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After years of getting shellacked in state legislative races, Democrats are finally running to win. But can the party make room for a new kind of candidate?

by Joan Walsh
Letters

Beyond #MeToo

As an on-and-off reader for over 30 years, I devour everything JoAnn Wypijewski writes. Thanks to her heartrending and mobilizing piece on #MeToo [“What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About #MeToo,” March 19/26], you can be sure I will be reading for another 30.

In this wise and subtle essay, I hear the echoes of a Marxist, sex-positive feminist and historian—part exposé and memoir, part treatise. More than all of that, Wypijewski writes from the heart. I have so longed for her meditations on this messy life, this fully human and complicated experience of the world. I so long for thinking people to see how class- and race-blind, how polarizing and cruel, this supposedly liberatory moment is. Reading her column gets us most of the way there.

Tracey Rizzo
Asheville, N.C.

Wypijewski’s article on the #MeToo movement, American justice, mass incarceration, workplace suffering, and the history of sex panics from Reconstruction to the child-predator mania of the ’90s is sprawling but remarkable for its candor, and the best thing I have read on the subject. (Also one of the least polemical.)

David Bromwich
New Haven, Conn.

A Place to Be

I would like to thank Sue Halpern for her article “Libraries Are Essential to Democracy” [March 19/26]. Halpern’s story is remarkable: creating a blossoming library from scratch for a town of some 3,000 people.

Halpern notes that Trump is “gunning” for libraries, but just as important is the neoliberal fever that is destroying every public good in its path. Libraries still need to provide the services that they have traditionally provided, but they are needed now more than ever to provide new services, such as Internet access and safe community spaces. Furthermore, shrinking staffs and deprofessionalization are taking a toll on basic services. Higher-paid librarians are fast being replaced by lower-paid support staff without master’s degrees, and full-time staff are being replaced by part-timers who receive few or no benefits. Instead of offering quality services, directors are playing a numbers game that often consists of staging big, splashy programs to get as many bodies into the building for the least cost. Public-library boards very often just go along, but there have been several revolts from the library-going public. At this time of stretched budgets, library users should be on the lookout for such trends and hold their library administrations and boards accountable.

Al Kagan
Champaign, Ill.

In this era of Trump, it was both heartening and sad to read this article. I am uplifted when I visit my local branch library with its diversity of patrons: new immigrants with their young children, local professionals and seniors—all there to read and learn. We cannot afford to lose this critical resource.

Barbara Moschiner
San Antonio

After Parkland

Katha Pollitt’s instinct is, as usual, unerring [“Teens Versus Guns,” March 19/26]: Nobody has a right to own a gun, period. At least not a constitutional right, as opposed to a right granted by custom or case law. Individual ownership of arms has never been threatened by the government, and it certainly wasn’t at the time of the Constitutional Convention. What was threatened was the practice of storing arms and ammunition

(continued on page 26)
Fifteen years ago, President George W. Bush launched the invasion of Iraq, initiating one of the longest military engagements in US history. In an address to the nation, Bush declared, “America faces an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality.... The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.”

Those weapons never materialized, of course, and the decision to go to war under false pretenses proved to be catastrophic. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, including at least 180,000 civilians, have been killed since 2003, and nearly 4,500 US soldiers were killed during the US occupation. The financial costs of the war also vastly exceeded the Bush administration’s projections, totaling over $3 trillion, according to Nobel Prize–winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard professor Linda Bilmes.

Yet in the post-9/11 era, the United States sacrificed more than blood and treasure. The country also severely damaged its moral standing by adopting a barbaric program of torture in brazen defiance of constitutional law and international conventions. That illicit program has been the subject of fierce debate—and often harsh criticism—over the past 15 years. Nonetheless, President Trump’s nomination of Gina Haspel to be the next director of the Central Intelligence Agency is a quieting reminder that the United States has never truly reckoned with the disgraceful legacy of torture.

A longtime veteran of the CIA, Haspel is the former chief of a “black site,” or secret detention facility, in Thailand that played a prominent role in the Bush administration’s torture program. Before Haspel’s arrival in 2002, one prisoner there, Abu Zubaydah, was waterboarded 83 times in the course of a month, confined in a coffin-like box for hours on end, and slammed headfirst into walls. The abuse was so inhumane that, as Dexter Filkins wrote in The New Yorker, “at one point he appeared to be dead.” On Haspel’s watch, another prisoner, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, was waterboarded multiple times. And in 2005, as members of Congress and the press increasingly scrutinized the CIA’s use of torture, Haspel was involved in destroying videotapes of the interrogations.

Haspel has faced no legal consequences for her role in the torture or the ensuing cover-up. Neither did any of the other officials involved in the torture of at least 39 detainees who were subjected to waterboarding, mock executions, sleep deprivation, rectal feeding, and other brutal techniques. In 2009, President Obama issued an executive order banning torture and directing the CIA to shut down its black sites. But he declined to take any further action against those who’d participated in the program, naively insisting that “we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards.” Not only were these officials not held accountable, but some, including Haspel, have been rewarded.

Today, there is much about the use of torture that the American people still don’t know. The most comprehensive accounting of what happened is a 528-page summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation, which Senator Dianne Feinstein, a defender of the intelligence community throughout her career, released in December 2014. The report determined that CIA officials lied to lawmakers about the program and concluded that torture “was not an effective means of obtaining accurate information.” The CIA fought hard to suppress these findings, including by spying on Senate staffers’ computers, and the full 6,700-page report has never seen the light of day.

Feinstein is now rightly calling for the declassification of documents related to Haspel’s role in the torture program, but that alone is not sufficient. It is long past time to investigate—and, where appropriate, to prosecute—the crimes of the torture era. The Senate report should be fully declassified. So should the internal review that former CIA chief Leon Panetta conducted during his time leading...
the agency. And Haspel should not be confirmed. With Senator Rand Paul declaring his intent to vote against her and Senator John McCain expressing concerns about her past, Democrats may be able to defeat Haspel’s nomination. But they need to insist on the fundamental principle that a torturer is not fit to serve in government in any capacity.

In 2016, then-candidate Trump contemptibly proclaimed that “torture works.” His choice of Haspel to lead the CIA sends a worrisome signal that reviving the use of waterboarding and “much worse,” as Trump has urged, is one of the few campaign promises he may actually intend to fulfill. Only by taking a cold-eyed look backwards and finally reckoning with the reality of the US torture program can we ensure that this never happens.

Sanders Breaks the Silence
An interview with Bernie on media and inequality.

For decades, Senator Bernie Sanders has objected to the failure of major media outlets to adequately cover the growth of economic inequality in America. As a presidential candidate in 2016, he used every opportunity that was afforded him to address poverty, plutocracy, and the consolidation of wealth and power in the hands of the “billionaire class.” On March 19, Sanders found another opening to tip the popular discourse away from the story lines of the super-rich and toward the real-life concerns of working-class Americans—hosting a live-streamed town-hall meeting in the US Capitol auditorium on “Inequality in America: The Rise of Oligarchy and Collapse of the Middle Class” with Senator Elizabeth Warren, filmmaker Michael Moore, economist Darrick Hamilton, and others. Earlier this year, Sanders hosted a similar town-hall meeting on Medicare for All, and he says he has plans to do more.

Sanders spoke with The Nation’s John Nichols before the March 19 event about what he hopes to accomplish with this series of live-streamed town halls. The interview has been edited and condensed.

Nichols: You say there are two fundamental issues with inequality. What’s the first?
Sanders: The first one is that this country is moving into oligarchy. The three wealthiest people in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of American society. The top one-tenth of 1 percent now owns as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. And then, politically, what we have seen since the Citizens United decision is billionaires like the Koch brothers and a few of their friends pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the political process to elect candidates who represent the wealthy and the powerful. That is an issue of huge consequence to the future of America—in terms of the economic life of this country and the collapse of the middle class, and a political system which is being corrupted by big money.

Nichols: And the second issue has to do with how the first is being covered?
Sanders: The problem is that, to a very significant degree, the corporate media ignores, or pays very little attention to, the most important issues facing working people. If you look at just the issue I described to you—the movement in this country toward oligarchy—you will find very, very little discussion about that. Stormy Daniels [the porn star who says she received a hush-money payment from Donald Trump] will get 10 times more print and video coverage than will the movement toward oligarchy in this country. You will see very little discussion about poverty in this country. “Poverty” is just not a word that is used on television very often.

Nichols: And you think you can do something about that.
Sanders: What we are trying to do now is pretty revolutionary. We have co-sponsorship on this town meeting that includes, obviously, our Facebook [page], which has 7.5 million followers; Elizabeth Warren, with close to 3.5 million; Michael Moore, with 2.2 million; The Guardian, with 7.9 million; The Young Turks, with millions; and many more pages that will be sharing the live stream.

Last time [in January], when we did the Medicare for All/single-payer town meeting, we ended up having 1 million live viewers, and then more people came on board later. What this means is that there is now extraordinary potential to get issues out, whether it is the health-care crisis and Medicare for All; whether it is the collapse of the middle class and the movement toward oligarchy—maybe next time we’ll do something on criminal justice or guns or immigration. We now have the possibility through live-streaming to discuss serious issues with serious panellists that will never be discussed—or very rarely be discussed—in the corporate media.

Nichols: This question of the corporate media’s coverage of inequality, or lack thereof, has been a concern of yours for a long time. But your interest hasn’t just been with the patterns of coverage by traditional media; it has been that those patterns of coverage create results by putting some issues on the table while taking other issues off.

Sanders: Absolutely, absolutely. Somebody has to determine every morning what the news of the day is. And somebody says that we need three days of coverage on some Trump aide getting kicked out of the White House—day after day after day. Do you think people in Kansas, or in Vermont or California, are sitting up and worrying about that? It’s important—I’m not suggesting that these things should not be covered. But there are other issues that should also be covered.

Today, there will be hundreds of people dying in this country because they can’t afford the prescriptions or the health care that they need. That happens every day, and that’s not just a story in our media. There are children today who are sleeping in the back seats of cars because their mom does not have an apartment that she can afford. That happens today, but it’s not a story.

And the issues of oligarchy and who controls America; the unnecessary misery that millions of Americans are living in because they don’t have any income; what it means to people’s lives that they’re making eight, nine, 10 bucks an hour working 50 hours a week and unable to afford their bills—those issues are not treated as if they’re important. The same is true with the fact that you have millions of senior citizens living on $12,000, $13,000 a year; the fact that the Koch brothers will spend $400 million to influence our elections; the fact that climate change is threatening the future of the planet.

So what I want to do is begin to move forward presenting our perspective on what we think are the most important issues facing America. There has never been a television program like this. If we get a large viewing audience, as I think we will, we will continue doing this.
Dear Liza,

My wife resents having primary (overwhelming) responsibility for our family’s dinner. I try to help out. I try to be responsible for cooking at least one meal a week and to come home with takeout when we’re both busy. The complication for me is that I work a lot more hours: 40 to 50 to her 16 to 20. What’s fair?

—Feminist Working Stiff

Dear Working Stiff,

It’s hard for couples to discuss the domestic division of labor. Any criticism feels like a failure of our partner’s understanding: How can they not know how hard we work? “When could I have possibly done that?” we mumble inwardly or, in moments when diplomacy fails us, out loud. Worse, any effort to lighten our partner’s workload adds to our own. Yet the situation demands empathy.

It sounds as if you have children still living at home (or other dependents). If your wife is caring for them on top of her part-time job, it’s not surprising that she doesn’t feel she has much more time or energy to cook dinner than you do. Since women’s labor is often invisible to men, she may feel (fairly or unfairly!) that, by assuming she has time to cook, you’re failing to appreciate the hard work of raising kids.

Has your wife historically loved cooking and food? If so, the question is: How can you make this fun for her again? Can you do more of the shopping? You can certainly clean up, Working Stiff. Also, if they’re old enough, encourage the kids to help. In fact, you might consider training them to prepare a few simple meals, eventually making dinner their weekly responsibility.

You could take charge of dinner on the weekends. You could also, on Sunday, make some meals that can be frozen and enjoyed later in the week, like stews, pasta sauces, and soups.

Is your wife a talented cook? Are you? Praise for each other’s culinary efforts, when merited, can make this labor more rewarding.

For some people, cooking is so essential to family life, caregiving, and well-being that it can’t be hacked, even in this age of tandoori-chicken TV dinners. But at least consider the myriad ways of downsizing and outsourcing dinner. I applaud your takeout solution; there are other shortcuts. Kids don’t care how much time or money you spend on a meal. They even like store-bought spaghetti sauce. Just last night, my son gleefully demanded “mac ’n’ cheese, but with cheese” — a reference to an incident in which your genius advice columnist may have neglected to add the cheese powder to the Annie’s boxed mac ‘n’ cheese.

Dear Liza,

I am a middle-aged professor at a large public university. Call me naive, but I have been shocked to learn that some of my junior colleagues have over six figures in student-loan debt. I am now realizing that it is not just our PhD students who face a lifetime of crushing debt from financing their educations; it is the new generation of young profs, whose starting salaries are, of course, not even close to six figures. I had wondered why they were so disengaged from university controversies. Now I feel guilty for thinking of them as politically conservative nerds. Of course they’re disengaged—they are serfs to the student-loan industry!

How can I be a better colleague to young people in my profession? That is, how do I help change the workplace environment for graduate students and younger colleagues, given what I now know about student-loan debt? My other colleagues really have no clue. Do I try to make them more aware of these junior colleagues’ debt loads, so we can try to create a workplace that accommodates their situations? I don’t want to invade anyone’s privacy or wag my finger at benighted oldsters, but I do think these are the new economic realities of being in the humanities.

—Concerned Humanist

Questions? Ask Liza at TheNation.com/article/asking-for-a-friend.

The Feminist Cookbook

Illustrated by Joanna Neborsky
ay what you will about the terrible, terrifying Trump years, one good thing has already come out of them: the discrediting of evangelical Christianity. For decades, believers have boasted of their superior virtue, especially in matters of sex and marriage and parenting and social propriety. They’ve blamed premarital and extramarital sex, LGBTQ people, divorce, pornography, sex work, foul language, crude behavior, and not being a Christian—as they define “Christian”—blaming these things for everything from 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina. They never get tired of going after Bill Clinton for his infidelities and Hillary Clinton for “enabling” them. (How frustrating it must have been for them that Barack Obama, the Muslim Kenyan communist, spent eight years in the White House with nary a whiff of scandal!) Now they’ve sold their souls to Donald Trump, who has partaken freely of practically every vice and depravity known to man. Urged on by their leaders, 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump—more than voted for George W. Bush, an actual evangelical—and now everyone is laughing at them. It’s about time.

In the latest issue of *The Atlantic*, Michael Gerson, a former Bush speechwriter and current *Washington Post* columnist, mourns the loss of evangelical credibility in an angry, eloquent essay, “The Last Temptation.” As Gerson writes: “The moral convictions of many evangelical leaders have become a function of their partisan identification. This is not mere gullibility; it is utter corruption.” An evangelical himself, Gerson excoriates those leaders who make outlandish excuses for Trump’s behavior (my personal favorite: James Dobson’s explanation that the president is a “baby Christian”). Evangelicals, he says, have been driven to a kind of paranoia by their loss of cultural hegemony: They fall into absurd and unnecessary battles over school prayer and creationism, and losing those battles has made them seem—or actually be—“negative, censorious, and oppositional.”

I suppose it’s natural for Gerson to look on the bright side when he can: The evangelicals are his tribe. Thus, he’s full of nostalgia for the 19th-century evangelicals who opposed slavery, but he never mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation). He mentions that the largest evangelical denomination by far today, the Southern Baptist Convention, split from those northern abolitionist Baptists in order to defend slavery (and, after that, segregation).

The bottom line is racism. “I do not believe that most evangelicals are racist,” Gerson writes. “But every strong Trump supporter has decided that racism is not a moral disqualification in the president of the United States. And that is something more than a political compromise. It is a revelation of moral priorities.” I’m sorry, but being OK with a racist president is what racism is! Only 5 percent of black evangelicals identify as Republican, so it’s unlikely many of them voted for Trump; before the election, only 15 percent of nonwhite evangelicals planned to vote for him. And, as Gerson notes, we know that almost no black evangelicals voted for Roy Moore, the darling of godly whites. According to Pew, in December Trump’s approval rating among white evangelicals was 61 percent—down from 78 percent the previous February, but still almost twice the figure for voters overall (32 percent). They’re the only religious demographic where Trump has anything like majority support.

If you leave out the part about Trump being a corrupt, immoral con man and bully who might well plunge us into World War III—which to some evangelicals wouldn’t be so bad, given the sinfulness of humanity—there’s lots for them to like. He’s putting their guys on the federal bench—just one more Supreme Court justice and there goes abortion, civil rights, gay rights, the separation of church and state, and much more. He’s installed agency heads who are right-wing Christians: Betsy DeVos, Ben Carson, Jeff Sessions, Scott Pruitt, and Nikki Haley, plus virtually anyone in his administration who has anything to do with women’s health. He’s promised to get rid of the Johnson Amendment, which bars tax-exempt religious institutions from endorsing candidates, paving the way for a mammoth tide of political contributions to churches. White evangelicals distrust science, dismiss racial discrimination, believe that immigrants threaten American values, and worry about extremism among American Muslims? So does Trump.

Best of all, Trump is the one New Yorker who will never make them feel the least bit culturally inferior. After all, they are virtuous, and he is not.
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BEACON PRESS  BEACON.ORG  NOW MORE THAN EVER
Robert Grossman, the cartoonist, caricaturist, illustrator, sculptor, animator, and commentator, who died on March 15, will be much missed, but his unforgettable images will live on.

I had the honor of publishing Bob, then fresh from Yale, in Monocle, the political-satire magazine I had founded—with the help of Richard Lingeman, among others—while at Yale Law School. Way back in the early 1960s, Bob gave us one of the first black superheroes, Captain Melanin, along with Roger Ruthless of the CIA; with the latter, he did as much to question the agency’s work at that time as any print journalist.

As art director Steve Heller wrote some years ago, “These strips acerbically address issues of the day, most often before they are on the popular culture radar screen.” Grossman also gave us Richard M. Nightcrawler—almost as wormy as the real Nixon, with two henchmen named Haldebug and Ehrlichbug.

Grossman’s cover art, spot illustrations, and comic strips (such as the Stone Age-themed “The Klintstones,” a running gag during the Clinton presidency) have delighted readers of The Nation for many years.

Once, when asked where he drew the line—pardon the pun—between satire and insult, not to mention outright slander, Bob observed: “If satire isn’t at least a little insulting, what’s the point of it? Slander is a legal term, but I believe the courts have generally held that parody is a form of protected expression.”

When asked about people who argue that caricature is undignified when it comes to depicting presidents or presidential candidates, Bob replied, “Undignified? Virtually anything has more dignity than lying and blundering before the whole stupefied world, which seems to be the politician’s eternal role.”

He was one of a kind.

Victor Navasky

COMIC GENIUS
Robert Grossman, 1940–2018

Dear Humanist,

You should enlighten your contemporaries in general terms, without naming your junior colleagues; frame it as a cohort problem of the “rising generation of humanities scholars.” You should also push your senior colleagues to help create a more flexible workplace for the indebted youngsters—for example, by providing more possible pathways for promotion. Some institutions and departments give junior academics additional time off in their first few years to complete the work needed for promotion (which usually means more money) and tenure (job security); organize your fellow “oldsters” to create policies like this, as well as to push for more generous maternity and paternity leave (easing the stress on those just starting families, as many young academics are). And do take responsibility for defying the administration when necessary, Humanist, since you’re right that it’s harder for the precariously positioned serfs to do. Tenure is designed to allow professors to take risks, and with so many scholars politically silenced because of either their debt loads or their disposable status as adjuncts, that risk-taking has now become an obligation for those who can.

Debt is a huge burden for many graduates, and so outside the office we should follow the lead of countless student activists around the world and fight for free higher education. It’s crappy that our system forces people to navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of ignorance and indebtedness.

But until that time, do whatever you can to support graduate-student unions, which can help lower students’ debt by allowing them to make a living wage while in school, as well as raising the floor in the labor market they’ll be entering later. Indeed, supporting all academic unions at your university—for adjuncts and full-time profs as well as grad students—is another great way to improve the workplace for your younger colleagues, as well as being a fine use of your seniority and that of your benighted contemporaries.
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LAW & ORDER

Google’s Dragnet

Law-enforcement officials in Raleigh, North Carolina, have started to request user data from Google—not necessarily for people suspected of a crime, but for everyone with a mobile device in an area up to 17 acres from where a crime occurred. An investigation by local news station WRAL-TV revealed that in at least four cases last year, ranging from homicide to arson, police issued “area-based” search warrants to identify every device in the vicinity of the incident.

It isn’t uncommon for tech giants to disclose user data at the behest of government agencies. In 2017, Google received requests for the anonymized data of more than 33,000 user accounts in the United States, and shared information for 81 percent of those requests. What is new is that police may not have a specific target in mind.

In the case of an apartment-building fire in Raleigh last year, police asked Google for “time stamped location coordinates for every device” in the vicinity over a two-and-a-half-hour period. The warrant also included a 90-day provision that barred Google from informing users that their data had been handed over to the police.

Critics say this practice is a clumsy invasion of the privacy rights of unsuspecting citizens. One former local prosecutor asked, “If you know a crime was committed in an area and you have no information on a suspect, would you allow them to go through every house in the neighborhood?”

To date, an arrest has been made in just one of the four Raleigh cases.

—Andrew Tan-Delli Cicchi

The Cruelty of ICE

Asylum seekers get treated like criminals, and children are torn from their parents.

Why is the United States separating asylum-seeking children from their parents? Kirstjen Nielsen, the secretary of homeland security, has avoided answering this question, which makes a recent lawsuit by the ACLU so important and so necessary. The suit is based on the case of a Congolese woman and her 7-year-old daughter—identified in court papers as “Ms. L.” and “S.S.”—who fled the violence in their home country, traveled to Mexico, and then crossed into California last November, turning themselves in to border agents. Ms. L. was processed and detained in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in San Diego, while her child was torn away from her and taken to a different facility in Chicago—2,000 miles away. They were not brought before a judge or given a chance to be heard.

The case has rightly drawn public outrage, as well as a renewed focus on the Trump administration’s immigration policies. In a sense, Donald Trump is the great revelator: His vulgarity brings attention to practices that would otherwise have been hidden beneath a veneer of respectability. But, as it happens, the case of Ms. L. is not the first time that ICE has separated a child from his or her parents. This occasionally happened under the Obama administration, too, though immigrant-rights activists say there has been a noticeable and significant increase in the practice under Trump. The rationale that the Department of Homeland Security has offered for this horrendous practice is that there is a high risk of human trafficking at the border, and thus US officials need to ensure that a minor is indeed accompanied by his or her parent.

But if a concern for the safety of the child is foremost, then a simple DNA test could have established Ms. L.’s maternity, and the pair could have been kept in the same facility as they awaited the result of their hearing. Instead, S.S. was held in Chicago for more than four months. She spent her first Christmas in this country in detention, separated from her mother, in a strange, snowy city. It was only after the ACLU lawsuit drew nationwide attention that a DNA test was completed; it proved that Ms. L. was indeed S.S.’s mother. It’s important to note here that mother and daughter turned themselves over willingly to Customs and Border Protection agents when they arrived in the United States, because they wanted to prove to the authorities that they have a compelling claim to be granted asylum and should be able to remain in this country legally. In short, they did exactly what asylum seekers are supposed to do, and have been met with shocking cruelty.

Anti-immigration activists (or “restrictionists,” as they euphemistically call themselves these days) often argue that the arrival of undocumented immigrants is unfair to people who come here the legal way. But asylum seekers rarely have the leisure to file an application and wait months, or even years, for it to be processed. Civil wars, political assassinations, and religious persecutions are often unpredictable events, so it’s unreasonable to expect people to risk their lives and expose themselves to retaliation as they wait for the paperwork to be completed. The reality is that refugees flee their homeland first and look for asylum later, which is what Ms. L. and her daughter did.

When asylum seekers turn themselves in to US border guards, they are immediately arrested and processed through the court system. In her searing book Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions, Valeria Luiselli explores what happens to refugees as their cases are heard in federal immigration courts. Luiselli, a Mexican novelist and essayist, volunteered in New York as a translator and helped undocumented Central American children fill out a questionnaire required by the government for adjudicating their appeals. The first question on the questionnaire is “Why did you come to the United States?” Others ask for details about their journey, the dangers they faced in their home country, and the names and legal status of their family members here.

The children answer, and Luiselli translates

“S.S.” was taken to Chicago, where she was held for more than four months. She spent her first Christmas here in detention.
The children answer and Luiselli fills out their forms, but very often they give her only terse replies or play with crayons. They have fled gang violence and journeyed thousands of miles, often under extremely perilous conditions, to seek safety. Or they’ve lost parents or caretakers and are trying to reunite with a living relative in the United States. Even when their answers clearly show that the children are afraid for their lives, this is not enough to build a strong case. Some kind of documentation is often necessary to secure a pro bono lawyer—which, given the nature of the journey they’ve just endured, is arduous if not impossible.

Luiselli’s book, and the case of Ms. L. and S.S., highlight the mistake in handling asylum applications as a law-enforcement problem. Nielsen’s DHS is treating refugees as a priori criminals, denying them the protections of due process. Far from deterring future refugees, the practice of separating asylum-seeking families is instead inflicting unbearable trauma on children who have already suffered so much.

Over the past few years, the enforcement of immigration policy in this country has slowly shifted from the corrective to the punitive, and now to the abusive. We see this with the construction of walls around border cities, which has resulted in a shift of migratory trails to deserts and mountains and a rise in migrant deaths. We see this in the raids and arrests that ICE has conducted outside schools, places of worship, and soccer fields. We see this in the effort by Attorney General Jeff Sessions—previously a staunch advocate of states’ rights—to stop places like California from declaring themselves sanctuary states. And we are now seeing this in the practice of breaking up asylum-seeking families. None of it has worked. But it has created a vast, cruel bureaucracy that has, step by step, diminished our collective humanity.

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SNAPSHOT / CAROLYN KASTER

Enough.

Hundreds of students rally against gun violence in front of the White House on March 14, in the biggest nationwide demonstration since the massacre of 17 people at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February.

Trump Attacks the Russia Investigation in Twitter Storm

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

Trump’s showing willingness to litter The Internet with trash on Twitter About the probe. Does this show fear That Robert Mueller’s drawing near? This sort of ranting may provide More proof Trump’s got a lot to hide.
After years of getting shellacked in state legislative races, Democrats are finally running to win. But can the party make room for a new kind of candidate? by Joan Walsh
In 2014, when newly elected Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe tried to get the state legislature to approve Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, he ran into a bright-red wall in the House of Delegates. Even though 100 percent of the initial cost was to be paid by the federal government, 66 of the chamber’s 67 Republican Delegates voted against the measure. Later that year, in a special session, McAuliffe tried and failed again. A 2017 effort died as well, once again on a party-line vote. As a result, almost 400,000 low-income Virginians went without health insurance, even as Medicaid enrollment grew by some 16 million nationwide.

Then, last November, Democrats pulled off a massive upset at the polls: 15 challengers, 11 of them women, captured GOP-held seats in the House of Delegates. A 16th victory, and control of the chamber, vaporized when a tie vote was settled, quaintly, by drawing lots from a ceramic bowl, allowing Republican David Yancey to retain his seat. Still, Democrats shifted the balance from 66–34 to 51–49. And this February, a budget that included Medicaid expansion passed the House of Delegates 68–32, with 19 Republicans in support, including Yancey.

“Elections have consequences,” Republican Delegate Glenn R. Davis Jr. told his colleagues a little mournfully, as he flipped from opposing the Medicaid expansion to supporting it. Davis, for what it’s worth, had survived a challenge from Democrat Veronica Coleman, an African-American pastor, by less than four points.

“The only reason it happened was: We are 49 now!” said a jubilant Jennifer Carroll Foy, the newly elected Democratic delegate from Woodbridge, when I spoke with her by phone. While the measure is unlikely to pass the GOP-controlled State Senate this year, Carroll Foy says the progress on Medicaid expansion is just the beginning of the effort to bring Virginia’s policies in line with the state’s increasingly liberal electorate, which has been woefully underrepresented in Richmond for years, especially after Republicans gerrymandered the state map in the wake of the 2010 election.

When I first wrote about the amazing crop of women running for the Virginia House of Delegates last year, I quoted Daily Kos’s Carolyn Fiddler, a noted expert on state politics, on “the Trump effect”—the ferocious feminist rage over the election of an admitted pussy-grabber that inspired so many women to enter politics for the first time. “If that fucking schlub can be president, I can run for office,” Fiddler memorably told me.

But as we head into the first national elections since Trump’s inauguration, Democrats are talking less about “the Trump effect” than they are about “the Virginia effect”—the unprecedented surge of women, minority, and millennial candidates running for seats in their state legislatures, many in deep-red districts long written off by the Democratic Party establishment. These candidates have been buoyed by a raft of outside and resistance groups, including Indivisible, Emily’s List, Run for Something, Forward Ma-

The Trump effect: Virginia’s House of Delegates now includes Kathy Tran (left), one of the first Asian Americans, and Danica Roem (right), the first transgender delegate.
all three states have reliably voted Democratic in presidential elections since 1992. That is, until 2016.

Since Trump’s victory, however, Democrats have flipped 39 statehouse seats, counting the 15 Virginia pickups plus four in New Jersey. Amazingly, 20 of these victories have come in special elections, in districts carried by Trump, some by very large margins, in places as varied as Wisconsin, Missouri, Kentucky, and Florida. Democrats have taken five GOP statehouse seats in purple New Hampshire, four in red Oklahoma, and a big one in Washington State last November 7, when activist Manka Dhingra grabbed an open seat formerly held by a Republican, flipping the state Senate to blue. Almost immediately, Washington passed a statewide automatic-voter-registration law, which Governor Jay Inslee signed on March 19. Earlier in March, a bill was passed banning so-called conversion therapy for LGBTQ folks. Elections have consequences.

Nationwide, there are 7,383 state legislative seats, and 6,066 of them, in 87 out of 99 chambers, will be on the ballot this November. Democrats aren’t quite running a 7,383-seat (or a 6,066-seat) strategy—at least not yet. But after years of frustration and neglect, it’s no longer impossible to imagine the day when the party contests every single statehouse seat in every state in the Union. Party insiders, activists, resistance groups, and candidates—from Maine to Minnesota, from Arizona to Georgia, and all the GOP-dominated states in between—are gearing up for an unprecedented number of races in 2018. In dozens of states, Democratic leaders are vying to bring about “the next Virginia,” in the words of North Carolina Representative Craig Meyer, who is part of a recruitment effort that has enlisted a Democratic challenger for every Republican incumbent in both houses of the state’s General Assembly for the first time in recent memory. In 2014, by contrast, 34 GOP incumbents in the State House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate went unopposed. Ohio Democrats have likewise recruited a challenger in every legislative district in the state. And in Pennsylvania, the number of Democrats who have filed to run for the State House and Senate outnumber Republicans 56 percent to 44; most of the Republicans are incumbents.

A blue wave in North Carolina would be particularly significant, since the state has experienced what many election experts say is the most brazen example of gerrymandering in the country. Drawn up by a Republican-controlled Legislature with the express purpose of electing Republicans, the state’s new map led to the GOP taking 10 of 13, or 77 percent, of the House seats on the ballot in 2016, even though Republican candidates won just 53 percent of the vote statewide. In January, a federal court ordered the state to redraw that map, ruling that it was “motivated by invidious partisan intent” and in violation of the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court has blocked that order pending its decision on a host of gerrymandering cases that the Court has in front of it this year.

North Carolina also demonstrates how statehouse losses reverberate up the ballot. Barack Obama won the state in 2008 but lost it in 2012. Democratic Senator Kay Hagan lost to Republican Thom Tillis by more than 45,000 votes in 2014. Hillary Clinton made the state a top priority in 2016 and still lost to Trump by more than three points. Newcomer Deborah Ross also lost a Senate race to incumbent Richard Burr that year, even though the party poured resources into her campaign. And beyond the Tar

It took Democrats a long time to get into this mess—and it will take more than one election cycle to get out of it. Sadly, what seemed like the zenith of Democratic political participation—the election of the country’s first black president in 2008, when Democrats also increased their majorities in both houses of Congress—held the seeds of the party’s undoing. Almost immediately, a white racial backlash took shape, most visibly in Tea Party rallies across the country. Savvy Republicans recognized that the demographic trends that cost them control of the federal government could ultimately doom them, and they moved swiftly to capitalize on the conservative base’s rage.

Their answer was to launch a multipronged attack on democracy itself. One prong was to demoralize Obama’s coalition of young voters, people of color, and women, and make it harder for these constituencies—especially minorities—to cast a ballot. But perhaps the most important part of that strategy was to focus crushing energy and resources on taking over state legislatures. This, Republicans realized, was the key to drawing new electoral maps, both for state legislatures and the US House of Representatives. They didn’t need to win over a majority of Americans; they just needed to rig the game so that an ever smaller, older, and whiter pool of voters could consistently prevail.

This strategy was never a secret, and it had been in the works for a long time. Writing in The Wall Street Journal in 2002, senior George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove explained a plan known as REDMAP (short for “Redistricting Majority Project”): “Republican strategists are focused on 107 seats in 16 states. Winning these seats would give them control of drawing district lines for nearly 190 congressional seats.” Rove downplayed the role of dark money in the project, while exaggerating the extent to which unions and progressive groups had similar plans to control redistricting. (Sadly, it turns out, they did not.)

In eight short years, the scheme worked. Most journalists focused on Republicans taking back the House in 2010, but the most momentous developments of that year were the GOP gains at the state level. For example, Republican strategist Ed Gillespie, who ran and lost a race for Virginia governor last year, brought REDMAP to North Carolina in 2010. Republicans hadn’t controlled

| Right-to-work laws decreased the Democratic presidential vote share by 3.5 percent. Clinton lost Michigan by 0.2 percent. | Backlash: Under Obama’s watch, Democrats lost almost 1,000 state legislative seats. | THE 7,383-SEAT STRATEGY |

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**THE 7,383-SEAT STRATEGY**

- **North Carolina**

- **Michigan**

- **New Hampshire**

- **Washington State**

- **Virginia**

- **Georgia**

- **Arizona**

- **Wisconsin**

- **Missouri**

- **Kentucky**

- **Florida**

- **New Jersey**

- **Oklahoma**

- **Minnesota**

- **Maine**

- **Districts**

- **Seats**

- **Gerrymandering**

- **Politics**

- **Elections**

- **Voting**
both houses of the General Assembly “since General Sherman,” a local politician quipped to The New Yorker’s Jane Mayer. Nevertheless, Art Pope, a wealthy businessman who had already served in the state’s House of Representatives and seeded many conservative groups, helped bankroll an assault on Democrats. Pope-funded groups targeted 22 legislative seats and took 18, winning control of both houses of the General Assembly for the first time since 1870. Overall, 22 state legislative chambers changed control in the 2010 election cycle—all from Democratic to Republican. Nationwide, the GOP won 720 seats that year, counting special elections, to control 54 percent—more than they had since 1928.

In 25 states, Republicans suddenly controlled the entire legislature, up from just 14 the year before. They also flipped governorships in 11 states, including Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, where redistricting battles would prove brutal in the years ahead. Republicans already had a majority in the Virginia House of Delegates, but they gained nine seats in 2011, attaining a veto-proof majority. In 2012, when Obama won reelection, Democrats picked up a measly 168 statehouse seats and lost one majority. In 2016, both parties picked up nine seats in the Virginia House of Delegates, where Pat McCrory defeated Walter Dalton and promptly repealed the state’s Racial Justice Act.

Things only got worse in 2014, when Republicans took control of another nine state legislative chambers. They attained trifecta control of the statehouse and governorship in 23 states. In 2016, both parties picked up a few statehouses, but the number of divided legislatures dwindled to just three, giving the GOP trifecta control in 24 states.

As their numbers and power grew across the country, Republican state lawmakers set out to make life dramatically worse for Democratic voters, low-income people, workers, and women, imposing dozens of voter-suppression laws, restricting the rights of labor unions (in particular public-employee unions, a major source of Democratic funding), pioneering new abortion restrictions, and pushing through cutbacks to women’s-health programs as well as anti-LGBTQ legislation.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 23 states passed new restrictions on voting after the GOP’s statehouse takeover in 2010: 13 have more restrictive voter-ID laws in place, including six with strict new photo-ID requirements; 11 have laws making it harder for citizens to register; six have cut back on early voting; and three have made it harder to restore voting rights for people with criminal convictions in their past. Of the 11 states with the highest black turnout in 2008, seven put new voting restrictions in place (although North Carolina’s law was blocked by a federal court).

The anti-labor laws passed in GOP-run states have diminished Democratic voter participation—by design. Since 2012, six states—Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—have passed new “right-to-work” laws that allow workers to benefit from union representation without having to pay union dues. Some of those same states, like Wisconsin, have also limited public-sector unions’ bargaining power; in 2017, Iowa made that move when the GOP returned to power. As Sean McElwee has documented in The Nation, right-to-work laws have decreased the Democratic presidential vote share by 3.5 percent; Hillary Clinton lost Michigan and Wisconsin by 0.2 and 0.8 percent, respectively. But these laws also hurt Democrats on the state level. James Feigenbaum, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, and Vanessa Williamson of the Scholars Strategy Network estimate that right-to-work laws decreased the seats held by Democrats in state legislatures by 5 to 11 percent.

This year, five Democratic senators are up for reelection in states that have become right-to-work since 2012: Joe Donnelly in Indiana, Claire McCaskill in Missouri, Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin, Debbie Stabenow in Michigan, and Joe Manchin in West Virginia, which went right-to-work in 2016. The reduction in Democratic voting strength, thanks to laws enacted at the state level, will make their chances at winning reelection that much tougher in a year when Democrats must defend every seat in order to have a shot at gaining control of the Senate.

Perhaps the most reactionary new policies have come in the realm of abortion rights. In the years from 2011 and 2016, states passed as many abortion restrictions—281—as they had in the 15 years prior. In fact, the limits enacted in those six years amount to a full quarter of the abortion restrictions passed in the 43 years since Roe v. Wade. According to the Guttmacher...
Institute, of the 10 states that adopted at least 10 new abortion restrictions in those years, which accounted for 60 percent of all new restrictive laws, all 10 were run by Republican governors with GOP statehouse majorities.

The redistricting that the new GOP majorities pushed through also had a devastating effect at the federal level. RealClearPolitics’ Sean Trende—far from a liberal—called Pennsylvania’s GOP-drawn map for US House districts “the gerrymander of the decade.” And it worked as intended right away: In 2012, even though Democrats won more than half of the state’s votes in US House elections and Obama won reelection easily, Republicans took 13 of the 18 House seats being contested. Michigan’s new congressional map, unveiled in 2011, has been compared by one election-law expert to a confectioner’s fantasy, “with districts swirling around Southeast Michigan like colors in a Willy Wonka lollipop.” Although Obama carried the state in 2012 by almost 10 points and Senator Debbie Stabenow won reelection by more than 20, Republicans took nine of the 14 US House seats up for grabs. In Wisconsin, Democrats went from a 50–45 edge in the State House of Representatives to a 38–60 deficit in 2010, and lost both the State Senate and the governorship. The GOP-gerrymandered maps drawn the following year meant that, while Republicans got less than half of Wisconsin’s US House votes in 2012, and while Obama defeated Mitt Romney in the state by seven points, Democrats wound up with only three of Wisconsin’s eight US House seats. (Courts have recently challenged the Wisconsin map, as well as those in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, which could help Democrats in all three states in 2018.)

As bad as all this news is, it may not be the worst of it. First, after the next two election cycles, the results of the 2020 census will be in, triggering another wave of House redistricting across the country. Although courts have pushed back on some of the most extreme maps, there’s little reason to believe that Republican line drawers won’t try to extend and consolidate the advantages the party has gained in recent years. If they prevail, the post-2020 maps could make the post-2010 maps look logical by comparison.

Second, Republicans have succeeded so wildly at their state legislative gambit that conservatives are on the verge of what was once just a fever dream. With the GOP in control of 32 statehouses, they need only two more to reach the two-thirds threshold required to call a constitutional convention, which would enable them to gut federal power on issues from taxes to guns to voting rights to abortion to labor and environmental regulation. That’s the goal of the conservative group Citizens for Self-Government, supported by Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Florida Senator Marco Rubio. Right-wing former senators Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and Jim DeMint of South Carolina are also constitutional-convention evangelists. “People are disgusted with Washington. They are ready to move power back closer to home,” DeMint told USA Today last year.

Democrats already have many reasons to focus on taking back state legislatures, but the prospect of a constitutional convention is what keeps many of them up at night. It’s one of the reasons that media veteran Michael Hirschorn helped create the People PAC, a coalition of media and creative professionals working to strengthen the anti-Trump resistance. Hirschorn spent months after Trump’s election trying to find the best points of leverage and finally settled on state races—at least partly because, if the Republicans pull off a constitutional convention, he says, “that’s game over.”

Democratic leaders undoubtedly deserve a heap of...
THERE ARE TWO BIG GROUPS WITH OBAMA TIES playing on this turf: the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, led by former attorney general Eric Holder, and the statehouse-focused political-action committee Forward Majority, led by Obama for America veteran David Cohen and other Obama alums. Holder’s NDRC is targeting 10 states, including Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Georgia, with a combination of legal challenges to gerrymandering, ballot initiatives on redistricting, and material support for a still-undetermined number of individual candidates. One of the group’s main goals, says NDRC director Kelly Ward, is to make clear to black voters that “gerrymandering and voter suppression go together.”

Forward Majority will target more than 100 legislative races in at least eight states, including North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Like the NDRC, the group is focused on states where gerrymandering has been extreme. It is also trying to bring the tools of the modern congressional campaign—social-media and SMS outreach, in addition to mail messaging, polling, and canvassing—to underfunded state races. “We’re looking for a set of races that are competitive, but where others are not playing,” says Forward Majority’s Hausman. “We tell people their highest return is at the state-legislature level. A small amount of money can go a long way.”

Emily’s List, long known for its work at the congressional level, plans to target at least 598 state races and has more than tripled the size of its staff supporting state and local candidates. In North Carolina and Pennsylvania, the group has worked with state parties and with outside activists to recruit robust slates that feature plenty of women. “We need to take this opportunity and momentum to expand our targets and compete to flip legislatures that may have seemed impossible before,” says Julie McClain Downey, director of campaign communications.

The smaller new groups that were active in Virginia are ramping up, too. Run for Something has endorsed 103 first- or second-time candidates in 33 states in the past 15 months, and co-founder Amanda Litman says that number will climb. The respected start-up Flippable—which raised $600,000 and backed 10 statehouse candidates in Virginia, Washington, Florida, and Delaware in 2017—is endorsing 100 candidates in nine states this year. They are focusing, in part, on districts won by Clinton where a strong Democrat is challenging a Republican, according to co-founder Catherine Vaughan. Flippable plans to start in Pennsylvania and Texas and move on from there.

Other venerable lefty groups are getting in on the action. “There is so much power in the states, and the Republicans have more or less run the table,” says Joe Dinkin of the Working Families Party, which began in New York but now has chapters around the country. The WFP got involved in Virginia in 2017, backing Lee Carter and several other progressives. In 2018, Dinkin says, “we’re going to be working with lots of progressive candidates—especially in races that Democrats don’t think are the most competitive.” The party is backing candidates in Florida, Nebraska, Colorado, Connecticut—and at home in New York, where, over the years, Democratic control of the State Senate has been subverted by defectors who caucused with the GOP.

For its part, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee is trying to learn from this new wave of innovation and escape its reputation for incumbent protection by partnering with Run for Something and Emily’s List. “Virginia showed us we could flip 15 seats in one state in a single day,” says DLCC director Jessica Post. Nobody thought that was possible a year ago, she admits, but the experience has convinced her that party organizations need to aim higher than they have in the past. In Virginia, for example, the Democrats more than doubled the number of candidates running for Republican-controlled seats, from 23 in 2015 to 54 in 2017.

Kelly Ward of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee agrees. Having assumed it would take two
cycles, through 2020, to achieve many of the NDRC’s goals, she now says, “We think we should be embracing the momentum of 2018, and push that momentum as far as it can go.”

But the lessons from Virginia go beyond mere scale. The unexpected victories last year are a powerful sign that the party needs to be more ambitious in terms of gender and racial diversity. The winning Democrats in Virginia were stunningly diverse; the 2018 House of Delegates includes the chamber’s first two Latinas, first two Asian women, first out lesbian, first public defender, first AFSCME member, first social worker, first Democratic Socialist, and first transgender legislator. As these new members were sworn into office on January 10, Lisa Turner, the former political director of the DLCC, who worked with Virginia Beach Delegate Kelly Fowler, watched in awe. “I felt terrific to see that class, and see all those fresh faces,” she recalled. “Then to look over at the Republicans and see all those white men!”

Running a dramatically larger and more diverse slate of candidates also means that state parties will have to make room for outside groups to play a larger role. In Virginia, for example, the party lacked the resources to support all the new challengers, House Democratic Caucus leader David Toscano told me candidly last year. “It’s stretching our resources, and it’s stretching our thinking about how to support so many candidates,” he confessed.

“The big Virginia victory—15 winners!—was due to the outside groups,” Turner declares. “It would not have happened without them.”

Delegate Lee Carter, a Democratic Socialists of America activist, concurs. “I had a strained relationship with the state party, but I had a great relationship with the Manassas and Prince William Democratic Party folks and with all the regional staff. But my biggest support came from the coalition of outside groups—DSA, Let America Vote, Forward Majority, Indivisible NoVaWest, 31st Street Swing Left, the Sierra Club, NARAL, Planned Parenthood. It was a very interesting coalition.”

The folks at Forward Majority, one of the better-funded outside groups, are diplomatic about the tensions between Virginia’s House Democratic Caucus and some of the Forward Majority-backed candidates. “We went to the caucus and said, ‘OK, you’ve got your top 10 or so candidates,’” Obama alum David Cohen recalls, “‘so we’ll start with number 11 and work down.’” Forward Majority worked with Fowler and Carter, along with Dawn Adams, the first out lesbian elected to the House of Delegates, and progressive feminist college professor Debra Rodman, as well as a few candidates who came close but lost.

Virginia veterans also argue that issues matter—and not just the ones that establishment Democrats think are safe. Virginia Republicans have passed shockingly reactionary bills on abortion, health care, guns, and education. But since so many voters have lived for years in districts where there has never been a Democratic challenger, they were often unaware of the far-right stands their own representatives had taken. Forward Majority specialized in digital messaging that called out these reactionary policies. Rodman’s opponent, John O’Bannon, “voted to defund Planned Parenthood, led the effort to block Medicaid expansion in Virginia, and went on TV to profess his love for the president’s reckless efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act,” says Ben Wexler-Waite of Forward Majority, whose ads highlighted that record.

In Fowler’s race for the House of Delegates, Christine Bachman, a lawyer and Moms Demand Action activist who threw herself into politics after Trump’s election, recalls that Fowler “started out eight points behind” incumbent Ron Villanueva. But in issue polling, “when we told voters he opposed Medicaid expansion, Kelly gained two points. When we said he voted to defund Planned Parenthood, she gained three. When we said he opposed gun control, it became a dead heat.”

Gun safety was a winning issue for many of the new candidates, even though the National Rifle Association is headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. Of the 13 competitive races where Democratic candidates supported by the pro-gun-control group Americans for Responsible Solutions squared off against NRA-backed Republicans, the Democrats won 12. The three men at the top of the ticket—newly elected Governor Ralph Northam, Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax, and Attorney General Mark Herring—each received an “F” rating from the NRA; all of them won handily. (“And each of us is proud of our ‘F,’” Fairfax proclaimed.)

These same factors may play out differently in deep-red states, but the stunning student activism since the massacre in Parkland may have changed the political calculus, not just in Florida but everywhere.

Likewise, despite the frequent reluctance of mainstream Democrats to broach racial issues, outside groups found Virginia voters open to engagement on the subject. Adrianne Shropshire’s BlackPAC worked to elect Fairfax, who is African American, and got involved in some down-ballot races, too. Polling showed the group that “for all voters of color, racial-justice issues, and the perceptible rise of racism, were equal to or more important than the economic issues,” Shropshire told me. “In fact, they were driving indicators of voter turnout.”

Between GOP gubernatorial candidate Ed Gillespie’s fervent support for Confederate monuments and his attacks on Virginia Democrats for supporting “sanctuary cities,” voters of color were energized, Shropshire said. And then came the white-supremacist marches in Charlottesville. “We heard a lot of concern about racial justice after the immediacy of Charlottesville,” she added. “About Trump, about hate crimes, about voting rights and voter suppression—those issues are huge to black women.”

Virginia’s rainbow of Democratic candidates, along with their willingness to engage tough issues of racial justice, helped boost black and Latino turnout—all the
way to the top of the ticket. Public defender Jennifer Carroll Foy, who is black, campaigned on the need for criminal-justice reform, while Elizabeth Guzman crusaded to support Dreamers and other immigrants, documented and undocumented alike.

Shropshire and many others believe that the “reverse coattails” of the down-ballot Democratic challengers helped Fairfax win his race for lieutenant governor. Reed Shaw, the former deputy data director for Obama’s 2012 campaign in Virginia, presents a persuasive case that the down-ballot candidates helped Northam win, too: In deep-red precincts where no Democratic candidate ran, Northam outperformed the vote total of his predecessor, Terry McAuliffe, by 4 percent. But in deep-red precincts that featured a Democratic challenger, he eclipsed McAuliffe’s 2013 vote by 17 points. And in precincts considered flippable, Northam bested McAuliffe’s total by 40 points.

“Reverse coattails were real,” insists Forward Majority’s Hausman. “Northam was always going to do well in urban Virginia, in traditional Democratic areas, but diverse candidates increased votes for him elsewhere. We created more competitive districts.”

“We definitely saw reverse coattails,” says former DNC chair Howard Dean. “This was a groundbreaking election: We saw millennials, women, Latinos, African Americans, and Asians come out—the first mass election of the new Democratic Party.”

BUT IF FOLKS ON THE GROUND IN VIRGINIA DID A lot of things right, we can also learn from what activists say was done wrong. Women and people of color are stepping forward to run for office in amazing numbers: Since Trump’s election, 34,000 women have contacted Emily’s List about running; Run for Something has heard from more than 16,000 millennials who want to be candidates; VoteRunLead, which has trained some 33,000 women in its 12 years of existence, has 38 candidates who are running for statehouse offices this year. But the Democratic Party’s recruitment and development mechanisms still have trouble recognizing and supporting this new cohort of politicians.

“State parties are very hierarchical—there’s a bias built in by men, for men,” says VoteRunLead’s Erin Vilardi. “Your rank comes with the time you’ve given to the party. And these women are not necessarily that into being Democrats, either. They’re pissed. They’ve been yelling. They’ve been involved in issues, but not necessarily in the party. So the party is not necessarily equipped to support the women who are running.”

“The formula has to change,” says Carroll Foy, who didn’t get the party’s backing in her primary but secured help after she won it. “We knew we weren’t the favorites of the establishment. But we showed that when minorities and women run, we win.”

Dean says the same is true of the new crop of millennial candidates. “These millennials aren’t necessarily Democrats,” he notes. “They’re anti-institution. And the state parties can be an incumbent-protection racket. They’re not bad people; they want to do the right thing. But they’re kind of a closed club.”

Forward Majority worries that state parties will over-invest in protecting candidates who survived the 2016 Trump wave. “If you held on in ’16, you’re probably in good shape!” says Vicky Hausman. Christine Bachman, the lawyer and Moms Demand Action activist, points to polling from Virginia in early 2017 showing that some Democratic incumbents, and even some challengers, enjoyed a comfortable lead over their GOP opponents.

“How can we become more nimble about reallocating resources to mid-tier and lower races when those top races become safe wins?” she asks.

David Toscano, the Virginia House Democratic Caucus leader, is familiar with the criticism. When I ask him a version of Bachman’s question—why didn’t the party allocate money away from the incumbents who looked pretty safe early on?—he answers quickly. “Look, you don’t get to 51 without making sure your incumbents are protected. I had other elections in my head,” he adds, meaning the one back in 2009, when Virginia Democrats held 44 seats in the House of Delegates. “We thought we had a run at the majority. But we spread ourselves too thin, and we lost seats that year.”

Lisa Turner isn’t convinced. “You gotta throw away the playbook,” says the former political director of the DLCC, who is now critical of the group and of the official Beltway approach to these races. Turner helped Kelly Fowler survive a fund-raising crisis and stay in the delegate race last August, and she has

April 16, 2018 | 19
criticized Virginia party leaders for overinvesting in their incumbents and a relative handful of newcomers. She wants to see state parties and the DLCC put more people on the ground. “We also need to focus on the mentoring of new candidates. This is not a one-size-fits-all thing.”

Another major lesson from Virginia is that the tactics must evolve with the time. Many of the 2017 candidates say they were given an antiquated template by party leaders: Spend a certain number of hours per day calling donors; invest in polling; pay for mailers. Some were steered to the same vendors for polling, fund-raising, mail, and campaign management. The candidates who balked paid a price.

“The state party was mad I wasn’t using the same vendors,” says Lee Carter. Jennifer Carroll Foy says that she got pushback regarding her decision to go door-to-door and talk issues with the voters directly: “We believed in having conversations at the front door, but the old mentality was about mailers and money.”

Bachman agrees that the focus on “mailers and money” is outdated and should be replaced with more emphasis on digital advertising and social media. “We don’t think [candidates] should have to do so much call time” for money, she says. “We want them out in the district.” Bachman is most excited about “the incredibly diverse creatives” who donated their time and talents to produce video for Virginia’s newcomer candidates—groups like the Arena and the People PAC and One Vote at a Time, all of which are ready to move on to where they’re needed in 2018.

After Trump’s election, “a lot of us said, ‘Holy shit, we may not have a democracy anymore,’” recalls Michael Hirschorn of the People PAC. He began meeting with “journos, creatives, politicians,” talking about what to do in the wake of Trump’s victory. Then Bachman sold him on the importance of state races and getting involved in Virginia. “The candidates are people who tend not to be professional politicians—they have the fewest resources, but your dollar goes so much further...we can do this pretty cheaply,” Hirschorn notes. He connected with Sarah Ullman of One Vote at a Time, who was doing videos for three of the Virginia insurgents. “We told her to stick around a few more days and we would roll some more candidates through the studio.” Together, the groups ultimately produced videos for 19 candidates, including one incumbent.

These video groups made a crucial difference, activists say. “We found that the personal narratives were huge: People struggled with telling their stories,” BlackPACs Shropshire told me. Turner and Fowler, who worked with the Arena, say they were able to cut the videos in different ways for different audiences and use them on social media cheaply and effectively. “It was a phenomenal resource,” Turner says. Hirschorn remains inspired. After Virginia, he realized, “there’s no reason we can’t do this in all 50 states.” Christine Bachman is so sold on the opportunity that she’s gone to work as political director for the People PAC and as an adviser to One Vote at a Time.

A ND SO, ASSUMING THAT DEMOCRATS NEED REASONABLY WELL THE lessons of Virginia, what can they achieve in statehouse races this year, with 6,066 seats in play? For starters, there are about 400 state legislative seats held by Republicans or independents in districts that Hillary Clinton won in 2016. On a more granular level, in six state chambers, Democrats are within 12 seats of wresting control from the GOP. It would take only one pickup each in Colorado, Minnesota, and Maine to flip the State Senates there; three pickups to do the same in New Hampshire, Arizona, and Wisconsin. Most of the marquee groups, including Forward Majority and the DLCC, are targeting Wisconsin and Michigan, at least in part because they so unexpectedly flipped to Trump in 2016. The deliberate erosion of union power makes grassroots Democratic organizing there more crucial, albeit more difficult.

LARGER wins are possible too, activists argue. Many groups, including Forward Majority, are focused on Pennsylvania, where Democrats need 21 seats to take back the State House of Representatives. Already, at least 10 Republicans there have succumbed to the same Trump-related retirement flu we’ve seen in Congress. “It looks like it’s going to be a war zone,” State Representative Gene DiGirolamo, a moderate Republican, told The New York Times in February. There are 19 seats held by Republicans in southeastern Pennsylvania districts that Clinton won; Democrats aren’t likely to pick up all 19, but there are also opportunities in other parts of the state—as the recent upset victory of Democrat Conor Lamb, in a congressional district that went for Trump by 20 points, has shown.

Democrats are also fielding a remarkable slate in North Carolina, where the party has recruited a candidate for every single statehouse seat for the first time in memory. Democrat Roy Cooper won the governorship in 2016, and the party is now focused on at least 60 legislative districts where Cooper either won or came close that are currently represented by Republicans. Of the 170 candidates recruited there, 77 are women and 71 are people of color. “To break the GOP supermajority, we need to pick up either four seats in the House or six seats in the Senate (or both),” says Robert Howard, the state party’s communications director. “To win back the chambers, we need 16 in the House and 11 in the Senate.”

The parallels between North Carolina and Virginia are many. Both states have seen explosive suburban growth due to immigrants, who are turned off by the GOP’s far-right agenda. And both states are now led by popular Democratic governors who are committed to fighting gerrymandering and electing more Democrats to the State Legislature. North Carolina has a similar proportion of African Americans in the electorate, and it also boasts the Rev. William Barber II’s Moral Mondays movement, “a grassroots ecosystem that actually pioneered much of the resistance work we have seen since Trump’s election,” says Bachman, who plans to be active in North Carolina’s statehouse push this year.

State Representative Craig Meyer, who has been in charge of candidate recruitment since 2016, told me: “I’ve been very impressed by the caliber of candidate stepping up this year. Some of them are people who told me in 2016, ‘I’m just not interested in politics; I’m an activist.’” Trump’s election “was a tipping point—I’m finding a lot of women inspired by the Clinton campaign who wanted to do more.” Meyer added that North Carolina’s candidates are diverse not only in terms of race and gender, but in terms of background. They include a statewide Parent-Teacher Association president, a lo-
cal NAACP leader, a Moms Demand Action activist, an opioid-abuse counselor, and a man convicted of armed robbery in his youth who went on to become a businessman and is now a popular small-town mayor.

Another target this cycle will be Georgia, where both Forward Majority and Eric Holder’s National Democratic Redistricting Committee will be active. Assuming that Georgia House of Representatives leader Stacey Abrams, who is black, wins her May primary and becomes the Democratic nominee for governor—she has a tough challenger in Stacey Evans, in a race that has already been racially divisive—the state will certainly be a priority for BlackPAC and Higher Heights, which focuses on the political advancement of black women. Our Revolution, an independent offshoot of Bernie Sanders’s 2016 campaign, plans a big push for Abrams; the group’s director, Nina Turner, helped kick off the Georgia progressive’s campaign back in June of last year. In March, Sarah Ullman of One Vote at a Time began work on videos to capture Abrams’s historic campaign.

Florida, where Democrat Margaret Good won a seat this year in a district that went for Trump by five points, “is probably going to be a multicyle play,” says Daily Kos’s Carolyn Fiddler. But the political calculus in the state has undoubtedly shifted since the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in affluent Parkland. Students left their classmates’ funerals and headed to the State Capitol in Tallahassee, armed with a precocious political sense that the statehouse was where the NRA’s power was greatest. Forward Majority has tagged Florida as a potential priority state; it expects to have more company there now.

But activists see opportunities all over the map. Ohio Democrats announced that they will run candidates in every state legislative district for the first time in six years. In Arizona, the DLCC says, 114 Democrats—including 51 women and 55 people of color—have filed to run for the State Legislature; that number can still climb. In Texas, Democrats will run more legislative candidates than they have since the 1990s, contesting 133 out of 150 State House districts, plus 14 of 15 State Senate districts; among the candidates are more than 80 women. There’s much hope that the state will provide reverse coattails for Democratic Congressman Beto O’Rourke, who is challenging Senator Ted Cruz and is only eight points behind in the latest polls. Forward Majority and Flipppable are both looking to Texas and Georgia as potential priority states.

Even red states that haven’t shown up yet on the heat maps of Democratic activists are fielding promising statehouse slates: Indiana Democrats are running in 84 of 100 legislative districts, a record in this millennium, Mother Jones reports. In Kentucky, over 60 women are running for the House or Senate, according to the state Democratic Party. Contesting 93 of the 100 seats in the lower chamber, Democrats haven’t put up this many candidates in the Bluegrass State since 2000. The party is on the rise even in deep-red states like Alabama in the wake of Doug Jones’s Senate victory: Democrats are running candidates in 74 of the 105 House districts, up from just 56 in 2014.

Writ large, these statehouse races represent not just the chance to control redistricting, or to roll back restrictions on voting rights and women’s health, or to have “reverse coattails” contribute to flipping US House or Senate seats or governor’s races. They also offer an opportunity for a diverse army of progressive reformers to take over the Democratic Party itself. Many of the Democrats’ state-party structures are moribund. In Virginia, women and people of color like Jennifer Carroll Foy, Kelly Fowler, Kathy Tran, and Hala Ayala, and smart Democratic Socialists like Lee Carter, are infusing new political and legislative energy into their caucus. Not only did these new Virginia lawmakers propel the expansion of Medicaid; they also helped push the threshold for felony larceny from $200 to $500; Carroll Foy wanted the limit at $1,000 but praises $500 as a start. Also in February, progressive Democrats bucked their own governor to block the energy titan Dominion from essentially double-dipping when passing on the cost of infrastructure investments to consumers. When it became obvious the Democrats had the votes, Republicans joined them, and the measure passed almost unanimously.

Of course, the final lesson that Virginia has for all of us is this: Every vote counts. Ask Shelly Simonds, the Democrat who tied with incumbent David Yancey last November, only to lose the seat in a bizarre game of chance. Simonds intends to challenge Yancey again, and two black Democrats who also lost after recounts—pastor and educator Joshua Cole, and Air Force veteran and small-business owner Donte Tanner—have announced they’ll run again in 2019. For Virginia Democrats, the work isn’t over—and never will be.

States have long been termed the “laboratories of democracy,” but in the past decade they’ve become an experiment in what happens when democracy withers, overcome by dark money, conservative chicanery, and Democratic passivity. But now the states may be places where democracy comes alive again. Part of this democratic revival has been sparked by the resistance to Trump, but every single state activist I spoke with stressed that what’s really mobilizing their efforts is a focus on local issues. “You only run for these offices because you care about your neighbor,” says North Carolina’s Meyer. In Virginia, progressives and conservatives found common ground on traffic, education issues, even guns—and ultimately compromised on the Medicaid expansion, too. Sanders supporters locked arms with Clinton diehards and put out destructive fires locally. These new activists are reweaving a social fabric frayed by decades of progressive retreat and conservative assault; they are what the Rev. William Barber has called “repairers of the breach.”

Of the 170 candidates recruited in North Carolina, 77 are women and 71 are people of color.
IS NET NEUTRALITY THE SLEEPER ISSUE FOR DEMOCRATS?

Across the country, savvy candidates have started to campaign in favor of a free and open Internet.

JOHN NICHOLS
NET NEUTRALITY MUST BE RESTORED. THAT’S A GIVEN. THE decision in December by the Federal Communications Commission to abolish the First Amendment of the Internet was, in the words of dissenting commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, “not good for consumers. Not good for businesses. Not good for anyone who connects and creates online. Not good for the democratizing force that depends on openness to thrive.”

So, yes, net neutrality must be renewed. But how? Ideally, Congress would pass legislation reversing the FCC’s decision, or a federal court order would overturn it. But that could take time—years, perhaps—and if we’ve learned anything about the digital age, it’s that the future doesn’t wait for Washington to catch up.

So the pressure is now on state officials to take the lead in restoring a free and open Internet. Democratic governors and state legislators, by and large, get this. But like most of their partisan counterparts in Washington, Republicans in the states continue to position themselves on the wrong side of the issue. As errand boys for the corporations that would sacrifice open access on the altar of rank profiteering, Republican governors have already benefited from the money lavished on them and on the Republican Governors Association by the telecommunications conglomerates that hope to subdivide the Internet.

The good news is that even as these GOP governors, attorneys general, and legislators abandon the public interest, the Democrats seeking to replace them are emerging as outspoken champions of net neutrality and of a broader vision for the future of the Internet. This is smart policy and smart politics, as polling suggests that 83 percent of Americans support net neutrality and that the issue is especially important to the young voters the party hopes to mobilize this fall. Democrats in the states are increasingly recognizing that what has historically been seen as a federal matter must now be an issue at every level of American politics.

The role that Congress can play in renewing this country’s commitment to a free and open Internet is reasonably well understood, and the lines of division are clear. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell have shown little inclination to restore net neutrality—but all is not lost in the Senate. Maine Republican Susan Collins broke with her party in January and joined 49 Democrats in supporting a Congressional Review Act resolution sponsored by Massachusetts Democrat Ed Markey. The CRA initiative, which seeks to reverse the FCC’s decision, requires one more supporter for the resolution to pass, and a “One More Vote” campaign to get the next Republican on board has been launched by groups including Fight for the Future and Demand Progress.

This sets the stage not merely for a legislative response but for an electoral game plan. It frames net neutrality as a key issue in the 2018 midterms—something smart candidates like Texas Democrat Beto O’Rourke, who is challenging Senator Ted Cruz, have already recognized. On the campaign trail, O’Rourke has successfully highlighted the difference between himself and Cruz on this issue, going so far as to cut a video targeted at small-business owners, who will be particularly harmed by any narrowing of access to the Internet. “Standing together,” O’Rourke says in the video, “we are more than a match for the corporations and the special interests, and we will be able to restore net neutrality to the Internet, and make sure that we will have an open and free Internet for everyone in this country to use.”

Hopefully, O’Rourke will be proved right. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer have both indicated that digital democracy will be on the agenda in 2019 if Democrats win Congress this year—a tall order, but certainly not an impossible one. And strong votes by Congress, combined with aggressive negotiations with the administration, could tilt the balance back toward digital democracy.

Congressional candidates like Texan Laura Moser—who wrote a primer on net neutrality as part of her bid for a GOP-held seat that Democrats are aiming to flip—have already campaigned aggressively on the issue. Other contenders have been offered a template by Congressional Progressive Caucus member Ro Khanna, a tech-savvy California Democrat who proposes an Internet Bill of Rights. In addition to net neutrality, his platform includes the right to universal access; the right to be free from warrantless metadata collection; the right to disclose the amount, nature, and dates of secret data requests by the government; the right to be fully informed concerning the scope of your data’s use; and the right to be informed when there’s a change of control over your data.

“The reality is that our laws have lagged far behind our technological capabilities,” argues Khanna, who affirmed the importance of net neutrality as a deputy assistant secretary of commerce in the Obama administration. Khanna warns that “Congress has been asleep at the switch” on a host of digital issues.

But no matter what happens on Capitol Hill or in the federal courts, where public-interest groups are challenging the FCC’s ruling, net neutrality must also be an issue in the states. On that front, the states where Dem-
Innovators and small companies depend on an open, neutral Internet for growth and progress. This is not an exchange; it's a human right. A right for users. This will jeopardize economic development and undermine important protections for users. This will threaten the Internet as we know it.

Montana’s Democratic governor, Steve Bullock, isn’t waiting for Congress or the courts. In January, he issued an executive order requiring telecommunications companies that seek to do business with the state to maintain net-neutrality standards. California, Hawaii, New York, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont have made, or are in the process of making, similar moves. In Washington State in early March, legislators approved a sweeping measure that bars telecom firms in the state from impeding or degrading “lawful Internet traffic” and specifically prohibits them from providing faster service for content from companies and campaigns that write bigger checks. This law would be a fine model for Democrats, as well as responsible Republicans and independents, who are running in other states.

Congressman Jared Polis, a tech entrepreneur before he was elected to the House, is running for governor of Colorado with a detailed agenda for expanding access to broadband service. In an op-ed for the alternative Denver weekly newspaper Westword, Polis linked his plan to net neutrality, arguing:

In a state like Colorado, where broadband access is scarce in rural communities, many consumers are lucky to have even one high-speed internet provider available to them. Without net neutrality, these consumers will have nowhere to go if their provider decides to limit access to websites and web-based services.

Rural Coloradans could lose access to telemedicine they rely on for health care if their internet provider chooses to increase costs for these data-intensive services. It would be especially devastating in high-need communities where consumers have few other health-care options. Without net neutrality protections, fewer people would be able to telecommute, clogging up our highways and roads even more.

Michigan Democratic gubernatorial candidate Abdul El-Sayed, a Rhodes scholar and former head of the Detroit Health Department, has also made digital issues one of his campaign’s priorities—as have other contenders in a competitive primary season. On his campaign website, El-Sayed includes the following promises: “Provide high-speed broadband internet to every community in Michigan and protect net neutrality.”

In New Mexico, Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham, who is running for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, issued a statement warning that, “after explicitly ignoring millions of Americans supporting net neutrality, the FCC’s decision to dismantle equal access to the internet undermines important protections for users. This will jeopardize economic growth in New Mexico and across the country, where innovators and small companies depend on an open, free, and fair internet.”

Meanwhile, in Wisconsin, Democratic gubernatorial contender Mike McCabe describes the FCC’s decision as a recipe for “Internet Apartheid” and says: “Not much imagination is required to see how Internet Apartheid would shape our politics once the electoral impact of the digital age reaches full flower. The marketplace of ideas would be further tilted in favor of big-money interests. Citizens or groups without the means to buy top-tier service would be further disadvantaged. Political innovation would be further stifled.”

One of McCabe’s Democratic rivals, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin, has also been an important figure in the national effort to organize municipal leaders in support of net-neutrality. Still another contender, former state Democratic Party chair Matt Flynn, has developed a “21st Century Bill of Rights.” It declares the following:

1. Internet users have the right to a free and open Internet. The State of Wisconsin is obligated to protect Net Neutrality.
2. All Wisconsin citizens have the right to high-speed broadband Internet access.
3. Local communities in Wisconsin have the right to form municipal broadband districts to preserve Net Neutrality, keep prices reasonable, and provide high-speed Internet to those currently without access.
4. Internet users in Wisconsin have the right to digital privacy from state and local government. The government may not access user accounts without just cause.
5. Private individuals in Wisconsin have the right to protect themselves from Internet fraud and unfair practices.
6. Wisconsin citizens have the right to protection from Internet fraud and unfair practices.
7. Wisconsin citizens have the right to free and fair elections, safe from digital interference.
8. The State of Wisconsin has the right and the responsibility to take full measures to protect itself from cyber-attacks.
9. Wisconsin students have the right to computer education to prepare them for the future.
10. Wisconsin citizens have both the right to access an Internet free of censorship and the right to know when information on the Internet is false, misleading, or satirical.

“As our lives have moved increasingly online, we need to enumerate our digital rights,” Flynn says of his effort.

He’s right, not just about net-neutrality but about the broader issue of how to determine our digital destiny. Too many decisions about the role of the Internet in our lives and in our democracy have been made by multinational corporations and unelected (and often conflicted) regulators. The emergence of net-neutrality as an election issue suggests a route by which voters can finally and firmly assert a public interest in the sprawling international computer system that provides the information and opportunities all Americans need.
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in public arsenals for the use of local militias. After all, Daniel Shays almost succeeded in seizing the arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts.

The Second Amendment guarantees a collective right: the right of the people to keep arms in a public place and bear them for the defense of the community. The Constitution says nothing about an individual’s right to own arms. In fact, if there ever had been such a thing as an intellectually honest originalist on the Supreme Court, he would have pointed out that the Bill of Rights is quite explicit in using the terms “person,” “persons,” “owner,” and “the accused” when referring to individual rights. “The right of the people” is a collective right only, as in the First, Second, Fourth, Ninth, and 10th amendments.

Someday the NRAs savage and paranoid 40-year campaign will backfire as the courts—and the people—discover how little relevance the Second Amendment has in our modern crisis of armed violence.

The false dichotomy of pro-gun/anti-gun contributes to a serious polarization that keeps the movement toward a sane gun policy in this country paralyzed. This movement needs gun owners and non-gun owners to join together in supporting laws that can genuinely reduce gun tragedies. I would have preferred that Pollitt, instead of saying “...and work like heck to elect anti-gun candidates,” had said: “to elect candidates who support reasonable, sensible gun legislation.”

Virginia Classick
Duarte, Calif.

Katha Pollitt has become my favorite writer, and her column on guns really hit home with me. The only “common-sense” answer to gun violence is to reduce the number of deadly weapons; pass a ban on assault rifles, high-capacity magazines, and large-caliber ammunition; and begin a new dialogue on power and violence. I too have become tired of progressives who defer to the NRA in an attempt to woo people who will probably never change their minds or their votes. Except for Hillary Clinton, the Democrats have not aggressively addressed gun violence or the astonishing loss of access to abortion. When they do, maybe they will start winning their races again.

Sally J. Keller
Toledo, Ohio

If the DNC had a spine, much less a brain attached to that spine, it would recognize that running candidates on a platform that is unequivocally opposed to the AR-15 and other instruments of war and terrorism would work beautifully. This defense of assault weapons is a giant Republican Achilles’ heel laid out for the Democrats to slash to ribbons. But sadly, they probably won’t. “Let the kids do it,” indeed. Well, thank God for them. I and my fellow left-minded adults have long been pretty pathetic on this particular issue.

Duncan Forster

Thank you for this. I agree wholeheartedly! I am so tired of this obsession with owning weapons.

Diane Payne

I am so proud and happy that the youth of today are taking this issue into their hands. They are not corrupted by the idiocy of the American public. Their beliefs are still close to who they really are, and they act from a sincere spot. I support the youth, and I am grateful that they are rationally effective.

Laurel Podrasky
In September 1865, Fyodor Dostoevsky was living in Wiesbaden, Germany, and couldn’t pay his rent. A string of gambling losses had left him near financial ruin, a familiar circumstance for Dostoevsky (as dramatized in his novel The Gambler). Owing a considerable amount of money to his landlord, he hoped an advance for a new novel might shore his fortunes up. Writing to Mikhail Katkov, the editor of the Russian Herald, Dostoevsky asked for 300 rubles, promising in return the manuscript that would become Crime and Punishment. To make his case, he explained its plot to Katkov:

It is a psychological account of a crime. The action is topical, set in the current year. A young student of lower-middle-class origin, who has been expelled from the university, and who lives in dire poverty, succumbs—through thoughtlessness and lack of strong convictions—to certain strange, “incomplete” ideas that are floating in the air, and decides to get out of his misery once and for all.

“Floating in the air” were a set of ideas, imported from Western Europe, that would come to define the tenets of Russian radical thought in the 1860s. Russian students like Crime and Punishment’s

Jennifer Wilson is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania.

Crime and Punishment
By Fyodor Dostoevsky
Translated by Michael Katz
Liveright. 624 pp. $35

Books & the Arts.

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM ROBINSON
Dostoevsky wrote *Crime and Punishment* amid an unprecedented upsurge in violent crime that was sweeping St. Petersburg. Following the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (just five years before the novel’s publication), the then-Russian capital saw a massive influx of people seeking work. Severe overcrowding and limited opportunities for employment left many in a state of desperation. As Katz writes in his introduction, “The murder rate rose, and the Russian press reported on horrendous crimes in graphic detail. Drunkenness, prostitution, disease, unemployment, family breakups, and abandoned children all came to typify the nature of Russian reality in the 1860s.”

The novel certainly depicts the oppressive sense of corruption and misery plaguing St. Petersburg, but it takes special care to castigate those eager to exploit the victims of these desperate circumstances (most notably the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna). Indeed, an onslaught of everyday economic violence (the denial of loans, the shame and humiliation inflicted on those in debt, the indignity of having to beg, and so forth) forms so painful a backdrop that the murder sometimes gets lost in the larger canvas of depravity that Dostoevsky paints in *Crime and Punishment*.

Despite his tendency to rage at the amount of cruelty and greed to be found in 19th-century St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky reserves a special anger in this novel for those who talked about the economy in terms abstract and thus callous—the followers, as he puts it, “of the latest ideas.” Shortly after the novel begins, Raskolnikov wanders into a tavern. He has just completed a trial run of the murder, visiting the pawnbroker and taking note of her apartment, its layout, her habits. An intoxicated older man, a government clerk named Marmeladov, approaches Raskolnikov and begins to tell him his life’s story, particularly the woes he has brought upon his family as a result of his alcoholism and financial irresponsibility. (His daughter Sonya works as a prostitute to support the family.) Having asked a man who lives in his building, a young intellectual committed to the “latest ideas” named Lebezyatnikov, for a loan, our clerk is coldly refused with the explanation from his neighbor that “in our era compassion has even been prohibited by science and that this is already being done in England, where they’ve developed political economy.”

Dostoevsky’s treatment of utilitarianism and social progressives is hyperbolically ungenerous (it is also suggested that Mr. Lebezyatnikov beats Marmeladov’s wife), and many radicals, not surprisingly, were unhappy to see someone of their political persuasion depicted as so cruel and unfelt in the face of suffering. Ultimately, though, Dostoevsky was concerned not with debasing any single idea, but rather with exposing how easy it is to use lofty theories to mask self-interest, and how quickly mere concepts—unlike convictions—could shift and evolve. After speaking with Marmeladov in the tavern, Raskolnikov is said to have “a strange idea” emerge “in his head, like a baby chick pecking its way out of its egg.” The next day he successfully carries out his crime, and thus begins the true drama of the novel: the slow revelation that there was no one idea “pecking” away in Raskolnikov’s head, but a confused chorus of ideas—far more noise than notion.

While it ponders larger questions of sin, free will, and forgiveness, *Crime and Punishment* is unmistakably a novel about what it means to break the law, something Dostoevsky had experienced firsthand in his late 20s—in part because he too had once been a follower of the “latest ideas.” In 1849, Dostoevsky was tried for and convicted of crimes against the state. Some two years earlier, he had become involved in an intellectual society devoted to the utopian ideals of the socialist Charles Fourier. Dostoevsky was drawn to the group, known as the Petrashevsky Circle, largely for the principled stance it took against the institution of serfdom. When the group’s activities were discovered, its members were arrested and then sentenced to death by firing squad. Just seconds before Dostoevsky...
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expected to die, however, as the officers were steadying their weapons, a last-minute order came from the czar, commuting the sentence to hard labor as a supposed “act of mercy.” Dostoyevsky spent the next four years in a katorga (penal camp) in Omsk, Siberia.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in subsequent years Dostoyevsky was fascinated by the judiciary; throughout his career, he devoted a considerable amount of time to attending trials in person and reading about them in the news. (A later novel, The Possessed, was inspired by a court case where a group of nihilists were put on trial for murdering a member of their organization.) He conversed with lawyers about the nature of guilt and innocence and debated court decisions in one of the journals he edited, Diary of a Writer. At the center of his writings on crime, particularly in the Diary, was a frustration with defense attorneys, who were increasingly winning acquittals for their clients by pointing to “environmental” factors like a poor upbringing. To Dostoyevsky, such arguments left no room for questions of conscience and morality and undermined an individual’s free will, all of which he viewed as a rejection of Christian principles.

The murderers in his novels, therefore, are often misguided, confused, full of convoluted passions and even more convoluted ideas about the world. Besides Crime and Punishment, Dostoyevsky wrote three more novels in which murder plays a major role—The Idiot, The Possessed, and The Brothers Karamazov—and in which the crime becomes a way of indexing the stages of a character’s moral degradation and, likewise, absolution. For Dostoyevsky, murder provided the most compelling lens through which to understand a human being’s capacity for both destruction and redemption. In depicting the taking of a human life, Dostoyevsky could bring the full spectrum of lived experience rapidly into focus.

When we first meet him in Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov lives in a state of crushing poverty and gets by on meager translation work. His situation deeply grieves his loving mother and sister; the latter is even more devastated (and British) a style. (The critic Korney Chukovsky wrote that Garnett distorted the “volcano” that was Dostoyevsky’s “nervous trembling” style, sanitizing it into “a smooth lawn mowed in the English manner.”) But Katz has added something with his own translation: Hoping to accentuate what he calls the novel’s “richness of registers or tones,” he pays specific attention to how Dostoyevsky’s characters alternate between religious solemnity and drunken vulgarity. The new work also has an American simplicity and informality that sets it apart from Ready’s more elegant British rendering: Where Ready has Raskolnikov describe the pawnbroker as “positively vicious to all and sundry,” Katz elects for the sparser “causing harm to everyone.”

Perhaps because I’m an American and Ready’s translation presents a modicum of foreignness to me, I feel it better captures the heightened reality of the novel. But it may also be that, in an era marked by illogical actions and self-destructive decisions, a Dostoyevsky translation like Katz’s—one that feels so pedestrian and familiar—is what’s needed for us to recognize how much like, not unlike, Dostoyevsky’s world is to our own.
STILL A LONG TIME COMING

Selma and the unfulfilled promise of civil rights

by ELIAS RODRIQUES

What history of the civil-rights movement should we tell today? How do the political gains of an era marked by hope and possibility look from our contemporary vantage point? Our conditions, after all, seem to call for pessimism. Like Ronald Reagan before him, Donald Trump has pandered to law enforcement. Like Bill Clinton, he has justified attacks on the American welfare state that disproportionately hurt people of color. Like Richard Nixon, he rode into the White House with a call for law and order, and he and his cabinet hope to dismantle the few anti-racist protections left intact.

While researched and written before Trump’s election, Karlyn Forner’s Why the Vote Wasn’t Enough for Selma, a history of the Alabama city and surrounding Dallas County, seems to appropriately reflect the tenor of our time. Her book begins with the economic distress faced by many African-American residents of Selma, who today constitute almost 80 percent of the city’s population (approximately 19,000 people). According to the Census Bureau’s 2016 estimates, the median household income in Selma is $23,000; 41 percent of its population lives below the poverty line; and only 17 percent hold bachelor’s degrees. This bleak portrait is a far cry from the popular image of Selma—the site of the heroic march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, a major turning point in the fight for the vote—as a symbol of the civil-rights movement’s triumphs. How could the town whose name became a rallying cry for the federal protection of black people now be home to such intense poverty?

To answer that question, Forner goes as far back as 1901 to offer a long view of the civil-rights movement and to examine both its achievements and the white backlash that counteracted its gains. She maps the transformation of black tenant farmers into low-wage industrial workers and the unemployed, and tracks how local white government officials and businessmen adapted to

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Why the Vote Wasn’t Enough for Selma
By Karlyn Forner
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these changes in order to find new means of profiting from African-American labor while reasserting the South's racial hierarchies. “Whichever way you look at it,” Forner writes, “the political and economic history of Dallas County doesn’t offer much in the way of prosperity, harmony, and success.”

As a result, Forner’s history is one in which the gains made by the civil-rights movement are almost always outflanked by white supremacists. When African Americans assaulted the racial hierarchy, white citizens time and again shifted their battle to another front where they held the advantage. In response to black residents advocating for desegregation, white citizens attacked them on economic grounds. In response to black residents striking for higher wages, the local government sent in the police. In response to federal voting protections, the local government drew new electoral districts. The rapidly changing terrain of racist and anti-racist politics makes Forner’s book a dizzying read. But by illustrating the protean changes of institutional racism, she captures why systemic change rather than sporadic intervening is the only means for uprooting those institutions that still discriminate against African Americans.

F orner’s history begins in the late 19th century, when poor whites and black Republicans allied to vote for the Populists. Afraid of losing political control, Alabama’s white Democrats called a constitutional convention in 1901. At the convention, they drafted and ratified a state constitution that granted county registrars the power to reject voters and that produced several requirements for voting (including literacy tests and poll taxes). That such requirements might disenfranchise poor whites was less of a concern than the risks of losing control of the state. “I do not propose to put my people under the hand of Negro rule,” said Dallas County attorney Henry F. Reese, even if a poll tax “might disfranchise one or two bastards in the white counties of Alabama.”

Legal and political control reinforced the already racialized distribution of labor. In Dallas County, cotton was king, providing jobs for most residents. At the turn of the century, white landlords owned the cotton farms, other affluent white people worked as merchants or ran stores in Selma, and poor white people worked in factories that produced cottonseed oil, textiles, and other goods. But it was the county’s black people who worked the cotton fields as tenant farmers.

Tenant farming, like the voting laws, was a form of white power as much as an economic system. Under it, a landlord provided land, tools, and a home on credit. To repay their debts, tenant farmers provided labor, crops, or the money earned from selling cotton to the white landholders. Because most tenant farmers couldn’t read, they couldn’t debate the terms of their contracts; nor could they dispute any claims by their landlord that the farmers never paid back what they owed.

This unfair system of exchange was reinforced by violence. If the farmers tried to better their situation or resist paying off disputed debts, the police and lynching mobs attacked them. If a farmer committed a minor crime, plantation owners could pay their fines and force them to work for free. Four decades after Emancipation, it seemed that there was little escape for the tenant farmer. “Never did a state of serfdom more truly exist in Russia,” wrote a contributor to the black Montgomery newspaper The Emancipator, “than in some parts of Alabama.”

The tenant system began to break down not for political reasons, but for ecological ones, when the boll weevil entered the United States. A quarter-inch-long beetle that feeds on cotton, the boll weevil had already decimated cotton crops west of Alabama by 1910. When the pest arrived in Dallas County in 1913, the federal government urged farm owners to reduce the production of cheap cotton and more food. Many landlords converted their land for food production, including cattle raising, while others provided their tenants with less credit; both caused tenants to leave.

In the midst of this blight, many farmers moved north, and the loss of so many laborers fueled a panic throughout the South. In response, Selma police arrested at least eight men accused of being labor recruiters for northern factories in 1917. A year later, the city passsed laws prohibiting unemployment, for which it prosecuted only black people.

The cataclysmic year of 1929 made matters worse in Dallas County. In March, the Cahaba River flooded, washing away much of the area’s crops. The stock market crashed seven months later, leaving even more tenants unemployed or faced with fluctuating currency values and little aid. Although Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal guaranteed certain wages for those enrolled in its job-creation programs, local organizations refused to pay black workers at rates comparable to white ones. An even more egregious misuse of federal funds occurred when the newly created Agricultural Adjustment Administration provided local organizations the funds to convert cotton land into food farms, and they in turn paid white landowners for land that black tenant farmers worked, leaving many farm workers homeless and without any relief. When the remaining tenants went on strike to raise their wages, the landlords and the police assaulted, arrested, and killed them. Tenant farmers’ conditions were so dire that Amelia Platt, the federal agent who worked with them during the Great Depression, once said: “I had read in school that Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. I believed in this until I went to Dallas County, Alabama.”

Shortly thereafter, the United States entered World War II. As in the past, the government subsidized food production to meet the war’s demands. This, combined with mechanical cotton harvesting that had become cheaper and more efficient, greatly reduced the need for tenant farmers. Many left the South; those who remained in Dallas County found low-paying jobs or day labor on the farms on which they had once lived, or worked at the recently constructed Craig Air Force Base. The local Chamber of Commerce lured new industries to the region with promises of cheap resources, cheap labor, and an anti-union climate. But with segregated schooling and limited access to vocational training, African Americans wound up working “the lowest-paid, hardest, and dirtiest jobs” in these new industrial sectors. Once again, many left the region entirely. Given their minimal education and perpetual debt—to say nothing of the effect upon the body of years of cotton farming and malnutrition—the displaced had little means of supporting themselves in the cities to which they had migrated.

Such was the state of affairs when the civil-rights struggle reached Selma. In the 1940s, Congress and the federal courts attacked laws that prevented black soldiers from voting or that segregated interstate buses, along with other bulwarks of the Jim Crow regime. The demand to desegregate schools and public spaces led white Selmans to improve black infrastructure. Using federal funding, they expanded black schools’ curriculums in 1940 and began building a new high school in 1944. “If we are to maintain the principle of segregation, desired by both races,” read one editorial in the Selma Times-Journal, “we must maintain comparative educational facilities.”

But coupled with these improvements was the ominous threat of violence. In 1953, two women claimed a black man had broken into their homes and attempted to rape...
them. Describing the period in his autobiography, *Black in Selma*, attorney J.L. Chestnut recalled his uncle saying, “The police were getting five or six calls a night—‘There’s a nigger in my house! I saw him! I saw him!’—from white women all over Selma.” In response, the cops arrested William Fikes and interrogated him for nearly a full day before he confessed. At trial, an all-white jury convicted Fikes and sentenced him to 99 years in prison. The NAACP intervened and secured a retrial, but the jurors again found him guilty.

The white backlash persisted throughout the decade. Six months after the Supreme Court overturned segregated education with its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, white citizens formed the Citizens’ Council of Dallas County and exerted economic pressure on black people advocating for desegregation or unionization by threatening their jobs and denying them credit. Rather than employing violent policing—the target of NAACP lawyers—white Selmians now aimed to control black residents through the wage.

In the face of this economic counter-revolution, black Selma intensified its resistance to Jim Crow in the 1960s. When state troopers killed a black man in nearby Perry County in 1965, Selma’s civil-rights activists—now backed by outside organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—unified to march together in protest. After crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, named for a former Confederate brigadier general and grand dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan, the marchers encountered a phalanx of state troopers, local police, and deputized forces who ordered them to disperse. When the protesters refused, they were teargassed and beaten; news cameras captured the brutality, which was then broadcast to the nation. Lyndon Johnson watched the bloody footage from the White House; one week later, he delivered a televised address in which he decried the violent denial of the vote and spoke of a new voting-rights bill. Five months later, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act. Black Selma, it turned out, had changed not only Dallas County but the country.

Although civil-rights activism flourished for a moment in Selma, the movement’s victories did not have an immediate effect on the city. In the ensuing months, black Selmians attempted to use the vote in their battle against the white-run local government. But the city’s influential white citizens allowed the election of a small number of black representatives in 1972—enough to forestall federal intervention, while preventing black people from gaining enough seats to effect any significant change.

At the same time, the local government used federal funding from Johnson’s War on Poverty programs to reassert the city’s racial hierarchy. Selma’s white-led Economic Opportunity Board distributed $6.5 million in federal funds on the basis of race. Black women were trained in domestic work; black men were paid to load the garbage trucks that white men drove; and so on. In so doing, the board ensured that black people continued to receive much lower wages than poor whites. And wherever the local leaders did not control the distribution of funds, they worked to undermine black economic self-reliance. For instance, the federal government directly supported poor Dallas County residents by funding the Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association, which used the money to help mostly black farmers buy supplies and market their crops. In response, local banks refused to provide credit. When the farmers’ association persevered, state troopers stopped its trucks from delivering goods, keeping them idling until the July heat ruined their produce. Even if one brackets the historian Elizabeth Hinton’s argument that the War on Poverty laid the foundation for mass incarceration, Johnson’s programs failed even as they were unfolding: Nothing would improve for Selma’s black residents, precisely because these programs did not overturn white control of the city’s government.

Decades of underfunded educational systems also caught up with black Selmians, who struggled as the city’s economy changed. Local low-skill industries left Selma because its low wages couldn’t compete with the even lower wages in Mexico and China, and the city’s de facto segregated schools ensured that higher-skill industries would never come there. As the ’70s progressed, Craig Air Force Base closed, and several retail businesses soon followed suit. At the same time, gerrymandered local districts and low voter turnout prevented African Americans from holding a majority on the county’s most powerful governing bodies, providing little ability to allocate the meager local funds for relief to the growing number of black unemployed.

After years of lawsuits against discriminatory election districts, black Dallas County residents finally gained a majority on the County Commission in 1988, but electing more black representatives could not undo the cumulative effect of years of racist policies. When the 1996 welfare bill required recipients to meet work requirements, black Selmians were forced to search for jobs in a county whose systematic discrimination meant that there were none to be found. “Politics alone,” Forner notes, “could not fix segregated schools, drugs, scarce and inadequate jobs, and state and federal governments uninterested in pursuing policies aimed at economic justice for all residents.”

F orner’s detailed portrait of reactionary white politics is so powerful that, by the end, it feels like a totality, ready for every challenge. When the boll weevil isn’t destroying black people’s livelihoods, federal intervention is. When the federal government begins supporting black residents, the local police swoop in. When the police are not attacking black citizens, the Citizens’ Council is firing them. And when local governing
bodies are not attacking them, the economic system is starving them. It is not that black Selmians lost every battle—they earned the right to vote, elected local black politicians, and changed the school-board structure to represent their interests—so much as that those gains seem outpaced by the war’s casualties.

This vision of Alabama history is depressing, even tragic, but it can help to reinvigorate our thinking about racial justice in the future. Forner persuasively demonstrates that the economic plight of many black Americans is the direct result of years of racist policies, global labor changes, and a federal government refusing to protect its citizens. Her book reminds us that anything less than a total and complete commitment from the federal government to end institutionalized racism simply leaves in place some problems of the past and enables new and different forms of dispossession to take root.

By painting this stark picture, Forner also challenges the conservative uses of civil-rights history. Following in the footsteps of Nikhil Singh and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, she shows how the abbreviated history of civil rights, which begins with the protests of the 1950s and ends with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, can deceptively suggest lasting progress by excluding the longer history of reaction. What Forner’s narrative reminds us is that, for many black Americans, the vote was not enough—in fact, for all its achievements, the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s was not enough. What was and still is needed is not simply the vote or local political representation, she argues, but “economic opportunity and independence, quality education, and hope for a better life...equity in jobs, loans, and land.” Only large-scale social change can provide these kinds of improvements.

And yet the advantages of this book are also its limits. History as tragedy all too frequently sees violence as the climax and ignores the experience of life after injury. In Forner’s book, we read many narratives of dispossession, yet we do not read an in-depth portrait of living without work until late in the book. Further, we rarely read about what it feels like to live with the memory of violence and where people found joy in the face of it. This is especially disappointing given that Karlyn Forner has spent so much time in Selma. But after such a strong first book, I enthusiastically await her next, when she might again pick up many of these threads.

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EVERYTHING’S GONNA BE FINE

Rejjie Snow’s borderless music

by BRIANA YOUNGER

From U2’s rock anthems and Enya’s smoky dirges to Snow Patrol’s post-Britpop, Ireland, Scotland, and Northern Ireland have produced some noteworthy musicians whose sounds have become staples in the United States: It’s hard not to immediately associate the TV show Grey’s Anatomy with Snow Patrol’s “Chasing Cars” (2006), or any sorrowful event with Enya’s “Only Time” (2000). But despite all the artists who have crossed over and all the genres they have influenced, hip-hop hasn’t been so lucky—that is, until Rejjie Snow.

Born and raised in Dublin, the 24-year-old rapper has become Ireland’s most popular hip-hop export. (The trio Hare Squead, whose contagious “Herside Story” was adapted for GoldLink’s 2017 album At What Cost, isn’t far behind.) Snow began garnering attention in 2011, back when he was recording under the moniker Lecs
Luther. His breakout track, “Dia Dhuí”—an Irish greeting—was a forceful introduction, all tongue-twisting syllables and nimble flow. The timing made him sound like a long-lost member of Odd Future, the collective whose hype was reaching a fever pitch around the same time. Snow’s 2013 EP, Rejovich, a grim and cacophonous project that wore its MF Doom influence proudly, contributed to his rapidly growing buzz and had fans anxious for more music. Released on February 16, Snow’s debut studio album, Dear Annie, has been four years in the making. Here he presents a clear improvement on his earlier releases, a fully realized set of songs complete with a conceptual outline.

There’s not much on Dear Annie that would immediately suggest Snow’s nationality. The cover features a redheaded girl in a lush green field—apparently an old photo of a friend’s mom. Snow’s accent peaks through on occasion, but the album largely sounds borderless. That an Irish rapper has been embraced by a sizable US audience is a testament to hip-hop’s cultural omnipresence; that it took this long is a testament to hip-hop’s cultural omnipresence; that it took this long is a testament to Snow’s national identity.

At an ambitious 20 tracks, Dear Annie has very little fat and an abundance of versatility. Taking its cues from jazz, funk, and various eras of hip-hop—especially the fusion of N.E.R.D., in addition to its Odd Future–like outsider approach—the album chronicles the decay of a romantic relationship. On several of the songs, Snow’s baritone makes even the most upbeat jam sound like a quiet storm. “Egyptian Luvr,” the lead single, is the peak of this effect: Kaytranada’s smooth disco production provides a discordant space for Snow to mourn his relationship. “I want you to stay / Forever,” he sings alongside Dana Williams, who lends her satiny soul to three of the album’s tracks, before suggesting that they “Leave it in the past.”

But Snow brings so much more to the table than just pop music’s favorite lyrical inspiration. Questions of death and spirituality show up often on the album: “And when I fly myself to heaven, gates will open for me / I’ll be with brothers I no longer have praying for me / I still believe in Jesus Christ, but what’s the point in mourning?” he wonders on “Oh No!” “Room 27” pairs loneliness and morbid thoughts of joining the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin in the so-called 27 Club with twinkling synths and Williams’s breezy vocals, to mind-bending effect. It’s one of the album’s standouts (and provides a trace of the darker-hued rhymes that earned Snow the spotlight in the first place).

“The Rain” is similarly bleak, this time backed by frequent Chance the Rapper collaborator Cam O’bi’s piano-driven production. Snow’s voice is well suited for lyrics like “my actions / Keep on haunting me, my / Demons are my bitch when I sleep,” his cadence staggering each line into the next. Much like Williams with her appearances, O’bi offers the song its only hint of light in a pleading hook: “Just one of them days when the rain falls down / Wash my tears away.”

Dear Annie isn’t all thunderstorms, though. The whimsical “Charlie Brown” is a remake of the hit “Steady Song” by the Irish funk-rock outfit Republic of Loose. It’s a lively nod to Snow’s background, but even for listeners who don’t know its source material, the absurd lyrics and feel-good synth-and-guitar bounce make for a memorable moment of respite. “Greatness,” meanwhile, is a heartfelt tribute to Snow’s mother and offers the best picture of who he is and where he came from. He raps about his upbringing (Sisqó and Sega Genesis get name-checked) and acknowledges that his mother has always counted as his anchor, his “lifeline.” The production, courtesy of Kendrick Lamar collaborator Rahki, leaves Dear Annie ending on a note of uplift. The album’s final words: “Everything’s gonna be fine.”

On a Sentence by Fernanda Melchor

¿Qué es lo más cabrón que te ha pasado en la vida? The most fucked-up thing to happen to me?
Addled by busyness, I crumpled my life and let it drop and then I outlived my life, rocking on my misery like a cypress in the wind. I watched stars emerge from a black egg. Lucidity of loss. Someone came to tell me the spider vibrating on its long legs in the ceiling corner over my desk does not exist now. It is wedged between the violent uninterruptedness of one single day and the void I discovered inside myself. Forehead tautening with self-pity. I said, You think you know me, but you don’t know me from Adam’s goat. And she said, I do, and you are one and the same thing.
Early on in the first episode of *Atlanta’s* new season, we’re treated to a kind of fable. Earn (Donald Glover) has just told his friend Darius (Lakeith Stanfield) that his parents are going on a trip to Florida. “Make sure you tell ’em to watch out for Florida Man,” Darius replies.

“What’s Florida Man?”

Darius is incredulous that Earn’s never heard of him. “Florida Man is responsible for a large percentage of abnormal incidents that occur in Florida,” he tells Earn (and us). “Think of him as an alt-right Johnny Appleseed. No one knows his true identity, date of birth, what he looks like. That’s why headlines always say ‘Florida Man:’ ‘Florida Man Shoots Unarmed Black Teenager.’ ‘Florida Man Bursts Into Ex’s Delivery Room and Fights New Boyfriend as She’s Giving Birth.’ ‘Florida Man Steals a Car and Goes to Checkers.’ ‘Florida Man Beats a Flamingo to Death.’ ‘Florida Man Found Eating Another Man’s Face.’”

As Darius recounts each of Florida Man’s exploits, we get nightmarishly vivid cutaways to a man in a yellow trucker cap, his face not fully visible, performing them. Darius ends the speech on a note of stoner paranoia: “Him, the state government, in fucking cahoots.”

“Why would anyone even do that?” Earn asks.

“To prevent black people from coming to and/or registering to vote in Florida, Earn,” Darius answers, as if his friend has missed the most obvious of connections.

“This scene isn’t typical of *Atlanta*—indeed, part of the joke here is the usually laconic Darius delivering such a long monologue to begin with—but it reflects something of the show’s ambition and its variety of registers. The scene is funny, surreal, frightening, and closely observed, all at the same time.

“Florida Man” is a meme borrowed from Twitter; it may be that Darius has seen the joke account of that name and taken it for reality. Then again, it is a kind of reality: The headlines that the account gathers are all real, even if they obviously don’t refer to the same man. In that sense, “Florida Man” really is someone to watch out for, and while Darius’s conspiracy theory about him is ridiculous, it’s not as ridiculous as it ought to be—or as it would

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"Come on!"
have seemed in September 2016, when Atlanta premiered.

Atlanta was created by Donald Glover, who also stars as Earn, a Princeton dropout who is struggling to make a living managing his cousin Fred's rap career. (Alfred goes by the name Paper Boi.) The show is ostensibly a sitcom—the episodes last half an hour, and there are always jokes—but individual scenes have an unsettling unpredictability that floats free of genre: At any given moment, Atlanta can feel like a crime show, a family drama, a Southern Gothic horror story, or sketch comedy.

Glover has described Atlanta as “Twin Peaks for rappers,” and while that somewhat overstates its strangeness, it isn’t totally off. Season one featured a black Justin Bieber and an invisible car, among other surrealist grace notes. In one of my favorite moments, a promoter Earn has been trying to track down disappears into a secret revolving door in the wall of a nightclub. It’s a great trick, and an apt visual metaphor for the show’s willingness to fake us out and keep us off-balance.

Atlanta’s second batch of 10 episodes has been given the subtitle Robbin’ Season, which, as Darius explains, refers to the period just before Christmas when crime in the city begins to rise. The show’s writers have said that Robbin’ Season was structured as a longer narrative, though the first three episodes (the only ones I’ve seen so far) all feel relatively self-contained.

The new episodes are unified, though, by a greater sense of danger than was present in the show’s first season. Each of the first three features guns prominently, though they don’t always go off; the premiere begins with a heist at a fast-food restaurant, which is shot with real tension. Characters who at first seem purely comic—like the clean-living rapper Clark County (RJ Walker), who hawks chocolate drink in TV commercials (“We drinkin’ Yoo-hoo like it’s dirty Sprite”)—turn out to have a violent dark side. The comedian Katt Williams has a surprisingly moving turn in the first episode as Earn’s Uncle Willie, a frustrated, defeated man with a chip on his shoulder and an alligator in his bathroom.

The white world, and the menace it represents, feels more present, too. Florida Man’s insane violence—and, implicitly, Donald Trump’s insane governance—haunts the relatively safe and self-sufficient black community of Atlanta. Racism might take the form of a microaggression, a suspicious look, or a physical assault. Earn and Paper Boi visit a Spotify-like music-streaming company where they’re viewed with condescension by the all-white staff. Earn’s attempts to spend a $100 bill result in a series of public humiliations. A tearful white woman recites Paper Boi’s “disgusting” lyrics (“I still might have to slap a trick / Shout-out Colin Kaepernick”) into her vlog, hinting at some sort of conservative backlash to come.

It’s too soon to tell exactly where Atlanta: Robbin’ Season is headed, and the truth is that it doesn’t really need to go anywhere; it already is somewhere. The show has a sense of place and tone you hardly ever see on television, for which credit should go not only to Glover but to Hiro Murai, who directs almost every episode. Not to mention the city of Atlanta itself—increasingly a center of film and television production, as well as a longtime hub of the black middle class—a setting that helps to unify the show’s whimsical twists and turns into something coherent. The place has, as Darius would put it, a vibe.

And then there are the actors. The entire ensemble cast is extraordinary—Brian Tyree Henry’s quiet, measured performance as Paper Boi is a particular wonder—but Glover’s charisma is key to making the show work. On paper, Earn is a somewhat dour, passive character: He spends a lot of scenes scowling and looking frustrated, as if there’s something he wants to say that he knows he can’t. But Glover renders him totally sympathetic even in his stifled moments, and when he does turn on the charm—as in his scenes with Zazie Beetz, who plays Vanessa, Earn’s former girlfriend and the mother of his daughter—you begin to see how this guy could be a plausible heir to Billy Dee Williams, whom he’ll succeed as Lando Calrissian in a forthcoming Star Wars film.

Glover’s burgeoning movie career means we’ve had to endure a bit of a wait for the second season of Atlanta, and there’s no telling how long it will be before the next one. So we’d better all savor it while it’s here; shows this inventive and surprising are rare indeed.

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Sunset Pool

Things are where we wanted them to be. These cutouts—blue—on the city, spread Like holes in the folds of a map: I walk Into them, little frames of a sequence In which I am a person touring swimming Pools. Perhaps I feel something pass. Perhaps I’ve begun to gather something That seems elusive only because I can’t Turn away. At the base of this pool, empty But for a pile of leaves and Robert Moses Sliding out from under my reach—as I fall— Slipping pool lights into my eyes: like crystals, They color inside themselves, a blue which Clears the second the light leaves them.

SAMUEL AMADON
Puzzle No. 3461

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

1 Bowing abjectly, Republican breaks in support of the government (9)
6 Almost make a connection involving love? That could make your baby cry (5)
9 No answer for fan of chocolate and fruit (7)
10 Gasp mantra when infused with a bit of Holy Spirit (7)
11 Cheap yet extravagant accessory for a pirate (8)
12 Audio equipment restored after removing its casing and rearranging the parts (6)
14 Hunk of dust in the wind (4)
15 Color of gym ball frantically grabbed by libertine (5,4)
17 College administrator holding inappropriate idyls is one of seven (6,3)
19 The Chosen includes “...The Chosen includes...” (4)
21 Live-in compadres I’d evicted (6)
22 Nightingale in a Tuscan city (8)
24 Favoring the most high-class tree that exists within (7)

25 Naturalist returns, grasping container for coal or rare metallic element (7)
26 European leather with the second letter doubled? (5)
27 Former talk-show host turned and perpetrated an act of vandalism, like Long John Silver (3-6)

DOWN
1 Walked back and forth, taking a taste of kipper-like sardines (6)
2 Musical composition, or bird of prey with mellifluous sounds (10,5)
3 Mug’s score in football enthraling most of West Asian capital (7)
4 Evil one’s frisky new shirt (10)
5 Sense with clairvoyance and ultimately telepathy (4)
6 Have a conversation and, upon reflection, rent property (7)
7 I’ll see you and Gore lean over man with rule that can often help in solving a puzzle (7,8)
8 Jazz band backing away from extremely regrettable tonsorial choice (8)
13 At first, you land awkwardly in vessel, more or less (2,3,5)
16 Losers do badly, not raising a stink (8)
18 Tech opponent did wreck inside of instrument (7)
19 Nobleman overlooks UK officer in piercing locale (7)
20 Appeared to 5 a drug (6)
23 It can be found in a magazine: “How one tends to do things in the morning” (4)

ACROSS
7 NO(J)EL
8 SH + ANGRIL(y) + A + VIS(U)RE + L
9 J [O]RES + EX - AC + RED + COW
10 LIGHT + BLUE 17 hidden
11 F - RIDGE 21 T + H + RICE
12 A + STROTURF
13 ELUZOZA (real anagram)
14 IN + V(ICE)
15 NO(V)EL
16 S(TROT)URF
17 MUSICAL COMPOSITION, OR BIRD OF PREY WITH MELLIFLOUS SOUNDS
18 SCIENTIFIC
19 WATER (anagram)
20 A S(TROT)URF
21 S(TROT)URF
22 O(BE)SE

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3460

ACROSS 7 NO(J)EL
8 SH + ANGRIL(y) + A + VIS(U)RE + L
9 J [O]RES + EX - AC + RED + COW
10 LIGHT + BLUE 17 hidden
11 F - RIDGE 21 T + H + RICE
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