The Nation’s new Digital Magazine format offers:

- The **Page-turning** experience of a print magazine
- **PLUS:**
  - Live Web Links
  - Multimedia Access

**CLICK HERE TO VIEW IN THE ENHANCED READER FORMAT**

**The Games Journalists Play**

Eric Alterman

The Nation

January 15, 2010

America's Secret Afghan Prisons

Anand Gopal

Villagers and human rights officials accuse the United States military of running secret detention centers.

![Image of the Nation's new Digital Magazine format](image-url)
Letters

Beyond Family
I agree with Bryce Covert [“A Simple Plan,” Dec. 17/24] that something must be done about poverty. However, her column leaves out a group of people who are also excluded from the plans by Senators Kamala Harris and Cory Booker: poor, childless adults.

I am 67, single, with no children. I have had nothing but low-paying jobs all my life, in spite of having a college degree and being an Army veteran. Therefore, I have lived my adult life at or near the federal poverty level. I live in Northern California and can’t afford my own place. Please do not forget those of us who are poor, childless, and alone.

Roberta Benjamin
Santa Rosa, Calif.

Fox Lite
Re Nawal Arjini’s “Et Tu, Chuck?” [Dec. 17/24]: I too have noticed that MSNBC has become some-thing of an imitation of Fox News. Such neocon panelists as Bill Kristol, Alan Dershowitz, and Norman Podhoretz are now regulars on MSNBC. The women who lead the discussions do not show as much leg as they do on Fox, and they are all very smart, but one wonders if the primary job requirement is not to be “eye candy.”

Darcy Rowe
Columbia, Md.

No Nukes Are Good Nukes
My deepest thanks to The Nation for publishing Beatrice Fihn’s desperately needed article, “Women Against the Bomb” [Dec. 3/10]. The dangers of nuclear weapons are so great—and increasing—that our survival as a species depends on all the support we can get from the publication of such stories. Please continue to publish articles that help alert people to the tremendous peril to our planet from these insane weapons of utter destructiveness.

Rama Kumar
Fairfax, Calif.

Laying Waste
Re Bill Hartung’s “The Cost of War” [Dec. 17/24]: We need to cut the Pentagon’s budget by at least half. None of the wars we are fighting have even the smallest concern with “national security.” They are sham wars, wasting the lives and loyalty of our troops, and even more so the lives and security of the people in the countries where we are engaged, who end up losing everything.

Muhammad Thompson

Sign up for our new OppArt Weekly newsletter at TheNation.com/OppArt
Democratizing Foreign Policy

For the first time in the 45-year history of the War Powers Act, senators have passed a resolution that would help end a war—in this case, US involvement in the Saudi-led war on Yemen. But the catalyst had little to do with the conflict itself.

In March 2018, the Senate had voted 55–44 against bringing the same resolution to the floor. Then, in October, Saudi agents brutally murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the country’s consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

After Khashoggi’s death saturated the news, the outrage boiled up into Washington’s hawkish political class. Senator Lindsey Graham, a hardline critic of Iran and supporter of US arms sales to the Saudis, called for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to be replaced. Bob Corker, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he believed that bin Salman had “committed murder” by ordering Khashoggi’s death and declared Saudi Arabia merely “a semi-important country and a semi-important ally.”

The effect of the affair on US-Saudi relations serves as an important lesson on the need for a left foreign policy. By increasing democratic control over the way the United States acts abroad, we might constrain our worst impulses.

Foreign policy is, by constitutional design, walled off from public input. We don’t hold national referendums on trade deals or strategic alliances; even in areas where our elected representatives are meant to give the public some say, such as going to war, Congress has abdicated its authority.

In the perpetual state of emergency of the post-9/11 era, a blanket of secrecy has spread over US military actions abroad. It’s become impossible for the average American to learn how many troops we have deployed, which factions or governments we support, or the strategic rationale behind either. The crisis mentality of the War on Terror has only exacerbated the tendency of Congress to throw up its hands in deference to the White House, giving rise to seemingly indefinite and unchecked conflicts around the world.

But could a well-informed public do better? The outpouring of anger over Khashoggi’s murder suggests that it could. An October Axios/SurveyMonkey poll found that 56 percent of Americans believed that the Trump administration hadn’t been tough enough on the Saudis after the killing. A Rasmussen poll found that 57 percent of likely voters considered Khashoggi’s murder important to national security. Those views dovetailed with public skepticism about the US-Saudi alliance: An Economist/YouGov poll found that only 4 percent of Americans considered Saudi Arabia an ally, and a YouGov Blue/Data for Progress poll found that 58 percent of respondents with opinions on the matter wanted the United States to end its support for the Saudi war in Yemen, while 22 percent wanted to continue it.

This tells us that while average Americans might know little about the history of the war in Yemen, the politics of US arms sales, or the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, they do understand a journalist’s murder to be an outrageous crime, can connect that crime to the repressive nature of the Saudi regime, and want our relationship with the monarchy to change accordingly.

Elected representatives need to harness the recent surge of support for more just and equitable policies at home to create a more just and equitable outside the nation’s borders, too. The connection that the American public made between the suffering of one man and the war in Yemen is a theme that senators and representatives can expand to other failings, such as our response to the crisis in Central America or our support for authoritarians in the Middle East. Senators Chris Murphy, Brian Schatz, and Martin Heinrich were already offering a detailed progressive foreign-policy platform in 2015. Bernie Sanders has also turned his attention to international affairs,
calling for a “global democratic movement to counter authoritarianism. Congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for her part, has called for a “peace economy” that redistributes funds from war-making to domestic needs. Central to this worldview is the idea that foreign and domestic policy are inseparable, and that the United States can’t be taken seriously as a defender of democracy and equal rights in the world if it doesn’t defend them at home.

Polls suggest that these ideas are only growing in popularity with a wide cross section of voters. And they have a deep American pedigree. In his landmark speech against the Vietnam War in 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. told the crowd at Manhattan’s Riverside Church that when “profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered” and called for “a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation.”

Fourteen years earlier, President Dwight D. Eisenhower laid out a similar domestic case for stopping the Cold War. “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed,” he said. That Eisenhower’s speech sounds radical 65 years later shows how accustomed we are to the unnatural background hum of endless, costly, worldwide conflict. It was not always like this, and most Americans want to do something about it. —Aaron Coleman

---

**Replace Title IX**

Expanding equality beyond the college campus.

Last month, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced her plans to revise Title IX regulations and dramatically narrow the definition of sexual harassment at colleges and universities. Under her proposed rules, accusers will undergo a process more similar to the one they might experience in a court of law, which means cross-examination and a higher burden of proof.

DeVos’s initiative came not long after then–Attorney General Jeff Sessions supported a lawsuit attacking race-based affirmative action at Harvard University, which if successful would effectively make it harder for African-American and Hispanic applicants to get into elite schools.

As student activists prepare to defend the survivors of sexual assault as well as students of color on their campuses, it’s worth asking: Are Title IX and affirmative action, as they stand today, worth defending? And if the answer is no, then what could we replace them with that more effectively combats the racism and sexism that Americans of all ages and education levels experience?

Finally: Why do we care so much about the policies of a few elite colleges, when rape and racism are national concerns outside the ivory tower, too?

A horrifying 11 percent of college students (and 23 percent of undergraduate women) are sexually assaulted. But college-age women who aren’t enrolled in a degree program are 20 percent more likely to be raped than women on campus, and even more likely to be violently assaulted. Later in life, lower-paying jobs put them at increased risk of sexual violence as well.

And while affirmative action helps some students of color gain access to certain protections, it too applies to far fewer people than we might expect. Almost 80 percent of American students attend an institution that accepts more than half of its applicants, meaning that selective admissions practices—including affirmative action—don’t apply.

We care about Title IX and affirmative action because of what they’re supposed to do: namely, to stop sexual violence and to allow people born without privilege into elite institutions. But that can be done without Title IX. This moment should prompt reflection about better systems for ensuring equality, on campus and across the nation, because the ones that we have—as embodied by Title IX and affirmative action—are regressive and flawed.

Legal scholars have written extensively about the shortcomings of Title IX. Technically, it’s not an antirape law but an antidiscrimination code—which means that a student-filed Title IX complaint is an accusation of gender discrimination levied against the school, not a claim of individual violence. This is a bizarrely roundabout way to combat rape; it’s also not very potent.

The people accused of rape, for their part, have few avenues of defense and no presumption of innocence, unlike in a criminal court. Black men especially (and minority men generally) are disproportionately accused of sexual assault under Title IX, leading the faculty at Harvard Law School to write an open letter against strengthening the code.

Affirmative action as it stands is clearly an improvement over the status quo. But it, too, is depressingly limited. At its most expansive, it could address gender, race, class, and historical discrimination; instead, the Supreme Court has ruled that it can only be used to increase the diversity of a student body. As a result, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. has noted, the children of highly educated African immigrants are disproportionately represented in elite schools as compared with the descendants of African Americans.

Affirmative action is also about equality of opportunity, and thus does not ensure that women and students of color have a shot at succeeding once they’re admitted. Black women are the group most likely to enter college, but they are also among the groups least likely to graduate. Student and faculty activists who oppose DeVos would be wise to connect campus struggles to national concerns. Instead of relying on a bureaucracy that leaves all parties miserable, students could follow Skidmore (continued on page 8)
THE NATION

January 14/21, 2019

We don’t have much time to tackle climate change. A new report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finds that we need to reduce carbon emissions by 45 percent in the next 12 years to keep the earth from heating up “only” 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit. This isn’t a problem for future generations; this is an emergency now.

Into this crisis comes a demand for a Green New Deal, a call to mobilize the federal government to tackle this threat. Led by the young organizers of the Sunrise Movement, the campaign received a signal boost when Congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez joined its members during a sit-in at Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi’s office.

The fact that the earth is rapidly warming is reason enough to pay attention. But there are three additional reasons why the Green New Deal should excite Democrats and progressives.

First, it proves that the grass roots can drive the Democratic agenda. Just a few months ago, virtually no one in DC policy circles was discussing ambitious climate plans. But four years ago, that was also true about a $15 minimum wage—which only became a priority after service-sector workers started to pressure cities, states, and the federal government to ensure that nobody working a full-time job lives in poverty. And it’s the same with Medicare for All. After Trump’s attacks on health care, activists have not been content merely to clean up the Republicans’ mess and embrace Obamacare; instead, they want every American to have genuine access to public health care.

Organizers across the country are forcing Democrats to fully confront real issues. The party can no longer get away with offering milquetoast solutions that don’t address the scale of the problems. And so far, the people most affected by the inequities in our economy are actually the ones setting the agenda. It is telling that the Green New Deal is being helmed by millennials, who will live long enough to see the most vicious effects of climate change.

Second, a Green New Deal helps solve the Democrats’ ideas problem. Whereas Republicans have continually pointed to “small government” as their ideal (even as they’ve built up a massive carceral, military, and surveillance state), Democrats often have trouble communicating what they stand for. Ocasio-Cortez describes the Democrats, correctly, as the party that electrified the nation during the Great Depression and developed the space program that put a man on the moon. Fighting climate change is a challenge worthy of this party—and by tying climate action so explicitly to new jobs, high-tech training, and investment in collapsing communities, it can be sold as something that benefits people and the nation as a whole. With the Green New Deal, Democrats can honestly say they are the party ready to take bold action to save the planet.

Finally, we are not prepared for the next recession. With low interest rates, corporate balance sheets bloated with cash that companies won’t spend, and workers without the power to demand higher wages, the next recession will be just as devastating as the previous one and will require an even bigger response. During the 2008 financial crisis, progressive groups had to scramble to prepare their proposals to rescue the economy. The resulting plan funded infrastructure insufficiently and was too focused on temporary spending. Until now, no progress has been made in addressing these problems. This is where a Green New Deal will be essential. The next recession will see a shortfall in investment as well as millions of unemployed people badly in need of jobs—both of which a Green New Deal can address in a generationally transformative way.

Some criticize the champions of a Green New Deal for not yet offering specifics. But the goal is for congressional hearings in 2019 to create a bill for 2020. These hearings will be important for making clear the scope of what needs to be done. Even better, this process will build energy and excitement within the Democratic coalition. The Green New Deal could solve two problems at once: it could save the Democratic Party as well as the planet.

Mike Konczal

What Is the Green New Deal?

A 45 percent cut in carbon emissions by 2030 could keep global warming to 2.7°F. Here’s how to save the planet and create jobs:

1. What works for the environment...

100% of the nation’s power demand met with renewables by 2030.

2. ...can also work for the economy.

10 million new jobs in the first 10 years.

Sources: Data by Progress: PGCC
"A New America: From Welfare to Wealth"
A Subway Gone to Pot

The New York City subway is filthy, sluggish, and fickle—and, as any weary straphanger knows, it's getting worse. But fixing the subway won't come cheap: It could cost some $40 billion over the next 10 years.

But now a team from New York University's Rudin Center for Transportation has put together what it believes to be the best solution for the city's transit nightmare: legalizing and taxing cannabis and using the money to overhaul the ailing system.

The plan arrives at a moment of surprising cultural acceptance. As the report notes, "marijuana is one of the least polarizing issues in the United States today," with 62 percent of Americans supporting legalization. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced on December 17 that he would push to legalize marijuana statewide.

Cannabis has proved to be a reliable source of income for many other states. According to the cannabis business research group BDS Analytics, the legal-cannabis industry in North America reached $9.2 billion in 2017—an amount that's expected to increase fivefold over the next decade. Colorado, which legalized marijuana in 2012, has already taken in hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue.

In New York State, residents illegally purchase 6.5 million to 10.2 million ounces of marijuana every year. By the Health Department's valuation, that's between $1.7 billion and $3.5 billion annually. This means tax revenues could amount to more than $1.7 billion and $3.5 billion by the Health Department’s valuation, that's always a high hope that it could be.

Facing the Facts

Even fact-checking sites feel the need to try and find balance where there is none.

No matter how ridiculous their claims about the media’s “liberal bias,” conservatives never stop working the refs. It doesn’t matter how powerful or wealthy the owner of any given media institution may be: Accuse him—and it's always a him—of being biased against conservatives, and the next thing you know, he’s offering back rubs and foot massages to people who claim that Sandy Hook was a hoax and that Hillary Clinton ran a pizza parlor for pedophiles. It worked with Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg. It worked with Twitter’s Jack Dorsey. And now we’ve learned that it also worked with Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google. According to a report by Wired’s Nitasha Tiku, Adam Kovacevich, Google’s director of public policy, stated at an internal meeting: “I think one of the directives we’ve got very clearly from Sundar...is to build deeper relationships with conservatives. I think we’ve recognized that the company is generally seen as liberal by policymakers.”

You might imagine that at least the business of fact-checking would be immune to this practice—but, regrettably, this is not the case. A 2017 Duke Reporters’ Lab study found, in the words of one of its authors, Politifact’s Bill Adair, that right-wing sources “often put the phrase in snarky quotes—‘fact-checking’—to suggest it is not legitimate.” Adair said he decided to shut down PolitiFact’s “Truth-o-Meter” because, for conservatives, the truth hurt too much: “Needless to say, fact-checkers can’t afford to alienate conservatives—our nation can’t have a healthy political discourse if the two sides can’t agree on facts.”

The Washington Post’s Glenn Kessler has become a folk hero to some for his aggressive fact-checking of Donald Trump; as of November 2, he’s identified 6,420 “falsehoods.” But Kessler and the Post’s “Fact Checker” team have proven that they, too, are not immune to the pressure to try to “balance” the arguments of “both sides,” even though only one side is doing 99.9 percent of the lying.

During the 2012 Republican National Convention, for example, Kessler defended the falsehoods told in a speech by Representative Paul Ryan, then the party’s vice-presidential nominee. Why? According to the headline above Kessler’s column, “The truth? C’mon, this is a political convention.”

In Ryan’s defense, Kessler wrote: “The whole point is for the party to put its best foot forward to the American people. By its very nature, that means downplaying unpleasant facts, highlighting the positive and knocking down the opposing team.”

Kessler didn’t bother to explain why this was impossible to do without, saying, offering a dishonest timeline regarding the closing of a GM factory, as Ryan did in his speech. Kessler went on to note that “Ryan was so quickly labeled a fibber by the Obama campaign that one suspects it was a deliberate effort to tear down his reputation as a policy expert.”

Amazingly, he did not even pause to consider the possibility that Ryan was “so quickly labeled a fibber” because he was fibbing.

Naturally, Kessler also sought to create a false equivalence between the Republicans—whose lies had, by this time, become endemic and central to their appeal—and the Democrats, whose arguments remained largely based in reality. More than a little lazily, however, he did so without pointing out a single lie told at a Democratic convention. The best he could do was complain that, during Barack Obama’s speech at the 2008 convention, the candidate “knocked” his opponent, John McCain, “for voting 90 percent of the time with his own party.”

The Post’s “Fact Checker” team has proven that it, too, is not immune to the pressure to try to “balance both sides.”
What Kind of Hearing Aids Do Doctors Use?

The same ones they recommend to their patients!

Doctors love MDHearingAids® for the same reasons patients do. These FDA-registered, medical-grade hearing aids have the same high-tech features found in more expensive hearing aids yet cost one-fifth the price.

**Advanced Hearing Aid Technology**

**For Less Than $200**

“MDHearingAids are better than expensive clinic hearing aids, which cost thousands more,” says retired physician Dr. Robert A.

“I have had five pairs of expensive hearing aids and MDHearingAids are just as good,” adds retired neurosurgeon Dr. Brian L.

**So Strong Even Doctors Can’t Break Them**

MDHearingAids are made to last, backed by a world-class support team. Says one forgetful neurologist:

“My MDHearingAids went through a complete washer and dryer cycle. I placed them on my ears and — ay caramba! — they were working fine! Can you believe that I did it again? I found them at the bottom of the washer... still working!”

**CRISP, CLEAR SOUND**

MDHearingAids were created by a board-certified otolaryngologist frustrated that patients couldn’t afford the high price of hearing aids. So, he did the only logical thing... he created a low-cost, feature-packed hearing aid that costs one-fifth the price of a comparable hearing aid.

**STATE-OF-THE-ART FEATURES**

Automatic dual-directional microphones, adaptive noise suppression, speech enhancement technology, and dynamic range compression are just a few of the features that help you focus on the conversation, not the noise around you.

**NO AUDIOLOGIST NEEDED**

Save time and money, cancel those audiolist appointments! Advanced hearing aid technology lets you easily program and adjust your MDHearingAid at home. Set-up is fast and easy, too, going from box to ear in just five minutes.

**Try MDHearingAids risk-free with a 100% money-back guarantee for 45 days. Just call toll-free or visit the website shown below. Call now and get free shipping plus a free, one-year supply of batteries.**

**Call Toll-Free 1-800-558-3735**

Visit www.GetMDHearing200.com

Free 1-Year Supply of Batteries with Offer Code JC37

MDHearingAid®

The Doctor’s Choice for Affordable Hearing Aids
in Reporting’s Reed Richardson recently wrote, the Post slammed her for a tweet that “drew a direct comparison between $21 trillion in unsupported Defense Department budget adjustments over an 18-year period and the projected $32 trillion cost of implementing ‘Medicare for All’ over the next decade.” That $21 trillion number came from Dave Lindorff’s recent special report in The Nation, “Exposing the Pentagon’s Massive Accounting Fraud,” but it refers to both undocumented inflows and expenditures. Richardson noted that Ocasio-Cortez had oversimplified the argument, but qualified it about 10 hours later with a follow-up tweet: “this is to say that we only demand fiscal details w/ health+edu, rarely elsewhere.”

The Post’s “Fact Checker” blog gave Ocasio-Cortez’s initial tweet four Pinocchios—the worst rating a single statement can receive—for failing to capture the complexity of the issue, something that would be impossible in 280 characters or fewer. As Richardson pointed out, this was the second time the Post had fact-checked the millennial democratic socialist before she has even assumed office. The first time was when she said during a live interview that “everyone has two jobs”—as if she meant it literally. It was also the second time (at least) that the Post went after a progressive’s claim on how to fund Medicare for All, when in each instance the truth wasn’t so simple. In August, Kessler saddled Bernie Sanders with three Pinocchios when the Vermont senator argued that a study by the conservative Mercatus Center showed that switching to his single-payer system could save $2 trillion over the coming decade. And while it’s true that the conservative author of the paper made some questionable assumptions and didn’t support the policy himself, Sanders was right: The Koch-funded Mercatus study did find that Medicare for All could save $2 trillion. Yet despite this fact, Kessler’s three-Pinocchio rating remains. No one deserves a Pinocchio here, except perhaps for the Post “Fact Checker.”

(The last time the paper corrected Ocasio-Cortez was when she said in an interview, “Everyone has two jobs”—as if she meant that literally.

College’s lead and push for restorative justice when dealing with sexual misconduct. This is good for both accuser and accused: Currently, in the rare case that someone is found guilty of assault under Title IX, the most extreme consequence is expulsion. But it’s irresponsible, at best, to send a student who has committed violence out into the wider world; a restorative-justice approach would encourage making amends and taking personal responsibility.

Affirmative action and Title IX aren’t the only policies that affect students and the world around them. The continued existence of fraternities exemplifies a tacit acceptance of rape culture on campus—and ultimately in government, given that ex-frat boys assume public office in astonishing numbers. State budget cuts, tuition increases, and predatory student loans affect the makeup of the student body at least as much as affirmative action does. Expanding advantages for certain groups cannot come at the expense of other marginalized people, though. Efforts to ensure black representation in higher education should not mean quotas on Asian enrollment; they should mean an end to legacy admissions.

And conversations about the very fair expectations that college students have—of a racially and economically just student body and a rape-free campus—cannot come at the expense of discussing a rape-free country or a racially and economically just nation.

The needs of students and those of other young Americans are not mutually exclusive. On campuses and off, let’s take this moment to fight for what we want, not just defend what we have.

Nawal Arjini is a New York–based writer and fact-checker.
HAVE A WALL?
MAKE A STATEMENT!

Visit shop.thenation.com or call (844) 549-5528 to order.
Strange Loops

Political language and the end of meaning.

A friend of mine has a new habit of sighing, “I’m so glad I’m not 10 years old.” It’s an interesting way to express her pessimism: by personifying her angst in the figure of a child. She’s worried about the encroaching climate devastation, the current administration’s relentless denialism of reproducible fact, and our nation’s increasingly exuberant gyers of zealotry. The planet’s increasing numbers of humans aren’t helping her peace of mind, either: They’re charted to spike to 11 billion by 2100—before which time toxic air may be suffocating us into extinction anyway.

I try to resist giving in to dark imaginings, but I share her dread. I don’t know what to do; I am sometimes unable to trust even my own senses. One of the peculiar responses to the proliferation of plundered forests, rising seas, authoritarianism, trolls, bots, dark money, and the politics of what The Washington Post has engagingly labeled “bottomless Pinocchios” is that there are moments when I feel as though I’m dreaming. I don’t trust anything.

Here’s a silly example: Recently, I went to a restaurant and ordered haddock. I was served what appeared to be a nice rosy slab of grilled salmon. “This isn’t haddock,” I said. “Yes, it is,” said the waitress. But it was late, and the kitchen was closing, so I decided to be grateful for whatever it was.

“How was your haddock?” the waitress asked. “That’s right.”

“Disincentive” for those who “choose” to flee life-threatening conditions. “Choice” imputes blame; it shifts the burden of responsibility and effectively criminalizes the process of asylum-seeking.

We have entered a dangerous moral universe. It reminds me of the notorious “Collateral Murder” video released by WikiLeaks in 2010, which showed US helicopters gunning down a small group of people walking on a street in Baghdad. At least a dozen people, including civilians and two journalists, were killed, and two young children were seriously wounded. A voice in the helicopter can be heard saying, “Well, it’s their fault for bringing their kids into a battle.” A second voice responds: “That’s right.”

“Choice” imputes blame; it shifts the burden of responsibility and effectively criminalizes the process of asylum-seeking.

Our political moment is as Orwellian as that fish. Everything I thought I knew—as a lawyer, a citizen, a native speaker of English—has been challenged.

Yesterday, my friend sighed about being a hypothetical child again, but this time her resignation hit harder. I had just heard about the death of Jakelin Caal Maquin, a 7-year-old Mayan girl who was fleeing Guatemala with her father, and who died while in the custody of the US Border Patrol. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen expressed sympathy over Jakelin’s death, but faulted her family. “This family chose to cross illegally,” Nielsen said on Fox and Friends.

The language of consumption preference is a semantic tie in the Trump administration, with agency heads styling unspeakable cruelty as a “disincentive” for those who “choose” to flee life-threatening conditions. “Choice” imputes blame; it shifts the burden of responsibility and effectively criminalizes the process of asylum-seeking.

Hello, my name is …

I’m calling because Governor Brown needs to stop Sear’s deportation. Sear Un was born in Cambodia during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, when, from 1975 to 1979, some 2.2 million people—about a third of the country’s population—were killed or starved. Thankfully, when Un was just a baby, his family escaped across the border. He spent his early childhood in refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines until, in 1984, the family was resettled in the United States.

As refugees, they were given “permanent” legal status—but for noncitizens, US residency is always precarious. In 1997, when Un was 20 years old, he was involved in a home burglary. According to court documents, he waited in the car while his friends stole a TV—for which he was paid $125. Still, his conviction was spared at the last minute so he could fight his case in court. But as part of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown, more and more legal residents—especially refugees from Cambodia, Vietnam, Iraq, and Somalia—have been picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Un was arrested in September as part of an ICE sweep in Cambodian-American communities. He was scheduled to be deported on December 17, along with four dozen others, but was spared at the last minute so he could fight his case in court. “Sear’s story is not a unique one,” Kevin Lo, Un’s attorney, told The Nation. Refugees, particularly Cambodians, “are being torn from their families…so that ICE can deport them to a country that many of them do not remember.”

—Chris Gelardi

CALL GOV BROWN TO STOP SEAR’S DEPORTATION

916-445-2841

916-445-2841

WILL THE GOVERNOR COMMIT TO PARDOING SEAR TO KEEP HIM FROM BEING DEPORTED?
Surely this determined sense of a right to exist is the same commitment that Jakelin’s father felt as he fled the legacy of a civil war specifically targeting Mayan populations in Guatemala. Surely this insistence on the right to be is what also drives the stateless millions around the globe fleeing displacement by war, toxins, climate change, flood, famine, and drought.

Our president has been able to defame the northward flow of mostly Central American mothers and children as a terrorist invasion, twisting low probabilities of petty crime into a racially weaponized certainty of total destruction. It’s easier to dehumanize people depicted as “swarming,” as “parasites,” as infection. But the management of desperate civilians is badly served by models of raging contamination—or by blaming a child’s death on the parents who fled death in an attempt to save her. Inversion of meaning cannot reverse what happens in fact. It cannot resurrect the dead.

Meanwhile, in the land where haddock is not haddock and climate change is not real, we tolerate other misnomers and strange loops of meaning. We begin to accept that boxing children up in desert detention camps like industrial surplus will not break them. We start to believe that drone strikes and border armies will make for sustainable ecosystems.

As we walk farther and farther down an ideological path where we see one another only as data points for disaster, we will end up having abandoned some of our most fundamental commitments: to hospitality as humanizing, to children as our future, and to earth as our mother.

**FAREWELL, RYAN ZINKE**

We bid adieu to Ryan Zinke. Though he may well avoid the clink, he had ethics lapses hardly dinky. They leave that swamp aroma—stinky.

---

**SNAPSHOT / THE CAAL FAMILY**

**Jakelin Caal Maquin**

Jakelin Caal Maquin, a 7-year-old Guatemalan girl, died two days after she was taken into US Border Patrol custody. According to the United Nations, migrant deaths have increased under Trump, even as the number of border crossings have decreased dramatically.

---

**Calvin Trillin**

Deadline Poet

---

"They’re sending people that have lots of problems...they’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists."

—Donald Trump
The Nation.

PROGRESSIVE
2018
HONOR ROLL

Most Valuable Senator
Bernie Sanders

Most Valuable House Member
Ro Khanna

Most Valuable Policy-Makers
Pramila Jayapal & the Progressive Caucus

Most Valuable Multimedia Maker
Laura Flanders

Most Valuable Mayor
Michael Tubbs

Most Valuable Champion of Checks and Balances
Amy Klobuchar

Most Valuable Progressives
Ilhan Omar
Ayanna Pressley
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Rashida Tlaib
...and more.
Progressives were on the March in 2018. They weren’t just resisting Trump; they were outlining the alternative to Trumpism. They weren’t just winning the battle of ideas by moving Medicare for All and Fight for $15 proposals into the mainstream; they were winning battles at the ballot box as well. The fight for the future is far from over, but 2018 offered signs that it can and will be won. The Nation’s 2018 Progressive Honor Roll recognizes the dissidents and the strategists, the veteran campaigners and the next-gen leaders who are charting the course.

Most Valuable Progressives
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, and Ayanna Pressley

Democrats took back the House of Representatives on November 6, restoring the system of checks and balances that had failed to function for the first two years of Donald Trump’s presidency. But this was not a traditional transition of power: The winning Democrats were younger, more diverse, more aggressively progressive—and so many of them were women.

A week after the election, at the VoteRunLead Women and Power Town Hall, newly elected congressmembers Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (New York), Rashida Tlaib (Michigan), Ilhan Omar (Minnesota) and Ayanna Pressley (Massachusetts) were snapped in a now-iconic photo showing the fab four, smiling, in their “seats at the table.” They were not the only groundbreaking victors in a year that saw a historic number of women secure Democratic nominations for the House, the Senate, and state posts. But this particular foursome had arrived with a sense of solidarity and shared purpose, having won with backing from Justice Democrats, the group that promised “a new type of Democratic majority in Congress.”

Omar announced that the newcomers—two of whom had defeated Democratic congressmen in the primaries, two of whom had won crowded primary contests for open seats—“did not come to play.” Fox News disapproved; it featured an image of the quartet with the headline “Radical New Democratic Ideas: Free College for All, Free Health Care for All, Abolish ICE, Green New Deal.” Ocasio-Cortez replied: “Fox News discovered our vast conspiracy to take care of children and save the planet.”

That wasn’t just rhetoric on her part. The youngest woman ever elected to Congress and her colleagues got started by calling for the creation of a select committee to create a Green New Deal. That unsettled some senior committee chairs. But young activists from the Sunrise Movement flooded the Capitol to lobby veteran Democratic lawmakers to follow the lead of their caucus’s newest members. The teenage protesters carried signs that read: No More Excuses. Now they have a nucleus of Democrats who share their sense of urgency.

Most Valuable Senator
Bernie Sanders

A senator serving in the minority in Mitch McConnell’s chamber of legislative horrors has a duty to object. And few senators have objected so consistently in 2018 as Bernie Sanders did to the Senate’s transformation into a rubber stamp for the Trump administration and Wall Street. But what made Sanders so valuable—and effective—was his determination to promote an alternative politics and policies. Throughout the year, he introduced major bills that drew national attention: a “Too Big to Fail, Too Big to Exist” measure, with California Congresswoman Brad Sherman, to break up the nation’s biggest banks and risky financial institutions; a Workplace Democracy Act, with Wisconsin Congressman Mark Pocan, to restore the right of workers to organize unions and bargain collectively by repealing Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act and upending so-called right-to-work laws in the states; an Opioid Crisis Accountability Act of 2018, with Hawaii Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, to penalize drug manufacturers who illegally market or distribute opioid products; and a comprehensive plan to save the US Postal Service.

Sanders, Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy, and Republican Senator Mike Lee of Utah built a bipartisan coalition that voted 56–41 to reject the Trump administration’s support for Saudi Arabia’s genocidal assault on Yemen. When he couldn’t get the Senate to act, Sanders used his bully pulpit: he organized live and online town-hall meetings—with Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, filmmaker Michael Moore, actress Shailene Woodley, author Bill McKibben, and others—that attracted millions to discussions on climate change, inequality, and corporate welfare. In September, Sanders introduced the Stop Bad Employers by Zeroing Out Subsidies (or “Stop BEZOS”) Act, named for Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, to pressure trillion-dollar corporations to pay fair wages. The proposal, wrote Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Michael Hiltzik, “set the policy world ablaze.” In October, Bezos announced that Amazon would pay its 250,000 US employees—and 100,000 seasonal workers—at least $15 an hour.

Most Valuable House Member
Ro Khanna

California Democrat Ro Khanna spins out more ideas in a week than most House members produce in a congressional career. In his freshman term, he emerged as the chamber’s most ardent and courageous advocate for a new approach to foreign policy by promoting engaged diplomacy as an alternative to ever-expanding Pentagon budgets. To that end, Khanna worked with Mark Pocan to end US support for the Saudi war on Yemen, and with California Democrat Barbara Lee to scrap the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which presidents have routinely used as justification for military interventions since 9/11. He also urged his colleagues to take risks in supporting the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

That would be sufficient to earn him a place on this year’s honor roll. But Khanna has also stepped up as the...
savviest advocate on communications and technology issues in the House, circulating a pitch-perfect Internet Bill of Rights. And he moved to the forefront of the fight for corporate accountability, sharing credit with Sanders for getting Amazon to raise wages and declaring: “I am not in the House to appease special interests, so it’s fine if Big Pharma and defense contractors don’t like me. I don’t work for them. I work for ordinary Americans who can’t afford a lobbyist.”

**Most Valuable State Official**  
**Maura Healey**

Massachusetts’s Maura Healey is the bane of Donald Trump’s existence: a whip-smart state attorney general leading a skilled team that has joined (and frequently led) legal challenges to the president. Pick an issue—climate change, immigrant rights, predatory lending, the ban on transgender people in the military—and Healey has battled and often beaten the Trump team. “As attorney general, if I won’t stand up for the Constitution and against the abuse of power, then who will?” she asks.

Healey is just as tough on corporate abuses of power. As The Boston Globe notes, “Her aggressive action in regard to utilities, insurers, lenders, landlords, and dubious business practices has resulted in hundreds of millions in savings or money returned or rebated to taxpayers, workers, and ratepayers. Stories about her success on that front have become so regular as to be almost routine.” The voters were impressed, too: Healey was just reelected with 70 percent of the vote.

**Most Valuable Champion of Checks and Balances**  
**Amy Klobuchar**

The Senate failed the American people when it put Brett Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court, even after Christine Blasey Ford’s courageous testimony to the Judiciary Committee. The crudest moment in the meltdown of the advice-and-consent process came when Kavanaugh made a second appearance before the Republican-controlled committee and responded venomously to questions from Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar. Even as he demanded to know whether Klobuchar—who’d spoken poignantly about her father’s struggles with alcoholism—had ever blacked out from drinking, the senator remained firmly focused on the questions that needed to be answered. Her dignity under fire confirmed Klobuchar as the ablest defender of the system of checks and balances at a moment when the Senate was losing sight of its responsibility to the Constitution.

**Most Valuable Policy Intervention**  
**The Congressional Progressive Caucus Center**

As Democrats prepare to take charge of the House, the Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chairs for the 116th Congress, Mark Pocan (Wisconsin) and Pramila Jayapal (Washington), have launched a bold initiative to get progressive lawmakers working on strategy and messaging with policy and advocacy groups outside Congress. The Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, with a budget in excess of $1.5 million and a staff of at least eight, will coordinate progressive policy development and messaging. Their mission, says Jayapal, is to leverage “the power of the progressive movement to enact strong progressive legislation and really build our movement for change across the country.”

**Most Valuable Mayor**  
**Michael Tubbs**

Two years ago, at age 26, Michael Tubbs defeated a Republican incumbent to become the first African-American mayor of Stockton, California, a city of 310,000 that, after the 2008 financial crisis, was the second-largest community in the United States to file for bankruptcy protection. Leading a majority-minority city where one in four people live in poverty, Tubbs has sought transformational change. He’s embraced a test project that will make Stockton the first city in the country to implement a universal basic income (UBI), providing 100 residents with payments of $500 a month for 18 months.

“Have we a bunch of folks starting off life already behind, born into communities that don’t have a lot of opportunity,” says Tubbs, who recognizes that the “looming threat of automation and displacement” could make

**Most Valuable Judges**  
**Texas’s “Black Girl Magic” Slate**

The movement for criminal-justice reform has increasingly focused on the election of local prosecutors who recognize that new approaches are necessary. But it’s also vital to elect judges who understand the need for equal justice under the law. A huge step in that direction was taken on November 6, when 17 African-American women were elected to judgeships in Texas’s Harris County, which includes Houston. Aided by the excitement over Beto O’Rourke’s Senate run and a smart social-media campaign that urged people in the state’s largest county to “make history” by voting for the “Black Girl Magic” slate, these candidates spurred a record turnout that changed the face of the local judiciary.

“I hope that our election will usher in courts that ensure an equal opportunity for justice for all,” said Latosha Lewis Payne, one of the new judges. “We talked about…being more compassionate, more understanding of the poor and disadvantaged that come into the judicial system.”

**Most Valuable State Legislator**  
**Pamela Powers Hannley**

In her years as a blogger and activist, Pamela Powers Hannley often heard Arizona Democrats bemoan their party’s minority status. But she didn’t want to complain; she wanted to help fight for women’s rights, criminal-justice reform, strong unions, public banking, and her vision for democratic renewal. So she ran for a seat in the state House of Representatives, beat a Democratic incumbent in the 2016 primary, and joined eight newly elected Democratic women in the state legislature.

“This is a really intelligent, assertive group of freshmen,” noted Arizona House minority leader Rebecca Rios, a Democrat whose district includes parts of Phoenix. With a boost from Powers Hannley, an experienced communications consultant, the new legislators used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and podcasts to drum up attention—and support. “The people back in Tucson, they expect me to speak up,” Powers Hannley told the Arizona Capitol Times. "That’s why I persist.” Persistence paid off: In November, she was reelected with ease, as Arizona Democrats had their best finish in state House races since 1966.
their circumstances dramatically worse. Tubbs isn’t suggesting that a UBI will address every challenge of the future; rather, the Stanford grad is working with some of the savviest thinkers in the country to make sure that his city generates cutting-edge responses to inequality.

**Most Valuable Advance for Voting Rights**

**The Florida Voting Restoration Amendment**

Four years ago, Floridians for a Fair Democracy drafted the Florida Voting Restoration Amendment. It became Amendment 4, a proposal to restore “the eligibility to vote of Floridians with felony convictions after they complete all terms of their sentence including parole, probation, and restitution.” The group gathered 1.1 million signatures to put the measure on the November 2018 ballot, betting that a campaign based on common decency and common sense would earn broad support for returning voting rights to roughly 1.5 million disenfranchised Floridians. And it did: The amendment was passed with 65 percent of the vote.

**Most Valuable Protest**

**Love Knows No Borders**

There have been many objections to the horrific treatment of migrants at the US-Mexico border. Particular credit goes to Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley, who traveled to South Texas in June and demanded access to hundreds of migrant children who had been grabbed from their parents under orders from the Trump administration. Video of Merkley’s stand went viral and played a critical role in forcing a debate that ultimately caused the president to declare that families should be kept together. But Trump’s policies continue to create chaos at the border.

That is why it is so important that faith groups have maintained a vigilant moral presence. The role played by groups like the American Friends Service Committee has been essential, especially as the president has demonized Central American migrants who have traveled by caravan to the border. AFSC supported a powerful “Love Knows No Borders” week of action in December, which saw more than 100 faith leaders from across the country participate in nonviolent direct action in the border region near San Diego. The campaign’s purpose: “demanding an end to border militarization and calling for humane immigration policies that respect the rights and dignity of all people.”

**Most Valuable Multimedia Maker**

**Laura Flanders**

If our media spent less time obsessing about Trump and more time focusing on the construction of a new economy, examining the abuses of the military-industrial complex, getting real about racial justice, and embracing the promise of intersectional feminism, there would be a lot more hope for the future. Laura Flanders knows this. Her focus on the work of visionary social critics, artists, and activists has, over the past decade, made *The Laura Flanders Show*—on television, radio, podcasts, and the Internet—essential media for our times. As the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II says: “Laura Flanders is the real deal.”

**Most Valuable Documentary**

**Dark Money**

“When I heard that my home state of Montana would be the only state to fight back against Citizens United in the Supreme Court, everything changed. As a fourth-generation Montanan...I knew I could tell a compelling story of campaign finance through the eyes of real people. I grabbed the best camera I could get my hands on and started filming,” recalls director Kimberly Reed. Her documentary, *Dark Money*, is a riveting story of how money corrupts our politics, and of courageous challenges to that corruption. It also makes a powerful argument for why grassroots journalism (as practiced by reporters like John S. Adams, founder of the *Montana Free Press* and one of the “stars” of *Dark Money*) remains our essential defense against the abuses of corporate and political elites.

**Most Valuable Biography**

**Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death**

The 2018 election results prove that we are still in the era of “firsts”: the first Native American women (Kansan’s Sharice Davids and New Mexico’s Deb Haaland) and the first Muslim American women (Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar) elected to Congress; the first openly gay man elected as governor (Colorado’s Jared Polis). As the barriers to the full realization of America’s democratic promise were being broken down, historian Lillian Faderman released a brilliant rumination on the revolutionary political journey of Harvey Milk, the openly gay San Francisco supervisor who was assassinated 40 years ago. “From his earliest campaigns, Harvey had argued that gay people had to make coalitions with all dispossessed people,” she writes. “Not only did they have common enemies: the ‘them’s that kept the poor and minorities in positions of powerlessness; but [it was also] the morally right thing to do.” These coalitions matter now more than ever, as Faderman so ably reminds us in a book that recalls the whole of Milk’s activism.

**Most Valuable Music**

**Fandango at the Wall**

Grammy Award–winning jazz pianist, composer, and bandleader Arturo O’Farrill crossed borders and musical genres to create a stunning challenge to the politics of distrust and divisiveness that Donald Trump has amplified with his constant attacks on immigrants and refugees—and his obsessive advocacy for a wall along the US-Mexico border. O’Farrill drew together 50 artists for five recording sessions—several of them at the Tijuana–San Diego border—that produced 30 songs influenced by Latin jazz, hip-hop, classical, world, Broadway, and *son jarocho* music.

The resulting album is stunning, and the vision—as described in an essay by executive producer Kabir Sehgal—is a strikingly hopeful one: “Mobilizing a small army of musicians, producers, staff to stage a concert was a significant amount of work. But it was worth it.

“Here is the moment that struck me: the border wall was behind us, the sun was setting over the Pacific Ocean, the crowd was yelling ‘Epa’ and Otra’, and the band was grooving. Many of us were in tears as we took everything in. For a moment, we had helped to turn a symbol of division into a common space of peace and harmony.”

---
The Battle Over NAFTA Has Just Begun
Progressives must fight strategically to improve the pact.

After over a year of renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, the NAFTA 2.0 text signed on November 30 revealed improvements for which progressives have long campaigned, the addition of damaging terms that we oppose, and critical unfinished business.

It’s no surprise that the administrations of Donald Trump, Justin Trudeau, and Enrique Peña Nieto failed to deliver a transformational replacement for the corporate-rigged trade pact model that NAFTA hatched in the early 1990s. But if progressives secure swift and certain enforcement of the agreement’s new labor standards—and succeed in incorporating some other key improvements—the final package that will head to Congress in 2019 could end some of NAFTA’s continuing, serious damage to people across North America. And that would be a big deal.

The status quo, with NAFTA helping corporations outsource more US jobs to Mexico every week after nearly a million have been government-certified as lost to NAFTA, is not acceptable. Nor are the ongoing Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) attacks on environmental and health safeguards, or the corporate exploitation of Mexican workers, who today face $1.50-an-hour manufacturing wages that are unlivable and lower in real terms than before NAFTA. Neither withdrawing from NAFTA nor maintaining NAFTA 1.0 will raise wages in Mexico, which must be done to stop the offshoring that transforms middle-class jobs into sweatshop jobs.

This explains why congressional progressives, unions, groups like Public Citizen, and others who have fought decades of bad trade deals did not respond to the signing ceremony with an opposition campaign, but rather with demands for further improvements. Thanks to the midterm elections, only a version that can win significant Democratic support will get through Congress. That creates an opportunity we must seize. The signing of the NAFTA 2.0 text was just one step in a long process. Phase two of the battle to replace NAFTA has begun.

Trump’s claim to have created a totally different kind of agreement is a deceitful sales pitch, similar to those used for decades by US presidents to hawk previous trade deals. No one should refer to NAFTA 2.0 by using Trump’s preferred “US-Mexico-Canada Agreement” (USMCA) rebrand.

The NAFTA 2.0 framework, like previous agreements, sets limits on domestic consumer safeguards and grants protectionist monopoly rights to Big Pharma. Appallingly, the 164 countries that are members of the World Trade Organization—including the United States, Mexico, and Canada—are captured under this regime, NAFTA or not.

But “free trade” agreements like NAFTA include corporate goodies, like ISDS, that extend beyond the WTO rules. This is why fighting for improvements to NAFTA 2.0 matters. Analyses by unions and Public Citizen provide a road map for the improvements still needed.

On the upside, NAFTA’s outrageous investor privileges and ISDS tribunals are dramatically reined in under NAFTA 2.0, after hundreds of millions in taxpayer funds have been paid to corporations using the regime to attack public-interest policies. The new text terminates ISDS tribunals between the United States and Canada, which will prevent significant future damage. Most ISDS cases under NAFTA have involved US or Canadian corporations attacking the Canadian or US government, and all but one of the ISDS payouts over environmental issues involved US firms challenging Canadian policies.

For Mexico, ISDS is replaced by a new approach: Whereas ISDS allows investors to skirt domestic courts, the new process requires investors to use such courts to resolve disputes with a government until the highest available domestic court rules, or until two and a half years pass with no resolution. In the latter case, an investor can seek compensation—but only for limited claims in which “an investment is nationalized or otherwise directly expropriated through formal transfer of title or outright seizure,” or for discriminatory government actions against an established investment.

The five other investor protections in NAFTA that have resulted in almost all payouts so far are eliminated in the new agreement. These are also the protections that made it cheaper and less risky to outsource US jobs to Mexico. Additionally, NAFTA 2.0 eliminates the “right to invest,” which companies use to launch ISDS attacks if a government refuses to authorize an environmentally damaging mine or other proposed investment.

The new text also includes important procedural reforms. Those reviewing claims under NAFTA 2.0 cannot simultaneously represent corporations suing governments, which is not the case under the ISDS process. Also, investors can only be compensated for losses they can prove, with “inherently speculative” damages banned; previously, investors have obtained huge sums premised on their claims that expected future profits would be lost.

These changes don’t go into effect until three years after NAFTA 2.0 does. But this vexing delay did not stop the Business Roundtable, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Wall Street Journal editorial board from criticizing the gutting of ISDS—nor did a loophole under NAFTA 2.0 designed to protect nine US companies if their contracts with Mexico’s National Hydrocarbons Commission are canceled without cause. These companies retain the broader ISDS rights if Mexico maintains agreements that provide such rights to investors from other countries. While none of the companies have used ISDS against Mexico, several have against other countries. Preserving access to broad ISDS rights for any corporation, much less oil companies, is bad.

Yet even with these flaws, NAFTA 2.0 delivers a significant scaling-back of investor power over governments. If an administration as compliant to corporations as Trump’s is whacking ISDS, it will be hard for future
presidents to backslide. The move also sends a powerful signal to the many nations worldwide that are seeking to escape the ISDS regime.

However, unless the final deal includes strong labor and environmental standards that are subject to swift and certain enforcement—which is not the case with the NAFTA 2.0 text—US firms will continue to outsource jobs, pay Mexican workers poverty wages, and dump toxins in Mexico. Absent a remedy to this fundamental failing, NAFTA 2.0 will face broad opposition.

The Labor Advisory Committee report, prepared by unions serving as some of the few official US trade advisers not representing corporate interests, concludes that “there are modest but meaningful improvements” in the new labor standards. These include new terms protecting migrant workers and the right to strike, as well as requirements that signatory countries address violence and threats of violence against unionists and implement policies to prohibit workplace discrimination. (That the discrimination provision covers sexual orientation and gender identity and undermines the attack on Obama’s executive orders granting such protections to federal workers has spurred considerable backlash by right-wing groups and antediluvian members of Congress.)

But the new text also retains a fundamental flaw of past agreements by relying on the International Labor Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, as opposed to the more precise ILO Conventions, which enumerate specific labor rights and standards and are backed up by related jurisprudence.

The new labor chapter has one standout feature: clear, specific rules that would eradicate the wage-suppressing “protection contracts” that current Mexican law allows employers to impose on workers ostensibly represented by a union. If enforced, these terms could make a real difference in raising Mexican wages, which in turn would reduce incentives to outsource US jobs to Mexico. Today, before Mexican workers arrive at a new plant, a “union” they have no role in selecting—and that is essentially a branch of the pro-business political party that ruled Mexico for 71 years—signs a labor contract with the employer that locks in low wages and otherwise protects the employer’s interests. Workers don’t get to vote on the contract, but if they strike or try to organize an independent union, they can be fired for violating it. NAFTA 2.0 requires that the Mexican government guarantee workers secret-ballot votes on union contracts and facilitate voting to replace all existing protection contracts within four years.

But the NAFTA 2.0 text does not include the monitoring or enforcement provisions necessary to ensure that the new rules actually make a difference in the lives of North American workers. As in other trade pacts since 2007, the NAFTA 2.0 labor and environmental standards are written into the core text, with the same enforcement mechanisms as the other terms, in contrast to the original’s unenforceable labor and environment side agreements. However, Democratic and Republican administrations have been unwilling to use available enforcement mechanisms against even the most egregious labor or environmental violations. The labor movement is now engaging with trade officials to try to solve this fundamental defect. NAFTA 2.0 must not go into effect unless and until enforcement mechanisms are significantly improved and Mexico implements labor-law reforms to comply with the new obligations.

While unions advocated for their demands during the NAFTA renegotiations, environmental groups did not. Given the Trump administration’s unrelenting attack on environmental protections, the green groups concluded that their demands—which had been rejected by the Obama administration during Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations—would certainly go nowhere with this administration.

The NAFTA 2.0 text, like that of the TPP, fails to even mention climate change—a glaring omission in a time of climate crisis. But NAFTA 2.0 also follows the TPP model in not requiring countries to adopt or enforce domestic laws that would achieve the goals of seven core multilateral environmental agreements. Congressional Democrats forced this obligation into George W. Bush’s final four trade deals. But NAFTA 2.0, like the TPP, only sets that standard for the endangered-species treaty known as CITES. And, like the TPP, the conservation terms in NAFTA 2.0—except for new rules on fisheries—impose few real obligations.

Contrary to their expectations, progress was made on the environmental groups’ top priority, ISDS, and the new text meets their demand to eliminate NAFTA terms that forced countries to continue exporting natural resources they sought to conserve. These “proportional sharing” rules required the continuing export of oil, gas, timber, and even lake water based on previous years’ export levels.

NAFTA 2.0 also reverses the original NAFTA’s requirement that trucks from all three countries must have access to all North American roadways regardless of environmental and safety concerns. When the United States limited access to Mexico-domiciled trucks after investigations found widespread violations of US safety and emissions standards, a NAFTA tribunal authorized sanctions on $2.4 billion in US trade. NAFTA 2.0 reestablishes US discretion to limit access and impose strict standards.

One way in which NAFTA 2.0 is dramatically worse than the original is the addition of a slew of new monopoly rights for pharmaceutical corporations that would help them avoid competition from generic products and keep medicine prices high. Among other dangerous terms is a requirement that countries grant 10 years of marketing exclusivity—that is, longer monopoly protections—for biologic medicines.

These terms would not only lock the United States into a terrible system that keeps such medicines—including cutting-edge cancer treatments—hideously expensive; it would also export that system to Canada and Mexico. Eliminating or reducing the current US 12-year exclusivity protection for biologics has been a priority for advocates of affordable health care. Mexico now provides no extra exclusivity rights for biologic medicines, while Canada allows eight years. If the 10-year provision is not excised from NAFTA 2.0, people across North
Focus on widespread public anger over health-care costs helped propel the Democrats to victory in the midterm elections, so eliminating the Big Pharma giveaways in NAFTA 2.0 will be crucial if the final package is to win a majority in the House next spring.

If the balance of good, bad, and incomplete in the NAFTA 2.0 text weren’t confusing enough, consider that for the first time, the new agreement would condition market access on meeting a set wage level. For vehicles to qualify, for example, 40 to 45 percent of their value must be made by production workers paid $16 an hour or more on average. There are limitations to this requirement, including the lack of inflation-adjusted increases in wages. But it sets an important precedent. How it would affect production-location decisions and wage levels remains unclear, because only the automakers have the supply-chain information needed to calculate what changes might be required to meet the new rules.

The wage standards are part of NAFTA 2.0’s improved rules of origin, or ROO, which determine whether products qualify for NAFTA’s tariff-free access to markets (goods with significant Chinese and other non–North American value now do). NAFTA 2.0 raises the ROO for autos to require that 75 percent of a car’s value be produced in North America. NAFTA required 62.5 percent (and the TPP required only 45 percent).

Beyond autos, NAFTA 2.0 strengthens NAFTA’s ROO in ways that the Labor Advisory Committee concluded should increase production and employment in North America. Strict rules of origin are also essential for labor and environmental enforcement, because they limit the value of inputs that do not meet those standards.

NAFTA 2.0 also includes first-time terms on the distortion of currency values to gain trade advantages. This is an important precedent for future pacts with countries where, unlike Canada and Mexico, this is a big problem. But the new terms provide no means to stop or discipline cheating. The only enforceable obligation requires countries to provide information on currency practices.

Many other NAFTA 2.0 terms are unchanged from NAFTA or replicate bad rules now in place in the WTO. For instance, despite Trump’s “Buy American” rhetoric, the new deal maintains NAFTA’s waiver of rules that would otherwise require the US government to procure US-made goods. This is a tricky problem to fix: The WTO provides Canada with even broader waivers of such requirements than NAFTA. But without changes, tax dollars and US jobs will continue to be outsourced rather than reinvested to create jobs at home.

Other NAFTA 2.0 chapters include an array of constraints on non-trade policy that progressives have long criticized in NAFTA and the WTO as undermining domestic consumer safeguards. For example, while strong opposition from members of Congress derailed a proposal that would have forbidden countries from requiring consumer warnings on sugary drinks and fatty snack foods, the chapter on food standards otherwise reflects the demands of agribusiness. It includes terms these companies have pushed into US law and practice that undermine consumer health and safety.
We should fight for Marc Lamont Hill’s reinstatement—but we should also heed his message.

By Phyllis Bennis and Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II
CNN fired its popular commentator, Temple University Professor and public intellectual Marc Lamont Hill, in late November. Contrary to most reporting, Hill was not actually fired as a result of the speech he gave at the United Nations on November 28; he was fired because CNN panicked in the face of a backlash from powerful pro-Israel forces, most notably the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which condemned the speech as anti-Semitic.

Since that time, Hill has apologized for a phrase in the speech that some in the Jewish community found hurtful—a call for a “free Palestine from the river to the sea”—while reaffirming his commitment to his larger critique of Israeli policies. Hill’s many defenders have strongly asserted not only his First Amendment right to his opinion, but the historical and legal accuracy of his speech, and have demanded, appropriately, that CNN rehire him. However, with a few important exceptions—Noura Erakat’s piece in The Washington Post and David Palumbo-Liu’s in The Nation among them—the demand that CNN rehire Hill has obscured much of the actual content of his speech. Too many seem to have heard only the one phrase, taken out of context, that was the centerpiece of the ADL’s attack.

And Hill’s words are important: not only because he laid out a fiery, cogent argument for the need to end Israel’s policies of oppression against the Palestinians in the context of international law, but also—and this was especially fitting, given that he was addressing top UN officials and diplomats—because he shaped his presentation around the 70th anniversary of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Nakba (“catastrophe”) of 1948, which saw 750,000 Palestinians displaced from their homes, expelled from their land, and dispossessed of their country with the creation of the state of Israel. In his speech, Hill stressed how Palestinians continue to be denied the very rights—political, civil, economic, social, and cultural—supposedly guaranteed to every human being under the Universal Declaration.

Hill’s comments were not anti-Semitic; they were anti-oppression, rooted in history and calling for the recognition of a common humanity grounded in the rights of all people, whether Palestinian or Jewish, African or European, black or Native American, Latinx or white.

Early in his speech, Hill noted that “while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that all people are ‘born free and equal in dignity and rights,’ the Israeli nation-state continues to restrict freedom and undermine equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as those in the West Bank and Gaza.” He then moved, chapter and verse, through the human rights guaranteed by the declaration for 70 years, but which have been denied Palestinians for exactly the same period. He identified the right to freedom and security; the right to protection against torture; the right to be free from arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile; and the right to a fair trial, and he enumerated Israel’s long-standing violations of those rights. Crucially, given that Israel continues to imprison almost 2 million Palestinians in the impoverished and ravaged Gaza Strip, he reminded his audience at the UN that the declaration recognizes the “right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, as well as the right to leave any country, including ‘one’s own’ and to return to said country.”

Hill condemned his own government for its role in financing and enabling Israel’s attacks on Palestinian rights. And he made clear that the Trump administration “is not an exception to American policy. Rather, Donald Trump is a more transparent and aggressive iteration of it.” He described Israel’s theft of Palestinian land, such as the current demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

It is important to note that Hill framed his arguments in the context of rights, not states. He talked about the state of people, not whether or how a nation-state should be divided.

Like many Palestinians, and like many in the global movement in solidarity with them, he spoke of the urgency of fighting for rights—for equality, for the realization of all globally recognized rights—rather than for any particular arrangement of states. In a later discussion online, Hill indicated his personal preference for the one-state solution—a single democratic state with equal rights for everyone—but even this was tempered with the recognition that “it is not my job as an outsider to decide for Palestinians or Israelis.”

Israel—specifically the Likud Party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—focuses instead on states, not rights. The Likud Party’s original platform asserts that there will be a single state: “Between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.” The platform was amended a few years after Israel signed the Oslo Agreement, which was supposed to pave the way for the much-heralded two-state solution. Instead, that 1999 iteration declared that “the Jordan river will be the permanent eastern border of the State of Israel…. The Government of Israel flatly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state west of the Jordan river.”

The acceptance of a single state—which today exists as an apartheid state with separate legal systems for the two different groups within the same territory, determined on the bases of race, religion, and language—is the official position of the Israeli government. It has been strengthened by the new nation-state law passed earlier this year. Despite the fact that more than 20 percent of Israeli citizens are Palestinian Christians, Druze, or Muslims, the new law asserts that “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.”

The alternative to apartheid is to focus on rights, not states. This was Hill’s point. And this focus on the rights of people must be the starting point for any just resolution. The rights of people are fundamental; if anyone suggests that one cannot discuss human rights as they relate to Palestinians or to any other people who suffer oppression, then they are suggesting that those people are not equal partners in the human family.

The United Nations, in commemorating 70 years of both Palestinian suffering and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provides exactly the right time and place to ask, as Hill did, “What does justice require?” His answer: “To truly engage in acts of solidarity, we must make our words flesh. Our solidarity must be more than a noun. Our solidarity must become a verb.” It is that struggle for human rights and equality for all—for everyone living in that territory between the sea and the river—that still provides the best possibility of peace with justice in Israel and Palestine.
WHY

"OVERMATCH"

OVERKILL

by Michael T. Klare

The Pentagon’s strategy for global supremacy could bankrupt the country and spark a world war.
For the 40-odd years of the Cold War, the United States and its allies were governed by the overriding strategy of containment: a scheme to obstruct the Soviet Union’s advances around the world and eventually trigger its collapse. Every aspect of US foreign and military policy—and much of America’s economic, technological, and cultural behavior—was subordinated to this all-inclusive concept. Once the Cold War ended, however, US strategists lacked a unifying theme for military planning and spending, and so they flirted with one imperfect substitute after another—the campaign against “rogue states,” the “Global War on Terror,” and so on. But now, with Donald Trump in the White House and a new cast of hawks at the Pentagon, military leaders have landed on a new grand strategy: overmatch.

Overmatch decrees that the United States must retain military and technological superiority over Russia and China (and all other potential challengers) for as far into the future as we can see. In this vision, America sits alone at the top of the global hierarchy; there can be no partnership among the major powers. “The United States must retain overmatch—the combination of capabilities in sufficient scale to prevent enemy success and to ensure that America’s sons and daughters will never be in a fair fight,” proclaimed the Trump administration in its National Security Strategy, released in December 2017. Above all, overmatch is a call to arms in every realm of combat—nuclear, conventional, unconventional, space, and cyber—at whatever cost to American taxpayers and the independence of American tech companies. “To retain military overmatch,” the National Security Strategy asserts, “the United States must restore our ability to produce innovative capabilities, restore the readiness of our forces for major war, and grow the size of the force so that it is capable of operating at sufficient scale and for ample duration to win across a range of scenarios.”

Although reminiscent of containment in some respects, overmatch differs from Cold War strategy not only because it presumes two (and possibly more) major competitors instead of just one, but also because it requires a perpetual struggle for dominance in every realm, including in trade, energy, and technology. As the overmatch strategy gains momentum, it will require substantial changes in American society. Mammoth sums will be needed to procure new weapons systems to ensure US superiority over all conceivable combinations of adversaries. The tech sector, including large parts of Silicon Valley and its offshoots elsewhere in the country, will be harnessed for the development of exotic weapons—artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons, hypersonics, and so on. America’s oil, coal, and natural gas will be used for geopolitical competition. International trade and travel will be subjected to military oversight to ensure that US technological advances are not transferred to America’s military competitors; likewise, the Internet will be heavily policed to defend against enemy spying and technology theft. And more is bound to follow.
This means not only *more* things—more tanks, planes, missiles, and so on—but *more capable* things. Technology is seen as a “leveler” in the emerging strategic competition, because it has allowed China, Russia, and others to find ways to counter America’s advantages in conventional military hardware. By investing in AI, cyber, robotics, and other technologies available from commercial sources, those countries have been able—or so we’re being told—to eat away at America’s technological superiority. The response to this challenge is obvious: Spend more money on technology—a lot more money.

**The Implications of Overmatch**

With virtually no public or congressional discussion, overmatch has become the driving principle of US foreign and military policy. This means, at the very least, that US military spending will continue to exceed that of all potential adversaries and that the country’s arsenals will be perpetually replenished with new and more capable weapons.

The Pentagon’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2019, released last February, calls for spending $686 billion—an increase of $74 billion, or 12 percent, over FY 2018. (These figures do not encompass spending on nuclear weapons via the Department of Energy or other security-related expenditures outside the Department of Defense.) But this is merely a start. To maintain overmatch, the Pentagon—and its supporters in Congress and the White House—must keep enhancing the military’s capabilities to defeat China and/or Russia in a full-scale confrontation. “While our trajectory is in the right direction,” Mattis told Congress in April, “our work has just begun.” Among his stated goals: to expand the Navy from an existing force of 280 ships to 355; to acquire new high-tech conventional weapons capable of overpowering Chinese and Russian defenses against American attack; and to replace almost the entire US nuclear stockpile with new, more capable atomic weapons.

Building a larger Navy, the Pentagon argues, is essential to ensure US dominance of the world’s major sea lanes and to enable American forces to battle the Chinese and Russians on their maritime peripheries—something they will never be permitted to do on our periphery. Similarly, the acquisition of more long-range guided missiles and other advanced conventional weaponry is needed, we’re told, to allow US forces to remain beyond the range of ever-improving Chinese and Russian defensive systems and still strike critical targets inside those countries.

In parallel with this buildup of conventional forces, overmatch demands the modernization and expansion of US nuclear forces and, it appears, a new approach to arms control. Under the existing US-Russian nuclear-arms-control regime, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty of 2010, the two countries maintain arsenals of approximately equal size and character, with neither possessing any distinct military or technological advantage (of a sort that might lead one side or the other to consider their actual use). A prior agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987, bars either country from deploying ground-launched missiles with a range (500 to 5,500 kilometers) intended for regional but not intercontinental nuclear exchanges.

For the architects of overmatch, this overall situation inhibits America’s ability to employ its technological prowess in the pursuit of strategic advantages over its rivals, and so it must be remedied. This means, as they see it, replacing existing US nuclear weapons with more capable ones, acquiring new *types* of nuclear weapons, and, if necessary, abandoning the INF and other arms-control agreements.

Although never quite expressed in those words, this is all spelled out in the Nuclear Posture Review released by the Defense Department last February and in Mattis’s testimony two months later. Contending that America’s existing nuclear armaments have become obsolete, Mattis called for a 30-year, $1.7 trillion commitment to replace each “leg” of the strategic “deterrent” triad—ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and intercontinental bombers carrying cruise missiles or gravity bombs—with new, more modern systems. The FY 2019 defense budget contains a down payment of $6.9 billion on these systems, the beginning of what will be an exponentially greater amount in each year to come.

Mattis further called for the deployment of so-called low-yield nuclear weapons (able to incinerate, say, Lower Manhattan but not all of New York City), supposedly to discourage Russia from believing it could use such weapons without precipitating a full-scale US nuclear response. (This despite the fact that the United States already deploys nuclear bombs in Europe that can be “dialed down” to a low-yield setting.) The military’s objective, Mattis explained in typically obfuscating Pentagon-speak, is to field “a nuclear deterrent fit for its time—a tailored and diverse set of nuclear-deterrent capabilities that provides a flexible, tailored approach to deterring one or more potential adversaries.” The repetition of “deterrent” or “deterring” suggests a policy of war avoidance, but other words—“tailored,” “diverse,” and “flexible”—suggest something else entirely: the desire to construct a variegated arsenal that will be there for the president to draw on under a wide range of circumstances.

All this has been made far more ominous by President Trump’s stated intent to withdraw from the INF Treaty. His public explanation for the impending move is Moscow’s failure to acknowledge a breach of the treaty—Russia allegedly developed a ground-launched nuclear-capable cruise missile—as well as its failure to take steps to return to compliance. “We’ve honored the agreement, but Russia has not, unfortunately...so we’re going to terminate the agreement. We’re going to pull out,” Trump told reporters in October.

For many observers, however, the decision to abandon the INF Treaty is as much about opening the space for the United States to develop and field new intermediate-range missiles—conventional or nuclear-
I invite you to join me on a fascinating, in-depth journey to South Korea—a dynamic country that has emerged in recent years as a hotbed of progressive politics, advanced technology, and global music and culture. It’s also a country of enormous contrasts that’s gained in geopolitical importance as its neighbor to the north has embraced diplomacy as a way to resolve issues lingering from the Korean War and its long standoff with the United States over nuclear weapons.

With me as one of your guides, we’ll visit incredible cultural and historical sites and, through exclusive meetings with South Korean activists, scholars, preservationists, and historians, gain a unique insight into this complex country that is so little understood by the US. We’ll also meet one of the many North Korean defectors, as well as former soldiers.

I will share my personal stories from the many years I have spent in Korea, and will talk about my work exposing the US role in suppressing the famous May 1980 uprising against military rule in the southwestern city of Gwangju. Together we’ll visit where the democracy movement took place, meet some of the participants, and discuss the South Korean democratic movement.

We’ll experience the frenetic energy of Seoul, stroll through peaceful Buddhist temples, explore the rich UNESCO site of Gyeongju, visit an ancient medicinal market in Daegu, and travel to the DMZ to look into North Korea and see firsthand the realities and sorrows of the war. We’ll also learn about the dynamic steps the two Koreas are taking to end their division and heal from 70 years of conflict. Along the way we’ll meet incredible people, savor delicious foods, learn about centuries-old traditions, and experience so much more.

I hope you will join me in this unique exploration of a country of great personal significance to me and immense political importance globally.

Inclusive tour price from $6,970. See our website for complete details at TheNation.com/SOUTH-KOREA or call us at 212-209-5401.

100% of the proceeds from our travel programs support The Nation’s journalism.

Tim Shorrock is a journalist and writer who grew up in Japan and South Korea. Over the last two years, he has reported extensively for The Nation about North Korea and the evolving inter-Korean peace process. Shorrock is the author of Spies for Hire: The Secret World of Intelligence Outsourcing.
CONTENDING WITH OVERMATCH

There's no getting away from it: overmatch will govern US foreign and military policy for years into the future. It will increase the risk of great-power war and encroach upon civilian life. The Democrats in Congress cannot stop it, partly because they lack the power to do so and partly because most of them also subscribe to the notion of permanent US military superiority. Resistance from the peace and antinuclear movements, such as can be mustered, is unlikely to slow the pace of expanding militarization. What is needed, therefore, is a clear-headed critique of overmatch and a strategy for contesting its most dangerous components.

Overmatch rests on the assumption that the United States can and should devote whatever resources it takes to preserve a significant military lead over all potential competitors indefinitely. This is both practically and morally flawed. America's competitors will always find new ways to overcome US advantages, while any sustained drive to stay ahead of all conceivable threats will eventually drain this country of its economic, scientific, and technological assets. As the architects of the original US-Soviet arms-control agreements eventually concluded, negotiating parity in weapons capabilities is a much more sensible strategy.

The moral flaws in overmatch derive from its repudiation of reciprocity in international relations. During the Cold War, the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union—no matter how much they detested each other—determined that it was necessary to meet periodically to address global dangers lest they provoke a conflict that could spark nuclear Armageddon. The advocates of overmatch have no such inclinations. For them, the only acceptable position for every potential US rival is subordination to Washington in world affairs. Though no doubt a pleasing prospect to the occupants of the White House, this is an unacceptable condition that will goad countries like China and Russia to engage in a perpetual struggle to overcome their inferior status—a struggle that will result in a monumentally costly arms race and perhaps even global war.

Lending this critique visibility and bolstering it with an effective political voice will require assembling a coalition of all those groups who are bound to suffer from overmatch: poor and working people who will be denied essential services to pay for a new military buildup; tech workers who will be compelled to devote their talents to war; parents of young children who may someday be drafted to fight against China or Russia; and businesspeople who are being forced to sever ties with their Chinese counterparts, among many others. The various ways in which we could be harmed by this strategy may not yet be fully evident, but they will be soon—and when they are, we must be ready with a plan of action for resistance.
In August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This wasn’t the first time it had bombed Japan’s cities—its firebombing campaign had already wrecked more than 60 other population centers—but the atomic bombs were different. They portended a new era in world history.

That’s how George Orwell saw it, at least. In an astonishingly prescient essay published two months after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he reflected on the future that atomic weaponry would bring. Power would be consolidated in the hands of two nations, the United States and the Soviet Union (perhaps China, too, he allowed). The two would perpetually threaten atomic war against each other, Orwell predicted, but they wouldn’t actually risk it. Instead, there would be an “end to large-scale wars” and the rise of a new form of chronic half-war. Orwell, coining an indelible phrase, called it a “cold war.”

And cold it was. The Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis, writing in the late 1980s, confirmed Orwell’s prediction: The Cold War had been a time of great perceived danger, yet it had also been a time of impressive international sta-

---

Daniel Immerwahr is an associate professor of history at Northwestern University. He is the author of Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development and How to Hide an Empire.

The Lethal Crescent
Where the Cold War was hot
by DANIEL IMMERWAHR

The Cold War’s Killing Fields
Rethinking the Long Peace
Paul Thomas Chamberlin
HarperCollins. 640 pp. $29.99
bility. For all the bluster, there had been no World War III. Weapons of stupefying destructive power had been built but never used. Perhaps, Gaddis suggested, we should understand the period not as the Cold War but as the Long Peace.

Scholars still debate why the Cold War stayed cold. Gaddis, like Orwell, emphasized nuclear weapons, which forced caution on the superpowers. Unwilling to gamble on all-out war, Washington and Moscow sought to contain, not destroy, each other, and they largely stuck to their own spheres of influence. They pressed frequently on the boundaries of those spheres, but just as often, they backed down from conflict.

That pattern can be seen clearly in the first true Cold War crisis in Europe, Joseph Stalin’s 1948 blockade of the Western-controlled parts of Berlin, a city located in the middle of the Soviet zone of occupied Germany. Harry Truman could have gone to war over this, but he didn’t. Instead, he responded with a creative workaround, a round-the-clock stream of planes that flew 2.3 million tons of supplies to the city’s sealed-off sectors. In a swaggering show of abundance, one squadron developed the habit of parachuting candy to Berlin’s overjoyed children. For his part, Stalin could have shot the planes down, but he didn’t. Instead, after 11 humiliating months and more than a quarter-million overflights, he reopened the roads. Not a single shot was fired.

But is Berlin a good stand-in for the entire Cold War? Perhaps not. Just as Stalin and Truman were facing off over that contested capital, a similar showdown was taking place nearly 5,000 miles away in Changchun, a prosperous provincial capital in Manchuria. As with Berlin, communist forces—this time under the leadership of Mao Zedong—controlled the zone around the city, but Changchun itself remained under the control of Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang government. As with Berlin, Mao closed the roads to the city.

Yet here this tale of two cities diverges. Mao didn’t expect Chiang to relinquish Changchun peacefully. Rather, the point of his five-month blockade was (as one of Mao’s generals put it) to “turn Changchun into a city of death.” The trapped, starved, and freezing residents started dying in the streets. “There were corpses everywhere,” recalled the general charged with defending the city. “It had become a living tomb.” The siege very likely killed more people than the bombing of Hiroshima did, with estimates between 120,000 and 200,000.

Many more people died in the campaign that followed. On the eve of his victory, Mao bragged to Stalin that his forces had killed more than 5 million since 1946, though between 2 million and 2.5 million killed on all sides seems like a sturdier number. But however many millions of people died, one thing was clear: The contrast between Berlin and Changchun—planes dropping candy versus corpses in the streets—represented a larger divide. The Cold War in Europe may have been a patient chess game, or a Long Peace. But in Asia, it was a bloodbath.

Paul Chamberlin’s eye-opening The Cold War’s Killing Fields offers us a precise, painful account of the Cold War as narrated from the Changchuns of the world rather than the Berlins. His focus is not on the capitals where grand strategies were spun, as in Gaddis’s telling, but on the blood-soaked locales where those strategies took their greatest toll. By Chamberlin’s calculations, more than 20 million people died in conflicts related to the Cold War. Of course, not every one of those conflicts had its origins in the superpower rivalry. But even when Washington and Moscow had little to do with starting a war, they nearly always had a hand in finishing it—by sending troops, advisers, weapons, or cash.

Chamberlin isn’t the first historian to observe that the Cold War ran hot outside Europe. Orwell himself imagined the fighting taking place within a “rough quadrilateral” whose “vague frontiers” stretched from Southeast Asia to North Africa. But what’s so valuable about Chamberlin’s book is that it draws the separate wars together into one intelligent, crisply written narrative. Doing so drives home just how relentlessly murderous the Cold War was. It also allows Chamberlin to make an important and novel argument about where the killings took place. It wasn’t just outside Europe in general; it was in Asia, particularly in the lethal crescent extending down from Lebanon to Southeast Asia and up to Korea. That zone—the Cold War’s “bloodlands,” as Chamberlin calls it—accounted for 95 percent of Soviet military deaths and 99.9 percent of US military deaths during the Cold War. Seven out of 10 people who died in violent conflicts between 1945 and 1990 died there.

Why so much killing in Asia? The Second World War transformed the region, distributing arms widely and leaving a huge power vacuum in the wake of the Japanese empire’s fall—compounded soon after by the collapse of European empires. In addition, Chamberlin stresses the importance of the Chinese Revolution, which sent “shock waves” throughout a region already teetering on the brink, inspiring revolutionaries and terrifying their opponents. Peasants fought landlords, imperial collaborators fought nationalists, and ethnic groups fought one another. “From one end of the vast continent to the other,” wrote a journalist in Asia, “it has seldom been possible since Japan’s collapse to escape the sound of continuing gunfire.”

Asia’s wars had a way of sucking the superpowers in. And the superpowers, once in, had a way of making those wars worse. That dynamic was already in place during China’s civil war, when Washington fed arms to Chiang Kai-shek’s government and the Soviets, after initially cooperating with Chiang, tipped the advantage to Mao in Manchuria during their departure. The costs of a superpower-fueled conflict became even more evident in 1950, with the start of the Korean War.

That war began as a civil war, sparked and ignited by Korean leaders rather than by their backers in Washington, Moscow, or Beijing. Koreans were already fighting each other as early as 1948, when the government response to a leftist revolt on the South Korean island of Jeju left tens of thousands dead on both sides and triggered rebellions in two other cities that killed thousands more. But in 1950, the North Korean People’s Army, crossing into South Korean territory, turned isolated insurrections into an all-out invasion. Stalin and Mao had warily signed off on it, but the initiative had been entirely that of the North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung. South Korea, for its part, managed to summon in the United States.

What followed was unspeakably bloody. When Kim’s troops approached Seoul, South Korean authorities executed more than 100,000 political prisoners so they wouldn’t join the invasion. North Korean
Give a gift of The Nation.

Save up to 83% off the cover price

All gifts only $34

The Nation—the magazine that can’t be bought—makes a great gift.

Order today!

To order, please use enclosed cards or visit thenation.com/2018HolidayNS

For gifts outside the US: Canada, add $26. All other overseas orders, add $59 (for airmail delivery). Payable in advance. US funds only. Checks payable to The Nation. Savings based on $5.99 cover price. The Nation publishes 34 issues a year. The number of issues per month varies.
forces, meanwhile, massacred those suspected of sympathizing with the South. Millions of civilians fled from the front lines, rightly fearing the mass killings that occurred whenever any ground changed hands. But flight was no guarantee of safety: Near the village of No Gun Ri, US troops mowed down hundreds of refugees—a three-day slaughter of civilians that left perhaps 400 dead. South Koreans have since reported to their government more than 200 other episodes in which US forces attacked unarmed civilians.

The atrocity-prone ground war was matched by a brutal air war. With little aerial opposition, US and allied planes had control of the skies, which they used to “rain munitions down upon North Korean forces, railways, river dams, and population centers for the three years the war lasted,” Chamberlin writes. The planes dropped conventional bombs and napalm liberally and comprehensively. They “eventually burned down every town in North Korea,” wrote US Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, “and some in South Korea, too.” Chamberlin observes. That was about 10 percent of Korea’s population.

From a military perspective, the Korean War accomplished little: It ended in a stalemate, with the North and South divided by roughly the same border as before. Yet from a humanitarian perspective, it was catastrophic. The three years of war killed more than 3 million people, “many of them civilians massacred in successive waves of political repression,” Chamberlin observes. That was about 10 percent of Korea’s population.

The Korean War was the last great-power war that history has seen, pitting as it did the United States against China in direct conflict. Yet this did not mean the end of war in general. Rather, it meant a redistribution of violence, so that the great powers saw proportionately less of it and the weaker states proportionately more. Long after the Korean War, conflagrations of killing continued to burn throughout Asia.

Some of these we still know too little about. In 1965, the left-leaning president of Indonesia, Sukarno, lost power in a half-coup. Who started it and who supported it remain mysterious to historians. But what is clear is that the political crisis touched off a state-supported massacre of suspected communists. Sometimes, government forces did the killing; at other times, it was youth groups, Muslim organizations, or simply the victims’ neighbors. They killed with knives, bamboo spears, and farm implements, and simply left the bodies to rot. Like the Korean War, this was a civil conflict, but one that Chamberlin shows dramatically worsened when the superpowers got involved. “We should get across that Indonesia and Army have real friends who are ready to help,” cabled Secretary of State Dean Rusk to the US embassy in Jakarta. That help came in the form of covert military aid. A political officer in the embassy, Robert Martens, also sent along lists of thousands of purported communists, whom the killers then targeted. “They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that’s not all bad,” Martens reflected. “There’s a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment.”
This view was shared by the Soviet Union, which also sent weapons to Indonesia. Arm- ing a government as it slaughtered commu-
nists might seem a counterintuitive approach for Moscow, but the Kremlin proved to be less interested in ideology than in gaining a strategic advantage in the region. It was eager to bolster its relationship with the ascendant Indonesian military, and it feared losing ground to China.

The commander of the Indonesian govern-
ment's forces claimed that 3 million peo-
ple had been killed on his watch. Scholars,
more conservatively but still alarmingly,
usually report half a million killings, which is the figure that Chamberlin prefers. Either way, and with both superpowers pitching in, the killing was extensive.

W hat strikes the reader again and again in Chamberlin's bleak ac-
count is how blithe the super-
powers were about the costs of
their global confrontation. Orwell predicted that the carnage would impinge
only slightly on the mind of the “average
man,” and he was largely right when it
came to the West. That the United States
was fighting in Korea was no secret, but the atrocities its side committed there were, as the historian Bruce Cumings has shown, “suppressed, buried and forgotten.” The Indonesian massacres were, to the US public, even more obscure.

There was one case, though, where the
facts pierced through the West's moral
haze. That was the Vietnam War, in which
more than 2.5 million US service members
fought. Boots on the ground eventually gave rise to stories in the press, and for the first time, the horrors visited upon Asia by the Cold War superpowers—and by the United States in particular—became a matter of
public scrutiny. “It's time to talk of the Viet-
nam casualties nobody dares talk about: the wounded boys and girls,” reporter Martha
Gellhorn wrote in 1967 in Ladies' Home Journ-
al (after other magazines declined to publish her account). Gellhorn was speak-
ing, in particular, of the wounds inflicted
by napalm.

Napalm was not new: The United States
had used it copiously in firebombing Japan
and had dropped 32,557 tons of it on
Korea. Yet, finally, US readers were grasp-
ing the human implications of this. The
same month that Gellhorn's story broke,
magazines as disparate as Redbook and Ram-
parts ran their own napalm exposés, the
latter with 15 pages of photos.

Martin Luther King Jr. bought the Ram-
parts issue in an airport, and when he opened
to the photo spread, he was appalled. It was,
for King, a wrenching moment of clarity. In
a blisterring sermon delivered three months
later at New York's Riverside Church, he
declared that it was time to “break the si-
ence,” not only about Vietnam but about
US foreign policy in general. “The greatest
purveyor of violence in the world today,”
King announced, turned out to be “my
own government.” Intent on securing stable
investments abroad, Washington had pos-
tioned itself on the international stage as
the defender of the world's wealthy, thereby
creating “a hell for the poor.” It was a “hor-
rible, clumsy, and deadly game we have
decided to play,” and it may have “killed a million” Vietnamese already. The victims,
King added, were “mostly children.”

This was a dangerous sermon, one
that King's advisers initially counseled
him against giving. Life magazine opined
that King had gone “beyond his personal
right to dissent.” But as further revelations
from Southeast Asia tumbled out, King
increasingly looked clear-sighted. Most
harrowing was the My Lai massacre, the
notorious 1968 mass killing by
US troops that left hundreds
of unarmed Vietnamese
civilians dead, including
women and children.

Chamberlin offers a
detailed account of the
massacre, but he also
warns against focusing
on it too much. My Lai
wasn't an aberration, a
brutal and unfortunate
excess—it was, he argues,
a fairly normal occurrence.

It was far from the only such
massacre in the Vietnam War, and the
killing of civilians was incessant throughout
the larger Cold War. Taking the My Lai
massacre (in which, he conservatively esti-
mates, 400 people were killed) as his unit of
measurement, Chamberlin grimly calculates
that “in raw numerical terms,” the Cold War
amounted to “more than three My Lai mas-
sacres every day for forty-five years.”

T he Vietnam War threw the United
States into crisis. Yet though it left
US leaders nervous about commit-
ting troops to future wars, it did not
wean them away from the Cold War
entirely, so long as that war could be con-
tained within Orwell's quadrilateral
and Latin America. Just as the Nixon adminis-
tration was searching for a way out of Viet-
nam, Chamberlin notes, it was funneling aid
to Pakistan, which was then in the process
of massacring Hindus especially and Ben-
galis more generally in what was then East
Pakistan. This was, reported the horrified
US consulate in Dhaka, a “reign of terror,”
for which “unfortunately the overworked
term genocide is applicable.” Yet Pakistan
was a valuable Cold War ally, integral to
Nixon's attempt to wrong-foot Moscow by
befriending Beijing (which was also arming
Pakistan). And so he continued to send mili-
itary aid as hundreds of thousands of civil-
ians—perhaps a million—were slaughtered.

Elsewhere, the US government carried
out the killing itself. While Washington aban-
donied its war in Vietnam, it escalated the one
in Cambodia. Not only did the United States
aid the anticommunist regime there (which,
like Pakistan, was in the process of massacring
its own subjects); it also dropped three
times the tonnage of bombs on Cambodia that it
had dropped on Japan in the Second World
War. To no one's surprise, this violence trig-
ered a rebellion and a coup. The new regime,
the communist Khmer Rouge, emptied the
cities and killed nearly a quarter of Cambo-
dia's population.

Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge was the Cold War's
“darkest chapter,” Chamberlin writes. But it was
also, he suggests, the most illuminating as to
the war's true colors. In his view, the best em-
blem of the Cold War is not the menacing yet
ultimately peaceful Berlin Wall, but the killing field.

Though that term is often used
metaphorically, here it has a literal
meaning: The Khmer Rouge executed
so many people at Tuol Sleng, its prison in
Phnom Penh, that it ran out of room for the
bodies. The authorities thus prepared a plot
of land outside the city for executions. Under
electric lights, prisoners would kneel, hands
tied, in front of shallow ditches. There, they
would take in their final moments before
being beaten on the neck with iron ox-cart
axles and tumbling into the earth.

As usual, few in Washington cared. From
the White House's perspective, the Khmer Rouge,
though the epitome of a totalitarian
communist regime, was also a counterforce
to Vietnam and thus a potential ally. “Tell
the Cambodians that we will be friends with
them,” Henry Kissinger instructed Thai-
land's foreign minister. “They are murderous
thugs, but we won’t let that stand in our way.”
The Microscopes

Heavy and expensive, hard and black
With bits of chrome, they looked
Like baby cannons, the real children of war, and I
Hated them for that, for what our teacher said
They could do, and then I hated them
For what they did when we gave up
Stealing looks at one another’s bodies
To press a left or right eye into the barrel and see
Our actual selves taken down to a cell
Then blown back up again, every atomic thing
About a piece of my coiled hair on one slide
Just as unimportant as anyone else’s
Growing in that science
Class where I learned what little difference
God saw if God saw me. It was the start of one fear,
A puny one not much worth mentioning,
Narrow as the pencil tucked behind my ear, lost
When I reached for it
To stab someone I secretly loved: a bigger boy
Who’d advance
Through those tight, locker-lined corridors shoving
Without saying
Excuse me, more an insult than a battle. No large loss.
Not at all. Nothing necessary to study
Or recall. No fighting in the hall
On the way to an American history exam
I almost passed. Redcoats.
Red blood cells. Red-bricked
Education I rode the bus to get. I can’t remember
The exact date or
Grade, but I know when I began ignoring slight alarms
That move others to charge or retreat. I’m a kind
Of camouflage. I never let on when scared
Of conflicts so old they seem to amount
To nothing really—dust particles left behind—
Like the viral geography of an occupied territory,
A region I imagine you imagine when you see
A white woman walking with a speck like me.

JERICHO BROWN

Kissinger’s tolerance of the Khmer Rouge—one shared by Jimmy Carter’s national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski—encapsulates the deep cynicism of the late Cold War. A conflict that had started as a rivalry between clashing ideologies had become by the 1970s a grim contest of wills, in which concepts like democracy and communism meant close to nothing. Vietnam invaded Cambodia, China invaded Vietnam, the Soviet Union armed Saddam Hussein as he quashed Iraq’s communists, and the United States funded Islamist guerrillas in Afghanistan.

A notable peak in this mountain range of realpolitik, Chamberlin shows, was the war between Iran and Iraq that extended through most of the 1980s. The Reagan administration supplied arms to both sides. (“It’s a pity they can’t both lose!” Kissinger is said to have mused.) Moscow, for its part, carefully calibrated its aid to Iraq—enough to keep the country fighting, but not enough for victory. The eight-year war ended in a stalemate. And, Chamberlin notes, it left 680,000 people dead.

Gaddis has, in his writings, expressed a grudging respect for the ideological flexibility and “moral anesthesia” of the superpowers, which ultimately helped them to accommodate each other. Ronald Reagan, in the end, didn’t seek to eradicate the Soviet Union but to befriend Mikhail Gorbachev. “There is good chemistry between us,” the president told reporters, and he threw his arm around Gorbachev in Moscow’s Red Square. This is how the Cold War ended: not in a cataclysm, as most great-power rivalries do, but by a gentle melting away.

Things undeniably could have been worse. “The world, I am quite sure, is a better place for that conflict having been fought in the way that it was,” Gaddis wrote. Yet with Chamberlin’s book in hand, one hesitates at that statement. The lack of direct military confrontation between the superpowers made nuclear Armageddon less likely, but it also insulated them from the horrendous costs of their conflict, most of which took place elsewhere. From positions of relative safety, they unleashed violence that arced like a scythe through Asia. Well past the point when the Cold War meant much ideologically, they kept it going.

The 45 years of peace between the Cold War’s superpowers that Gaddis praised were also 45 years of killing for much of the rest of the world—killing that subsided considerably after 1991. The Cold War never became the nightmare that it could have been. But it was, in the killing fields, its own kind of hell.
The video opens with a young man named Taylor introducing himself. He is sitting in a room with posters of video games papering the walls. A stuffed Pikachu doll is nestled in a corner next to his desk. Usually, Taylor reviews games on his YouTube channel, but today he has a different topic: “My Experience Working at Amazon || Week 1,” reads the title.

After describing the hiring process, Taylor turns to the particular characteristics of the job:

You’re not allowed to bring your phone into the facility because they’re afraid of stealing. You’re also not allowed to bring electronics, so you can’t listen to music—apparently, it’s a safety hazard. You also can’t sit on the floor while you’re stowing stuff away. There are shelves that are very low...and bending down to put items in the lower bins is very strenuous on my knees and on my back.... They’re supposed to have kneepads for us eventually, so that’ll be nice—to be able to not screw up my knees. Kneeling down on concrete is not good for your knees. Not being able to listen to music is a big issue for me. You’re mostly working alone for 10 hours.... It’s very monotonous, it’s very repetitive—it’s a little bit soul-crushing.

By the end of the 22-minute video, Taylor is visibly distressed. Though he speaks optimistically of his desire to become a trainer at the warehouse, he keeps returning to the mental strain of the work: “It’s just very repetitive, OK?... There’s nothing to keep my mind occupied, and it causes me to sort of go insane after 10 hours doing the same thing over and over and over again.... This job is the most mindless work you can possibly imagine.” It’s no surprise that the title of his next video, dated a little more than a month later, begins: “Why I left Amazon.”

Taylor’s video went viral and now has over 210,000 views. But it’s not uncommon on YouTube: The Amazon warehouse job is a popular genre. A person—or sometimes two—sits in front of the camera and discusses sore feet, aching backs, early mornings, or long overnight shifts. These people are, in the company’s terminology, “packers,” “stowers,” “problem solvers.” Watch enough of the videos and the accounts blend together. Many of these workers film them within the first week of the job, and there are many follow-up videos announcing their departure.

On one level, Heike Geissler’s Seasonal Associate is another of these, albeit in print: It is Geissler’s first-person account, originally scribbled on Post-it notes, of her time as a temporary worker at an Amazon fulfillment center in Leipzig, Germany. In the language of Amazon, she was a “seasonal associate,” one of those hired by the thousands to work during the extra-busy holiday season. But her book—the first two chapters of which were initially published in n+1—is much more than that, offering a portrait of self-estrangement, instability, and loneliness on the modern-day assembly line.

In some ways, Geissler is an atypical Amazon warehouse worker, at least culturally; she’s an accomplished writer in her native Germany. And yet, in the most important way, she is exactly like every other Amazon warehouse worker: After years of living hand-to-mouth on freelancer checks and translator assignments, and with children to raise, she was forced to take the job because she needed the money.

The focus on this tension—the clash between a worker’s individuality and the brute facts of life in the warehouse—is what drives the book. While several journalists have gone undercover at the e-commerce giant’s warehouses to expose its labor practices, Geissler’s account is about a person just trying to make ends meet. Seasonal Associate is also far more literary in style, as she turns to the likes of Gertrude Stein, Emil Cioran, and Mónica de la Torre to make sense of the tedium.

Katy Derbyshire, the book’s translator, notes that Geissler first sought to publish the book as a more straightforward journalistic account of conditions at the warehouse, but the fact that she ended up putting more of herself into the story helps to capture one of the central facets of working for Amazon. As with the other accounts, Geissler exposes many of the horrors of the job, but what her
What the Parrot Said

My friend tells me his uncle the sailor died
and left him a parrot that nobody else would take
because the bird was so profane, and not long after,
my friend threw a party at his house, and the parrot
was in a cage in the kitchen, and I must have walked
by him a dozen times to get a beer, fetch ice, use
the rest room, and the parrot was silent the whole time,
and finally almost everyone had gone home,
so I went back in to get a broom and help clean up,
and I stopped in the kitchen and looked
at the parrot for a good long minute, and finally
he took a couple of those little childlike steps
parrots take when they’re sidling down that bar
they all perch on, and when he got close
to the bars of the cage, he tilted his head and leaned
toward me and said, “Fuck a duck.” I wonder
what he meant by that. Okay, he was a bird,
and a duck is another, but why would a duck
appear attractive to a parrot? Another way
to look at it is, why would a parrot think a duck
would appeal to me? That’s beyond my understanding
of interspecies romance. Experts say parrots
don’t really talk the way we do, that they simply
mimic their owners so they’ll be accepted.
But if that’s so, why wasn’t this parrot more chatty?
No, I think he was just in love with the beauty
of the language: the clipped Anglo-Saxon
monosyllables, the plosive k-sounds of both
the f- and the d-word, the rhyme. Good bird.

DAVID KIRBY

book reveals, above all else, is how working in
a place like Amazon erodes one’s sense of self.

From the start, Geissler highlights this
erosion, switching between the first and
second person—a means of distancing
herself from the events she chronicles.
Although the self she describes is, in
fact, her, it is also not, in the sense that, as
a seasonal associate—a single temp worker
subject to the immense power of a global
corporation—Heike Geissler ceases to exist.
As she writes in the book’s opening pages,
“[You’ll] realize that your trouble and suf-
fering are by no means specific to you, but
astonishingly generic. Yes, you are generic.”

Unable to process this experience at first,
Geissler responds to it by initially distancing
herself from her waged work: references to
playing a part, to her uniform as a disguise,
and to the job as a “field trip” abound. But
under the grinding pressure of the work, it
becomes harder for Geissler to keep up the
act. Eventually, while sorting books, she en-
counters one by a man she knows, “formerly
a good friend of mine.” There, surrounded by
crates of anonymous goods shipped by anony-
mous employees, she can no longer maintain
the farce. “It was as if I were the chambermaid
and he were the guest,” she observes. “It was
as if we were showing our true faces.”

The relentless weight of ruthlessly mea-
sured time also begins to take its toll. When
she first accepts the job, Geissler reassures
herself that she is merely a journalist at work,
“a book person…perfectly within your rights
to be interested in the company for research
purposes.” But just a few pages later, she
knows better: “You’re at their disposal from
the very beginning. You’re an item on a list.”
Although she seems to believe at times that
she or other people like her—the educated,
the literary, the culturally bourgeois—are
the only ones resistant to such a reduction of
individuality, more often she recognizes that
the imposition of such demeaning work is
“essentially rotten,” something against whose
effects no one can be immune. “It’s almost
impossible not to be forced to your knees and
into defiance by this job,” she writes.

Yet while Amazon may be new, the prob-
lem is centuries old. Marx termed this vio-
lence “alienation,” or “self-estrangement.”
It was a condition inherent in commodity
production, whereby “the worker becomes an
ever-cheaper commodity the more commodi-
ties he creates.” As Geissler puts it, it is “work
that leaves no space to be human.”

While many on the left have long discussed
the loss that comes with alienating people
from their labor, Geissler offers a detailed
description of the alienation from the self that accompanies it. No longer free to live according to her preferred rhythms, she begins to eat faster, to walk faster, and to push and shove her colleagues as they rush to leave the warehouse. She counts the days until her contract’s expiration date: Christmas Eve. “It’s all about sheer endurance, about presence, about translating your time and energy into money,” she writes. And yet, though she’s only a seasonal associate, she quickly comes to feel that the end of her daily grind is “nonexistent”: “Work simply alters its own physical state, going from a solid to a gas and entering your body through your nose after the actual end of the work, circulating inside you.”

Reduced to a state of exhaustion, Geissler knows that the company sees her and her co-workers as temporary alternatives to robots, “nothing but a placeholder for machines that have already been invented but aren’t yet profitable enough to permanently replace you and your workmates, who are very low-cost.” Their minds become “counting machines”; their hands, covered in Band-Aids, exist only to sort products. “You’re a tool gifted with a voice no one wants to hear,” she writes. Later, as she breaks under the strains of her job, the formulation changes: “You’re not even a tool with a voice [anymore].”

Geissler also helps us keep track of how this process takes place. The account of her (unpaid, of course) training day, led by an American MBA named Robert—“a man who has exercised his body into a state of squat firmness”—is particularly sadistic, and no less so for the mundane with which the job information is delivered. Robert begins by telling the assembled new hires, “Anyone who doesn’t stick to the rules has to do push-ups.” He repeats this whenever any of them is too slow to respond to a question. The assembled new employees laugh, but it doesn’t feel like a joke. After all, despite the professed “horizontalism” of the company, Robert is Amazon—at one point, he stands in front of the projector, and a “projection of the Amazon home page [lands] across his face, stretching down to the middle of his stomach.”

As Robert and his assistant, Sandy, go over the safety practices standardized across the company’s many warehouses, their effect is chillingly robotic. “A picture of a bleeding hand comes up,” Geissler writes. “This doesn’t look good, says Sandy, not turning round to the screen. This is an employee’s hand…. There was a lot of screaming.” Sandy follows the presentation with an astonishingly cold statement, a reflection of the company’s long-standing attempts to make its employees identify with it rather than each other: “Sick days harm Amazon.”

Geissler’s co-workers are constantly working while sick, pushed by economic necessity, the desire to become a “permanent” or year-round Amazonian, or, possibly—it’s unclear if the Leipzig warehouse she worked at operated under such a system—the company’s practice of docking workers for sick days under its points system, which can lead to their being fired. Sexual harassment is rampant: Male managers stand too close to Geissler, tell her to smile, and make suggestive comments. Phones are banned from the warehouse floor, with personal belongings relegated to a bin. Managers speak to the workers as though they were children; the constant condescension gnaws at Geissler’s sense of self, reminding her of how she speaks to her own children at home. All of this combines to create people without a sense of power or agency, so deeply affected by their work environment that they lose hope.

This constant self-denial, as well as the denial from above, leads Geissler to a pessimistic view of the possibilities for resistance. Though she sometimes daydreams about her co-workers banding together in protest and other times becomes quietly furious at the everyday indignities of the job, it never leads to collective action. The faceless immensity of Amazon leaves her with no one who might listen to her complaints; and, after all, she thinks, she and her co-workers would be quickly replaced should they go off script, their actions reduced to “a single sentence on the company website: Due to poor weather conditions, we currently anticipate delivery delays of up to three days. We apologize for any inconvenience.” And with the work so tiring that even the cries of her children can’t tear her away from the need to sleep, how, exactly, is she supposed to resist?

Geissler quotes the German philosopher Byung-Chul Han: “There’s no way to form a revolutionary mass out of exhausted, depressed, isolated individuals.” But while it’s true that the mechanization, surveillance, and sheer exhausting physicality of the job make organizing incredibly difficult, Amazon’s warehouse workers have fought back, and continue to do so—including going on strike at the Leipzig warehouse years after Geissler left. (She returns to visit the picket line.)

Geissler was a seasonal associate in 2010, but the release of this translation couldn’t come at a better time: In 2018, Amazon workers went on strike in multiple countries. During the most recent Prime Day, a “holiday” during which Amazon offers discounts
Vince Staples isn’t disturbed by dissonance: The California rapper’s music—stark, biting, and oblique—reveals in knotted tensions that defy easy resolution. His world is one of white fans dancing to black death, of relationships crumbling into oblivion, of shootouts killing both enemies and friends—and it all feels natural. Staples’s ability to evoke these contrasts and then slash through them is unmatched, in rap and beyond. He’s a master at drawing listeners close, only to explode that proximity.

FM!, his latest album, extends that tradition, using a radio station to amplify the signal. The record features some of his most accessible songs to date, and in typical Vince Staples fashion, stings as much as it slaps.

On his debut album, Summertime ’06, Staples rapped, “We love our neighborhood / So all my brothers bang the ‘hood.”

Stephen Kearse is a freelance writer and critic. He has previously contributed to The Baffler, Pitchfork, The Ringer, Hazlitt, and The New York Times Magazine.
The line hints at the community pride and camaraderie that undergirded gang life in his hometown of Long Beach, California. On FM!, the popular radio show Big Boy’s Neighborhood, broadcast locally on the “Real 92.3” FM, loves him back. Introduced by the actual Big Boy, the album’s fictional Neighborhood episode places Staples in heavy rotation. Joined by a bevy of his fellow West Coast artists, who appear for features, bumps, and song snippets, Staples comes across as a local star. This backdrop is a cheeky allusion to his low profile within his home state, and the way that terrestrial radio can elevate local artists regardless of their real stature. His homeland only loves him in his dreams.

Playing up this California love, Staples’s aesthetic here is strictly West Coast. It’s a bit of an inside joke: Despite being a respected member of LA’s hip-hop community, his music has typically held the West Coast rap canon at a remove; stylistically, Staples’s first home is the Internet. The punch line of this unexpected homecoming on FM! is that it’s a fantastic match. Staples’s winding flows and übernasal timbre are suited perfectly for the groove and thud of classic West Coast styles like hyphy and Mustardwave. Producers Kenny Beats and Hagler evoke all this history expertly, providing Staples with bold, twitchy compositions that pound and sway and bounces. Breezier than the jolly rave hops of his last album, Big Fish Theory, these beats are designed to be heard in compact but open spaces, such as a swap-meet stall or a car with the windows down.

What makes FM! more than pastiche is that, for Staples, fun is never pure. He relishes any opportunity to inject gravity into the expected levity of entertainment. His party jams incorporate death, loss, and snide references to Beverly Hills Cop and The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. On “Outside,” he raps, “At my Uncle Phil’s house with the MAC-10,” evoking both black wealth and menace. “Relay” features the eerily catchy ditty “Fed chirp on scanner / Got blurp with the hammer,” which depicts police surveillance as a fun game of cat-and-mouse. It’s startling how thrilled Staples sounds.

Although it’s easy to perceive these contrasts as sarcasm or trolling, there’s a consistent current of transparency to FM! amid all the bedlam and discord, a quiet pride shines through. When Staples chants, “I always been famous where I’m from,” on “Run the Bands”—an allusion to his days as a Crip—he’s being both glowering and forthright. His formative experiences are the foreground of his music, even as he’s “made it” to the radio. His rapping, too, embodies that pride. Over the years, his voice has become an all-purpose tool that can stretch and bend and pierce. On “FUN!” alone, he uses it to wildly different ends, affecting a cool deadpan in the first verse (“My black is beautiful but I will shoot at you, dawg”) and a cartoonish yap in the second (“Miss with the glitz and the glam / Fried catfish at the Ritz in Japan”). At all times, he is who he is and who he has become.

Above all, FM! is a story of accumulation. As Staples’s profile has risen and he’s journeyed from being a local gangbanger to a global artist, he’s never forgotten his arc. The distance between his grim beginnings and his unlikely ascent continues to grow, but so does his ability to shrink it.
**Puzzle No. 3486**

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

**ACROSS**

1 Different tactic ultimately executed (7)
5 Holiday tradition—for example, turning instrument over (6)
8 Broken-down car belonging to no traffic cop? (5)
9 Relating distorted figure from 3 (8)
11 Mail recipient reads letters, often more than once (9)
12 Retired TV host has internalized “Start to talk slowly” (5)
13 Major highway buries museum in London (10)
16 Oddly, put aside shell shock (4)
18 Car seat contents! (4)
19 Some celebrities refuse to be bound by independent label in comeback (10)
23 Former Washington newspaper docked former baseball team (5)
24 Heavens! Conclusion of *Hamlet* involves play on words that is most courageous (9)
26 Ornamental decoration resembling a white powder? (8)
27 Buffalo Bill dropping lines with a boy (5)
28 Like a weight lifter, Roosevelt breaks into song (6)

**DOWN**

1 Polluted and foul 10 (12)
2 Ran two by two, with a late start (5)
3 After removing nitrogen from biological blueprint, try some math (8)
4 Organized information with prosecutor to shock court at last (4,3)
5 Famous rapper’s abridged New Testament (7)
6 Awkward mob at large gym (6)
7 Love beginning to overcome desire before giving a new order to eat and drink (6,3)
10 Do not enter 1D under the influence (2,10)
14 Aviator’s toilets malfunctioned when clogged with toilet paper (4,5)
15 Environmentalist harbors draft resister (3)
17 Hold up a book, mostly for baby’s entertainment (8)
20 Tilting component of a directory (7)
21 Minor improvement that hurts parts placed the wrong way round (5-2)
22 Phony post office pockets a raise in what members pay (6)
25 Overseas yachtman assuming course with predictable outcome (4,1)

---

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3485**

ACROSS

1 Die off
2 Bass + D + Rum
3 Cent + Ra (Lamé) + I Can
4 Rises 12 D + Ragout
5 Neel’s = Dover + L. 15 anag.
6 Rev. 20 Lab oratory
7 Skim + Ask 24 rev. hidden
8 “The right” + Of (Spring)
9 Post + “Lewd”
10 Argyle (early anag.)

DOWN

1 Doc (Turn) in (Proclam mig.)
2 Aug. 3 F + I Beside
3 Arm + A Dill + O 6 anag.
4 Bac + Co + On (rev.) B Mon(ete
5 Hidden “Week blank”
6 Rev. + Yp (L) = Ague
7 Rag (rev.) + Pi + Per 19 Ici + Nees
8 Easterly 22 Fa + CIA (rev.)
9 Setup (UPS anag.) 24 SI (rev.) + FT

**Note:** The Nation is published 34 times a year (four issues in March, April, and October; three issues in January, February, July, and November; and two issues in May, June, August, September, and December) by The Nation Company, LLC © 2019 in the USA by The Nation Company, LLC, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018; (212) 209-5440. Washington Bureau: Suite 108, 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address, and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 8505, Big Sandy, TX 75755; or call 1-800-333-8536. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleichroeder International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No. 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow four to six weeks for receipt of first issue and for all subscription transactions. Basic annual subscription price: $69 for one year. Back issues, $6 prepaid ($8 foreign) from: The Nation, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018. If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Alliance for Audited Media. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 8505, Big Sandy, TX 75755. Printed in the USA.
TAKE A KNEE
WITH THE NATION

Made in the USA
50% polyester, 50% combed ringspun cotton
T-shirt illustration by Eric Drooker

Order online at shop.thenation.com or call (844) 549-5528.
A penny saved is a penny at work
Together we can make a difference. Every small action creates a reaction. Put your money to work with a mutual fund that cares about people, planet and profit.

Invest in the
Domini Impact Equity Fund™

Domini®
Investing for Good®
domini.com
1-800-762-6814

Before investing, consider the Fund’s investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses. Contact us for a prospectus containing this information. Read it carefully. The Domini Funds are not insured and are subject to market, market segment, style and foreign investing risks. You may lose money. DSI/L Investment Services LLC, Distributor. 11/18