What All Parents Can Learn From Black Mothers

For black women like me, motherhood is inescapably political.

Dani McClain
What About the Marshall Court?
Re Karen J. Greenberg’s “Political Scripture” [Feb. 25/March 4]: It strikes me as surprising that Professor Greenberg makes no mention of the role of the “founding era” Supreme Court in answering the questions that Jonathan Gienapp’s book, The Second Creation, raises—that is, what kind of instrument was the Constitution, and how was it to be interpreted?

Chief Justice John Marshall was certainly active in the founding era. He famously used both “excavation” and “invention,” as well as several other, often weightier interpretive strategies, in deciding the leading cases of that era. Marshall regularly interpreted the Constitution only after considering, among other factors, the inherent ambiguity of language, the dictionary meaning of the text, contemporary economic realities, and the nature of a constitution itself. Ultimately, he concluded that the Constitution was a living document.

Having taught constitutional law for 40 years, I find it difficult to agree with either the interpretive understanding of Gienapp himself or the seeming ready acceptance of such an understanding by the reviewer. Be that as it may, it is difficult to imagine Chief Justice Marshall, with his multi-factor interpretive approach, ever joining an “originalist” opinion by Justice Antonin Scalia.

Chief Justice Marshall was certainly active in the founding era. He famously used both “excavation” and “invention,” as well as several other, often weightier interpretive strategies, in deciding the leading cases of that era. Marshall regularly interpreted the Constitution only after considering, among other factors, the inherent ambiguity of language, the dictionary meaning of the text, contemporary economic realities, and the nature of a constitution itself. Ultimately, he concluded that the Constitution was a living document.

Debating the Need for Debate
Re “Calling Out the Israel Lobby” by Phyllis Bennis [April 1]: For me, there’s a bright-line test: Elected officials should support the existence of Israel and work for a just peace on that basis (which, by the way, has always been Bernie Sanders’s position). That, however, is not my main criticism of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. Through her tactless, poorly worded comments, Omar has opened up a breach among progressive Democrats that didn’t need to be opened. That is a gift to Trump that he has already taken advantage of.

Caleb Melamed

Perhaps when Israel stops throwing up its hands and saying, “We can’t stop it” (referring to its land grabs and continued settlement of Palestinian-owned land), we’ll begin to see some semblance of responsibility and ethics within Israel’s borders. After all, $3.8 billion is a lot of money for us to be giving every year to a country that shows so little regard for basic human rights. By all means, let’s open up this breach.

Eugene Barnes

The White Supremacists Around Us
Re Laila Lalami’s “The Man With the SS Tattoo” [April 1]: And then there are the purportedly “fine people” who support President Trump and his policies—40-plus percent at last count. We don’t classify them as “extremist.” The president himself may not be considered mainstream, but his pronouncements on race, religion, and ethnic background are approved by an alarming number of people who don’t bear the trappings of white supremacy. Perhaps this is the reason there’s no will to combat domestic terrorism, even as some push for a southern border wall. A chance encounter with a white supremacist, though chilling, is every bit as nauseating as the “fine people” in our midst everyday.

J. McCormick

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The Mueller Report

After 22 months of painstaking inquiry, the investigation headed by special counsel Robert Mueller is finally over. The key finding was instant headline news on the day that it was announced: Mueller found no evidence that Donald Trump or his subordinates conspired with the Russian government to steal the 2016 election. Critics of the president should not try to relitigate that aspect of Mueller’s findings or imagine that he somehow missed or misinterpreted details about Russian interference.

Not settled, however, is the question of whether the president engaged in obstruction of justice. As Attorney General William Barr noted in his four-page summation of Mueller’s inquiry, “the report sets out evidence on both sides of the question and leaves unresolved what the Special Counsel views as ‘difficult issues’ of law and fact concerning whether the President’s actions and intent could be viewed as obstruction. The Special Counsel’s report states that ‘while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him.’”

Neither Congress nor the rest of us should accept Barr’s rushed and unwarranted conclusion that Trump did not commit obstruction; it is not for the attorney general but rather the American people, through their elected officials in Congress, to decide such weighty questions about the highest office in the land. For this and other reasons, Congress must insist on a speedy release of the full Mueller report.

Mueller’s conclusions—as well as the indictments and convictions resulting from his inquiry—should spur both Democrats and the media to focus on the full scope of Trump’s misrule and the predators’ ball that he hosts in the nation's capital. The special counsel’s investigation has exposed the ugly intersection of presidential campaigns, campaign-finance laws, and lobbying. Congressional Democrats should rigorously address the existing laws and regulations regarding these issues, as well as the vulnerabilities of a US election system that is neither coherent nor secure from malign interference, foreign or domestic.

Congress should continue to pursue all avenues opened up by Mueller’s team. Those highlighted in the recent congressional testimony by former Trump attorney Michael Cohen, for example, implicated the president and the Trump Organization in various crimes, from campaign-finance felonies to tax fraud, bank fraud, insurance fraud, and money laundering. An obsessive focus by many in the media, and some in Congress, on the claim that Trump conspired with Russia has often obscured these other avenues of inquiry. Indeed, while we’re on the subject of accountability, we should insist on more of it from the journalists and pundits who, while understandably alarmed at Trump’s ethical violations and destructive policies, have often been too quick to accept rumor and unfounded allegation as fact in the Russiagate saga.

Mueller’s key findings should tamp down the fervor for impeachment. That question cannot be settled definitively until Congress examines his report. But even if Democratic leaders in the House decide there is strong evidence that the president committed obstruction, they must weigh that against the limited time available to pursue articles of impeachment, not to mention the near-certainty of failure for such an effort in the GOP-dominated Senate. It seems increasingly clear that the way we will rid ourselves of Trump is by defeating him at the ballot box in 2020. That requires both exposing his administration’s corruption and, even more important, laying out a bold alternative that will inspire the American people. Democrats are already debating parts of such a program; it includes a democracy-reform bill that Republicans are now blocking in the Senate, and the proposal for a Green New Deal co-sponsored by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey. The ethic of black motherhood.

The Mueller inquiry does not “take the president down,” as some of its most over-the-top advocates
had hoped. Nor does it exonerate him. What it should do is inspire us to get more serious, more engaged, and more focused on the genuine evidence of presidential wrongdoing that is already at hand—and to offer progressive ideas that will define the 2020 campaign and take back the White House.

RIP, Russiagate

Special counsel Robert Mueller’s findings should finally put to rest the “collusion” theory that has consumed the mainstream media and the political class for more than two years. The central question of Mueller's probe was whether there was any conspiracy between candidate Donald Trump and the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin to secure Trump’s election over Hillary Clinton in 2016. And after an exhaustive inquiry with sweeping investigative authority, Mueller has answered it: The special counsel’s office “did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities.”

The outcome is no surprise to those who scrutinized the facts as they emerged. Time and again, the available evidence undermined the case for such a conspiracy. None of the characters presented to us as Russian “agents” or “Trump-Kremlin intermediaries” were shown to be anything of the sort. None of the lies that Trump aides or allies were caught telling pointed us toward the collusion that members of the media and political figures insisted they were hiding. None of the various pillars of Russiagate—the June 2016 Trump Tower meeting, the fanciful assertions of the Steele dossier, the anonymously sourced media claims, such as Trump-campaign members having “repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials”—ever led us to damning evidence. And all of that is likely why Mueller never charged anyone with involvement in (or covering up) a Trump-Russia conspiracy.

A minimally responsible media and political class would have acknowledged this reality. Instead, leading voices from cable news, Congress, and other influential perches promoted Russiagate by ignoring the countervailing evidence and those who pointed it out. They filled in the evidentiary holes with supposition, innuendo, and outright falsehood. That helps to explain the sizable number of discredited or retracted media reports that advanced the notion of a Trump-Russia plot, culminating in the final collapse of that narrative.

The implosion of Russiagate is a humiliation for everyone who promoted it, but it need not be a defeat for the broader anti-Trump “resistance.” Throughout the Trump era, liberal attention and energy has been channeled into believing that the president was a traitor, or compromised by Putin, and that Mueller would uncover the smoking gun to prove it. With that narrative no longer sustainable, those organizing against Trump have the opportunity to create an opposition centered not on a spy-thriller plot, but instead on challenging the harmful policies that Russiagate overshadowed. The task will not be easy: As some of us progressive skeptics of Russiagate warned, the faith in this conspiracy theory not only sidelined the critiques of Trump’s actual policies, but would benefit him if it didn’t pan out. This is already happening. A senior White House official told The Washington Post of a “feeling of euphoria” throughout the administration over what the newspaper admitted was “an unmistakable political victory for Trump.” According to the Associated Press, Trump and his aides have developed an “expansive” plan “to turn the end of the probe into the launching pad for a new round of attacks on the president’s foes and a moment to reinvigorate his supporters in the run-up to the 2020 campaign.”

This massive gift to Trump should be grounds for a reckoning among those who presented it to him. Prominent media outlets that spun an outlandish tale of a compromised or even treasonous president should be held to account for the most catastrophic failure since the days when the media promoted the fiction of Saddam Hussein’s “weapons of mass destruction” as a justification for the Iraq War. Leading Democrats should explain how it is that their promises of “more than circumstantial evidence of collusion,” as Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA) put it, resulted in zero indictments on such charges when #MuellerTime ran out.

Top intelligence officials, both current and retired, also owe us an explanation: not just for their explosive statements—such as former CIA director John Brennan’s prediction earlier this month that a new round of conspiracy indictments would be coming—but for their investigatory decisions from the start. That includes relying on the Steele dossier to seek a surveillance warrant against former Trump-campaign adviser Carter Page, and to open a counterintelligence investigation on Trump himself, motivated in part by disagreement with his public embrace of Russia. Accountability on this front may well serve Trump’s self-promotional claims of a “witch hunt,” but it is vital that intelligence abuses be held to account as well, no matter the partisan consequences. A failure to do so could very well hurt progressives in the future, should overzealous intelligence officials put them in their sights.

A major part of that process should be the public release of the Mueller report and as much of the underlying evidence as possible, as Democrats rightfully demand. But that rallying cry should not be used as an opportunity to double down on the conspiracy theory that Mueller has rejected. There are already rumblings from Democrats and the media about a potential cover-up and unresolved questions about Trump and Russia that only further congresional inquiries can resolve. These same voices were the ones who implored us to put our faith in Mueller as his investigation unfolded. They should heed their own advice now that his investigation is complete.

Aaron Maté is a Brooklyn-based journalist and former host and producer for The Real News and Democracy Now!
Q&A

ALEXANDRIA VILLASEÑOR

Since mid-December, 13-year-old Alexandria Villaseñor has skipped school every Friday to protest outside the United Nations. Each week, she sits on the same bench with two cardboard signs: “School Strike 4 Climate” and “COP24 Failed Us” (the latter a reference to the UN’s 2018 climate-change conference in Poland). Not even the polar vortex could deter her—when the wind-chill temperatures fell below zero, Villaseñor continued her demonstration from the warmth of her sleeping bag.

Villaseñor was also a leader of the New York City climate strike—one of more than 2,000 demonstrations across some 120 countries that took place on March 15. Inspired by Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who began her #FridaysforFuture protest in front of the Swedish Parliament building last year, more than a million children and teens filled the streets, calling on adults to cut fossil-fuel emissions. While Villaseñor is often the only climate protester in front of the UN, she’s certainly not alone in her fight for climate justice.

**AM:** Why are you doing this?

**AV:** I used to live in California, and I was visiting family there when the Paradise fire broke out. That was very scary for me, because I have asthma. Smoke was seeping into my house. People were rolling up wet towels and putting them under doors. My family had to fly me back to New York early. Fire season is all year round in California—that’s not normal.

**AM:** What do you think young people understand about the urgency of climate change that older politicians ignore?

**AV:** We’re going to be the ones living through this. They’re basically throwing away our future.

**AM:** And when you started striking, did you start alone?

**AV:** I started my climate strikes in front of the UN alone. It took a few weeks to even get a visitor, and it started out being adult protesters with signs. It was at around week 10 when I got my first group of student protesters.

**AM:** Of all the ways to build awareness about climate change, why did you pick striking from school?

**AV:** I decided that disobedience was the most effective way to take action. It’s already effective in places like Germany, where they got a zero-coal plan by 2038 put in place. That was because of student strikers.

**AM:** What did it feel like to be part of that crowd on March 15?

**AV:** I was at the United Nations around 9 AM. We had a die-in in front of the security guards. Then there was a press conference where I and others gave speeches. Then everyone hopped onto the subway—there were hundreds of students taking up all the cars. We went to City Hall, where students were already protesting. After City Hall, we went to Columbus Circle. Thousands of students showed up there.

Locally, it wasn’t a historic march, but globally it made history. We had 1.5 million students protesting. Seeing that happen was incredible, but it won’t be an actual success until world leaders act. World leaders are hearing us, but they aren’t acting on climate change yet.

**AM:** Do you foresee being a climate advocate forever?

**AV:** I hope that we find solutions so I don’t have to do this all my life. In the future, when hopefully climate change is reversed or delayed, I could see myself working at the United Nations.

**World leaders are hearing us, but they aren’t acting on climate change yet.**

Greta Thunberg started this conversation, and I began following her speech at COP24. Then I saw her call to action. I decided, since the United Nations is here in New York, this is where I should go strike.

**AM:** There are adults who believe the students are being naive. What would your message to them be?

**AV:** By the time the youth are in positions of power, it’ll be too late to reverse climate change. We have to force politicians to start acting now. Why go to school if we won’t have a future? Why go to school if we’re going to be too busy running from the next hurricane or fire? There are things you can do for yourself, but there comes a point when things have to happen on a governmental level.

Illustration by Andy Friedman
Better Led by Reds
We should celebrate Milwaukee’s socialists.

If I owned all the real estate in the world, I wouldn’t feel so powerful as I do on the streets of this socialist city,” declared former New York City councilman Baruch Vladeck when he arrived in Milwaukee in 1932 for the Socialist Party’s national convention in that city.

Norman Thomas, the famed civil-rights and economic-justice campaigner who became the party’s presidential nominee that year, celebrated the fact that he was chosen for that honor in a city governed by Socialists. The success of Milwaukee under then-Mayor Dan Hoan, Thomas said, was proof that the party’s social-democratic “dreams will someday come true.”

“Someday” was dramatically delayed by the results of the 1932 elections. The Socialist ticket did well, securing almost 900,000 votes nationwide and registering its highest percentage of the total vote in Wisconsin. The winner of that year’s race, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt, took notice: He met with Thomas after the election and borrowed liberally from proposals that had long been championed by the Socialists—for a Social Security system, unemployment compensation, strengthened labor unions, and public-works programs. Roosevelt’s New Deal took the wind out of the Socialist Party’s sails in the national arena, but the party remained a force in Milwaukee for decades to come.

Now that Milwaukee has been selected as the host city for another national convention—that of the Democrats in 2020—Republicans have suddenly discovered its history. “No city in America has stronger ties to socialism than Milwaukee,” griped Wisconsin Republican Party director Mark Jefferson. “And with the rise of Bernie Sanders and the embrace of socialism by its newest leaders, the American left has come full circle. It’s only fitting the Democrats would come to Milwaukee.” Wisconsin Republican Senator Ron Johnson said the Milwaukee convention would provide a “firsthand look” at “the risk of Democrat socialistic tendencies.”

Apart from the fact that Wisconsin’s top Republicans don’t seem to like the state—or its history—very much, the GOP response is comic. Many Wisconsinites know that their state has a long, rich socialist tradition, and that Milwaukee’s association with it is one of the coolest things about the city. It even earned a mention in the movie Wayne’s World, when rock star Alice Cooper explains, “I think one of the most interesting aspects of Milwaukee is the fact that it’s the only major American city to have ever elected three Socialist mayors.”

The Democratic Party is not a socialist party, but the delegates to its 2020 convention might nominate a democratic socialist, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, for president. And when they convene in Wisconsin’s largest city next summer, they shouldn’t hesitate to take the Republicans up on their call to highlight lessons from Milwaukee’s Socialist past. Doing so will strengthen the hand of the party’s eventual nominee, whether it’s Sanders or another of the contenders, all of whom will surely be labeled “socialist” by Donald Trump and his troll army.

Instead of fearing mention of the S-word, Democrats can and should approach it as smart Republicans have the L-word—“libertarian.” Republicans frequently borrow from the libertarian lexicon and toolbox, and acknowledge as much, without abandoning their essential partisanship. Democrats ought to be similarly limber. It’s great that the party now has a strong democratic-socialist wing, which includes Sanders and members of Congress like New York’s Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Michigan’s Rashida Tlaib. But Democrats who do not identify as socialists can still follow the lead of FDR and the late senator Edward Kennedy, who worked...
Hoan also took on the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, at a time when politicians in both the Democratic and Republican parties were compromising with the violent racists as they extended their reach from the South to northern cities. “The Ku Klux Klan will find Milwaukee a hotter place to exist in than Hades itself,” the mayor declared in 1921.

Hoan’s integrity, along with his managerial skills, would eventually earn him recognition as one of the 10 finest municipal leaders in American history. In The American Mayor, his groundbreaking 1999 assessment of municipal governance in cities across the country, Melvin Holli wrote: “Although this self-identified socialist had difficulty pushing progressive legislation through a nonpartisan city council, he experimented with the municipal marketing of food, backed city-built housing, and was a fervent but unsuccessful champion of municipal ownership of the street railways and the electric utility. His pragmatic ‘gas and water socialism’ met with more success in improving public health and in providing public markets, city harbor improvements, and purging graft from Milwaukee politics.”

Emil Seidel and Frank Zeidler, the Socialists as well. And Milwaukee voters elected dozens of Socialists to the city council, county board, school board, state legislature, and Congress. Milwaukee’s Socialists were so fiscally and socially responsible that historians to this day hail them as exemplars of a uniquely American form of democratic socialism. Zeidler once explained to me, “Socialism as we attempted to practice it here believes that people working together for the common good can produce a greater benefit both for society and for the individual than can a society in which everyone is shrewdly seeking their own self-interest.”

That worked well for Milwaukee in the 20th century—so much so that “socialism” ceased to be a scare word for the city’s residents. What frightens Republicans today is that “socialism” is ceasing to be a scare word in our contemporary national discourse.
**FREE SPEECH**

**Don’t Have a Cow, Nunes**

Representative Devin Nunes (R-CA) sued Twitter on March 18, claiming that the social-media company acted negligently as a “portal for defamation.” Twitter’s alleged misdeed? Hosting three accounts critical of the Trump-loving congressman. For his “pain, insult, embarrassment, humiliation, emotional distress and mental suffering,” Nunes is seeking $250 million in damages.

The purported online bullies are GOP strategist Liz Mair—noted in the complaint as having described Nunes as “Dirty Devin”—and two parody accounts, @DevinNunesMom and @DevinCow.

“Are you trying to obstruct a federal investigation again? You come home right this instant or no more Minecraft!” @DevinNunesMom tweeted at the congressman. That account has since been suspended.

Meanwhile, @DevinCow—which is still active and now has more than 633,000 followers—described Nunes as a “treasonous cowpoke” and added, “Devin’s boots are full of manure. He’s udder-ly worthless and it’s pasture time to mooove him to prison.”

As absurd as Nunes’s lawsuit is, it has a potential chilling effect on free speech. “What it is, it has a potential chilling effect on the end of meaningful democracy in the United States, along with many of the rights that women, minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and others now take for granted.”

Let me clarify: I’ve been a fan and supporter of Sanders ever since he was elected mayor of Burlington, Vermont, in 1981. I was honored to be asked to testify before him in Congress years ago, and I voted for him in the New York presidential primary in 2016. I did so, however, not because I imagined he might win the nomination, but because I hoped that a strong showing by Sanders would help wake up Hillary Clinton to the importance of addressing economic inequality, and also to honor his brave criticism of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.

I was wrong. Sanders turned so negative toward Clinton that it hurt her in the general election. Even though he campaigned for her after he lost the nomination, roughly 12 percent of Sanders’s supporters switched to Trump, and enough of the rest supported Jill Stein’s kamikaze candidacy that it helped tip key states to Trump.

Sanders has now hired two press aides, David Sirota and Briahna Gray. The former had recently devoted himself to harsh Twitter attacks on Sanders’s potential rivals for the nomination. (Sirota has since deleted his Twitter archives.) The latter, also a frequent and combative tweeter, ended up a Stein supporter in 2016. Their hires appear to presage a take-no-prisoners campaign that could conceivably put Sanders over the top in the primary while also alienating most of the electorate.

In a poll of likely primary voters in the battleground state of Wisconsin, Sanders crushed the field with a 40 percent showing. But he already has a 45 percent unfavorable rating among all voters, up from 36 percent three years ago. His favorable number is down to 46 percent, 13 points lower than it used to be. And this is before the Trump/Fox News/Breitbart/Facebook/Twitter/YouTube right-wing noise machine turns its poisonous attention to him—to say nothing of Wall Street and all the other industries that will no doubt strenuously oppose him.

Sanders today insists on calling himself a “socialist,” but he no longer holds most of the positions historically associated with socialism. He should know this because he was a serious socialist between 1972 and 1976, when he ran and lost in four statewide Vermont races on the Liberty Union Party line. His platform called for the nationalization of pretty much every industry in America, together with a 100 percent income tax on America’s top earners. And Sanders was still a socialist in 1980, when he served as an elector for the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, which favored the abolition of the US military budget and proclaimed itself in solidarity with both Cuba and Iran at a time when the latter held over 52 Americans hostage.

I held some of the same views myself as a young man, but I am not running for president. And if I ever thought I might, I probably wouldn’t have agreed to attend a rally in 1985 in Managua, Nicaragua, with a crowd chanting, “Here, there, everywhere, the Yankee will die,” while the Nicaraguan president, Daniel Ortega, condemned my country’s “state terrorism” (accurate as the term was).

Much of Sanders’s agenda is popular with Democrats, but calling yourself a “socialist” is, according to recent polls, a losing proposition.

I mention this appearance because, according to reporting by journalist Kurt Eichenwald, Republicans have it and similar events on tape. They also have binders full of statements made in support of the kind of socialism that Sanders backed before he became what he is today: a typical New Deal-style....
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A Sanders nomination, I fear, would deliver the country to Trump for a second term.

liberal or European social democrat. Much of Sanders’s agenda is popular, but calling yourself a “socialist” is, according to recent polls, a losing proposition—74 percent of independent voters disapprove of it, with just 9 percent approving.

Sanders consistently speaks of the “political revolution” that he expects will carry his campaign across the finish line. He is, however, a candidate with views that, like mine, are to the left of the American “center,” wherever that may be. He is also a candidate who will be 79 years old in January 2021; who refuses (thus far) to release his tax returns and thereby robs the Democrats of a potent weapon against Trump; and who cannot even bring himself to become a member of the party whose presidential nomination he seeks. (Insert Groucho Marx joke here.) And I’ve not even mentioned his weakness, relative to Clinton, with crucial Democratic constituencies like African Americans and women. We can also count out the many voters who are uncomfortable with criticism of Israel (much as I admire Sanders for that).

A Sanders nomination would, I fear, deliver the country to Trump. It would depress turnout among all the groups I mentioned; increase support for the likely spoiler in the race, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz; and keep a significant number of swing voters in Trump’s column. Additionally, some of the moms and grandmas who make up the backbone of the #Resistance told researcher Theda Skocpol that, owing to Sanders’s harsh treatment of Clinton in the 2016 election, they might sit out 2020 if he’s the nominee.

Someday, all of this may change, and I—or more likely my daughter—will be able to vote for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for president. Today, however, with Donald Trump as president, Democrats cannot afford to bet America’s future on an invisible “revolution.” Here’s hoping they realize this soon enough to protect the progressive achievements of the past from the destruction and devastation that would be the inevitable result of four more years of Trump.
Native American Voices
MAY 12–20 AND SEPTEMBER 1–9, 2019

Featuring Nick Estes* and Melanie Yazzie (Diné)*

Join us as we travel to the Dakotas, Colorado, and New Mexico, where we will gain insight into important aspects of the Sioux, Hidatsa, Mandan, Lakota, Ute, Navajo, Apache, and Kiowa Nations. The idea for a Native American–focused educational tour came to us from our previous Nation travelers. They asked if we could work with tribal leaders to create a thoughtful, respectful, and stimulating program that would begin to look at some of the current community initiatives, energetic activist work, legal challenges, and cultural engagement of Native peoples in the US.

We’ll meet with leaders of the Standing Rock Reservation and visit the innovative community center of Thunder Valley. We’ll discuss tribal-US relations with the director of the Indian Affairs Commission and hear from leaders at the Native American Rights Fund. We’ll tour historical sites like Badlands National Park and the scene of the Wounded Knee massacre. We’ll visit tribal-run colleges and meet with academics, writers, dancers, and artists. We’ll learn about the preservation of Native languages and visit the Oglala Tribal Justice Center. We’ll enjoy dinner prepared by indigenous food activist Karlos Baca, plus much more, with an optional extension to Sante Fe. See full program for details at TheNation.com/NATIVE-VOICES.

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To survive domestic violence, some individuals resort to violence themselves. Others are coerced into committing crimes by their abusers. Often, these people—disproportionately black and brown women—end up incarcerated for years.

After a decade of advocacy by the Coalition for Women Prisoners and others, the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act passed the newly Democratic-controlled New York State Senate on March 12. The legislation now sits on the desk of Governor Andrew Cuomo, who is expected to sign it into law. “The bill will allow judges to issue shorter prison terms to survivors of domestic violence who were convicted of crimes directly related to the abuse they suffered,” according to the Coalition for Women Prisoners. “In some cases, such individuals could be sentenced to community-based alternatives to incarceration programs instead of prison.” Once the bill is enacted into law, the coalition estimates that 480 incarcerated survivors could be eligible for alternative sentencing, while future survivors would avoid harsh sentences altogether. Similar legislation has already been passed in California and Illinois.

Activists acknowledge that this is not a solution to the criminalization of domestic-violence survivors, but it is an important first step. It comes as part of a larger campaign, #FreeThemNY, by groups like Survived and Punished to push the governor to grant clemency to all criminalized survivors, but it is an important first step. It comes as part of a larger campaign, #FreeThemNY, by groups like Survived and Punished to push the governor to grant clemency to all criminalized domestic-violence survivors.

—Liz Boyd

Our Toxic-Speech Epidemic

Trump likes his words free, loud, and hateful. Just don’t take him literally.

When Breitbart asked Donald Trump about his recent executive order to “protect” speech on college campuses, the president gave a wandering reply that included something of a threat: “I can tell you, I have the support of the police, the support of the military, the support of the Bikers for Trump—I have the tough people, but they don’t play it tough until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very bad, very bad.”

If Trump’s statement sounded inconsistent with his mandate of free speech, the backdrop against which he spoke was even more remarkable. The news that week was filled with reports that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has been deploying armed motorcycle gangs as extrajudicial enforcers in his country. (By the same token, Vladimir Putin’s fondness for the paramilitary bikers known as the Night Wolves is notorious.) Trump’s statement also came just days before a sitting member of Congress, Representative Steve King (R-IA), hypothesized about “another civil war” in the United States: “One side has about 8 trillion bullets, while the other side doesn’t know which bathroom to use…. Wonder who would win.” Again, an alarming image of our polity divided between armed and unarmed, right and left, the tough and those who didn’t see it coming.

Most glaringly, Trump bragged about his de facto backup crew just days before a heavily armed gunman killed 50 Muslims in New Zealand and cited the US president as a “symbol of renewed white identity” (albeit just “one time,” as Trump aide Kellyanne Conway noted helpfully). Obviously, a politician’s words don’t necessarily make him liable for the acts of all his admirers. But the issue is not about proving a direct causation between Trump’s speech and the violence it inspires. It is just as worrying that there is a US president who so relentlessly dehumanizes, infantilizes, hypersexualizes, pathologizes, and criminalizes. Trump is not Hitler, but the rhetoric he employs isn’t that far off. Hitler wrote that Jews were a “poison” to national bodies, causing “a ferment of decomposition” among peoples and races that renders them, in the broader sense, “a dissolver of human culture.” Trump and many of his apointees have reinvigorated such sentiments with a caustic new life, applying them to everyone from Mexicans to Muslims to Democrats to dead war heroes: low-IQ, lowlife, parasitic, worst-of-the-worst, scummy, wussy, disgraceful, ugly, fat-faced, coddled, vicious, animal, raping, drug-dealing, a bad-very-bad subhuman invasion.

The philosopher Lynne Tirrell writes about toxic speech in the contexts of Nazi demagoguery and the Rwandan genocide. She casts it as a public-health problem in which hateful memes spread and can be tracked according to predictive patterns that “divide groups, make people think the group division is natural,” and encourage the use of “derogatory terms to refer to the group you plan to eliminate, especially terms that have action-engendering power.” Words that are “action-engendering”—that move people to act—are sometimes imperatives or have institutional heft. They are the bridge from purely linguistic descriptions to the nonlinguistic behaviors that such terms license or permit.

As Tirrell observes about the dehumanizing images deployed in the Rwandan genocide: Boys “learn how to kill a snake with a machete, and so when Tutsi were called snakes, the Hutu militia knew exactly how to attack.” She notes that the bipolar division into “us and them” is an especially efficient action-engendering device in the creation of bunkered populations. There is a persistent bipolarity concerning who is or is not entitled to share in the president’s envisioned American destiny: Republicans versus Democrats, right versus left, real versus fake, good versus bad, “our people” versus the rest. For all his professed devotion to the notion of free speech, Trump has consistently expressed the wish to shut up and put down those whom he deems not among “my people.” At a Michigan rally, he urged security guards to remove a protester with these words: “Get him out. Try not to hurt him. If you do, I’ll defend you.
in court. Are Trump rallies the most fun? We’re having a good time.” When a protester heckled him at a gathering in Las Vegas, Trump declared: “I’d like to punch him in the face.” The president even offered to pay supporter John McGraw’s legal fees after McGraw sucker-punched a black heckler and then told an Inside Edition crew that “we might have to kill him” if he saw the protester again. McGraw, Trump purred, “obviously loves the country.”

Hitler described the bonding effects of mass meetings as essential for “esprit de corps.” He wrote in Mein Kampf: “When from his little workshop or big factory, in which he feels very small, [the ordinary man] steps for the first time into a mass meeting and has thousands and thousands of people of the same opinion around him...when the visible success and agreement of thousands confirm to him the rightness of the new doctrine and for the first time arouse doubt in the truth of his previous conviction—then he himself has succumbed to the magic influence of what we designate as ‘mass suggestion.’”

The Washington Post recently published statistics showing that counties that hosted Trump rallies saw a 226 percent increase in hate crimes over those that hadn’t. “It is hard to discount a ‘Trump effect’ when a considerable number of these reported hate crimes reference Trump,” the story noted.

We are living through a time of emergency—just not the one to which Trump would assign meaning. The emergency I fear is precisely the great collective power among the armed and angry warriors to whom the president throws the red meat of his words. His words are more than insult or defamation; they carry the weight of constant threat, for, as commander in chief, his speech may be construed as imperative. Which of “us” will follow that command?

SNAPSHOT / RAFAEL MARCHANTE

Climate Strike

On March 15, students in Lisbon, Portugal, poured into the streets to demand action on climate change. Inspired by 16-year-old activist Greta Thunberg, who demonstrates regularly outside the Swedish Parliament, more than 1 million students in at least 120 countries participated in the climate strike.

LOW POINT?

Is what Trump said of John McCain as low as low can get?

No. Knowing Trump, it’s likely that we ain’t seen nothing yet.
When I was 7 or 8 years old, my mother would put on Whitney Houston’s “Greatest Love of All” every day before we left home for school and work, and we sang along from start to finish. Standing in the living room moments before we shrugged on our coats, we belted out lyrics about self-reliance and persistence, finding a kind of armor through song. We wrapped ourselves in the richness and power of Whitney’s voice, reaching for the high notes right along with her. I can’t remember how long this lasted, but I consider it a defining ritual of my childhood. She’s too young now, but I plan to do something similar with my daughter, Isobel, who is 2. Black children and their families need this. We need a kind of anthem, a melodic reminder to ourselves and each other that we are not who the wider world too often tells us we are: criminal, disposable, lazy, undeserving of health or peace or laughter.

Black mothers like me know that motherhood is deeply political. Black women are more likely to die during pregnancy or birth than women of any other race. My own mother, who has never married and who worked full-time throughout my childhood, is a model for my own parenting, but culture-war messages from the left and the right tell us she fell short of maternal ideals. My grandmother, great-grandmother, aunts, and elders in the community supported my mother as she raised me. Their investment in me and in other children—some their blood relations, some not—demonstrated an ethic that we can all learn from. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has called this “other-mothering,” a system of care through which black mothers are accountable to and work on behalf of all black children in a particular community: “I tell my daughter all the time: We don’t live for the ‘I.’ We live for the ‘we,’” Cat Brooks, an organizer in Oakland, told me.

In addition to serving as other-mothers, we’ve had to fight for our right to be mothers. Prior to Emancipation, the child of an enslaved woman was someone else’s property. Slave owners routinely destabilized enslaved people’s lives, severing kinship structures rooted in marriage and blood ties; family as a concept became elastic and inclusive.

Because of this history, black women have had to inhabit a different understanding of motherhood in order to navigate American life. If we merely accepted the status quo and failed to challenge the forces that have kept black people and women oppressed, then we participated in our own and our children’s destruction. In recent years, this has become especially evident, as dozens of black women and men have had to stand before television cameras reminding the world that their recently slain children were in fact human beings, were loved and sources of joy. The mothers of those killed by police or vigilante violence embody every black mother’s deepest fears: that we will not be able to adequately protect our children from or prepare them for a world that has to be convinced of their worth. Many parents speak of feeling more fear and anxiety once they take responsibility for keeping another human alive and well. But black women especially know fear—how to live despite it and how to metabolize it for our children so that they’re not consumed by it.

In the fever dream that has been life in the United States since Donald Trump came to power, some of black women’s deepest fears have become more comprehensible to the broader society. No one has ever been able to guarantee safe passage into adulthood for their children, but nonblack parents with money, citizenship, and class status had a leg up on the rest of us. Now, even for many of them, the threats and uncertainty seem to multiply by the day. The Trump era has given those who
may have previously felt invulnerable to the shifting tides of human fortune a wake-up call.

Family is often the first social institution to shape how we understand our identities and our politics. At a time when “Resist!” has for some become a national battle cry in response to the norms-trampling Trump administration, it’s critical to look at the messages communicated within our families and address hypocrisies or inconsistencies head on. Research suggests that white parents in particular need help seeing family as a source of political education, especially when it comes to passing on anti-racist values. A 2007 study in the Journal of Marriage and Family found that out of 17,000 families with kindergartners, parents of color are about three times more likely to discuss race than their white counterparts. Seventy-five percent of the white parents in the study never or almost never talked about race. According to research highlighted in Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman’s 2009 book, NurtureShock, white parents communicate messages that skin color doesn’t matter and that everyone is equal—messages that children know to be lies based on their own experiences even as early as infancy. When pressed, these parents often admit that they don’t know how to talk about race. Black mothers, on the other hand, are scared not of talk of race, but of the impact of racist oppression. We’re scared because we have no choice but to release our beloved creations into environments—doctors’ offices, hospitals, day-care facilities, playgrounds, schools—where white supremacy is often woven into the fabric of the institution, and is both consciously and unwittingly practiced by the people acting in loco parentis. Black mothers haven’t had the luxury of sticking our heads in the sand and hoping that our children learn about race and power as they go. Instead, we must act as a buffer and translator between them and the world, beginning from their earliest days.

I am the daughter of an unmarried black woman. I am now an unmarried black woman raising a girl. I didn’t grow up with my father at home. As has been the case since soon after her first birthday, my daughter isn’t either. I didn’t meet my father until I was in my early 20s. Our meeting was healing, but his absence hadn’t mattered in the ways that some people assumed it would. I grew up in a house in the suburbs, the same house where my mom and her sisters and their dad before them had grown up. My maternal grandmother had grown up around the corner. We had a big in-ground pool in the backyard, where I’d swim with my cousins and other neighborhood kids. I grew up playing soccer and riding horses and skiing, and on the few occasions that I was referred to jokingly as a “Cosby kid,” I knew what that meant: I was privileged, maybe even a little spoiled.

I always had a kind of unvarnished pride in my upbringing. None of the assumptions people seemed to have about families headed by “single mothers” applied to my life. As an only child, I was the focus of my mom’s attention and resources. That investment in my success and happiness was supplemented by the love, time, and money of other adults in our family, especially my maternal aunt, Pam, who lived with my mom and me from the time I was 7. Extended family was everything, and while the word “family” seemed to mean a mom and dad and siblings to some, to me it’s always meant aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents and the neighborhood elders who watched you grow up.

Like me, my daughter is growing up without a dad at home, but the similarities in our experiences end there. My father lived across the country—he’d moved west before I was born to pursue a graduate degree—and we had no contact until I sought him out and initiated a conversation that led to us staying in touch for a few years. My daughter’s dad also lives in a different city, but he was by my side during her birth and cared for her daily during the first year of her life, while we were still together romantically, and before he relocated for a job. He visits her often and video-chats with her daily, and they have a relationship that I support and that brings us all joy. Our family is not unique in this. In 2013, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention corrected the misconception that black men disproportionately shirk their fatherly duties. Instead, black men are generally more likely than men of other races to read to, feed, bathe, and play with their young children on a daily basis, whether they live in the same home as the child or not. Relying on nonmarital birthrates to tell a story about parental involvement has built a false narrative. Just because a father isn’t married to his child’s mother doesn’t mean he’s an absent dad.

For my daughter’s dad and me, it’s not easy, but we work at it. For about six months after our breakup, we were in therapy to learn how to parent together despite our separation. I feel proud of us when I read a line from a 2008 study on co-parenting outside of marriage: “We conclude that parents’ ability to work together in rearing their common child across households helps keep nonresident fathers connected to their children and that programs aimed at improving parents’ ability to communicate may have benefits for children irrespective of whether the parents’ romantic
relationship remains intact.” We created our own program with the coaching of a black woman who talked us through some painful periods and helped us put our goals and commitments on paper. Now here we are—making the road by walking.

My father and my daughter’s father are college-educated black men from middle-class families. They both grew up with their dads at home. At the time of their children’s births, they were gainfully employed or training to advance in a profession. They were not ripped away by death or by the criminal-justice system or by the Pull of the Streets™. But not all black single moms have such a benign family backstory. For every 100 black women in communities around the country, there are just 83 black men. “The remaining men—1.5 million of them—are, in a sense, missing.” The New York Times reported in April 2015, and incarceration and early death are to blame. There’s no comparable gender gap for white people. For every 100 white women, there are 99 white men. But nearly one in 12 black men between the ages of 25 and 34 are behind bars, a rate that’s five times that of nonblack men that age. The imbalance between free, living black boys and free, living black girls starts during their teen years and peaks in their 30s. (To be clear, black women are disproportionately incarcerated as well: One in 200 black women are behind bars, compared with one in 500 nonblack women.) These data help clarify why 30 percent of black families are headed by unmarried women, compared with 13 percent of American households overall.

G. Rosaline Preudhomme, a 73-year-old grandmother and organizer, helped pass Washington, DC’s Initiative 71, which legalized marijuana. Preudhomme’s work seeks to address the systemic reasons for these “missing” black men. Fifty thousand people were behind bars for nonviolent drug offenses in 1980. By 1997, that number had jumped to more than 400,000, close to where it remains today. A study by the Economic Policy Institute found that the incarceration of parents takes a serious toll on their children; children of incarcerated parents suffer from more physical and mental health problems than those whose parents aren’t behind bars. Still, Preudhomme notes, despite the tremendous pressure that punitive drug policies have put on black communities in the past 40 years, our families persist. That’s in part because black Americans have had a structure for organizing family life that predates the drug war and accommodates the absence or intermittent presence of parents. “It’s the resilient spirit of black women that has gotten us through these past 400 years of our family life always being disrupted,” Preudhomme says.

In taking a village-oriented approach to child-rearing, black Americans may be out of step with mainstream white, middle-class American culture, which became more centered on the nuclear family at the middle of the last century with the advent of mass suburbanization. But we’re fully in step with how the rest of the world has functioned throughout most of history. A body of research has determined that Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic countries, with their focus on the nuclear family, bring up children in what anthropologist David Lancy has called “a departure from all other human culture.” Most humans across time and space are “cooperative breeders” and depend on adult women and older children in the extended family and community to care for the young.
family—and, by extension, patriarchy in the broader society—is normal. Collins suggests that slavery and the economic realities of Jim Crow made it hard for black families to create the separate, gender-based spheres of influence (father as economic provider and head of household, mother as nurturer and subordinate) that white America lauded as the ideal organization of family life. Instead, black girls grow up with a sense of empowerment and possibility that girls of other races don’t necessarily see modeled at home or in their communities. “Since Black mothers have a distinctive relationship to white patriarchy, they may be less likely to socialize their daughters into their proscribed roles as subordinates,” Collins writes.

Black families have developed a tradition of passing onto our children a culture that repels the forces of white supremacy and creates ample opportunities to question patriarchy. But unmarried black mothers and their daughters aren’t lauded for holding the keys to resisting patriarchal oppression. Our reliance on extended family networks and collective approaches to childcare, our rejection of the nuclear family as the only way to organize our lives, has been consistently derided throughout history. The dominant narrative is that we’re poor, draining public coffers, and so a blight on society. The safety zones that black parents have created, with leadership from black mothers, the places where we learn that we are not who the world tells us we are, have been criticized by everyone from Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the 1960s to the American Enterprise Institute’s W. Bradford Wilcox today:

Those who promote marriage as social policy want us to believe that getting married will automatically lift poor people out of poverty. But poor plus poor does not somehow equal middle class. It means two poor adults raising poor kids and trying to figure out how to survive. Lost in the conversation is the impact that low-wage work has on black families. The question shouldn’t be whether we can put together two measly paychecks, but whether we as individuals can get paid a fair wage for the work that we do. In 2016, nearly 40 percent of black, female-headed households with children lived in poverty—meaning over 60 percent did not. Why don’t we talk about how that 60 percent is often doing just fine, or why that 40 percent is actually impoverished?

Governments aren’t equipped to understand all the pressures that low-income couples face, and they shouldn’t presume to meddle in romantic relationships. What governments are equipped to do is address poverty head on, by acknowledging and supporting people’s economic and social rights. Social policies such as paid parental leave, universal child care, and universal health care would go a long way to alleviate the financial pressures that unmarried moms face. This kind of government intervention is why a single mother and her child in Denmark are no more likely to be poor than a married mother and her child.

But the complex story of family formation and black mothering isn’t only about beating back stigma and correcting falsehoods; the psychic and emotional impact of leading households on our own is often ignored. I’ve been guilty of this myself. In writing about black women and marriage in the past, I’ve failed to acknowledge that some of us actually aspire to the narratives of being chosen, of living happily ever after. Yes, it’s important that we can and do successfully raise children without steady, committed romantic partners. But can we also note how depressing it is that we so often have to? There’s a reason some black women were excited when finally, after 12 seasons of the franchise, there was a black Bachelorette. Some of us want love, marriage, and a baby carriage in exactly that order, and preferably with black men. It’s important to acknowledge how it feels when those desires are often out of reach for us in a way they’re just not for other women.

Add to the existential angst the day-to-day responsibility of being in charge. Even with family help and enough money to pay for childcare, it’s exhausting to be the sole adult responsible for cooking, bathing, reading, playing, and cleaning on those days or in those stretches of hours when you’re going it alone. I never take it for granted that I was 100 percent certain I wanted to be a mother when I had my daughter. I can’t imagine giving mothering the energy it demands and deserves if I had come into this reluctantly, especially now that it’s often just the two of us. I enjoy the work of mothering and don’t often feel like I’m going through the motions or putting on a brave face, but there have been times when my spirit has flagged under the weight. I’m reminded of those times, the moments I’ve blinked back tears, when I read asha bandele’s memoir, Something Like Beautiful, about raising her daughter while her husband was incarcerated and then deported. She writes: “I told myself if I cried I was setting a bad example for my daughter. Others told me the very same thing. Told me never to be a victim, Black women are not victims and we are not weak…. In the post-welfare-reform days of the alpha mom, I was clear that being a victim, showing any weakness, was punishable by complete isolation and total loss of respect. I was a mother, a single mother, a single Black mother. I was part of a tradition of women who do not bend and who do not break. This is what I said, this is
how I now defined myself. As someone with no room for error.”

I see little room for error in my own life. I have to guard against letting parenting become one more place I practice perfectionism. There are so many reasons to try to do it as close to perfectly as possible, since the mainstream conversation tells me that as both an unmarried mom and the child of an unmarried mom, I’m incapable of being or raising a successful, well-adjusted person. Even though I have known since childhood how mean-spirited and hollow that conversation is, I’m still affected by the stigma. As I get older, I can also see the danger in being too defensive, in disproving others’ assumptions before I honestly explore my own nuanced truths. In 2007, artist Meshell Ndegeocello released an album called The World Has Made Me the Man of My Dreams. That album’s title reminds me that learning to navigate an often-inhospitable world on one’s own and with the help of relatives and friends can make us into our own rock-solid protectors. Partnership with a man can begin to feel unnecessary: nice when it comes along, but not a must for survival or happiness. This strength can be a source of pride, but it can also be reason to grieve when one starts to think about all the structural and historical reasons that black women have had to be so independent, and black men have often been unavailable or unwilling to offer meaningful help.

It’s a February day, and Is and I are at the playground. I push her on the swing and notice that she can’t take her eyes off the next swing over, where a dad is pushing his daughter. I think to myself: I know that feeling. That “Why don’t I have that?” feeling. That “Where’s my dad?” feeling. That “I want bigger, messier, gruffer, rougher, and sillier than Mom” feeling. But the truth is that I’m projecting. My child is a watcher; she’s super-nosy and could be thinking anything. She actually gets playground time with her dad, though not daily. But my mind goes there because I am still, at 39, processing my own feelings around abandonment and loss. I don’t want that for my daughter. I don’t want her to know that sense of longing. If she does, I want her to know that she can express it, put it out in the open. In my experience, the silence around an absence can do more harm than the absence itself. For Is and for me, the challenge is to find—to make—space where we can be vulnerable and acknowledge hurt without giving into the narrative that we are of and in a “broken family.” As we are, our family is perfectly whole.
ANCY PELOSI AND THE DEMOCRATS THOROUGHLY OUTPLAYED DONALD TRUMP in January’s legislative battle over funding for his border wall; he didn’t get an additional dime. So when Trump sent up his annual proposed budget asking for still more, Democrats scoffed. “This ridiculous request,” said Representative Nita Lowey, chair of the House Appropriations Committee, “is not worth the paper it is written on.”

But Trump isn’t aiming for a budget victory; his purpose is to keep the fight going in order to make illegal immigration a wedge issue in his 2020 reelection campaign.

The Democrats’ insistence on compassion for the undocumented gives them the moral high ground in this debate. Trump’s proposed wall is not popular, and most Americans do not like his separation of immigrant children from their parents or his deportation of the many undocumented people who have worked and paid taxes here for years. And they sympathize with the students and others who fall under the Obama-era protections of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), whom Trump also threatens to deport.

But a majority of Americans—in numbers well beyond Trump’s base—also want immigration laws to be strictly enforced and the border sealed against illegal crossings. A 2018 Harvard/Harris poll reported that 70 percent of voters support more restrictive laws, with 64 percent—including 53 percent of Latinos—in favor of sending back people who cross the border without papers. And although most blamed Trump for the government shut-down, when that skirmish was over, his favorability ratings rose by three points.

Trump is betting that he can again use anxieties about immigration to stoke enough class anger to win the Midwestern battleground states that he needs for reelection.

“No issue better illustrates the divide between America’s working class and America’s political class,” he signaled bluntly in February’s State of the Union address. “Wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders, while living their lives behind walls and gates and guards. Meanwhile, working-class Americans are left to pay the price for mass illegal immigration—reduced jobs, lower wages, overburdened schools, hospitals that are so crowded you can’t get in, increased crime, and a depleted social safety net.”

To hammer home that message, Trump already has an enormous war chest and an experienced and ruthless propaganda machine that includes Fox News, the most popular cable-news channel in the country.

The GOP has been honing its skills in the politics of fear and division for decades, from Ronald Reagan’s racist “welfare queen” trope in 1980, to George H.W. Bush’s 1988 campaign, which smeared Michael Dukakis by playing on racial fears involving the furlough of convicted black murderer Willie Horton, to the GOP’s fraudulent assault on the war record of John Kerry in its 2004 campaign to win a second term for Bush’s draft-dodger son.

The inflammatory ads attacking immigrants that appeared at the end of the 2018 midterm elections were a warm-up for what’s to come. TV and social media will be flooded with images of immigrants—doctored to make dozens look like thousands—throwing rocks at the Border Patrol or rushing to scale the fences, as well as police mug shots of immigrant Latino criminals. The US-bred, Salvadoran-born MS-13 gang might well become the Willie Horton of the 2020 election.

The goal will be to fix in voters’ minds not just that the Democrats are weak on crime (i.e., illegal immigration) but that they’re beholden to activists who champion “open borders.” And many will be receptive to this claim: A 2018 Quinnipiac poll found that voters thought the Democrats are weak on crime (i.e., illegal immigration) more than Trump, by 60 to 53 percent.

The Democrats are thus in a political bind. They need the Latino vote, so they have to defend immigrants against Trump’s inhumanity. But as they do, they risk losing credibility with voters who are not racist or xenophobic but who suspect that Democrats care more about protecting people who cross the border illegally than they do about securing it.

On the question of border security, Trump is loud and clear: Keep illegal immigrants out. As far as the 2020 campaign is concerned, whether he actually makes any progress in building his wall is irrelevant; it’s much more important as a symbol of his supposed commitment to law and order.

Many Democrats, on the other hand, are unclear where they stand. When pressed, they offer measures that could be described as “Trump Lite”—a little more money for the Border Patrol, a small fence rather than a big wall, and carefully modulated assurances that of course they favor border security. Outside the liberal enclaves, Democrats try to change the subject, as Pelosi and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer did by focusing their
Kikito’s view:
French artist JR’s 2017 installation on the Mexican side of the border wall, near Tecate, which uses a photo of a toddler he met named Kikito.
budget away by itself. Unauthorized border crossings fell substantially from their highs in the late 1990s and early 2000s, largely because of a drop-off in migrants from Mexico. But the numbers from Central America—especially Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—have risen. Some 76,000 undocumented migrants crossed the border in February, an 11-year high. Forecasts are for another 180,000 by May. The immigration system on our southern border is collapsing. Courts are swamped with a backlog of cases estimated at 850,000. Detention centers are overwhelmed and understaffed. Children are lost, women are swamped with a backlog of cases estimated at 850,000. Detention centers are overwhelmed and understaffed. Children are lost, women are abused, and busloads of confused migrants and refugees are dumped on the street and told to come back later for their hearings. Some show up, some don’t.

Regardless of whether the numbers rise or fall over the coming year, attempts at evasion or Trump Lite will not be an option in the face of the president’s fear-mongering blitzkrieg. To meet it, Democrats need to gain clarity and credibility and go on the offensive. First, Democratic candidates must make clear that they are committed to limiting immigration to what is legal (currently over 1 million people per year). Second, they need to counterattack. Democrats should be using the rising numbers of illegal border crossings as evidence that Trump’s hard line has failed. They need to make clear that the irrational “catch and release” policy that he rants against stems from our failure to provide the judges and other legal infrastructure needed to process claims quickly. Third, Democrats need a broader narrative to connect the dots between immigration and foreign policy. The current debate is US-centric, focused entirely on domestic policies: what to do about the undocumented once they arrive here. But there can be no enduring solution to the problem unless we also ask why they are coming from there.

Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are de facto US colonies, places where oligarchs have long exploited their people in partnership with American capital. They are suffering the aftereffects of brutal civil wars stoked by Washington’s paranoia toward leftist political movements. The region has also become a major route for the shipment of drugs from South America to the United States. Attracted by the enormous profits, oligarchs have collaborated with narcotraffickers and other criminal gangs that terrorize citizens through robbery, extortion, rape, and murder.

Washington’s so-called War on Drugs reinforces the rich and powerful in these countries with money and military equipment, which is often used to suppress dissent rather than snare criminals. Thus, for example, in 2009 the Honduran military kidnapped the elected president—whose modest social programs providing food and education to the poor had enraged the upper class—and, after refueling at a US military base, shipped him out of the country. Protesters were beaten, jailed, or killed. The “compassionate” Obama administration endorsed this coup, and the “law-and-order” Trump administration continues to support the violent kleptocracy that has been in power ever since. Five years after the coup, the number of Honduran children illegally crossing into the United States jumped by more than 1,200 percent.

Progressive Democrats should demand that we stop supporting regimes that are driving immigrants to our doorstep. A policy of zero tolerance for corruption and oppression should apply to any aid, and the US national-security apparatus needs to cleanse itself of its unhealthy relationship with Central American militaries. Given that there is no conceivable military threat to the United States from the region and that none of these countries threaten their neighbors, we arguably do not need to have military bases or advisers there at all.

Conditioning foreign aid on wholesale political reforms and breaking up the cronism between the US and Central American militaries would give democracy some political room to grow. And having helped to impoverish the people of these countries, we also need to rebuild their hopes for a better future. The newly elected president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known as AMLO), argues that investing in jobs is the real answer to the drug violence and out-migration that drains these economies of their hardest-working and most ambitious people. He has outlined a long-term social- and economic-development plan, a Mexican version of the Green New Deal proposed by progressive US Democrats (it’s worth noting that Franklin Roosevelt is one of AMLO’s heroes). But Mexico cannot change the region’s direction by itself. Despite his history as a critic of US meddling, AMLO has proposed a joint US-Mexican Marshall Plan for Central America. Given the United States’ history in the region, Mexican leadership in such a project would be essential.

Trump has signaled support for this idea in principle. But, as usual, it’s a trick: He promises that the private sector would put up the money, while his own 2020 budget cuts foreign aid to Central America by 25 percent. Foreign aid is not popular, of course. But a generous US contribution to this effort would cost a lot less than Trump’s border wall. Its domestic purpose would be clearer to the average American voter than the abstract geopolitics used to rationalize most foreign-aid programs. A new narrative on immigration would also contribute to the search for a progressive foreign policy in the post-Trump era.
Retirement insecurity is becoming an increasingly serious problem across the United States—but not for all Americans.

Katherine S. Newman and Rebecca Hayes Jacobs
The United States is in the early stages of a crippling retirement crisis. Nearly half of all private-sector employees in the country—some 58 million people—had no company-sponsored retirement plan in 2018. As recently as 1999, only 39 percent of retiring workers were in this predicament. The retirement situation in the United States isn’t just bad; it’s getting worse with each passing year.

The crisis engulfs all kinds of workers: blue-collar teamsters, high-skilled professionals working for profitable corporations like Verizon and United Airlines, and public-sector civil servants in cities plagued by budget crises (read: Detroit). Many have lost their health insurance and pension benefits—and in some places, they’ve even been ordered to return payments that were miscalculated by pension authorities years in the past. An increasing number of people now work at jobs that never offered pension plans in the first place.

Pensions are regarded by most workers as among the most binding of all promises—a compact between themselves and their employers, sealed by years of labor. Americans assign to government the responsibility for protecting this sacred compact from any temptation by companies to raid retirement accounts for their own purposes. Increasingly, though, this once-unbreakable promise has become discretionary: Employers can abandon it when the stock market falters, when a firm goes through financial reorganization, or simply when shareholders demand higher profits. Insecurity is becoming the standard of older age in this country.

Across the spectrum, workers have responded to the crisis by planning to work many more years than they had expected, only to find that they cannot hold onto the jobs they had in their 50s. Aching backs make physical labor too difficult, while companies are often looking for ways to ease out older, more expensive workers. Those who do find employment past the age of 65 are likely to be relegated to positions that are far below the status—and salary—of the jobs they once held.

Yet this problem is not universal. In late 2015, the Institute for Policy Studies and the Center for Effective Government co-published a report, entitled “A Tale of Two Retirements,” that substantiates what many have long suspected: While companies are defaulting on pensions and benefits for workers, up in the C-suite, the weather is fine. Not only are CEOs socking away millions of dollars in executive retirement plans, they are also enjoying such benefits on a tax-deferred basis. In 2014, Fortune 500 chief executives put $197 million more into their retirement accounts than they would have been able to if they’d been ordinary workers, saving $78 million on their tax bills in the process. They won’t start paying a dime in taxes on those funds until they retire, thus depriving the country—at least for now—of critical resources needed to fund schools, hospitals, and other public institutions.

Retirement insecurity is an increasingly serious manifestation of the vast inequality that is eating away at the social fabric of America. The same forces eroding pension rights are also leading to historic wage disparities, the uneven distribution of wealth, a hollowing-out of the middle class, and the exacerbation of historic racial inequities. Roaring stock markets deepen inequality by driving increases of wealth at the top. Middle-class equity is tied up in the housing market, which has gyrated in ways that have placed serious downward pressure on retirement savings for the majority.

We can get a sense of how profoundly inequality affects retirement when we look at communities that experience retirement in very different ways. Opelousas, Louisiana, a city of about 16,000, has one of the highest elder-poverty rates in the United States. Seventy-seven percent African-American and Creole, Opelousas is home to men and women who have worked all their lives, but mostly in jobs that provided no benefits at all—retirement or otherwise. In 2017, per capita income in Opelousas was only $15,266 a year, and 45.3 percent of its population was living in poverty.

Few residents were entitled to sick leave or healthcare coverage while they were working, and virtually none can count on a pension to support them when they reach retirement age. A lifetime of poverty never translates into what the rest of the country defines as true retirement. Instead, the working poor stay on the job until they are ready to drop.

The story of 71-year-old Valerie Miller offers a raw glimpse into this reality. Miller grew up in extreme hardship. As an adult, she cleaned houses while her husband, Martin, worked as a carpenter, until eventually their bodies broke down in their 60s. He is now in a nursing home with Parkinson’s, and she survives in their house on her own with a $960-per-month Social Security check and $50 in food stamps. Hardened by years in poverty, Miller is girding herself for more of the same. “A lot of people sometimes wonder how you’re making it, but you manage,” she says.

In contrast, Ogden, Utah, has had an easier time taking care of its retirees. A small city nestled at the base of the Wasatch Mountains, Ogden has earned the notable distinction of having the narrowest wealth gap among US metropolitan statistical areas with 500,000 people or more. Ogden residents are much more likely than Opelousas residents to live a good life in their working years and to be able to retire comfortably.

Some local observers have been quick to credit the powerful influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church, and its moral code. And there is some truth to the assumption, as the faith is justly known for its blend of self-reliance and care for others. Support for the aged of all faiths in Ogden is largely organized through private means and based on strong social bonds, a powerful culture of service, and a desire to help the poor, whether they’re Mormon or not.

But the underlying economic stability of Ogden owes much more to the presence of the federal government—more specifically, federal agencies and installations, which provide steady jobs with good benefits, including generous retirement plans. The US Air Force has a large base near-
by. The Internal Revenue Service office in Ogden employs thousands of the city’s residents. Before the federal government’s arrival, Ogden was a bustling railroad hub, and this too provided steady access to well-paying jobs. These stable sources of middle-class employment have ensured that Ogden’s workers and retirees flourish in a way that their counterparts in Opelousas never have.

Ogden retirees like Louise and Randy Nathanson have benefitted from both church and state. Randy worked at the local Air Force base, while Louise raised their children and then became a schoolteacher. “We weren’t rich before,” she remarks, “and we’re not rich now”—but, she adds, they are comfortable and secure. Given the area’s affordability and the Nathansons’ modest mortgage, they didn’t need to dip into Randy’s 401(k) until they retired.

Ogden is similar to Opelousas in that both cities have religious underpinnings and active volunteer groups that seek to serve the broader community. But in Opelousas, there is a limit to the effectiveness of the faith-based charity model. In spite of the valiant efforts of committed volunteers, systemic racism coupled with hard economic realities—and the notable absence of stable employers like the federal government—make it difficult to sustain a decent retirement. In Ogden, the combined economic power of the Mormon Church and the federal government protect residents from the vagaries of inequality and amplify the efficacy of volunteer organizations.

In the United States, economic security in old age was seen, for a long time, as both a social issue and a national obligation. From the birth of Social Security to the end of the 20th century, the common assumption has been that we have a shared responsibility to secure a decent retirement for our citizens. Yet that notion is weakening rapidly. Instead, we have started to hear echoes of the mantra of self-reliance that characterized welfare “reform” in the 1990s: You alone are in charge of your retirement; if you wind up in poverty in your old age, you have only your own inability to plan, save, and invest to blame.

This is an unacceptable conclusion. To reverse it, we must ensure that workers who have spent decades saving for retirement through pension contributions—based on promises made to them by their employers—can rely on those commitments. Companies that go bankrupt should not be able to put their shareholders first and their employees last when debts are settled. The fiduciary responsibilities of banks and brokerage houses that supervise the investment portfolios of pension funds must be elevated, and the supervision over them by federal regulators made more robust.

At the same time, the rules governing 401(k) plans need to be tightened so that retirement money becomes an investment that cannot be touched until retirement. In times of economic hardship, many workers feel they have no choice but to tap into these savings early. If we had more substantial and generous unemployment insurance, invested more in retraining, and provided more generously for medical needs, it would be much more feasible to create retirement funds that wouldn’t need to be raided early by families in distress.

Finally, we must shore up the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the federal agency charged with insuring private retirement plans, since it is the only backstop for those that go bankrupt and will soon be out of business if we don’t. Even though the PBGC provides only partial coverage for benefits, it remains a vital means of protecting at least some of the pension money that workers depend on. If it goes belly up, there will be nothing for them to fall back on.

Beyond these protections for private retirement accounts, the most universal of retirement plans, Social Security, needs to be more robustly funded. Eliminating the earnings cap and requiring high-income employees to pay a Social Security tax on all of their earnings is a vital first step, and it may well be the only one needed to ensure that this basic support system can function well into the future. Needless to say, the wealthy would hardly feel it if they were required to pay the same tax on their earnings that people with far less income routinely pay now.

What we cannot do, however, is ignore these issues or assume they are merely problems for the current generation of retirees. Younger workers will not be able to escape this vortex; indeed, they may face futures even more precarious than today’s seniors do. Younger workers have far less generous retirement benefits; are expected to work for many more years than prior age cohorts did; were punished more in the housing market when the 2008 financial crash reduced the availability of credit; and have faced, in general, more uncertain conditions in the labor market.

For them, the very concept of retirement is fading away, replaced by a work life that does not end at the traditional age of 65. As private pensions, Social Security, and Medicare become increasingly inadequate for meeting basic needs, the working life simply has to go on. That may not be a problem for those who are well-educated and work in rewarding, well-paying professions that do not tax the body. But it is not a solution for people who can no longer stand for hours, lift heavy objects, move at a rapid pace, or master new technologies that require an education they don’t have. For these people, the obligation to work longer and longer is a recipe for stress and downward mobility.

The fact that the fastest-growing sector of American labor consists of full-time workers over the age of 65 tells us how bad the problem of retirement insecurity has gotten.

We have to start looking in the right direction for solutions. And we must ensure that we do not rob other deserving populations—especially children, in whom we invest a paltry sum relative to other advanced postindustrial societies—to solve the inequalities that beset the retirement “system” in the wealthiest country in the world.
We’re going to confront the national-security crisis on our southern border,” President Trump said on February 15, as he announced a state of emergency under the National Emergencies Act. “We’re talking about an invasion of our country,” he continued, “with drugs, with human traffickers, with all types of criminals and gangs.”

Trump’s “state of emergency” was a new legal gambit following his failure to win congressional support for a border wall, but the sub-Boschian picture of criminal invasion from the south was at the center of his incendiary 2016 campaign and has never been far from the surface of his presidency. Trump styles himself a modern-day Cassandra: Mexicans and Central Americans are crossing the border to kill US citizens, he insists, and only he is sounding the alarm.

Greg Grandin’s The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America presents this delusional episode as merely the latest chapter in an old American dilemma. As early as the days of Thomas Jefferson, official American mythmakers cast the United States as a frontier nation, one defined by its sense of the boundless possibilities, personal freedom, and natural riches waiting over the western horizon. The individualism, mobility,
The End of the Myth
From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America
By Greg Grandin
Metropolitan Books. 384 pp. $30

and wealth that the frontier represented seemed to set the United States apart from all other countries, fostering the idea that American progress could be infinite and that, because the United States was a country uniquely oriented to the future, it could serve as a progressive model for all humankind. But the frontier’s advance across the continent has always doubled as a tale of bloody conquest—of Native Americans, Mexicans, and farther-flung peoples. And every open frontier eventually arrives at its end, the place where it turns into a closed border.

The myth of an infinite frontier in 19th-century America also pandered over the conflict raging in the United States as working-class movements for greater social and economic equality—some of them antislavery and even antiracist—were diverted by westward expansion, military expeditions, and xenophobic panics. Since the literal frontier closed more than a century ago, the conceit of limitlessness has served to justify expanding America’s borders into first a worldwide military empire and then commercial globalization. Grandin’s book demonstrates that American myths about open frontiers have always been dangerously simplistic, covering up inequality and violence both at home and abroad. The relentless crisis of the Trump presidency has been a long time coming, Grandin shows: the spasms of a country reckoning with the loss of its foundational myth, the myth of limitlessness.

In his first inaugural address, in 1801, Thomas Jefferson presented a utopian view of territorial expansion. America, he said, offered “room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation.” On a continent “kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc” of Europe, white Americans could build free, self-governing communities of political equals. This vision of political equality among free men was genuinely utopian, powerful enough that Frederick Douglass, in his 1852 speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” hailed the Declaration of Independence—the slaveholder Jefferson’s most iconic work—as the vital source of “saving principles” for Americans hoping to make their country genuinely free.

But the “exterminating havoc” that Jefferson imagined Americans avoiding was also the reality of the very frontier that he helped to open. The American Revolution was a revolt by settlers in pursuit of self-government. But the American revolutionaries also wanted the trans-Appalachian West for themselves and were forbidden from claiming it by a royal proclamation.

George Washington, like many of the other revolutionaries, had participated in the brutal fighting in the French and Indian War—the American version of the Seven Years’ War, which saw Britain, France, and their allies clash from Ohio to India—and he had scouted out the bountiful lands west of the 13 colonies. Among other things, the American Revolution that Washington helped lead was a grab for these lands, and the violence of the century-long conquest that followed was unrelenting: Scalping, enslavement, rape, and revenge killings were the currency on all sides, with the balance of forces almost always favoring the advancing settlers and the soldiers who fought their wars. Washington may have been many things, but among them was the first real-estate speculator to become president.

In its early days, western conquest took a less belligerent form. The “founders’ coalition” of coastal elites, who governed the United States for the first 50 years of independence, were, for the most part, believers in the rule of law. Until Andrew Jackson entered the White House, they mostly shied away from openly embracing the genocide and conquest that continental settlement implied, preferring legal and diplomatic measures. With Jackson, however, came an American expansionism of an entirely different order. Jackson was not shy about the violence that came with resettling already settled land, and political fortune in the young democracy favored the bold and bloody-handed.

The only president known to have personally driven a “coffle” of enslaved people to market, Jackson set about establishing from the beginning of his presidency a white-man’s democracy at the expense of everyone else. Under him, the American republic took its frontier wars southwest, where US fighters brought the scalping techniques they had learned on earlier frontiers and established the border where Trump postures today. According to the report of Gen. Winfield Scott, the commander of the US forces in Texas, volunteer soldiers led by the future president Zachary Taylor made “Heaven weep.… Murder, robbery & rape on mothers & daughters, in the presence of the tied up males of the families, have been common all along the Rio Grande.” Jefferson Davis and another president-to-be, Franklin Pierce, also led troops in the campaign. It was the crucible of an era, a democratic time inseparable from bloody conquest.

For Grandin, the frontier represents not only a literal space but a political strategy. The strategy was to use the expansion of American power to avoid having to resolve thorny domestic political conflicts. From the beginning, the new country was as divided as any other by class: small farmers pitted against coastal landlords and merchants, laborers against early manufacturers, debtors against creditors. But whenever these agitations threatened to grow into something more radical—sometimes even a cross-racial idea of genuine American equality—the restless energy was displaced into whites-only frontier expansion and racist border wars. Westward expansion is thus only the first chapter in a longer history, Grandin contends, in which foreign policy and domestic rule were two sides of the same coin. Projecting American power onto the frontier and abroad helped to head off reckonings with inequality and domination at home.

In the last decades of the 19th century, settling the continent gave way to a new model of expansion: global commercial and military empire. Gilded Age inequality, coupled with the closing of the frontier, inspired radical labor movements and agrarian populism. In response, many of America’s politicians looked outside the country’s borders for missions that could inspire a new sense of national unity.

Teddy Roosevelt was typical of this tendency: He pressed for genuine reforms...
at home but hated labor radicals, decreed class conflict, and called for a “new nationalism,” powered partly by muscular empire in Cuba and the Philippines. (Roosevelt had made his name as the leader of the Rough Riders on a Cuban expedition, much as earlier presidents had cut their teeth in campaigns along the Rio Grande.) Roosevelt’s political allies, such as Indiana Senator Albert Beveridge, laid out a theory of American empire that claimed the lands of the Pacific and Caribbean as the next stage of the frontier.

This episode of expansion would end the hopes of racial equality for a lifetime. Post–Civil War Reconstruction was already in retreat after the Compromise of 1877. Now, imperial expansion in the Spanish–American War of 1898, which brought Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines under US control, became a rallying point for a white-American fraternity that was already thriving in much of the South. As the war approached, Northern newspapers printed sentimental poems about the patriotism of Confederate veterans, saluting the young soldiers headed to the Caribbean. After his election victory in 1896, President William McKinley made a victory tour of the South with a Confederate badge on his lapel. The banner of secession became standard decoration in the military. White Americans had found a new frontier: one that came with a global mission of “civilization” and commerce but still retained the racism of the West’s conquest.

When the veterans of these early imperialist campaigns returned home, they brought with them the revanchist racial violence in which they’d participated abroad. In one case, white veterans of the war led an insurrection in Wilmington, North Carolina, against a racially progressive, populist Republican coalition, a coup by mob that set in motion what would become a pattern of segregation, black disenfranchisement, and racial terror. Veterans revived the Ku Klux Klan in both the South and the North.

Throughout the early 20th century, as the US military expanded, “redeemed” Confederate symbols persisted in its ranks. Entire units wore the Confederate battle flag in place of the Stars and Stripes. The first flag that victorious US troops raised over Okinawa was the Confederate banner. Likewise, while the United States went to war against fascism abroad, a regime of racial segregation and authoritarianism persisted at home—and even after America became the uncontested leader of the “free world,” it continued to sustain this regime for decades. As the last few years remind us, plenty of Americans have never given up on it.

Although the Mexican border was seldom in the headlines during these decades, the unequal and often racialized ways in which freedom and prosperity were distributed in the US could not have found a better emblem. From the 1920s on, a series of bilateral agreements and unilateral US policies made Mexico—which at one point had been (albeit briefly) a revolutionary social democracy—into a workhouse and reserve labor pool for the United States. With the bracero program in the 1940s and the guest-worker programs later, Mexico provided millions of laborers—who some farmers admitted were rented slaves—to keep down the costs in California’s plantation-style system of agriculture. And beginning with the tariff deal brokered by Lyndon Johnson in the late 1960s, the border became a factory site as well, with waves of plant relocations headed there whenever US companies faced trouble at home, from the inflation and labor discontent of the early 1970s to the economic shock of the 1980s recession that Paul Volcker’s Federal Reserve imposed to curb inflation during Ronald Reagan’s first term.

Grandin’s treatment of that border is among the book’s freshest and most illuminating portions, and also the most disturbing in a work already full of Confederate flags and patriotic gore. The pathology of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, he shows, dates back much further than 2016, or even its founding in the aftermath of the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, when Congress created the Department of Homeland Security. US border-security outfits have often been racist redoubts. Going back to the 1920s, Grandin describes Border Patrol agents torturing and shooting migrants, and sometimes handing them over to others for further exploitation. He also shows how vigilante groups have claimed the authority to police the border and attacked and killed migrants for decades.

Grandin doesn’t say a lot about the Cold War, perhaps because some of the themes in his book were eclipsed in those decades in an America struggling for global hegemony. The story picks up again with the 1990s, when American expansionism came to mean stitching the world together under liberal capitalism, supposedly the first step in a push toward universal prosperity. In many ways, the decades following the fall of the Soviet Union were a return to Gilded Age form: American nationalism advertised itself as the postnationalist progress of market liberalism, from Warsaw to Shanghai.

Grandin provides a vivid account of the politics of international trade and financial liberalization in the 1990s. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton agreed that, with the end of the Cold War, the United States had been presented, along with political hegemony, a new frontier on which to recover its moral supremacy. Only cranks and reactionaries could think that their breed of globalization was bad, and the Clintonites delighted in debating throwbacks like Ross Perot, the eccentric billionaire businessman and fierce critic of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), while slighting opposition from the labor unions and the Congressional Black Caucus. Pushing international trade made the Democrats seem progressive: Wasn’t globalization the wave of the future? Republicans, too, embraced the chance to be future-oriented multilateralists, a nice symbolic compensation for a party run by traditional elites—people like Bush—who were now increasingly dependent on white Southern voters.

In this allegedly borderless new frontier of global capitalism, actual borders only mattered more. NAFTA exemplified a pattern of economic integration on deeply unequal terms that went back to the bracero and other guest-worker programs, with the inequality enforced by limiting mobility across the border. This is why Trump’s militarization of the border is nothing new. Every time that guest workers, trade, or naturalization programs bring the various national economies closer together, parallel initiatives—often linked to political bargains and legislation—have built fences
and swollen the Border Patrol. Reading Grandin, it is clear that the ICE union’s endorsement of Trump—like much else that happened in 2016—is just a new fractal in a pattern that is centuries old. It is hard not to see, in the book’s assemblage of bloody tropes “in the mind of America,” how Trump’s rhetoric and actions resemble those of Andrew Jackson, with ICE as his irregular and violent frontier troops and MAGA his answer to Jackson’s white-man’s democracy. The parallels are haunting, which is the point: ‘We are’ haunted. Whatever else he is, the man in the White House is an American poltergeist.

As Grandin demonstrates compellingly, the notion of an infinite frontier has helped Americans evade a material dilemma. This continent’s wealth is finite and, past a certain point, zero-sum; the same holds true for the entire planet. Our uses of that finite wealth are deeply interdependent: Your labor is my rest, and my drudgery makes room for your “doing what you love.” These material constraints pose problems for the American desire to be free and left alone in a community of equals—the formula of the Declaration of Independence, and of most canonical American politics ever since. Yet the more we accept the equality of others, the more constraints we have to take upon ourselves. The point of politics is to engage with these problems, to set the terms of our interdependence as well as our independence, and this requires setting limits.

In short, as the myth of the frontier collapses, American democracy encounters limits, and the road ahead forks. Pointing left are the egalitarians, who take equality seriously, both among citizens and, ideally, among nations, and who therefore speak of the limits we may have to accept on our own appetites and convenience—that is, our freedom, the mythic prize of the frontier. Gesturing right is the Jackson-Trump line of white chauvinists, who aim to resolve the problem of limits by announcing that not everyone can be equal or free. As with the current president, they celebrate walls for keeping out the foreign, the poor, and the dark, reducing the polity to a gated community. Like Jackson’s Democrats, they accept that the relative prosperity and freedom of those inside the country’s borders persist partly because they have their boots on other people’s necks. “How else can it be?” ask these hard-minded realists.

“The border is everywhere,” as left activists point out today, has always been the slogan of the Jacksonians, albeit without the note of criticism.

The Jackson-Trump white chauvinists, however, are not the only expansionists in Grandin’s story. The other line of trouble is more tragic and subtle. Grandin devotes evocative pages to Frederick Jackson Turner, the influential progressive historian who argued in the Gilded Age that the frontier had shaped the American character in a unique combination of individuality and egalitarianism, a true democratic temper. Turner was named for his father, Andrew Jackson Turner, who was named for the president, and young Frederick grew up in the Midwest, where he saw some of the last cruel wave of Indian removals. Yet he whitewashed the image of the American frontier, portraying its history as a diorama of ineluctable progress. Although Turner declared the frontier closed at the end of the 19th century, he also described it as having prepared Americans for their new role as a model democratic people for the world.

For Grandin, Turner is an emblem of all the moderate reformers and liberals who like to pretend that the founders’ coalition was never broken, that the original American promise has now been realized in a regime of mildly regulated markets at home and multilateralism abroad. In 2019, they are the liberals who just want to return to the days of 2015, when the Obama administration was pushing trade liberalization via the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and it was all too easy for them to ignore Obama’s stringent immigration policies. The Trumpists reject the hard work of democratic politics, but, as Grandin shows, liberals also evade it, either by ignoring its importance or by invoking bromides about globalization’s “open” world.

There aren’t many heroes in The End of the Myth, but Grandin does offer us some, such as the Industrial Workers of the World, who fought back against state and vigilante violence along the southwestern border both before and during World War I. Grandin also gives us favorable glimpses of those rare members of the elite in the early republic who saw the horrors that Jackson’s vigilante frontier democracy was preparing. “Are you ready for all these wars?” asked John Quincy Adams, forecasting conflicts between white and indigenous peoples, between slave and free communities, but also giving Grandin a prophetic formula for the frontier’s expansion beyond America’s borders in the next century.

Grandin also finds sources for an egalitarian response to the material constraints on American democracy in Franklin Roosevelt’s progressive advisers, such as the economist Rexford Tugwell, who was sympathetic to a program of deep reforms and saw the frontier as a source of dangerous American ignorance that needed to be overcome; and in Martin Luther King Jr., who toward the end of his life began to direct his energy toward anti-imperialism and democratic socialism.

Grandin is well aware that his argument here is not new. Hegel, in his lectures on the philosophy of history, argued that Americans would never have politics until they ran out of frontier and had to turn to face one another. Alexis de Tocqueville mused that the frontiersmen, once they had grimly extirpated everything between them and the Pacific, might turn back to harry their own countrymen. In 2010, the legal scholar Aziz Rana published The Two Faces of American Freedom, which argues, like The End of the Myth, that American democracy has always been defined by its fraught relationship to racial domination at home and imperialism abroad. Grandin gives us a vivid update of this argument for a time when Jackson’s ghost is once again roaming the land, otherwise known as the Trump era.

What politics follows from turning to face one another and reckoning with the necessary limits to our freedom? Grandin posits “socialism, or at least social democracy.” This encompasses a pretty broad spectrum, but if you agree with him, then Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren—or at least someone else who is moving the Democratic Party toward a deeper engagement with inequality and economic power—will likely fit the bill. But there are some harder
questions as well, which have to do with the issues of international order and domestic nationalism that Grandin’s book helps foreground. In a world of international trade and capital movement, are “open borders” an expression of democratic solidarity, or just a radicalized version of the Clinton-style global expansion of markets? To oppose Trump, should progressives revive the patriotic images of egalitarian democracy that developed around the Union side in the Civil War? Or does intellectual clarity require looking to the defeated margins, to the Wobblies and the last Adams in the White House? How much can a specifically American politics hope to achieve when our neo-frontier fantasy of infinite growth has also become key to the ruling ideologies in China, Russia, India, and Brazil? Should it be gratifying to revanchist American nationalists to reflect that these new authoritarianists learned their legerdemain from us? And should it comfort despairing liberal internationalists to consider that, in this respect, our frontier experience has indeed made us the universal model of humanity? Grandin doesn’t answer these questions, but he does show what we will have to overcome to address them: the American attachment to political fantasy, to visions of progress that gloss over our inequalities and our failure to achieve true democracy, and, above all else, to the myth of a boundless frontier. Fantasizing limitlessness is a bipartisan practice, almost a constitutional norm, and if there is one consistent lesson from American political history, it is that those who point to limits usually lose. But facing limits is exactly what we have to do. When we ignore them, we also ignore the real inequality and domination that we impose on the millions who fall on the wrong side of the border, the color line, or the latest “meritocratic” exam.

One basis of hope is that, while the planet’s resources are ultimately finite, solidarity doesn’t have to be. The perverse genius of nationalism is to turn strangers into siblings, willing to sacrifice for one another. The hope of the democratic left has always been that this is not the only, or the best, form of solidarity, and that understanding the limits we face in common can help to power a politics of common care. If people will fight and die to preserve so many lies and half-truths about what ties them together—Manifest Destiny! White supremacy!—maybe we can also work to grapple with the crises that bind us together in a world cut up by borders and still feverish with delusions of limitless frontiers.

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**Little Death**

*after Jonathas de Andrade*

When a man traps a fish
he removes the hook from its side
and once it has beaten its fright
into the wooden boat with its strongest slaps
he will clutch the fish to his chest
and hold it as it struggles
he will hold it in the tender air
He will hold its tail as if it were his dance partner’s waist
and gaze into the fish’s face for many minutes

When a man seizes a fish, he soothes it
careses its whole body tip to tip
while it thrashes bloody against his bare chest
He will clasp the fish with one hand
like a newborn
and hush its gasping with the other
With love he will tuck it under his chin
so he can feel its heartbeat
in the insistent heat that hangs above the water

Remember: when a man captures a fish
he will seduce it while he slaughters it
the strength of his love can’t be simulated
the sound of the green water can’t be simulated
he will kiss the wheezing gills
his kisses can’t be simulated
he will hold it as it struggles
that little death
he will hold it in the tender air

RACHEL GALVIN
Last September, French President Emmanuel Macron met an unassuming gardener on the grounds of the Élysée Palace. Introducing himself, the 25-year-old timidly explained that he was having trouble finding work. “I send résumés and cover letters… they don’t lead to anything,” he told the president. Many people in France can relate: The country’s unemployment rate hovers just below 9 percent, more than two points above the European Union average. The joblessness rate, meanwhile, is more than twice that for young people age 15 to 24.

Macron’s reaction, however, was less than sympathetic—almost as if he were hearing this problem for the very first time and wasn’t all that convinced of its seriousness. “If you’re willing and motivated, in hotels, cafés, and restaurants, construction, there’s not a single place I go where they don’t say they’re looking for people!” he exclaimed. Then he added, “If I crossed the street, I’d find you one.”

The exchange only added to Macron’s long list of comically arrogant and out-of-touch utterances, both before and after he took office in May 2017. Along with his policies, which include tax cuts for the ultrarich, a decrease in low-income housing aid, and labor “reforms” that make it easier to lay off workers, these Macronisms have fueled the former investment banker’s image as “president of the rich.” Among the growing list: In 2016, while still serving as minister of the economy under François Hollande, Macron informed a young demonstrator that he wasn’t scared by his T-shirt and told him that he should get to work so he could “afford a suit”; in 2017, Macron described train stations as spaces filled with “people who succeed and people who are nothing”; and, later that same year, he dismissed tens of thousands of union-backed protesters as “lazy.”

Only the most fervent of the president’s supporters would deny that Macron has come to be viewed by many as an avatar for the country’s elites. A recent poll found that he had an approval rating of just 30 percent—down more than 30 points since his election two years ago. The Yellow Vest protests, which erupted late last year and continue today with broad support, have come to embody the intensity of public resentment against Macron. While a chorus of prominent fans continues to cheer him on from abroad, true believers are increasingly hard to find in France itself.

Sophie Pedder, Paris bureau chief of The Economist, is one of them. Her new book, Revolution Française, is for this reason not very helpful for understanding Macron’s presidency and its limits. But it is useful for understanding his own self-perceptions, as well as the reasons why an ever-diminishing share of European and American liberals still support and admire him.

Pedder is perhaps best known in France for her previous book, French Denial: The Last Spoiled Children of Europe, which was published in France in the aftermath of Hollande’s 2012 election victory. It’s a nasty polemic against the country’s welfare state and relatively pro-worker labor laws, both of which Pedder sees as outmoded and irresponsible in an increasingly globalized world. With the ascension of Macron, Pedder found someone she could finally cheer: a politician willing to loosen workforce regulations and transform France into a “start-up nation.”

Pedder divides her book into two sections. The first traces Macron’s spectacular rise and the circumstances that made it possible; the second turns toward his political project and his brief time in office. Journalists can often be enthusiastic about their subjects, but in the book’s second section, Pedder takes her enthusiasm to a new level. For her, Macron’s presidency is, as the book’s title suggests, nothing short of a revolution. For much of France’s work-
Revolution Française
Emmanuel Macron and the Quest to Reinvent a Nation
By Sophie Pedder
Bloomsbury. 320 pp. $28

Pedder is a proud practitioner of access journalism, and she has interviewed Macron at length on multiple occasions. Exchanges like these can be fruitful if they are framed around a set of tough questions; they might have even been useful in clarifying Macron's underlying worldview. Unfortunately, Pedder's gushing admiration for her subject means that Macron is often treated less like a politician than as some kind of philosopher-poet manqué who simply happened to fall into public service.

Despite Pedder's efforts, Macron is not even very good at playing this role. Mostly, he provides a series of rambling and mind-numbingly rapid quotes that are neither philosophical nor political. The challenge now, he says, "is to build a neo-progressiveism, structured around the idea of individual progress for all, in a way that combines agility with security."

In another, he explains: "We need to define another horizon together. We can be leaders of tomorrow's world." At one point, Pedder lets Macron ask and answer his own question about populism: "Why do we have a revival of religious and other fanaticisms? Because they have a hold on the imagination, sometimes an extreme hold, which responds to an ontological need that mankind has for exaltation, for figures that count."

Macron's verbosity and his tendency to embrace irritating jargon may have actually worsened since he assumed the presidency. Speaking in vacuous language, it seems, is one of his preferred political weapons. By doing so, he can find a way to appease multiple constituencies at once—by talking a lot and yet saying very little. But the president does have a political project, and it is one that cannot possibly appease everyone. For Macron, France has long been crippled by entrenched special interests—labor, civil servants, naive student protesters—who turn to the state to solve their problems and prevent the economy from realizing its full potential. Macron's ambition, at least in his telling, is to pass the tough but necessary reforms that will liberate the private sector from these nefarious forces and unleash long-term growth. In this way, Macron can serve as the tribune of the people, the supposed "hidden majority" that supports his plans for "reforming the country."

Previous efforts to relax the state's grip on the economy and roll back public spending have failed, because the powerful special interests derided by the president and his ilk ultimately prove to be a large portion of the population. Macron is indeed a tribune, but it is for the economic elites, who themselves constitute their own entrenched special interest. His base is not a "hidden majority" so much as an influential minority composed of executives and white-collar professionals—the latter of whom used to split their votes between the Socialist Party and the mainstream right wing but, in 2016, helped to propel Macron into the second round of the presidential election. In that run-off, Macron then trounced the National Front's Marine Le Pen, winning support from a much broader coalition of young people, retirees, and public-sector workers. But as the exit polls showed, most of these voters were motivated by hostility toward the far right, not by support for the president's platform. Macron's polling numbers today reflect his actual base: the 33 percent or so of the French electorate who genuinely believe in his project.

Not only does Pedder accept Macron's claims to represent a hidden majority, but she also anchors her defense of him to the idea that France is in dire need of reform because of its hostility toward business. Whether or not it's the popular thing to do, she argues, the country needs to loosen labor regulations, slash government spending, and privatize public services. This argument is common among certain Anglophone observers of France, especially those of the neoliberal variety. Although France has the world's sixth-largest economy, boasts 28 Fortune 500 companies (seven more than the United Kingdom), and is a nation where shareholders are rewarded handsomely, with one of the highest rates of corporate profits going
toward dividends and stock buybacks on the planet, Pedder insists that “corporate France has not fulfilled its potential.”

Perhaps because she's so sympathetic to the supposed woes of the business world, Pedder also proves to be not all that interested in the various protest movements which, in previous years, have successfully beaten back Macron-style reforms, and which have flamed into existence again in 2018. Pedder recognizes the street as a potent force in French politics, and she makes note of the 1995 movement against retirement reform and the 2005 student movement against a proposed youth-employment contract. But instead of exploring the causes of these demonstrations, Pedder simply chalks them up to the nation’s “romantic affection for revolutionary rhetoric and theatrical protest.” France's penchant for protests, as far as she's concerned, is merely a question of style—not the product of genuine political conflict or class dynamics.

The spectacular success of the Yellow Vest movement should safely put that notion to rest. Launched last November to oppose an increase in the fuel tax, the movement has come to encompass a deep frustration with the rising cost of living and with Macron's disinterest in providing relief to the working and lower-middle classes. After weeks of disruptive traffic blockades and demonstrations that grew violent, the president was forced, humiliatingly, to make concessions. The government canceled the planned fuel-tax hike and vowed to increase a state subsidy for low-wage workers by up to €100 per month; scrap another tax hike that hit retirees; and stop taxing overtime pay. Needless to say, these aren't concessions to a protest movement focused simply on prices at the gas pump.

Pedder calls her book Revolution Française because she believes Macron's election as president could prove nearly as pivotal as the much bloodier political transformations of 1789. It could mark, she writes, “the beginnings of a reshaping of modern France, and with it possibly Europe.” According to this view, Macron's victory spells the end of a political crisis, the welcome conclusion to a cycle of despair and tepid growth that dates back to the end of the Trente Glorieuses, the nation's 30-year postwar boom.

In reality, Macron's election didn't signify the end of France's political crisis, but rather its deepening. The Fifth Republic now faces a hegemony crisis without parallel in its 60-year history. As En Marche, Macron's party, braves the swelling winds of disapproval, the two political families that have dominated life in France since World War II stand in tatters. The Socialist Party is a spent force on the national level, polling in the single digits ahead of this May's European elections. The mainstream right, meanwhile, has been paralyzed as Macron's government approves a series of policies it has long advocated. At the same time, populist forces are bubbling on opposite sides of the spectrum: on the left, La France Insoumise, which seeks to mobilize popular discontent against corporations and the ultrarich; on the far right, the newly renamed National Rally, formerly known as the National Front.

At the moment, none of these parties can plausibly claim majority support on their own. Polls are a constant reminder of their basic lack of popularity, with most political figures earning less than a third of the public’s approval. It’s a dizzying and frightening moment—but one not without opportunity for those committed to a revival of social democracy. The left could gain momentum as it rallies behind France’s imperiled social safety net, regaining support from working-class voters. On the other hand, the far right, as Le Pen and company continue to harp on national identity and rail against the government’s economic policies.

The Yellow Vests illustrate the complexity of the path ahead. One of the most comprehensive studies of the protesters to date found most of them hostile to political labels and motivated primarily by issues of economic justice—in other words, apt recruits for a reinvigorated left. At the same time, a separate poll showed that more than 40 percent of self-described Yellow Vests backed Le Pen in 2017—more than any other presidential candidate. While her party remains a magnet for chest-thumping nationalists, the National Rally has also managed to reinvent itself as a pro-worker foe of the political establishment represented by Macron.

Given the roller coaster of the last year and a half, only fools would try to predict what comes next. What is clear, though, is that the starry-eyed optimism of Pedder’s account has already been superseded by events. Macron's appeal peaked the day that French citizens rallied together to deny the presidency to Le Pen. Voters may be called on to do so again soon. Unfortunately, for many, the choice may not be as obvious next time.
Stacey Haney just wanted a barn. The price, around $9,000, was beyond her means as a registered nurse raising a family: $600 a week for shifts that could last as long as 23 hours. When the mining company Range Resources arrived in her hometown of Amity, Pennsylvania, and told residents that the contemporary equivalent of gold lay beneath their properties, Haney believed that she'd found a solution to her quandary. Amity sits on the Marcellus Shale, a sedimentary-rock formation that stretches about 90,000 square miles and contains natural gas. Like her neighbors, Haney signed what was meant to be a lucrative lease with Range to allow the company to build a fracking-waste pond nearby. Not only could she buy better shelter for her farm animals, but Range agreed to provide her with potable water in case the site affected the quality of her well—a point of pride for Haney, who'd grown up hauling water back to the family home.

Then her animals started to die, and her children became sick. A prize goat gave birth to a kid in three pieces and then died. A neighbor's beloved boxer puppy died from what seemed to be poison, its insides "crystallized, as if it had drunk antifreeze." One of Haney's children, Harley, suffered from mouth ulcers, nosebleeds, and personality changes, and a cut on Haney's foot refused to heal. Something was clearly wrong—the air stank, and strange liquids leaked from the waste pond—but it was hard to link either the human or animal sickness to environmental contamination. And the burden of proof fell on Haney.

Sarah Jones is a staff writer for New York magazine, where she covers politics and culture.
fourth lawsuit against the state for its newly passed Oil and Gas Act, which was poised to loosen the zoning restrictions on fracking ponds and allow companies like Range to position them closer to residential areas. The Pennsylvania Constitution guarantees all citizens “the right to clean air and pure water,” and the expansion of the extractive industry in western Pennsylvania, the Smiths and their legal team argued, threatened the citizens’ common good. Amity and Prosperity tells the story of how these Pennsylvanians fought to save it. The book also points us to the prospects for a more rooted environmentalism that might help to bridge the gulf between middle-class liberals in urban centers and rural working-class activists.

By reputation, anti-fracking activism is a liberal cause, mostly taken up by middle-class progressives living on the West and East coasts. But fracking has tangible effects on the land and on the people living there, and opposition to the industry has emerged in other parts of the country as well, creating new alliances between middle- and working-class Americans. Today, liberals and environmentalists are not the only groups that oppose fracking; so do many of the working-class people who are supposed to benefit from it. In southern Appalachia and parts of the Shenandoah Valley, residents have organized against construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. In Virginia and West Virginia, protesters have occupied trees and various roads to try to block or at least slow construction. In Louisiana, activists have established a camp to protest the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. While all of these campaigns were organized by local activists, each with their own concerns about the effects of the extractive industry’s use of their land, they also capture a broader movement in the state but also the visions of regional progress that justified it. In one arrest moment in the book, Griswold describes a gas company’s billboard: On it, “a translucent baby” floats, the words ENGINEER? WELDER? emblazoned over its features.

Their frustration over how the energy industry has come to dominate politics in their state has also led them to grow increasingly disenchanted with both the Democratic and Republican parties. Haney ended up voting for Jill Stein in 2016—not out of a standing commitment to the Green Party or the left, but because she felt that neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump represented her interests. While she was certainly in the minority—most of her neighbors supported Trump, by a nearly two-to-one margin—according to Griswold, Haney was one of 16 people in her small township to vote for the Green Party candidate.

Griswold’s book captures another kind of politicization that is also taking place in much of rural America and one that often goes neglected by many books written about its rightward turn: Out of the dislocations and ecological harm caused by industrial extraction, a new expression of environmentalism is gaining popularity among working-class people. The campaigns against the Mountain Valley and Dakota Access pipelines are only a few examples of an emerging politics that focuses on the commons and what is at risk when extractive industries mine and harm the land.

Partisanship isn’t totally irrelevant in these struggles. Trump embraced fracking early on, and his administration’s platform of deregulation favors the coal and natural-gas industries—which poses a dilemma for some fracking opponents who may otherwise consider themselves conservatives. But the opposition to fracking and gas pipelines has often proved to transcend partisan expectations. In Virginia’s Ninth District, Representative Morgan Griffith, a Tea Party Republican who defeated a 14-term Democratic incumbent in 2010, made clear in the run-up to last year’s elections that he had “legitimate concerns” about what the Mountain Valley Pipeline could do to local water supplies, and many of the Virginia teachers that I interviewed last May said much the same.

Precisely for this reason, this new breed of environmental activism offers the possibility of building new alliances and radicalizing new constituencies for the left. State constitutions may also be on their side. In the suit that the Smiths filed against Range Resources, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that key aspects of the Oil and Gas Act did violate the state’s constitution. “It is not a historical accident that the Pennsylvania Constitution now places citizens’ environmental rights on par with their political rights,” wrote then-Chief Justice Ronald Castille in his decision, singling out Haney’s testimony as a persuasive factor in the case.

Haney’s case was eventually settled—though Range, for its part, insists that it did nothing wrong. But what she and her neighbors have lost is something that can never be recovered. In a postscript to her book, Griswold notes that the Haney’s farmhouse still stands empty. The Voyles’ daughter wants to buy it, but if she does, she’ll have to haul in her own water, or collect rainwater in a cistern—the very fate that Stacey Haney hoped to avoid for herself.
Puzzle No. 3494

**ACROSS**

1. Hold down a soda (lawyer’s drink) (4,6)
2. Close to the target with gun, perhaps (4)
3. Orator’s someone who doesn’t have a coat (7)
4. Partially disturb our engine (5)
5. Without a date, Sinatra produces sluggishness (9)
6. Piece of cloth is inside out, shredded, and much appreciated (5,3)
7. Sprite goes after packaging for beautiful advertising vehicle (5)
8. For instance, Snapchat Mrs. Gorbachev at the onset of Last Judgment (9)
9. Pierce small fruit (5)
10. Graveyard legend of jumbled heap around gaping hole in the ground (7)
11. Cheerful lad steals uranium from female relative (7)

**DOWN**

1. Picture Henri initially running away from torture device? (8)
2. The opposite of liquor? Put in a bit of salt to make snake covered in oddly sour wine (7)
3. Guitarist Ford, for example—a hill dweller—with an April 15, 2019 (5)
4. Reads an article about deprivation (6,7)
5. Tempted with something that might have been used to serve tea to a swim? (3,6)
6. Raise illumination source with 18 for river’s end (5)
7. Here in Mexico, “san” comes up for “saunt” (7)
8. Dirty so-and-so involved in smuggled goods, mostly—that’s extremely low (13)
9. Somewhere you can have sex, act young at heart, and run to embrace bishop (6,3)
10. Savage pirate provided drink (8)
11. Busy decapitating, using an ax (7)
12. Arranging flowers somewhat like bananas (7)
13. Rise of divinity in timid basketball star (6)
14. Louisiana Armstrong, dropping by with idiot (5)
15. Republican editor, angry with humanitarian outfit (3,5)
16. Leading characters associated with manger at Galilean inn! (4)
17. Dirty so-and-so involved in smuggled goods, mostly—that’s extremely low (13)
18. Free the spray (6)
19. Anteater run to embrace bishop (6,3)
20. Deadfall (rev.) (6)

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3493**


DOWN: 1 Back + ward (rev.)
2 Rev. hidden 3 hidden 4 2 defs. 6 [petrograde] 7 at present (pattern ang.) 8 Hurry + A + H 9 Legs 14 Astr (star ang.) + Oncom 16 (more ang.) + ER (kilt.) 17 TELET + Hon’[nc] 18 Con + Goldes + E 19 Children + N 22 Sup’Per 24 Gas + P 26 Ale + X 27 theme
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