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How a feminist foreign policy can save the world

BEATRICE FIHN
This Is What Heroism Looks Like
Re Ady Barkan’s article “My Word Count” [Nov. 5, 2018]: Whatever the word count, and no matter the ravages of ALS, Ady Barkan packed sufficient power into his comment to move me to tears, and action. Heroic.

Harold Ford
Flint, Mich.

Lost in Translation
Halfway through his lengthy review of Andrea Komlós’s Work: The Last 1,000 Years [“What We Do,” Nov. 5, 2018], Gabriel Winant notes almost in passing that “in its original German, Komlós’s book is not titled Werk…but rather, Arbeit.” Yet nowhere in the piece is there specific mention of the book’s pair of translators, Loren Balhorn and Jacob K. Watson. A most unfortunate irony, then: In a review of a wide-ranging historical account of “work,” the actual labor of the translators who have made the volume available for English-language readers gets lost in the shuffle. Now what would a Marxist analyst say about this casual lapse?

Gene H. Bell-Villada
Cambridge, Mass.

Humph!
In reviewing my biography, Hubert Humphrey: The Conscience of the Country [“The Dual Defeat,” Nov. 12, 2018], Michael Kazin questions the subtitle, which was taken from a quotation by Vice President Walter Mondale, in which he called Humphrey “the country’s conscience.” Professor Kazin remains unforgiving of Humphrey’s strong support for the Vietnam War as vice president. Like Kazin, I too vigorously opposed that war, and actively backed Senator Eugene McCarthy’s presidential candidacy.

In 1964 and early 1965, Humphrey warned President Lyndon Johnson that the Vietnam conflict was unwinnable militarily and would splinter the Great Society political coalition. But Johnson’s public humiliation of Humphrey led Humphrey to become an administration spokesman for the war until his September 30, 1968, presidential-campaign speech, during which he proffered the idea of halting the bombing of Vietnam as an acceptable risk for peace. It was, however, too late to bring electoral victory.

Humphrey later admitted that bowing to Johnson’s demands about Vietnam was a tragic error. Upon his return to the Senate in 1970, he voted for measures to cut off war funding and for the 1973 War Powers Act limiting the president’s ability to wage war without congressional approval.

I admire Humphrey for advancing civil-rights legislation and defining civil rights to include “health care for all,” a safe neighborhood, good housing, a good education, and a job at a fair wage; and for his leadership in promoting aid to poorer nations, international control of atomic weapons, détente with the Soviet Union, and “containment without isolation” of the People’s Republic of China.

Humphrey was the most successful legislator of the 20th century, as over 1,000 former legislative aides and reporters voted days before he died in January 1978. And as conservative Republican Senator Robert Dole of Kansas said, he may have “overshot the nation’s highest office, and become instead one of the great world leaders—one of the major moral forces of our time or of any time.”

Despite his flawed behavior as vice president, Humphrey deserves to be called the “conscience of the country” based on his remarkable legislative achievements.

Arnold Offner
Newton, Mass.
The Wave Hits a Wall

Waking up this morning and looking at the midterm results, I kept returning to the British expression “a curate’s egg”—an object or turn of events described as “good in parts.” The end of Republican control of the House of Representatives is certainly good news. So too is the democratic pickup of seven governors, with the ousters of union foe Scott Walker in Wisconsin and Kris Kobach, the Kansas poster boy for voter suppression, particularly worth savoring. Jared Polis’s victory in Colorado makes him the first openly gay governor in the country, which is especially sweet since he ran on universal health care, stricter gun laws, the expansion of public education, and an opposition to fracking.

The election of Alessandra Biaggi, Zellnor Myrie, Jessica Ramos, and other successful challengers to members of the misleadingly labeled Independent Democratic Conference means that New Yorkers will finally get the Democratic State Legislature they have long voted for, which in turn might increase the pressure on Governor Andrew Cuomo to make good on his progressive rhetoric. As a close observer of Zephyr Teachout’s 2016 loss in New York’s 19th Congressional District, I was pleased to see Antonio Delgado overcome John Faso’s race-baiting campaign (though Delgado’s ability to raise $7.8 million to Faso’s $3.6 million—not a feat most Democratic challengers can emulate—suggests that Teachout’s focus on the corrosive effects of money on our politics is more relevant than ever). And while Andrew Gillum’s narrow defeat in Florida by Trump sock puppet Ron DeSantis is a particularly bitter disappointment, the passage of Amendment 4, which restores the right to vote to convicted felons who have completed their sentences, is a huge win for progressives and, with 64 percent of Floridians voting in favor, an indication that, slowly, the state is changing.

So much for the good news. The Senate was always going to be tough for Democrats, who had to defend 26 seats—10 in states that voted for Trump in 2016—while the Republicans only had to defend nine. I’d argue that Claire McCaskill, who ran ads distancing herself from “crazy Democrats,” and Joe Donnelly, an abortion foe who was also bad on guns, immigrants, and the environment, are no great losses. But the battle for Senate was never about individuals; it was about breaking Republican control—a rationale that might even justify the existence of Joe Manchin. Instead, the GOP has strengthened its grip on the upper house, making it easier to confirm right-wing judges to the bench and corporate lackeys to the agencies that are supposed to protect us.

Meanwhile, anyone hoping to ride the once-promised blue wave has been left high and dry. Headline heartbreaks in Florida, Texas, and Georgia—where, as I write, Stacey Abrams has yet to concede—are all the most stinging losses from a national Democratic strategy premised on the repudiation of that man in the White House. To be fair, Gillum, Abrams, and Beto O’Rourke all ran as progressives. But the wave that might have carried them to victory never materialized. Instead, yesterday’s results suggest a few sobering facts:

§ Donald Trump is extremely popular with his base. Although he may be anathema on the coasts, Trump’s support in flyover country remains a powerful asset.

§ With unemployment at a record low and wages apparently rising, Democrats are in danger of losing the economic argument. Yes, many workers have simply left the workforce, and wage gains haven’t kept up with inflation in the long run, but by ducking the issue and failing to offer their own economic plan, Democrats are fighting on Trump’s turf.

§ Immigration is the new abortion—a tool for demagogues and right-wing culture warriors to stir up fear and divert the argument away from health care, economic insecurity, climate change, and corporate corruption.

§ Even when Democrats have brilliant, charismat-
ic candidates like Abrams, Gillum, and O’Rourke, with progressive platforms and adequate funding, the system is still rigged against us.

Still, not all of Tuesday’s lessons are bitter. Abrams and Gillum both exploded the myth that candidates of color can’t compete in the South. #MeToo remains a political force. The backlash against Brett Kavanaugh’s critics may have dominated the headlines, but the wave of Democratic women candidates—the real political wave of 2018—tells a different story. Not just Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York, who ratified one of the biggest upsets in American political history, but Ayanna Pressley in Massachusetts, Veronica Escobar in Texas, Jahaan Hayes in Connecticut, Abby Finkenauer and Cindy Axne in Iowa, Ilhan Omar in Minnesota, Rashida Tlaib in Michigan, Sharice Davids in Kansas, Deb Haaland in New Mexico, and, of course, Jacky Rosen in Nevada. Not to mention ballot measures like the one that passed in Long Beach, California, protecting hotel workers against sexual harassment by bosses and guests.

Organizations that oversold the chances of mediagenic long-shot candidates like Randy Bryce, who lost by more than 10 points, might want to reconsider their tactics. But groups that focused their efforts down ballot, like the Texas Organizing Project and the Working Families Party (whose co-founder, Daniel Cantor, told me that “the main event…is state legislatures”), reaped solid results, flipping state senates in Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Colorado—where, with Polis in the governor’s mansion, Democrats won a trifecta.

Each of those wins gives progressives a chance to make the arguments, and develop the policies and the track record of solid accomplishment, that they will need to defeat the Republicans in 2020. Because the one thing that Hillary Clinton proved in 2016 is that not being Donald Trump simply isn’t good enough.

Women Win Big

The feminist insurgency hits the polls—and Congress.

The feminist resistance to Donald Trump marched from America’s cities, suburbs, and small towns into Congress and the statehouses on November 6. As of this writing, nearly 100 women will take their seats in the US House of Representatives in January; almost 90 percent of these women are Democrats. “I feel so good,” says Emily’s List president Stephanie Schriock. The group had a plan to elect at least 23 Democratic women to the House, so that the 23 victories needed by the Democrats to control the chamber would be provided by women. Of the party’s 26 pickups in the midterms thus far, 19 are women, all endorsed by Emily’s List. Another six Emily’s List–backed candidates are in races too close to call.

According to CNN exit polls, almost 80 percent of voters said that electing women was important to them, and apparently they meant it. This new class of women legislators is the youngest and most diverse in American history, featuring two Muslim women (Michigan’s Rashida Tlaib and Minnesota’s Ilhan Omar); the first Native American women (New Mexico’s Deb Haaland and Kansas’s Sharice Davids, who is also a lesbian); the two youngest women ever elected to Congress (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Iowa’s Abby Finkenauer); Texas’s first two Latina congresswomen (Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia); plus three young black women (Massachusetts’s Ayanna Pressley, Connecticut’s Jahaan Hayes, and Illinois’s Lauren Underwood). In a big victory for gun safety, Moms Demand Action candidate Lucy McBath—whose son, Jordan Davis, was murdered by a white man in 2012 for playing his music too loud—appears to have narrowly defeated conservative antiabortion crusader Karen Handel on a wave of suburban female activism that almost won Georgia’s long-Republican Sixth District in a 2017 special election. Of the 121 winning candidates endorsed by the group Run for Something, which supports millennial candidates for office, mainly in state and local chambers, a majority are women.

For a while on election night, the good news for women and progressives was obscured by at least two crushing defeats, with popular African-American gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum going down to the race-baiting Trump clone Ron DeSantis in Florida, and Beto O’Rourke coming within 2.6 points of beating right-wing Senator Ted Cruz in Texas. O’Rourke became a national hero as he toured every corner of the state and won more votes there than Hillary Clinton did in 2016—an unheard-of accomplishment for a Senate candidate.

Perhaps the most important female candidate of the night, Georgia’s Stacey Abrams, was trailing Brian Kemp in her race for governor as The Nation went to press, but she is refusing to concede because of the thousands of absentee and provisional ballots still uncounted. In a better country, Kemp’s206 electoral misdeeds—as secretary of state, he purged voters, held up ballot applications, and refused calls to step down as the state’s top election official while he ran for governor—would have resulted in federal supervision of the Georgia race, but so far he has been left alone to make the rules for his own election. “I truly believe he’s been trying to steal the election, and we’re not gonna let him do that,” says Schriock, whose group named Abrams its “rising star” in 2014. An Abrams loss would be a heartbreaker, but Democratic women have won four new governorships, in Michigan, Maine, New Mexico, and Kansas, which all flipped from red to blue. Kansas was a particularly welcome surprise, with Laura Kelly upsetting the notorious vote-suppressing Republican secretary of state, Kris Kobach.

The feminist insurgency that first showed up in the 2017 Virginia House of Delegates races—when 15 Democrats, 11 of them women, won seats previously held by Republicans—continued to pay off for Democrats, electing three new women to the House of Representatives: Richmond’s Abigail Spanberger, Northern Virginia’s Jennifer Wexton, and Virginia Beach’s Elaine Luria. Spanberger’s communications director told The Nation that the State House victories of two female candidates in Spanberger’s congressional district “made a huge difference” in her upset victory of Tea Party darling Dave Brat. The three women join four male Virginia Democrats in flipping the state’s congressional delegation, which before last night had seven Republicans to four Democrats.

Those 2017 Virginia victories marked the beginning of a new Democratic commitment to state legislative races, after losing almost 1,000 seats during the Obama presidency. On November 6, Democrats picked up more than 350 seats—cutting the Obama-era losses by more than a third—and flipped seven state chambers. In North Carolina and Michigan, they broke Republican super majorities. They also made huge gains in the Texas House of Representatives thanks both to O’Rourke’s campaign and to investment by Democratic groups like Forward Majority, as well as in the Pennsylvania State Legislature, where 12 Emily’s List–endorsed women won seats. Between the new governors and the newly won state chambers, Democrats are in good shape to control a significant number of statehouses when redistricting begins in 2021.

Redistricting matters. Democrats won the popular vote by more than nine points—a larger margin than the winning party has en-
The Trump administration has spent the past two years attacking the rights of trans people. But the president’s biggest assault may be imminent: In October, The New York Times reported on a leaked memo from the Department of Health and Human Services and said that by the end of this year, the White House would likely seek to redefine “sex” under federal law as being based on the genitals a person is born with—a move that could lead to the loss of civil-rights protection for some 1.4 million trans and gender-nonconforming individuals.

I caught up with Chase Strangio, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union’s LGBT & HIV Project, who has represented plaintiffs like Gavin Grimm, a transgender student who sued his school district after he was barred from using the boys’ bathroom, and Chelsea Manning, the former Army private and whistle-blower who spent seven years in military prison after releasing documents to WikiLeaks. We talked about that.

CS: The memo is an internal document that reflects the administration’s goals with respect to trans people and the law. We have known for a long time that this administration is invested in attacking trans and nonbinary people. The goal is to say that “sex” under federal law means what they have called “biological sex.” And that is defined in such a way as to exclude trans people from coverage under civil-rights laws—but also to go much broader, rolling back decades of case law interpreting federal civil-rights laws to protect anyone who departs from sex stereotypes.

The memo itself is just their goal; it’s not self-executing. That said, it reflects this sweeping framework of erasing trans people from the law. So there’s reason to be freaked out—but also, it didn’t do all of the things already that people are worried it’s going to do.

NGL: In an interview with Democracy Now!, you said, “There may be things that are typically true in science…. But it’s a political choice to make that definitional, to say men have to have certain bodies in order to be men…. These are political choices that are part of a long legacy that is very much connected to colonialism, white supremacy, and efforts to exclude people from participation in society.” I wonder if you could say more about this.

CS: When we think about our bodies, or science in general, there are very few things that fit neatly into a binary. So it becomes part of our political structures to decide what things are definitional. We see this all the time in the law—not just in the context of gender and bodies, but also in how the legal definition of “whiteness” constantly changes to exclude people and maintain power.

There is this series of Supreme Court cases from the turn of the 20th century where you had federal immigration laws excluding people from gaining citizenship. You had one case saying that you have to be “Caucasian” to naturalize. And then, in a subsequent case, you have an individual of South Asian descent who, under this anthropological construction of what is a Caucasian, says, “Well, I am Caucasian—I should be able to naturalize.” But this person is brown-appearing. And the Court changes the definition right there and says, “No, no, what we mean is: That which is commonly understood to be white.”

NGL: We’re now almost two years into this administration. I’m wondering how you deal with the exhaustion and despair. Where are you drawing strength and hope from?

CS: I love being queer; I love being trans. I love who I am. And it took me so long to get to that point—I hated myself for so long. Finding that ability to feel at home in my body and in the world is something that feels like a blessing. And since I’m alive at 36 years old, I’m like, “All right—we’re gonna do what we can. And I’ll give what I can.” Connecting with other human beings is the thing that gives me hope in the end.

Systems of power are always going to deploy definitions for the purposes of exclusion.
joyed since at least 2010, and larger than the so-called “waves” of 1994, 2006, and 2014. Analysts are resist...ing this one a wave election, since the party “only” won 26 House seats—Republicans won 63 in 2010, with a much smaller share of the popular vote—because gerrymandering has given the GOP a structural advantage both in the US House and in state chambers around the country. Given those disadvantages, this was indeed a wave election, no matter what underinformed pundits tell you.

And the wave was largely due to female voters and candidates. Women broke for Democrats by a 19-point margin, the largest midterm gender gap we’ve seen. But there is still some room for shame: At least 59 percent of white women in Texas supported Ted Cruz, and an unacceptable 67 percent of Georgia’s white women backed Kemp over Abrams. That’s why the diversity of the women that Democrats send to Congress matters so much, Schriock says. “You have to make sure you have someone who understands her community, and these women do. They just rolled up their sleeves and got it done.”

A Big House-Cleaning

Democrats won the competition that matters most.

the people of the United States voted on November 6 to check and balance the presidency of Donald Trump. After two years in which the constitutional separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches was rendered meaningless by unitary Republican control of Congress, voters have given Democrats the House of Representatives. This is a monumental shift in the political dynamic at a crucial moment in our history, and Democrats must be aggressive in identifying it as such. If they fail to do so, Trump will maintain control of the narrative in what should be an accountability moment for his presidency and a policy-shift moment for the country.

To get this difficult task right, Democrats must recognize why the voters engineered a transfer of power that has marginalized noxious partisans like Devin Nunes, the chair of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, and empowered watchdogs like the man who will take the gavel from him: veteran prosecutor Adam Schiff. Democrats have not been handed control of the House so they can fight among themselves or make excuses about what they cannot do because Trump is still the president and Republicans have strengthened their hold on the Senate. The Democrats have been authorized, in Schiff’s words, to reassert the role of the House as “a co-equal branch of government” that will “push back against the basic indecency of this person in the Oval Office.”

If Nancy Pelosi hopes to unite an ideologically and strategically combative Democratic Caucus and become the next speaker of the House, she must organize a leadership team that recognizes the generational shift this election has highlighted, and she must empower that team to amplify a coherent message about what a Democratic House is capable of accomplishing. Before the 2018 elections, one of the most dynamic new members of Congress, Massachusetts Democrat Ayanna Pressley, promised her constituents that “change is on the way.” This wasn’t mere sloganeering; it was a show of respect for the #ChangeCantWait calculus of the millions of young voters, people of color, and women who organized, mobilized, and delivered for the Democrats this year. Their sense of urgency helped Pressley displace an able but older Democratic incumbent in her September primary, and it has ushered into Congress a new generation of in-

For Ntozake Shange

Who conjured the rainbow.

hen the poet and writer Ntozake Shange died on October 27, I felt her words explode on the underside of my heart and heard her voice—beautiful, big, and vulnerable—push through my ears. The reaction was immediate, like her work, and although the news of her death was upsetting, it somehow made sense. Not that it was time for her to die, or that her
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family was ready to let her go, but that, as I knew and understood her, she had been dying all along while she was living, bearing the weight of her particular brand of bold, brave emotional insurgency, and holding up the rainbow.

I didn’t grow up knowing her work, which is perhaps why it hit me so hard when I first discovered it in college. As any young black woman who has read For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf will tell you, the stories and voices and experiences in this book go far beyond representation, as integral and clarifying as that aspect of it is. The book, her most celebrated work, is an introduction (for whoever needs it) to a broad array of black women that invites you to live among them and finally waves you out the door, so that we can get on with our business of being black women. It’s a living will of sorts, the genesis of which—pain, depression, and more than one attempted suicide—I don’t think Ntozake ever fully released.

In 1991, I did a semester-long internship at Mother Jones in San Francisco. My primary job was as a fact-checker, but I was eager to write for the magazine as well and ended up leaving the internship with one or two clips, and the promise of more assignments down the road. I graduated from Hampshire College with a degree in black women’s literature and literary journalism. My “Division Three” thesis was a collection of narrative interviews with black women writers that would later become my first book, I Know What the Red Clay Looks Like. I hadn’t been able to get Ntozake as a subject for it, but I was able to successfully pitch an interview with her to Mother Jones, when her novel Liliane was published in 1994.

I started off with a question about The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life, a book by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein that came out the same year and is basically one long argument for white supremacy and eugenics. And Ntozake went in: “Oh my God, it made me so mad. Do you believe that just because they can’t control us, they’re gonna say it’s Darwinian—that they’re better…. They took all the land, all the food—we ate chitlins and they ate beef! But who carried that nice food to them? And who is still talking and thinking? Now all they can say is that they’re better? It’s not even a new idea!” And we were off. I loved her from that very moment—she felt kindred.

For a period after that, we would have long talks over the phone, sometimes late at night. At the time—me in my late 20s, she in her late 40s—my sense was that Ntozake needed a sister-friend to listen, to help her reflect on and reframe her life in some way. Now that I am the age she was then, give or take a few years, I think maybe it was more that she was going through what women go through at this age. On a good day, we all grown and can say and do whatever we want and you can’t tell us nothing, and we love it. But on a bad day, it’s every last drop of joy, every single truth laid bare, each warrior moment, and every suicidal thought inside a new box, a different, changed body, and we have to figure out how to live in it.

My third book, Sugar in the Raw: Voices of Young Black Girls in America, was in many ways a tribute to Ntozake and For Colored Girls—a visceral map to help black girls navigate and master the complexity of their emotions, live in their pain, and find strength in the sound of their own voices. As I was writing Sugar, I kept thinking of this one quote from our Mother Jones interview, in which Ntozake said: “I write for young girls of color, for girls who don’t even exist yet, so that there is something there for them when they arrive. I can only change how they live, not how they think.” These words were essentially what inspired me to ask her to write the foreword to my book—apart, of course, from the fact that she was Ntozake Shange.

Ostensibly, Ntozake wrote that foreword for the black girls in the book and beyond, and for me. But even though we lost touch over the years, as I reread her foreword while thinking about writing this piece, I realized that she wrote it for herself, too. For the girl who had considered suicide when the rainbow was enuf: “I must honestly admit, sometimes I forced myself to relive with these young black women moments that continue to sicken me, inhibit and constrain my spirit.”

But relive she did, until the very end. And I will be forever grateful. Rest in power, Ntozake.

Rebecca Carroll is a cultural critic and editor of special projects at WNYC.

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MILITARY BLOAT

A Mugs’ Game

Republican Senator Chuck Grassley recently sent a letter to Heather Wilson, the secretary of the Air Force, asking why a single squadron at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California, spent nearly $56,000 on mugs over the past three years. Apparently, the mugs’ plastic handles frequently break off, and since the company that makes them doesn’t manufacture individual parts, the Air Force often shelled out more than $1,200 for each replacement.

The mugs, which are used to reheat coffee and tea on air-refueling tankers, hardly represent the first overspending scandal in the military. In July, The Washington Post reported that, on at least three separate occasions, the Air Force paid roughly $10,000 to replace toilet-seat covers on Vietnam War-era cargo planes.

As comical as these examples might seem, they point to a serious accountability problem. The Pentagon has avoided a comprehensive audit of its spending for years, and in February, Politico found that one of the Defense Department’s largest agencies had lost track of more than $800 million in construction projects.

Despite this fiscal recklessness, lawmakers continue to vote for an ever-expanding military budget. In August, with the support of a majority of both Democrats and Republicans, President Trump signed into law a 2019 National Defense Authorization Act to the tune of $716 billion—a $24 billion increase from fiscal year 2018.

—Chris Gelardi

Eric Alterman

Deaths Foretold

Trump’s hateful rhetoric encourages mass violence.

What is most surprising about the mass murder at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and the pipe bombs sent to journalists, Democratic politicians, and the philanthropist George Soros is that we find it surprising at all. After all, both perpetrators were acting on messages they had repeatedly received from President Trump and his supporters in Congress and the media.

The Washington Post’s Aaron Blake traced the ricocheting effect of the Soros-centered conspiracy theory through the White House, Republican representatives, and the increasingly bonkers right-wing media. And it’s not hard to see where these terrorists thought they were getting their instructions.

During the final days of his presidential campaign, Trump ran a commercial attacking Soros, Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, and Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen—all of them Jews—claiming they were seeking to control the world. When neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville chanting “Jews will not replace us,” Trump called them “very fine people.” Even after a pipe bomb was discovered at Soros’s Westchester county residence, House majority leader Kevin McCarthy warned on Twitter that Soros (Jewish) and his fellow billionaires Tom Steyer (Jewish father) and Michael Bloomberg (Jewish) were trying “to BUY this election!” The National Rifle Association tweeted: “There is no end to how much they’ll pay to push their elitist agenda on Americans.” The NRA’s executive vice president accused the same three of promoting “socialism” and “social engineering.” Fox Business Network host Lou Dobbs allowed a guest to complain that the migrant caravan headed to the US-Mexico border was the result of the “Soros-occupied State Department.” NRATV correspondent Chuck Holton explained that “the real story here is the nexus we’re finding…. It’s telling that a bevy of left-wing groups are partnering with a Hungarian-born billionaire [i.e., Soros] and the Venezuelan government to try to influence the 2018 midterms by sending Honduran migrants north in their thousands.” Fox Business’s Maria Bartiromo pushed part of the same outlandish idea: “I mean, who do you think is behind these caravans? A lot of speculation that it was George Soros.” This led Texas Republican Louie Gohmert to say, again on Fox News, that “the Democrats—perhaps Soros, others—may be funding this, thinking it’s going to help them.”

Next thing you know, Trump is tweeting deliberately deceptive videos of the caravan and asking, “Can you believe this, and what Democrats are allowing to be done to our Country?” And his idiot son Don Jr. retweeted the idiot actor James Woods, who opined that the caravan was an “election trick” attributable to “Soros nonsense.” All of this took place in the context of Fox News’ Laura Ingraham, in an echo of both Trump and former Ku Klux Klan wizard David Duke, telling viewers that liberals were seeking to replace real American voters with immigrants. Her colleague Tucker Carlson went even further, insisting that liberals were supporting “genocide” against white men.

If liberal Jewish financiers are conspiring to use immigrants to “replace” you and eliminate your race, doesn’t that call for an extreme response? And is it really that extreme to start shooting when you have a president who encourages violence against journalists and liberal protesters? The Internet posts of alleged Florida pipe bomber Cesar Sayoc were filled with conspiracy theories and violent insinuations. He seemed to harbor a particular disdain for Hollywood and the media, according to The Washington Post. (Now who does that sound like to you?) Sayoc’s family lawyer, Ronald Lowy, said the suspect “had no interest in politics” until “the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, who welcomed all extremists, all outsiders, all outliers, and he felt that somebody was finally talking to him.”

And what of apparent mass murderer Robert Bowers? He too listened to Trump and company. Before he entered the synagogue, Bowers posted that the Jews of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which helps resettle refugees in the United States,
sought “to bring invaders in that kill our people.” He could not “sit by and watch [his] people get slaughtered.” Such talk is an overenthusiastic extension of the world of Trump tweets, Republican campaigning, Fox, and NRATV—not to mention Breitbart, The Gateway Pundit, Infowars, and the unpoliced corners of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

Acting like representatives of a quisling government, Israeli right-wingers rushed uninvited to the scene of the shooting, Pittsburgh’s Squirrel Hill neighborhood, to absolve the Trump administration of its responsibility. Predictably, they blamed liberals, when it’s really the president’s rhetoric that threatens American Jews. Naftali Bennett, the far-right minister of the diaspora, disputed—without evidence—the Anti-Defamation League’s statistics about the alarming rise of right-wing anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi agitation since Trump’s inauguration. And as a reminder that these people are as bizarre as they are hateful and incompetent, Vice President Mike Pence participated in a ritual with a defrocked Jews for Jesus rabbi.

Meanwhile, the Jews of Squirrel Hill showed us another America and another Judaism as they marched in dignified protest of Trump. Ari Mahler, a nurse and one of three Jews who helped save Bowers’s life after he was shot by police, explained: “I didn’t see evil when I looked into [his] eyes. All I saw was a clear lack of depth, intelligence, and palpable amounts of confusion.” Meanwhile, Jeffrey Myers, the Tree of Life rabbi, told Trump: “Mr. President, hate speech leads to hateful actions. Hate speech leads to what happened in my sanctuary.” But Trump wasn’t listening. In one of his countless incendiary lies, he said afterward, “The fake news is creating violence”—no doubt encouraging his army of violent misfits to find new targets for their frustration, ignorance, and boundless hatred.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE CARAVAN

Invasion by tired and poor but not white!
We’ll stop them, Trump tells us, of that there’s no doubt. The troops have been sent. Will the Air Force be next? And nuclear weapons—have they been ruled out?

SNAPSHOT / LUCA BRUNO

Rising Waters

Tourists look at a bird swimming in flooded St. Mark’s Square in Venice, Italy, on November 1. The historic city has become a poster child for rising sea levels. By the end of this century, the Mediterranean Sea could rise by as much as five feet, flooding the city twice a day.
How a feminist foreign policy can save the world

BEATRICE FIHN
On October 20, President Trump announced that the United States would pull out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty after more than 30 years. In doing so, he ended an agreement that abolished an entire class of nuclear weapons and recklessly pushed us to the brink of a new Cold War. He’s brought us back to a time when the United States and Russia could develop and expand their nuclear arsenals without restraint.

Trump’s decision is a wake-up call as much as it’s a clarion call. It highlights the flaws of a system in which one man can determine our collective fate, and makes clear why all nations need to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by 122 countries at the United Nations last year. By banning nuclear weapons under international law, we can still pull the hand brake on a new arms race.

In a series for The New Yorker, Jonathan Schell wrote a masterpiece on the horrors of nuclear war. Schell’s series was such a tour de force that when it was published as a book, The Fate of the Earth, in 1982, The New York Times wrote: “It accomplishes what no other work has managed to do in the 37 years of the nuclear age. It compels us, and compel is the right word, to confront head on the nuclear peril in which we all find ourselves.” Schell embedded his argument against nuclear weapons in human stories. As with climate change, simply explaining the basic facts rarely provokes action. Talking about the absurd number of nuclear weapons challenges people only to reduce stockpiles, but describing what the fire following a nuclear blast felt like at Hiroshima and Nagasaki makes us realize that these are weapons of mass slaughter.

The breakthrough for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came after we showed political leaders the faulty foundations of the realpolitik arguments underpinning the nuclear world order. When it comes to doomsday weapons, the supposed realists ignore reality. Reality like the 7,000-degree-Fahrenheit ground temperature in Nagasaki after an American B-29 bomber dropped “Fat Man” on the city in August 1945, or the radioactive rain that poured down later. Reality like the people in Hiroshima crying out for help, although none was forthcoming because 42 of the city’s 45 hospitals had been instantly destroyed, and 90 percent of the doctors and nurses killed or injured. Or reality like the testimony from inhabitants of the Marshall Islands, where the United States conducted 67 nuclear blasts. One resident, Dretin Jokdru, recalled trying to survive on fish: “We got sick from them, like when your arms and legs fall asleep and you can’t feel anything. We’d get up in the morning to go to our canoes and fall over because we were so ill. We were dying.”

When faced with these realities, the insanity of what we have done for the last 73 years becomes hard to ignore. Recognizing the threat to humanity from climate change, ecological destruction, and nuclear weapons, we ask: “What is the fate of the earth?” I’d answer that by borrowing from former secretary of state Hillary Clinton: “The fate of women is the fate of the earth, and the fate of the earth is the fate of women.” To state this more explicitly: The survival of the human species depends on women wresting power from men.

Roughly 1,000 miles west of New York City, a radioactive by-product of the Manhattan Project pollutes the air, soil, and water. Now where do you picture a pile of carcinogenic waste from the government’s most famous science project being stored? It’s not buried underground or contained within a lead-lined storage tank; it’s not in a secured government facility. It isn’t even in some remote field. No, this waste sits within the city limits of St. Louis, Missouri. When a handful of St. Louis moms, families, and neighbors began experiencing headaches, nosebleeds, and breathing problems one winter, they identified the problem and organized. Now a bunch of moms in St. Louis are a regular feature at the State Capitol, lobbying their representatives to clean up the mess that is killing their community. They fittingly called their group Just Moms, and they are only one example of the women around the world leading the charge to fix the problems created by men.

Even if these weapons are never used—which, by the way, is unlikely—they still harm people. In Texas, contract workers at the Pantex Plant are removing plutonium cores from nuclear weapons by hand. Why? Because they need to make room for a new generation of even more lethal nuclear weapons. The United States is scheduled to spend at least $1.7 trillion updating its arsenal, because our leaders are locked in an archaic view of national security—one that believes against all reason that terror provides safety.

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, many serious men have said that we need to get rid of these weapons, but...
they have lacked the vision, creativity, and strength to do so. We can no longer leave it to the same men who created these problems to solve them. As with so many issues, the consequences of men’s nuclear hubris fall disproportionately on women. Women in Hiroshima and Nagasaki die from cancer at twice the rate of men due to ionizing-radiation exposure. Findings from Chernobyl indicate that girls are considerably more likely than boys to develop thyroid cancer from nuclear fallout. Pregnant women exposed to nuclear radiation face a greater likelihood of delivering children with physical malformations or stillbirths, leading to increased maternal mortality. Near the Semipalatinsk nuclear-testing site in Kazakhstan, one out of every 20 babies is born with serious deformities. These effects will last for generations.

I should be careful here to make a distinction. I often say, “The leaders are not the problem; the weapon is.” This is a key point: While we might feel safer with Theresa May or Hillary Clinton in charge of our nuclear arsenals, we are not in fact safe. I don’t believe that having these weapons in the hands of women is a solution. That is not what I mean by wresting power from men. When you are concerned about the ease of one person’s access to world-destroying firepower, the answer is not to choose the most level-headed person; the answer is to remove the possibility that anyone could be in that position in the first place. That is the power we must wrest from men and the feminist foreign policy we need.

In September, I found myself addressing an unprecedented gathering of powerful women. Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s minister of foreign affairs, invited female foreign ministers from around the world to convene in Montreal. The discussions were simultaneously refreshing and worrying. When the doors closed, brilliant women filled the wide-ranging conversations with remarkable insights. Yet I found the debate around nuclear weapons limited—still set by men, like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who said that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was useless. Having more women in positions of power is insufficient if we are restricted to such an outdated, patriarchal worldview. We are in desperate need of a foreign policy that is cooperative, inclusive, and based in our shared humanity—that is to say, feminist.

Nuclear weapons are the beating heart of our colonial and patriarchal order. These weapons and the security apparatus that places faith in them are inherently dehumanizing. Consider that just a few months after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a poll showed that less than 5 percent of Americans thought laying waste to those cities was a bad idea, and nearly a quarter said that the United States should have dropped more bombs in order to inflict maximum suffering and death before Japan had a chance to surrender. Or consider the financial order that encourages banks to fund companies that produce nuclear weapons, so long as they produce them for European countries and the United States. Or consider how the proponents of deterrence claim that nuclear weapons have prevented war, in spite of the millions of deaths in proxy wars in Korea, Southeast Asia, Africa, and now the Middle East. The loss of those lives is considered a necessary evil or even a policy success.

Or perhaps consider the swimsuit—yes, the swimsuit. You’ve probably never heard of one called the atom, the French word for “atom.” In 1946, it was declared the world’s smallest swimsuit. In addition to denoting the tiny size, the name was chosen to announce that the swimsuit would be as shocking as the atomic bomb—a tongue-in-cheek marketing campaign built on thousands of deaths. A few weeks later, a competing designer released an even skimpier suit. He wanted his product to be provocative, even explosive, so he named it after a famous nuclear-test site: the Bikini Atoll. The tests at Bikini were called, appropriately, Operation Crossroads, and they were the first of many that would destroy lives and livelihoods in the Marshall Islands. Mistakes, miscalculations, and negligence saw the tests spread radiation across the islands, causing death, sickness, stillbirths, and deformities. The first bomb had a picture of the Hollywood star Rita Hayworth stenciled on its side, and was even named “Gilda,” after her character in the 1946 film by the same name. The movie’s tagline? “Beautiful, deadly, using all a woman’s weapons.” Or consider that the US military government of the Marshall Islands assembled the Bikinians and asked them to leave their homes—temporarily, the military governor assured them. When the residents doubted him, he implored them that it would be for “the good of mankind.”

Perhaps I’ve illustrated sufficiently that nuclear weapons are linked to patriarchy; perhaps not. Did I mention that former vice president Dick Cheney claimed that Barack Obama had “neutered” the international order with the Iran deal? Or that Pakistan said that efforts to keep it from developing nuclear weapons amounted to “castration”? Or perhaps consider the swimsuit—yes, the swimsuit. Whether or not you agree with the premise that nuclear weapons are part of a patriarchal world order, I hope you can at least agree that what we’re doing now is not working. We cannot move forward with new nuclear weapons that tie us to this security order; we cannot achieve peace by threatening mass murder; and we cannot build stability through instability. We must choose an approach that ends nuclear weapons before they end us.

Luckily, we know what works. Victory will require us first to change the terms of the debate. We need to articulate the human ramifications of nuclear war, move away from an understanding of international relations as a series of zero-sum battles, and accept that nuclear weapons know no borders.

Over 500 organizations make up our effort, the Inter-
national Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). We have worked to build a global movement, and in many places, it’s being led by women. Through these partnerships, we are helping to re-shape how people talk about nuclear weapons, highlighting stories of real people. This moment in history is fragile, but it’s not hopeless. For the first time, the majority of countries have stood up to nuclear-armed states and said: “Enough—we will not be held hostage to these weapons any longer.” Nine countries have deployed some 15,000 nuclear weapons, with more nations tacitly endorsing them by living happily under a nuclear umbrella. But there are 122 countries on our side. It’s been a year since the treaty was opened for signatures. So far, 69 states have signed it, and 19 have ratified it. Once 50 countries ratify it, the treaty will go into effect. At that point, nuclear weapons will be banned under international law.

I have to confess that there were moments in this campaign when I doubted that this treaty would ever happen. We expected a chorus of noes from the old guard, but even many allies cautioned us not to push too hard or expect too much. We learned very quickly, however, that the humanitarian case for banning nuclear weapons resonated, and those claiming to respect international law while relying on these weapons were soon forced into convoluted and nonsensical arguments. We also learned that fearless, committed women were a requirement to get things done.

I don’t believe that women are inherently more peaceful, but what I do know is that women are more realistic about what is needed to keep our families, communities, and world safe. I believe that women are the doers. We cannot afford to wait for some kindly but charismatic leader to rise up and change nuclear policy. We certainly can’t count on the current men in power to choose sanity and security over fear and instability. But we also can’t leave this to the dreamers. In this movement, we are always going to be the optimists, but we are also the doers committed to ending the nuclear world order. We just want to achieve this through collaboration, not domination. We are the realists squarely facing up to the nuclear threat and formulating a strategy. Believing that we can keep these weapons indefinitely is a dream.

With the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, we have a plan, a legal framework, and momentum. What we need now is you. People everywhere need to claim their right to speak and act on nuclear issues. We need to bring democracy to disarmament and take action in local contexts. The US Conference of Mayors supports our work. Several towns and cities, including Baltimore and Los Angeles, have endorsed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; in August, the state of California did likewise. This is not just a symbolic victory: From the Manhattan Project onward, every nuclear weapon developed in the United States was designed in labs managed by the University of California. Right now, we’re also working to stigmatize those companies—like Boeing in Seattle and BlackRock, the largest investor in companies making nuclear weapons, in New York City—who benefit from Trump’s nuclear doctrine.

Instead of leaving life-and-death decisions to a few men, this movement allows us all to have a say in our future. To achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, we must all educate, motivate, and activate. In order to educate others, learn how your community, your bank, and the services you use are complicit in developing nuclear weapons, and share that information. Don’t let people forget that these weapons exist and that there’s something they can do to
Meet the activists who helped save the ACA and almost brought down Brett Kavanaugh.
On September 23, Laura O’Grady, a disabled engineer, flew from Boston to Washington, DC, where she’d hastily rented a basement apartment near Howard University. For weeks, O’Grady had followed the news about Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, who she feared would strip reproductive rights from women and fail to check the autocratic tendencies of President Trump. But when she learned that Christine Blasey Ford had accused Kavanaugh of sexual assault, the need to do something became urgent.

If you had asked O’Grady what she planned to do, well, she didn’t exactly know. The 56-year-old had been sexually assaulted as a young girl, faced frequent sexual harassment as a female engineer in the 1980s, and was once fired by a male boss because she’d had a baby. With the news about Kavanaugh, O’Grady reached a breaking point. She landed in DC several hours before she could check into her apartment and spent the time wandering Capitol Hill in the rain, looking without success for a protest to join.

Before leaving Boston, O’Grady had completed a form on an activist website to report that she was headed to DC. After she’d settled into her apartment, someone from the Center for Popular Democracy, a progressive advocacy organization, called to invite her to a meeting that evening at a local church. There were perhaps 200 people in attendance; many had journeyed from far-flung states: Colorado, Maine, Arizona, even Alaska. Some were veterans of the successful fight the previous summer to protect the Affordable Care Act. “A lot of them seemed to know each other, and I’m very introverted most of the time,” recalled O’Grady, whom I first met in the atrium of the Hart Senate Building, a space that served as a gathering point for anti-Kavanaugh activists. “It’s hard for me to go into a situation when I don’t know anybody.” But she found the people at the church—almost all of them women—welcoming and funny, and it didn’t take long for her anxiety to fade.

At the front of the sanctuary, one of the group’s leaders, Jennifer Flynn Walker, provided a preview of the following day and offered advice to those who planned to get arrested. O’Grady had no intention of going that far. Although she’d joined the Women’s March in Boston, she didn’t really consider herself an activist, at least not that kind of activist—the kind who camped out in churches and had trouble remembering how many times they’d been arrested. Some people spoke of “bird-dogging,” which involves approaching a politician and telling them a personal story, followed by a pointed question. For O’Grady, going to the meeting had been challenge enough; approaching a senator was out of the question.

She was wrong, it turned out. Over the ensuing weeks, as waves of women descended on Washington, O’Grady’s fear receded and her anger crystallized. She was arrested once, then twice. She chanted, marched, and disobeyed the orders of police. In the office of Senator Susan Collins, she shared her story of being sexually assaulted—the first time she’d spoken of the incident. With a friend she’d recently met, she attempted to question Senator Orrin Hatch, and when he waved dismissively and instructed the two women to “grow up,” she shouted back with a rage she almost didn’t recognize.

Many of the women protesting alongside O’Grady were part of an informal network of activists who had come together in the wake of Trump’s election under the name Birddog Nation. In the fraught period since then, they had shown up, thousands strong, to protect the Affordable Care Act, to stop the Republican tax cuts, and now to halt Kavanaugh’s confirmation. They sang protest songs, spoke to the media, and darted around Capitol Hill, determined to speak to their political representatives.

It didn’t take long for these women to be labeled, in the words of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, a “mob”—a charge that Trump promptly amplified into an “angry left-wing mob.” The president also accused some of them of being paid professionals, hired by the right’s favorite bogeyman, George Soros. But the notion that Soros, the Democrats, or any other hidden force was orchestrating these protests was as laughable as it was offensive. Women like O’Grady were done taking orders from anyone. And while many intended to help get out the vote in the upcoming midterm elections, if the last two years had convinced them of anything, it was that engaging in traditional politics was no longer enough.

“There’s a constant interaction between protest politics and electoral politics,” says Frances Fox Piven, who has dedicated much of her career to studying disruptive social movements. “Protests can create an audience, and they can move people.” Day after day, she explains, women across the country saw other women rise up to call out sexual harassment and assault, only to be chastised by white men whose views appeared to have scarcely evolved since the 1950s. The effect, Piven believes, will be galvanizing for the Democrats: “Chuck Schumer is not going to raise the issues in a way that is going to reach very many people—he just won’t do it. The rising of women is significant.”

Several days after Blasey Ford went public with her charges against Kavanaugh, I traveled on Amtrak from New York to Washington, DC, with Jennifer Flynn Walker, the speaker from the church. While Birddog Nation is fluid by design—more affinity group than traditional organization, and with no official leaders or spokespeople—Flynn Walker comes about as close as any single person can to embodying its spirit. On the train, she attempted to recall her schedule during the past month, but given the chaotic swirl that had characterized the protests, it wasn’t easy. “Last week, we did 42 actions,” she said. Despite this grueling schedule, she was upbeat and somehow managed to appear well rested.

Flynn Walker is 46, with fierce blue eyes, shoulder-length brown hair, and a freckled face. She was dressed in jeans and a gray T-shirt emblazoned with the name of the Center for Popular Democracy, where she is the director.
of mobilization and advocacy. Her primary assignment is to fight back against Trump and bring along as many people as she can. She spends much of her time crisscrossing the country to train new activists in union halls, diners, and churches. She’s been doing this sort of work for decades, mostly in New York City, where she organized alongside homeless people living with HIV/AIDS, and where civil disobedience—disruptions of fund-raisers, blocking City Hall, shutting down bridges—has played a key role in forcing authorities to address a crisis. Before the 2016 election, Flynn Walker had been thinking of retiring from organizing—“I felt like I had contributed what I had to contribute,” she said—but Trump’s victory forced her to reconsider.

“There’s no inside game with Trump,” she said, no potential allies within his administration. “I like to believe that there’s a smarter person, some genius just waiting to disclose the plans to make things right,” she added. But in the absence of such a savior, “all we’ve got are protests and people power.”

In the case of the Kavanaugh protests, this meant a broad coalition effort spearheaded by organizations like the Women’s March, Housing Works, Ultraviolet, and Flynn Walker’s own group, the Center for Popular Democracy. Part of her role was to spread the philosophy and tactics of Birddog Nation—direct, in-your-face protest and civil disobedience—throughout the coalition.

This work began in earnest on August 1—well before the rest of the nation was paying attention—when 600 people came to Capitol Hill and disrupted meetings between the Supreme Court nominee and various senators. The event resulted in 74 arrests, but the energy on the ground didn’t appear to be matched by that of the Democrats. Several days later, a USA Today op-ed argued that Kavanaugh’s confirmation was “nearly inevitable” and that the campaign against him was a “losing cause.”

That the campaign to block Kavanaugh was seen as a long shot by political observers didn’t particularly bother Flynn Walker. “I have this idea that you win when you decide you’re going to win,” she said. So she and the rest of Birddog Nation spent the last weeks of summer sleeping on church floors, occupying senators’ offices, and camping out overnight so they could secure spots at the Kavanaugh hearing and then disrupt the proceedings.

Now, as we rode the train, it was clear that the landscape was shifting. With the news of Blasey Ford’s allegations, the rest of the country finally seemed to have caught up with the protesters—and they, in turn, were scrambling to transform what was supposed to have been a last-ditch round of civil disobedience into a sustained campaign. Their first plan of action: to hold what Flynn Walker called “people’s lobby visits,” in which individuals occupy Senate offices and “loudly tell their stories.”

The first “people’s lobby” visit began the following morning, as dozens gathered inside the atrium of the Hart Senate Building, with Capitol police monitoring the situation from four floors up. The crowd began to chant—“We believe Anita Hill! We believe Christine Ford!”—but before the police could descend, the group went silent and began to march, fists in the air, toward the office of Senator Chuck Grassley, chair of the Judiciary Committee.

Once inside, Flynn Walker introduced the group to Grassley’s staff—the senator himself wasn’t in—and announced matter-of-factly that they would be using this opportunity to share their stories about why they believed Grassley ought to oppose Kavanaugh. The three staffers quickly retreated to a back office, while the group spread out on couches and chairs, took some of Grassley’s visitor forms, and began to write. Eventually, a middle-aged administrator returned and sat down at the reception desk, where she took notes on her computer that she promised to give to the senator. One by one, women approached the desk to speak, sharing stories—often for the first time—about having survived sexual violence. They spoke of being afraid to report the assault, of not being believed, of the long struggle to heal. A few yelled in anger. Others’ voices were shaky, and several people broke down midsentence. The effect was haunting and overwhelming.

That morning was a preview of the two weeks to come, when dozens—or perhaps hundreds—of women would share their stories of sexual assault with senators and their staff. It was a reckoning with the epidemic of sexual violence that the #MeToo movement helped to expose, and though the courage in sharing such stories was inspiring, it was also excruciating. O’Grady told me that she hadn’t expected to share her own story in the office of Senator Collins. As television cameras rolled, she spoke aloud the secret she had kept for so long: When she was a young girl, she’d been molested by a relative over a period of three years. “It all spilled out, spurred on by the feeling of humiliation,” O’Grady recalled. But the experience didn’t offer her a sense of closure or comfort, or any of the other words that people sometimes use; she walked out of the building, sat down on a curb, and cried for half an hour.

Not long after, I found Flynn Walker seated on a marble bench in the Hart atrium, in what was a rare quiet moment. For the first time since I had arrived, she looked tired. “Everyone has a story,” she said. “We’ve exposed a deep evil here.”

FLYNN WALKER GOT HER START IN ORGANIZING in the mid-1990s, after finishing college and moving to New York City. At the time, Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s budget cuts had slashed important social-welfare programs and threatened the city’s entire Division of AIDS Services. One day, a woman that Flynn Walker had a crush on invited her to a meeting of young activists,
which led to more meetings and eventually to her involvement with the AIDS activist group ACT UP. As a queer person, Flynn Walker had found Catholic schools and college suffocating. ACT UP was liberating and even fun.

Her first act of civil disobedience occurred in 1995, a year into the Giuliani administration, when hundreds of people—AIDS activists, students, people with disabilities, families of victims of police brutality—stopped traffic during rush hour by blocking bridges and tunnels to protest city- and statewide budget cuts. The city was caught off guard, and nearly 200 people were arrested, including Flynn Walker, who was with a group that shut down the Midtown Tunnel. She spent 36 hours in custody, but the action unaccountably left her feeling free.

She learned how to bird-dog as a member of ACT UP in 1999, when she began trailing Al Gore and George W. Bush during their presidential campaigns to demand that they pledge more help to combat the AIDS epidemic. At Gore’s events, she and others questioned him about his role in blocking, at the behest of the US pharmaceutical industry, an initiative by the South African government to provide low-cost, lifesaving drug treatments to AIDS patients in the country. (The industry, which also challenged the initiative in South Africa’s courts, was a major contributor to Gore’s campaign.) At one stop in New Hampshire, four members of the group—which included Flynn Walker and a young Rachel Maddow—flagged spots near Gore and then, as the cameras clicked, unfurled a banner that read Göre Kills. Gore characterized the action as “an inappropriate way” to make a point, but three months later, as he was still dogged by protesters, the drug companies dropped their lawsuit.

Also standing beside Gore in that photo was Paul Davis, a longtime colleague of Flynn Walker’s who was often at her side during the Kavanaugh fight. After Trump’s victory, Housing Works—an AIDS advocacy and service organization that grew out of ACT UP—opened an office in DC and hired Davis to prepare for the coming assault on the Affordable Care Act. With the help of traditional politics. In the health-care fight, Davis and Flynn Walker expected that the people willing to risk arrest would be those with the most to lose if the Affordable Care Act was gutted: low-income people living with HIV or AIDS, whose voices had been ignored in the back-and-forth of traditional politics. In the health-care fight, Davis and Flynn Walker expected that the people willing to risk arrest would be those with the most to lose if the Affordable Care Act was gutted: low-income people living with HIV or AIDS, people with disabilities or chronic health conditions. But at some point, a suggestion was floated: Why not invite the members of Birddog Nation? They rush to the line together and ask more questions.

“Bird-dogging is one of my favorite tools, because it’s one of the few where you get to talk directly to the person who makes the decision,” Flynn Walker told me. She believes in the power of a constituent making eye contact with a politician and sharing a genuine story, and the possibility that these unmediated interactions can lead to “breakthrough moments.” She points to what happened when Maria Gallagher and Ana Maria Archila (who is the co–executive director of the Center for Popular Democracy) confronted Senator Jeff Flake inside an elevator during the Kavanaugh fight, an interaction that was broadcast live on CNN and immediately went viral.

Still, even if they don’t achieve a breakthrough moment, Flynn Walker believes that bird-doggers can force an opening by showing up again and again. As Davis told a reporter last year, “No one ever says ‘uncle’ over the Internet. You have to go to where they are and twist their arms in person.”

BIRDDOG NATION FIRST BEGAN TWISTING ARMS in the spring of 2017, during the fight to defend the Affordable Care Act. With the help of 10 organizing fellows, and in conjunction with the Town Hall Project, the group researched public events held by representatives and alerted people when one was occurring in their area. During Congress’s spring recess, thousands of people crowded into town halls across the country—or simply showed up at their representatives’ offices—to demand that they protect the ACA. But despite this flurry of activity, the House of Representatives passed a replacement bill, the American Health Care Act. And so the action shifted to the Senate—and to Washington, DC.

The bird-doggers’ tactics shifted, too. Militant civil disobedience had been central to the victories won by groups like ACT UP. Those fights were led by people with HIV or AIDS, whose voices had been ignored in the back-and-forth of traditional politics. In the health-care fight, Davis and Flynn Walker expected that the people willing to risk arrest would be those with the most to lose if the Affordable Care Act was gutted: low-income people living with HIV or AIDS, people with disabilities or chronic health conditions. But at some point, a suggestion was floated: Why not invite the members of Birddog Nation? They (continued on page 26)
When conservatism meets environmentalism, immigrants are the targets.

GABY DEL VALLE

GREEN-EYED MONSTERS
On his prime-time show in August, Fox News host Tucker Carlson declared that his opposition to immigration partly stems from his deep love for the environment. Instead of banning helium balloons, plastic straws, and other “things that bring ordinary people joy,” Carlson suggested, liberals should be better advised to get tough on immigration. “I actually hate litter, which is one of the reasons I’m so against illegal immigration: It produces a huge amount of litter—a huge amount of litter,” Carlson said.

“And I mean that with total sincerity.”

Carlson’s comment was mostly lost amid the uproar over the separation and indefinite detention of migrant children and their families at the US-Mexican border. But those who did catch it found themselves a bit confused about his point. “It’s unclear whether Carlson was equating migrants themselves with trash or making an assumption about the litter they produce when they enter the country,” wrote Salon’s Rachel Leah. “The latter seems odd, and the former undoubtedly bigoted and hateful.”

Odd as it may seem, though, Carlson was indeed implying that undocumented immigrants pose a serious threat to the country’s ecosystems. In doing so, he was continuing—perhaps inadvertently—a century-old tradition of American politicians, philanthropists, and public figures blaming immigrants for the country’s environmental woes.

In the latter decades of the 19th century, outspoken nativist environmentalists lobbied for restrictions on hunting and for the creation of national parks, all while warning of the dangers posed by “inferior” people from Southern and Eastern Europe and advocating policies that would prevent them from coming to the United States.

The marriage of nationalism and environmentalism isn’t exclusive to this country. In Latvia, the Union of Greens and Farmers, the liberal-conservative Unity party, and the right-wing populist National Alliance have teamed up to form a center-right coalition. In the United Kingdom, conservatives are trying to win over young voters by banning plastic drinking straws and microbeads. In Mexico, the Ecologist Green Party has become better known for its corruption than for its environmental activism: In 2004, Jorge Emilio González Torres, the party’s current leader and the son of its founder, Jorge González Martínez, was caught discussing a $2 million bribe to secure permits for the construction of a new hotel in Cancún, which would have required the destruction of nearby stands of mangrove trees. (González Martínez later claimed that he was actually attempting to expose corruption himself.)

In most cases, these alliances do not originate in a genuine desire to protect the environment; rather, they seek to make right-wing policies more palatable. In the United States, however, the environmentalist and anti-immigration movements originated in tandem and were often led by the same people.

Adison Grant, an Ivy League–educated lawyer whose family dates back to the earliest days of the colonial era, exemplifies how closely these movements have been linked. His father descended from one of the first settlers in 17th-century New England, his mother from the first colonists in New York. Grant was close friends with early conservationists like Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and George Bird Grinnell, and he used his wealth and connections to champion their cause. He co-founded a half-dozen conservationist groups, including the National Parks Association, the Save the Redwoods League, and the New York Zoological Society, and despite never having held office, he drafted legislation prohibiting the “unsportsmanlike” hunting of game. He was also instrumental in creating a number of national parks, including Denali National Park in Alaska and Everglades National Park in Florida.

At the same time, Grant dabbled in racist pseudoscience: He co-founded the American Eugenics Society, served as president of the Eugenics Research Association and vice president of the Citizens’ Committee on Immigration Legislation, and, in 1916, published The Passing of the Great Race, a since-discredited racial history of the West that Adolf Hitler once referred to as his “Bible.” In it, Grant argued that the peoples of Europe could be divided into three distinct races: Nordic, Mediterranean, and Alpine. The Alpine race, largely made up of Central Europeans, had an “essentially peasant” character and was not fit to rule; the Mediterraneans had a sluggish attitude and “feeble” build. Only the Nordics, who hailed from Northern Europe, constituted the purest form of the white race.

Yet the Nordics, Grant believed, were an endangered species in the United States, their existence threatened by intermarriage and by the immigration of Slavs, Poles, Russians, Greeks, Italians, and Jews. As he explained in The Passing of the Great Race, “The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro. The cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew.”

These days, Grant’s dual concerns—conservation and eugenics—might seem like an unusual mix, especially given a political context in which the party of immigration restriction is also the party of deregulation and climate-change denial. But according to Jonathan Spiro, who published the definitive biography of Grant in 2009, these seemingly antithetical ideals were perfectly consistent at the dawn of the 20th century.

For Grant, Spiro explains, eugenics was a way of ensuring the survival of those who had made the United States a prosperous country, while conservation was a way of preserving the land with which nature—and natural selection—had endowed them. “Grant dedicated his life to saving endangered fauna, flora, and natural resources; and it did not seem at all strange to his peers.
that he would also try to save his own endangered race,” Spiro wrote in his introduction to the provocatively titled *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant.* Or as he told me recently: “You and I might disagree with the politics of the immigration-restriction movement 100 years ago, but their love of nature was genuine.”

Grant and his allies considered immigrants an “infestation,” Spiro continued—outsiders who had no respect for American laws or culture or for the country’s natural beauty. They believed that the influx of undesirable immigrants at the turn of the 20th century was the impetus for declining birth rates among native-born Americans, particularly those “old stock” Nordics who could trace their lineage to the colonial era. “One argument was that immigrants are litter and vermin,” Spiro said. “The other argument was that we need to protect our natural resources. That’s the redwood trees, the American bison, the bald eagle, and the blond-haired, blue-eyed white male. These guys were genuinely trying to protect the best and brightest species, whether it’s the redwood tree or the Nordic male.”

In the end, Grant was successful on both counts. Using the same quiet lobbying that gave us national parks, hunting restrictions, and wildlife refuges, Grant and his associates pushed for legislation that sharply limited the number—and, more importantly, the “quality”—of immigrants to the United States.

In February 1917, just three weeks before President Woodrow Wilson authorized the creation of Denali National Park, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, which included a provision barring illiterate immigrants from entering the country. One bill was the result of Grant’s conservationist lobbying; the other was the pet cause of the Immigration Restriction League, which he served as vice president.

Grant’s most decisive legislative victory, however, came with the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, which, through quotas on nationality, mandated that the bulk of new immigrants must come from Western and Northern Europe. Known as the Johnson-Reed Act, the law stipulated that the number of immigrant visas issued would be 2 percent of the total for each nationality present in the United States as of the 1890 census. Grant and his associates chose 1890 because that year marked a decisive turning point in both the number and the national origin of people coming to the United States. It was after 1890 that Grant’s ideal immigrant, the Nordic male, started being outnumbered by the “inferior” working-class immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

![Litter anxiety: A family burns trash near a section of the border fence separating Mexico and the United States.](https://example.com/litter-anxiety)

**T**he notion of a small coterie of nativists wielding such an outsized influence on federal immigration policy should sound familiar to anyone who follows the news. However, these days it’s not the American Eugenics Society pushing restrictionist policies, but rather the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), and NumbersUSA. Much like the network of Grant-affiliated anti-immigrant organizations in the 20th century, today’s most prominent nativist groups can be traced directly to one rich white man: John Tanton, an elderly ophthalmologist and former Sierra Club official from Michigan.

Before Tanton became the “mastermind behind the organized anti-immigration movement,” as the Southern Poverty Law Center dubbed him in 2002, he was concerned with overpopulation on environmentalist grounds. Tanton chaired the Sierra Club’s National Population Committee and served on the board of Zero Population Growth in the 1970s. He started FAIR in 1979 with the intent of persuading liberals and moderates on the need to restrict immigration (though a founding member conceded that “we didn’t convince anybody.”)

John Hultgren, a professor of environmental politics at Bennington College and the author of the 2015 book *Border Walls Gone Green,* believes that Tanton, like Grant, is sincere in his environmentalism. “He is somebody [who got] involved in the population-reduction movement…out of a desire to protect nature,” Hultgren says.

But Tanton’s love of all things natural dovetailed nicely with his other pet project: eugenics. Carly Goodman, a historian of immigration and US foreign relations, notes that Tanton “had particular ideas about the environmental impacts of certain kinds of people.” In *Skirmish in a Wider War,* an oral history of his life and career, Tanton argued “that certain cultural values supported a conservation ethos,” Goodman says, and “that environmentalism was a value characteristic of American society that he suggested could be traced to the tenets of ‘Western civilization.’” (Tanton also insisted, Goodman adds, that Latin Americans and Southeast Asians “don’t have the same sort of conservation ethic we have here.”)

The motives behind Tanton’s conservationism begin to explain why FAIR and its spin-off organizations ended up having a much bigger influence on 21st-century immigration policy than on environmental matters. The Center for Immigration Studies was launched in 1985 with the purpose of making “the restriction of immigration a legitimate position for thinking people,” as Tanton put it; the CIS’s reports are often cited by anti-immigrant politicians and media groups, as well as by members of the Trump administration. In 1997, Tanton associate Roy Beck founded NumbersUSA, which helped to torpedo President George W. Bush’s proposed amnesty bill for undocumented immigrants in 2007 by reportedly sending senators more than 1 million faxes in opposition. More recently, lawyers from FAIR’s Immigration Reform Law Institute drafted Arizona’s SB 1070, the 2010 law that made it easier for local police in the state to ask people for proof of citizenship during routine interactions.
Under Trump, this influence has grown exponentially. The Tanton network has drafted versions of controversial policies like the mandatory detention of asylum seekers and the defunding of sanctuary cities. And as Brendan O’Connor reported for Splinter in July, it has helped place allies in key administration posts: Kellyanne Conway previously worked as a pollster for FAIR, the CIS, and NumbersUSA; Stephen Miller has regularly cited work from all three organizations; and US Citizenship and Immigration Services ombudsman Julie Kirchner was FAIR’s executive director from 2007 to 2015.

The recent resurgence of nativism has made these groups’ invocation of environmental arguments unnecessary. Republicans, it seems, no longer need to disguise their racism as part of a greater concern about the fate of cute pandas and baby elephants. “When Tucker Carlson makes absurd statements about needing to close up the border to prevent desert ecosystems from being trashed, I don’t see him persuading a lot of moderates or liberals, or certainly not the left,” says John Hultgren, noting that groups like the Sierra Club and Earthjustice have taken a decidedly pro-immigration stance in recent years.

Rather, nativist conservationism could find a more powerful vehicle in the geopolitics of climate change. This approach may prove more seductive to younger generations as the consensus grows over the dangers of global warming, and as fears over climate migration start to shape national immigration policies.

The countries most responsible for global climate change—the United States and the member states of the European Union—will likely feel fewer and less-catastrophic immediate effects than do impoverished countries in the Global South. And many of the people most vulnerable to the damaging effects of climate change hail from the very countries that right-wing nativists have deemed racially and culturally inferior.

John Tanton dedicated his life to limiting birth rates in and immigration from these same countries. Now, when the effects of climate change are finally upon us, his ideological heirs will have the nativist infrastructure he built at their disposal, to keep the world’s poorest people from fleeing its worst effects.

Already, these groups are hard at work. For the past eight years, NumbersUSA representatives have manned an Earth Day booth at the Texas state fairgrounds. “NumbersUSA reminds attendees about the main reason why the sustainability goals of the first Earth Day in 1970 still haven’t been met—massive population growth forced by congressional immigration policies,” president Roy Beck wrote in a blog post this year. In a recent column for the International Journal Review, Beck similarly claimed that “federal immigration policies undermine eco-friendly goals” by “forcing a massive expansion of the sheer number of the American people.” A 2010 report by the Southern Poverty Law Center termed such arguments the “greenwashing” of hate.

The Center for Immigration Studies—whose tagline is “Low-immigration, Pro-immigrant”—has an entire section of its website dedicated to immigration’s effects on the environment and population growth overall. In a fact sheet released on Earth Day, FAIR called immigration the “‘elephant in the room’ ignored by most environmental groups.”

Spencer Raley, a research associate and staff writer at FAIR, said the group’s environmentally related immigration concerns are mainly focused on urban and suburban sprawl. In an e-mail, he wrote that Las Vegas—whose metro area is home to more than three-quarters of the state’s population—was a good example of a city whose population had “exploded” thanks to immigration, “resulting in lost desert landscape and a water supply issue so severe that the Southern Nevada Water Authority is now paying landowners $3 per square foot to replace their lawns with desert landscaping.” (Never mind that Nevada’s foreign-born population was less than 20 percent of the state’s total between 2012 and 2016, or that just over half of Nevadans owned their own homes during that time. Raley might be better served blaming city planners and landowners for lawn maintenance—or, on second thought, perhaps not.)

Right-wing pundits have also begun sharing photos of the “trash” left by migrants along the US-Mexican border. Fox News covered the issue in 2008, and NumbersUSA released a fact sheet about it in 2011. Environmental groups say this “litter” is mainly clothing, food, and supplies that migrants had to discard. In fact, the effects of this trash “pale in comparison to the ecological damage that the border walls are doing already,” Hultgren says.

Though the CIS and similar organizations go to great lengths to publish seemingly dispassionate reports on what they claim are the objective drawbacks to immigration, their bloodless nativism is giving way to a resurgence of out-and-proud xenophobia and biological determinism. Ann Coulter recently warned The Daily Caller’s readers that they’d soon have to make a choice “between a green America and a brown America,” asserting that the problem isn’t just “the number of people traipsing through our wilderness areas; it’s that primitive societies have no concept of ‘litter.’” Concern for the environment, Coulter wrote, is “a quirk of prosperous societies. The damage to our parks shows these cultural differences.”

Like the nativists of the Progressive era—and in a sharp contrast with the CIS’s pseudo-objective data-based approach—Coulter and her ilk frame their anti-immigration arguments as a key factor in the larger culture wars.
‘Who Run the World’ Beaded Bracelet
Inspired by the Beyoncé anthem, gift this to an inspiring girl in your life for a reminder that she can change the world. Donates 10% to support girls’ education. $30

The Future is Female (Set of 2)
The perfect present for your favorite feminist! Donates 10% to Planned Parenthood. $68

Upcycled Love Necklace
Made of upcycled glass, this classic necklace is perfect for your favorite environmentalist. Donates 10% to help women in Kenya start businesses. $36

Cleopatra Bracelet
Look good and make an impact with this delicate bracelet. Donates 10% to help women in Kenya start businesses. $27

Social Justice Kittens Calendar
Each month features a charming kitten professionally photographed in a heroic pose appropriate to a small cat defiantly speaking out on the hottest social justice issues of the day. $18

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Carson Ellis is the author and illustrator of the bestselling picture books Home and Da Is Tak? and also the illustrator-in-residence for The Decemberists. She’s created a line of cards printed on thick, creamy watercolor texture stock. $4

Dissent Collar Earrings
Now, you can wear your own dissent collar in the form of these 1/2” wide hard enamel earrings. $17.95

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Now, you can wear your own dissent collar in the form of this 1” wide hard enamel pin. $14.95

Dissent Collar Necklace
Now, you can wear your own dissent collar in the form of this necklace with a 1” hard enamel pendant. $17.95

Nikki McClure 2019 Calendar
Nikki McClure’s paper-cuts feature strong images of everyday life, each with a powerful verb that inspires to action. $18

The perfect gift for the dissenters on your list! Plus, 50% of profits from every sale go to organizations you love.
Immigrants, for Coulter, are more than just unwelcome new bodies whose existence in this country diverts resources away from native-born Americans; they’re a scourge—both unwilling and, more importantly, unable to adapt to American culture. They aren’t just polluting our “wilderness areas”; they’re polluting our society.

Steve Bannon, who previously served as President Trump’s chief strategist, once asserted that Muslim immigrants are biologically incapable of assimilating to Western culture. “These are not people with thousands of years of understanding of democracy in their DNA coming up here,” Bannon opined on his radio show in 2016.

This cultural and biological essentialism isn’t limited to the immigration debate; it has seeped into every facet of political life, both in the United States and abroad. Brazil, for instance, recently elected Jair Bolsonaro, a proto-fascist who has described Afro-Brazilians as “not even good for procreation.” Bolsonaro also said that he’d be “incapable of loving a homosexual son” and that his (straight) sons were at no risk of falling in love with black women “because my sons were very well educated.”

Meanwhile, The New York Times reported in October that the Trump administration is attempting to narrowly define gender as a “biological, immutable condition determined by genitalia at birth.” A paper published by the White House Council of Economic Advisers that same month, “The Opportunity Costs of Socialism,” claimed that Nordic-descended Americans make more money than their non-Nordic counterparts because low wages are not a part of “Nordic culture.” (Sound familiar?)

Similarly, in March, New York magazine’s Andrew Sullivan published a defense of a Harvard geneticist who suggested that race and IQ are correlated, and that differences in the material conditions between races and genders can be partly attributed to each group’s inherent, immutable characteristics. “I think of myself as moderately conservative,” Sullivan wrote. “It’s both undeniable to me that much human progress has occurred, especially on race, gender, and sexual orientation; and yet I’m suspicious of the idea that our core nature can be remade or denied.”

Those who claim to be concerned about immigration similarly focus on the fertility of nonwhite immigrant women. “Wilders understands that culture and demographics are our destiny,” Iowa Representative Steve King tweeted last year, referring to the far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who pushed for the Netherlands to ban Muslim immigrants long before Trump was elected to office. “We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies.”

Yet even as organizations like FAIR and the CIS co-opt green rhetoric, the anti-immigrant right isn’t doing the environment any favors. Trump, who has repeatedly denied that climate change is man-made and permanent, nominated Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of Exxon-Mobil, to be secretary of state in December 2016. The Trump administration’s environmental policy has been to roll back as many protections and regulations as possible. In September, the Environmental Protection Agency repealed the Obama-era rules on methane. The Department of the Interior approved the first offshore wells in the Arctic in October, a few weeks after the EPA disbanded its air-pollution review panel.

What all this reveals is the true motive of the environmentalist-nativist nexus. Whether its members are sincere or merely opportunistic, the “endangered” species they care most about preserving is bipedal and fair-skinned—Nordic, even.

(stop from page 15)

stop them. To motivate, tell people about the treaty and the support behind it. Most people have no idea that this treaty was adopted and that another way is possible. And to activate, work with others to find concrete steps you can take—perhaps by engaging our local partners in ICAN. Also, don’t forget to tell your representatives that the United States should join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Most importantly, do what women making history have done for decades: Refuse to be constrained by the ruling order’s lack of vision and belief in humanity. When you’re called crazy, keep going, and when you’re told it doesn’t matter, know that it does.

For decades, only men were allowed to engage in high-level discussions about nuclear weapons and global security. It’s time to challenge that. The nuclear-ban treaty presents a chance for us to correct the course of history. We have pried open the door to the halls of power, and we have rooted our progress in international law. It is time to counter the old vision of the world with a new one based on reason and cooperation; it is time for a truly feminist foreign policy. The fate of the earth depends on it.
The fight to defend the Affordable Care Act was successful; the fight against Trump’s tax cuts was not. But both helped to transform the members of Birddog Nation. “Many of them started out as fairly privileged liberals who were outraged by Donald Trump,” Davis said. “And then they’re getting arrested with people who will die if we don’t win. That changed everything. They became an army of people who really love getting together and coming to DC to fight.”

Davis told me that they’ve purposely kept Birddog Nation “unbranded”—meaning that it is not associated with any particular organization. “Movements are dangerous and powerful, whereas individual organizations can be bought off,” he says. “We prefer to come to you like the ocean.” It feels, he added, like an “early ACT UP.”

Others felt it, too. One October morning, as I walked with a group of protesters to Flake’s office, I found myself next to Medea Benjamin, the co-founder of Code Pink, who has made a career out of confronting politicians. “I’ve never seen anything like this,” Benjamin said. “It gives me a lot of hope. We’ve been doing this at Code Pink for years, but we were alone in the wilderness. I hear people chanting, ‘This is what democracy looks like,’ but I think they should be chanting, ‘This is what history looks like.’”

Republicans, however, did not appreciate the visitors, and it didn’t take long for some of them to characterize the women as bullies trying to “intimidate” GOP senators. On Fox News, former Wall Street Journal reporter Asra Nomani described the bird-dogging effort as part of “an extremist alt-left insurgency in America that is trying to topple this government with any means necessary.”

But to anyone who trailed the bird-doggers for several days, it was clear that critics like Nomani had little idea what they were talking about. Some participants were comfortable confronting politicians and spoke in confident and angry voices; others were shy and struggled to overcome their fear of addressing a senator surrounded by a phalanx of armed police. These citizen/politician inter-

actions could be tense and uncomfortable, but they didn’t look like an attempt to topple the government by any means necessary. They looked like exercises in democracy.

It wasn’t easy keeping up with Flynn Walker. On October 5, the day that Susan Collins stated she would announce her vote on Kavanaugh, Flynn Walker had been up early with two dozen others for a protest at the Capitol Hill home of Mitch McConnell. They arrived with cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon and red solo cups, chanting, in a satirical echo of Kavanaugh’s congressional testimony, “I like beer!” Flynn Walker, dressed in a white dress shirt and black slacks, shouted out: “Georgetown Prep! Woo-hoo! Beach week!” The past couple of weeks had been heavy, and it felt good to finally have a bit of fun.

For the next six hours, Flynn Walker appeared to be everywhere: strategizing with a group of Unitarian seminary students preparing to visit Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse; cheering on protesters as they were loaded into a police van; and, finally, watching on a television set in a Capitol-building waiting area as Collins began her speech.

“Jesus,” she whispered, as it quickly became clear that Collins was going to vote for Kavanaugh. Flynn Walker put her head down for a few minutes in silence. Several friends came over. One told her that she had done everything she could do; another advised her to go home and finally get some sleep. (Flynn Walker has a wife and two kids whom she hadn’t seen much in the past few months.)

She walked back to the Hart Senate Building, stunned. Inside, the crowd was subdued, still trying to absorb the news. Flynn Walker called people into a circle. “There’s still some time, and miracles have happened,” she said. “We were in this spot when the Affordable Care Act was about to be repealed. We didn’t think that we had the votes. And then, at the last minute, one of the senators found their soul and voted to save the lives of millions of Americans.” She then introduced Ana Maria Archila, whom she called the “greatest bird-dogger ever.”

“We did something that seemed impossible, which was to make this a real fight,” Archila said. “We seized the moment and made it a fight about our lives.”

—Ana Maria Archila
In June 2016, shortly after Donald Trump secured the Republican nomination for president, Barack Obama’s ambassador to the United Nations flew to Berlin to make a speech. Like her boss, Samantha Power was more than just a political figure; she was the closest thing the foreign-policy world had to an icon. In the 1990s, Power had made her name urging US leaders to abandon the narrow pursuit of national self-interest and instead lead a crusade to rid the world of genocide. Through her advocacy and her best-selling, Pulitzer Prize–winning book, “A Problem From Hell,” she perhaps did more than anyone else to define a new generation of liberal internationalists—theorists and policy-makers who sought to imbue American power with a renewed sense of moral purpose after the Cold War. Now, with candidate Trump denouncing “the false song of globalism,” one might have expected her to mount a rousing response.

Yet Power delivered something else: a rearguard defense of traditional diplomacy. Where she had once castigated US
Hathaway and Shapiro open with a question of enduring importance. For centuries, wars of conquest were the way of the world. The powers of the West seized land from the rest, placing the majority of humanity under a colonial yoke. They even made a habit of invading and conquering the territories of their fellow Western nations. All of this was perfectly legitimate, at least according to the finest legal minds of the time. Rather than seeking to end wars of conquest, jurists like Hugo Grotius judged them to be sound methods of diplomatic conduct. What’s more, when states went to war, international law required third parties to stay neutral; the international community was prohibited from punishing aggressors or aiding their victims. The effect was to quarantine wars in time and space, but at the price of accepting whatever wars were fought.

If this logic sounds strange, that’s because the international order changed in the 20th century. Today, we regard war as anomalous and turn to law in order to stop it. Stopping war has become the business of the world, even at the risk of inflating small, regional wars into unlimited and global ones. Although violence plainly persists, Hathaway and Shapiro are encouraged by the results. Focusing on wars of conquest, they assemble data sets that purport to show how these conflicts have plummeted in frequency. After occurring an average of every 10 months from 1816 to 1928, the pair claim, wars of conquest have slackened in the past seven decades to an average rate of one every four years.

Hathaway and Shapiro argue that we owe the demise of wars of conquest to a small circle of internationalists who bent the self-interest of the great powers toward peace. The pivotal year was 1928, when, at the urging of transatlantic jurists, the United States and France devised a treaty that renounced the use of force between them and then opened their agreement to all comers. Soon, almost every state had joined the Paris Peace Pact, agreeing not to wage war against anyone else. In effect, the international community lined up behind the pact’s goal, what it called the “frank renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy.” In Hathaway and Shapiro’s view, this was an epochal achievement, ranking among “the most transformative events of human history, one that has, ultimately, made our world far more peaceful.”

Most scholars have thought otherwise, when they’ve bothered to think about the pact at all. For them, it remains notorious as an exercise in empty moralism—an “international kiss,” Missouri Senator James Reed jeered—because it contained no provisions for its enforcement. Yet Hathaway and Shapiro see this omission as a virtue. As they argue in an incisive chapter, the pact won over states with divergent agendas because it consisted of pure legal principle and fudged the whole question of force.

The result, however, was an agreement built on contradictory visions. One of the pact’s architects, James Shotwell, a Columbia University historian and transatlantic networker, favored a scheme of enforceable sanctions like that of the League of Nations. Because the United States had never joined the league due to stiff opposition in the Senate, the pact was Shotwell’s fallback option, and he hoped that a sanctions regime would follow. Others, meanwhile, valued the pact for just the opposite reason. Salmon Levinson, a corporate lawyer in Chicago, believed that law could bring peace by molding people’s minds and habits. Armed force—deployed, necessarily, by the powerful—would only stifle this process, so Levinson opposed the league and Shotwell's other plans for coercive sanctions, deriding one such scheme as using the “soft glove” of outlawing war to “conceal its iron hand of world control by force.”

Despite these opposing views, the pact appealed both sides of the Senate and sailed through the chamber, 85 to 1. Born from competing values, it was nevertheless the first international instrument to declare war illegal. In this respect, the pact went further than the League of Nations, which required states only to attempt to settle disputes through certain processes, from which they might emerge free to wage war legally. Only the pact, Hathaway and Shapiro insist, declared war itself illegal and forced the rest of international law and politics to catch up.
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n so arguing, Hathaway and Shapiro challenge the “realists” gathered in schools of international relations, such as the influential Stephen Walt at Harvard University, who insist that states follow the iron dictates of self-interest rather than the gentle pressure of norms. For Walt, the crucial test of The Internationalists’ argument would be whether national leaders, after the 1928 pact, contemplated launching wars of conquest but decided not to out of fealty to the law. Because the book doesn’t offer such evidence, Walt and other realists are likely to remain unmoved. But Hathaway and Shapiro retort that law operates more subtly than these realists think: It shapes how states define their self-interest to begin with, rather than acting as a separate and opposing force. In a world that no longer recognizes wars of conquest as legal or acceptable, most states will not want to undertake them. International law can work, they argue, and without an army to back it up.

Perhaps so. Other scholars have argued, similarly, that law changes politics by channeling interests in new directions. But what Hathaway and Shapiro add is that this law, the Paris Peace Pact, changed world politics dramatically. Here they struggle, starting with the outcome they seek to explain. Even if the pair were correct to credit the pact with halting wars of conquest, they neglect that its original intention was grander. The pact did not specifically target “conquest,” a term that appears nowhere in its text. Instead, it outlawed “war,” full stop—including wars undertaken for any aggressive purpose, not just land hunger. Looking to tell a tale of progress, Hathaway and Shapiro move the goalposts from all wars to those of conquest, thereby sideline the many wars fought for non-territorial aims, whether strategic, economic, ideological, or biopolitical. Only in this way can they turn the pact, and the world we have today, into a putative triumph.

Nor does the pact deserve the importance that Hathaway and Shapiro impute to it. Eager to rescue it from oblivion, they show how seriously many contemporaries continued to take it for the two decades after 1928. But they fail to show that the pact was central or even necessary to the transformation of the laws of war, a process that historians date to the entire period spanning the two world wars and attribute to a variety of sources.

World War I began, for example, with President Woodrow Wilson proclaiming strict neutrality. It ended with the United States joining the “war to end all wars,” the Allies pleading not to annex new territory, and the liberal states creating the League of Nations to prohibit and punish future warmaking, even if some loopholes remained. At the level of legal norms, never mind diplomatic practice, the league marked a vaster change than did the Paris Peace Pact. The laws of war and conquest traveled a far greater distance from 1914 to 1919 than from 1928 to 1933, when Japan completed its conquest of Manchuria and Adolf Hitler took power in Germany.

Indeed, Hathaway and Shapiro have to explain why a treaty signed in 1928 caused wars of conquest to begin to slow only two decades later—after the Axis powers had invaded far and wide and the Red Army had planted itself in Eastern Europe. They claim that the pact, given its momentous nature, took time to win genuine acceptance, and also that it led to the creation of the United Nations, which helped to end wars of conquest after the dust of World War II had settled. But this long chain of causal links—leaving aside for the moment whether they actually connect—undercuts the authors’ effort to single out the pact itself and the idealistic jurists who shaped it.

In fact, when one looks at the history of this period, something like the opposite story makes as much sense. By outlawing war, one might argue, the great powers sought to freeze the territorial gains they had already made. This attempt, in turn, spurred their competitors to grab everything they could. As historians like Adam Tooze have shown, the Axis powers feared that, if they did not gamble on rapid conquest, they would drop forever to the second tier, below the internationalist poseurs who had already seized Africa, Asia, and North America and now pronounced their consciences shocked when others followed suit. If the pact had any direct effect, then, it was this: to spur Germany, Japan, and Italy to grab imperial hinterlands of their own before it was too late.

The Allies prevailed in the end, of course. Yet their victory did not eliminate the hazards of “outlawing” war. Now that making war is theoretically forbidden, many war-makers claim to be doing something else—engaging in self-defense, or policing the commons, or taking military measures that stop just short of war. In the United States, for example, Congress has not formally declared war since 1942. Yet American presidents still order troops into battle while the public and its representatives cheer, carp, and, above all, watch.

Outlawing war has also given powerful states a paradoxical new rationale for waging war: enforcing international law. This danger was detected at the time by Carl Schmitt, the right-wing jurist and Nazi who submitted liberal internationalism to relentless criticism in the 1920s and ’30s. Where liberals hoped to subordinate states to rules and war to peace, Schmitt retorted that the devices needed to do this would inevitably be wielded as weapons by the powerful. The Paris Peace Pact, he argued, “does not outlaw war, but sanctions it,” because the signatories put forward a raft of exceptions (on grounds like self-defense and vital interest) that would allow them to wage war when they wanted and yet attack their enemies for violating this solemn pledge. Frank Kellogg went so far as to exempt any action that the United States took under the Monroe Doctrine, through which it claimed the right to police the Western Hemisphere.

One of the original “realists,” Schmitt is the bête noire of The Internationalists, and Hathaway and Shapiro assail not only his ideas but his personal actions, recounting his well-known machinations at the University of Berlin, where he defended the legality of the Nazis’ extrajudicial assassinations, and his interrogation at Nuremberg, where he escaped prosecution but not disgrace. Yet the authors try to have it both ways in their quarrel with Schmitt. At times, they acknowledge the validity of his claim that outlawing war will merely redirect violence rather than reduce it. “The outlawry of war has not brought world peace,” they concede toward the end. “By opting for outlawry, we have traded a world of interstate war for one of intrastate war,” where weak states no longer get conquered even if they cannot maintain internal order. But for the most part, Hathaway and Shapiro claim to reject Schmitt wholesale and applaud the pact for getting rid of actual war. “Compulsion by war was over,” they enthuse. “The era of global cooperation had begun.” Confusing norms with
practices, Hathaway and Shapiro celebrate an achievement they elsewhere recognize exists in name only. Their account, in this way, is not so much nuanced as schizophrenic.

Perhaps for this reason, Hathaway and Shapiro can’t settle on their reasons for optimism about today’s world. When they want to make a case they can demonstrate, they home in on wars of conquest, which have indisputably declined. Yet this is too slender a stake to support their grand pronouncements about the forward march of world order. So to make their case sufficiently significant, they make declarations about war in general, even though they struggle to show, and at times decline to argue, that warfare as such has abated. This switching of standards not only makes for jarring reading; it also forces Hathaway and Shapiro to minimize the continued existence of war—the very thing their vaunted internationalists sought to banish from the earth.

Why do Hathaway and Shapiro neglect the persistence of war in a book about its outlawing? One reason is that to confront wars of all kinds would require them to address the ills, and not just the blessings, of American power. This is something they are unwilling to do. Like the humanitarian interventionists they hope to displace, Hathaway and Shapiro appear to take US global military supremacy as the prerequisite for a peaceful world, not as a significant source of proliferating arms and armed conflict.

For all they hype the 1928 pact, the authors hinge their narrative on World War II, after which wars of conquest slowed. They go to great lengths to argue that the pact inspired the United Nations: American leaders, they claim, took the outlawing of war in 1928 and, in a straight line, added “teeth” to it in 1945. Shotwell supplies the central link for this argument, since, after promoting the pact, he went on to help design the United Nations Charter in the wartime State Department. Yet Shotwell, as discussed earlier, had always valued the pact as a fallback plan that would eventually include a scheme of enforceable sanctions. The pacifist Levinson, who also shaped the pact as a fallback plan that would eventually include a scheme of enforceable sanctions to the pact’s pacifism. The pacifist Levinson, who also shaped the pact as a fallback plan that would eventually include a scheme of enforceable sanctions to the pact’s pacifism.

son’s pacifist strain of internationalism lost out as the United States not only created a new world organization but also decided to install itself as the supreme military power and enforcer of “world order.” Insofar as Shotwell’s vision was realized, Levinson’s was betrayed.

Yet even Shotwell’s vision had a more limited influence on the postwar order than Hathaway and Shapiro claim for it. They are right to point out that the UN Charter, like the Paris Peace Pact, prohibited the use of force but without mandating any punishment against violators. Yet the charter also set up a Security Council that authorized the great powers to use force however they collectively liked. To American officials at the time, this was precisely the attraction of the UN: It could serve as a vehicle for the United States, in concert with its allies, to project power on a global scale. “Only force will make and keep a good peace,” as one postwar planner, Isaiah Bowman, declared in 1940. In an almost overt realization of Schmitt’s prognosis, the United States nominally outlawed war while claiming the right to police the “peace.”

For this reason, when they formulated the UN Charter, American planners drew inspiration less from the Paris Peace Pact than from the League of Nations, the British empire, and the Allied councils of World War I, all models they associated with military force. Shotwell was no exception here: In his early draft of the charter, penned in 1942, he provided only for a great-power directorate, without a general assembly of the member nations. Hathaway and Shapiro brandish Shotwell’s draft as if it were a smoking gun. “As far as we are aware,” they exclaim, “no one has previously made the connection between Shotwell and the first draft of the United Nations Charter.” In fact, two major historians of the subject, Andrew Johnstone and Christopher O’Sullivan, have noted Shotwell’s authorship of the charter’s early draft, without finding cause for excitement in the role of the Paris Peace Pact, since Shotwell appealed to multiple models and had always preferred enforceable sanctions to the pact’s pacifism.

Proceeding from the unusual vantage point of 1928, Hathaway and Shapiro should be perfectly positioned to show how the goal of transcending power politics had turned, by 1945, into something else: the American domination of power politics. Astonishingly, however, they end up eliding the difference. Urging the United States to return to its original formula for world leadership, they effectively replicate the conceit that ending war requires the armed preeminence of the United States. Instead of making this contradiction visible, they obscure it. The Internationalists becomes The Supremacists; the anti-war pact in effect cleanses America’s military primacy. As a consequence, Hathaway and Shapiro commit what the legal historian Samuel Moyn has called the “cardinal error” of liberal internationalism; namely, an “over-identification with American interests and power, betraying liberalism and internationalism alike.”

This error grows stark as the authors turn, at the end of their book, to recent events. They blame Russia and the Islamic State (ISIS) for threatening to plunge the world into the dark days of rampant conquest. They are not wrong, but their field of vision is incomplete. America’s invasion of Iraq receives one brief discussion in the book, and when it does appear, Hathaway and Shapiro mention it not to exemplify a norm-shattering illegal war, but to dramatize the happy story that the George W. Bush administration, despite its unilateralist outlook, later felt compelled to reverse its steel tariff in deference to World Trade Organization rules. They also all but ignore the now 17-year-old war in Afghanistan and the US-backed violence in Yemen and beyond. They mention “drone” once, in describing the prosecution’s tedious opening statement at the Nuremberg trials. For Hathaway and Shapiro, and for many other so-called liberal internationalists, the United States doesn’t really count as a war-maker and lawbreaker. America upholds and enforces peace and law—never mind when it doesn’t.

Back when Samantha Power wanted to stop genocide, she wrote out of a sense of outrage at the state of the world and a faith that the United States could make things better. Hathaway and Shapiro compellingly criticize her style of humanitarian intervention, noting that it erodes the norms that prohibit conquest. “If the United States insists on the right to
resort to war in violation of the Charter to address emergencies,” they warn, “it cannot stop others from arrogating to themselves the same powers—and that, in turn, threatens the entire system, which requires states to abide by the prohibition on war.” On this count, Hathaway and Shapiro’s liberal internationalism improves on Power’s, by taking a structural view absent from humanitarian interventionists.

Yet the “entire system” that Hathaway and Shapiro seek to defend has bequeathed profound problems, too. As they explain at the end of The Internationalists, they intend their manifesto as a defense of the international system as it has existed for nearly a century. “The international institutions that have grown up since 1928, while imperfect, have brought seven decades of unprecedented prosperity and peace,” they conclude. Power, at least in her earlier incarnation, summoned her fellow citizens to improve a violent and unjust world. Hathaway and Shapiro risk throwing that goal away. They write to preserve what has come before, not to change it.

This explains why their book has resonated with so many liberals in the Trump years. Since the presidential election, US foreign-policy experts have banded together to guard what they have called the “liberal international order,” which they seem to think was uniformly upheld by postwar presidents before Trump and that Trump wholly rejects. Hathaway and Shapiro share this protective project, even if they distinctively backdate its inception to 1928. Reviewers have so far approved. “Given the state of the world,” writes the Oxford historian Margaret MacMillan, “The Internationalists has come along at the right moment.” Isabel Hull, the great historian of imperial Germany, likewise commends its “timely and necessary plea for international law and for the value of institutions from which we all have benefited, but which we have in recent decades neglected to explain or defend.” So desperate is Hull to preserve the old order that she absolves Hathaway and Shapiro of the very myopia—an unquestioning faith in America’s supreme role in the world—that threatens it today. “They may be forgiven,” she allows, “for exaggerating the role of the US in outlawing war and in fashioning the institutions that sustain the hope of international co-operation.”

Perhaps Hull has it backward. The present moment should invite us not to suspend our criticism of past US foreign policy, but to sharpen it. Somewhere in this history lie the sources of the militarism and the national and racial chauvinism that Trump has paraded before humanity. One source is World War II and the same internationalists who were romanticized a decade ago as the antithesis of George W. Bush and, now, Donald Trump. Putting America first, those internationalists decided that the United States must maintain an armed supremacy over the rest of the world in order for the world to stay at peace. In this respect, Trump is also their heir and resembles some of his most prominent critics. The internationalists of the last century are, it turns out, quite relevant to our current crisis: They helped us get here, and they offer us no way out.

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Self-Portrait as a Shadow

for V. Lamar

Word is I wasn’t born so much as skimmed off another living thing by a source of light. Let’s just say that you are light-skinned and the back of my mom’s hand is a color best worn around the eyes after a knuckle’s kiss, though this fact itself is not here to imply I was born of an act of violence, but, rather, that I was born into violence as a cultural practice and product. And I enter post-crack, post-Reagan, when the big city newspapers sell themselves with headlines about shadow-on-shadow crime like light doesn’t factor into the equation by definition, like light doesn’t have a gaze upon the world called the day. Fact of the matter is—

sad as the matter is, I can only see myself in relation to it, to the light; I can only move in reaction to movement, my ankles shackled to dogma that dogs me and us out from the moment of first appearance. In my case, that’s June 1990. Summer. Maternity ward full of shadows and from then on I can only measure love by the amount of nightmares I have in a shortened span of space and simultaneity. They all always say I look like my daddy, which is to frame me a shadow in a related sense, which is to say your presence gives my own life definition, which is what they like to say on TV whenever some kid like me is extinguished too soon. Under the lights, I make due with all of this being watched and watched over and I make questions of it, too. And I ask. And you answer: not always well, often incompletely but completely honest at the same time, and that is how the concept of faith clicks for me, how I learn to perturb politics and push myself into conversations like the connotation of a word or phrase, which, too, is a form of shadow, thus a part of me, who upon a lot of light shines that I take advantage of, take care that whenever they flick the switch to turn them on—they themselves, on—that they’ll be sure to see me trailing tightly behind, keeping them on their toes like they’ve kept me on mine, like you always told me they would.

CORTNEY LAMAR CHARLESTON
Let’s just get this out of the way: All jobs are bullshit jobs. Even if you’re a public defender or work for Médecins Sans Frontières, insofar as your labor is determined by a system of abstract compulsion—insofar, that is, as it exists within capitalism—it’s bullshit. You know this.

In his new book, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, David Graeber is interested in a particular variety of bullshit and work. In 2013, the anthropologist and anarchist (he hates to be called “the anarchist anthropologist”) published an essay slamming the proliferation of “pointless jobs” that seem to exist “just for the sake of keeping us all working.” The response was tremendous: It turns out that many people have jobs that they believe require them to do nothing of value (or to do nothing whatsoever while trying to appear to be doing something).

Graeber sifted through the responses and solicited additional input on Twitter in a quest to categorize the “five basic types of bullshit jobs” and document the absurdist travails of those who hold them. From such data, he constructed a working definition of the subject at hand:

[Bullshit jobs are forms of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case.]

Graeber distinguishes these bullshit jobs from “shit jobs,” which serve a purpose but suck. Which is not to say that bullshit jobs don’t suck as well, but they suck precisely because they don’t serve a purpose. Much of the stress they produce—the “spiritual violence,” as Graeber terms it—results from the contortionist maneuvers that employees are forced to perform in order to pretend to be working when they have nothing to do. And as Graeber notes, this sense of purposelessness is widespread: To give just two examples, 37 percent of the UK respondents to a poll on the subject, and 40 percent of the Dutch ones, insisted that their work is utterly useless.

In 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by the end of the century, technology would have become so far advanced that developed economies would have a 15-hour workweek. So how did we get to our current state, almost two decades into the 21st century? It turns out that Keynes was only half right—technology has advanced spectacularly, but we are far from a 15-hour workweek. Keynes thought that the developed economies would adjust to a growth in productivity by decreasing workers’ hours. Instead, capital absorbed those gains but did not free up the now-superfluous human labor—a tendency that Karl Marx noticed long ago.

For Marx, this pattern is intrinsic to capital, whose constant expansion of its own value requires the reproduction of existing social relations. For Graeber, however, this pattern has less to do with capital’s prerogatives than with human agency; the problem “clearly isn’t economic: it’s moral and political,” he writes. Yet it would be truer to say that the problem is not merely economic, but also moral and political, and even truer to relate these spheres to one another, a point that Graeber himself makes later: “[E]very day it’s more difficult to tell the difference between what can be considered ‘economic’ and what is ‘political.’” But despite a muddled sense of causes and effects, Graeber’s book offers us an engaging—albeit at the same time tremendously disheartening—portrait of labor in 21st-century capitalism.
In his previous books, especially 2009’s *Direct Action: An Ethnography* and 2011’s *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, Graeber’s ear for anecdote lent his activism the air of folktale. *Debt’s* opening vignette, for example, set at a garden party at Westminster Abbey, offers a charming little parable about our tacit beliefs and assumptions. At the party, Graeber suggests to an attorney he meets that the developing world’s debt should be abolished. “But,” she objects, “they’d borrowed the money! Surely one has to pay one’s debts.”

In *Bullshit Jobs*, Graeber similarly employs anecdote in order to illustrate just how much insanity we take for granted. Liberally drawing from the respondents to his original essay, he recounts stories that read like Philip K. Dick at his least plausible. Some are sad, others infuriating, and many are both. A number verge on the absurd: One woman’s job was to go around demanding IDs and proof of income from temporarily sheltered homeless people so that “the temporary homeless unit could claim back [the] housing benefit.” If homeless people couldn’t provide the necessary paperwork—as often happened—their caseworkers would kick them out. In another instance, a “subcontractor of a subcontractor of a subcontractor for the German military” describes driving for hours and filling out pages of paperwork simply to prevent a soldier from carrying his computer about 16 and a half feet down a hallway to his new office.

Most of the stories involve jobs that are also nightmarish in their unrelenting tedium. My favorite is the museum guard whose job was to protect an empty room, apparently to make sure no one started a fire in it. To ensure his vigilance, he was forbidden to read a book or even look at his phone.

All of these jobs sound terrible, but are they also bullshit? The people who have to do them think so. But Graeber’s reliance on subjective impressions of whether work produces value is the book’s major weakness. He brings up Marx’s distinction between productive and unproductive labor—between workers who produce surplus value and those who do not—simply to brush it off. And it is telling that he focuses on “information work” and what he calls “salaried paper pushers.” While he claims that these kinds of positions, rather than “waiters, barbers, salesclerks and the like,” account

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**I Make a Toothpick Diadem & Crown Myself Token**

Pink light sears the marbled bar & the straw in my drink is pastel. On wood-paneled walls, American Traditional paintings of my goddesses. Kati texts me: *all this gaslighting today*. I’m taking extra space, my bags all over the butterscotch seats, & the only men around are behind the bar, burning sage & lemon rinds for garnish, talking about mangoes—their remedial qualities, the cost & palette & current trend toward. I’m turning fuchsia, bottled up. Appropriate me sideways, my bags are full & I’m nothing if not a product, lush. Kati writes: *like how I’m feeling isn’t legitimate enough*. On the counter, two artificial flames are a native woman’s breasts. Durga save me, I’m liable to paint the borough white—that is, in reminder—my wrists already smelling of tamarind &; jasmine & not because it comes natural, but if I’m to invest in anything, shouldn’t it be our first fruit, that ancient juice, & shouldn’t it be to remedy—. I have to cherry-pick my battles here, can’t argue against exotic existence, so I don’t write: *my mother holding a mango is more brown joy than this place will ever see*. Filaments fitted with paisleys glow & the tequila’s got this sweet bite & I’m pissed at the walls, they just shutter out light. Joy is fine, joy is pretty pink, but Kati *would like to yell, after all, isn’t dissent patriotic & anger a form of grief & I inhale the incense the white bartender burns as if from a censer. My holy hour has only just begun, yes, mangoes are astonishing, & women are worth our own saving. I go about separating pulp from rind.

RAENA SHIRALI
for “the bulk” of service jobs added to the economy since 1990, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics could have set him straight on this score. As Jason E. Smith pointed out in his review of Graeber’s book in The Brooklyn Rail, the bureau’s table of “occupations with the most job growth” actually does include waiters and retail salespeople, not to mention nurses, customer-service representatives, janitors, health aides, fast-food workers, cooks, and construction workers. Most service workers, in other words, are indeed providing valuable services—caring for others and feeding people.

Graeber’s picture of a Dickensian bureaucratisation run amok has other problems as well. He correctly notes that our economic system has undergone profound transformations since the 1970s, with declining manufacturing and wages and a rising service and financial sector. But according to Graeber, these changes mean that the existing system isn’t exactly capitalism anymore, but rather a kind of “marginal feudalism”—one that involves “hierar-

ches,” “class loyalty,” and “moral envy”—

that is the result of political will rather than structural determination. However, while one can surely find such attributes at work in the global economy, the system remains capitalist: predicated on the extraction of profit from the labor of others (even when such profit is mediated by financial markets). “Class loyalty” and “moral envy” are the products of such a system.

In his work, the Marxist theorist Moishe Postone (who died earlier this year) explored the “domination of people by time” under capitalism in ways that bolster some of Graeber’s claims. Postone’s discussion of the shift from the “variable” time of the Middle Ages, which was determined by the different kinds of human activity, to the clock time of the modern period, an invari-

able standard that dictates the workday, parallels Graeber’s own.

Yet there are important differences as well. In his discussion of value, Graeber (like some Marxists, it must be said) attributes to Marx a “labor theory of value” akin to David Ricardo’s, according to which the value of a given commodity is equal to the amount of labor that went into its produc-

tion that Graeber rightly decries: because it is a theory about how social relations get reproduced, including those that seem irrational and unnecessary.

Here we find Graeber exploring what is perhaps his true subject: not jobs that seem unnecessary, but the unnecessary compulsion of wage labor. In a free society—one in which your time and work are your own rather than commodities—Lilian’s sentiment would not necessarily be pathological. Work doesn’t need to be drudgery; we can find meaning in our jobs. But a society based on the produc-

tion of value is by definition unfree, since we don’t really have a choice about whether to participate in it, and because work often becomes merely a tedious means of survival.

We have all experienced the truth of this. After college, I worked briefly as a temp in an article—one of the most terrifying things I’ve ever read—that describes Candelia, a job-training center in France:

The wages are imaginary, too. Nothing is produced in this “job” except the illusion of waged labor, but de Buyzer “welcomes the regular routine.” France has more than 100 of these “staged companies.”

This is the world we’ve inherited—one in which we reflexively inquire of strangers, “What do you do?” which means, of course, “How do you earn a wage.”

De Buyzer, working in the accounting department, leaned into her computer and scanned a row of numbers. Candelia was doing well. Its revenue that week was outpacing expenses, even counting taxes and sala-

dries. “We have to be profitable,” Ms. de Buyzer said. “Everyone’s working all out to make sure we succeed.”

This was a sentiment any boss would like to hear, but in this case the entire business is fake. So are Candelia’s customers and suppliers, from the companies ordering the furniture to the trucking operators that make deliveries. Even the bank where Can-

delia gets its loans is not real.

The wages are imaginary, too. Nothing is produced in this “job” except the illusion of waged labor, but de Buyzer “welcomes the regular routine.” France has more than 100 of these “staged companies.”

This is the world we’ve inherited—one in which we reflexively inquire of strangers, “What do you do?” which means, of course, “How do you earn a living?” And this is so even when there’s no social need for everyone to be working all the time. Bullshit jobs are only one idiotic facet of this larger decoupling of work from meaningful activity. If the problem were managers and bureaucracies, then we would simply need to eliminate them. But if the problem is capitalism, then we need to change the world. The familiar slogan of Occupy Wall Street and the global justice movement of the early 2000s, both of which Graeber was involved in, was “Another world is possible.” We’re told this is idealistic and naive. But it’s not bullshit.
In 2004, ten years into her career, Robyn wrote a song that her record company didn’t like. An electropop anthem recorded in collaboration with the electronic duo the Knife, “Who’s That Girl” was a fierce rejection of the demands placed on the Swedish pop star as a young female artist: “Good girls are sexy, like every day / I’m only sexy when I say it’s okay.”

At 15, Robyn had launched into the charts with a series of hits that were catchy and full of exuberant feeling, but something had been missing in those songs: Her genius was being smothered by the sleek and bland productions preferred by her label. What “Who’s That Girl” showed was that there was a vast emotional range just under the surface of her music. After a decade caught in the machinery of the pop industry, Robyn wanted to unleash it.

When the record-company bosses said no to the new song, she left to start her own label, Konichiwa. In the years since, Robyn has built an enviable career defined by independence and self-possession. With 2005’s Robyn and her 2010 Body Talk trilogy, she pioneered a form of cerebral dance pop—defiant and fun in equal measure. Her mastery has only become more apparent as others have tried to live up to her blueprint.

After her Body Talk tour, she staged another rebellion of sorts: She took a very long break from the spotlight. Her latest album, Honey, is her first new solo work in eight years.

In that time, the fervor behind the record had reached a boiling point—hashtags implored her to release long-teased songs, and fans staged raucous tribute nights in her honor.

Last May, she began her return to public life with a surprise appearance at one of those parties—Brooklyn’s “This Party Is Killing You.” Dressed in a black suit and stiletto boots, she dove from the stage into a sea of arms. In a video of the event released in July, which included a preview of a new song, “Missing U,” fans cried as they described how much her music has meant to them. “Robyn is the soundtrack of, like, my literal coming out of the closet,” one fan said in a voicemail begging her to attend the party.

Since she last spoke to the press, Robyn has faced some tough times of her own. In 2014, her close collaborator and friend Christian Falk passed away. The same year, she split from her long-term partner, the...
Honey's nine songs are split into two acts; the first five, anchored by “Missing U,” offer a portrait of a broken relationship that might or might not be fixed. The desires driving these songs are perhaps, as Robyn admits, old-fashioned—“All these emotions / Are out of date,” she sings in “Human Being”; “Nothing lasts forever / Not the sweet not the bitter / It’s a tired old record / I still play it anyway,” on “Because It’s In the Music.” But the raw expression of that desire supercedes her admission. She wants touch, forgiveness, and honest communication, and she’s not afraid to ask directly or to tell you to do the same. “If you’ve got something to say, say it right away…. If you’ve got somebody to love, give that love today,” she sings on “Send to Robin Immediately.”

Where, altogether, the first five songs add up to a darker mood, the sixth track, “Honey,” marks a turning point. A luminous tribute to lust—“No, you’re not gonna get what you need / But baby, I have what you want / Come get your honey”—the soaring synth that opens the song sounds like psychic relief, or like sun on bare skin after a long winter. The direction of the desire is flipped. Now she’s not asking for anything; she’s got the honey that the listener wants. “Honey” is followed by three songs that continue this note of relaxed confidence—her phone’s on blast with a lover at her beck and call; she’s partying on the beaches of Ibiza without a care. On “Ever Again,” the album’s closer, Robyn leaves the looping beats and returns to the pure dance pop that has become ubiquitous since she perfected the form on Body Talk. At first the song appears unusuallyoptimistic—a jubilant celebration of new (or restored) love and the idea that heartbreak is a thing of the past. But while she’s dedicated plenty of time to getting to know herself in the years since her last album, what she hasn’t done is solve the unsolvable problem that propels the beginning of the album—the problem of other people and the pain they can cause. In an interview in May with Adam Bainbridge, who makes music as Kindness, and produced “Send to Robin Immediately,” she said her relationship with her analyst was her “one totally healthy” relationship.

Honey, in many ways, is a reckoning with both her self-discovery and some of the loneliness that has come with it. In “Missing U,” she’s mourning a lost relationship; in “Ever Again,” she’s proclaiming that she’s “Never gonna be broken-hearted ever again / I’m only gonna sing about loving ever again.” We know—statistically speaking—that’s impossible, but far from being naive, the assertion feels well-earned by the time Honey concludes. Of course, she’ll be broken-hearted again, but so will we, and for now we sing along anyway.
Puzzle No. 3482

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1. Going back and forth sick during time off (11)
2. Key West finally seen in a small vessel (5)
3. A loud noise in support of Mac Knight (7)
4. A female tennis legend (4)
5. Typical weather conditions and so forth, on the rise (10)
6. Refusal to gobble, feast, or swell (5)
7. A loud noise in support of Mac Knight (7)
8. Honeymooners, perhaps, beginning to seem inexperienced, left and went most of the way north (9)
9. One interrupting President Hoover’s initial victory (7)
10. Large room in plant is not deep (7)
11. Army chief captivated by return of tiny animals (6)
12. Celebration of workers adorably frolicking (5,3)
13. Freedom from snooping is costly around Virginia (7)
14. Suggestive evidence (7)
15. Easily disgusted, Susan takes question on religious sect (9)
16. Cleaned bird, for example, replacing black with white (5)
17. 3A Later, in a, John’s return to the secluded area (11)
18. Makes it known cannon use is unacceptable (9)
19. Refusal to gobble, feast, or swell (5)
20. Cruz, harboring a sorceress, quivered (8)
21. Newspaper features prisoners swallowing fruit with top cut off (7)
22. Poet with assassin (7)
23. Article invested in elevating certain blue Americans (5)
24. Leader of Tatooine to succeed Luke Skywalker, for instance (4)
25. After making some changes, I atoned for cutting back (2,1,4)
26. Poet with assassin (7)
27. That guy sitting between relatives) (11)
28. Keep in order today, a teacher for instance (11)

DOWN

1. Freedom from snooping is costly around Virginia (7)
2. A female tennis legend (4)
3. Establishing big breaks in tweet (10)
4. I ought to put in a new order about work lack (2,7)
5. Going back and forth sick during time off (11)
6. Flawed teachers disregarding C (6)
7. Makes it known cannon use is unacceptable (9)
8. Cleaned bird, for example, replacing black with white (5)
9. Over time, John’s return to the secluded area (11)
10. Freedom from snooping is costly around Virginia (7)
11. Cleaned bird, for example, replacing black with white (5)
12. Keep in order today, a teacher for instance (11)
13. Over time, John’s return to the secluded area (11)
14. Freedom from snooping is costly around Virginia (7)
15. Flawed teachers disregarding C (6)
16. Makes it known cannon use is unacceptable (9)
17. Over time, John’s return to the secluded area (11)
18. Freedom from snooping is costly around Virginia (7)
19. Keep in order today, a teacher for instance (11)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3481

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