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Let's agree: Jerry Brown deserves real praise for his role as a first-generation climate leader. As California’s governor, he helped shepherd the state to a place near the top of the green league standings, by reducing the demand for energy and producing more of that energy with renewables.

But let's add: Global warming is a timed test, one that now demands stronger responses. And the governor is flunking that test. Yes, it seems unfair to rag on Brown for losing track of the plot—but boy, would it be nice if he proved the exception to the rule and used the final months of his governorship to help the world move to the next stage of the climate fight.

Brown worked hard to cut energy use and to increase the use of solar panels. But at least since the start of the battle over the Keystone XL pipeline about a decade ago, environmentalists have added a new key strategy: To have any hope of meeting global targets, we also need to keep coal, oil, and gas in the ground. That's why every new mine, well, pipeline, and terminal gets fought. Since California is a major oil-producing state, activists asked Brown to play a part, by beginning to phase out the routine granting of permits for new wells. (Thus far in his tenure, Brown's administration has approved about 20,000 of them.)

This is not a particularly radical idea anymore. Barack Obama, when he vetoed the Keystone project in 2015, noted: “If we’re gonna prevent large parts of this Earth from becoming not only inhospitable but uninhabitable in our lifetimes, we’re gonna have to keep some fossil fuels in the ground.” French President Emmanuel Macron announced in 2017 that there would be no new oil or gas exploration in his country’s territories. Earlier this year, Jacinda Ardern, the bold new prime minister of New Zealand, banned all offshore oil and gas exploration around the island nation: “Transitions have to start somewhere,” she said.

But not, apparently, in California. In fact, every time the subject has come up, Brown has sounded testy, off his game—-not even able to keep up with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who banned fracking across the Empire State. A year ago, when an activist dared interrupt his speech by shouting “Keep it in the ground,” Brown’s reply was caught on video: “Let’s put you in the ground.”

Now, in an interview with The Nation (see Mark Hertsgaard’s article on page 10), Brown relies on a combination of sophistry and slur. He somehow transforms the request for a gradual, managed phaseout of new oil-drilling permits into a demand that he “snap my fingers and eliminate all gasoline in all California gasoline stations.” And if he did that, he continues, “what would happen? Revolution? Killings? Shootings?” The absurdity of this straw-man scenario only proves Brown’s unwillingness to lift a finger against the oil companies that have poured millions into his campaigns.

Brown also adopts a favorite talking point of the Canadian tar-sands industry: Stop the flow of our filthy oil and we’ll just end up buying it elsewhere. But the most thorough study of phasing out California’s oil fields found that, even if it slightly raised the demand for foreign oil, the net result would be to cut total world emissions—in fact, at a rate on par with all of California’s other energy innovations.

The plagues that have visited California during the Brown years should spur him to action: the epic drought, followed by the record wildfires, followed by the record rains, followed by the killer mudslides, followed by—well, this summer, California’s Death Valley set the world record for the hottest month ever measured on our planet. Exactly how many signs is a hardworking God supposed to send?

Those horrors add up to a compelling truth: The steps that first-generation leaders like Brown have taken are too small to meet the demands of the moment. Yes, Brown is standing up to President Trump, and yes, he’s done more than other governors have. But when it comes to climate change, it’s physics that we must measure ourselves against. Global warming is a timed test, one that now demands stronger responses.

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against—and by that standard, we’re losing.

Brown insists that he can’t do more: “We’ve got a lot of elements in the political landscape that in a free society we have to deal with.” But in this case, that’s not true: He could simply stop issuing new permits. If he did, the fossil-fuel industry would kick and fuss, but it does that all the time anyway. And if he chooses, Brown could fight it with more power than any other politician on the planet.

He’s got a state filled with engineers who are pointing the way toward the future, and with citizens who support real action. (Hispanic Americans show up in every poll as caring more about climate change than anyone else.) And Brown is 80 years old, never running for office again, and in no further need of oil money.

One would hope this would free him to act. Even an announcement that he would phase out drilling within 2,500 feet of schools, hospitals, and homes would be a real start, one that would win him deserved acclaim. But given the defensiveness that his interview reveals, perhaps we should honor Jerry Brown as a pioneer in the early stages of this fight—not as a leader in its current and future battles.

BILL McKIBBEN

Aretha Franklin

Aretha Franklin was a singular figure in American culture. Even as a child, her musical gifts were monumental. Smokey Robinson recalled first hearing her sing when she was just 4 years old. He told biographer David Ritz that Franklin came out of the rich Detroit culture that produced so many musical greats, “but she also...came from a distant musical planet where children are born with their gifts fully formed.” That voice, so full of history and power, defined popular singing and set the standard for any who would aspire to her standing. She was, indeed, the Queen.

Shaped and refined in Detroit’s New Bethel Baptist Church, where her father, the legendary C.L. Franklin, reigned in the pulpit, Aretha absorbed his rhythms and cadences as well as those of the black musical royalty who graced the sanctuary and visited the Franklin home—Dinah Washington, Mahalia Jackson, and Clara Ward among them. She also absorbed their political sensibilities: an unapologetic blackness, a militant dignity, and a devotion to using her talent to further the cause of black freedom.

At the height of her fame in 1970, Franklin supported Angela Davis, the philosopher, revolutionary, and Communist Party member who’d been accused of purchasing the firearms used in the takeover of a courtroom in Marin County, California, and who was charged with conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder. Franklin told Jet magazine that she wanted to post Davis’s bond, “whether it’s $100,000 or $250,000.” Franklin’s father, himself a longtime civil-rights advocate, discouraged her. “Well, I respect him, of course, but I’m going to stick by my beliefs,” Franklin said. “Angela Davis must go free. Black people will be free.”

Franklin explained that her support for Davis had nothing to do with communism, “but because she’s a Black woman and she wants freedom for Black people.” She added that she had the money to post Davis’s bond because she’d earned it from black people and wanted to use it “in ways that will help our people.” Ultimately, she was unable to post the bond because she was out of the country.

Davis, who never met Franklin in person, told me that the singer was among her most prominent supporters: “Beyond the promise of financial support, the fact that she championed the cause of my freedom had a profound impact on the campaign, especially because her statement inferred that people should not fear being associated with a communist; rather, they should be concerned about justice.... Her bold public call for justice in my case helped in a major way to consolidate the international campaign for my freedom.”

By 1970, when she expressed her support of Davis, Franklin had established herself with a string of hits, including “I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Love You),” “Respect,” “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman,” and “Think.” She was an international superstar. Born just two years before Davis, Franklin, like Davis, represented the brilliance, militancy, and defiant beauty of their generation of black women. She had no fear of losing her audience or future opportunities because of her support for a radical freedom fighter. She was protected by the times and by her own sense of integrity and truth.

Truth—that’s what we hear in Franklin’s voice. It’s a voice that contains the spiritual and the field holler, the blues moan, the gospel shout, and jazz improvisation. It is sensually grounded and spiritually transcendent and completely lacking in contradiction. It also transcends national boundaries, invoking the West African cultures that gave birth to diasporic musical practices. It is America at its best.

Franklin was the featured singer at Barack Obama’s first inauguration. Significantly, she did not sing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” with its brash militarism. She sang “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” her voice reminding us of who we were, who we are, and who we are capable of becoming. She claimed this nation for those of us who have experienced its underside: Native Americans, black Americans, Latinos, workers of all races, and the poor. She offered us a vision of a valiant history of struggle and of aspirations for a future that we might build, a future as glorious and free as that magnificent voice. That’s the nation of which she sang.

One can hardly imagine a world without Franklin’s voice. Yet we have lost her, just when we need her most. Our country is sinking deeper into the morass of racial hatred, gender violence, and untempered greed and corruption. Mendacity rules from the very top of our government, posing a danger to our democracy that has global consequences. But we must stand tall against these forces, knowing that we had Aretha, we heard her, and thanks to the body of work she leaves behind, we can hear her still. As we honor the truth and power of her voice, may we aspire to its integrity and glory. And may we be inspired by the woman who stuck by her beliefs and demanded respect for herself and her people with boldness and soul.

FARAH JASMINE GRIFFIN

Farah Jasmine Griffin is a professor of English, comparative literature, and African-American studies at Columbia University.
Dear Liza,

I'm a cis man in a monogamous relationship with a strong feminist woman. But I've long had qualms about the idea that being with just one person is the defining trait of commitment. Recently, I decided to do some reading about ethical non-monogamy, and it really resonated. I'm starting to think that it may be the best relationship model for me. When I broached the topic with my partner, however, she got angry and dismissed non-monogamy as a ruse of patriarchy designed to justify male sexual predation.

I haven't dared to bring it up again. I don't think she's right and can articulate why, but it's pretty obvious this is a deal breaker for her.

What are your thoughts on ethical non-monogamy as a sex-positive feminist? I'd also appreciate advice on how to talk about it with my partner. My ultimate fear is that ethical non-monogamy may be the only way I can be happy in a relationship, but that exploring the idea will lead to the end of ours.

—Ethical Slut

Dear Slut,

Feminist arguments for ethical polyamory abound. For centuries, monogamy was enforced by the patriarchal ownership of women, and even today, exclusive sexual access to one woman is seen by many as a central, nonnegotiable feature of male privilege; notice, for example, the insulting power of the word “cuck” among conservatives on the Internet (the term, which is short for “cuckold,” has in recent years become a frequent right-wing taunt, implying deep terror about wives having sex with other men. Needless to say, no female synonym exists). In the right context, polyamory can offer a way out of such retrograde machismo and slut shaming.

But don't you think all this is beside the point in your situation? We mostly don’t choose the terms of our relationships for political reasons. Whatever she’s saying, your girlfriend's resistance to polyamory isn’t about feminism; it’s about her feelings. She does not want you to sleep with other people. Maybe this will change over time—but if just mentioning the possibility angers her, I doubt it. If she doesn’t want an open relationship, she shouldn't have one.

But don't give up the idea without further discussion. It doesn’t sound like a passing whim on your part. If you want to try to stay together, talk about this issue in couples therapy, which can place boundaries on the conversation and help explore why each of you feels as you do. The goal should be for the two of you to decide, in a compassionate way, how to move forward. Should you be exclusive or ethically non-monogamous? Can you find some compromise (a common approach is to find the exception to monogamy that works for both of you—“threesomes only,” for example)? Or is it best to break up?

If you do split, your next step is finding someone who wants the kind of relationship you want. Put your desire for ethical non-monogamy all over your Tinder or Match.com profile. If it’s possible where you live, go to poly events. Join poly communities online. Whatever you do, don’t get into a serious monogamous relationship until you’ve tried this other option for yourself.

Dear Liza,

I work in higher education. Last year, the celebrated chair of a department at my institution assaulted three young women at a campus event after buying cocaine from a student and sharing it with others. This became common knowledge, and he resigned. As far as I can tell, the institution made it possible for him to leave in a manner that would leave his career untarnished. Then another local institute of higher learning hired him.

I’m very upset by this, and would like to do something about it. What are my options? How do I balance my personal risk with the safety of other young women in academia?

—Cautious Cassandra

(continued on page 9)
Power in Theory

What on earth is going on at NYU?

What are we to make of the bizarre story of Avital Ronell and Nimrod Reitman? She’s a superstar deconstructionist professor at New York University, teaching in the German and comparative-literature departments. He’s a graduate student who came to NYU to be her advisee. In 2017, two years after getting his PhD, Reitman claimed that Ronell had stalked him, sexually harassed and assaulted him, and sabotaged his job search. After an 11-month Title IX investigation, the university found Ronell guilty of sexual harassment, both verbal and physical, and punished her with a one-year suspension without pay.

Ronell denies everything. To me, her hundreds of histrionic e-mails read like a humorless novel of obsessive passion. Not so, she claims; they were lighthearted fun “between two adults, a gay man and a queer woman, who share an Israeli heritage, as well as a penchant for florid and campy communications.” Well, all you queer Israeli academics out there, do you address your grad students as your “sweet cuddly baby” or warn them that “I love you too’ does not cut it darling,” if they fail to respond with sufficient enthusiasm?

The truth behind the charges and countercharges isn’t easy to discern. I’ve read Reitman’s 56-page legal claim against NYU, which he’s suing for millions of dollars, and came away thinking that if even one page is true, she was way over the line. Her constant demands—for attention, affection, time, loyalty, reassurance—seem unhinged: “I am a bit weepy and confused, a normal aftermath for attention, affection, time, loyalty, reassurance—seem unshinged: “I am a bit weepy and confused, a normal aftermath I suppose, and also a response to the separation from you…. But I will try to gain some ground with a visit to shrinky-winky.”

I’ve also read Ronell’s 136-page formal response, in which she claims that she was doing her best to save Reitman from serious emotional problems and attacks him for “duplicitously” pretending to share her intense feelings. (That he was faking it is the one thing both agree on.) Not being an academic, I was puzzled that a gay man turning 30 would—or even could—spend three years returning the extravagances of a woman he derided to friends as a psychotic, a witch, a monster, and a bitter old lady. (Ouch! Ronell was in her early 60’s at the time.) But numerous people in academia have told me that an adviser whose ego isn’t properly fed can destroy your career.

A broader window into the corner of academia that is “theory” is provided by the defenders of Ronell. In May, some 50 prominent academics signed a pro-Ronell letter that was sent privately to NYU’s president and its provost. Co-written by the renowned philosopher Judith Butler, the letter asserted that some of its signers found Reitman “malicious” and stressed Ronell’s achievements and fame. It even invoked Jacques Derrida, the founder of deconstruction, who once tried to stop the sexual-harassment investigation of a colleague. That these smarts thought they could e-mail hundreds of academics about signing the letter without having it leaked tells you the kind of bubble they live in. (Butler has since expressed regret for portions of the letter.) As others have pointed out, Ronell’s defenders sound a bit like the friends of Harvey Weinstein: He’s made so many great movies. That’s just Harvey being Harvey. Those actresses were no angels. As the novelist Chris Kraus put it recently: “Those outside this world don’t seem to realize that Reitman—or any PhD student at NYU—is hardly an innocent.” Really? Any PhD student?

For many in the mainstream media, the story line is simple: Feminists are hypocrites. Women harass men—as the Asia Argento case suggests, they may even rape men—and feminists defend them in the deluded belief that all women are peaceful and good. Excuse me, Bari Weiss (whose recent New York Times op-ed instructed us that women can be “abusers and bullies and manipulators”), but the last feminist who believed that women were all sweetness and light retired years ago. The whole thrust of women’s studies has been to reveal that women are “fully human” and “just like men.” Well, not just like men, who—inconvenient fact—commit the vast majority of rapes, murders, assaults, and, yes, sexual harassment.

Ronell’s supporters have done their best to change the subject. It’s not about sexual harassment; it’s about neoliberalism (Lisa Duggan), or stamping out “all but the most technocratic pedagogy” (Kraus), or singling out queers (Jack Halberstam), or attacking a rare and original person (Slavoj Žižek). And in one way, Ronell’s defenders have a point: Maybe sexual harassment isn’t the real problem here. As the political scientist Corey Robin has argued, even if there was nothing sexual in their relations (as Ronell claims), her demands were outrageous, because as Reitman’s adviser she had all the power. Perhaps an accusation of sexual harassment is the wrong instrument with which to challenge professorial bullying. But, unfortunately, it’s the best tool that graduate students have right now.

Some of those who initially defended Ronell have faded away. I wish I felt those who still support her were surprised and troubled by her behavior. Instead, they seem to find it delightfully provocative. As Abby Kluchin, who teaches at Ursinus College, asked in a much-circulated Facebook post, “What is at stake in the bizarre doubling down on the idea that the rules of professional behavior exist to be playfully transgressed? Why is there no recognition that one person’s playful transgression is another’s traumatic nightmare?”

Ronell’s work strikes me as a big bowl of word salad. But I understand that the general project of deconstruction is the analysis and dismantling of conscious and unconscious structures of power. How odd, then, that these professors could see domination operating everywhere except the one place they could actually do something about it: in their own relations with students.
Wild horses embody American freedom, and yet our government wants to systematically eliminate these majestic creatures from our public lands. There are over 45,000 wild horses imprisoned by the US government. Help us stop this. Let’s keep wild horses wild.

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Ending Minority Rule

Let’s acknowledge the true political fight we’re having.

This summer, just about a year after a white nationalist murdered Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia, I visited Memphis, Tennessee, and witnessed an odd scene.

There’s a small park in the middle of the city, just off the main drag downtown. It’s a peaceful spot, perched above the Mississippi River and shaded by tall old trees. For generations, locals knew it as Confederate Park, with cannons ringing its edges in hostile formation. A statue of Jefferson Davis—the Confederacy’s only president—towered in the center, striking a triumphant pose, about a mile away from the spot where Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead.

Memphis is an overwhelmingly black city, and after Heyer’s murder, municipal leaders wanted white-supremacist iconography removed from its public spaces. But the Tennessee Legislature keeps vigilant watch over the kinds of trouble that majority-black cities can cause, and after Dylann Roof’s terrorist attack a few years ago, lawmakers gave Confederate mythology some extra protection. They updated the state’s historic-preservation law to make it much more difficult to remove historical markers from public property. Let that sink in: This was how the State of Tennessee responded to a white-nationalist attack that killed nine black people in a church.

So Memphis’s leaders had to get creative: They sold the park to a not-for-profit organization. That meant it was no longer public property, and its new owners could redesign the park as they pleased. This maneuver outraged the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who appealed to the state for help. During my visit, the whole matter was still being adjudicated, so Memphis’s quiet little park was in limbo. A tall chain-link fence marked off the space where Jefferson Davis once presided. His statue had already been taken down, though the pedestal upon which he’d stood for hundreds of years was still put up for auction. The park was leased to a not-for-profit organization. That meant it was no longer public property, and its new owners could redesign the park as they pleased. This maneuver outraged the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who appealed to the state for help. During my visit, the whole matter was still being adjudicated, so Memphis’s quiet little park was in limbo. A tall chain-link fence marked off the space where Jefferson Davis once presided. His statue had already been taken down, though the pedestal upon which he’d stood for generations remained in place. It was an awkward scene, as well as an apt testament to our political moment.

There’s an election coming, but it has nothing to do with partisan politics. Nor is it about left versus right, or our national identity, or how prosperous we do or don’t feel, or any of the other prisms through which we typically view politics. It’s not even a referendum on the president, really. He’s a stark representation of the matter at hand, but an up-or-down vote on Donald Trump is just a proxy for the real questions we can no longer avoid: Are we prepared to end the real divide in American politics. Their position may be demographically unsustainable in a functioning democracy, but it remains perfectly viable in a broken one. The hopeful thought for 2018 is that the majority may now see that fight clearly too, and may be ready to engage it with both major parties.

This is being called another “Year of the Woman.” Women, of course, can be misogynists and white supremacists as well, but many of those organizing and running right now aren’t. From Georgia to New York, women of color are challenging the Democratic Party’s reflexive deference to white male power, and have begun to build electoral majorities that reflect demographic realities.

So there’s hope for this moment—even in Memphis’s former Confederate Park. In July, the nonprofit that owns the space got tired of the stalling and simply removed Davis’s pedestal. The Sons of Confederate Veterans are still fighting their legal battle, but the rest of Memphis has moved on to writing a new history.
Dear Cassandra,

That’s one hell of a disturbing story. I can see why you’d want to keep this man from working with other young women, but it may not be your story to tell.

Were you assaulted by the department chair? If so, I am so sorry! Please engage a lawyer right away! But if you were not one of those students, says Claire Potter, a history professor at the New School who writes extensively on Title IX issues, you have no standing to spread these allegations. First of all, has there been a Title IX investigation already? If not, you could encourage the students to file complaints or even go to the police.

Then too, there can be restrictions on the speech of people involved in Title IX investigations, and depending on your school’s policies, talking about this could be verboten. Worse, going public could expose the assault victims to unwelcome attention, from doxxing to rape and death threats. And if you speak out, you make yourself vulnerable. Misogynist trolls will likely denigrate you online in the ugliest terms. Anything stupid you’ve ever said or done may be revealed.

You also risk causing unjust harm to the department chair. Potter cautions, “She needs to ask herself: How does she know what she thinks she knows?” You sound very certain, but you don’t say what your evidence is. Were you present at the event? If not, keep in mind that “common knowledge” isn’t always vastly different from “rumor.” The scenario you’re describing may be untrue, or it may not have happened exactly in the way you heard.

Which brings us to another risk: legal defamation, says Kimberly Lau, a partner at Warshaw Burstein who specializes in Title IX cases. If the former department chair hasn’t been found guilty (either by the school or in a criminal trial) and you tell this story to his employer, you’re “sharing unsubstantiated allegations” and could be sued. Lau warns emphatically, “I recommend that she refrain from making statements to [his] new school.”

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SNAPSHOT / SHAHIDUL ALAM

Free Shahidul

In August, Bangladesh jailed acclaimed photographer Shahidul Alam, who shot this image of a Rohingya refugee camp in 2017. Alam was dragged from his home by more than a dozen officers after he spoke in support of mass student protests on international TV.

COMPARISON

“Trump Rejected Plans for a White House Statement Praising John McCain”
—Headline, The Washington Post

One person’s a hero for how he endured The hell with which he was beset. The other remains an example to show How petty a person can get.
Jerry Brown vs. the Climate Wreckers: Is He Doing Enough?

The California governor has led the nation in reducing emissions, but activists say he won’t take the next step: leaving fossil fuels in the ground.

by Mark Hertsgaard
A t the Paris Climate summit in 2015, Jerry Brown was treated like a head of state and a climate leader par excellence. Heads turned throughout the gargantuan press center as aides hustled the California governor to a row of makeshift studios where the world's leading television networks waited. As the governor of what was then the world's sixth-largest economy, Brown took a seat beneath the studio lights and told French TV about organizing the Under2 Coalition: 123 national, state, and local governments, representing more than a quarter of the global economy, that were collaborating to keep the global temperature rise under two degrees Celsius. Days later, the international community endorsed the coalition's goal by adopting the Paris Agreement, which pledged to limit warming “well below” that mark.

This year, from September 12 to 14, Brown will host a follow-up meeting intended to keep the world moving toward that under-2°C future, notwithstanding the obstructions emanating from Washington. The California Global Climate Action Summit will draw thousands of people to San Francisco, Brown's staff estimates. Government delegations from China, India, Germany, France, the European Union, Brazil—indeed, from virtually all of the world's major greenhouse-gas emitters, except the United States—will be there, along with hundreds of mayors, governors, policy experts, business executives, climate activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens.

“Let’s need catalytic events that propel states and people forward to turn the earth away from the catastrophic course we’re pursuing,” Brown told The Nation in an interview this past July. “This summit is a step, but it’s only a step.” He was seated on a couch in his office inside the State Capitol. Outside, the weather was hot (102 degrees Fahrenheit) and dry, foreshadowing the record-setting wildfires that would soon erupt 80 miles to the northwest.

“Is it enough?” Brown asked rhetorically. “No. Are we on a path to avoid catastrophe? No. But I want to do the maximum I can do.”

Although Donald Trump’s shadow will inevitably hang over the proceedings, the California summit was planned well before his election. Arms folded across his chest, an untouched cup of coffee beside him, Brown said the idea first emerged at the conclusion of the Paris summit. “Christiana Figueres asked if I’d do it, and I said yes.” Figueres, the Paris summit’s chair and the top UN climate official at the time, wanted a high-profile event in 2018 to accelerate progress on the way to a crucial third summit in Paris in 2020. An interim conference to share best practices, she thought, would help the world’s governments fulfill their obligation to publish action plans at the 2020 summit detailing the changes they’d make to meet the “well below” 2°C goal.

Figueres wanted California as the host because its record of climate accomplishments was second to none among the world’s major economies. The state was well on its way to reducing emissions to 1990 levels, and in 2015 Brown had signed a law that would go much further. Senate Bill 350 requires California to double its energy-efficiency savings by 2030, and to obtain 50 percent of its electricity from non-carbon sources.

Even so, Brown now finds himself under attack by climate activists who insist that he’s not doing enough. Seizing the opportunity of the summit and the media attention it will presumably attract, hundreds of groups have demanded that the governor ban fracking and halt new oil production in the state as part of a global push to leave most remaining fossil fuels in the ground—a necessity, science says, if humankind is to limit global warming to 2°C.

Nation contributors Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein are among the backers of the campaign, called Brown’s Last Chance, which has accused the governor of being too cozy with the oil industry. “During the past seven years, Brown has issued permits for 20,000 new [oil] wells while receiving over $9 million in political contributions from energy industry special interests,” the campaign has charged. On September 8, activists plan a protest march in San Francisco, part of a global Rise for Climate, Jobs and Justice demonstration.

“Brown has been all talk and little action on climate change, so I expect this summit will be more of the same,” says R.L. Miller, the co-founder of the group Climate Hawks Vote, who organized delegates at the 2014 California Democratic Party convention to interrupt Brown’s speech with shouts of “Ban fracking!” Brown was quick to lash back from the podium: “I challenge anybody to find any other state that’s done more than California.” In an interview for this article, Miller acknowledged that Brown had “a fair point,” but added: “Show me a state that’s done enough. California isn’t—not with 20,000 new oil wells.”

When asked to comment on this critique, Brown lurched forward, nearly leaping from his couch to denounce what he clearly viewed as the activists’ naïve demagoguery. “What if I could snap my fingers and eliminate all gasoline in all California gasoline stations?” he demanded. “What would happen? Revolution? Killings? Shootings? It couldn’t happen…. There would be mass chaos. You’d never get close to [leaving oil in the ground] before the public reaction stopped it.”

These vexing dilemmas in the fight against climate catastrophe will be front and center at the California summit. Can the state—now the fifth-biggest economy on earth—rally the rest of the world to outflank US climate policy? Can effective international cooperation neutralize the efforts by Trump and a Republican Congress to pull the
world’s largest economy in the opposite direction? Are acclaimed climate leaders like Jerry Brown doing enough? Should activists be attacking them less, or do even the best politicians need to be pushed? Perhaps most important, how do officials, activists, and everyone who cares confront the fundamental drivers of this crisis: Big Oil and the rest of the climate-wrecking industry, which continues to put its business model ahead of civilization’s survival?

The tragedy of today’s phase of the climate crisis is that Brown and his critics may both be right. Even the states and countries moving the fastest aren’t moving fast enough to outrun the gathering tsunami of climate disruption—at least not yet. And because the world delayed taking meaningful action for most of the past 30 years, largely because of resistance from Washington, emissions must now be cut at a pace and a scope that will likely require massive—and perhaps politically untenable—upheaval.

California is a prime example. “The Paris Agreement was amazing,” says Kevin de León, the former president pro tem of the State Senate, who is challenging Senator Dianne Feinstein in the midterm elections in November. “But because of SB 350, California is light-years ahead of the Paris Agreement.” Besides prioritizing green electricity and energy efficiency, the bill will shift the state’s transportation sector—the single biggest source of its carbon emissions—from gas to electricity, and more and more of that electricity will come from renewable sources. “As gas stations are ubiquitous now,” de León adds, “charging stations [for electric vehicles] will be ubiquitous by 2030.”

Moreover, even as the state cut emissions to 1990 levels (by 2016, four years ahead of schedule), its economy grew and created jobs faster than the US economy did as a whole. And much more lies in store. As de León explained, SB 350’s energy-efficiency upgrade will “create hundreds of thousands of jobs”—installing insulation, caulking windows, replacing inefficient appliances—and those jobs can’t be outsourced overseas or to states that don’t believe in climate change.”

Yet even California has a long way to go. In 2015, Brown issued an executive order to cut emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. “We’re on our way, but that is a heavy lift,” said Ken Alex, the director of Brown’s office of planning and research.

The conflict between Brown and his critics is the latest iteration of a global tension that goes back decades. Advocates of stronger climate action start from a core scientific truth: To avoid utter disaster, heat-trapping emissions must fall by a very large amount in a relatively short time. Indeed, a new scientific study warns that even a temperature rise of 1.5°C to 2°C might unleash impacts like a catastrophic “dieback” in the Amazon. Meanwhile, government officials and others who administer the status quo counter with political and economic truths: Today’s societies are deeply dependent on fossil fuels and other climate-destroying activities, and shifting to a new paradigm invites powerful resistance from entrenched interests and mass opinion alike, especially if that shift is too rapid.

Shaping the entire conundrum—as Brown, unlike most political leaders, is willing to discuss—is the fact that today’s global economy demands endless growth in production, consumption, and profit, no matter the ecological consequences. A Jesuit student in his youth, Brown has long approached politics from a philosophical perspective. He applauded Laudato Si, Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical, which assailed the consumerism and growth imperative of modern capitalism. But Brown clarified that it isn’t politically possible for any elected official, or even an authoritarian ruler, to challenge the religion of economic growth.

“Growth has to be transformed to be compatible with nature, or [at least] with decarbonizing,” he said. But the public wants growth and Wall Street demands it, so “if [political leaders] don’t achieve that, we don’t stay around very long.” Citing Chinese President Xi Jinping, Brown added: “Even if you’re a dictator, it’s not that easy, because you’ve got to maintain a certain level of legitimacy and popular support.”

Brown ridiculed the demand by activists to leave California’s oil in the ground as preposterously out of touch with such realities. “We’re trying to do more,” he said. “But we have a legislature; we have courts; we have a federal Congress and federal courts. We’ve got a lot of elements in the political landscape that in a free society we have to deal with.”

Popular habits are not the least of the challenges. Brown continued, noting that Californians drive a total of 343 billion miles per year. The state has begun a shift to more electric vehicles, mass transit, and smarter development, but for the moment those 343 billion miles are overwhelmingly fueled by gasoline. And woe to any politician who threatens America’s addiction to driving. Indeed, California Republicans and the oil industry are attacking on this front in November with a ballot measure to repeal the 12-cents-a-gallon gasoline tax that Brown approved.

That said, Brown’s apocalyptic “leave it in the ground” scenario is a gross caricature of what activists have actually proposed. As McKibben has pointed out, they urge not a sudden halt to all oil production and consumption but rather a managed decline over the next decade and beyond. By contrast, activists argue, approving 20,000 new oil wells all but locks in fossil-fuel production for decades to come.

Brown counters that limiting production only in California makes no sense: Oil would simply be imported from elsewhere. “If you leave it in the ground in Bakersfield, don’t take it from Texas,” he admonished. Besides, “California is already leaving more oil in the ground. Our production has declined the last three years in a row, and it’s dropped by 56 percent since 1985. That’s a big drop.” In another jab at critics, Brown credited part of this decline to the state’s cap-and-trade system, “which I had to get Republican support to [extend through 2030] because our environmental friends are against cap-and-trade.”

Some of those “environmental friends” accuse Brown of killing a provision in SB 350 that would have yielded the gradual but substantial decline in oil production called for by the “leave it in the ground” campaign. The clause required the state’s oil consumption to decrease 50 percent by 2030, but it was dropped at the last minute after a three-hour meeting among de León, Brown, and their staffs. “Brown chickened out after a deal was done,” charges Jamie Court,
the president of Consumer Watchdog.

With de León standing beside him, Brown told a press conference that they couldn’t muster the votes needed to pass SB 350 unless the oil provision was dropped. “The industry’s opposition proved too powerful. And while Brown promised to fight harder in the future, he also noted that this was how power politics works. “You’re not surprised, when the State of California says, in law, we’re going to cut the sales of the most powerful industry in the world by 50 percent, that there’s some resistance,” he told reporters.

Miller of Climate Hawks Vote has a different take: “Brown is simply unwilling to say no to the oil industry.” Reinforcing that accusation, Consumer Watchdog’s Court cites a quote by Brown in 1994, when he was hosting a talk-radio show. Asked whether he’d been influenced by campaign contributions during his earlier gubernatorial terms, Brown replied: “You bet I was influenced…. You think you can collect $10 million or $20 million and not let it affect your judgment?” Citing the millions that energy companies gave to Brown and the state Democratic Party from 2009 to 2016, Court asked, “Doesn’t this money influence him, based on his own statement?”

“Thousands of Californians—individuals, unions, businesses, and others—have made contributions, large and small, to Governor Brown over the years,” replies Evan Westrup, Brown’s press secretary. “The governor’s focus is doing what’s best for California.”

Dan Jacobson, the state director of Environment California, is among those urging Brown to ban fracking and halt new oil production. But he credits the governor for challenging the oil industry as much as he has. “I don’t think there’s much that Jerry Brown is afraid of politically,” Jacobson says. “I mean, it’s not as if the other climate fights he’s engaged in—the push for 50 percent renewable, for 5 million electric vehicles, the gas-tax repeal on the ballot in November—don’t have massive political costs. It’s more: How much of a fight does he want to pick with the oil industry while still getting other things done?”

De León, an outspoken critic of Big Oil, agrees that there are only so many battles that one can fight against the industry—not because the battles aren’t necessary, but because the other side has so much wealth and power. “The oil industry threw [as much as] $25 million at SB 350,” he noted. “That buys a lot of influence.”

De León is fighting on as the co-author of Senate Bill 100, which requires the state to reach 100 percent clean energy by 2045. “This is going to be the biggest, hottest debate in the Legislature this session,” he predicted in July.

The outcome of the SB 100 fight was unknown at press time, but these are the battles that must be won—over and over and over again, in cities, states, and countries across the world—if humankind is to limit global warming to “well below” 2°C. How to achieve such victories is arguably the most important question facing attendees at the California Global Climate Action Summit—and, indeed, anyone else who cares about our future on this planet. Given that Trump and the climate-wrecking industry have made it clear that they won’t stop, how do the rest of us stop them?

...Is He Doing Enough?

WORDS OF WARNING

The Nation’s Top 10 Articles on Climate Change

I

only more people had been reading The Nation! That’s the melancholy conclusion that emerges from a review of the hundreds of climate-related articles we’ve published over the last 20-plus years. Writers like Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, Mark Hertsgaard, James Hansen, and Chris Hayes have produced some of the most farsighted reporting and analysis of the climate crisis to appear anywhere. They remind us that solutions have long been available, and that our failure to apply them might still be remedied. Here, The Nation’s top 10 articles on climate change, all of them worth reading—and acting on—today,

1 Bill McKibben
"Too Hot to Handle"
November 10, 1997
America’s foremost climate writer was educating readers more than two decades ago about climate change, the scientific method, and the need to push politicians and journalists alike to meet the emerging challenge, McKibben’s critique of the mainstream media’s reliance on industry propaganda could have been written yesterday.

2 Mark Hertsgaard
"A Global Green Deal"
February 1, 1999
Further challenging the conventional wisdom, Hertsgaard argued that repairing our ravaged environment could become one of the biggest economic enterprises of the coming century. Just as FDR’s New Deal lifted the United States out of the Great Depression, a Global Green Deal to renovate buildings, vehicles, and farms in communities rich and poor across the planet could generate millions of jobs. Yet getting there would require taking on some firmly entrenched interests, so, as Hertsgaard noted, “Politics must be committed.”

3 James Hansen
"Why We Can’t Wait"
May 7, 2007
The NASA scientist whose 1988 US Senate testimony put climate change on the national agenda explained that the source of the problem is the influence of special interests over government policy. With unsettling prescience, Hansen warned that if their influence was not overcome, in as little as 10 years the human race would find itself living “on what I would call a different planet.”

4 Mark Hertsgaard
"Adapt or Die"
May 7, 2007
Reporting from Bangladesh and New Orleans, Hertsgaard was the first journalist to advocate a paradigm shift in climate policy: in addition to reducing heat-trapping emissions, humankind also had to adapt to the storms, droughts, and other Impacts that were guaranteed to Intensify in the coming years. And the wealthy nations whose emissions had caused the crisis should aid the poor, who suffer first and worst.

5 Naomi Klein
"Capitalism vs. the Climate"
November 28, 2011
"Most leftists have yet to realize that climate science has handed them the most powerful argument against capitalism since William Blake’s ‘dark Satanic mills.’” Klein argued, with climate change the ultimate example of how capitalism drives environmental as well as social destruction, climate activists would have to embrace an agenda of jobs, equality, and justice.

6 Chris Hayes
"The New Abolitionism"
May 12, 2014
Why is stopping climate change such a daunting challenge? Because leaving most fossil fuels in the ground, as climate science requires, would deprive powerful people and institutions of roughly $10 trillion, Hayes calculated. The only comparable (continued on page 17)
AMONG CLIMATE ACTIVISTS, THE SCENE IS REMEMBERED WITH A MIX OF EMBARRASSMENT AND SCORN: AT THE END OF HIS 2006 Oscar-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore, having just detailed the existential threat posed by global climate change, offered the audience a way to take action: Change your light bulbs. Gore’s prescription seemed completely incommensurate with the scope of the problem. The future of the human race, as well as millions of other species, is hanging in the balance—better get to the hardware store for some compact fluorescents.

Yet even today, at this late hour, the fight against global warming is bedeviled by public bewilderment. Climate change is such a huge, multidimensional threat that it’s hard for many people to grasp the root causes of the crisis. Perhaps most pernicious, some Americans still believe that we are all equally responsible for climate change. This shibboleth was the basis for the novelist Nathaniel Rich’s much-discussed 30,000-word magnum opus in *The New York Times Magazine*, published this August, which argued that “human nature” is to blame for our inability to address global warming. “[W]e had an excellent opportunity to solve the climate crisis” in the 1980s, Rich writes. “Almost nothing stood in our way—nothing except ourselves.”

Such gauzy thinking is exactly what the carbon polluters want—and it demands a forceful counterargument that calls out those polluters for their greed and duplicity. Climate change isn’t so much a failure of human nature as it is the predictable result of a small number of corporations putting their profits ahead of humanity’s future and the planet’s well-being. A growing number of activists have grasped this fact and are saying, with new clarity and force, that global warming is a crime perpetrated by a group of (what else to call them?) corporate villains.

The activists’ new target is what you might call the climate-wrecking industry: the coal, gas, and oil companies that have amassed colossal fortunes through the extraction, marketing, and sale of fossil fuels and, along the way, deceived the public about the inherent dangers of their business model. The activists’ refashioned narrative follows a proven axiom of social change: To solve a problem, you first have to name a perpetrator.

This new corporate-focused activism is partly a response to research that has clarified the carbon polluters’ role in altering the atmosphere. According to peer-reviewed studies by Richard Heede and the Climate Accountability Institute, the business practices of just 90 fossil-fuel companies are responsible for two-thirds of the observed increases in global surface temperatures between 1751 and 2010. Similarly, a report by the British research group InfluenceMap has established precisely how companies exacerbate climate change through deceptive PR and advertising, as well as by funding research of dubious quality and submitting regulatory filings that skew the public discourse by, in effect, “working the refs” in government agencies. The InfluenceMap researchers concluded that the political and media activities of a mere 35 corporations have played an outsized role in stalling action on climate change. The list includes the usual suspects, such as ExxonMobil and Koch Industries, but also some surprising names, like Bayer, Caterpillar, and Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway.

Drawing on this and other research, *The Nation* has assembled a list of the “Worst of the Worst” in the climate-wrecking industry. (See our list on the opposite page.) Earning a dishonorable mention is the Republican Party, which continues to drink the Kool-Aid of climate denial and to obstruct even the most modest measures to protect the climate. Also on the list is the US Chamber of Commerce, which has spearheaded much of the opposition from business groups as a whole.

While it can feel as though the invisible hand of the market is driving global warming, the fingerprints of the climate-wrecking industry are clear. Deep-green groups like Greenpeace have always viewed unchecked corporate power as the greatest threat to a stable climate. These days, that view is far more widely shared—not only by movement upstarts like 350.org, but also by legacy organizations like Earthjustice and even some elected officials.

Local governments around the country have filed more than a dozen lawsuits seeking to hold the fossil-fuel industry liable for climate-related damages. In an echo of the historic campaign against Big Tobacco, these local governments argue that the industry’s products are inherently harmful, and that its well-documented decades of deception concerning those harms require some sort of restitution. The lawsuits stretch from Baltimore (wracked by two so-called “1,000-year” storm events in just two years), to Boulder, Colorado (slammed by wildfires and freakish floods), to King County, Washington (where ocean acidification is taking its toll on the shellfish industry).

“The public mood is shifting enormously,” said Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), a leading climate champion on Capitol Hill. He spoke with me this past summer, not long after the Rhode Island attorney general filed the first state lawsuit against the major oil corporations. “You now have a situation in which the CEOs of Shell and Exxon and the other big oil companies have to pub-
Industry
...and How to Beat It

Worst of the Worst
Koch Industries
ExxonMobil
21st Century Fox (Fox News and The Wall Street Journal)
The Republican Party
The US Chamber of Commerce
Berkshire Hathaway (Warren Buffett)
Chevron
Shell
Duke Energy
Southern Company
BP
American Electric Power
General Electric
licitly admit that their products are causing climate change.” Of course, White-

house added, these same companies continue to push for increased fossil-fuel production (ExxonMobil recently released oil-and-gas extraction forecasts stretching out to 2040). But he argues that a reckoning is at hand: “I think what petrifies the fossil-fuel industry is not so much the possibility of ultimate judgments and liability, but the day of discovery, when plaintiffs start to get

access to their internal files. Once the documents become public, and a hard look can be taken at those documents, then the reputational damage for their knowing behavior will begin to pile up.”

The climate-liability suits are one tactic in a multipronged strategy against the climate wreckers. A reinvigorated Native American sovereignty movement is fighting fossil-fuel projects from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and in the process bringing a sharper moral clarity to the climate fight. At the same time, environmentalists are attempting a pincer maneuver aimed at cutting off the flow of capital to the fossil-fuel companies—staging demonstrations at banks and other financial institutions that underwrite carbon-intensive energy projects. Religious groups, major philanthropies, and public and private colleges and universities have pulled their money out of oil, gas, and coal investments.

The veil of invulnerability that the climate wreckers have hidden behind for decades is starting to tear. But will the new corporate-accountability efforts be enough?

**Signature Difficulty of the Climate Threat**

It is that is so massive, and its causes so widespread, that people have a hard time wrapping their minds—much less their energy—around the thing. For years, activists have struggled to figure out where to place the bull’s-eye.

Then came the years-long campaign against the Keystone XL pipeline and the dramatic, Native-led opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline in 2016. When the grassroots movement against Keystone began to gather momentum, many DC insiders dismissed the campaign as unstrategic. But the effort had a kind of ripple effect: It is now virtually impossible for a fossil-fuel company to propose a major project anywhere without throngs of activists trying to tie up the bulldozers with little more than human bodies and bike locks.

The infrastructure fights have provided climate campaigners with something they had long been in search of: tangible local targets that ordinary citizens can focus on. In contrast to the campaigns in the early ’00s targeting ExxonMobil and Chevron, the “keep it in the ground” movement (as activists call it) has the power of emotional immediacy. The pipeline fights and oil-train opposition are fueled by the righteous parochialism that has always been the backbone of the environmental movement: the desire to save a beloved patch of woods or to protect a special river. “Everybody can relate to someone’s home, ranch, or sovereign land being threatened by a corporation, because they have a backyard too,” says Jane Kleeb of Bold Nebraska, one of the groups that have spearheaded the effort to stop the Keystone pipeline.

Activists concede that these infrastructure fights can feel like a game of whack-a-mole. But here’s the thing: Sometimes they succeed in hitting a mole. While TransCanada continues to make noise about stockpiling pipe for Keystone XL, the fact remains that, as of this writing, construction has yet to start on the critical northern section of the pipeline, and a federal judge has recently ruled that the Trump administration cannot unilaterally resurrect the project. Meanwhile, the Constitution pipeline, a proposed gas conduit from Pennsylvania to New York, appears dead, and a string of proposed coal-export terminals in Oregon and Washington have all landed in the dustbin.

Moreover, even when these campaigns ultimately fail to stop a proposed project, activists say they still have an important effect on public opinion. “It’s not about this one pipeline; it’s about changing the culture of how we think about the damages they do versus the benefits we get out of them,” says Cherri Foytlin, an organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, which is fighting the construction of the Bayou Bridge pipeline through Louisiana. “You can still have a win even if it’s not a victory. If all we get out of this is an army of people willing to defend the waters of southern Louisiana, that’s a win, because it wasn’t like that before.”

But this strategy has a natural limit. One weakness of campaigning directly against the climate wreckers is that it’s simply unrealistic to expect a corporation to abandon the very reason for its existence. A lasting and equitable solution to climate change would put the fossil-fuel industry out of business, since these companies aren’t going to walk away from their (for now) still-profitable enterprises.

Recognizing that problem, organizers have sought to outflank the companies by targeting their bankers. As the protests and blockades make new fossil-fuel projects controversial, even notorious, there’s an increased reputational risk to lenders, who will begin to think twice about taking such projects on. That, at least, is the theory; in practice, the results have been mixed. “The reality is that, on the finances side, it was always going to be a long row to hoe,” says Lindsey Allen, the executive director of Rainforest Action Network. “Where we have seen the most progress is when we can get in front of a project before it is so far down the road.”

In response to grassroots pressure, most American lenders have retreated from financing mountaintop-removal coal mining. Last year, US Bank announced that it would no longer lend to oil-and-gas-pipeline construction projects. Most of the success, however, has been overseas. BNP Paribas, France’s largest bank, has announced that it will no longer fund tar-sands or oil-shale extraction. HSBC, the biggest bank in Europe, has also retreated from tar-sands projects, as well as from coal-fired power plants and oil drilling in the Arctic.

Yet while they’ve declined to finance specific projects, these banks are still extending loans to the carbon polluters’ various holding companies. And even their baby steps toward climate responsibility have generated blowback. HSBC has been quietly blackballed by the fossil-fuel industry, which has had little difficulty finding other lenders (most notably JPMorgan Chase) to fill the gap. For now, at least, the banks need fossil-fuel companies as much as these companies need the banks. “Until the revenue loss is greater than the revenue opportunity, the banks won’t stay out,” says one Wall Street banker, speaking on the con-
mong activists, a consensus is emerging that legal action may prove the best way to bring the climate wreckers to account. While the direct-action and financial campaigns to keep oil and gas in the ground target current and future emissions, the city and county lawsuits seek to hold fossil-fuel companies liable for climate-related damages that have already occurred. In doing so, these lawsuits sharpen the public narrative about the imminence of climate change. Global warming is no longer some far-off, abstract threat; it’s something that’s causing real trouble now. “I think the thing that is most working [to hold carbon polluters accountable] is, in fact, the litigation,” Senator Whitehouse told me. “The fear of liability is the dominant driving factor in the fossil-fuel industry’s thinking about whether to sue for peace.”

The climate lawsuits, like the other strategies, have not been uniformly successful. This past summer, federal judges dismissed the complaints brought by New York City, Oakland, and San Francisco. But other lawsuits are still churning through state courts, and new cities continue to join the effort; Baltimore’s lawsuit was filed the day after New York’s suit was dismissed. A key to the landmark settlement with Big Tobacco was getting dozens of state attorneys general to file suits against the cigarette makers.

While acknowledging that there is strength in numbers, some legal observers say the magic number for success is one: A single judgment against the oil companies would be enough to change their political calculus about the value of continued intransigence. “I think, in some respects, it’s less about how many cases are filed, and more about whether a judge rules in favor of a city or county or state. That will open the floodgates,” says Ann Carlson, a professor at the UCLA School of Law who has followed the climate-liability cases closely.

The climate wreckers do, in fact, appear to be shaken by the lawsuits. In a procedural counterattack, ExxonMobil has petitioned a Texas judge to allow it to depose attorneys and local officials from the California communities suing the company. During the federal-court proceedings in San Francisco, the fossil-fuel defendants all acknowledged that human activities are driving climate change—then swiftly pivoted to argue that the ultimate responsibility lies with the general public and its appetite for energy. The rhetorical sleight of hand perfectly captures the climate wreckers’ classic talking point: Since you can’t live without us, we’re innocent.

The more savvy wreckers like to say they’re open to Congress crafting a political solution. But their PR statements are hard to take seriously. On the same day that the San Francisco ruling came down, the House of Representatives voted 229 to 180 to condemn the idea of a carbon tax; only four Republicans voted against the nonbinding measure.

Moreover, if the fossil-fuel industry were genuinely interested in addressing the crisis through legislation, many climate advocates would gladly take them up on the offer. Whitehouse and Carlson, among others, think the lawsuits could open the way for a kind of grand bargain on climate change: In exchange for helping to pass a law mandating an economy-wide tax on carbon, the major polluters would receive immunity from lawsuits. But such a deal would have to come with financial accountability for the climate wreckers’ misdeeds—what Whitehouse called a “massive climate-relief fund” modeled on the tobacco settlement and BP’s settlement for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. “They don’t get to walk away scot-free,” Whitehouse said.

Of course, for that to happen, climate-action champions would have to gain control of Congress. Which means that climate activists, like the rest of the progressive movement, need to do everything they can to ensure that Congress changes hands.

That’s the sort of transformation that will require far more work—and many more people—than changing a light bulb.

(continued from page 13)
It wasn’t until heavily armed men arrived from across the river that Cláudio José da Silva realized who was bankrolling the latest episode of illegal logging. His bare chest traced with blue-black lines of body paint, da Silva is a member of the Guajajara people in eastern Brazil, one of the country’s largest indigenous groups. Their side of the Carú River is pristine Amazon rain forest. Across the river, the rain forest has been razed and replaced by cattle ranches and farms. On paper, the Guajajaras’ nearly 700 square miles of rain forest are protected as federally recognized indigenous territory. In reality, the group lives under constant threat of theft and violence. Just the day before, da Silva’s self-defense force, the Guardians of the Forest, caught the local sheriff’s son using cattle to drag lumber from their forest. Armed with machetes, they chased him away and confiscated the cows. Now the sheriff had come bearing an ultimatum: Return the cattle or his posse would retrieve them by force.

“This struggle, for us, is war,” da Silva says. He claims to have received dozens of death threats since founding the Guardians of the Forest in 2012. “The loggers carry arms. The farmers are armed. They want confrontation.” Indeed, on August 12, a month after I visited da Silva, the dead body of his comrade, Jorginho Guajajara, was found in a nearby river.

Violent conflicts over land and logging have spilled blood throughout the Amazon since the 1980s, when the murder of the organizer Chico Mendes made international headlines. Brazil is the deadliest country in the world for land defenders, with more than 140 killings since 2015, according to the NGO Global Witness. The state of Maranhão, where the Guajajaras live, is perhaps the most dangerous: In 2016, more attacks on indigenous groups occurred there than anywhere else in Brazil, according to the Pastoral Land Commission.

Apart from the human toll, the violence in the Ama-

Illegal logging and land seizures are driving an ominous yet overlooked trend: Tropical forests are flipping from storing carbon to releasing it.

by Sam Eaton
zon is also driving an ominous trend in the earth’s climate system. Last October, Science published one of the most important—and least noticed—climate studies in years. Tropical forests in the Amazon and around the world have been so degraded by logging, burning, and agriculture that they have started to release more carbon than they store, according to scientists from the Woods Hole Research Center and Boston University. In the parlance of climate change, these forests are flipping from carbon sinks to carbon sources.

This is very bad news, for two reasons. First, until now, the capacity of forests to absorb carbon dioxide via photosynthesis has been a crucial buffer against greenhouse-gas emissions: The forests’ absorption of CO₂ has limited the global temperature rise to considerably less than it would otherwise be. Second, forests must absorb even more carbon going forward if humankind is to contain that temperature rise to a survivable amount. Current trends put the earth on a trajectory to an increase of 3.5 degrees Celsius,
an amount that scientists have warned is “incompatible with organized society.” Minimizing future emissions is imperative, but it’s not enough. To meet the Paris Agreement’s commitment to hold the temperature rise “well below” 2°C, humankind must also “go negative.” That is, we must extract the CO₂ that’s already in the atmosphere and store it where it can no longer trap heat, notably in the earth’s trees and soil. And that means growing more trees, not cutting them down.

“This is really very serious,” says Carlos Nobre, Brazil’s leading climatologist, in an interview at his home in a tree-lined suburb outside São Paulo. Nobre has the tired expression of someone who’s been ringing the alarm bell for too long while society looks away. He says the world’s forests have been absorbing roughly 30 percent of the CO₂ emissions generated by human activities. But Nobre’s research, conducted with Thomas Lovejoy of George Mason University, has found that deforestation, combined with rising temperatures and the droughts and fires they encourage, is taking a heavy toll.

“We’re dangerously approaching a point where the convergence of all these drivers might reach irreversibility,” Nobre says. Cross that threshold, and much of the Amazon rain forest will begin to die. The Amazon could reach that tipping point if 20 to 25 percent of its original forest cover is destroyed, Nobre estimates. In that case, more than half the Amazon would transition from rain forest to savannah, releasing massive amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere as the trees die and burn. Such a “dieback” is one of the scenarios that could trigger runaway global warming, according to the “hothouse Earth” study published by the Potsdam Climate Impacts Institute in June.

Humans have deforested roughly 16 percent of the entire Amazon basin so far, Nobre cautions—just 4 to 9 percent from his projected tipping point. This means that the deforestation must be halted—and soon—if humankind is to have much chance of avoiding a climate catastrophe.

JUST AS THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE AMAZON’S deforestation are global, so are its causes. “There’s really no mystery as to the main reasons we’re seeing tropical forests disappear,” says Frances Seymour, a senior fellow on forest and governance issues at the World Resources Institute. “Vast areas continue to be cleared for soy, beef, palm oil, and other globally traded commodities.”

The world’s growing demand for meat has transformed Brazil into an agricultural superpower. Today it boasts the largest commercial cattle herd in the world. It’s also the world’s largest exporter of soy, mostly for animal feed, with food giants like Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland eagerly processing that harvest into their transnational supply chains. Globally, hundreds of billions of dollars are invested each year in cattle, grains, and palm oil, which translates into additional deforestation. Dirty money only feeds the destruction: More than two-thirds of the foreign capital driving the expansion of Brazil’s soy and beef sectors were channeled through offshore tax havens, according to a Stockholm University study published in Nature in August, making accountability for environmental destruction that much harder to enforce.

As with the assaults against the Guajajaras, much of the clearing of tropical forests, in the Amazon and elsewhere, is illegal—but it continues with the blessing of corrupt officials. Throughout Brazil’s so-called “arc of deforestation,” a crescent-shaped strip tracing the southern and eastern edges of the Amazon, such violent clashes are only the first stage in a chain of events that threatens indigenous people and global climate stability alike.

Criminal organizations and land grabbers start with illegal logging, Nobre explains, extracting valuable timber from indigenous lands and other supposedly off-limits areas. With the money gained from selling that timber, the criminals clear the land and plant grass for cattle. Once they have enough cows on the land, they draw up phony titles and sell the lots.

It’s at this point that the corruption becomes institutionalized. Astonishingly, criminals who seize land then have their actions made legal, because the Brazilian government grants them amnesty. In 2017, President Michel Temer signed legislation “regularizing” illegal land claims by anyone who appropriated Amazonian land before 2011. And that amnesty was an extension of the previous 2004 limit. The maximum area of claimable land was also increased, from 1,300 hectares (3,706 acres) to 2,500 hectares (6,178 acres) per person. “It’s a very perverse dy-
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A Climate Tipping Point in the Amazon

In Brazil, that dynamic has also transformed the political landscape, enabling a coalition of landed rural elites called the ruralistas to dominate, despite the fact that 86 percent of Brazil’s population lives in cities and towns. Some have called the ruralistas’ taking rise to power a “parliamentary dictatorship.” Their success is due to the growing economic clout of the agribusiness sector, as well as a savvy political union—dubbed the BBB caucus, for “beef, Bibles, and bullets”—in which the farm lobby joined with evangelical and anti-gun-control parties to take control of Brazil’s Congress.

The rise of the ruralistas has largely reversed the Brazilian government’s previous success in slashing deforestation rates. Between 2002 and 2009, federal protections were applied in the Amazon to an area twice the size of Germany; enforcement was beefed up; and financial credits were applied in the Amazon to an area twice the size of Germany; enforcement was beefed up; and financial credits were denied to properties associated with illegal deforestation. Those hard-won achievements are now being gutted. An embattled Témer, in exchange for the ruralistas’ support, has provisionally lowered environmental standards, suspended the ratification of indigenous lands, and reduced the size of protected areas. Nara Baré, who heads the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations from the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB), one of the largest such organizations in South America, explains that the ruralistas’ motives are simple: “to expand agribusiness and to expand large enterprises that are focused on the Amazon.”

In the agricultural boomtown of Sinop in northern Mato Grosso, that logic is on full display. Sinop’s brief history includes all the stages of the Amazon’s deforestation: from logging in the 1970s, to cattle ranches in the 1980s, to today’s mechanized soy plantations, which have brought wealth and prosperity to early settlers like Jaime Farinon, who owns an 8,000-acre farm there.

“We came to this region in 1985 to occupy—to turn this abandoned land into a productive area,” Farinon says, tapping a cigarette from a pack of Dunhills. Those were the final days of Brazil’s military dictatorship, an era that Farinon remains nostalgic for. “Maybe we’ll manage to get a Trump here to align this country.” This is a none-too-veiled allusion to Jair Bolsonaro, a current presidential candidate and apologist for Brazil’s dictatorship, who is known for his attacks on women, black people, homosexuals, and indigenous communities. “In these parts,” Farinon adds, “you have to have a little blood in your veins.”

When he first arrived in the Amazon, Farinon was allowed to clear the trees from half of his land. The laws have since changed to allow only 20 percent of private lands to be deforested, which is hindering expansion, Farinon complains. He owns another 1,700 acres that aren’t worth clearing because of these limits: “It’s the laws that are blocking us.”

Officials at the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), the federal agency for environmental protection, paint a very different picture. Evandro Selva, an IBAMA enforcement officer, works in the northwest corner of Mato Grosso. Selva looks the part of an environmental cop: square jaw, black polo shirt, and blue jeans, the keys for his truck clipped to a belt loop. With resigned weariness, he points to the stacks of green paper folders in his office, which reach from the floor to the ceiling. “All of these are fines—deforestation embargoes, illegal mills, illegal timber transport from indigenous lands, from private lands.” But only 10 percent of the fines will ever be paid, Selva adds, because “there is no fear of being punished.”

President Témer reinforced that message last year, when—again with the ruralistas’ support—he slashed the budget of the Ministry of Environment, which includes IBAMA, by a staggering 43 percent. Those draconian cuts, and the political message they’ve sent, will make Selva’s work even more untenable. His field office is responsible for patrolling an area with one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. But “we only have four agents,” he tells me, “of which three will retire in the next 12 months.”

The ruralistas are also targeting one of the most effective strategies for protecting the Amazon: indigenous land rights. The ruralista bloc has introduced more than 100 bills in Congress aimed at reducing the land rights and autonomy of indigenous and other traditional communities. “Brazil’s debt with the Indian is not over land,” says Nilson Leitão, the ruralistas’ polished political leader, who wants to open indigenous lands to mining and other extractive industries.

But indigenous people are fighting back. In April, more than 3,000 repre-
sentatives from over 100 groups descended on Brasília, the nation’s capital, for a week of rallies that proved to be the largest mobilization of indigenous people in Brazilian history. The agribusiness lobby “is our main enemy,” says Sônia Guajajara, a vice-presidential candidate from the Socialism and Freedom Party and the executive coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, the umbrella group that organized the mobilization. “They can’t see the environment as a space that needs to be preserved because it guarantees life, guarantees water. They only see it as something to exploit, to create wealth.” Guajajara argues that preserving the rain forest requires more financial support and legal protection for indigenous people so they can do the kind of patrolling that Cláudio José da Silva’s Guardians of the Forest are doing in Maranhão. “The Brazilian state doesn’t do it,” she says, “so the indigenous people are doing it themselves. But they lack resources.”

Guajajara’s recommendation mirrors the findings of specialists: that the best way to defend forests is to empower the people who inhabit the forests, assuring them of property rights, legal standing, and government protection against invasions by outsiders. Annual deforestation rates in the areas legally managed by indigenous peoples have been two to three times lower than in other forests, while generating billions of dollars’ worth of benefits from carbon sequestration, reduced pollution, clean water, and more, according to the Woods Hole Research Center and World Resources Institute. But in the Amazon, 71 million hectares—an area roughly the size of Chile—remain undesignated public lands, leaving them especially vulnerable to deforestation. “The land grabbers consider these areas to be a no-man’s land that can be invaded,” says Renê Luiz de Oliveira, head of environmental enforcement at IBAMA.

Zero deforestation is possible in Brazil. One model of future land use projects that if the country continues to expand the agricultural and livestock frontier into new areas at the current rate, over 50 percent of the Amazon rain forest will be razed by 2050. However, if Brazil shifts to a sustainability scenario, reinvesting and strengthening its environmental policies and enforcement, deforestation can be virtually halted. Getting to that zero-deforestation future will require a reshuffling of economic incentives that makes it worthwhile to leave forests standing. But the payoff is potentially enormous, saving Brazil as much as $100 billion a year by 2030 while also fulfilling the country’s emissions-reduction commitment of 43 percent under the Paris Agreement.

Meanwhile, in Maranhão, I watch as da Silva and his fellow Guardians wake before sunrise and pour sweet black coffee from orange thermos containers into shared glass jars. They paint their faces and chests with a red paste made from urucú seeds before climbing into speedboats for the day’s patrol.

“This painting represents blood,” da Silva tells me. “We paint when we monitor our territory. It gives us more strength, more energy. This is for fighting.”

The day before, da Silva and I had stopped at the spot where the sheriff’s son had downed the trees he tried to steal. Someone had placed a cross made of palm fronds on the riverbank—a clear threat. But da Silva was undeterred. His biggest concern, he says, is that in 30 years’ time, his people’s territory will no longer be a vibrant rain forest, but rather the deforested landscape that relentless logging and industrial farming has engendered across the river. “We keep fighting,” he tells me, “so that this doesn’t happen.”

The reporting for this project was produced in partnership with PBS NewsHour and the public-radio program PRI’s The World, with support from the Pulitzer Center and the Society of Environmental Journalists.
Dan Anguiano had been working in the solar industry for just a few months when his employer, Evolution Energy, got a contract to install a solar-heating unit two blocks from his home, in the Boyle Heights section of East Los Angeles. "I was working on the roof and looking straight at the view of where I grew up, and it was like: Wow," he recalled.

Just a few years earlier, Anguiano, 33, would never have imagined himself with this job—or any job. He had begun "making mistakes, getting into trouble" in high school, leading to a two-year stint in a juvenile-detention facility when he was 16, and then a couple of short prison terms in his 20s. "I didn't have anything," he said. "I fell back in the same old ways."

Then a friend suggested that he check out the solar-installation program at Homeboy Industries, an organization that the Rev. Greg Boyle and other community members had started in 1988 to support and train people who had been...
incarcerated or involved with gangs. Anguiano had known Father Greg since he was 7; the priest’s Dolores Mission parish was a short distance from the Aliso Village housing project, where Anguiano grew up. Now, he told Father Greg, he wanted to turn his life around. The priest handed him a slip of paper that read “March 6, 2015.” It was his start date at Homeboy Industries.

Since 2010, Homeboy Industries has been offering tuition, tutoring, and financial support for “homies” wishing to learn about solar-panel design, construction, and installation in the photovoltaic-training program at the East Los Angeles Skills Center. Through the four-month course, Anguiano discovered that he loved the work and was good at it, despite having never completed high school. “It was a lot of math,” he said, “and math really spoke to me.”

But it was the hands-on rooftop experience he gained through GRID Alternatives, Homeboy’s partner in the program, that made him realize this was part of “something big.” GRID, a nonprofit organization, provides free solar panels to low-income families in communities designated as “red zones” by the California Environmental Protection Agency—poor neighborhoods plagued by environmental, air-, and water-quality problems. According to GRID, the solar panels typically cut energy costs by at least 50 percent, and often as much as 80 or 90 percent. They also help to ensure that these communities aren’t left behind in the transition to renewable energy; installing rooftop panels can cost several thousand dollars.

The panels are funded through legislation that sets aside 35 percent of the proceeds from California’s cap-and-trade program for green investment in red-zone communities. Since 2014, $1 billion has been delivered via this fund. As the first statewide program to redistribute money from the worst polluters to the most underrepresented and environmentally damaged communities, it is also something of a blueprint for the rest of the nation.

Red-zone communities include inner-city LA neighborhoods marred by active oil pumpjacks as well as the predominantly Latino Boyle Heights, which is bisected by six freeways and has a childhood-hospitalization rate due to asthma higher than the statewide average. Through GRID, Anguiano clocked more than 100 hours of volunteer experience installing panels for low-income families and homeowners in neighborhoods like his. “I felt good that we were helping them out,” he said.

It helped him out, too. In March 2017, Anguiano got his first job as an installer, making $15 an hour. A little over a year later, he was promoted to crew leader, and his hourly wage rose to $23. That was more than he’d ever made before, and he still sees room to grow in his new career. “I’m teaching my crew, and everyone’s happy, working,” he said. His cousin, newly released from federal prison, recently joined his crew. “Sometimes we drive through apartment complexes,” Anguiano said, “and I tell my cousin, ‘I did this one right here.’”

As a renewable-energy worker, Anguiano is part of an industry that employs 3.4 million people around the world. According to the 2017 National Solar Jobs Census, employment in the US solar sector has grown 168 percent since 2010 to more than 250,000 jobs. (Nationwide, 806,000 people are employed in the renewable-energy sector overall, compared to 51,000 in coal mining.)

Most solar jobs in the United States—78 percent—are on the demand side, including sales and installation, not in manufacturing. “Working in the solar program is a career opportunity, not just job training,” said David Andrade, the friend who urged Anguiano to check out Homeboy Industries.

Andrade had sought out Homeboy as well, after spending nearly a decade in prison. He got counseling, had his gang tattoos removed, and graduated from the solar-installation program in 2014. Today, he’s the volunteer-and-training coordinator at GRID Alternatives, where he speaks proudly of the first Homeboy cohort he ushered through the program: All 19 were undergoing reentry after stints in prison, and all 19 found jobs, after graduation, in the solar industry.

California is at the center of the US solar industry, with 40 percent of the country’s capacity and some 100,000 jobs (over 16,000 in Los Angeles County alone). Homeboy is part of RePower LA, a coalition of environmental, faith-based, community, and labor groups that work to generate good renewable-energy jobs and shift the city’s energy infrastructure away from fossil fuels.

These jobs are a crucial part of California’s move from a carbon-based economy to a carbon-neutral one. And as the Trump administration rolls back what small gains had been made in federal climate policy, state-level policies to cut emissions and stimulate the renewable-energy industry will also be a crucial part of the nationwide energy transition. Thus far, however, Hawaii is the only state to commit to 100 percent renewable energy, a goal that state lawmakers have pledged to reach by 2045. (California is currently considering a similar legislative mandate.)

Amy Vanderwalker, the senior policy strategist for the California Environmental Justice Alliance (a RePower member), has doubts that the state’s much-vaunted cap-and-trade program, which funds the solar panels that GRID provides, can cut carbon emissions enough to reach California’s 2030 target: 40 percent below its 1990 levels. And the program does nothing to dismantle the network of refineries, factories, and industrial facilities that are polluting neighborhoods like Boyle Heights in the first place. (Cap-and-trade schemes impose penalties on companies when they exceed a limit on emissions, meaning that the market dictates whether it is cost-effective for companies to pollute. Stronger emissions regulations, by contrast, can make polluting illegal.)

This kind of large-scale public investment in infrastructure and air quality in red-zone communities could also have unintended effects. “The danger that this could exacerbate existing displacement and gentrification is huge,” Vanderwalker said. It’s an issue in Boyle Heights, where skyrocketing rents have already sparked clashes over gentrification, and it’s an issue throughout Los Angeles, which is currently suffering a homelessness and affordable-housing crisis. Andrade’s neighborhood, City Terrace, hasn’t been spared, either. He’s still in the same house that he lived in before he was incarcerated, but the rent has nearly doubled in that time. Without his work for Homeboy, Andrade stated, “I’d be in trouble.”

But the changes to Boyle Heights don’t bother Adan Anguiano as much. He’s on track to achieve his dream: owning a house and a little boat and, above all, being self-sufficient. “I like doing things that don’t have to do with being tied into the grid,” he explained. “But getting power from the sun? That’s something. That’s like: Wow.”
‘68 Letdown

What a gigantic disappointment the special 1968 issue, “Year of Global Insurrection” [Aug. 27/Sept. 3], must be for anyone who was actually alive and aware in ‘68 and expected a comprehensive and progressive history of that year—a year to be remembered not only for the male-founded-and-operated Students for a Democratic Society, the male-dominated anti–Vietnam War movement, the protests in Paris and Mexico, and the trial of eight radical men in Chicago. So much more was happening that year.

In 1968, the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, the Miss America protest, and other female-organized actions demonstrated that feminism had taken a bold new turn. Feminist leaders were on the cover of every magazine; women’s consciousness-raising groups were meeting in living rooms around the country; and, two years later, 50,000 women would march down Fifth Avenue, spearheading a movement that fought for the rights of half the population and would eventually affect the entire world for the better. At the same time, the civil-rights, gay-rights, and environmental movements were coming into full maturity. Stonewall happened the following year and Earth Day the year after that.

Do those defining social movements not deserve historical coverage, even a sidebar? And what about the art for the issue? Flip through the photos and you’ll find a total of 46 men and seven women. The ratio in the leadership photos is even worse.

“Global Insurrection,” indeed. Perhaps a sequel is in order.

Mark Dowie
ASHLAND, ORE.

letters@thenation.com

A Hopeful Issue

I often don’t read The Nation because political bad news increases my deep mourning for our nation and the world, not to mention my skepticism about possible remedies. The August 13/20 issue, however, has two articles that stand out to me for their positivity. I am talking about Michael Massing’s “Journalism in the Age of Trump,” which displayed courage in calling out the media for disparaging those who voted for the current president, thereby emphasizing that the country is splitting up into factions and excusing themselves “from the hard work of analyzing and explaining the…nature of Trump’s populism.” And I am talking about Sasha Abramksy’s “A Green New Deal in the Evergreen State,” which demonstrated hope in describing the plan developed in Washington State to use funds from polluters to help those who are poor and who often suffer most from the pollution. Brilliant. I deeply appreciate these articles.

Anne Hanson
FLORIDA, N.Y.

The Bankruptcy of Tax Cuts

Nice piece by Bryce Covert [“Red-State Rumblings,” July 30/Aug. 6] on the failure of conservative tax cuts to produce the results promised by supply-side economist Arthur Laffer, the Koch brothers, and the American Legislative Exchange Council. They have done us a favor by proving the bankruptcy of their simplistic economic propaganda.

Wendell Fitzgerald
POINTE REYES STATION, CALIF.

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decade ago, in a series of dark chambers beneath the Invalides in central Paris, the French government inaugurated what it called the “Historial” Charles de Gaulle. Historial is a French neologism meaning something between a museum, a monument, and an educational exhibit. This example, however, all too clearly reflected the middle-aged designers’ vision of what would attract a generation raised on computers and video games. Quotations from de Gaulle literally glow on walls in massive, multicolored fonts. Film clips play on the ceilings. There are several “audiovisual portals.” Interactive screens, offering up yet more clips as well as short articles, stand available for those who want to learn more.

The intention of the Historial was to provide a site of homage and learning that would instruct visitors about the man who led the Free French in World War II and founded the Fifth Republic in 1958. The overall effect, however, is strangely sinister. When I visited in June, the Historial was nearly deserted, and the shadowy underground spaces filled with glaring displays reminded me of nothing so much as the nuclear-command bunker in Dr. Strangelove. In fact, the remains of an actual Nazi bunker on the site had to be cleared away for its construction. De Gaulle himself, whose cultural tastes tended toward the deeply traditional, would almost certainly have loathed the place.

David A. Bell teaches history at Princeton and is the author, most recently, with Anthony Grafton, of The West: A New History.
But precisely because it is such a commemorative misfire, the Historical inadvertently captures some of the difficulty of memorializing Charles de Gaulle. He played an undeniably heroic role during World War II. But his postwar career was just as important, and had far more ambiguous consequences for contemporary France. After briefly heading the provisional government after liberation, de Gaulle retired to his country home in the early 1950s. In 1958, after army officers seized power in what was then French Algeria and threatened to overthrow the government in Paris, he became premier, ruling by decree, in what many described as a coup d’état. He then proceeded to found a Fifth Republic with an outsized presidency tailored to his own outsized ego and occupied the position for more than a decade. The qualities of arrogant determination and inflexible patriotism that had served him well during World War II proved far more troubling in this later role. They turned positively toxic in the 1960s, when de Gaulle utterly failed to understand youthful frustrations with the rigid, outdated institutions that dominated French society—especially in the educational sector. The result was an explosion of protest in 1968 that for several weeks seemed likely to pitch the country into a new revolution.

De Gaulle remains France’s most important political figure since Napoleon. Over 3,600 French localities have a public monument named for him. President Emmanuel Macron, who posed for his official photographs in 2017 with de Gaulle’s war memoirs prominently displayed on his desk, is only the most recent French leader to cast himself as de Gaulle’s heir. But the veneration of de Gaulle owes more to his wartime role than to his subsequent political one. And it is becoming increasingly obvious, as Macron’s presidency follows several of his predecessors’ into the nether regions of unpopularity, that the political system de Gaulle created is serving the France of the 21st century quite poorly. If de Gaulle did more than anyone else to create the France we know today, many of the problems it now faces have roots in his legacy.

All of this makes writing de Gaulle’s biography particularly important, but doing it is no easy task. The documentation is overwhelming, while the main lines of the story are already well-known—not least thanks to de Gaulle himself, who wrote extensive memoirs of a high literary quality. While freshly released material from the archives offers new insights into various aspects of de Gaulle’s career—including his bizarre secret flight to a military base in Germany at the height of the 1968 protests—it has not yielded any particularly shocking revelations. There are already a good number of lively biographies by French and British journalists that provide a good basic introduction, not to mention Jean Lacouture’s exhaustive three-volume study.

Faced with this challenge, one possible strategy—exemplified by my Princeton colleague Stephen Kotkin’s ongoing multivolume life of Joseph Stalin—would be to embed the biography within a larger reinterpretation of the period as a whole. Julian Jackson, a professor at the University of London, has taken a more conventional path: He concentrates tightly on de Gaulle himself. This choice has the disadvantage of presenting de Gaulle’s story largely free of context, including the massive changes in the daily lives of most French people in the period between de Gaulle’s birth in 1890 and death in 1970. It means that Jackson follows, in occasionally tortuous detail, every significant quarrel in the career of this exceedingly quarrelsome man. But it has for the most part served Jackson well, allowing him to give us a judicious, authoritative, lucid, and engaging portrait. He is one of the leading historians of 20th-century France, known especially for his France: The Dark Years 1940–1944, a superb history of the country under German occupation. His De Gaulle will likely remain the standard biography for many years to come.

Jackson has composed De Gaulle in a venerable, and very British, empirical style, and makes no attempt to psychoanalyze his subject. While he quotes many people who questioned de Gaulle’s sanity, he never does so himself. In discussing de Gaulle’s early years, he concentrates mostly on the family milieu, rather than on the roots of the man’s extraordinary personality. That milieu was extremely traditional, Catholic, patriotic, and fiercely committed to education (especially in de Gaulle’s case—his father was a teacher).

The cultural background was crucial. Like many of his successors, including Macron, de Gaulle grew up in a literary culture that leaves even relatively well-read American politicians looking like Trump, and he liked to show it off. In an early book on military leadership, he quoted, among others, Goethe, Henri Bergson, Francis Bacon, Flaubert, Socrates, Tolstoy, Anatole France, Shakespeare, and Cicero. De Gaulle was also from an early age a devout Catholic, and remained so for all his life. He occasionally fantasized about restoring the French monarchy, but never embraced the viciously intolerant reactionary nationalism so common among monarchists on the prewar French right. (That said, he was not above the occasional racist or anti-Semitic crack, notably when he labeled Jews a “domineering and overconfident people” after a quarrel with Israel.) Despite his traditionalist inclinations, in practice his politics were usually moderate and pragmatic. Unlike many conservative army officers, he always accepted the legitimacy of the Republic, and often expressed admiration for the military leaders of the French Revolution, making a particular hero of Lazare Carnot, a member of the radical Committee of Public Safety.

De Gaulle’s personality, however, was anything but moderate. All his life he was prey to depression, violent mood swings, and uncontrollable rages, and nearly everyone who met him seems to have commented on his truly extraordinary arrogance. To quote one of his instructors at the French war college in the 1920s: He “spoils incontestable qualities by his excessive self-assurance, his harshness towards other people’s opinions, and his attitude of a king in exile.”

His personality did not keep de Gaulle from rapid advancement in the French Army. His obvious brilliance and fanatical work ethic counted more heavily, along with his spotless record in World War I (he led men bravely in combat, was wounded, and made numerous escape attempts while a prisoner of war in Germany). His arrogance did lead him into endless quarrels with superiors, though, including with the man who for a time acted as his mentor: Marshal Philippe Pétain, later the head of the Vichy regime.

In the 1930s, de Gaulle enraged much of the top brass by calling for a full-scale reorganization of the army and a heavier emphasis on mechanized warfare. Of course, he was right. The Germans’ skillful use of tanks helped produce their stunningly rapid defeat of France in 1940. As de Gaulle himself put it, with his usual modesty, in the midst of the blitzkrieg: “Our initial defeat...
B

between 1940 and 1944, often through sheer force of personality, de Gaulle forged the Free French into the undisputed French government in exile, and gained authority over the non-Communist resistance in France itself. He outmaneuvered a series of rivals to remain the movement’s uncontested leader.

Still, the same force of personality nearly sank him on many occasions. He fascinated everyone who met him, with diarists rarely failing to comment on his odd physique (he was very tall, with a noticeably small head and oddy wide hips). But his arrogance repelled. Franklin Roosevelt grew to loathe him, and one of de Gaulle’s own aides admitted that he suspected the French leader had trouble understanding other people “because he despises them.” As Jackson aptly observes, de Gaulle owed his survival in large part to the initial support he received from Churchill. “The romantic and sentimental side of his nature,” he writes, “was seduced by the quixotic nobility of the General’s solitary struggle.” Yet Churchill saw the Free French mainly as an allied auxiliary force. When it became clear that de Gaulle intended to function as an equal member of the Allied coalition, with sovereign authority over anything to do with France or its colonial empire, the two men’s relationship deteriorated sharply. By 1944, a Foreign Office official noted: “PM is almost insane at times in his hatred of de Gaulle, only less insane than the president.”

By 1944, however, de Gaulle could afford to drive Churchill insane, since he had sufficient independent support in France and its colonies. When he returned to France with the Allied armies in June of 1944, he did so with the overall backing of the population, who realized his leadership guaranteed the quick restoration of French civil authority. With what Jackson calls his “instinctive showmanship,” he turned the liberation of Paris two months later into a grand demonstration of national pride and reawakening, staging a massive march down the Champs-Élysées and delivering one of the great speeches of the 20th century: “Paris. Paris outraged. Paris broken. Paris martyred. But Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the armies of France, with the help and support of all of France....”

Nothing in de Gaulle’s long subsequent career could quite match that moment. The immediate postwar period quickly turned bitter for him, as the French political class fell into its usual squabbling and stubbornly refused to follow his commands. Retiring to his country home, he turned to writing his war memoirs, which enjoyed enormous success. The books, needless to say, expressed de Gaulle’s gargantuan sense of his own historical importance and also made clear his continuing political availability: “Looking into the chasm into which the fatherland has fallen, I am its son, who calls it, shows it the light, shows it the road of salvation.”

When he published these words in 1954, another chasm was already opening with the Algerian crisis. Since the 19th century, Algeria had legally constituted an integral part of France, but with indigenous Muslim Algerians deprived of political rights. After 1945, a war for independence launched by the National Liberation Front (FLN) met with savage repression from the French authorities. “Algeria is France and the only road of salvation,” de Gaulle stated clearly. “The moment has come for Algeria to claim its right to self-determination.”

al de Gaulle actively plotted with the rebellious generals? Many thought so. “He was no more directly involved in the plot than God in the creation,” charged his longtime opponent Mitterrand, with some credibility. Whatever the case, the new Fifth Republic received overwhelming support in a referendum. Then, within four years, to enraged cries of betrayal from the supporters of “French Algeria,” de Gaulle negotiated Algerian independence. Disgruntled officers formed a secret organization, tried and failed to stage a coup against him, and attempted to assassinate him several times.

De Gaulle loathed political parties and hoped his Fifth Republic would become “a kind of popular monarchy,” with the president governing in the national interest, above the political fray. Of course, nothing of the sort took place. No modern democratic leader can avoid the political fray, and the Gaullists predictably coalesced into a conventional center-right party, albeit one deeply committed to the French tradition of a powerful, interventionist state (they now call themselves Les Républicains).

De Gaulle himself, imperious as ever, tried to avoid domestic political squabbling and concentrated on foreign policy. He worked to restore French influence in Africa, oversaw the development of nuclear armaments in France, and withdrew French forces from NATO command, all in pursuit of maintaining France’s great-power status. As he wrote, in one of the most famous lines from his memoirs, “France cannot be France without grandeur.”

Yet in the search for grandeur, and in de Gaulle’s romantic vision of an older, government minister.

European settlers and the army remained committed to this line, but as the ugly struggle dragged on and the FLN gained international recognition, many in mainland France came to reconsider the question. In May 1958, army leaders in Algiers staged their putsch, demanding the preservation of “French Algeria” and the return of de Gaulle to power. On May 29, President René Coty, warning of civil war, dramatically invited de Gaulle to take office. Parliament approved, giving him the power to rule by decree, and the Fourth Republic died. The Fifth Republic, custom-designed by de Gaulle himself, arose in its place.
more traditional France, he failed to see what his country had actually become. He had a fascination with modern technology, especially military technology, but he failed to appreciate, understand, or even notice a great many other changes within French society: the disappearance of the peasantry; the decline of religious observance; the changing role of women (de Gaulle himself had a highly traditional, intensely private marriage); the decline of heavy industry; the growing number of immigrants moving to the country.

Some of these changes were the unwitting results of de Gaulle’s own policies. In the 1960s, his government presided over a massive influx of immigrant laborers coming to France. Most came from former French possessions in Africa, but the government made little provision for integrating them into French life—still less planning for how France itself might change as a result of their arrival. In a remark that has since become infamous, de Gaulle warned that Muslims could no more “integrate” into French society than oil could mix with vinegar, and that with Muslim immigration, “my village would no longer be called Colombey-les-deux-Eglises but Colombey-les-deux-Mosquées” (i.e., not Colombey-the-two-Churches but Colombey-the-two-Mosques).

Haughty and stubborn, de Gaulle saw no need for the rigid institutions of the French state to adapt to changing demographics and needs. His administration maintained rigid control over the educational sector—including higher education—and also over television and radio broadcasting. All this, along with rising unemployment, and protests against America’s war in Vietnam, fed into burgeoning social frustration. But at the end of 1967, de Gaulle himself wrote blithely to his son: “politically, economically and socially the year is ending in calm.”

A few months later, the country proved him spectacularly wrong. What began as student protests turned into pitched battles with the police. Workers joined in with a general strike. Suddenly, the country seemed on the brink of revolution. On May 29, in an episode that only came to light years later and remains murky, de Gaulle flew secretly from Paris to a French military base in Germany. Reviewing the available evidence, Jackson concludes that de Gaulle did not necessarily intend to flee the country, and that a conversation with an old comrade at the base probably stiffened his resolve. But whatever the case, de Gaulle returned to Paris the same day, made a firm speech on the radio, and his faithful supporters massed again on the Champs-Élysées. The revolutionary fervor sputtered out.

Still, the “events” of May 1968 left de Gaulle exhausted and disillusioned. France, not for the first time, had failed to live up to his high expectations. If the French increasingly saw him as a rigid relic of the past, in his view the French had turned away from higher, shared ideals to pursue petty individual pleasures. In 1969, he resigned the presidency. A year after that, he died.

Jackson recounts de Gaulle’s career in a scrupulously fair manner, and his overall conclusions are entirely persuasive. While he acknowledges his subject’s arrogance and recklessness, he also argues that de Gaulle knew how to step back from the brink of ruinous confrontation. He stresses de Gaulle’s “pragmatic capacity to adapt,” notably in acknowledging the inevitability of Algerian independence. De Gaulle famously wrote that “all my life I have had a certain idea of France,” but as Jackson nicely quips, “it was not always the same idea.”

If Jackson finds a constant in de Gaulle’s politics, it was his “almost religious reverence for the state.” Jackson rejects the idea, dear to some French admirers, that de Gaulle saw prophetically further than any of his contemporaries. “What is remarkable about de Gaulle in 1940,” Jackson explains, “is not so much his intellectual analysis of the future of the war as his readiness to act.” On occasion, Jackson cannot contain his exasperation with de Gaulle, for instance commenting that a passage in his memoirs shows “a cynicism and lack of generosity startling even from him.” Yet he also recounts with admiration the tenderness, protectiveness, and care that de Gaulle showed for his daughter Anne, who had Down syndrome and died at the age of 20, in 1948.

De Gaulle concludes with a quote from the Catholic intellectual Jacques Maritain. De Gaulle’s “heroic chivalry,” he wrote in 1942, “has given back hope to the French.” Jackson concurs. His “lasting achievement,” Jackson also insists, was to create the Fifth Republic, the first regime to enjoy the consensus support of the French since 1789. Gaullism has proven, in Jackson’s view, to be a stabilizing synthesis of France’s monarchical and republican political traditions, allowing left and right to accept each other and reconciling the Old Regime and the Revolution.

Jackson is not the first to make this claim. It’s an old, well-known argument. It was made by de Gaulle himself. But is it correct? The oddity of de Gaulle’s famous “synthesis” is that after the experience of Vichy, which thoroughly discredited traditional French conservatism, there did not remain much, on the right side of the spectrum, to synthesize. Did France really need a popular monarchy with echoes of the Old Regime? Perhaps de Gaulle, with his heroic aura, in the midst of crisis, only made it seem inevitable and necessary. As Jackson notes, the much-maligned Fourth Republic in fact accomplished a great deal, especially in the area of economic modernization. It put in place effective planning mechanisms, developed enduringly effective welfare policies, and cooperated with Germany to found what would become the European Union. Had it managed to survive the Algerian crisis, it might well have lasted till the present day.

De Gaulle’s Fifth Republic receives a great deal of credit for political stability, but many other European democracies, broadly similar to France in social makeup, have enjoyed a similar degree of stability without recourse to an overly powerful executive. One might also note that while the Fifth Republic may have consensus support, even today it is the Third Republic, with its relatively weak presidency, that remains the longest-lived of all France’s postrevolutionary regimes, despite the fact that the then-powerful traditional right considered it illegitimate.

What the Fifth Republic and its presidency did end up doing was protect the interests of de Gaulle’s beloved state—and France is not America, where statist has broadly progressive connotations. French statist of the Gaullist variety protects the interests of social elites who attend exclusive public educational institutions like the École Nationale d’Administration (ENA) and then flit easily between high civil service and private enterprise. In an increasingly diverse, multicultural country, this statist opposes diversity efforts in the name of formal republican egalitarianism. It has also proven to be surprisingly compatible with free-market fundamentalism. Large banks and corporations already exercise an influence comparable to that of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. And the
Whether or not Paris was the “capital of the 19th century,” as it has sometimes been called, it really was the capital of 19th-century art. That’s something to ponder, because at the start of the century, its preeminence might not have been easily predicted. Just before the Revolution, the one figure we still recognize as belonging among the great masters is Chardin, essentially an outlier: a largely self-taught artist who gained the esteem of the French Academy with paintings that ignored its promotion of a narrative and literary art focused on heroic public action over the depiction of everyday domestic life and its mute objects. We also still remember the florid talents of his contemporaries Fragonard, Boucher, and Greuze, but they offer little hint of art’s future. The postrevolutionary scene was dominated by David, a massive force, to be sure, but one whose neoclassical pictorial rhetoric mainly served to initiate an academic rigor that would soon almost strangle French painting. What subsequently

last four French presidents have made it a top priority to loosen labor protections and otherwise cut regulations. The one Fifth Republic president elected on a genuine, if out-of-date socialist program, François Mitterrand (in 1981), abandoned that program after barely two years and, despite his own hatred of de Gaulle, devoted much of his remaining 12 years in office to a quite Gaullist politics of grandeur.

Emmanuel Macron, elected overwhelmingly a year ago over the extreme-right populist Marine Le Pen, is an emblem of Fifth Republic statism. He is a product both of the elite ENA and of a top bank with close ties to the French finance ministry. Like de Gaulle, Macron views the presidency as an institution that sits above the political fray, using a powerful bureaucracy to impose rational, necessary reforms on a sometimes-recalcitrant country. He came into office promising to enact neoliberal social reforms that would free French business from burdensome regulations. He also promised to temper these reforms with a strengthened social safety net and with retraining for refugees from obsolescent industries. But to date, the French have seen a great deal of Macron’s neoliberalism—some of it imposed by decree, despite Macron’s strong majority in Parliament—and precious little of the rest. Many of his reforms, including a reduction of taxes on the wealthy and the introduction of selectivity into the university system (which has traditionally offered a place to anyone passing the high-school baccalaureate exam) will certainly exacerbate social inequality. Macron claims to want a new “revolution” in French society (his campaign book was called Révolution), but the society he envisions is, in a fundamental sense, like de Gaulle’s: a society with formal, civil, republican equality, but also a society where a well-educated social elite remains firmly in charge.

Not surprisingly, many of the French feel increasingly alienated. Macron’s popularity stands close to where his hapless predecessor François Hollande’s did at the same point in Hollande’s term—and Hollande’s support eventually crashed to an impressively awful, record-setting 6 percent. Populist anger continues to throb. If an election were held today, Macron would have no serious opposition. But if his slide in the polls continues unchecked, then by the time his term ends, in 2022, a path may be cleared for a populist, anti-EU candidate—of either the far left or right—to win the presidency. That victory would certainly test the Fifth Republic’s vaunted stability. And it would be, in part, Charles de Gaulle’s legacy.

THE IMMENSE GAZE

The women of Impressionism

by BARRY SCHWABSKY
made Paris a lightning rod for artistic energy was, in fact, a sequence of rebellions against David’s neoclassical strictures—first Romantic, then Realist, and finally Impressionist.

The traveling exhibition “Women Artists in Paris, 1850–1900,” curated by Laurence Madeline, helps recover much of this rebellious energy, and it does even more to redress the still-ongoing undervaluation of the work of women artists in this period of incredible richness and dynamism. On view at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, through September 3—concluding a national tour, organized by the American Federation of Arts, that also included the Denver Art Museum and the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky—it also offers a fresh look at an artistic situation of 19th-century Paris, a look that does not presuppose that all the judgments that have been handed down over the intervening century or so must be taken at face value.

Imagine an exhibition simply titled “Art in Paris, 1850–1900.” Its structure, centering on Impressionism, seems already predetermined. It would start with the Realism, so-called, of Courbet, follow with the great transitional figures of Manet and Degas, encompass all the major and secondary protagonists of Impressionism (Pissarro, Renoir, and the rest), and then set off all the brilliant sparks that uneasily coexist under the label Post-Impressionism (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat) before concluding, not with the art of a new generation, but with at least a foreshadowing of the astonishing late achievements of Cézanne and Monet as they lived on into the 20th century. Perhaps all this would be accompanied by a sort of counterpoint of academic resistance (Cabanel? Gérôme?—but would there be any aesthetic basis for the choice?) and Symbolism (Redon), but the main line of development would be a foregone conclusion.

I expected nothing less than to see a sort of distaff version of this story in “Women Artists in Paris.” After all, today the best-known of the women artists active in Paris in the second half of the 19th century are both central figures in Impressionism: Berthe Morisot and her American colleague Mary Cassatt—artists who still have not received their due as the major talents they were. And both are well represented here, as are the less-engageing talents of Marie Bracquemond, who participated, like Morisot and Cassatt, in the Impressionist exhibitions, and Eva Gonzalès, a student of Manet’s who did not exhibit with the group but is nonetheless usually considered an Impressionist herself. Instead, what I found was a depiction of these female Impressionists as part of a much more varied ecosystem of artists attempting to find a way forward amid shifting and often contradictory currents.

Straight academic classicism is little in evidence in this exhibition, but many shades of realism and naturalism are here, as well as various types of Symbolism. Even more striking than the stylistic heterogeneity of the exhibition, though perhaps partly accounting for it, is the fact that this exhibition of art in Paris is not primarily an exhibition of French art. For that matter, although all of the artists included here spent some time in Paris, many of the works were painted elsewhere, showing the influence of a stay in the City of Light on artists who eventually went elsewhere—usually the country of their birth. The exhibition includes more artists from the Nordic countries than from France; all in all, and thanks to the numerous US contingent as well as a sprinkling of Germans, Austrians, Russians, Ukrainians, and Brits, the foreigners outnumbered the French by more than two and a half to one. A few of them, like Cassatt, settled in Paris permanently, but many eventually brought what they found there home to Philadelphia, San Francisco, Helsinki, Christiania (today’s Oslo), or wherever else they’d come from, thereby contributing to the worldwide influence of Paris as an art center. Like New York from the time of the Abstract Expressionists until now, or London since the 1990s (though we’ll have to wait and see what changes Brexit may bring), 19th-century Paris thrived as a place where artists from all over could find a niche.

By so many of the women artists who made their way to Paris in the late 19th century came from Scandinavia is an interesting question that an exhibition like this can’t answer; but it’s worth pointing out that this was a period when Nordic culture suddenly went from being somewhat peripheral to Europe as a whole to a position of centrality. Just consider that the great triumph of late-19th-century theater—Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov—consists of a Norwegian and a Swedish playwright alongside the Russian. Given that these names include the authors of A Doll’s House and Miss Julie, one might conclude that an unsettling of traditional relations between men and women was essential to what the critic Georg Brandes called the “modern breakthrough” in Nordic culture. Brandes himself, a towering intellectual of the time, translated John Stuart Mill’s essay “The Subjection of Women” into Danish in 1869, the very year it was published in English, playing his own role in this breakthrough. So, too, did his female contemporaries—Anna Ancher, Harriet Backer, Hanna Pauli, Helene Schjerbeck, and Ellen Thesleff—who began arriving in Paris in the 1870s. All took from Paris in terms of aesthetic theory or pictorial technique, but one suspects that, like Brandes, they also offered just as much in return by way of challenging stereotypes that were still more readily accepted in Paris, perhaps, than in the Scandinavian capitals. As Vibeke Waallann Hansen suggests in the catalog, the bonds between artists from the various Nordic countries were more likely to be forged “in foreign art metropoles such as Munich, Berlin, and Paris” than at home; it’s unlikely that those art centers were unmarked in turn by their presence.

Not that French artists were overshadowed by their foreign colleagues. No female painter made a bigger mark in her day than the Frenchwoman Rosa Bonheur, whose most famous painting, The Horse Fair (1852–55), will be familiar to visitors to New York’s Metropolitan Museum, where it hangs alongside works by Courbet. Given her renown, it’s peculiar that in Williamstown she is represented by a single work, albeit an impressive (and impressively

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large) one, *Plowing in Nivernais*. Painted in 1850—a remake of an earlier version now in the Musée d’Orsay, Paris—it represents the show’s chronological starting point, though because the exhibition is thematically organized with sections on topics like “The Lives of Women,” “Fashioning an Image,” “Picturing Childhood,” and so on, we only encounter it about halfway through.

Bonheur was one of the notable characters of her day. Her father was a painter as well as a follower of Saint-Simonian socialism, and he encouraged her love of art. Her astonishingly vivid and monumental depictions of animals brought her great success while she was still in her 20s. She hobnobbed with royalty, bought herself a château, and was the first woman artist to be awarded the grand-croix of the Légion d’Honneur. An open nonconformist, Bonheur wore men’s clothing and lived with a female partner. (Her later life partner and eventual heir, Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, an American painter, is also in the exhibition.) Bonheur inverted gender stereotypes without quite contesting them, personifying an ideal of masculine genius in ways that other women painters would not. Likewise, the realism of her paintings lacks the critical edge of Courbet’s. Her depiction of peasant life in *Plowing in Nivernais* lends her workaday subject the drama and monumentality of grand-scale history painting, not unlike what Courbet did with a country funeral in *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50). But by making the animals into exemplars of heroic force and vitality, Bonheur smuggles a kind of idealization into the painting that defuses its surface realism. And by shrouding the cattle drivers and plowman in shadow, turning them into mere staffage, she asserts what Courbet contested: that ordinary people are inappropriate protagonists for great painting.

Bonheur was not the only one to use a surface realism for essentially conservative ends, though none could match her for energy and technique. The Swiss-born Englishwoman Lady Elizabeth Butler, represented here by two paintings from the 1870s, was a specialist in military scenes. What she lacked in experience of the battlefield she made up for by a valiant effort in research. One painting, we read, involved “studying the anatomy of horses at the circus, purchasing a field to serve as the setting, requesting the British army to organize military exercises so she could observe smoke patterns, and even going so far as to ask specific troops to charge her on horseback.” At a time before photography took on the journalistic role it would soon play, Butler’s conscientious efforts had considerable value. But the backstory of her preparation is more inspiring than the paintings themselves, and her soldiers are mere stereotypes in a costume drama. Today, when documentary modes have once again come into favor in art—though no longer typically in the form of painting—works like Butler’s should serve as a reminder that accuracy of detail may not compensate for banality of form.

Having the means to buy a piece of land to serve as a setting for a painting is extreme, but it points to something I wish the catalog writers had explored. Reading through the biographies of the artists, one gets the impression that an unusual proportion of these women came from wealthy, even aristocratic families—more than would be the case for a similar sample of their male colleagues, who mostly emerged from more modest backgrounds. Many of these women artists were able to use their class privileges to offset the gender inequities they faced. But it was probably never very clear in advance what chance they had of persisting. A family with a name to protect could present more formidable challenges than an obscure one. The teacher of the well-to-do Berthe Morisot and her older sister Edma warned their mother that she might find their potential success as artists a problem: “In your upper bourgeois milieu, that will be a revolution, almost, I should say, a catastrophe.” In fact, the Morisot parents did not stand in their daughters’ way, but Edma’s marriage signaled the end of her artistic career. Cassatt’s father, apprised of his daughter’s plan to paint in Paris, told her, “I would almost rather see you dead.” In the end, he and the whole family followed her there.

Cassatt’s and Morisot’s tenacity paid off. For me, the exhibition’s high point is Cassatt’s *Portrait of an Elderly Lady in a Bonnet: Red Background* (circa 1887). Here, accuracy of observation is keyed to human presence more than to the reconstruction of details, and the seemingly nebulous red background is actually artfully structured as a kind of inconspicuously enveloping and sustaining support for the ramrod-straight figure. The evident informality of Cassatt’s brushwork, its sweeping and suggestive rather than definitive character—leaving the surface seemingly unfinished yet all the more manifest for that in the lower left corner—provides a telling counterpoint to the intelligent formality of the subject’s bearing to give the sense of a person known and encountered on multiple levels. Nearly as remarkable is Cassatt’s *Autumn, Portrait of Lydia Cassatt* (1880), in which the artist’s sister, sitting with a distant expression on a park bench, is enclosed in a blanket of intricately interwoven abstract marks in fall colors that seem to evoke the pattern of her thought as much as the chill of the season.

Morisot is lyrical where Cassatt is analytical; her color is clearer and less rich. Her paintings tend toward a balancing of color, even a kind of monochromy. One could construct an extensive point-by-point comparison between Cassatt’s *Autumn* and Morisot’s vernal park-bench portrait *Young Girl in a Park* (1888–93). But for all the differences, what they share is a systematic use of the painting’s factura—mostly free-flowing in Morisot’s case, more restless and agitated with Cassatt—to articulate the canvas as a space of nearness, to express at once both the distinction and the continuity between a painting’s subject and the surrounding space, the hidden unity of figure and background. Morisot’s *Woman at Her Toilette* (1875–80) wraps its subject—her back turned, showing a bare shoulder—in a quiet storm of feathery nuances of white and gray tinged with all sorts of pink and blue notes, encompassing both her dress and what is presumably a wallpaper background. Here, every perception seems fleeting and intangible—except for the bright silvery dot of an earing that seems to hold the whole painting together despite its centrifugal undertow.

It makes sense, in the end, that among the artists at the forefront of Impressionism would be two women. To a great extent, the whole effort of Impressionists—their rejection of the blaring rhetoric of historical painting and of the heroism of its mystical protagonists, and their concomitant change of focus to everyday life, the domestic sphere, and the spaces of leisure and entertainment—was, as Chardin’s heirs, to shift the primary subject matter of art toward matters that had previously been looked down upon as trivial and feminine.

Degas, Monet, and the other male Impressionists did so for reasons that might be called ideological; their female counterparts added to these principled motives a different sense of identification. There can be a somewhat voyeuristic bent to the male Impressionists’ observation of daily life that is absent from the women’s, as Griselda Pollock wrote in her groundbreaking 1998 monograph on Cassatt—but the same is true of Morisot: “the represented space within the painting registers the space from which the painting was made, a space that included the artist, looking, painting, thinking, organizing, interacting with her models.” This inclusive space was something new in the history of art.
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of the exhibition really came to a close in 1900, as its title says, then the discovery of this new recursive space of “looking, painting, thinking, organizing, interacting” by the Impressionists would really be its climax; the denouement would be the incorporation of this discovery by a number of strong but less radical artists who followed in their footsteps—here, paintings like Erneste (Child With Nurse) (1894) by the American Cecilia Beaux, with its abrupt cropping, or the Norwegian Harriet Backer’s Evening, Interior (1890), with its strange dialogue between figure and shadow, could be cited. Elizabeth Nourse, another American, seems to quote the famously awkward splayed-leg sprawl of the child in Cassatt’s Little Girl in a Blue Armchair (1878), which is not in this show, in her own A Mother (1888), albeit enveloped in a more Whistler-esque monotone and with an added dose of sentiment.

However, the show also offers several works from the first decade of the 20th century, including some by an artist who might be designated as the true successor of Cassatt and Morisot: the extraordinary German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker. She, too, came from a well-to-do family, but—in contrast to Cassatt and Morisot—you’d never know it from looking at her paintings. She seems to have perceived people in an utterly creaturely way; Rainer Maria Rilke, in the “Requiem for a Friend” he wrote in her memory after her early death, at 31, spoke of a gaze that was “immense” and “unpossessive, of such true poverty.”

The figures in her Nursing Mother in Front of Birch Forest (1905) are massive, reminding us of how such a pair may form, for a moment, a kind of self-enclosed world of their own. Here, everything is raw, un-gainly, and seemingly more connected to tactile perceptions than visual ones. Modersohn-Becker cares nothing for the infinitely refined sensations that beguiled Morisot in her Woman at Her Toilette, or the inner distance bordering on ennui that’s conveyed in Cassatt’s Autumn. Yet she is the heir to those two artists—and the progenitor, in turn, of an artist like Alice Neel—in her ability to envision the figure of the nursing mother as expressing its subjective singularity not through a separation from its context as a quasi-sculptural protrusion engaged in heroic action, but as the iterative locus of an expression that pervades the painting as a whole. This is the painted modernity that would never have been experienced with such poignance and pungency had it not been for the women who made their way to Paris in the late 19th century.

Intimacy can be music’s greatest muse, and yet often it can be belabored to the point of deadened cliché. Many times one feels that there are few original things left to say in a love song. But serpentwithfeet, aka the Baltimore-born and New York-based musician Josiah Wise, has proved this notion wrong. His debut album, soil, a meditation on the intricacies of romance, captures what it feels like to love men and love love loudly. Much like Janelle Monáe’s recent exploration of her queer black womanliness and Moonlight’s portrayal of queer black manhood, soil proves transcendent. Privileging soul-baring and radical honesty over palatability, the album is stunning.

In soil, serpentwithfeet thrusts himself into the open, pining and healing in the same breaths. But these aren’t just run-of-the-mill make-up and break-up ballads: His depiction of love is biblical, and every song is a hymn. Raised in the church as a choirboy and later trained in classical music, serpentwithfeet renders the carnality of R&B and the exuberance of gospel into a triumphant spectacle, equal parts infernal and celestial. At any given moment, the distance between sanctity and sensuality is hard to spot. The “him” in his songs isn’t the capital-H “Him” in gospel, but serpentwithfeet gleefully plays with the ambiguity. “I get to devote my life to him / (Oh how I love the taste of you),” he sings of his holy love on the absorbing ritual of “cherubim.”

The song “wrong tree” further highlights serpentwithfeet’s church background, employing sanctuary organs and praise-and-worship handclaps, complete with a few “sang choir!” flourishes at the open and close. It’s one of the more playful arrangements on the album, but serpentwithfeet’s impassioned vocals and lyrics of rejection also keep the song firmly grounded in our world. His voice is perfectly fit for this kind of blurring of the heavenly and the earthly. His falsetto quivers with poignancy, and his lyrics flower and fall with all the gravitas of Scripture. Structurally, the songs rarely feature hooks in the

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

The love songs of serpentwithfeet

by BRIANA YOUNGER

Briana Younger’s criticism has appeared in The Washington Post, Pitchfork, and Rolling Stone.
traditional sense; in their place are layer upon
layer of spine-tingling harmonies and lush
choral arrangements set to experimental pro-
ductions—regal bells, atmospheric synths,
thudding percussion. When serpentwithfeet
traverses the tumultuous lands of lost love, it’s
with thankfulness and pride.

On “fragrant,” the singer finds grace on
the lips of his ex’s other lovers, allowing the
shared connection to join them in a sort of
collective sorrow that isn’t underscored by
bitterness but by appreciation. Similarly, the
album’s standout “mourning song” eulogizes
a relationship in a swirl of theatric vocals,
as serpentwithfeet honors the melodrama of
his misery rather than attempting to leave
with bloated dignity. “It’s too much to be the
monster and miss you too,” he cries midway
through. And later: “I want to be big big sad /
I want to make a pageant of my grief.”

Both calm and storm, holy water and fiery
hell, soil is serpentwithfeet’s testament to the
liberating qualities of offering yourself in
full—to art and to love. His songs earn their
power through his lyrics and the turmoil
situated in his vocals. Emotions, no matter
how chaotic, explode through his music
and then wither away without resistance.
But above all else, it’s his transparency that
can be shattering. On the villainous, string-
driven introspection of “slow syrup,” he
ponders how his anguish is remaking him:
“Rejection is shaping me again,” he con-
fesses, his voice unsteady and vaporous,
“making me the man I don’t want to be.”

Yet there’s a universality beneath the per-
sonal despair: serpentwithfeet sings about
his romances and heartache, but he does so
in a way that seems to be singing for all of
us. (“Love says you are not too much,” goes
one line on the opening track, “whisper.”)
Though it would be a mistake to attempt
to separate the triumph of this album from
serpentwithfeet’s proud homosexuality: soil
is beautiful because of that fact, not in spite
of it—a queer black (former) choirboy hon-
oring what it means to live and love in the
world with every piece of him out front.

When the lead single, “bless ur heart,”
emerges at the very end of the album, it arrives
on a bed of piano keys as a prayer of gratitude
to the way love reshapes us all, but in particu-
lar the way it has reshaped the singer. “When
I give these books away, will my ink betray
me? / Will my stories resist wings and grow
feet and convince men that I’m boasting?” he
asks. But the transformative power of love has
taken its final shape, and serpentwithfeet can
only offer a benediction: “Boy, thank you for
showing me how to be gentle / I have courage
to share your love boldly.”

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that is a response to the xenophobia and hostility against
immigrants that has recently been coming from some
individual(s) in Washington, D.C.

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JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

Puzzle No. 3475

1 Stand and kick habit, to begin with (5)
4 Arrow maker in Florida—one who leaves an impression? (8)
10 Famous LSD advocate embraces grand goal… (9)
11 …by swallowing stray fruit (5)
12 Like some exams after commencement, displaying a sense of right and wrong (4)
13 Send small joint (4)
14 Castro redeploying district leader to the east for agricultural area (5)
16 Lunatic did in knockout youngster (5)
17 River running west and east at location in reverse (8)
19 Second alternative to milk for a loud baby, perhaps? (8)
21 Moving front to back, drain jugs (5)
25 Moderates try to return, imbued with energy (5)
26 Looking at just the rear ends makes the Bayeux Tapestry erotic (4)
27 Pressure to get old part of a book (4)
29 Elegant bird with duck’s tail (5)
31 Painting is almost red after some alterations (3,6)
32 Changes the arrangement of vacation, for sure, to include a bit of leisure (8)
33 Ring to mark award won by 13 actresses in the completed grid (5)

DOWN
1 Papal decree to authorize eating head of cow or steer (7)
2 University taken over by terrible dragon is ready for anything (5)
3 Pursue barbarian on time (4)
5 Turn in offensive play! (5)
6 and 30 Bachelor enters appropriate place to work out—that’s one way to create space (3,3)
7 For the most part, Weinstein and a couple of stars reap what was sown (7)
8 Savage raid engulfing Yemen’s capital, starting from hostile Saudi city (6)
9 John Roberts originally upholds all but the first piece of oath during economic upswing (8)
14 Regrets offer to hold back support (6)
15 Senior, for example, or contrarian acknowledges receipt (6)
18 About 11, quietly wear away chemical compound (8)
20 Beginning to chase us around, sailor raised sword (7)
22 Flexible source of characters in Ecclesiastes (7)
23 Person tending to lamb (rare, not well-done) supervised by that woman (7)
24 One who takes too much public transportation in chaotic era (6)
26 Rock or punk notes (5)
28 Firm adopting American disguise (4)
30 See 6

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3474

ACROSS 1 HASAFIT (faint aug.)
3 U - PR + EIGHT 9 aug. 10 aug.
4 CAROL + F 12 EG + PLAN + T
9 REIN + FOR + CEMENT 18 letter bank
11 GOD (rev.) + OF + WAR 22 LANCE
14 UN + PR + FLIGHT (aug.) + T 25 “no bell” 26 aug.
15 SH + EGO + AT 28 bidos + O aug.

DOWN 1 HARD/COVER (ord. aug.)
2 SOFA + R 3 aug. “tale”
4 aug. 6 [g]R[IN] + PUP
5 GOD/NOW + PLANET 17 aug.
7 G U A R (aug.) +ANTE + E + TREATY
8 BR/ERRAIR + BIT (R + bare rev.)
9 AU + BLE[ats] 16 aug. 17 aug.
10 [e]Y[ange] aug. 21 rev. 23 CHIC + O
19 SHEGOT DISORDER
24 [O]QUID

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