s character is a very bad guy, posited as the opposite of Chadwick Boseman’s very good T’Challa/Black Panther. One swaggers, schemes, rages, and draws with the voice of urban America; the other strides, pursues wisdom, practices benevolence, and (like the other Wakandans) speaks in the kind of lifting, accented English you might call soundstage Swahili. Boseman is a wonderful actor who brings an innate grace and
matches—James Letitia Wright as Wakanda’s Princess Shuri, a character who has fallen almost exclusively to the delightful performance of Rachel Morrison.) A little more humor would have helped, but the script’s lack of it is more than offset by the spectacle of Constructivist furnishings—that Coogler is known for—and mammoth CGI rhinoceroses to glowing life from towering waterfalls to dazzle the eye—from towering waterfalls to concentrate the absence of anyone remotely like Killmonger in the background. It’s fun, in that heavy blockbustery way. But it’s also notable as the first Disney release to come out explicitly against a program for global race war—or to admit that a character could argue for that program seriously.

Race war—the actually existing version of it still practiced in the United States—is the subject of Travis Wilkerson’s experimental, investigative documentary Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?

A proudly oppositional no-budget veteran, Wilkerson is so determined to make his case that he’s tried to punch through the screen. For the initial presentations of Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun? (including its 2017 premiere at the Sundance festival), he went back to one of the oldest practices in cinema—taping interviews, snatches of songs, and fragments of newsreels to interviews, snippets of songs, and fragments of To Kill a Mockingbird—set loose a personal, familial, national murder story that Wilkerson hasn’t the slightest desire to contain within a frame.

Told briefly, Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun? is an account of a white man getting away with murdering a black one. On that fatal day in October 1946, in the town of Dothan, Alabama, 46-year-old Bill Spann walked into Branch’s Grocery and shot a white woman supplied him with a contemporaneous newspaper article confirming that Branch had been charged with first-degree murder. But even though Wilkerson succeeded in retrieving Spann’s death certificate—which he read aloud, in painful detail, over excerpts from his family’s home movies—his search through the courthouse archives turned up no record of an indictment. The case simply vanished—like Spann’s corpse, which was taken to Louisville, about 45 miles from Dothan, and buried in an unmarked grave. S.E. Branch, however, is memorialized in his hometown: The cemetery is no more than an unsheltered triangle within spitting distance of the main road, but Branch lies under the family headstone. He lived until 1970—long enough that Wilkerson can show you a photo of himself as a baby cheek by jowl with his killer great-grandfather.

The image of the valiant documentarian is appealing, but the multiple failures Wilkerson acknowledges in his voice-over. His inquiries consistently hit a dead end whenever he approached white people, none of whom seemed to have any idea what he was talking about. Black people were more forthcoming, but they often preferred to speak with him anonymously and could shed no light on the last moments of Bill Spann’s life. The exception was Ed Vaughn, a retired public servant and activist, whose home museum of African-American history is the subject of an extended visit by Wilkerson. Vaughn, too, had no information about Spann’s death, but he testified that two other people were murdered in Branch’s Grocery.

Knowing this much, a different filmmaker might have set about structuring his story as a personal journey into his family’s history. Wilkerson resists the impulse. In the first place, as he’s at pains to note, two families were involved here, one of which he’s unable to sympathize with...
to record because the other wiped it from the world. In the second place, if Wilkerson were to concentrate on his family's history, he'd narrow the focus of the film, when what he wants is to stretch it to the horizon.

Which he does, without having to go to unusual efforts. A request to speak with his aunt Jean—the sort of inquiry any filmmaker would routinely log—leads directly to rifle salutes and battle games, since this aunt is a member of the forthrightly racist and proudly secessionist League of the South. A visit to a League ceremony in Verbena provides Wilkerson with another creepy scene that makes him want to run, and confirms that his family's images are mere shards in the pointillist explosion of American life. And despite having an eye like Walker Evans's—witness the somber, still images of dilapidated houses, churches, food shacks, and deserted Main Streets that multiply throughout the film—Wilkerson isn't interested in capturing a stable picture of this life. He wants to latch on to the blast itself, and ride along with the forces in it that he would call justice. That's why he begins and ends with the shouts of "Hell You 'Tambout," Janelle Monáe's roll call of murdered African Americans, to which he adds the name of Bill Spann.

That's also why he talks early on about the falseness of Atticus Finch's heroism in To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee's Monroeville is about 100 miles from Dothan) and finishes by speaking about the exposure of Finch's racism in Lee's long-unpublished Go Set a Watchman. Wilkerson sees his film, no less than his family, as caught up with these cultural artifacts in the continuing movement of history—a history in which you might decide to be a liberal (if you're content to congratulate yourself) or, as a better choice, a radical.

For what it's worth, I note that Wilkerson, too, indulges in a touch of self-congratulation. His ideas and methods really are radical; he didn't need to say so in his voice-over. He also had no need to express self-disgust for using expensive equipment and getting paid to make the film. (He's referring, I assume, to the foundation grants for which he and other artists bow and scrape.) I want to say to him: Yes, it's hard to avoid complicity, but please let up on yourself. "One can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse."

That said, the country road that Wilkerson drives in Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun? keeps winding on. You see it early in the film, and you see it late. Despite changes for the better, we're all still on it—and the way Wilkerson colorizes the image, we might as well be traveling through Mars on a bad day.

The Argentinean folk artist Atahualpa Yupanqui is an almost mystical figure in Latin America's musical history. Born Héctor Roberto Chavero in 1908, and with a stage name that means "He who comes from faraway lands to tell something" in the Andean language of Quechua, Yupanqui traipsed all over South America with guitar in hand during the mid-20th century, learning ancient songs and rhythms from indigenous cultures and reinterpreting tradition with his acoustic arrangements. Yupanqui referred to himself as "a singer of forgotten arts who walks the world so that no one forgets what is unforgettable."

More than two decades after his death, the Mexican singer Natalia Lafourcade has presented herself as a kind of kindred spirit—a disciple of Yupanqui's school of preserving cultural memory. Lafourcade's own fascination with Latin American folk roots inspired her to make the 2017 album Musas, a stunning compendium of original songs and classic covers, released with the help of the guitar duo Los Macorinos. Musas won Lafourcade a Latin Grammy Award for Best Folk Album last year and succeeded in introducing many traditional artists and composers to a new generation.

A number of songs recorded for Musas didn't appear on the finished album, and Lafourcade decided to compile them for a follow-up, Musas Vol. 2, which was released on February 9. With the steady traditional guitar rhythms of Los Macorinos as a guide, Lafourcade forges deeper into the pages of the Latin American songbook on this sequel, which contains boleros, sons, and trovars, early guitar-driven genres that helped
lay the foundation for popular Latin music. *Musas Vol. 2* also presents lullabies and folk melodies popularized by Yupanqui himself.

Exploring musical roots isn’t necessarily new for contemporary Latin American musicians. Even the most forward-thinking electronic artists have eagerly returned to their ancestors for inspiration: The Ecuador-based DJ Nicola Cruz, for example, works with ancient Andean flutes and Afro-Latin *mapalé* rhythms to make his colorful compositions. Back in 2015, newcomer Ileana Cabra collected a number of awards for *Illecebible*, a debut album of original ballads and boogaloos that could easily have been extracted from the 1950s. The most recent Latin Grammy for Best New Artist went to the Dominican singer Vicente Garcia, a dreadlocked romantic whose songs are reminiscent of the early days of bachata and other Caribbean genres.

But no contemporary artist has delivered evocative traditional sounds as elegantly and tenderly as Lafourcade. She handles each song she covers as gently as gossamer, ensuring that her treatments don’t alter the original melodies too forcefully. On an early song on *Vol. 2*, “Alma Mia”, Lafourcade offers only her voice and classic guitar arrangements from Los Macorinos, allowing the songwriting to remain the glowing focal point. “Alma Mia” was written by Mexico’s first internationally recognized female composer, María Grever, a prodigius artist of the early 1900s who, rumor has it, penned her first song at age 4. Lafourcade stretches out each syllable to convey the universal longing of Grever’s lyrics as she sings, “¡Alma mia sola, siempre sola! (“Soul of mine alone, always alone.”)

As the album progresses, Lafourcade continues the parade of inimitable artists from bygone eras. She honors Margarita Lecuona, the Cuban singer and composer best remembered for her 1940s composition “Babalú,” popularized by Desi Arnez. Lafourcade refashions Lecuona’s boleto “Eclipse” with a dreamy, jazz-inspired piano—the only use of the instrument on *Vol. 2*—that winds quietly through the song. Later, she brings out the strut of Peruvian dance rhythms, *tonderos* and *huaynos*, for “Te Sigo,” an homage to Augusto Polo Campos, the revered Peruvian composer who died in January. *Musas Vol. 2* also includes odes to Mexican artists like Álvaro Carrillo, a Oaxacan singer responsible for hundreds of ballads, and Manuel Ponce, a composer and scholar who experimented with Mexican folklore and European classical music.

Lafourcade’s biggest risks come when she undertakes music that Latin American listeners may remember a grandparent singing to them as children. She offers a take on “Duerme Negrito,” a lullaby believed to have originated from enslaved people on the Venezuelan-Colombian border. The lyrics are written from the perspective of a caregiver trying to put a child to sleep while his mother works the fields, and each verse details a treat that the mother will bring upon her return.

Yupanqui is credited with recording the song first, but the most powerful iteration is probably by the Argentinean folk matriarch Mercedes Sosa. Lafourcade can’t replicate Sosa’s intensity or strength, so she resorts to a wistful rendition that features a whispered chorus, provided by backup vocalists, and adds levity to the recording. The lighthearted, youthful quality of Lafourcade’s version creates more tension with the lyrics, which convey a threatening climax—if the child doesn’t sleep, “el diablo blanco” will come to eat his little leg.

Lafourcade also boldly reimagines “La Llorona,” a Mexican folk song from the Tehuantepec region that revolves around the legend of a weeping ghost. The tune is ubiquitous in Latin America, largely because artists like Chavela Vargas, Lila Downs, and the all-woman band María Chi Flor de Toloache have continually re-created it. Most recently, a spirited version of “La Llorona” made it into the animated Pixar film *Coco*—a movie that, with its themes of honoring ancestry and familial roots, has a lot in common with Lafourcade. She performs “Te regalo mi corazón” (with R&B singer Miguel on the soundtrack.) Lafourcade extends the legacy of “La Llorona” by adding her own sparse version. Its stripped-back quality reflects the spookiness and desolation of the song, and Lafourcade’s soprano, which is usually lithe and dreamy, becomes suddenly haunting.

A project in nostalgia always runs the risk of feeling contrived or annoyingly twee. But the simplicity of Lafourcade’s vocal and instrumental arrangements keeps *Musas Vol. 2* from morphing into something convoluted or insincere. The production never goes for gimmicks, like simulating the cracks of a Victrola or the fuzz of an old cassette tape. When discussing the making of the first *Musas*, Lafourcade said that she wanted the music to feel natural and woolsy. “I wanted an album that represented real music, bohemians, instruments made out of wood,” she told *Billboard* last May. “The music we made there is something we can’t explain, it could only be felt.” Lafourcade accomplishes this organic quality with restrained production and Los Macorinos’ crystalline guitars.

The two guitarists who make up Los Macorinos, Miguel Peña and Juan Carlos Allende, have more than 50 years of experience, and they’ve collaborated with many notable folk legends. Without them, the *Musas* projects would perhaps consist of far more imitation and mimicry, but Los Macorinos are a bridge to the past who impart authenticity to Lafourcade’s covers. They also have a deep understanding of her original work. (She released four albums of original music before *Musas*, including one effort with her four-piece rock band, Natalia y la Forquetina.) Lafourcade includes “Derecho de Nacimiento” on the album, a song she wrote to support Mexico’s student-protest movement YoSoy132. Not only does the track showcase her deep study of Latin American resistance music; it also highlights her own ability to compose and tell stories. The lyrics are reminiscent of political warriors like Víctor Jara or Violeta Parra: “I’m going to create a song so I can exist / So I can move the earth for men and survive / To cure my heart and free my mind.” Los Macorinos’ sonic references to nueva canción, a folk-inspired genre popularized in the 1960s and ‘70s throughout Spain and Latin America, help the song fit seamlessly with the other compositions.

On “Desdeñiosa,” a song written by the Yucatecan *trova* pioneer Benigno Lara Foster, Lafourcade enlists vocal reinforcements from the legendary singers Eugenia León and Omara Portuondo, the latter a founding member of the Buena Vista Social Club. León is 61 and Portuondo 87, so the three women represent multiple eras in music. But as their voices meld into one another, the singers seem to show how Latin folk music continues to endure against contemporary sounds.

The album’s most impressive feat is the euphoric “Danza de Gardenias”—the first song on the album. The bustling Cuban *son* boasts the most ambitious production on *Musas Vol. 2*, with a lavish arrangement that includes guitars, bongos, congas, con- trabass, clarinet, and trumpet. The song’s theme of celebrating a past love is a message of looking back and paying tribute to one’s history. Lafourcade sings powerfully and jubilantly, backed by a lively choir that features the female quintet Ventino. United, they raise their voices to invite the ghosts of Yupanqui, Lecuona, Sosa, Vargas, and other Latin American legends to join the revel alongside them.
ACROSS

1 Steamship in a lake? Quite the opposite when making a TV show (6)

4 Style accessory is small and brittle (8)

10 George and Gregory hugging antelope as a measure of love? (1,6,3,1,4)

11 Lightweight to damage set of rules (7)

12 Boy grabs ruined one-ply leaf (4,3)

13 Bill, before eating salt in a place of worship (10)

15 In the end, roast zebra is not kosher (4)

18 Not Common Era (looking back after start of Renaissance) (4)

20 Capital card game on tape (10)

23 Cultivate hybrid, finally, with someone who ate an apple and prune (7)

24 US citizen replacing me with force of another continent (7)

25 World War II leader divides noodle-soup vessel with elite shooter (15)

26 Nervous and playful? (8)

DOWN

1 Chuckle after comics ultimately kill (9)

2 Orator’s regret over insult in argument (7)

3 Transitory things are mediocre gym mounts (8)

5 Shut up about malfunctioning Dell, subject to flickering illumination (9)

6 At last! Ecru-black combination that can be applied (6)

7 Male involved in escapade is not as dear (7)

8 Hitched very well in the old road on the right (5)

9 Insulting remark one might find in a musical score (4)

14 Retro high-school dance hosted in a residence that’s unfinished and shapeless (9)

16 Comments placed atop of mirror image (9)

17 One way to cook eggs—or, by the sound of it, where they’re made empty? (4,4)

19 Pasta with red sauce containing a bit of veal (7)

21 Tonic I’d brewed, in a manner of speaking (7)

22 Charity receives nothing on time, practically (6)

23 Blockheads posed awkwardly (5)

24 How cute! Roy’s disheartened and wrong (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3458

ACROSS

1 IMAM (rev.)

4 APPRAISES

10 E- HEN

11 OUGHT

12 PAPER

13 PATTERN

14 IMAM

15 H- E- N- W- P- U- I

16 CONJUNCTION

17 CONJUNCTION

18 SECONDTONE

19 ELLE

20 SECONDTONE

21 ELLE

22 CONJUNCTION

23 CONJUNCTION

24 CONJUNCTION

25 CONJUNCTION

26 CONJUNCTION

DOWN

1 HOPPY 2 NE GATE

2 HOUGHT 3 APP + RAISES

4 PAT + TERN 5 Aff (ang.)

6 SECONDTONE 7 ONE

9 SHANGRI LA

10 SECONDTONETONE

12 PATERN + RAISES

13 SANGRIA

14 CONJUNCTION

15 CONJUNCTION

16 CONJUNCTION

17 CONJUNCTION

18 CONJUNCTION

19 CONJUNCTION

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26 CONJUNCTION
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