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**ENHANCED READER FORMAT**
The Perils of Make-Work

Re Michael Robbins’s review of David Graeber’s *Bullshit Jobs* [“Looking Busy,” Dec. 3/10]: When I was in college at age 19 back in the 1970s, I felt I had two choices for a summer job: waitressing or working at the Tampax factory in Rutland, Vermont. Being shy, I chose the latter: second shift, standing for eight hours stuffing two Tampaxes into a plastic “purse container” and then setting the container on a conveyor belt to be pushed into a box of 40.

Apparently, there was a limit to how many “free” purse containers would be included in a box of 40, so I was occasionally reassigned to do “cleanup.” This meant standing at an open bin into which defective tampons were dumped. My job was to separate the components: string over here, cardboard over there, paper and cotton elsewhere.

One day, I was assigned to “clean-up” for eight hours straight and then again on the following day—and on that second day I discovered my limit. I went to my supervisor and announced that I was going home and that she could give me a call when she had some real work for me. Then I went home and wept at my failure. I had lasted four weeks.

I’m glad that David Graeber has called a spade a spade. And the Tampax factory wasn’t the only bullshit job in my working life, just the first or second of many. I’m very glad to be retired.

Katherine Clark
Montpelier, VT.

Government Workers, Unite!

In “Banking on Unions” [Nov. 12], Mike Konczal suggests a method to remedy working conditions in banks like Wells Fargo, where workers were pressured to sell customers services that they didn’t need and created fake accounts to meet the required quotas. Konczal’s suggested remedy: unionization. If any employee were ordered or pressured to commit an unlawful or unethical act, the complaint would be addressed by the union so the employee would be protected from retaliation. This benefit would be in addition to the union bargaining for fair pay and better working conditions.

With Wells Fargo in mind, as well as the malfeansance of politically appointed agency directors, how about creating a confederated union of all federal-agency employees? Such a union could counter the illegal actions demanded by directors intent on thwarting the intended purposes of their assigned agencies. It’s critically important to empower those who are asked to bend or break the rules to refuse to do so without retribution.

James Weatherspoon
St. Cloud, Fla.

Corrections

D.D. Guttenplan’s article “The Wave Hits a Wall” [Dec. 3/10] mistakenly described Colorado Governor-elect Jared Polis’s platform as anti-fracking. In fact, while Polis was once an opponent of fracking, he had reversed that position by the time of the election.

In Rozina Ali’s “Marijuana Comes to Coalinga” [Dec. 17/24], Ocean Grown Extracts was described as cultivating cannabis at Coalinga’s converted Claremont prison complex. So far, the company is only manufacturing cannabis products there.

Also in Ali’s piece, a quote that first appeared in a 2016 article in *The Guardian* was misattributed to Damian Marley. It was Marley’s manager who gave the original quote to the newspaper.
Poppy’s Bloody Legacy

George Herbert Walker Bush represented a ruling class in decay. His WASP awkwardness, his famous syntactical struggles—described in obituaries as an aw-shucks genuineness, a goofy, “irreducible niceness”—was symptomatic of an Establishment in crisis. Franklin Foer, writing in The Atlantic, notes the nostalgic tone of the encomiums. The public apparently yearns for a time when politics was less coarse, when the country’s clubby elites were well-bred, well-voweled (compare the pleasantly rolling i’s and o’s of the Harrimans and Roosevelts with the guttural u’s of today’s ruling clan), and well-mannered, their grasping and groping kept out of the press, for the most part. What Foer doesn’t mention, and what is perhaps the single most important through-line in the 41st president’s life, is the way the extension of the national-security state, and the easy recourse to political violence in the world’s poorer, darker precincts, allowed Anglo-Saxon men like Bush to stem the decomposition and to sharpen their class and status consciousness.

Raised in the shadow of legends, of a father (Prescott Bush) and two grandfathers (Samuel Bush and George H. Walker) who helped steer the expansive, epic era of Episcopalian capitalism—when American industry and politics became interlocked with militarism—George H.W. Bush came into his own during the glory days of covert action in the Third World. This period ran from, say, the 1953 overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran through the Guatemala coup in 1954 and the Cuban Revolution in 1959, to the assassination of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and the Bay of Pigs in 1961, until the eve of escalation in Vietnam.

Bush would serve for a year as the director of the CIA in the mid-1970s, but as Joseph McBride reported for The Nation in 1988, his involvement with the agency started much earlier [see “George Bush, C.I.A. Operative,” July 16/23, 1988]. In November 1963, shortly after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote a memo to the State Department describing the briefing of “Mr. George Bush of the Central Intelligence Agency” on the reaction of the anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Miami. (It was feared by some that the exiles might take advantage of the chaotic situation by initiating an unauthorized raid against Cuba.) McBride also cited a source with close connections to the intelligence community who confirmed that, as he wrote, “Bush started working for the agency in 1960 or 1961, using his oil business as a cover for clandestine activities.”

Kevin Phillips’s American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush provides a helpful summary of the investigative journalism into the Bush family’s long-standing ties to this shadow world. It was a family linked by but a few degrees of separation to all the most-storied intrigues and collusions in postwar US history, from the overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala to the Iran-contra scandal. Phillips provides thick descriptions not to prove any particular conspiracy theory but to establish sociological overlap and ideological affinity, the tight class and status connections between elites—like the Bush and Walker families—and foreign policy. According to Phillips, “from Yale’s class of 1943 alone, at least forty-two young men entered the intelligence services” (Bush attended from 1945 to 1948), and nearly every major player involved in the Bay of Pigs invasion had been in Yale’s Skull and Bones secret society. By the time Bush became director of the CIA, Phillips writes, “three generations of the Bush and Walker families already had some six decades of intelligence-related activity and experience under their belts,” which apparently also involved a Mexico-CIA “money line” whose funds made their way into “the hands of the Watergate burglars.”

Through birth and breeding—at the Greenwich Country Day School, Phillips Academy, and Yale—Bush identified with an Eastern Establish-
Drug overdose deaths in the United States in 2017—a nearly 10 percent increase from the previous year

28,500
US overdose deaths in 2017 attributed to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids

33%
Increase in the national suicide rate since 1999

80,000
Flu deaths during the 2017–18 flu season—a record high over three decades of data

3
Consecutive years in which life expectancy in the US has declined

99
Years since the last time that US life expectancy declined over three consecutive years

5.2
Weeks subtracted from US life expectancy in 2017 compared with 2016

—Maia Hibbett

December 31, 2018

70,237

For Bush, a genteel veneer was the best disguise.

Greg Grandin, a professor of history at New York University and a Nation editorial-board member, is the author of numerous books. His latest, The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall, will be published in March 2019.

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December 31, 2018
**Asking for a Friend**

**Raising Trouble**

Dear Liza,

I talk a lot about toxic masculinity with my 10-year-old. But I'm having trouble figuring out how to respond to the way he and his friends act when they get together, especially the masculine habit of "ball busting." Around video games in particular, there's a lot of trash talk. Sometimes it's skill-specific ("You got me killed, you noob!") but at other times they degrade each other's manliness, which can veer into sexist or homophobic taunting. (One boy was teased about wanting to get into bed with a friend at a sleepover.) I hate this. My son says it's normal and that all boys do it. I'm not a guy, but I think it's as unhealthy as "mean girl" talk. Any suggestions?

—Bewildered Mom

Dear Bewildered,

As the mother of a 13-year-old boy, I feel this question, as well as your caveat ("I'm not a guy"). Seeking answers for both of us, I called up C.J. Pascoe, a sociologist at the University of Oregon and the author of *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Like all kids this age, Pascoe notes, your son and his peers are developing closer friendships as they gain independence from their parents. But because of still-rampant homophobia, she says, even platonic homosociality is fraught with anxiety: "So they manage it with aggressive joking. Ironically, doing this gives them the space for intimacy."

Of course, that doesn't mean that homophobic or sexist teasing is OK. Such taunts can be extremely painful for boys struggling with their sexuality and horrible for girls and women to overhear. When boys speak cruelly about feminine or gay people, they may also limit their own sense of who they can become.

You should tell your son not to tease his friend about the sleepover. But it's best to respond to his more subtle jibes without overt judgment, finding ways to encourage him to look critically at these interactions. When it comes to discussions with her own kids, Pascoe likes the formulation "Isn't it interesting that…?" You might try: "Isn't it interesting that you and your friends love hanging out together, yet are always insulting each other?"

Do look for ways to emphasize or praise more inspiring examples of guy bonding. Pascoe recommends watching the new *Queer Eye* episodes together and discussing them. My son and I watch a lot of sports. "I like how they all hug when someone scores a goal,"

Dear Working-Class,

Your ex acted like an asshole. Regardless of the sexual terms of the relationship, married people must share responsibility for the household finances and especially for the well-being of any kids who live with them. It's not the sex that made his behavior so wrong; a person who puts anything—art career, addiction to Alex Jones videos, asking for a Friend

Questions? Ask Liza at TheNation.com/article/aspiring-for-a-friend.
Asymmetric Warfare

Far-right media isn’t playing by the same rules.

Our political media today is a one-sided battle. In one corner, we have the old-fashioned gatekeepers doing business as they always have: fearful of offending the powerful, and constantly attempting to strike a balance between profit and what they deem the “public interest.” In the other is an amalgam of right-wing institutions that found a path to riches by combining lies, prejudice, and conspiracy theories—with precious little actual journalism. Donald Trump’s presidency has boosted the latter’s influence, helping to metastasize its cancerous mendacity throughout the body politic. But the phenomenon precedes Trump—indeed, without it he would still be a C-list celebrity grifter.

In their in-depth 2011 study of the Tea Party, political scientists Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson observed that “what America has right now is a thousand-pound gorilla media juggernaut on the right, operating nineteenth-century style, coexisting with other news outlets trying to keep up while making fitful efforts, twentieth-century style, to check facts and cover ‘both sides of the story.’” Back then, the juggernaut was mostly Fox News and Rush Limbaugh—style talk radio. But today, there’s been a proliferation of outlets that exploit their audience’s gullibility and the unwillingness of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to take responsibility for the lies and hatred they so profitably distribute.

Three scholars associated with the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University—Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts—have published a study that does the best job I’ve seen of contextualizing the current information ecosphere. Their book, Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics, builds on the Skocpol-Williamson thesis with an ocean of alarming data.

Contrary to popular opinion, the authors find “no left-right division, but rather a division between the right and the rest of the media ecosystem. The right wing of the media ecosystem behaves precisely as the echo chamber models predict—exhibiting high insularity, susceptibility to information cascades, rumor and conspiracy theory, and drift toward more extreme versions of itself.”

In an interview with Boston Review, Benkler noted that this arose with “the emergence of a business model that stokes anger and outrage and reinforces identity-based politics just when the Republican coalition began to lean heavily on two deeply identity-based communities, namely, angry whites in the wake of the civil rights movement and the religious right pushing back against the women’s movement.”

Today, right-wing sites account for an increasingly large portion of political-news sources, and they abide by no known rules of journalism. “[E]ven core right-wing sites that do claim to follow journalistic norms, Fox News and the Daily Caller, do not in fact do so,” the authors of Network Propaganda correctly observe. Zwing sites, which, according to Benkler, “share the reporting and journalistic traditions of mainstream media.” (I’d say we do far better.) But the influence of the left pales compared with that of the right. We should all know this by now, but the data amassed in this study remains shocking. During the 2016 election, for instance, the racist, inflammatory Breitbart was the third most frequently shared news source on Facebook, right behind The New York Times and CNN. (Fox News finished 14th; it’s no coincidence that Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch gave up their resistance to the Trump tsunami.) Together, Fox, Limbaugh, Breitbart, and all the smaller but surprisingly well-read conservative sites constitute a “propaganda Feedback Loop” that progressively lowers the costs of lying and “increases the costs of resisting that shared narrative in the name of truth,” according to the Berkman Klein Center team.

This “feedback loop” has been identified by other scholars as well. The libertarian Julian Sanchez uses the term “epistemic closure” to argue that whatever contradicts the reality presented by right-wing news “can be dismissed out of hand because it comes from the liberal media and is therefore ipso facto not to be trusted.” This was borne out by the research of scholars Matt...
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Bill Miller is an accredited journalist at the UN for the Washington International and has written extensively on UN issues. He is the Principal of Miller and Associates International Media Consultants, which created the Global Connection Television concept.

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

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Nearly half of Trump voters believed that Hillary Clinton was running a pedophilia ring from the basement of a pizza joint.

(continued from page 5)

Grossmann and David Hopkins. In their 2016 book *Asymmetric Politics*, they write that the “conservative movement simultaneously undermined popular faith in both mainstream academia and journalism among its supporters, while building and reinforcing Republican reliance on alternative ideological information sources.” Its members “view themselves as engaged in an ideological battle with a hostile liberal ‘establishment’”—“turn[ing] even their choice of news or research source into a conscious act of conservative self-assertion.” This explains why a YouGov poll in December 2016 found that nearly half of Trump voters believed that Hillary Clinton was running a pedophilia ring from the basement of a pizza joint named Comet Ping Pong.

Benkler says that Network Propaganda’s “most important audience...is the professional newsroom,” because the mainstream media have made themselves complicit in this system. He explains that “when one side systematically produces propaganda and has no internal checks,” the insistence on maintaining neutrality creates a fiction that “there are two legitimate sides to the story.” In fact, “To say this side says ‘x’ and this side says ‘not x’ systematically reinforces and amplifies the lies.” That mainstream news outlets spent more time on stories about the “migrant caravan” and “voter fraud” than health care is a perfect illustration of the problem.

Journalists, these researchers warn, are under an asymmetrical attack. But as Benkler astutely declares: “The commitment to professional journalism at its highest level is going to be the single most important thing that we can do to deal with this moment of epistemic crisis.” The early returns, alas, are not encouraging.

Even political organizing—over their family’s survival shows a reckless indifference to their marriage.

Had your ex been a real nonconformist, he could have been polyamorous and still treated you well. He could have tried much harder to find work to help support the family. And a man willing to reject the social norm of monogamy should be more than capable of challenging the heteronormative practice of taking women on expensive dates. He should have told his girlfriends that he needed to spend time with them in ways that didn’t cost money: walks in the park, bike rides, cooking together—or sex (which is free!).

Yes, you do need to get over this and move on with your life. But he should also apologize.

It’s important to note that, while your ex sucks, capitalism sucks more. In an economic system that guaranteed security, everyone in your household could have gotten what they wanted, and you might have stayed together happily. In her new book *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence*, Kristen Ghodsee argues that, under capitalism, women’s struggle for economic survival impedes our sex lives. Your letter provides a heartbreaking example of how this is so: Presumably, you liked the idea of a polyamorous relationship, but the material reality of supporting a child made it impossible for you.

Your ex was an irresponsible cad, but capitalism also burdens working-class people with too many responsibilities and delivers too few pleasures in return. Neither of you should have had to choose between taking your daughter to the movies, the family’s economic survival, and adult fun. You didn’t have the freedom that your ex had, and neither of you enjoyed the freedom that a well-off couple does—or that anyone might in a socialist society. You both deserved better—but especially you.
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—Dana S., Texas

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US MILITARY

Bombing Paradise

The Northern Mariana Islands are a US commonwealth just north of Guam. They’re home to palm trees, cerulean waters, and more than 50,000 residents—and soon, they could also be used as target practice for heavy mortar fire and artillery bombardment.

The islands have long been a hub for the US Navy in the Pacific. And, unlike many other military-base locations, the Navy’s relations with the locals have been mostly smooth since the Pacific-theater battles of World War II.

In fact, in the late 1970s, most residents considered a plan to build a naval base a welcome development, since it would have brought hospitals and movie theaters to the islands. Nothing, however, got built. Instead, the Navy is now seeking to use two of the islands for live-fire exercises.

“War games would include artillery, mortars, rockets, amphibious assaults, attack helicopters and warplanes, and... ship-to-shore bombardments,” residents explained to the Saipan Tribune. “The training would destroy native forests and coral reefs, kill native wildlife—including endangered species—and destroy prime farmland.”

Activists sued the Navy in 2016, claiming that its plans violated the National Environmental Policy Act. This September, a US district court sided with the military, but the activists are appealing. “This is a ‘life-or-death struggle,’” a resident told Radio New Zealand. “If the Navy’s plans go forward, they will turn our homeland into a militarized wasteland, and we will never be able to return.”

—Chris Gelardi

It’s Giving Time!

A list of 10 charitable organizations to help out this holiday season.

It’s Christmas and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa and the winter solstice; the birthday month of Beethoven, Emily Dickinson, Nostradamus, and approximately one-twelfth of all the people born here on Earth. Raise a glass and celebrate by making generous end-of-the-year donations to any and all of these worthy organizations.

1. Restore Hope: Liberia. After 14 years of civil war, a decade of slow reconstruction, and the largest Ebola epidemic ever seen in Africa, Liberians face the continuing challenges of extreme poverty, illiteracy, poor health care, and malnutrition. Restore Hope: Liberia provides education, health facilities, and economic development in the rural Kolahun District while empowering communities to figure out what they need, village by village—and it’s working. restorehopelibera.org

2. Black Voters Matter Fund. This summer, BVM traveled the South and mobilized over 3 million black voters. On Election Day, those voters made the difference for Democrats in race after race. With 2020 just around the corner, this group will keep fighting disenfranchisement, voter suppression, gerrymandering, and all the other tactics that have kept black people from wielding their full political strength. Does BVM get the big bucks from big donors? Not so far. That’s why they need you. blackvotersmatterfund.org

3. Afghan Women’s Fund. Afghan women were everyone’s favorite cause after the fall of the Taliban. Today? Not so much. Fortunately, AWF (disclosure: I’m on the board) keeps building and maintaining schools, running adult-literacy classes, providing school supplies and computers, and helping hospitals and clinics. Recently, they’ve added dental care and support for the survivors of suicide-bomb attacks in Kabul. Donate by check to AWF, c/o Jean Athey, PO Box 1563, Olney, MD, 20830, or online. afghanwomensfund.org

4. Network of East-West Women. NEWW has been connecting American feminists with women from the former Soviet bloc for 25 years, and its work has really blossomed. There are feminist libraries, gender-studies programs, and activist groups galore in the region, now fighting against the openly anti-women governments that have taken hold. NEWW’s latest project is supporting activists who are educating battered women in Georgia about their rights. “Feminist groups in East Central Europe are under massive attack,” says co-founder Ann Snitow. “They’re on the front lines pushing back.” Make out your tax-deductible gift by check to NEWW, c/o Ann Snitow, 167 Spring Street #3, New York, NY, 10012.

5. Abortion funding. On Election Day, voters in West Virginia and Alabama approved amendments to their state constitutions that could criminalize abortion if Roe v. Wade is overturned and that make it easier to pass further restrictions now. As a result, West Virginia, which has used state Medicaid funds to pay for poor women’s abortions, no longer does so. (Alabama already forbids state funding for abortions.) Show your solidarity with low-income women in these states, and with the clinics and providers who work there despite constant harassment and threats, by donating generously to the West Virginia Free Choice Fund (wvffree.org) and the Yellowhammer Fund (yellowhammerfund.org).

6. Survived and Punished. Our prisons are full of women whose only crime was defending themselves and their children against violent partners and other abusers. This all-volunteer grassroots coalition works to change laws, commute sentences, educate the public, and support current and former prisoners. We desperately need to rethink our criminal-justice system top to bottom; a good place to start would be to stop persecuting women who have already been victimized many times over. survivedandpunished.org

7. Amazon Watch. The election of arch-right-winger Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil means open season on the Amazon rain forest...
The Nation.

December 31, 2018

and its indigenous peoples. Amazon Watch fights the mining, fossil-fuel extraction, deforestation, and dams and highway construction that threaten to destroy this precious ecological resource. There’s not a moment to lose, because the Amazon rain forest is the world’s largest carbon sink and is crucial to stabilizing the global climate. If it goes, we all go. amazonwatch.org

8. **INARA.** This Lebanon-based NGO connects children injured in war or living as refugees with the medical care they desperately need. Currently, the organization is focused on aiding children from Syria. You can help mitigate terrible harm by donating to INARA’s Christmas appeal so that war-injured children can become well again. inara.org

9. **Border Network for Human Rights.** Located in El Paso, on the border between the United States and Mexico, BNHR informs immigrants and refugees of their rights, protects them from abuses by ICE, and advocates for immigration reform. It’s a grassroots organization with members all over the region. Did you know that the US has spent between $15 billion and $23 billion a year on immigration enforcement in the past 10 years alone? Donate to BNHR, so they can fight back. bnhr.org

10. **Support the publications you read.** Information might want to be “free,” but there’s no such thing as a free lunch—or newspaper, magazine, investigative report, or book. By all means, read the abundance of no-cost (to you) content online, but do pay your fair share by giving subscriptions as gifts and donating to keep the publications and writers you rely on in business. After all, how guilty will you feel if they end up folding? And since charity begins at home, start with thenation.com. The “Donate” button is right there in the upper-right-hand corner.

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**SNAPSHOT / HANNAH McKay**

**Well-Heeled**

Four-year-old Rosa Julia Romero from Honduras—part of a caravan of thousands from Central America trying to reach the US—wears her mother’s shoes as she walks through a temporary shelter after a heavy rainfall in Tijuana, Mexico, on November 29.

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**STAFFING THE ADMINISTRATION**

Replacing someone forced to leave
Could surely be no easier.
Trump looks among the folks he knows,
And picks someone who’s sleazier.

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HOW TO TURN UP THE HEAT ON TRUMP
Democrats, as the former—and likely future—House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has noted, must be “strategic” in using the power of their new majority in the House of Representatives. With Republicans still controlling the Senate and Donald Trump in the White House, most legislation proposed by the Democrats will be blocked. Therefore, they need to use their oversight authority to investigate corruption and abuses in the executive branch, while at the same time highlighting their fundamental differences with the Republicans and President Trump.

Already, Democrats are boasting about loading up a “subpoena cannon” to go after Trump on a host of issues: his taxes, his emoluments, his payoffs to the women he’s had affairs with, and, of course, the role of Russia in the 2016 election. This is necessary, but simply going after Trump will not be sufficient. There is a bottomless pit of corruption and lawlessness in his administration to investigate and expose. As Robert Weissman, president of the consumer-advocacy group Public Citizen, notes: “Throw a dart at a listing of agencies and wherever it lands, you’ll be certain to hit on a case of egregious conflict of interest.”

But while the media remain focused on Trump, voters—as Democrats found in this fall’s election—are much more concerned about kitchen-table issues. Even many of Trump’s supporters acknowledge the outrageousness of his behavior, but they still mistakenly believe that he’s on their side. Democrats need to challenge this big lie, calling out the predators’ ball that the president has hosted at our expense. Trump has stuffed his administration with corporate lobbyists, ideologues, and special-interest operatives who are rigging the rules in ways that do direct harm to the great majority of Americans.

Democrats need to hold public hearings that expose this predation, detail the harm to Americans across lines of race and region, make the case for bold reforms, and help energize the citizens’ movements that are pushing for change. Among the legion of possibilities, here are a few that deserve special attention.

**The War on Workers**

Democrats should convene a select committee to examine why our economy does not work for most Americans. Corporate profits are up, CEO pay is soaring, and unemployment is low, but workers’ wages are stagnant—even after a record-long recovery that began under President Obama. This is not only a fundamental failure of our economic system; it’s a threat to our democracy. It is also at the heart of Trump’s greatest con: his promise that “the American worker will finally have a president who will protect them and fight for them.” Instead, he has turned his administration’s economic policy over to Goldman Sachs alums and appointed corporate lobbyists and right-wing ideologues to wage a relentless war on workers.

The cumulative results of this war strip billions of dollars from the pockets of working people. The administration refuses to support a hike in the minimum wage, now 35 percent lower in real value than it was in 1968. Trump also canceled a paltry 2.1 percent pay raise for federal employees. He has delayed the Obama regulation that would have extended overtime pay to 4.2 million workers; rolled back his predecessor’s executive orders to curb wage theft; and torpedoed Obama’s initiative to keep financial advisers from cheating workers on their retirement accounts, which costs them an estimated $17 billion per year.

Trump’s anti-union appointees to the National Labor Relations Board have issued a series of decisions that weaken the ability of workers to organize—most recently, the board effectively outlawed union picketing at many job sites. Neil Gorsuch, Trump’s first Supreme Court nominee, cast the deciding vote in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which savaged public-employee unions, such as those for police, firefighters, and teachers. And, with Trump’s support, the Senate has repealed the Obama regulation that required government contractors to disclose past labor-law violations and to retain records of workplace injuries for five years.

The federal government spends more than $500 billion a year on contracts with companies that employ about one in five private-sector workers. According to Good Jobs Nation, a coalition of workers, 41 of the top 100 recipients of federal contracts engage in the offshoring of jobs. Those companies received over a third of all federal contract spending. With the stroke of a pen, Trump could issue an executive order giving priority to companies that use federal dollars to “Buy American” rather than offshore jobs—but instead, he’s used that pen to overturn Obama-era regulations to protect workers.

Trump’s labor policies mirror his personal business practices: The Trump Organization is notorious for stiffing contractors and using undocumented workers to lower its construction costs. The president’s Mar-a-Lago resort hires foreign workers at cut-rate wages while claiming, risibly, that it can’t find Americans to fill those jobs. Trump also rails against offshoring, even as he and his daughter set up shop in China to make their brand-name products. A systematic review of the efforts by former corporate lobbyists who are now in the executive branch, busily rigging the rules against working people, would provide the basis for comprehensive legislation to empower workers and protect their rights; raise the minimum wage; crack down on wage theft; use government procurement contracts to reward companies that treat their employees decently; and begin to allow workers to share in the rewards of the recovery. It would also supercharge movements like the Fight for $15 and the teachers’ strikes, which are already making progress at the state and local levels.

**Climate Catastrophe**

Scientists now warn that we have about a decade to drastically reduce our use of fossil fuels before major destruction becomes unavoidable. After the midterm elections, activists accompanied by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez flooded Pelosi’s office to demand action on climate change. Representative Ro Khanna and other members of...
Congress, including the newly elected Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib, have joined Ocasio-Cortez in calling for a Select Committee on a Green New Deal.

Armed with subpoena power, that committee could expose how Trump and the Republicans have pocketed millions in campaign contributions from the fossil-fuel industry and staffed the Interior Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other regulatory bodies with corporate lobbyists who have larded Big Oil and King Coal with billions in government subsidies and easy access to public lands, while weakening environmental and worker protections and suppressing even the mention of global warming throughout the federal government. Andrew Wheeler, Trump’s recent nominee to head the EPA, is a former coal-industry lobbyist dedicated to rolling back the regulations that protect the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Spotlighting this sordid reality could set the stage for comprehensive legislation to end these subsidies and launch a Green New Deal—generating a wave of public investment and innovation in the renewable-energy industries that represent the growth markets of the future. Such hearings would fuel the growing citizens’ movement for action on global warming and also educate the public on the key point that fighting climate change need not inhibit economic growth and the creation of good jobs.

**Fleecing a Generation**

Student-loan debt continues to rise, hitting a record $1.56 trillion in 2018, even though college enrollment has fallen since 2010. The most outrageous abuses are being committed by for-profit colleges that prey on low-income students, dishonestly promising them employment opportunities if they go into debt to pay the tuition and fees. Trump himself owned the for-profit Trump University, which paid $25 million to settle a suit by the students it had swindled.

Now, under the leadership of Betsy DeVos, a billionaire with ties to companies that own for-profit colleges or make money collecting student-loan debt, Trump’s Education Department has reopened the door to this exploitation. DeVos hired several former officials of for-profit colleges accused of defrauding students; these officials have been directly involved in neutering the Education Department’s investigative unit assigned to police these for-profit scams. And she has recently begun to roll back Obama-era regulations curbing such abuses. Congressional hearings on the student-loan catastrophe could expose the outrage of for-profit colleges and the department’s efforts under DeVos to aid and abet them. This would not only build support for tuition-free college; it would also galvanize a generation of young people who have been unfairly burdened with these debts.

**Swindling Consumers**

After Wall Street’s own “epidemic of fraud” (to quote the FBI) led to the Great Recession, Congress created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. In its first five years, the CFPB returned some $11 billion to consumers and curbed predatory practices such as payday loans. Not surprisingly, the CFPB became a leading target of Wall Street, payday lenders, and credit-card companies—and of the Trump administration.

After the CFPB’s original director resigned, Trump appointed his budget director, Mick Mulvaney, to run the agency. Mulvaney, who had received significant contributions from payday lenders in his years as a congressmen, had previously scorned the CFPB as a “sick, sad joke.” After taking over its reins, he immediately set out to gut the agency, slashing its resources, cutting back its investigations, and weakening the unit assigned to investigate student-loan fraud. Mulvaney suspended a rule that would have imposed restrictions on payday lenders, forcing them to document whether their customers had any chance of repaying loans. He also dropped an investigation into at least one company that had donated to his political campaigns in the past, and moved to weaken and delay the implementation of a rule that would have limited penalty fees for overdrafts on prepaid credit cards.

As former North Carolina congressman Brad Miller warns, by the time Mulvaney is finished with the agency, “we’ll be right back to where we were in 2007 and 2008, where it’s open season on consumers. Where anything you sign may have hidden in the tiny little print…provisions that just screw you blind.” If the House Democrats hold hearings on the CFPB’s dismemberment, they could highlight how, under the Trump administration, Wall Street is once again evading even limited efforts to protect American consumers.

**Privatization: Lock ‘Em Up**

Trump’s indefensible detention of immigrant children separated from their parents is only the most offensive part of the drive led by Jeff Sessions, his former attorney general, to lock up more and more people. This is a classic example of how the rules get rigged by lobbyists: After Obama’s Justice Department announced that it would phase out the use of private prisons at the federal level, the stocks of the two leading private-prison companies—CoreCivic and the GEO Group—plummeted. Then, on the campaign trail, Trump praised the use of private prisons and promised to lock up more people. The GEO Group gave $225,000 to a pro-Trump PAC; GEO and CoreCivic also donated more than $700,000 in the 2016 election cycle. When Trump was elected, the stocks of both companies soared. GEO and CoreCivic donated $250,000 apiece to Trump’s inauguration. The GEO Group also hired two more staffers from Sessions as lobbyists and held its annual leadership conference at the president’s cash cow, the Trump National Doral Golf Club in Miami. Obama’s projected phasewout of private prisons was scrapped, and the GEO Group was awarded a contract to build a 1,000-bed detention center in Texas, which will generate revenue of about $44 million a year.

Immigration and criminal-justice reform should be top priorities for Democrats. Hearings that expose the predatory practices of private prisons (which boost profits by cutting back on meals, wages, guards, and physical and mental health care) and the corruption not just of the Trump Organization, but of our whole revolving-door system of lawmakers turned lobbyists and campaign finance, can help drive that agenda. With Trump signaling that he might support bipartisan reforms on sentencing now that Sessions is gone, Democratic hearings on these issues could both propel these changes and help fuel movements like the Dreamers and Black Lives Matter.

America is “open for business,” Trump said earlier this year. This is the administration’s, and the GOP’s, routine way of doing business—and also their true vulnerability. Democrats would be well advised to focus attention and energy on exposing this reality to the American people.
Morocco

APRIL 24–MAY 5, 2019 | Contemporary & Imperial Morocco

To travel in Morocco is to move from one era of history to another, experiencing a culture that fuses indigenous Berber traditions with Arab, Jewish, Andalusian, and other European influences.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Attend** a briefing with Spanish journalist David Alvarado, who has covered North Africa for more than a decade as a correspondent for Spanish-language CNN, about the role of democracy in Morocco.

- **Meet** with Asma Lamrabet, a feminist leader who is part of a school of thought often referred to as “Islamic feminism.”

- **Hear** from Abdelmalek El Kadoussi, a communications professor, who will discuss the complex role of the media in Morocco, including the practice of self-censorship.

- **Stop in** at the offices of Centre des Droits des Gens (CDG, or “Close to the People”) and learn about its work as one of the biggest human-rights organizations in Morocco.

- **Depart** in a 4×4 for an overnight at a camp in the highest dunes of Morocco—the towering Erg Chebbi—and experience the magic of a night in the Sahara desert.

- **Join** activist Nadir Bouhmouch, who is working on a documentary about the six-year protest against the operator of a silver mine in a remote Moroccan village in the Sahara.

- **Visit** Meknes, a UNESCO World Heritage site and 17th-century capital; the vast ruins of Volubilis, Rome’s commercial capital for the region up to the third century; and Sefrou, home to celebrated artisans and once one of the continent’s largest Jewish communities.

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FIGHT FOR FUNDAMENTAL REFORMS

by ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

With the Republican monopoly on power in Washington broken, the new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives can now advance a bold agenda for the country. To do so, progressives inside and outside the House will need to force hearings and floor votes on signature reforms, from Medicare for All to a Green New Deal.

Even though the Republican majority in the Senate will quash any significant legislation out of the House, forcing debate on these “message bills” is essential. Open hearings will strengthen the case for reform and help educate legislators, the media, and the public. These actions will also energize parallel initiatives at the state and local levels. Grassroots mobilization can target legislators in both parties who stand in the way. The debate will also supercharge the ideas primary among Democratic presidential contenders, which has already been started by Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

The push for significant reforms will need to overcome Democratic timidity. The siren calls for bipartisan cooperation have already begun—led by Republican Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, the Darth Vader of obstruction. Worse, House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi has adopted her party’s characteristic defensive crouch by floating rule changes that would make it all but impossible to raise taxes on much of the population (undermining the debate on Medicare for All) and would require a “pay-as-you-go” stipulation for any new program (in contrast to Republicans, who blithely raised deficits by larding tax cuts on the wealthy). Bipartisan cooperation to pass modest reforms—on security for the Dreamers or criminal-justice sentencing, for example—is laudable, while investigating the pervasive corruption of the Trump administration is essential. But neither should prevent a debate on the vital reforms needed to revive our democracy and make the economy work for working people.

Progressives are now poised to drive this process. A significant number of Democratic candidates this fall—including several who won in red districts—embraced progressive ideas. The Congressional Progressive Caucus gained at least two dozen new members; now, with nearly 100 members total, it will comprise about two-fifths of the House Democratic Caucus. CPC members will chair over a dozen full committees and nearly three dozen subcommittees. New progressive stars Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley upset powerful Democratic incumbents in their primaries, putting other party members on notice. Independent progressive groups—new and old—demonstrated a growing electoral capacity in fundraising, organizing, and communications.

This increased clout and sophistication were on display in the jockeying over the House speakership. The CPC co-chairs of the next Congress, Representatives Mark Pocan and Pramila Jayapal, coordinated with outside groups like MoveOn and Indivisible. All withheld their support from presumptive House Speaker Nancy Pelosi until she pledged that CPC members would gain proportional representation on key committees (Ways and Means, Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, Financial Services, and Intelligence). That inside/outside coordination is what will be needed to compel hearings and votes on signature reforms. Here is a brief review of the ones likely to be at the center of the debate.

Strengthening Democracy

The corruption of American politics and the right’s systematic efforts to suppress the vote are a disgrace. Pelosi sensibly declared that the first legislation undertaken by the new Congress would strengthen democracy at home and would include automatic voter registration, reinvigoration of the Voting Rights Act, curbs on gerrymandering, congressional repeal of the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision, public matching funds for small donations, mandated disclosure of financial sources, and an end to loopholes in ethics laws. This will help expose the right’s assault on democracy and voting rights, as well as President Trump’s big lie about “draining the swamp.”

Medicare for All

America’s health-care system continues to cost more, with worse results, than that of other industrialized nations. Medicare for All enjoys the support of some 70 percent of voters, including even a majority of Republicans. In the outgoing Congress, Bernie Sanders introduced the legislation in the Senate, and potential presidential contenders Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Jeff Merkley, Cory Booker, and Kirsten Gillibrand signed on. Nearly two-thirds of the House Democratic Caucus endorsed the parallel bill sponsored by Representative Keith Ellison.

Pramila Jayapal, leader of the Medicare for All Caucus, plans to introduce a revised bill and push for hearings and a vote in the upcoming session. Republicans, backed by big money from the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, are implacably opposed, with Trump scorning Democrats for wanting to “raid Medicare to pay for socialism.” Many Democrats—including at least one expected chair of a relevant committee—argue for postponing consideration indefinitely, while moving on more modest measures to address prescription-drug prices and bolster the Affordable Care Act. Even Lloyd Doggett, the CPC member who could lead the Ways and Means subcommittee on health next year, suggests that a vote would be “premature.”

National Nurses United and a broad range of civil-society groups are planning a public campaign calling on Democratic legislators to endorse the Medicare for All bill and move it to a floor vote. NNU has announced “harnstorms” of intense grassroots activity for February 9 to 13.

Expanding Social Security

The median retirement savings for working-age Americans is zero. More and more seniors end up depending almost entirely on Social Security and are often forced to take low-wage jobs to help pay for food or medicine.
Not surprisingly, voters of both parties overwhelmingly oppose cuts in Social Security, while large majorities support expanding benefits.

Representative John Larson, the likely chair of a House Ways and Means subcommittee, is committed to moving forward with a bill that would apply the payroll tax to incomes over $400,000 (it now applies only to the first $128,400 in income) and use that money to expand benefits and bolster the Social Security trust fund for the coming century. With 174 Democrats signed on—including virtually all of the CPC—Pelosi is unlikely to stand in the way. Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, a leading activist group promoting expansion of the retirement system, reports that a broad coalition is ready to mobilize grassroots activity to push the legislation.

$15 Minimum Wage

The federal minimum wage is worth less in comparable dollars than it was 50 years ago, spurring fast-food workers to begin the Fight for $15 in 2012. Now, 29 states have passed a minimum wage higher than the federal rate. By 2022, 17 percent of Americans will live in cities or states with a $15 minimum wage. Yet Republicans continue to block any vote on lifting the federal rate, with Trump’s economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, calling any federal minimum wage—even the current absurdly low $7.25—a “terrible idea.”

Bernie Sanders pledges to introduce a bill in the Senate that would lift the federal minimum wage to $15 by 2024 and index it to median wage growth. That would give a raise to more than 40 million workers, or about 25 percent of the workforce. Bobby Scott, the likely chair of the Education and Workforce Committee, is the lead sponsor of a parallel bill in the House, with 171 members signed on.

A Green New Deal

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that we have just 12 years to limit global carbon emissions to avoid facing horrific consequences. The US government’s Fourth National Climate Assessment warns of dire economic and human costs. The increasing severity of storms, floods, and fires has convinced more and more Americans of the reality of global warming, but neither the public nor the press seems to grasp the urgency of the challenge. Republicans, led by Trump, remain in denial or have been utterly compromised by the deep pockets of the fossil-fuel industry. Democrats, while virtually unified in supporting the revival of President Obama’s climate plan and returning the United States to the Paris Agreement, are far from united even close to the scope and pace we need.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez marked her Washington debut by joining a group demonstrating outside Pelosi’s office, where she called for a select committee on a Green New Deal, which would craft legislation to move the country to 100 percent renewable energy in a decade. Pelosi has backed a plan to revive a select committee without the commitment to a comprehensive plan, although the party’s committee chairs in waiting argue that existing committees can do the job.

In fact, significant work must be done to forge what could be the most transformative economic proposal in decades. Central is the need to build alliances with unions and entrepreneurs. Construction unions should be asked what they would need in order to train enough workers to retrofit commercial buildings with renewable-energy technology in a decade’s time. We also need investments in mass transit, new energy and water systems, a new energy grid, and more. None of this will happen without mass mobilization, targeted pressure on Democrats, and work to build the blue-green coalitions that have too often been neglected.

Empowering Workers

Wages have essentially been stagnant since the 1970s, while inequality has grown to obscene extremes. Even with near-full employment, wages still aren’t keeping up with the rising costs of essentials, from health care to college tuition. Redressing this structural crisis requires, among other reforms, re-empowering workers to organize and bargain collectively. For many years, Republicans have served as foot soldiers in the corporate assault on labor unions and worker organizing. Democrats, while nominally favoring unions, have repeatedly failed to offer an effective defense.

Progressives should demand high-visibility hearings detailing the breadth and scope of the corporate assault on unions, the trampling of workers’ rights, and the neutering of the National Labor Relations Board and the Labor Department. The core of a reform agenda can be drawn from Mark Pocan and Bernie Sanders’s joint Workplace Democracy Act and the oft-maligned “Better Deal” agenda that Pelosi and Senator Charles Schumer introduced in 2017. That agenda pledged to “strength-en penalties” on “predatory corporations” that violate workers’ rights, with measures that included outlawing state right-to-work laws, giving workers the right to sue for damages when their rights are violated, banning the permanent replacement of striking workers, strengthening the NLRB, and using federal procurement to favor corporations that protect workers’ rights.

Terminating Endless Wars

America’s follies abroad also require action. Representative Ro Khanna has leadership support for a resolution to halt US support for Saudi Arabia’s war on Yemen. Representative Barbara Lee is pushing to amend Congress’s 9/11 Authorization for Use of Military Force to begin bringing the long conflict in Afghanistan to an end and to place new restrictions on US interventions abroad. But even getting these measures out of the House will require the revival of an anti-war movement that has been quiescent for too long.

This list of reforms is far from complete. Bernie Sanders has published a 10-point, 100-day agenda for House Democrats that adds tuition-free college, progressive tax reform, and more. What is clear is that progressive Democrats are ready to drive the debate, not simply react to Trump’s daily circus of lunacy. This will do far more than small-bore bipartisan reforms—or even long-overdue investigations—to define what the Democratic Party stands for, and who stands in the way. A new era of movement politics may be dawning.
In her first days on Capitol Hill, Representative-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) paid a visit to the office of House minority leader Nancy Pelosi. That alone wasn’t out of the ordinary; such visits happen as a matter of course. The difference was that the 29-year-old was flanked by nearly 200 other young people, some of them barely out of high school, 51 of whom would later be arrested and hauled off by the Capitol Police. Ocasio-Cortez arrived at the November 13 demonstration with members of the youth-led climate group Sunrise Movement and Justice Democrats, an organization that had backed her run (along with those of several other insurgent progressives) in the midterm elections. Together, they were calling for the creation of an initiative more sweeping than anything proposed by the Democratic Party in recent memory: a Green New Deal.

"Should Leader Pelosi become the next Speaker of the House, we need to tell her that we’ve got her back in showing and pursuing the most progressive energy agenda that this country has ever seen,” Ocasio-Cortez told those gathered around her. Some were wearing shirts emblazoned with the number 12—the years that the world has left to avert catastrophic warming.

With that number in mind, Ocasio-Cortez’s staff began circulating a proposal that day for a select House committee to “develop a detailed national, industrial, economic mobilization plan for the transition of the United States economy.” Central to that plan: weaning the country off fossil fuels in the next decade. As of press time, 18 additional sitting or incoming House members have signed on. The Green New Deal thus embodies the kind of big thinking that party leaders have shirked over the past few decades, during which liberals in Washington opted for incremental policy tweaks and compromises with Republicans and corporations alike. Episodes like the one in Pelosi’s office offer a taste of what having democratic socialists in power will be like: an inspiring break with business and politics as usual, both in style and in content.

Beyond the mediagenic protests and slogans, the platforms of politicians like Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib (D-MD)—both members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—have begun to delineate a bold new governing agenda. In addition to a Green New Deal, they’ve backed calls for Medicare for All, abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), ending cash bail, guar-
A MANDATE FOR LEFT LEADERSHIP

socialist Bernie Sanders (I-VT) remains the country’s most popular politician. Meanwhile, a majority of millennials—just years away from becoming the country’s largest voting bloc—say they favor socialism over capitalism. And the rumored presidential hopefuls for 2020 are now competing to establish their progressive bona fides. Even Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), by all accounts a mainstream liberal, has taken credit for proposing a jobs guarantee—a relatively recent addition to the left’s new policy wish list that enjoys majority support in all 50 states (while universal health care, in the form of Medicare for All, is backed by even a majority of Republicans). The left, in short, is back in style, and its ideas are more popular than at any time in recent memory.

Nevertheless, it’s hard not to feel a little outgunned. It’s one thing to pass discrete policies to improve the lives of ordinary Americans; it’s another to change the economic and political consensus that the free-market dogmatists of the center-right and center-left have been building since before some of these insurgent newcomers were born—along with a political and intellectual infrastructure designed to outlive us all.

The small pack of advocates who pioneered the neoliberal revolution after the oil crisis and the inflation of the 1970s weren’t selling lower corporate tax rates or rollbacks of labor protections on their own merits; they were selling freedom and small, responsible government, realized through markets and the sage guidance of American business leaders. Their ideology placed profits before people and markets before democracy, though in the United States at least, they never put it that way to the public. So to get the word out, they built institutions like the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI); cultivated promising talent for higher office, including Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan; wrote and published books; and founded magazines and radio shows, like National Review and The Manhattan Forum, aimed at spreading the doctrine of the free market.

In addition to a small army of wealthy backers (something that today’s left still lacks—largely by design), what allowed the right to become dominant in the second half of the 20th century was its ability to tell a compelling story about how the economy should work and who it should work for—and then repeat and tweak that story ad nau-

anteeding a federal job to anyone who wants one, raising the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour, and refusing to accept money from corporate PACs. Many of these candidates delivered on the last item when they ran for office; but for now, the rest is mostly a wish list of policies—albeit ambitious, radically egalitarian ones.

That being said, today’s progressives and democratic socialists face a much bigger challenge than simply passing good legislation. They also need to chip away at the neoliberal consensus that the right has spent the last 40 years cementing, and to redefine what constitutes economic sense—all in time to save the planet from burning.

WASHINGTON’S PROGRESSIVE NEW ARRIVALS MAY not have much in the way of legislative experience, but the political winds seem to be blowing in their direction. The fallout from the Great Recession and the looming threat of climate change have exposed bipartisan free-market dogmas as woefully ill-equipped to deal with the crises that we face today. National polling bears this out: In large part thanks to his appeals to Occupy Wall Street’s condemnation of economic inequality and the 1 percent, democratic
seam for anyone who would listen over the better part of half a century. As William Baroody Sr., the conservative activist who built AEI into a force to be reckoned with, noted: “This is no overnight miracle-passing operation... It will take time, financial resources, and the exercise of good brain power.”

It also took decades—but the hard work paid off. As Reagan settled into the Oval Office in 1980, he handed every member of his prospective cabinet a copy of a 1,100-page Heritage Foundation document that detailed some 2,000 conservative policy priorities. The document, which would later be published as the Mandate for Leadership series, served as the cornerstone of right-wing leadership; in his first year alone, Reagan would take up nearly two-thirds of its proposals.

Described by United Press International as “a blueprint for grabbing the government by its frayed New Deal lapels and shaking out 48 years of liberal policy,” the Mandate’s presence in the White House was the culmination of decades of work by a network of right-wing academics and activists who sought to dismantle the Keynesian consensus that there could be such a thing as good big government, in the mold of the New Deal and the Marshall Plan—and to provide a ready alternative.

Today, the institutions that the free marketeers built in the 1970s and ’80s still dwarf anything available to progressives. Top conservative think tanks enjoy lavish budgets, with the largest collectively pulling in tens of millions of dollars more per year than their progressive counterparts. (Compare the Heritage Foundation, which raised $82 million in 2016, to the Center for American Progress, which brought in some $25 million that same year.) Free-market organizations churn out fact sheets and model legislation for freshman state lawmakers, and recruit undergrads into leadership pipelines that end in influential academic and government positions. A study released this past summer found that nearly half of current federal judges have attended a two-week, Koch brothers–funded boot camp on economics—and that their attendance had a measurable effect on their rulings.

This is why a crucial goal for the insurgent left has to be to change the terms of the national debate. Currently, groups like the Sunrise Movement and the DSA support candidates based on their commitment to a set of goals, but they don’t have in-house policy shops coming up with big new ideas or the research to back them. Existing organizations like the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Economic and Policy Research produce valuable research and some useful proposals, as does a small network of non-traditional, heterodox economists scattered in institutions throughout the United States and elsewhere—but they aren’t focused on making change or swaying public opinion in the same tight (and perhaps mercenary) way as the right was in Reagan’s day. Many of the more established and better-funded bodies, like the Center for American Progress, also tend to track closer to the center than to the left—and so they may not be of much help to democratic socialists in figuring out how to govern.

There are a handful of scrappy left-leaning think tanks, such as Data for Progress and the People’s Policy Project, starting to dip their toes in the policy-making waters, publishing lengthy reports on proposals like the Green New Deal and large-scale public-housing development. Some of the people who helped set up Justice Democrats have started their own policy shop, New Consensus, though for now it remains comparatively bare-bones. But this is an area worth investing in heavily: With the left’s surging popularity—and plenty of people interested in moving in that direction—it’s not impossible to imagine a democratic-socialist agenda capable of meeting today’s crises as Reagan purported to meet those of the 1970s.

Critically, it wasn’t only a battle of ideas that fueled the neoliberal revolution. The right’s rise also followed its concerted attempt to break up unions and shift the balance of class power in the United States. “The deeper threat of organized labor went far beyond dollars and cents,” Kim Phillips-Fein writes in Invisible Hands, her history of the corporate attacks on unions from the New Deal to Reagan’s election. “If workers believed that they owed their benefits to the time they spent on the picket line, why would they respect the authority of the boss?”

That fact makes governing from the left in such a context—with a decimated labor movement and enemies who possess virtually unlimited resources—every bit as challenging as actually getting elected. The American judiciary, for example, has a long shelf life, so progressives lack the deep bench of appointees readily provided to the GOP by groups like the Federalist Society and AEI. (In contrast to the right’s shadowy personnel networks, Ocasio-Cortez’s team has posted job descriptions for DC and in-district positions on a view-only Google Doc.) And thanks to the success of economists like Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek in spreading their gospel, the economics discipline has become an echo chamber for orthodox neoclassical ideas, with only a small minority of departments teaching alternative theories.

With the prospect of progressives and even socialists winning control of the federal government, the left needs its own Mandate for Leadership to unravel 40 years of neoliberal policy. The Green New Deal is a start. Still, creating something of that magnitude will likely mean investing (continued on page 26)
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The new Cold War is more dangerous than the one the world survived.

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W

AR WITH RUSSIA?, LIKE THE BIOGRAPHY OF A LIVING PERSON, IS A BOOK WITHOUT AN END.
The title is a warning—akin to what the late Gore Vidal termed “a journalistic alert-system”—not a prediction. Hence the question mark. I cannot foresee the future. The book’s overarching theme is informed by past and current facts, not by any political agenda, ideological commitment, or magical prescience.

To restate that theme: The new US-Russian Cold War is more dangerous than was its 40-year predecessor that the world survived. The chances are even greater that this one could result, inadvertently or intentionally, in actual war between the two nuclear superpowers. Herein lies another ominous indication. During the preceding Cold War, the possibility of nuclear catastrophe was in the forefront of American mainstream political and media discussion, and of policy-making. During the new one, it rarely seems to be even a concern.

In the latter months of 2018, the facts and the mounting crises they document grow worse, especially in the US political-media establishment, where, as I have argued, the new Cold War originated and has been repeatedly escalated. Consider a few examples, some of them not unlike political and media developments during the run-up to the US war in Iraq or, historians have told us, how the great powers “sleep-walked” into World War I:

§ Russiagate’s core allegations—US-Russian collusion, treason—all remain unproven. Yet they have become a central part of the new Cold War. If nothing else, they severely constrain President Donald Trump’s capacity to conduct crisis negotiations with Moscow while they further vilify Russian President Vladimir Putin for having, it is widely asserted, personally ordered “an attack on America” during the 2016 presidential campaign. Some Hollywood liberals had earlier omitted the question mark, declaring, “We are at war.” In October 2018, the would-be titular head of the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, added her voice to this reckless allegation, flatly stating that the United States was “attacked by a foreign power” and equating it with “the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.”

Clinton may have been prompted by another outburst of malpractice by The New York Times and The Washington Post. On September 20 and 23, respectively, those exceptionally influential papers devoted thousands of words, illustrated with sinister prosecutorial graphics, to special retellings of the Russiagate narrative they had assiduously promoted for nearly two years, along with the narrative’s serial fallacies, selective and questionable history, and factual errors.

Again, for example, the now-infamous Paul Manafort, who was Trump’s campaign chairman for several months in 2016, was said to have been “pro-Kremlin” during his time as a lobbyist for Ukraine under then-President Viktor Yanukovych, when in fact he was pro-European Union. Again, Trump’s disgraced national-security adviser, Gen. Michael Flynn, was accused of “troubling” contacts when he did nothing wrong or unprecedented in having conversations with a Kremlin representative on behalf of President-elect Trump. Again, the two papers criminalized the idea, as the Times put it, that “the United States and Russia should look for areas of mutual interest,” once the premise of détente. And again, the Times, while assuring readers that its “Special Report” is “what we now know with certainty,” buried a related acknowledgment deep in its some 10,000 words: “No public evidence has emerged showing that [Trump’s] campaign conspired with Russia.” (The white-collar criminal indictments and guilty pleas cited were so unrelated that they added up to Russiagate without Russia.)

Astonishingly, neither paper gave any credence to an emphatic statement by the Post’s own Bob Woodward—normally considered the most authoritative chronicler of Washington’s political secrets—that, after two years of research, he had found no evidence of collusion between Trump and Russia.

Nor were the Times, the Post, and other print media alone in these practices, which continued to slur dissenting opinions. CNN’s leading purveyor of Russiagate allegations tweeted that an American third-party presidential candidate had been “repeating Russian talking points on its interference in the 2016 election and on US foreign policy.” Another prominent CNN figure was, so to speak, more geopolitical, warning, “Only a fool takes Vladimir Putin at his word in Syria,” thereby ruling out US-Russian cooperation in that war-torn country. Much the same continued almost nightly on MSNBC.

For most mainstream-media outlets, Russiagate had become, it seemed, a kind of cult journalism that no
counterevidence or analysis could dent and thus itself increasingly a major contributing factor to the new Cold War. Still more, what began two years earlier as complaints about Russian “ meddling” in the US presidential election became by October 2018, for The New Yorker and other publications, an accusation that the Kremlin had actually put Donald Trump in the White House. For this seditious charge, there was also no convincing evidence—nor any precedent in American history.

§ At a higher level, by fall 2018, current and former US officials were making nearly unprecedented threats against Moscow. The ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, threatened to “ take out” any Russian missiles thought to have violated a 1987 treaty, a step that would certainly risk nuclear war. The secretary of the interior, Ryan Zinke, threatened a naval “ blockade” of Russia. In yet another Russophobic outburst, the ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, declared that “ lying, cheating and rogue behavior” are “ a norm of Russian culture.”

These may have been outlandish statements by untutored political appointees, but they again inescapably raised the question: Who was making Russia policy in Washington—President Trump, with his avowed policy of “ cooperation,” or someone else?

But how to explain, other than as unbridled extremism, the comments by Michael McFaul, a former US ambassador to Moscow, himself a longtime professor of Russian politics and favored mainstream commentator? According to McFaul, Russia had become a “ rogue state,” its policies “ criminal actions” and the “ world’s greatest threat.” It had to be countered by “ preemptive sanctions” that would go into effect automatically”—“ every day,” if deemed necessary. Considering the possibility of “ crushing” sanctions proposed recently by a bipartisan group of US senators, this would be nothing less than a declaration of permanent war against Russia: economic war, but war nonetheless.

§ Meanwhile, other new Cold War fronts were becoming more fraught with hot war, none more so than Syria. On September 17, Syrian missiles accidentally shot down an allied Russian surveillance aircraft, killing all 15 crew members. The cause was combat subterfuge by Israeli warplanes in the area. The reaction in Moscow was indicative—and potentially ominous.

At first, Putin, who had developed good relations with Israel’s political leadership, said the incident was an accident caused by the fog of war. His own Defense Ministry, however, loudly protested that Israel was responsible. Putin quickly retreated to a more hard-line position, and in the end vowed to send to Syria Russia’s S-300s installed in Syria, Putin could in effect impose a “ no-fly zone” over large areas of the country, which has been ravaged by war due, in no small part, to the presence of several foreign powers. (Russia and Iran are there legally; the United States and Israel are not.) If so, this means a new “ red line” that Washington and its ally Israel will have to decide whether or not to cross. Considering the mania in Washington and in the mainstream media, it is hard to be confident that restraint will prevail. In keeping with his Russia policy, President Trump may reasonably be inclined to join Moscow’s peace process, though it is unlikely the mostly Democrat-inspired Russiagate party would permit him to do so.

Now another Cold War front has also become more fraught, the US-Russian proxy war in Ukraine having acquired a new dimension. In addition to the civil war in Donbass, Moscow and Kiev have been challenging each other’s ships in the Sea of Azov, near the newly built bridge connecting Russia with Crimea. On November 25, this erupted into a small but potentially explosive military conflict at sea. Trump is being pressured to help Kiev escalate the maritime war—yet another potential trip wire. Here, too, the president should instead put his administration’s weight behind the long-stalled Minsk peace accords. But that approach also seems to be ruled out by Russiagate, which by October 6 included yet another Times columnist, Frank Bruni, branding all such initiatives by Trump as “ pimping for Putin.”

After five years of extremism, as demonstrated by these recent examples of risking war with Russia, there remained, for the first time in decades of Cold War history, no countervailing forces in Washington—no détente wing of the Democratic or Republican Party, no influential anti—Cold War opposition anywhere, no real public debate. There was only Trump, with all the loathing he inspired, and even he had not reminded the nation or his own party that the presidents who initiated major episodes of détente in the 20th century were also Republicans—Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan. This too seemed to be an inadmissible “ alternative fact.”

And so the eternal question, not only for Russians: What is to be done? There is a ray of light, though scarcely more. In August 2018, Gallup asked Americans what kind of policy toward Russia they favored. Even amid the torrent of vilifying Russiagate allegations and Russophobia, 58 percent wanted “ to improve relations with Russia,” as opposed to 36 percent who preferred “ strong diplomatic and economic steps against Russia.”

This reminds us that the new Cold War, from NATO’s eastward expansion and the 2014 Ukrainian crisis to Russiagate, has been an elite project. Why US elites, after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, ultimately chose Cold War rather than partnership with Russia is a question beyond my purpose here. As for the special role of US intelligence elites—what I have termed “ Intelgate”—efforts are still underway to disclose it fully, and are still being thwarted.

A full explanation of the post-Soviet Cold War choice would include the US political-media establishment’s needs—ideological, foreign-policy, and budgetary, among others—for an “ enemy.” Or, with the Cold War having prevailed for more than half of US-Russian relations during the century since 1917, maybe it was habitual. Substantial “ meddling” in the 2016 US election by Ukraine and Israel, to illustrate the point, did
not become a political scandal. In any event, once this approach to post-Soviet Russia began, promoting it was not hard. The legendary humorist Will Rogers quipped in the 1930s, “Russia is a country that no matter what you say about it, it’s true.” Back then, before the 40-year Cold War and nuclear weapons, the quip was funny, but no longer.

Whatever the full explanation, many of the consequences I have analyzed in War With Russia? continue to unfold, not a few unintended and unfavorable to America’s real national interests. Russia’s turn away from the West, its “pivot to China,” is now widely acknowledged and embraced by leading Moscow policy thinkers. Even European allies occasionally stand with Moscow against Washington. The US-backed Kiev government still covers up who was really behind the 2014 Maidan “snipers’ massacre” that brought it to power. Mindless US sanctions have helped Putin to repatriate oligarchic assets abroad, at least $90 billion already in 2018. The mainstream media persist in distorting Putin’s foreign policies into something “that even the Soviet Union never dared to try.” And when an anonymous White House insider exposed in the Times the “amorality” of President Trump, the only actual policy he or she singled out was on Russia.

I have focused enough on the demonizing of Putin—the Post even managed to characterize popular support for his substantial contribution to improving life in Moscow as “a deal with the devil”—but it is important to note that this derangement is far from worldwide. Even a Post correspondent conceded that “the Putin brand has captivated anti-establishment and anti-American politicians all over the world.” A British journalist confirmed that, as a result, “many countries in the world now look for a reinsurance policy with Russia.” And an American journalist living in Moscow reported that the “ceaseless demonization of Putin personally has in fact sanctified him, turned him into the Patron Saint of Russia.”

Again, in light of all this, what can be done? Sentimentally, and with some historical precedents, we of democratic beliefs traditionally look to “the people,” to voters, to bring about change. But foreign policy has long been the special prerogative of elites. In order to change Cold War policy fundamentally, leaders are needed. When the times beckon, they may emerge out of established, even deeply conservative, elites, as did unexpectedly the now-pro-détente Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s. But given the looming danger of war with Russia, is there time? Is any leader visible on the American political landscape who will say to his or her elites and party, as Gorbachev did, “If not now, when? If not us, who?”

We also know that such leaders, though embedded in and insulated by their elites, hear and read other, non-conformist voices, other thinking. The once-venerated American journalist Walter Lippmann observed, “Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.” This book is my modest attempt to inspire more thinking.

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not just in getting progressives elected, but in helping them govern once they’re in office. That means coming up with smart ways to find talented candidates, and expanding the roster of staffers, policy wonks, and judges who are able to articulate and deliver on a vision for a radically egalitarian society. Today, democratic socialism represents less an ironclad ideological commitment than an accurate way to describe a set of policy priorities: namely, that the government has a basic responsibility to provide the makings of a good life and a livable planet. When *Vogue* asked Ocasio-Cortez, shortly before her primary win, why she’d embraced democratic socialism, she replied, “There is no other force, there is no other party, there is no other real ideology out there right now that is asserting the minimum elements necessary to lead a dignified American life.”

Even so, the vision of democratic socialism being championed by these insurgent candidates is more than just a revived New Deal. For one thing, they don’t exactly look back on the era of the original New Deal as America’s salad days—not when the millions disenfranchised by Jim Crow were also largely excluded from its programs. While drawing on the lessons from these reforms, they’re also beginning to articulate a vision that’s more aspirational than nostalgic, and that looks squarely at a future defined by rising tides and temperatures. Indeed, eliminating the use of fossil fuels within the period demanded by both Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal plan and the scientific consensus on global warming would require what the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has called “unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.”

“You have to sell the hope and the possibility,” says Corbin Trent, a staffer on Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign and the co-founder of Justice Democrats. “Anything that’s amazing that we’ve accomplished as a species sounded completely insane before it happened. You’ve got to sell it.”

In that regard, an American democratic socialism for 2018 will certainly not resemble the policies of the Soviet Union—or any more that American democracy resembles that of ancient Athens. Nor can any 21st-century democratic socialism be driven by the kind of carbon-intensive industrial development that was at the core of both the state-socialist experiments of the past and the New Deal itself. “The Green New Deal that Democrats like Ocasio-Cortez are advocating is the future of the Democratic Party,” says Sean McElwee, the co-founder of Data for Progress. “The next generations know that they are being fucked by the policies pursued by the current political system and demand aggressive action on climate change. It’s time for progressives to go to war with corporate polluters.”

Ultimately, for most Americans, democratic socialism will be defined by what its most public adherents—people like Sanders, Tlaib, and Ocasio-Cortez—are able to accomplish once they have the opportunity. At least in the short term, turning their ambitious bills into law will mean prying open the Overton window in policy debates to accommodate what might elsewhere be considered fairly basic social-democratic demands, such as removing health care from the private market and making it a right, or spending ample public money to take on existential threats like climate change. It will also mean beefing up the capacity to recruit and develop candidates and policy experts alike, ensuring that newly elected leftists have qualified staffs to hire and legislation to introduce at every level of government.

Patience matters, too—but only up to a point. For most of their careers, William Baroody and his comrades languished in relative obscurity on the fringes of policy-making. With just 12 years left to prevent a total climate catastrophe, time is a luxury that progressives simply don’t have.
Everyone knows that Russia is a kleptocracy, a Mafia state run by corrupt oligarchs who live in fear of the arch-oligarch, Vladimir Putin. It is also a neo-Stalinist dictatorship that seeks to restore the Soviet empire and sow the seeds of subversion in every Western democracy. Somehow, it is also a traditionalist bastion of Eastern Orthodox social conservatism and neo-czarist monarchism. Comfortable in our self-satisfaction, we writers and readers of Western journalism about Russia have an endless supply of frameworks by which to understand Russia, and very few of them ever indict us in the process. Russia’s problems stem from a tragic legacy peculiar to itself, a spectacle at which we can marvel but about which we can do very little.

Keith Gessen’s new novel, A Terrible Country, asks whether it is possible to unlearn the habit of thinking this way about Russia. Narrated through the eyes of an academic named Andrei, who flees the United States’ collapsing job market in 2008 to care for his grandmother in Moscow, the novel shifts our picture of Russia from one of comforting alienness to one of disturbing familiarity.

Born in Russia, Andrei is returning to a country that he left as a small child, a place now changed beyond recognition. Gone are the late-socialist stagnation and the post-Soviet poverty; in their place is something familiar to Western readers: a hip capitalist carnival for trend-chasing urban consumers side by side with economic insecurity and political malaise. As he comes to realize that capitalist dysfunction is harder to escape than he’d thought, Andrei also confronts an urgent moral challenge:
Will he stay and fight for justice in the old country, or wash his hands of it and go back to the West?

A Terrible Country is haunted by discourse. In his former career as a would-be scholar of Russian literature, someone attempting to make Pushkin relevant to American undergraduates, Andrei found himself surrounded by stale tropes about Russian history. His academic rivals quickly learned to navigate these stereotypes and leverage them for professional advancement, becoming experts, in the case of one especially memorable character, in the emerging field of “online Gulag studies.”

Gessen’s view of the economy of academia, especially when it comes to the study of Russia, is startlingly recognizable: He understands how unequally the profits of speaking on behalf of Russians are distributed, and how rarely Russians themselves end up the beneficiaries. But it’s not just academics who mine the country’s problems for professional capital and make lucrative careers as a result. Journalists, too, assemble endless clichés about modernization and the Soviet legacy.

Andrei is less successful than his peers at the complex art of academic bullshit. His job prospects in the United States turn out to be minimal, and when his brother, a shady entrepreneur in the gas-station business, asks him to stay with their aging grandmother, the request comes to Andrei like a reprieve. Driven by the vague hope of putting his good deed to use as fodder for his stalled academic career, he readily agrees.

As soon as Andrei lands at Sheremetovo Airport, he finds himself in a world that doesn’t conform to the platitudes in which he’s been trained. For one thing, they’re old, dating back to the Cold War or even earlier, and they’re predicated on a narrative of Russian backwardness inadequate for explaining Moscow’s modern glitz. They are also confounded by Moscow’s stark contrasts. His grandmother’s apartment, obtained long ago during the Stalinist purges, is located in what has become a tony district of the capital, full of overpriced restaurants and cafés. While everything inside the apartment is old and musty—knickknacks and relics of the ancien régime—as soon as Andrei goes outside, he finds himself surrounded by fantastic wealth and reminders of the power of the police. Viewed from a coffee-shop table, the difference between Russia and the United States seems one of degree rather than of kind.

Many of the Russians that Andrei initially encounters only add to his sense of disorientation. Through his brother, he meets a privileged coterie of Russian liberals, who cherish the propaganda stupidity of Russian television and rhapsodize about the prestige shows that represent the enlightened culture of the West. They’re not wrong about the propaganda, but they are oblivious to what it hides. They don’t understand the economic grievances that motivate most Russians or how their own class position insulates them from the regime’s worst crimes. For ordinary Russians, the market reforms of the 1990s created a disastrous era of collapse and dysfunction; for Andrei’s new friends, the problem is that the reforms weren’t allowed to go far enough.

Had Andrei made something of himself in the United States, he would have felt more comfortable within this charmed circle of successful urbanites. Instead, our down-and-out academic becomes an irritating reminder that not everyone in their Western utopia lives a life as glamorous or fulfilling as they imagine, and Andrei is swiftly ejected from the group. His grandmother’s life, which takes up much of Andrei’s daily routine, seems to be the opposite of theirs in every way. Unlike the cartoon version peddled by Andrei’s liberal friends, the version of Russian history he experiences has no clear heroes or villains.

Andrei soon finds his real friends in Moscow among a small group of Marxists. They are not members of the Russian Communist Party, the KPRF; the successor to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is a venal, racist, and anti-Semitic lapdog of the regime, happy to endorse its imperial ambitions and its culture-war agenda, as long as Putin’s government does not cut social services too deeply. Instead, Andrei’s friends belong to a small group called October, akin to socialists in the United States. They try to make clear the capitalist exploitation that underlies Putin’s rule while working to salvage a usable past from the Soviet legacy, building bridges with ordinary people who remain unmoved by the liberals’ focus on political freedoms alone but who feel strongly about their homes and public lands being handed off for plunder by developers.

For Andrei, another part of the Octoberists’ appeal is the fact that these Marxists recognize that Russia is not alone in suffering from the oppression of capital. The same processes going on at home are taking place everywhere else too. Their struggles are his, they reassure him; the humiliating and precarious position of adjunct instructors is not unfamiliar to them. Unlike the liberals, the Octoberists live on the periphery of Moscow and outside the belt of chic coffee shops and luxury boutiques that represent “the new Russia” to most foreign observers.

Navigating between the fossil-fuel wealth of the central city and the dismal highways and auto-repair shops on its sprawling outskirts, Andrei begins to view the new Russia in a different way. The much-maligned gray, prefab, concrete apartment buildings that ring the city no longer represent Soviet backwardness; instead, they have become the last refuge for Russia’s working class. These buildings stand in for the positive aspects of the Soviet inheritance: its commitment to free healthcare, housing, and education. Even the dilapidated state hospital that Andrei visits with his grandmother is not a monument to the failure of communism but rather a place where conscientious doctors and nurses try to make do with scarce resources. Where most Western writers present these institutions as obsolete relics doomed to disappear as Russia moves deeper and deeper into the capitalist mainstream, Andrei comes to see them as seeds of hope and alternate possibilities; at last the enjoyment of building a ramshackle dacha alongside his Marxist friends outweighs the dubious pleasures of Moscow nightlife, and he soon finds himself falling in love with one of them.

As Andrei grows closer to the Octoberists, he especially comes to admire the group’s unofficial leader, Sergei. A former academic like Andrei, Sergei has resigned his teaching position and became something of a Russian Socrates, driving around the country in an old Lada in order to give lectures and seminars. Like many of the characters in A Terrible Country, Sergei is likely based on a real person: the poet and writer Kirill Medvedev. In 2003, Medvedev broke publicly with the cultural establishment, and his old blog still hosts his declaration of independence from the world of official poetry. In a series of blistering essays, Medvedev rejected the apolitical career-building that some artists and intellectuals claimed was a form of...
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liberation, even anarchism, in post-Soviet Russia. For artists and intellectuals to stand meaningfully in opposition, he insisted, they had to recognize how their own careers and social acclaim were provided to them, in part, by the regime and the economic structure they opposed. If they didn’t, then they would end up complicit in the very system they hoped to transcend.

Gessen has long collaborated with Medvedev; in 2012, he was instrumental in publishing a set of Medvedev’s essays and poems, which he translated in a small book called It’s No Good. As October’s lone native English speaker, Andrei too assumes the role of translator, working up the group’s online communiqués for distribution to sympathizers abroad. But working with Sergei doesn’t just entail a stream of pleasant dinner-party chatter; it also comes to involve real risks. Andrei joins the group in protests, which soon gets him arrested. Similarly, Gessen was arrested while covering the campaign of liberal politician Boris Nemtsov in Sochi in 2009.

This is only one of a series of parallels that begin to emerge between Andrei and Gessen: Notably, the author himself moved to Moscow in 2008 to take care of his grandmother, an experience he wrote about for the London Review of Books. Gessen’s first novel, All the Sad Young Literary Men, also rested on his real-life experiences and social milieu, following a set of young writers as they struggled to put their Harvard educations to use as aspiring members of the American literary establishment. The novel was a navel-gazing exploration of educated-male interiority that somehow felt more sodden with narcissistic self-regard with every humiliation that its characters experienced, while also managing to depict women more as embodied projections of its male protagonists’ mental states than as full-fledged individuals.

Far more self-aware about class and gender, A Terrible Country avoids many of these problems. Andrei repeatedly tries to project his own expectations onto the women he meets—even his grandmother—but these expectations are repeatedly frustrated, and we never have the sense that we are getting the whole story. Through the flaws in his understanding of the Russians that he meets, we also come to understand the limits of his own fleeting and privileged presence in the country. Unlike the heroic schlemiels of Gessen’s first book, whose afflictions are intended to redeem them from being completely insufferable, Andrei may ultimately be neither as much of a schlemiel nor as redeemable as he likes to think.

That Gessen has become much less willing to let intellectuals off the hook makes A Terrible Country not only more appealing as a work of fiction but also more effective as a work of social criticism. Where All the Sad Young Literary Men ended on a cloying note of domestic bliss, A Terrible Country refuses such easy and individualized solutions: If Andrei alone is saved, that is no salvation at all.

The central decision facing Andrei is whether he should stay with his grandmother and save her apartment from his brother’s attempts to sell it out from under her, or try his luck once more in the United States. Yulia, his Octoberist lover, represents one route; having her own mother to take care of, she cannot leave, but in staying she represents how one might find a home in Russia worth fighting for. A tenuous job prospect in the States, on the other hand, gives him a glimpse of a different future: the possibility of a successful Western career built on monetizing his left-wing connections in Russia.

Underlying Andrei’s predicament is the broader question of whether Russia itself can be saved, whether it is worth saving, and who will be able to save it. Like Andrei, the country is at a crossroads. As Gessen noted in a recent interview, it was not a coincidence that he set the novel in 2008: At the heart of Dmitry Medvedev’s presidential interregnum, Russia appeared poised between a milder, more liberal form of “sovereign democracy” and a harsher return to the Putinist tradition. At the beginning of that year, liberals and Marxists thought the regime might make concessions to demands for bottom-up political and economic reform, and Gessen captures the sense of possibility, however illusory, before the country took its more authoritarian turn.

Recalling this brief moment of possibility was one of the many shocks of recognition that struck me as I read the novel. I, too, left Russia as a child (though after 1991); I, too, am a reluctant Russian-studies academic with an elderly grandmother who lives in central Moscow (though no longer in an apartment provided to her by Stalin). Like both Gessen’s and Andrei’s families, mine is also Jewish—a type of Soviet experience so often represented abroad as a monotonous story of religious persecution and anti-Semitic harassment that one misses how many Jews also lived pretty decent lives, at least in relation to the vast bulk of the Soviet population. Some were perpetrators of the Stalinist terror as well as its victims.

These ambiguities, in fact, go to the heart of the book’s nagging question: whether Andrei will leave or stay and fight for a better country. For Russian Jews, this is an especially vexing dilemma, not just because Soviet Jews were anti-Semitically caricatured as rootless cosmopolitans loyal to their interests alone, but also because they were among the few allowed to formally emigrate in the Soviet Union’s last decades. Gessen does not say so, but to a Russian reader it is clear that this was why Andrei’s mother was able to take her children abroad in 1981, and this legacy forms an unspoken backdrop to Andrei’s anguish about a choice that he knows most of his October comrades will never have to make.

Near the beginning of the novel, Gessen has Putin himself voice this moral quandary. In an interview that Andrei watches on his grandmother’s television, the then–prime minister argues that criticism of Russia too often targets not his government but Russia itself, which he compares to a sick mother. Andrei himself, of course, has come to Russia to be at his grandmother’s bedside, and he finds Putin’s speech “a devastating response” to liberal critics who seemed so ready to consign the country to the dustbin. Yet a year later, and with prospects in the United States less bleak, Andrei finds the temptation of abandoning his metaphorical mother and his literal grandmother a lot stronger than he had anticipated.

Andrei’s choice about whether to stay or go will define the novel. The Octoberists make their position clear: To have the standing to criticize, you must stay and fight for change at home. As Yulia puts it, “It’s indecent to criticize someone whose position you’ll never have to occupy.” However morally compelling, their fight seems quixotic and doomed to be squelched in Russia’s increasingly repressive society. Academia offers a different bargain. By exploiting the ongoing terribleness of Russia from afar, you can build your heroic reputation without sacrificing the comforts of a Western academic career. Yet this is no way out either. In America as well as Russia, it is capitalism that constrains your political options. There’s no use in pretending the fight for justice is someone else’s problem.
When the Social Security program launched in the mid-1930s, it was the concept of the SSN—the Social Security number, that unique identifier tagged to each American citizen—that captured the public imagination as much as the new entitlement itself. For opponents of Social Security, the number was evidence of state overreach. Republicans compared it to the Nazi registration laws of 1933 and warned that citizens would be forced to wear dog tags stamped with it. Meanwhile, New Deal Democrats did everything they could to avoid the image of fascist regimentation. Anxious about the dog-tag charge in particular, the Social Security Board abandoned its original plan to issue SSNs on metal tokens, instead opting for the flimsy paper cards we still use today.

What both Republicans and Democrats missed in these debates, however, was how enthusiastically citizens would embrace their SSNs. Viewing the number as proof of economic security and political belonging, Americans worried about what would happen if their card was damaged or they forgot their number. A small industry cropped up to offer more durable alternatives to the paper card: Consumers could purchase bronze-plated SSNs or birthstone rings emblazoned with their nine digits. The tattoo industry in the 1930s also experienced a boom, with some people opting to have their SSN inked onto their arm or chest. If the Social Security number posed a risk to privacy by making citizens more visible to the administrative state, this was a risk that, for much of the SSN’s history, seemed worth taking.

In her new book, The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America, historian Sarah Igo uses examples like the SSN to examine how generations of Americans have responded to new forms of public visibility. From her engaging and wide-ranging study, a central lesson emerges: Technologies of surveillance that seem relatively innocuous at first can take 20, or 40, or 100 years to reveal their more insidious potential—by which point they have long since insinuated themselves into our daily lives, so that there is often very little we can do about them.

Americans in the 1930s had good reason to embrace their SSNs; they also could not have imagined the wealth of personal data that would be tied to those numbers by the 1970s, when the American Medical Association worried about the use of the Social Security number in health records, or by 2014, when Americans concerned about surveillance cited their SSN as being particularly sensitive. All this poses a vital question for today’s left: How can contem-

Katie Fitzpatrick is a humanities editor at the Los Angeles Review of Books and a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia.

The Known Citizen
A History of Privacy in Modern America
By Sarah E. Igo
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porary progressives, the inheritors of the New Deal, promote new social entitlements but avoid laying the groundwork for a later escalation of surveillance?

The history of privacy in America has always comprised two distinct histories: one about the rise of self-disclosure, the other about the rise of surveillance. In *The Known Citizen*, Igo sets out to show that those who oppose increasing surveillance have often—but not always—defended privacy on egalitarian grounds, seeking to protect the personal rights of immigrants, women, people of color, and workers from state and corporate power. Meanwhile, those who oppose increasing self-disclosure have typically defended privacy on more conservative grounds, seeking to preserve bourgeois conceptions of propriety and traditional (often hierarchical) gender and social relations.

The concept of privacy made its first formal appearance in American law in 1890, when Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis published their famous essay “The Right to Privacy” in the *Harvard Law Review*. The Boston lawyers were spurred to action by the growth of the tabloid press, which reported on the personal affairs of Gilded Age families. But although they were fiercely defensive of their own privacy, Warren, Brandeis, and other members of their class would show little concern for that of the less privileged. When immigrants, radicals, and union members were subjected to new policing techniques in the early 20th century, few distinguished jurists spoke up in defense of their legal right to privacy. Indeed, it was only in 1920—when cabbies went on strike to protest a mandatory fingerprinting program—that such a legal right was claimed by members of the working classes. Needless to say, those refusing to be fingerprinted were defending privacy on rather different grounds than Warren and Brandeis; where the latter were worried about scandal and improbity, the workers were worried about their political and economic freedom.

Those who followed Warren and Brandeis’s example in using privacy as a cudgel to protect propriety were scandalized, Igo tells us, by the birth of reality television in the 1970s and ’80s and by the tell-all memoir boom of the 1990s; they fretted about improper self-revelation and photographs shared “in poor taste.”

These privacy proponents also retained the patriarchal gender politics of an earlier time, and many on the left chafed against efforts to protect privacy for that reason. American elites in the late 19th century, for example, complained about the circulation of photographs of their “wife, daughter, mother, or sister,” leading Congress to introduce a so-called “Bill to Protect Ladies” in 1888. It was this paternalistic regulation that feminists sought to counter in the 1960s, retaking control over how women shared their own stories and with whom. The LGBTQ movement also seized on this rhetoric, arguing that queer people should break the social taboos that kept them in the shadows and in the closet.

For both women and LGBTQ Americans, self-disclosure became a radical act in the latter half of the 20th century. It was a way to celebrate their own experiences and identities, in defiance of social forces that would rather silence or demean them. In feminist consciousness-raising groups, self-disclosure also allowed participants to recognize their personal trauma as part of a collective experience of political oppression—a practice that has since become vital to many identity-based movements, including #MeToo. Today, when we are tempted to critique new forms of self-disclosure readily shared on social media and on television, we would do well to remember that, historically speaking, self-revelation has been a powerful tool of liberation, while anxieties about “oversharing” have typically aided conservative cultural politics.

While Americans wrangled over questions of privacy and propriety, debates about the limits of government surveillance continued from the days of the 1920 cabbie strike, leaving a more complex political legacy. Corporate surveillance has consistently troubled working Americans, but state surveillance was viewed more ambiguously by many, at least in the early 20th century. Because the government often combined an offer of aid or redistribution with new oversight or police powers, state surveillance was presented as a necessary trade-off for the increasingly known citizen.

In the 1930s, Igo argues, the average American had relatively few qualms about enrolling in a new government program that offered economic security, even if it meant forgoing a considerable amount of privacy. In fact, workers who expressed early concerns about the Social Security number were often more worried about how their personal information might be misused by their employers than by the state. Women who lied about their age and marital status to evade sexist hiring practices worried that their employers could use their SSN to ferret out the truth. Similarly, ethnic and religious minorities who had changed their names to avoid prejudice worried that their real names would be provided to their bosses through their SSN, and union members worried that employers could find out their political and labor affiliations. These workers were right to be suspicious of their bosses, of course: When the Social Security program was launched, many employers circulated invasive questionnaires that asked about union membership, religious affiliation, and personal matters, falsely claiming that these forms were required to receive federal benefits. Initially, then, it was not governmental but private uses of the SSN that seemed most threatening to individual privacy.

Fear of government surveillance would become more widespread in the 1960s—the decade when a “right to privacy” was first guaranteed by the Supreme Court. In the 1965 case *Griswold v. Connecticut*, Justice William O. Douglas used the rhetoric of privacy to defend the use of birth control by married couples. The decision was an obvious victory for reproductive rights, but, as Igo notes, Douglas buried its radical potential in the language of bourgeois propriety. The state, he argued, had no business invading the precious sanctuaries of domesticity. In a particularly memorable phrase, he asked: “Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of contraceptives?”

Despite these shortcomings, the *Griswold* decision did inspire Americans of all backgrounds to insist on their own right to privacy. Welfare-rights activists would make a particularly crucial intervention by exposing the two-tiered privacy regime at the heart of the American welfare state: While middle-class citizens collecting Social Security still had relative privacy, those collecting welfare were placed under intense surveillance. Female welfare recipients were even subjected to surprise nighttime raids to check if they were “consorting with men.” Igo emphasizes the powerful irony here: In the *Griswold* decision, Douglas conjured a fantastic image of policemen invading the
Fraga’s analysis is full of striking findings. He shows that the gap in turnout between whites and non-whites is larger than we thought; that running a non-white candidate does not really close the gap; and that voter identification laws have not consistently widened it. ‘Fraga’s analysis is full of striking findings. He shows that the gap in turnout between whites and non-whites is larger than we thought; that running a non-white candidate does not really close the gap; and that voter identification laws have not consistently widened it.’

John Sides, George Washington University

The Turnout Gap

Race, Ethnicity, and Political Inequality in a Diversifying America

Bernard L. Fraga

The American citizenry grows more racially diverse every year, and yet communities of color continue to lag behind whites in political power and representation. Bernard Fraga offers a compelling theory for why this is the case... Fraga’s analysis is a sobering reminder that ‘demography is not destiny,’ and that parties and civic organizations need to make massive investments in outreach to disenfranchised communities in order to really close the gap; and that voting patterns in America today are no easy or simple political or policy ‘fixes’ to the problem of racial/ethnic inequality.

This is a very important book that takes a holistic approach to voting and race in the twenty-first century to explain the age-old question... of who votes, who doesn’t vote, and why?... This book is not just a data-rich resource on voter turnout; it provides a powerful theoretical explanation for the turnout gap beyond the resource model. This is a book that scholars, journalists, politicians, and the Supreme Court definitely need to read.

Bernard L. Fraga

American University

John Sides, George Washington University

Vincent L. Hutchings,
University of Michigan

Matt A. Barreto,
University of California–Los Angeles

Karthick Ramakrishnan,
University of California–Riverside

American Journal of Political Science

Journal of Politics

Washington Post

New York Times

and the

have been featured in various media outlets including the

and Latina/o Caucus Early Career Award. Findings from his work on race and elections represent a major contribution to our understanding of emerging patterns of white identity and collective political behavior, drawing on sweeping data. Where past research on whites’ racial attitudes emphasized out-group hostility, Jardina brings into focus the significance of in-group identity and favoritism.

Ashley Jardina

In White Identity Politics, Ashley Jardina offers a landmark analysis of emerging patterns of white identity and collective political behavior, drawing on sweeping data. Where past research on whites’ racial attitudes emphasized out-group hostility, Jardina brings into focus the significance of in-group identity and favoritism.

Available February 2019

White Identity Politics

Ashley Jardina

Cambridge University Press
bedrooms of middle-class couples; meanwhile, a much more literal version of this scene was playing out in the bedrooms of poor women across the country. As President Lyndon Johnson struggled to position his War on Poverty as the descendant of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, Americans were becoming increasingly aware of the surveillance that often went hand in hand with public relief, and how this surveillance was directed more toward some than others.

Concerns about state surveillance would further escalate in the late 1960s and early ’70s, when the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal brought trust in government to a new low. At the same time, the rapid growth of record-keeping, data collection, and computing technology made government surveillance all the easier. The government could now not only access discrete facts about citizens, but could cross-reference those facts to produce a near-complete account of someone’s background or daily life. And at the center of every citizen’s government dossier, of course, was their Social Security number. Americans had some misgivings about the SSN even in the 1930s. But by the 1970s, these fears had grown exponentially: Now many Americans were worried about the vast web of personal information—easily recalled, cross-referenced, and shared electronically—linked to their SSN.

If I Were to Rise Up All Colorless,

I could gather up old thoughts the way a mind distant in love brings about a gathering of stars. I don’t want people thinking

I don’t care about the future. Plenty of people are wrong about how I feel. For instance,
I bought a bar of soap to remind me

of a clean time coming, the smell of it.
Even I wasn’t right about how I was feeling then.
Embattled by a sense of honor,

I plotted to bring the smell of Lysol like metal on teeth straight into the future.
Some thoughts, being in them feels

like a battle to let a rare look inform me of how delicate and uncrackable I am.
How like an egg I can just roll myself

under the heart in the exact right way,
let it exert its pressure on my poles
and never crush me. The stars,

a gathering of paper under which we may be crushed. I was about to be proud.
I felt a late wish of pride unfurling.

When we arrive from distant cities cracked with love I don’t know if I’ll want my new hands to work any differently than the hands

I stashed in the drawer.
And yet by the smell of the gathering sky
I am arranged and disrupted!

LAURA EVE ENGEL
In the first episode of *My Brilliant Friend*, the feverishly anticipated HBO adaptation of Elena Ferrante’s novel of Neapolitan girlhood, the story’s child protagonist, Elena Greco, hardly speaks. As the series begins, we see Elena at 60, and then as a girl; the youthful Elena is played by Elisa Del Genio, an actor whose performance is mostly reactive, her angelically mournful face offering viewers an empathetic keyhole into her world. When she speaks, we are primed to pay close attention. From its first moments, *My Brilliant Friend* dedicates itself to the high drama—the joy, trauma, and mystery—of what many would call an unremarkable life, which is to say, in many ways, a woman’s life, and a girl’s.

Sarah Marshall is a writer in residence at the Black Mountain Institute in Las Vegas and co-hosts *You’re Wrong About…*, a podcast about misremembered history.
The viewer experiences this scene as a hauntingly faithful gloss on the novel: Elena imagines tiny, swarming insects crawling up the stairwell of her building and into the apartments, the beds, and finally the women, a cockroach-like infestation of rage. Elena’s narration about these furious women, lifted directly from the book’s text, is now dramatized. The series itself feels like an exploration of where language can take us in such a medium, and where we must leave language behind and let the images do the work—and every viewer who was once a reader of Ferrante’s novel will have different answers to this question.

Yet the series is at its most arresting when it shows us not just Naples through Elena’s eyes, but the part of it that has the power to take her somewhere else. Elena’s best friend, and the character we meet through her pained and loving memory, is a girl named Lila Cerullo (Ludovica Nasti) in the first episodes of the series: aggressive where Elena is silent, rebellious where she is obedient, and even smarter than her studious friend. In Lila, Elena finds her opposite and her equal, and the series’ muted cinematography does not allow any spectacle to upstage the luminous intensity of the two girls’ faces, their growing friendship and fragile trust. This series knows what it is about, as well it should—the project was once a reader of Ferrante’s novel will have different answers to this question.

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The popularity of Ferrante’s work—and especially her quartet of Neapolitan novels, which American readers first tasted with the 2012 translation of My Brilliant Friend—is a publishing phenomenon. The question everyone loves to ask about cultural phenomena in general—Should people want this as much as they do?—diverts the conversation from a much more interesting course: asking why such hungers lie within us, in vast and untapped reserves. Why have female readers longed, with such startling intensity, for stories about dystopian battles royale, or Mormon vampires, or weepily sadistic tycoons—or, now, stories of deep female intimacy? And why is one of these things not like the others?

I saw people reading Ferrante’s novels for a long time before I had any idea what I was seeing. Mostly, I saw women I thought of as being defined by a ferocious intelligence—an intelligence that inevitably shone with rage when confronted with the bare facts of life as an American woman—succoring themselves with the novels. Ferrante’s publisher, Europa Editions, seemed to be positioning the books as comfort objects; the Neapolitan novels were released with covers in a pastel palette that seemed designed to coordinate easily with Instagram spreads of matcha lattes and macarons. Sandra Ozola Ferri, Europa’s co-founder, called the series “brutal” and “a true masterpiece.” She called the covers—which she designed, with Ferrante’s input—“kitsch.”

“In a literary marketplace where the very image of a woman is seen as antiethi
cal to literature,” Emily Harnett wrote in The Atlantic, “Ferrante’s covers take an
important stand. If her covers are a ‘game,’ then readers at least know the price of
admission: the willingness—or the humil
ity—to be seen reading books about women
in public.”

There is also something deliciously sub
versive about disguising an incendiary ex
ploration of gender in its own gendered cli
chés. Ferrante’s novels, coyly camouflaging themselves in the publishing industry’s sig
ifiers of female experience—brides, blue
skies, and scenic beaches—are about flesh
and-blood womanhood: the power, the
horror, the dark and unwanted thoughts;
the feeling of everyday annihilation that
comes with an existence defined entirely
by other people’s ideas about you, other
people’s needs; the forms of violence that
appear, inevitably, in such a life. A woman
can sit quietly in a café reading a Ferrante
novel and never advertise the fact that she
is destabilizing the very foundation of her
gendered obedience.

The question of whether a woman’s ex
perience, in all its emotional depth, can be universal—i.e., human—is both bor
ning and pointless: Of course it can, and of course it can do much, much more besides. American popular media has a tendency to depict female friendship as a set of training wheels for romantic relationships, or as a sickroom of blurred identities and violence: a whistle stop on the way to monogamy or murder. My Brilliant Friend offers a banquet for those accustomed to crumbs. It promises not to make you feel good, but to make you feel. And perhaps, in the end, there is nothing surprising at all about audiences finding solace in My Brilliant Friend at the wintry close of 2018: It is a story about girls and women finding self and strength in each other in a reality that makes their psychic survival all but impossible. It tells women what they can still have, in a social order that denies them seemingly everything else. And it depicts the radicalizing experience of being seen.

A TV series is not a novel (even if it comes from a channel proclaiming that it doesn’t make TV) but the show’s willingness to direct all the viewer’s attention to the power of its young actors’ performances, and to let their faces take up the labor that language can no longer perform, feels faithful not just thematically but also ethically. It also feels in keeping with Ferrante’s work. In 1991, when she informed her publisher of her decision to maintain her anonymity, Ferrante wrote: “I believe that books, once they are written, have no need of their authors.” My Brilliant Friend is a story about girlhood—and now, on the screen, with the guidance of its writ
ers, it is in the hands of the girls.
ANYWHERE I GO

The indie-rock supergroup changing the genre

by OLIVIA HORN

Midway through “Me & My Dog,” the second song on a new EP from the group calling itself boygenius, singer Julien Baker revs up to deliver a Herculean line. She slams into the towering top note of the chord held down by bandmates Lucy Dacus and Phoebe Bridgers; percussion and guitar momentarily bottom out, clearing the path for revelation. “I wanna be ama—” the three women sing, stretching their vowels, and anticipation fills in the rest: I wanna be amazing. The sentiment is unabashedly aspirational, wounding earnest.

But when they finish, the word turns out to be “emaciated,” and an entirely different set of associations surfaces: fragility, instability, decay. The fake-out encapsulates a lot of what is remarkable about these three musicians. Their writing is clever and knotty, occasion-
ally self-lacerating, and capable of doling out emotional gut punches by way of the tiniest details. Part of a recent wave of young, clear-eyed female songwriters who have staked an intractable loneliness through the sheer togetherness of their voices. These lyrics are ostensibly about touring, but the words seem equally relevant to the experience of being a woman in the music industry—feeling presence-less, voiceless, and endlessly deferential to male co-writers and producers. The women of boygenius have found one another in these margins. Together, they write songs that ache for a time when the fact of extraordinary work being made by autonomous female musicians won’t scan as quite so… well, extraordinary.

They recorded their eponymous EP in the span of four days off from their demanding travel schedules—relatively unpretentious origins for a group instantly heralded as “super.”

To those who know these women as solo artists, a great deal of the fun in listening comes from hunting for their unique fingerprints on each of the EP’s six songs. Some are easy to spot. The brutal physicality of Baker’s writing peeks through in a line that Dacus delivers on “Souvenir”: “When you cut a hole into my skull / Do you hate what you see?” Bridgers brings her slick, cunning narrator’s voice to “Me & My Dog” when she sings: “I had a fever until I met you / Now you make me cool”—a sharp take on finding respite in a relationship while grappling with the power dynamics that play out within it. For her part, Dacus has a graceful and unnervingly tender way of articulating difficult truths; it shows on “Salt in the Wound,” where she crafts a lithe analogy for emotional labor: “Trick after trick, I make the magic / And you unrelent-

These women are natural songwriting companions. In their individual work, they come at the same subjects—death, isolation, deteriorating mental health—from slightly different directions; stitched together, their perspectives offer a sweeping, wide-angle view. The group’s musical camaraderie is also bolstered by the fact that they are, in fact, friends. Baker has described her bandmates as “wise, discerning, and kind people whom I look up to in character as much as in talent.” The story of boygenius is rooted in respect-fueled female friendship—a restorative narrative for an industry in which quotas are imposed on women’s success and the ambitious are too often pitted against one another.

That narrative also weighs on the habitual underestimation of female musicianship, given that the whole concept of a supergroup has historically been tangled up with male ego. The earliest or best-known examples in rock—Cream; Blind Faith; the Traveling Wilburys; and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young—offered no spots to women; with few exceptions, all-female groups like Wild Flag and case/lang/veirs have cropped up only within the last decade or so. The band name chosen by Baker, Bridgers, and Dacus cheekily evokes an appellation more readily granted to male musicians, and it embodies the ethos they adopted while writing the EP—voicing opinions and making choices with the unapologetic confidence of the guys they know “who’ve been told that they are geniuses since they could hear, basi-

What’s more, the project points to the flawed nature of “genius” as a concept. The archetypal genius is a recluse, subsumed by his gift; boygenius’s work reinforces the strength of the collective.

Nowhere is their communion more powerful than on “Ketchum, ID,” boygenius’s closer. The track is homey; it begins with a snippet of studio chatter and is coated in fuzzy, ambient noise, lending it that close-quarters, band-in-a-small-room quality. In the verses, the women trade tales of life on the road. When they join together in tight, velvety harmony on the chorus—“I am never anywhere / Anywhere I go / When I’m home I’m never there / Long enough to know”—it’s like they’re trying to ease an intractable loneliness through the sheer togetherness of their voices. These lyrics are ostensibly about touring, but the words seem equally relevant to the experience of being a woman in the music industry—feeling presence-less, voiceless, and endlessly deferential to male co-writers and producers. The women of boygenius have found one another in these margins. Together, they write songs that ache for a time when the fact of extraordinary work being made by autonomous female musicians won’t scan as quite so… well, extraordinary.

Olivia Horn, an Ohio native, is a writer based in Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in Pitchfork, Vogue, and other publications.
ACROSS

1 Wickedness in half-sleazy city (7)
5 Comedian Lee cut fool short (5-2)
9 Traveler to disfigure policeman near squalid loo (5-4)
10 Nonconformist replacing Rick with neutral expert (5)
11 Return ring where you play 9 (4)
12 Pennsylvania squad maneuvers around the French (8)
14 Choosing to join a kind of art with endless trace of color (chic!) (6,2)
15 Singes metamorphic rock (6)
19 If work is delayed, model tool becomes something that could block a canal (6)
20 Bowling? Let’s cut loose and play to begin with (8)
22 Perform on the guitar, keeping muscle in range (8)
24 Goren’s first ace vanished (4)
27 A pitch I assembled for old video-game machine (5)
28 Antagonized a particular contrarian, claiming a little space (9)
29 Base of a log and two trees? Nonsense (7)

30 Orange mixed with red is what you’ll find repeatedly among Lois Carmen Denominator’s friends Anita, Barbara, Ben, Jean, Justin, Ophelia, Polly, Warren, and Xavier, whose last names are answers to the italicized clues (7)

DOWN
1 Visual signals from angry holder of incorrect map, eh? (9)
2 Extremely curtailed happening contributes to eccentric term for a New England native (9)
3 Without leadership, sadly, circling globe to arrive at Asian country (4)
4 Selfish, dysfunctional cities taking turn (8)
5 Flood planter containing hydrogen (6)
6 Gash lent Mr. Wilder a safe distance (4,6)
7 Performer takes five in state capital (5)
8 Partially atop an exquisite piece of glass (4)
13 Insect and tailless arachnid taking bow at a cold location (10)
16 Weirdly long title is acquired through deceitful methods (3-6)
17 Rising American: one who pays for a means of support (9)
18 British politician involved in winter sport is pinching pennies (8)
21 In tub, note a sign of life (6)
23 Take steps to secure a bit of eternal rest (5)
25 Container is a lawyer’s concern (4)
26 Conclusions of sudoku, Ken-Ken, and kakuro in reverse (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3483

ACROSS 1 SAT + URN
4 CRABMEAT (anag.) + T + 9 A + R-RIVE-[i]
10 A BRA + SI (rec) + ON
12 (CAMEL)HAIR (lowl mag.)
13 (m)IDLER 14 PISTON(ENGINE) + E
18 V + LA(CTETOTHER) + 5 + 21 hidden
22 THERE + APER 24 LOCATION
24 Orol + LRIC (rec) + 26 PARADISE
27 KEN + YAN (rec)

DOWN 1 aug. 2 aug. 3 rev.
5 ROBER + T) GRAVES 6 BR + AZIL
11 LA(MEN) + [i] + TATION-S
15 OBLI (anag.) + GATED (rec)
16 ) + [o]EPOPAD + Y 17 aug.
19 S(HE)P (lowl mag.)
20 DANCE(ER) (lowl aug.) 23 hidden
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