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In Ecuador, women who terminate—or lose—pregnancies face prosecution and prison time.

ZOË CARPENTER
Letters

Wanted: A Peace Candidate

I’m glad to see John Nichols bringing up our costly wars with a Democratic presidential candidate [“Beto on the Costs of War,” April 29]. Imagine if we cut our annual military budget by $200 billion, closed our hundreds of foreign military bases, and used that money to make a down payment on rebuilding our country’s failing infrastructure. I hope Nichols is able to get all of the candidates on record.

Edgar Gehlert
Hyde Park, N.Y.

They’ve Had Their Turn

I agree with Kai Wright’s column “Apologies Owed” [April 22], but I’d go further. Way further. Our last 45 presidents have been men. Women and girls—half the country!—have never seen anyone in the White House who’s like us in this most basic way. Male candidates: Close your eyes and take a few seconds to imagine what that would be like. Now tell me: Why on earth would anyone who wants to build a new, better America work to install Male #46 there in 2020?

Bernie, Joe, Beto, et al.: You’re great, we love you, but we don’t need you for this. There are amazing female candidates for president—progressive, smart, experienced fighters! If you want to show true leadership in a party dedicated to reform, drop out of the race and support one of these stellar women. Wright’s closing paragraphs say it beautifully: “These inequities are not aberrations; they reflect deliberate choices made throughout our national history…. We cannot build a new, better America unless we learn how to deal with the white-male supremacy that built the one we’ve got.”

Guys, you’re not going to overcome male privilege by wielding it, no matter how noble your intentions.

This can’t wait. We need male leaders with the guts and humility to work for a woman in the White House.

Kathy Frugé Brown
Maple Valley, Wash.

Not My Candidate

I am so disappointed in The Nation for doing a puff piece on Kirsten Gillibrand and giving her the cover of the magazine [“Kirsten Gillibrand Isn’t Afraid of Anything,” April 29]. So disappointed that I am considering not renewing my subscription.

I think Gillibrand is a shallow charlatan, and I believe lots of center-to-left-leaning Democrats feel the same way. She jumped on the #MeToo bandwagon to further her career (bad move, I think) and led the hounding of Al Franken from the Senate. She should not be forgiven.

Beyond this callow opportunism, Gillibrand has no record. She only has a Senate seat because Hillary Clinton vacated it in 2009. Any Democratic nominee would win that seat in New York State. Gillibrand is merely mud-dying the Democratic primaries and will never get my vote. In fact, for what she did, if I were in New York, I would vote Republican. And if Gillibrand succeeds in her quest for the Democratic presidential nomination, I will sit out the election. I wouldn’t vote for Trump, but I could never bring myself to vote for her.

Michael Walsh
Montclair, N.J.

Acknowledgment

We failed to acknowledge that Bryce Covert’s article “Everyone Must Go!” (May 6), on the activism of laid-off retail workers, was funded in part by the journalism nonprofit the Economic Hardship Reporting Project. We appreciate the support and regret the oversight.

letters@thenation.com
A Frontal Attack

Since Roe v. Wade granted American women the legal right to abortion in 1973, the anti-choice movement has been divided over how to roll it back. Incrementalists favor eroding Roe’s protections by making abortions ever more difficult to provide and obtain; a more brazen faction supports a direct attack on the decision itself. Overturning Roe would require at least five justices, so the incrementalists have prevailed, passing hundreds of restrictions on the state and federal levels, including mandatory ultrasounds, biased counseling, restrictions on insurance coverage for the procedure, and for minors, laws requiring parental consent.

Since 2010, when Republicans gained control of 11 statehouses, the number of restrictions has spiked, and this year, anti-choice legislators have quickened the pace; 250 restrictions have been introduced in 41 states in 2019 alone. Those restrictions did what they were intended to do: Over a third of American women now live in counties without an abortion provider.

With the addition of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, anti-choice activists have pounced. In the first three months of 2019, 28 states introduced some form of abortion ban. Arkansas and Utah now prohibit abortions past 18 weeks. Ohio, Kentucky, and Mississippi have passed six-week bans, outlawing the procedure just two weeks after a woman typically finds out she’s pregnant; in Georgia, a six-week ban awaits the governor’s signature. And states aren’t stopping there. Texas and Alabama are attempting to criminalize abortion outright. The Texas legislature this year considered a measure that would make abortion punishable by the death penalty, and in Alabama a proposal introduced this year would make providing an abortion at any stage in pregnancy a felony.

The audacity of these measures is chilling, and that’s the whole point. Rather than simply testing Roe’s boundaries or finding ways to limit access while leaving the legal framework intact if hollow, these bans are a frontal attack on Roe. And there’s a very good chance they could succeed. “The newly constituted Supreme Court may be willing to reconsider the court’s previous rulings protecting the right to abortion,” said Jordan Goldberg of the National Institute for Reproductive Health. With Kavanaugh on the court, the timing couldn’t be better. Through the theft of a Supreme Court seat, the Republican Party has set up the religious right—one of the constituencies on which it most depends—to be in its permanent debt.

Meanwhile, abortion providers are more vulnerable than they’ve been since the 1990s—from 2016 to 2017, the National Abortion Federation reported, threats of violence against abortion providers nearly doubled, and President Donald Trump does nothing to help, accusing Democrats of being the “party of late-term abortion” and throwing around words like “rip,” “execute,” and “infanticide.”

The timing seems right for something else, too, though: Activists have increasingly recognized the role states and municipalities can play in protecting the legal right to abortion—and in ensuring that right is not guaranteed merely on paper. Since Trump’s election, Massachusetts, Delaware, Illinois, Oregon, and New York have passed laws protecting legal abortion or expanding access. This year, 13 states have introduced measures that would expand protections or repeal outdated abortion laws.

Last week, the Kansas Supreme Court found a fundamental right to abortion in the state’s Constitution. Abortion-rights advocates often say the anti-choice movement doesn’t want to end abortion, only safe and legal abortion. Zoë Carpenter traveled to Ecuador to meet women whose painful experiences bear out the truth of that claim. Ecuador has a near-total ban on the procedure, yet thousands of women obtain clandestine abortions there each year. In recent years, the criminal-justice system has cracked down on women who terminate pregnancies. As abortion provision moves further into the shadows, her reporting shows, women have been driven to obtain clandestine abortions. Ecuador to meet women whose painful experiences bear out the truth of that claim. Ecuador has a near-total ban on the procedure, yet thousands of women obtain clandestine abortions there each year. In recent years, the criminal-justice system has cracked down on women who terminate pregnancies. As abortion provision moves further into the shadows, her reporting shows, women have been driven to obtain clandestine abortions.
Aimed at 2020

New political group will push a “women’s new deal.”

Most Americans are women, as are an even larger majority of American voters. But somehow we’re still a “special interest.” At otherwise outstanding CNN town halls in late April, only the female 2020 presidential candidates were asked about so-called women’s issues—even though the dozen-plus male candidates are vying for a voting population that, especially in the Democratic Party, is mostly women and disproportionately women of color.

What is going on? Women, of course, are divided by race, age, class and much more. Our power is fractured; the powers that be often work to keep it that way. Often, even promising feminist initiatives address those fractures belatedly, if at all—and then wonder why their membership rosters remain so...white. That’s how the new women’s political action group Supermajority promises to be different—and if women can unite across the lines it’s proposing, we indeed make up a supermajority in the United States, and we can chart the future.

In launching Supermajority, Ai-jen Poo, Alicia Garza and Cecile Richards, household names in the activist community, have partnered with the women behind the enormous yet underestimated Facebook phenomenon Pantsuit Nation, along with a supporting cast that includes leaders from Planned Parenthood to the Service Employees International Union to Families Belong Together, to unite us across the chasms that have historically divided us.

Specifically, Supermajority says it will mobilize 2 million women ahead of the 2020 elections while building energy around a “women’s new deal”—an agenda to meet the needs of 21st-century women, from closing the persistent pay gap to staggering child care costs, rising maternal mortality, no family leave, and a government that continues to fail women,” the group announced in its introductory press statement. It seeks to support as well as increase the rising numbers of women running for elected office. Although women make up about 54 percent of voters, we are only 23.7 percent of Congress; that’s even after the spectacular surge of 2018.

Maybe most important, Supermajority starts with the goal of building “a multiracial, intergenerational movement for women’s equity.” If you want to know what’s different about this group, it’s this simple: having that ever-elusive objective of full inclusion as a founding premise, not an afterthought.

Its superstar leaders got the group enviable national media coverage on Day 1. Collectively, they’ve earned it: Richards helped turn Planned Parenthood into a political powerhouse; Poo, the executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, has worked mightily to move isolated, often exploited women out of the shadows and into economic and political power; Garza emerged from the activism of Black Lives Matter to become one of the leading voices for racial justice in the nation. I’ll confess: I’m aware of Pantsuit Nation only as a mostly white Facebook community for frustrated Hillary Clinton supporters that emerged in the closing days of the 2016 election—one that, by the way, I joined. Under the leadership of Libby Chamberlain and Cortney Tunis, it’s grown to 3.5 million members in under three years.

Those members got a blast of their new Supermajority partnership—including Clinton’s endorsement—on their Facebook page the very day it launched. The vast majority of 100-plus supporters who responded did so enthusiastically. But one Pantsuit Nation member asked an obvious question: How does Supermajority avoid competing with worthy groups already out there? She listed “NOW, Emily’s List, Pantsuit Nation, Pantsuit Republic, National Women’s Health Network, Black Women’s Health Imperative, Indivisible, Swing Left, Feminist Women’s Health Centers, + ACLU & NARAL, League of Women Voters; Feminist Majority” and more. I admit I wondered the same thing, so I asked Richards.

“Women are so used to living in a world of scarcity rather than abundance,” she observed. “We all come out of organizing, and we are all conscious of the need to build more capacity.” In Supermajority’s first 48 hours, she said, women have already signed up from all 50 states and created more than 40,000 member profiles. “It’s not the coasts. It’s states where there’s really little capacity.” Specifically, she said, they heard from women seeking training in how to work across racial and class lines. “We are working hard and intentionally to build something that’s multiracial and multigenerational, because we’ve seen that it really doesn’t just happen. We have to model a different way of organizing.”

As Poo noted in the group’s founding statement, “Women have always done the work, the invisible work that makes everything else possible.” Supermajority aims to make that work visible and more powerful than it would be in isolation.

JOAN WALSH
Beeping Mad

Dear Liza,

My husband and I moved into a new rental home on the outskirts of Philadelphia about eight months ago. Everything is great, except for one issue on our street. Every weekday morning before 6, one of my neighbors gets picked up by a driver who honks to announce their arrival: BEEP-BEEP-BEEEEEP!

I am trying not to “Becky” the situation by overreacting, as white people so often do. (I am white, and almost all of my neighbors are black.) I’ve tried ignoring it. We even sleep with a sound machine now, which helps drown out the quieter honks. But I am still woken up two to three times a week. Is there an appropriate way to talk to my neighbor about this?

—Sleepless in the Suburbs

Dear Sleepless,

You’re right to be cautious. You already know that filing a noise complaint would be overreacting, possibly exposing your black neighbors to police harassment or worse. But of course you need your sleep! Knock on your neighbor’s door and ask politely if the driver could send a text in the morning to announce their arrival rather than honk the horn. Failing that, suggest waiting for them outside. Then, the first time your neighbor complies with your request, bake the person a pie and leave a thank-you card.

Dear Liza,

I’ve been an activist and Marxist for most of my adult life—more than two decades now—and during that time, the left was small and weak. In most ways, that was terrible: We consistently failed to transform society. It makes you feel crazy when the world is collapsing and few people seem to notice or care. But as in any unhappy family, you get used to the situation.

Now I find myself in a new world. “Socialism” has become a popular term, and thousands of people have joined our movement. Waves of teachers are going on strike; people have occupied airports; millions of feminists have poured into the streets. It’s been exciting to see the beliefs that I’ve held for so long get a hearing in unexpected places. We are even starting to win sometimes.

But this sea change has shaken up my personal life in ways that are disorienting. I’m suddenly at odds with people I’d long considered mentors, friends, and comrades—people with whom I could, in the past, sustain relationships even when we disagreed. Those disagreements, which once seemed so inconsequential, can now take on sudden urgency and import.

The left for me has always been a space for political projects that I believe are necessary, but it’s also been where I’ve made my best friends, met all the loves of my life, and had fun. It’s scary to find the second (human) part of this so up in the air now.

I know you can’t change the historical conditions that keep producing new factions, but do you have any tips on how to hold on to the ties of personal affection, intellectual engagement, and social pleasure? I’ve seen other people become isolated, bitter, and paranoid when they lose this ability. How can we stay human, kind, caring, and generous while throwing ourselves into the struggle in a principled way?

—Yours in Love and Revolution

Dear L&R,

The explosion of possibility you so beautifully describe is only one of the significant historical changes since you entered left politics. Another is that so many disagreements are now aired on social media rather than face to face. In person, we are more likely to see our interlocutors as human and treat them accordingly. As Todd May, the author of Friendship in an Age of Economics: Resisting the Forces of Neoliberalism, pointed out to me, “You can hear their voices, see their eyes—all those things give them heft as a person.” On social media, by contrast, even a lifelong comrade can be reduced to an idea you don’t like.

(continued on page 8)
Voting Wrongs

Last November, a public referendum restored the right to vote to as many as 1.5 million Floridians with criminal records. It was a historic victory for voting rights: Before the passage of Amendment 4, nearly 20 percent of Florida’s black adults had been disenfranchised.

The state’s Republican lawmakers, however, are working to roll back that win. On April 24, the Florida House of Representatives passed a bill along party lines that would require felons who have finished their sentences to pay all court fees and fines and make restitution payments before they’re allowed to vote. According to The Miami Herald, Florida doesn’t even track such payments, and creating a system to do so could cost millions of dollars. NBC News reported that the state has 115 types of fees, fines, and surcharges. “These fines and fees in Florida are out of control,” said Ashley Thomas, the state director of the Fines and Fees Justice Center.

The fight now moves to the Florida Senate. If the bill passes there, it will be sent to the Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, who has yet to say whether he will sign it. Opponents say these new restrictions amount to a poll tax. “It will inevitably prevent individuals from voting based on the size of the person’s bank account,” said Kara Gross of the ACLU of Florida. “Those who have the financial means will vote, and those who [do not] won’t.”

(continued from page 4)

ing hearings may reveal, I spoke with committee member Jamie Raskin. Before his 2016 election as a Democratic representative from Maryland, Raskin was a professor at American University’s Washington College of Law and one of the nation’s most distinguished commentators on constitutional questions. Here is some of what he said about how the committee and the American people should approach one of the most awesome of those questions. (The full version of this interview appears on TheNation.com.)

JOHN NICHOLS: How should we be thinking about impeachment?

JAMIE RASKIN: It’s the people’s and Congress’s final instrument of self-defense against a president who is trampling the rule of law and assuming the powers of a king. It has both legal and political dimensions. The legal aspect requires us to ask whether there have been high crimes and misdemeanors such as treason or bribery, which I take to mean grave offenses from on high of a public character against the democracy itself. The political part requires us to ask whether the public interest demands impeachment and conviction as a remedy to stop a pattern of misconduct that is contemptuous of the rule of law and our Constitution. If it were a purely legal judgment, it would have been assigned to the courts in Article III, but the founders rejected that idea and located it in Article I, with Congress.

From the beginning of the administration, I’ve said impeachment should not be a fetish for anybody, but it should be a taboo for nobody. At this point in events, we have to be taking it very seriously.

What people sometimes miss is that impeachment takes the question of holding presidents to account out of the paradigm of crime and punishment. The president is not punished by virtue of impeachment as he would be with a prosecution. He doesn’t go to jail. He may face prosecution separately, but this is about defending our Constitution by removing a president who has become an intolerable threat to the people and our form of government.

There can be real risks attendant on impeachment, as when it acts like a partisan hit over low crimes and misdemeanors, which is what happened with Bill Clinton. But there are real risks attendant on not impeaching when a president is systematically thwarting the rule of law and destroying constitutional norms. If you read David Stewart’s book about Andrew Johnson, I think you will come away with the sense that Johnson was an egregious threat to the Constitution, to the rule of law, and to Reconstruction, and he absolutely should have been impeached, convicted, and removed. Johnson’s escape from this fate by a single vote in the Senate was a tragedy for America and especially for African Americans.

JN: Some members of Congress have called for impeachment. You’ve discussed the issue but not made a formal call. Why not?

JR: I’ve been vehement about calling for Democratic control of Congress. I threw everything I had into the 2018 fight to retake the House. And I feel the same way about the 2020 election. We are in a civilizational emergency with respect to climate change, which Republicans ignore and deny. But we have a major political party that is operating with the ethos of a religious cult in capitulating to whatever their leader tells them to do. And that leader lurches from crisis to crisis, from the shutdown of our government to the unlawful declaration of a national emergency to the vilification of immigrants to the systematic obstruction of the law-enforcement function of government, as was described in the Mueller report, to an effort to stop all executive-branch compliance with lawful congressional orders and demands for information.

With that said, as a member of the Judiciary Committee, I believe it is going to be very important for us to proceed deliberately, soberly, and with careful attention to all of the evidence, as well as all the information and views being brought to us by our colleagues.

JN: How should the committee make the call on whether the inquiry that extends from the Mueller report and related issues will become an impeachment process?

JR: To me, the question is whether we have sufficiently abundant evidence of high crimes and misdemeanors, meaning public offenses against the character of our government, which are part of a continuing pattern of attacks on our constitutional system. I’ve got to say that the mood here has changed over the last several days [in late April], ever since the president told the executive branch of the government to stop cooperating with congressional investigations. They are trying to disable our capacity to investigate corruption of the security-clearance process, to question the former White House counsel Don McGahn, to obtain the president’s tax returns, and to call witnesses and get documents. The obstructionism we read about in the report has come leaping off the pages and is making it impossible to do our work. Trump’s refusal to respond to our lawful demands is a direct assault on the separation of powers and an affront to our ability to get our work done.

JN: Doesn’t what the president is doing meet the standard of impeachment or a potentially impeachable offense?
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“Before I’m ready to impeach, I want to be certain that there is convincing evidence of high crimes and misdemeanors.”

So I would avoid using these platforms to work out important disagreements. Once people are abstracted from their appealing physicality and warmth, it’s easy to lose sight of our affection for them and make too much of minor differences. Which brings me to my next point: You seem to be placing too much importance on ideological struggle, L&R, and I suspect you’re being too rigid about it. While you’re aware that this is straining your friendships, it’s probably also impeding your political work. To build power and win, the left needs to continue to grow and be a place where people want to organize. Too much emphasis on making sure everyone has the correct positions can get in the way of all that.

“When you think of people as comrades or potential comrades,” said Jodi Dean, an activist and the author of Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging, coming this October from Verso, “you end up being a little less judgmental.” Plus the stakes of any given disagreement are lower than you think. Almost nothing, she told me, “rises and falls on any single decision. What it all really rises and falls on is your ability to maintain collectivity and grow. That’s the stuff that really matters: not damaging the bonds, the connections with other people.”

Consider approaching disagreements with more humility. Intellectuals can be grandiose when it comes to ideological warfare, making it more important than it is, partly in order to make ourselves more central to movements. Karl Marx, though right about so many things, isn’t a good role model here. His eloquent dising of political foes makes great reading today, but he wasn’t an organizer, nor was he trying to protect his friendships. The philosopher Michel Foucault offers more help, observing that the problem with ideological arguments is the “model of war,” in which your opponent becomes your enemy. That’s perfectly reasonable in some contexts, of course, but in disagreement with friends or comrades, this model is exactly wrong. “Wouldn’t it be much better instead to think that those with whom you disagree are perhaps mistaken,” he suggests, “or perhaps that you haven’t understood what they intended to say?”

JR: There is no doubt. Obstruction of justice is plainly an impeachable offense. It was the heart of the Nixon articles. Check out Article 3: It alleged presidential obstruction of justice and congressional process and then assembled an inventory of different things Nixon did to block and confound the investigation, including lying, intimidating subordinates, destroying evidence, and so on.

JN: How will you determine whether things have gotten to a point where impeachment is necessary?

JR: Before I’m ready to impeach, I want to be certain that there is convincing evidence of high crimes and misdemeanors and that the public costs now and in the future of allowing the president to continue a pattern of lawlessness are greater than the costs of removing him and going through the process.

JN: Does this period we are in have the potential, no matter what formal action Congress takes, to renew respect for the system of checks and balances?

JR: Well, I think that’s right. We’ve been plunged into a series of presidential wars and presidential crises for decades now, and this should be a moment when we restore the proper constitutional balance, with Congress understood as the people’s branch of government. It needs to be made far more democratic, which is why we’re fighting for sweeping campaign-finance reform and abolition of gerrymandering in the states. But as imperfect as it is, it is the people’s branch, and we need to vindicate our power.

JOHN NICHOLS

(continued from page 5)

PENDER KUPER

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SURVEY SAYS...

Social-Justice Worriers

America is more worried than the average nation, according to a Gallup survey released in April. The polling firm’s annual Global Emotions Report attempts to chart people’s emotional lives to help gauge a society’s well-being. And the results were, well, worrying. Despite a year of relative stability and economic growth, 45 percent of Americans surveyed said they worried “a lot” on a given day, and 55 percent reported feeling chronic stress. That’s 6 and 20 percentage points higher than the global average, respectively. The growing discontent can’t be fully attributed to a generational divide: Gen Z kids and millennials are about as worried and stressed as Gen X; baby boomers are a bit more relaxed.

Gallup’s report has come out every year since 2006, and this is the most dispiriting year for Americans to date. But it could be worse. Mozambicans report being the most worried, and Greeks the most stressed. (For the record, Taiwanese are the least worried, and Turkmen are the least stressed.)

The report doesn’t offer any prescriptions, but Gallup notes that in the United States, not surprisingly, income is inversely correlated with stress. There is also a strong correlation between Americans’ stress levels and their views on President Donald Trump. Julie Ray of Gallup said, “Those who disapprove of Trump’s job performance are significantly more likely to experience each of these negative emotions than those who do.”

—Rosemarie Ho

Harvard’s Strike at 50

Time passes, but our commitments to left politics don’t change.

I almost didn’t attend the reunion celebrating the 50th anniversary of the student strike at Harvard University in 1969. I was put off by the organizers’ listserv, with its endless political exhortations and relating of strike minutiae. How is it that so many people remember so much about events that took place half a century ago? Is there such a thing as memory envy? In the end, I went because it was probably my last chance to see many people with whom I shared a formative political event: getting arrested for participating in the takeover of University Hall to protest Harvard’s role in promoting the war in Vietnam.

Spoiler: We didn’t stop the war. The Vietnamese themselves did that—though the anti-war movement may have weakened President Richard Nixon’s resolve. We did get the ROTC kicked off campus, helped establish what would become one of the preeminent African and African-American—studies departments in the country, and got Harvard to build working-class housing. You can read about those days in a fascinating anthology of memoir-essays, You Say You Want a Revolution: SDS, PL, and Adventures in Building a Worker-Student Alliance.

So there we all were, gathered in the Science Center auditorium—gray-haired, white-haired, balding, a few of us thinner, most more rotund. On the upside, we’ve become universally nicer, smarter, and much more thoughtful than we were in our flaming, furious sectarian youth. Movies like Return of the Seamus Seven (1980) and The Big Chill (1983) cemented in the public mind the belief that ’60s radicals eventually dropped their picket signs for picket fences to lead bourgeois, apolitical lives with occasional twinges of wistfulness and guilt. What the reunion showed is that, to a remarkable degree, those who were serious radicals and activists stayed on the left for life and figured out ways to make a living and thrive without selling out.

Our members instead taught in the public-school system, community colleges, and universities. They became lawyers, like David Bruck, the renowned death-penalty attorney, or worked for civil-rights and civil-liberties groups, like Donna Lieberman of the New York Civil Liberties Union. Other alums became union organizers, doctors, and nurses or have run nonprofits that do good work, like Miles Rapoport, a former head of Demos. Others spent their whole lives in the Latin America solidarity movement, like Mike Prokosch. All of the women and some of the men were feminists—the sexism of the 1960s and ’70s left was a prominent theme throughout the day. Sure, the crowd was self-selecting, but there was nary a banker or a hedgeie among us.

Inevitably, the Progressive Labor Party (PL) was the text and subtext for much of the discussion. It’s hard to believe, but this Marxist-Leninist-Maoist groupuscule and its front organization, the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA), were hugely powerful in Harvard’s Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), then the main organ of the student left. PL brought discipline, devotion, and courage to the movement and connected it to working-class issues, such as the low pay of Harvard’s workers (amazingly, it would take a student-supported worker strike in 2016 to raise wages significantly—at a university with a $35 billion endowment) and the threat that Harvard’s expansion posed to working-class neighborhoods. Had it not been for the takeover of University Hall (despite Harvard SDS voting against it), the strike probably never would have happened.

At the same time, PL was secretive and hierarchical and respected democracy only when convenient. The party alienated members from friends and family, wore them out with meetings and grunt work, and exhausted them with its narrow, bizarre, and constantly shifting ideology. For example, PL initially opposed strikers’ demands for a black-studies department because it was “nationalist” but later supported it when it became one of the strike’s eight demands. Try explaining that to your classmates over tuna melts and Coke. In some ways, PL was a cult, down to its charismatic local leader, Jared Israel. I have a friend, now a

What the reunion showed is that people who were serious radicals and activists then stayed on the left for life.
A retired professor and a grandmother, who skipped the reunion because, she said, 40 years and more after she left the party, she is still suffering from “PLTSD.”

I feel a bit that way myself. I never joined PL because I didn’t believe in democratic centralism, the Leninist doctrine of going along with supposedly collective decisions (often handed down by unelected leaders). I never believed the United States was on its way to a communist revolution (and still don’t). But in the sometimes bitter factional fighting that would destroy SDS, I sided with the WSA, and I’ve since often wondered why. I think it was because I was raised in the old left and respected it for its seriousness, its combination of bravery, conviction, dedication, and puritanism—even though I didn’t agree with the puritanism (and even though I was sort of puritanical myself). You could say I’m still trying to sort out those contradictions.

Nate Goldshlag and Rapoport, who organized the reunion, had the genius idea of connecting us with today’s undergraduate activists. They’re an impressive lot. Where we had the war, they have climate change—a more difficult challenge, since we didn’t have to prove the war existed. Time has moved on—“What’s a mimeograph machine?” one young person asked—but mostly for the better: They have women in the leadership, are far more conscious of racism, and are way better at building unity.

But some things never change. Even as Harvard’s administration welcomed us with an exhibit of strike photographs (in a library named after Nathan Pusey, the president who called the cops who beat up students during the strike), it hasn’t been reluctant to meet student demands about fossil-fuel divestment. “Harvard is a corporation first and a university second,” said activist John Berg. The struggle continues.

“Harvard is a corporation first and a university second.”
—John Berg

SNAPSHOT / TOBY MELVILLE
Protests Heat Up
British police carry a demonstrator during the Extinction Rebellion protest in London on April 24. Thousands of activists engaged in direct actions for 10 consecutive days in April to draw attention to the climate crisis.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

ZELENSKY’S VICTORY
A brash comedian will lead Ukraine. He won the presidential vote hands down. Among world leaders, this may be a first, although our leader’s often called a clown.
The Nation.

THE CRACKDOWN

ZOË CARPENTER

In Ecuador, women who terminate—or lose—pregnancies face prosecution and prison time.
LAST YEAR, A LAWYER NAMED CRISTINA TORRES GOT A CRYPTIC PHONE CALL FROM A YOUNG WOMAN. The caller explained that she was contacting Torres on behalf of her mother, Sara (a pseudonym), who was imprisoned in the city of Latacunga, a windy crossroads on the Pan-American Highway, high on the volcanic plateau of central Ecuador. Sara was hoping to secure a form of legal relief that would allow her to serve part of her remaining sentence outside of detention. The woman asked Torres to take on her mother’s case—but as for the crime that Sara had been charged with, the daughter preferred not to speak of it. Just go visit my mother, she pleaded.

So Torres drove to Latacunga and, in the prison’s visiting room, met a tall woman with an upturned nose and honey-colored eyes. As Torres would learn, she’d had a difficult life. As a teenager, Sara said, she was raped by her aunt’s husband and became pregnant. After leaving her parents’ home, she began working as an escort to wealthy men in Quito. At some point, she tried to make a living as a seamstress but could not, so she returned to sex work, though she hid it from her daughter and, eventually, her son. By the time she was 38, Sara said, she thought she was too old to get pregnant again.

Inside the prison, Sara and Torres spoke across a table, separated from the other prisoners and visitors by only a thin partition. There were no chairs, so they stood. A guard looked on. When Torres asked about the charges against her, Sara lowered her voice. “I had an abortion,” she said.

Although abortion is illegal under most circumstances in Ecuador, thousands of women here end pregnancies every year, either seeking out clandestine procedures or inducing abortion themselves. Sara had taken misoprostol, a drug sold over the counter in Ecuador to treat stomach ulcers but also commonly used for medical abortion. In clandestine settings, misoprostol is generally safer than other methods, but an incorrect dose and other factors can lead to complications. After Sara took the pills, she began to bleed heavily. Alarmed, she went to a public hospital in Quito’s sprawling southern region, arriving in the afternoon. She said nothing about the drug she’d taken.

According to Torres, a doctor diagnosed a urinary-tract infection and reported on her chart that the infection had provoked a miscarriage. But a few hours later, after a shift change, a new doctor took over her care and became suspicious. He began to interrogate Sara, although her condition was still unstable and her fever stubborn. Around 10 PM, medical staff gave her an anesthetic and performed a curettage to remove the remaining tissue from her uterus. Afterward, still groggy from the anesthetic, she overheard the doctor arguing with a nurse about calling the police.

The officers arrived at about midnight. Sara was still bleeding, and a nurse hurriedly gave her a few sanitary pads before the police took her away to a detention unit. By early morning, she was assigned a public defender, who advised her to accept a plea deal. Soon, she was before a judge. Before noon, she was en route to the prison in Latacunga to serve a sentence of two years and eight months.

Demanding reform: Hundreds of women marched in Quito on September 18, 2018, in support of legalizing abortion.
Ecuador first banned abortion in 1837, when the country established its original penal code. Since 1938, when exceptions were created for women whose health is in danger and in cases of rape when the victim is considered mentally disabled, the law has remained largely unchanged, albeit the subject of intensifying public debate. Despite the near-total ban, health officials recorded 431,614 abortions between 2004 and 2014. Many women resort to clandestine procedures with varying degrees of risk, with sometimes deadly consequences. Unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes of injury and death for Ecuadorian women and girls, accounting for more than 15 percent of maternal deaths in the country.

Until recently, the state rarely enforced the ban. Although abortion was deeply stigmatized and often dangerous, it was considered a private matter. Then, beginning about a decade ago, when feminists and the religious right clashed publicly over legal reforms, women seeking medical attention for abortion complications or other obstetric emergencies were suddenly subject to unprecedented scrutiny. Since then, abortion-related investigations and prosecutions have escalated sharply. Between 2009 and 2014, Ecuador’s public defender recorded 40 cases of women prosecuted for abortion. Since 2015, according to government data, prosecutors have investigated at least 378 cases—including eight in January 2019 alone.

Women all over the country have been caught in the crackdown, the full scale of which has not previously been reported—in cities like Cuenca and Guayaquil and in villages high in the Andes and deep in the rain forest. The prosecuted include teenagers and single mothers, a young woman who worked at an Internet café in the lush coastal province of Esmeraldas, another who sold ice pops on the streets of Quito, and a woman from a town near the Colombian border who helped her 13-year-old daughter end a pregnancy that resulted from incest. Some women sought abortions because they couldn’t afford another child. Others were in abusive relationships or had been raped. According to the Ecuadorian legal organization Surkuna, which tracks these cases and has defended more than two dozen of the accused, most of the women who come to the attention of prosecutors live in deep poverty.

According to interviews with women who’ve been prosecuted and their lawyers, many of these cases are marked by serious violations of the rights of the accused—by doctors, police, prosecutors, and judges—ranging from coerced confessions to manipulated evidence. Like Sara, most of the women came into contact with the criminal-justice system after being reported to police by medical providers, in violation of professional secrecy laws. Miscarriages and intentional abortions are often indistinguishable, making it difficult for prosecutors to prove, in the absence of a confession, that someone has purposefully terminated a pregnancy. A number of women report being interrogated and pressured to confess in hospital rooms—either by doctors or by law-enforcement officials—while in the throes of a medical emergency, violating laws requiring that suspects be informed of their right to remain silent and their right to an attorney. According to defense lawyers, doctors have threatened to withhold medical care from some women in critical condition until they confessed. Others were advised to plead guilty even when prosecutors lacked enough evidence to convict them. Because of the inconsistency between the two doctors’ reports in Sara’s case, for instance, if she had insisted on her innocence, prosecutors would likely not have had proof beyond a reasonable doubt of her alleged crime, Torres said.

Efforts to enforce the abortion ban became so aggressive that the legal system started to treat a range of pregnancy complications as evidence of criminal behavior. According to defense lawyers, several women have been detained or prosecuted for unintentional miscarriages, often on the basis of discredited forensic methods. One woman charged with homicide after what her lawyers say was a late miscarriage is serving 22 years in prison. For abortion, prison sentences range from six months to two years, more if the crime is considered aggravated. In lieu of prison time, some women have received alternative sentences explicitly designed as psychological correctives, such as community-service work in orphanages.

Ecuador’s National Assembly is currently debating changes to the criminal code, including the decriminalization of abortion in all cases of rape and incest. A final vote is expected by June. The reform implicates various overlapping crises, including widespread sexual violence and teen pregnancy; almost 14,000 rapes were reported in the last three years—a figure that is likely far lower than the actual number of incidents—with more than 700 of them coming from girls under 10. Feminist activists have brought a surge of attention to the issue with public demonstrations, and the atmosphere feels ripe for reform. It felt that way six years ago, too, the last time legislators considered relaxing the ban. But then, instead of a model of reform, Ecuador became a test case for the consequences of criminalization.

In the late 1990s, Pilar García began performing abortions out of a nondescript office building in central Quito. Although criminal prosecutions were rare at the time, the options for women with unwanted pregnancies were limited, and many resorted to painful, dangerous procedures. An ob-gyn, she wanted to create a space for abortions to be done safely and professionally. (Because of recent threats against her, we are using a pseudonym.) She usually saw 12 to 15 patients a month, sometimes girls
as young as 13. “It was very intense,” García said. She doesn’t remember the faces of many of the women she helped; she’s blocked them out because she heard too many difficult stories.

In 2012, a couple went to the office, posing as patients. Once inside, they ransacked the premises, looking for incriminating documents, yelling that people should know what was going on there. The skirmish turned physical when the female intruder tried to pull a set of keys from the hands of one of García’s assistants. “After the attack, we started to think about closing down,” García said. They stopped offering surgical procedures, providing medical abortions only.

It wasn’t just the intrusion that made the work seem riskier; the political environment was shifting as well. In 2011, after efforts by feminist groups to destigmatize abortion, as well as campaigns by anti-abortion groups to limit abortion access even further and to ban emergency contraception, Ecuadorian lawmakers began debating revisions to the criminal code, including the decriminalization of abortion in all cases of rape. Virginia Gómez, the president of the reproductive health organization Fundación Desafío and a long-time abortion-rights advocate, assumed an increasingly high-profile role as an advocate for the change. In many ways, the political debate felt like progress: A taboo had become the subject of open discussion. Three female lawmakers sponsored the reform, and as it neared a vote in 2013, its passage seemed a real possibility. “We had the votes,” Gómez said.

Then came the backlash, led by Rafael Correa, who served as Ecuador’s president from 2007 to 2017. He is a self-described leftist who came to power on the promise of a “citizens’ revolution” against the “bourgeois state.” But his social politics were influenced by his Catholic faith, and he took a conservative position on issues of reproductive rights. Under him, a national family plan that promoted sex education and contraceptive access was rewritten to emphasize traditional family structure and abstinence. The result, according to Dr. José Masache, was a spike in teen pregnancy. Masache, who works on a program at Quito’s central obstetrics hospital for pregnant girls ages 10 to 19, said that contraceptive distribution to public hospitals became inconsistent, so they sometimes didn’t have enough for patients who wanted them. Today, Ecuador has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in Latin America, with 12 percent of girls 10 to 19 having been pregnant at least once.

In October 2013, the night before the National Assembly vote, Correa declared in a televised address, “I will never approve the decriminalization of abortion beyond what’s in the current law. What’s more, if these betrayals and disloyalty continue... I will resign from office.” His statement doomed the reform, and the next day, instead of holding a vote, one of its sponsors withdrew the proposal. She and two other female legislators from his political alliance who supported the reform were punished with a 30-day suspension from their posts for what he called an act of “treason.”

While the influence of the Catholic Church and other conservative groups played a role in killing the reform, Correa’s position also reflected the misogyny embedded in Ecuador’s militant left. Clara Merino, who has long been active in Ecuadorian workers’ and indigenous movements and now runs the women’s organization Fundación de Mujeres Luna Creciente, said that while “sovereignty of the body” has often been associated with anticapitalist movements, Ecuador’s left has also “been so closed and machista and violent.” (Her brother Ricardo Merino, a leftist activist, was slain by police in 1986 in what was considered an extrajudicial killing.) Cristina Burneo Salazar, a feminist writer and professor at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito, said, “Historically, what we call ‘left’ has been shaped by patriarchy. Even if its ideological foundation seeks to ensure social justice and redistribution of wealth, its most ancient oversight has been the inequality based on sexual difference. Ecuador is no exception.” Correa reflected this oversight in his public politics, and many women experienced it personally. “The men of the left are very macho,” said Guadalupe Tobar, a sociologist and the daughter of a communist guerrilla who abused her and her mother relentlessly. When María Fernanda Solís, an academic in Quito, described her abusive ex-husband, she used a phrase common in Latin American feminist movements: “En la calle, Che. En la casa, Pinochet.” (In the street, Che. At home, Pinochet.)

According to defense lawyers, doctors have threatened to withhold medical care from women in critical condition until they confessed.
misoprostol, Duque was able to win an acquittal—but only after Paula had spent a month detained with her child, who developed the flu, and lost her job at an Internet café. (Preventive detention is supposed to be reserved for suspects who pose a flight risk or other danger, but it has been used in a number of abortion-related cases.) Paula’s case gave Duque serious doubts about the legal system. “You’re not supposed to go [to health centers] and end up in prison,” she said.

The same day that Paula was arrested, two other women in Esmeraldas were detained under similar circumstances. There is no evidence the three arrests were part of a coordinated operation. But they did signal an escalation of abortion-related criminal cases that many see as bound up with the high-profile debate about the criminal code and Correa’s sweeping influence. “The women’s movement strongly inserted the issue of abortion for rape [into public consciousness]… and the question began to arise of what should be done, what was legal, what was not legal,” said Ana Vera, an attorney who directs Surkuna. Doctors who might not have thought much about abortion were suddenly hyperaware of its illegality, and new medical-malpractice laws helped create an atmosphere of fear among doctors that they might be criminalized themselves, even if they hadn’t provided an illegal procedure.

“Doctors begin to mix the issues in their heads and say, ‘If I do not report an abortion, I can be prosecuted for malpractice,’” Vera said—for instance, if a woman under treatment for complications from an illegal abortion died. “If you ask them, they denounce [women for abortion] because they are protecting themselves from malpractice—which is a bit absurd, but that’s a bit how they see it.” In 2017, concerns about doctors becoming an extension of law enforcement escalated to the point that the Ministry of Health released a guidance reminding health providers of their duty to maintain patient confidentiality—as mandated by Ecuador’s Constitution and criminal code—and to care for women with abortion-related complications. There’s little evidence so far that the guidance has limited reports from doctors; Gómez said the practice has already been “institutionalized.”

In 2014, as the number of abortion-related prosecutions was rising, Ana Vera, along with her sister Verónica Vera and another attorney, founded Surkuna, initially intending to collect data on who was being prosecuted, where, and under what circumstances. “We started to investigate because we were interested in knowing what was happening, because criminalization is a recent issue in our country. Although we have had the same law for 80 years, cases of criminalization began to emerge in force only in 2009,” Ana Vera said. “But little by little, we were having to litigate cases because there were no lawyers who wanted to defend women who were criminalized for abortion and childbirth. That put us in a situation of having to do it ourselves.”

Surkuna’s office occupies a single room up a narrow flight of stairs in a small office building in Quito, on a street lined with yellow-blossomed trees. The day I visited was stormy, and a bucket had been set on the floor to catch the drips from a leak in the ceiling. Vera, who has a round face and intense, caramel-colored eyes, sat at a circular table with a loose top that kept threatening to tip over, typing messages on her phone while maintaining a rapid-fire discussion about her work. Today, Surkuna’s five-person team conducts research on a range of women’s rights issues and litigates cases of violence against women in addition to those involving reproductive rights; it also organizes educational workshops with medical providers on patient confidentiality and with lawyers on abortion-related legal strategy. Vera estimates that Surkuna has defended about 20 women accused of abortion, all of whom lived in various states of financial precariousness and most of whom were reported to police by medical providers.

One of them, a 20-year-old whom I’ll call Martina, lived off the small income she made selling a fruity ice pop called Bon Ice on the streets of Quito. She was dating an older, wealthier, married man. When he found out she was pregnant, he gave her misoprostol and recorded a video of her taking the pills—“because he was crazy,” said Vera, though perhaps also in an attempt to blackmail her or elide his own responsibility. Martina did not know what to expect after taking the medication. Though she felt a bit ill the next morning, she went out to work. She began to bleed on the street, then fainted. When paramedics arrived, they called the police. Prosecutors charged her with a flagrant offense, a common practice that Vera criticizes for effectively stamping the accused with guilt from the start. Flagrant offenses require an audience with a judge within 24 hours; because Martina was still medically unstable, a judge went to the hospital and conducted the hearing in her room. Prosecutors eventually dropped the charges against her, citing a lack of evidence.

In March, I met a woman named Carmen Aguinida, who was sentenced to six months in prison for an illegal abortion. She is a taut wire of a woman, her arms almost impossibly thin. A faint scar runs beneath her left earlobe across the hollow beneath her cheekbone. Another scar transects her abdomen—or at least I imagine it is there. While we talked, she kept her hands clasped on the table between us, anxiously working her fingers.
Aguinda grew up in a remote part of Ecuador’s northeast, near the border with Colombia. She lived with her four siblings, her mother, and her mother’s abusive partner. Her early memories are of nights filled with violent arguments. Sometimes her mother would take the children to a neighbor’s house to get them away from the fighting. One night, Aguinda and her brother ran away and got lost in the black, humming forest. Starting when she was 6 or 7, she was sexually abused by three relatives—one of them her older brother, another the husband of an aunt with whom she’d been sent to live in Guayaquil.

Today, Aguinda is 34 and lives in Lago Agrio, a gritty border town named for Sour Lake, Texas, where the company that became Texaco first drilled for oil in 1903. Six decades later, Texaco was the first major oil company to drill in the rain forest in northeastern Ecuador, leaving the jungle around Lago Agrio pockmarked with hundreds of waste pits that leached oil and chemicals into the region’s soil and rivers.

Aguinda has three children, who are 12, 8, and 6. Then she found out she was pregnant again. “It was a pregnancy I didn’t want, because of my economic situation,” she explained. “I was under pressure.”

The options that women like Aguinda have are defined by a brutal equation: geography plus economic resources plus personal connections plus luck. Misoprostol has generally made clandestine abortion safer and more accessible, but while it’s sold over the counter, it isn’t always easy to get. One woman I met in Quito remembers being told to ask an older man to buy it for her, since he would arouse less suspicion as someone in need of ulcer relief. The medication’s increasing use has also changed the way that abortion bans are enforced: Without an abortionist to pursue, women bear the brunt of criminalization. The pills can be taken orally or inserted into the vagina; some women have been prosecuted after doctors found undissolved remnants.

A few organizations operate hotlines to provide information about obtaining and using medication to safely terminate a pregnancy. One group, Las Comadres—which translates roughly as “the Godmothers”—accompanies women through the process. (For more on Las Comadres and the evolution of abortion-rights activism in Ecuador, see part two online, at thenation.com/ecuador-abortion.) A South American NGO facilitates a network of more than 150 health professionals who provide safe abortion across Ecuador, but they aren’t widely known. The names of people—sometimes doctors, sometimes not—who provide clandestine procedures circulate through word of mouth, with little assurance of their safety record. Solíz said that when she searched for a way to end a pregnancy that was too advanced for her to use medication, “it was so hard to get information”—even though she had a doctorate and the means to pay. She ended up having a painful, traumatizing surgery that left her with a life-threatening infection. “In remote zones, it’s very difficult [to obtain safe abortions],” said Clara Merino, who works with health promoters in rural areas. Sometimes they’ll take women to reputable providers in Quito, but “criminalization has made this harder.” It’s the poorest and most geographically and socially isolated women who are most likely to resort to gruesome procedures, either on their own or at the hands of inexpert practitioners—and then end up with the kind of complications that put them in the criminal-justice system.

That’s what happened to Aguinda. Some of the facts in her case are murky, but what is clear is that her brother found her, bleeding and nearly unconscious. She woke
up in a hospital wondering how she got there. Her fear and confusion deepened when she saw a police officer. A prosecutor arrived with his secretary, and they began to question her: What happened? What was the method? With what tools? Aguinda told them, “I did this to myself.” But even her lawyer, Ruth Ramos, conceded that she must be protecting someone. The incision that was made to remove the fetus—horizontal, as in a cesarean section—looked too professional, and the pain would have made it impossible to complete the operation. Regardless, by the time she arrived at the hospital, Aguinda was alone, with “absolutely no one.”

The botched procedure nearly killed her. In the past, that likely would have been sufficient punishment. Instead, as soon as she was stable enough to leave the hospital, she was sent six hours away to the prison in Latacunga. During the day, she sat by herself in silence. Fights broke out constantly around her. She had no money to call her children. Nights she spent in a twin-size bed with two other inmates, afraid to sleep. “There was no liberty—in every sense,” she said. She closed her eyes and shook her head. “I suffered a lot.”

In that case and in others, prosecutors relied on a discredited forensic method to support a murder charge: the hydrostatic, or lung-float, test, a 17th-century procedure in which lung tissue from the fetus is placed in water. Floating is considered evidence that the baby was born alive and must have died—or been killed—after birth. But a number of factors can cause the lungs to float, and the test cannot distinguish between a killing and a death due to other causes. As early as the 1660s, according to historian G.K. Behlmer, Europeans “concluded that it was impossible to infer live birth from floating lungs.” A more recent forensic textbook calls such tests “black magic” that can “simulate a false sense of scientific validity and even [lead] to an eventual miscarriage of justice.”

One weekend last fall, very early in the morning, Priscilla Enriquez heard her neighbor screaming. Enriquez knew the woman lived alone with two young children, so she hurried over. She found the woman in the bathroom, covered in blood, with a stillborn fetus still attached by the umbilical cord to the placenta inside her. Enriquez called a taxi and directed it to the maternity hospital, a rust-pink building in central Quito. In the emergency department, she heard a doctor ask the woman if she’d had any prenatal exams; the woman, who was poor and worked in a restaurant, said she had not. “The doctor judged her right away,” said Enriquez. According to Enriquez, the police arrived with the intention of investigating the woman for homicide due to negligence. Enriquez, who had heard of Surkuna on Facebook, called its help line. Lawyers arrived quickly and were able to keep the case from moving forward.

Some women who’ve been prosecuted for abortion or murder after having miscarriages didn’t even know they were pregnant. In one case described by Vera, a woman was raped at the age of 18. It was her first sexual experience, and she told no one. Some months later, while she was doing chores, she began to bleed, and the next morning delivered a stillborn fetus at home. Paramedics called by her family found the body in the bathroom. She was charged with manslaughter on account of negligence—failing to take care of a pregnancy that she didn’t know she had.

In that case and in others, prosecutors relied on a discredited forensic method to support a murder charge: the hydrostatic, or lung-float, test, a 17th-century procedure in which lung tissue from the fetus is placed in water.
ple who judge them, these women are never going to receive justice,” she said. Duque, now a prosecutor, spent three years assigned to a unit that handles cases of gender-based violence, and she has represented young girls with no option but to give birth to babies conceived from rape. She said that while the decision to pursue abortion-related cases rests with individual prosecutors, misogyny throughout the legal system causes miscarriages of justice. “A lot of public prosecutors and judges haven’t been able to detach themselves from their prejudices,” she said, and defense lawyers often encourage their clients to plead guilty instead of fighting winnable cases.

Vera puts the state’s eagerness to punish abortion in stark contrast with its tepid response to femicide and sexual violence, both of which are rampant. She mentioned the recent trial of a taxi driver accused of raping a woman at knifepoint, during which the judge brandished a knife at the victim, mocking her for her fear. “It does not matter if you are a victim or if you are being prosecuted—if you are a woman, the justice system will treat you in a much stricter way than a man,” she said.

NE MORNING, AT A CAFÉ IN A BUSINESS DISTRICT in northwestern Quito, I met with a lawyer named Linda Arias, who said the criminalization of abortion in Ecuador has not gone far enough. She is a member of Vida y Familia (Life and Family), a network of anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ groups that are opposed to the proposed legalization of abortion in cases of rape. Opponents argue that rather than help the survivors of sexual violence, the reform will harm them. During a legislative debate this year, Pedro Curichumbi of the right-wing party Creo said that decriminalizing abortion in cases of rape “would turn [rape] into a sport or a hobby.”

Arias was dressed in a vermilion sweater with matching earrings and lipstick, a delicate scarf around her neck, her nails elaborately manicured. She said the laws against abortion “have no effect” because the judicial system has failed to enforce them. “If they were enforced effectively, there wouldn’t be any abortion,” she argued. Prosecutors are not investigating doctors who provide clandestine abortions, she said, nor are they doing anything about the sale and purchase of misoprostol. She added that the harshest sentences should be reserved for doctors and others who provide abortion services. Asked if she thought that women who have abortions should also be punished, she answered, “According to the law, yes”—not necessarily with prison time but perhaps with community service or psychological treatment.

She offered a somewhat contradictory analysis of the problem of rape and incest, particularly regarding young girls. She criticized the legal system for allowing rapists to act with impunity—a point that many of Ecuador’s feminists would agree with. Rather than allow the “killing of the baby” in cases of rape, Arias argued, the judicial system should impose longer, tougher sentences on the rapists. “If there were effective justice, there would be no rapes, there would not be abortions,” she repeated. But then she pivoted, arguing that pregnancy resulting from rape isn’t as big of a problem as it’s made out to be. The majority of cases of pregnant teenagers are with consent, she said, even with their parents. She admitted that no statistics exist to support this claim. (In Ecuador, children under the age of 14 cannot legally give consent, so any sexual activity with them is, by definition, rape.)

(continued on page 24)
How carbon farming can reduce emissions, restore ecological balance, and offer hope to the rising generation.  

BY WILBUR WOOD

Soil save us: The microbes that grow in healthy soil sequester atmospheric carbon at rates previously thought impossible.
INETY PEOPLE ARE GATHERED ALONG A TRENCH—MAYBE 20 FEET LONG, FIVE FEET DEEP, AND THREE feet wide—in the Montana prairie. It's an overcast spring day, with a cool breeze stirring the grass. Children clamber around the edges of the trench while the adults crouch or stand, listening to a woman pacing at the bottom, pointing out roots and different layers of exposed earth, talking about how the soil can save us from a climate catastrophe. The speaker is Nicole Masters, an agroecologist from New Zealand, conducting a workshop on soil health for this audience of ranchers, farmers, and conservationists.

“Even if we stopped burning fossil fuels tonight,” Masters says, “we’d wake up tomorrow and still have 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere.”

That figure has risen from approximately 280 parts per million in 1780, when the Industrial Revolution kicked in and burning coal became the way to power factories and trains. Over time, the use of such fossil fuels has triggered a greenhouse effect, trapping heat in our atmosphere and raising Earth’s surface temperatures to a level not experienced for some 150,000 years. Masters's message is that while replacing fossil fuels with clean energy from the sun, wind, and the planet's own heat is certainly necessary, it is not enough. To stop runaway global warming, tame the fierce extremes of weather we are now experiencing, slow down and eventually reverse the melting of icecaps and glaciers, rescue dying coral reefs, we must also find a way to remove excess carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the soil.

“How do we get greenhouse gases out of the air?” Masters asks the people at this workshop.

Our host, a rancher named Steve Charter, answers, “Photosynthesis.”

“Right,” she says. Plants not only take in carbon dioxide but also create ground cover—and this gets carbon back in the soil.

“You are solar ranching,” Masters continues as she writes the chemical formula for photosynthesis on a whiteboard: sunlight + 6CO₂ + 6H₂O (water) = 6C₆H₁₂O₆ (basic sugar) + 6O₂ (atmospheric oxygen). “Everything that grows here starts with sugar. Soil microbes eat sugar.” And feeding these soil microbes builds soil and sequesters atmospheric carbon in the ground “at a rate previously thought impossible.”

The workshop at the Charter Ranch took place in May 2015. Four years later, our climate situation has grown more dire and the carbon-sequestration message even more urgent. The levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have risen to 410 parts per million. The California fire season has expanded from a seasonal phenomenon into a year-round reality. Meanwhile, the dwindling Colorado River has become less and less reliable as a water source for the cities downriver—and for the irrigated agriculture that supplies food for much of the United States. Canada’s permafrost has already warmed enough to begin melting, which, if left unchecked, will release huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. And the same holds true for the vast Siberian permafrost.

In December 2018, the Global Carbon Project—an international collaboration among scientists, governments, and industries to track greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide—reported that in 2017, carbon emissions rose 1.6 percent and were likely to reach 2.7 percent by the end of 2018—two straight years of growth after a brief period of relatively stable emissions.

In 2018, China, the biggest carbon polluter on the planet, was on track for its biggest increase since 2011, 4.7 percent, and the United States is on track for its largest increase since 2013, 2.5 percent. The US increase coincided with the second year of Donald Trump’s presidency, after he began rolling back pollution controls in an effort to strengthen the faltering coal industry while opening up large tracts of public land for oil and natural-gas drilling. Adding to this surge were the massive summer fires on the prairies and in the mountains of my home state, Montana, followed by giant blazes in other Western states.

Last year, a snowy winter and wet spring, with rains extending well into the summer, kept the fires down in Montana, but they blazed anew in other Western states, and one conflagration almost completely destroyed the town of Paradise in Northern California.

Katharine Hayhoe, the director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University, remarks that 2018 showed “how climate change loads the dice against us by taking naturally occurring weather events and amplifying them.” Wildfires in the West, she says, “now burn nearly twice the area they would without climate change.” She adds that “almost 40 percent more rain fell during Hurricane Harvey than would have otherwise.”

Harvey settled over southeastern Texas from August 25 to 28, 2017, and drenched the region, resulting in disastrous flooding in Houston. Why did it not wreak havoc for a few hours, then move on? One factor is more water vapor in the atmosphere (a result of hotter temperatures) to feed such extreme weather events. A second is that many storms seem to be moving more slowly these days.

And take note: The Global Carbon Project predicts that when all the data are in, 2018 will have seen another rise in carbon emissions, to 41.5 billion tons.

DONALD TRUMP ISN'T THE ONLY NATIONAL leader who ignores or openly scoffs at these realities. The newly elected president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, began his reign by welcoming multinational corporations to resume the large-scale clear-cutting of the Amazon basin’s carbon-sequestering trees to open the land for industrial agriculture. And Trump joined leaders from three other oil-exporting nations—Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—in refusing to acknowledge the validity of

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The key insight of regenerative agriculture is not new. Humans have long recognized that the soil is alive, teeming with diverse, interacting creatures: bacteria, fungi, algae, mites, nematodes, earthworms, ants, spiders, the roots of plants. Soil flourishes in that narrow zone between rock and air, transforming mineral to vegetable, inanimate to animate.

But for far too long—at least 8,000 years—we human beings have treated the soil badly in many parts of the world: setting fires to drive wild animals or to clear land; overgrazing grasslands with domestic animals; plowing, planting, and harvesting crops, then leaving the ground denuded and vulnerable to wind and water erosion.

Central Australia, the Sahara, and various deserts in Asia and the Americas were once semiarid grasslands. Old-growth forests have dwindled and, in many places, disappeared. Over the Great Plains of North America, vast herds of bison and elk roamed, spurred by predators (primarily wolves and, after we arrived, human beings) to bunch up in herds for self-defense, then move on, leaving urine, saliva, and dung to revitalize the land. In some places, the topsoil was six feet deep. Within the last century, however, this topsoil has been exhausted by farmers deep-plowing and planting grains, primarily corn and, more recently, soybeans.

In an interview with *Acres USA* magazine, David Johnson, a soil scientist (and master composter) at New Mexico State University, was asked how we went so wrong. By adopting the wrong model of farming, he replies:

> where agriculture extracted nutrients and carbon out of soils and then farmers moved on to areas with undisturbed soils to repeat these soil-degrading practices. Then in the early 20th century came the Haber-Bosch process for manufacturing nitrogen fertilizers. Before 1940, you could produce six units of food energy for one fossil fuel unit. Now it takes 10 units of fossil fuel energy to produce and deliver one unit of food energy, even though the solar energy to grow the plant is free.

This has implications not only for the health of the soil but also for the health of the people and animals consuming the food grown in it. Yet today’s industrial agriculture continues to treat soil as an inert medium full of irrelevant life forms.

Irrelevant life forms, plowing it to plant seeds, applying synthetic fertilizers—primarily the trio known as NPK: nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium—and spraying pesticides and herbicides (often derived from fossil fuels) to destroy what they dismiss as pests and weeds, deliberately creating monocultures.

In Masters’s terminology, what remains after all this erasure of life-forms isn’t soil. It’s dirt.

**WILBUR WOOD**

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Equally distributed, so along with more extreme flooding there are also more severe droughts. How can we ameliorate these extremes? By rebuilding “Earth’s soil carbon sponge,” he says, since “about 66 percent of a healthy soil is just space, air—nothing—that creates massive capacity for the sponge to hold water.” That “beautiful, open, spacey structure” also allows essential minerals and trace elements to become available to plants. According to Jehne, “more than 80 percent of a soil’s biofertility depends on this surface exposure, rather than on the quantity of nutrients we add as fertilizer.”

What Kastner and Jehne are suggesting is that adding manure and compost to regenerative-agriculture systems will become less and less necessary as these systems begin to create their own nutrients. Australian soil scientist Christine Jones agrees. She begins with a big number: 550 gigatons, the weight of all carbon-based life-forms on Earth, of which 450 gigatons are plants. A big slice of the remainder (“more than we realize”) consists of tiny, often microscopic life-forms like bacteria and fungi, leaving only 7 percent of that 550 gigatons for “life in the sea and on land,” she says. Human beings, she adds, account for just 0.01 percent of Earth’s biomass.

“We are embedded in a microbial world,” Jones says, “and it is embedded in us.” She describes trials at farms in North and South Dakota, Canada, Germany, and New Zealand, mostly during low-rainfall years, in which monocultures failed but areas of multispecies mixing thrived. She also points to the grasslands of the North American Great Plains, which once had enormous diversity—500 to 700 kinds of plants, 40 percent grasses, 60 percent forbs—but now grow mostly corn and soybeans. “Simplified systems are degraded systems,” she says. “They can’t function optimally.”

In terms of regenerative agriculture, carbon farming means preserving ground cover, planting seeds with either minimal tilling or individual drilling. It often means planting two or more crops in the same field, to be harvested at different times, and paying attention to how nitrogen-fixing plants like lentils blend well with grains and figuring out how beneficial animal species can fit in. For a longtime organic gardener like me, carbon gardening may mean less digging and more companion planting, plus a renewed reverence for earthworms.

Carbon ranching means managing livestock so that they move through the land in the same way that elk and bison moved though the plains: bunching up in a relatively small area, eating it down, delivering their gifts of natural fertilizer to the land, then moving on to a new place and doing the same there, with each grazed area—paddocks, they are called—allowed ample time to recover before the grazers return. Instead of predators, it may be human herders or solar-powered portable fences that keep the livestock in a particular area. This is a way to reverse the decline of grasslands into deserts, pioneered in the United States by Allan Savory, a wildlife biologist who later became a rancher in Zimbabwe, where he is from.

His method has its serious skeptics, and their research continues, but when Savory showed up in Montana in the 1980s, many ranchers were intrigued by his convic-
tion that using this approach could reverse degradation of their rangelands over time. Charter was one of many early adopters of what Savory calls holistic management.

After her workshop in 2015, Masters gave Charter a bio-stimulant recipe—fish-oil emollient, molasses, and a small amount of sea salt—to spray on a pasture. Assisted by John Brown, a former organic farmer now working with him on carbon-ranching projects, Charter sprayed 80 acres with the bio-stimulant, and several things happened. Horses in another of his pastures smelled the spray and broke through a barbed-wire fence to get to the site and graze the grasses. Then a squadron of dung beetles flew in and went to work so that the horse dung, instead of drying into hard pellets, was buried in the ground by the next day. (This typically doesn’t happen in a climate that averages 10 to 12 inches of precipitation per year.)

By then, Charter and Brown were busy raising worms in shallow, straw-lined trenches, feeding them kitchen scraps, coffee grounds, dried weeds, wood chips, horse manure, sugar-beet tailings from a nearby refinery, pulp from juice bars in town, and sometimes phosphorous (from rock phosphate, broken down by bacteria). The product of this worm farming is vermicast—worm dung—which by itself is a superb fertilizer. And the vermicast produced by the worms feeding on this compost is especially rich in fungi and bacteria.

Spread out to dry, then combined with water, molasses, and fish emollients (Masters’s original ingredients) and sprayed on the land, vermicast is not just a fertilizer: “It’s more a way to inoculate the soil with these microbes,” Charter says. The spray has since been used on 2,000 more acres of the ranch. The cattle and horses are happy, and the bare ground amid the sagebrush and prairie grasses has been filling in with vegetation. More carbon in the soil means more microbial action—so much so that other ranchers and farmers have been buying vermicast from the Charter Ranch and seeing an improvement in their own grasslands.

Along with the work of tending the livestock, these methods are quite labor-intensive. At a time when aging farmers and ranchers are retiring—their land often gobbled up by wealthy out-of-staters—and rural towns continue to lose population, Charter’s daughter and son and their families are back on the ranch, engaged in various activities. There’s a milk cow and gardening and chickens, as well as talk—and plenty of regional action—concerning how to get carbon out of the air and give it a home in the soil.

The fossil-fuel industry will fight this. The agro-industrial complex will fight this. But on the other side are young people who want a livable future.

The fossil-fuel industry will fight this. So will the agro-industrial complex. On the other side are the young people who want a livable future.

The work that matters now is on the land, drawing carbon back into the ground. Planting trees. Tending the living soil on farms, on ranches, in gardens everywhere.

(continued from page 19)

I asked Arias if, say, a 12-year-old can truly give consent, particularly to an older man. She looked up from her orange juice and smiled, her teeth showing through red lips. “I know cases,” she said, and proceeded to tell a lurid anecdote about a 14-year-old girl who, in Arias’s telling, willingly slept with her father and had children with him. The problem of teen pregnancy is largely a result of promiscuity and permissive sex education, Arias said.

A few days later, in Lago Agrio, I met a woman I’ll call Carolina, who told a very different story about rape and incest. She lives up on a hill in a village in Sucumbíos province, where she raises chickens and pigs. Many of her relatives live on the same hillside, including her sister and her sister’s adult son, who allegedly raped one of Carolina’s daughters last year, when the girl was just 13. Carolina could tell something was wrong when the outgoing child who “played with the whole world” started shutting herself up in her bedroom, crying. One morning while Carolina was cooking breakfast, her daughter came into the kitchen looking ill. Through tears, she told her mother that her cousin had coerced her into having sex with him and now she was pregnant.

“Can you imagine the fury inside me?” Carolina asked. Her nephew had been like a son to her, and the fallout split the family apart. While Carolina and her husband filed a complaint against the man, most of their relatives rallied around him. Even her mother took the alleged rapist’s side, telling Carolina, “If something happens to that boy, it’s your fault.”

“People are accustomed to putting up with it,” Carolina said of sexual abuse. “It’s your family, and you protect your family, no matter what.”

While the case against her nephew proceeded, her lawyer, Ruth Ramos, received a call from the prosecutor informing her that Carolina was now under investigation for helping her daughter end the pregnancy that resulted from the alleged assault. (The adolescent had let the secret slip during her testimony.) Carolina’s relatives filed the complaint against her—a form of revenge, she said. She declined to discuss the details of the abortion with me because the investigation is pending. “She didn’t want to have the child,” Carolina said. “We were in such a desperate situation. Thousands of ideas ran through my head.”

I asked if she had a photo of her daughter, who was in school the day we met. Carolina didn’t. “All of my daughters look like me,” she said—round face, warm brown eyes, lips turned up at the corners so that even when she spoke of sadness and rage, she seemed to be faintly smiling. “It’s a horrible thing to happen to a child,” she added.

According to Geralinda Guerra, who works with a network of women’s shelters, about 80 percent of sexual-abuse cases in Ecuador involve someone in the victim’s family. Although the government adopted a mandate in 2008 making sexual violence a priority, the financial resources provided by the state have declined, particularly for services targeting adolescents and teens. Citing a fiscal crisis, Ecuador’s current president, Lenín Moreno, has slashed the budget for gender-violence prevention programs. For young girls who become pregnant after abuse, the options are extremely limited; even putting the child up for adoption isn’t always allowed.
Jordan’s location at the nexus of Asia, Africa, and Europe has helped shape this young country’s culture and society and placed it squarely in the middle of regional geopolitics. Now facing the challenges of refugees fleeing the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Jordan is being tested by the violence on its borders, but has remained peaceful, welcoming, and tolerant. On this extraordinary tour with The Nation, readers will have a unique view into Jordan’s history and culture, while also examining the contemporary issues facing neighboring countries in the Middle East. We’ll have exclusive lectures and discussions, travel to ancient sites, and immerse ourselves in the country’s dramatic natural landscape and vibrant communities.

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One girl, who spent months in one of the network’s shelters, had been raped by a relative at 14 and became pregnant. Although the shelter helped her find a family willing to adopt the baby and a scholarship so that she could continue her studies, a judge blocked the adoption and ordered her to return to her family in a remote part of the jungle. “They have the baby because they have no other options, and then they’re forgotten,” Guerra said. “The legalization of abortion is a debt that the state needs to pay.”

JUST SOUTH OF QUITO’S OLD CITY RISES THE HUMP OF EL Pancicillo, a small volcanic mound where, according to tourist guides, indigenous peoples once worshiped the sun. These days, the hill is topped with a 135-foot Madonna made out of thousands of pieces of aluminum. In her hand she holds a chain, with which she controls the demon beneath her feet. From certain angles, it looks as if the chain is wrapped around her wrists.

This idealized symbol of motherhood looms over the debate about abortion in Ecuador, where the desire to end a pregnancy is often treated by the legal system as evidence of pathology. “If you abort or have an obstetric emergency due to childbirth, the problem is that you are a bad mother, and we must sanction you with everything because the center of society is motherhood, and women have to be mothers,” Vera said the thinking goes.

In some abortion cases, women are punished not only for breaking the law but also for violating these expectations. The punishments are considered corrective, usually in the form of community service or psychological treatment designed, as Vera described them, to “awaken” the woman’s maternal instincts. In one case litigated by Surkuna, a teenager, her boyfriend, and a doctor who provided a clandestine abortion were all sentenced to community service in an orphanage.

Corrective community-service work has also been used as a punishment for abortion in Brazil. In 2008, over 1,000 women were accused of having abortions at a clinic in the state of Mato Grosso de Sur. According to a report from the international organization Ipas, at least 30 accepted alternative punishments that required them to work with young children, “providing community service in day-care centers and schools.” The judge described these sentences as “pedagogical penalties to enable these women to think about what they have done and regret it.” Several states in Mexico also explicitly permit the use of community service or “medical or psychological treatment” as an alternative to detention in abortion convictions; in three states, the law states that the goal of these sentences is to “reaffirm the value of motherhood and the strengthening of the family.”

For Aguinda, the woman from Lago Agrio who was sent to Latacunga, community service was preferable to prison. Although she was initially sentenced to six months of detention, her lawyer persuaded the judge to allow her to serve it instead by doing fieldwork with a women’s federation near her home. She worked as a health promoter, giving workshops on sex education with an emphasis on pregnancy prevention—work that she continues, though her sentence is complete.

Like many other women I interviewed for this story, Aguinda has complicated feelings about abortion. She said that she had been angry with herself, that while she was being questioned in the hospital, she was already repenting. She doesn’t condone “taking a life,” as she put it. Still, she wouldn’t wish what she’s been through on anyone: “Nobody should have to go to jail for this.”
If you want to appreciate the return of the left as a significant force in American politics, treat yourself to a quiet evening with the 2012 Democratic Party platform. This vast accumulation of words, over 26,000 in all, contains no fewer than 42 invocations of “the middle class,” 28 calls for “innovation,” and 18 promises of “tax credits.” Its first policy section places “Middle Class Tax Cuts” atop the list of Barack Obama’s achievements as president. And amid this great desert of focus-grouped language, boundless and bare, there rises not a single demand for a major universal public program.

How much has changed in the last few years. At the grass roots, the evidence for some kind of left-wing resurgence is too overwhelming for all but the most jaundiced or mechanical skeptic to deny: the wave of victorious labor strikess from West Virginia to Los Angeles, the advent of new activist movements like Black Lives Matter and the Women’s March, the rise of left political organizations (the Democratic Socialists of America grew from 6,500 members in 2014 to about 60,000 today), and the election of avowedly radical candidates to city governments, state legislatures, and Congress itself.

Amid this hive of activity, national opinion has pitched sharply to the left: Surveys now show record-high levels of support for same-sex marriage, legal marijuana, and a range of affirmative-action programs. Most striking of all, perhaps, is the apparent leftward shift in economic opinion. Recent polls have discovered commanding public support for social-democratic programs long exiled from mainstream politics: a national

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single-payer health-care plan, a federal jobs guarantee, universal parental leave and child care, and tuition-free college, along with heavy income and wealth taxes on the super-rich.

As the 2012 platform reminds us, it was not so long ago that Democratic Party leaders refused even to acknowledge the existence of such policies, let alone pay lip service to them. In 2013, President Barack Obama responded to the nascent Fight for $15 movement, which was beginning to organize fast-food workers, with a bold proposal to raise the minimum wage to $9 per hour. Throughout Obama's second term, national politics churned on with barely a reference to a left-wing vision of the possible: In 2014, the phrase “Medicare for all” appeared in The New York Times just once, in a single forlorn letter to the editor.

Now the Democratic National Committee champions a $15 minimum wage on its website. More than 100 congressional Democrats—including presidential aspirants Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, and Kirsten Gillibrand—have lined up behind a national health-care bill co-sponsored by Bernie Sanders. The same presidential candidates have backed Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s call for a Green New Deal while touting a range of additional proposals like tuition-free college, a federal jobs guarantee, and direct cash transfers.

There is reason for skepticism about the sincerity and intensity of these new commitments, especially when brandished by ambitious politicians whose records do not match their rhetoric. But such weather vanes are finely attuned to the direction of the wind. And the atmosphere of center-left politics has changed since 2013, or even 2016, when Hillary Clinton chose to frame her campaign in Iowa around the certainty that single-payer health care would “never, ever come to pass.”

What explains this swift ideological transformation? Over the longer term, no doubt, it owes its origins to the political and economic upheaval that has gripped much of the industrialized world in the last decade. Forty years of globalizing markets, deregulating states, declining unions, flattening wages, expanding debt, and skyrocketing inequality—administered by governments of the right and center-left alike—established the conditions for general political revolt, the reverberations of which could be seen from Wisconsin to Greece. Yet this broader crisis, by itself, hardly ensured a renaissance of social democracy in the United States. Across the Atlantic, the anti-establishment upheaval has boosted right-wing nationalists more often than movements of the left; its most immediate impact on American politics, after all, was the election of Donald Trump. And so one must look for more acute reasons for social democracy’s revival, and no better one can be found than Sanders’s 2016 campaign for president. So many of the ideas, tactics, and even key players of the current moment—including Ocasio-Cortez, a former Sanders campaign volunteer—emerged in the context of that remarkable primary run. As new books by Sanders and his 2016 campaign manager, Jeff Weaver, help demonstrate, the Vermont socialist’s long-shot bid for the Democratic nomination did not just succeed in “pushing Clinton to the left”; it helped transform the shape and content of progressive politics in the United States.

Compared with the leading Democrats of his generation and of the generations that followed, Bernie Sanders lacks a certain courtly polish. He grew up in a rent-controlled three-and-a-half-room apartment in Brooklyn, where his father, like Warren’s father, worked as a salesman. But unlike Warren—or Obama, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, John Kerry, Booker, Pete Buttigieg, and Beto O’Rourke—Sanders did not nurture his political ambitions on the campus of an Ivy League university. (If elected in 2020, he will be the first Democratic president since Jimmy Carter without a graduate degree.) At 38 years old—an age when Joe Biden was already fighting school integration in the Senate and Harris was enlisting millionaire donors to back her run for San Francisco district attorney—Sanders was working for the American People’s Historical Society of Burlington, Vermont, on a documentary about Eugene Debs.

If the social milieu of Sanders’s formative years was distinctive, his political education was even more so. At the University of Chicago, he joined the Young People’s Socialist League, read Marx and Lincoln and Dewey in the library basement, and fought for civil rights as a member of the Congress of Racial Equality. For the young Bernie, real politics was what happened outside the corridors of power: After being arrested at a Chicago sit-in, he told the writer Russell Banks, “I saw right then and there the difference between real life and the official version of life. And I knew I believed in one and didn’t believe any more in the other.”

Real politics, for Sanders, also meant third-party politics. In the late 1960s, he moved to Vermont and spent nearly a decade running for state office with the left-wing Liberty Union Party. Though he never won much more than 6 percent of the vote statewide, he made headlines with his calls for worker-controlled businesses, publicly owned utilities, a guaranteed family income, and, at one point, a redistribution of the Rockefeller family fortune.

Such deep roots in third-party struggle make Sanders a black swan not only among today’s Democratic elite but across American political history. To find an influential national figure with such an extensive background outside the two-party system, you have to return to Debs and the Socialists in the early 20th century or, perhaps, Salmon Chase and the abolitionists who helped found the Republican Party before the Civil War. Like the political abolitionists of that era, Sanders has spent his life working to find a party to advance his cause, rather than finding a cause that can advance his party. Nor has that cause wavered very much in half a century. Interviewed by United Press International at the start of his first Liberty Union Party campaign in 1972, he produced a paragraph that could be pasted into a tweet today: “If we wanted to, we could have decent housing and free medical care and jobs for everyone…. It won’t happen because the wealth and money lies in the hands of a few people who are not concerned with the welfare of others.”

In March 1981, Sanders ran as an independent candidate to become the mayor of Burlington. This time, he pulled off an astonishing upset, defeating the Democratic incumbent by a mere 10 votes and taking office just weeks after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan. Yet even as the international political climate turned against social democracy, Bernie forged ahead. Confronted with a uniformly hostile city establishment (Republican and Democratic alike), Mayor Sanders boosted worker-owned businesses and established a community land trust to fund affordable housing, the first such municipal program in the United States. Although the courts and the state legislature blocked his most ambitious efforts to overhaul the tax code, by the time he left office, Burlington
had become a model city for egalitarian, public-led economic development.

Sanders was a pragmatic administrator of municipal government, but he never abandoned the politics of class struggle. Using his bully pulpit to defeat a waterfront development project that he called “a rich man’s paradise,” he positioned himself as a champion of lower-income housing. In each of his three re-election campaigns, he won a larger share of the vote, driven by rising turnout from his young and heavily working-class base. And as he once again began to set his sights on winning a statewide seat, the song remained the same: His 2016 campaign manager, Jeff Weaver, recalls in *How Bernie Won* that during Sanders’s 1986 run for governor, the candidate delivered an identical lecture about “income inequality and tax fairness” in almost every town in Vermont. Sanders’s “message discipline and consistent use of the stump speech, while unexciting to the media, was a great strength…. It allowed him to carry out an intensely crammed schedule of events without having to incorporate new material.”

This description by Weaver could serve as shorthand for Sanders’s entire career in politics. Journalists and academics worship at the shrine of originality, but for a social democrat in the late 20th century, consistency has proved the rarer virtue.

After two failed campaigns for state office, Sanders won a place in the House in 1990. (“I was never inside the Capitol until after I ran for Congress,” he notes in his own new book, *Where We Go From Here.*) In Washington, he proved to be an effective legislator, passing more roll-call amendments in a Republican-controlled House than any other member. Real politics, it turned out, sometimes happened inside Congress, too, and Sanders fought in the trenches to eke out funding for low-income weatherization assistance and community health centers. In small but tangible ways, workers, consumers, and especially veterans benefited from his ability to cobble together unlikely voting coalitions on Capitol Hill.

In world-historical terms, though, Sanders swam against a heavy current. In August 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and capitalism’s tribunes proclaimed that history itself had come to an end, he was in Stockholm, on a trip to meet with Swedish Social Democrats and unionists. “Social democracy—a political party of the people—is something we want to take a good look at,” he told reporters. But in Washington, the Democratic Party was looking harder than ever in the other direction, leaving Sanders to record protest votes against NAFTA, capital-gains tax cuts, and telecom and financial deregulation—all of them in bills supported by Bill Clinton, Joe Biden, and Nancy Pelosi. Watching the Democrats devote their 1996 national convention to the questions of “gun control, smoking, and the personal tragedy of a popular actor [Christopher Reeve],” Bernie fumed that there “was virtually no discussion of class, despite the fact that we have the most unequal distribution of wealth and income in the industrialized world.”

Ideologically, Sanders was still nestled away in Burlington, a curious accident of the 1970s, compounding over the decades like a forgotten postal-bank account. His 2006 move from the House to the Senate did little to enhance his national influence, or to moderate his critique of the Democratic leadership. After the 2008 financial crisis, Sanders spent much of the Obama years waging a lonely campaign against the Wall Street–friendly status quo. One of just four members of the Democratic Caucus to vote against Timothy Geithner’s nomination as Treasury secretary, he also opposed Geithner’s replacement, former Citigroup executive Jack Lew, in 2013. “We need a Treasury secretary prepared to take on an oligarchy which now controls the economic and political life of this great nation,” Sanders declared on the Senate floor. “Is Jack Lew that person? No, he is not.” Was anyone listening? It’s not clear, since every Democratic senator, including Warren, voted to confirm Obama’s nominee.

In Washington, Sanders remained a figure of the fringe. When he announced that he would challenge Hillary Clinton for the 2016 Democratic nomination, pundits issued a collective guffaw. “Socialist to Snap at Clinton’s Heels,” brayed *The Hill.* “There seems to be very little desire on the left for a challenger to Clinton,” argued *FiveThirtyEight,* as usual better attuned to the Beltway elite than the electorate. But it was no coincidence that every loyal party progressive stayed out of the primary race: Obama and the Democratic leadership had worked hard to clear the field for Clinton, successfully discouraging runs by Biden and Warren, among other possible contenders.

This cleared field ironically produced the void that allowed an underdog campaign to flourish. Sanders made the most of his opportunity, balancing his attacks on the billionaire class with a bluntly social-democratic platform that promised health care, tuition-free college, and a living wage to every American. For the first time since Jesse Jackson’s 1988 campaign, the media were forced to cover a left-wing candidate seriously. And though much of this coverage was condescending, if not outright contemptuous, the message reached voters with remarkable speed. When Sanders entered the race in April 2015, he was polling at 5 percent nationwide; by August, he had a lead in New Hampshire. Democratic voters—and not just them, it turned out—were far hungrier for “political revolution” than anyone in Washington had guessed.

The stage was set for almost an entire year of fierce primary combat. For veterans of the 2016 campaign, Weaver’s *How Bernie Won* offers a chance to relive the glories and agonies of battle, complete with fulsome military analogies—one chapter is called “Stalingrad, Iowa”—and plenty of excerpts from the nonstop social-media crossfire. As Weaver notes, Clinton and Sanders fought each other on two different fronts and for two distinct prizes: the 2016 Democratic nomination, and the ideological trajectory of national politics thereafter.

On the first front, Sanders lost decisively. Although he won 22 states and more than 13 million votes, after the first few contests, he never threatened Clinton in the all-important delegate race. Weaver expends considerable energy lamenting the many reasons: the close collaboration between the front-runner and the Democratic National Committee; Clinton’s 20-fold advantage among superdelegates, which lent her an air of invincibility; and an unfriendly media eager to run hostile stories about Sanders (in the most egregious of many examples, MSNBC, *The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post* repeated and never corrected false reports of Sanders supporters “throwing chairs” during the Nevada state convention).

Yet looking back on the race three years later, the most important reason for Clinton’s primary victory was her overwhelming advantage in resources. Before a single ballot was cast, no fewer than 180 of 188 congressional Democrats had lined up behind her; eventually, 1,100 state legislators backed the
front-runner, compared with just over 150 for Sanders. By July 2015, Clinton had already raised $46.7 million, plus $30 million in super-PAC money, far outstripping Sanders, whose small-dollar fund-raising operation was only starting to gain steam. When the race began, his projected campaign spending for all of 2015 was just $12 million.

The defining challenge for the Sanders campaign, as Weaver puts it in typically martial fashion, was “how a much smaller force in terms of resources and infrastructure would be able to defeat a much larger one.” Sanders and Weaver made the only choice they thought they had, investing heavily in the first four state contests, Iowa and New Hampshire in particular. This strategy helped Bernie record the upssets that put him on the national map, but it left the campaign with few resources to compete in the pivotal Southern primaries immediately afterward. Clinton’s blowout victories in Texas, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida—where Sanders spent almost no money on direct media—gave her an insurmountable delegate lead and virtually ended the competitive struggle for the nomination.

Yet on the primary’s second major front—the battle for the ideological future of the country—Sanders has been an equally decisive winner. In the summer 2016 negotiations over the Democratic platform, Weaver recounts, Clinton’s team initially shot down proposals for a $15 minimum wage and universal tuition-free college while refusing to back away from Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal. Three years later, many Democrats now stand much closer to Bernie than Hillary on wages, college, and trade policy. The national debate on health care has shifted even more dramatically: “Medicare for All” has become a familiar and popular rallying cry, while Clinton’s opening position in 2016—that we must restrict ourselves to “improving” the Affordable Care Act with tax credits—is now almost starved of support outside of the insurance lobby itself.

It would be wrong to say that the Democratic Party, in its current institutional form, is anything like the party of Bernie Sanders. Business-friendly moderates still make up its largest congressional caucus, billionaire donors (and billionaire politicians) remain close to its leadership, and even many Washington progressives appear willing to dump Medicare for All for some plausibly-sounding substitute. Nevertheless, the larger pattern is clear. On issue after issue, from wealth taxes to climate change to corporate PAC money, the national debate has moved away from the cautious incrementalism of the Clinton campaign and toward the bold social–democratic agenda laid out by Sanders in 2016.

For all his remarkable consistency, Sanders has evolved, too. Throughout the 1980s, he argued that the “corporate-controlled Republican and Democratic parties...are, in reality, one party—the party of the ruling class.” His Vermont career was built not on cooperation with Democrats but on bitter competition with them. When he appeared at a county Democratic meeting to endorse Jackson in 1988, a local partisan slapped him in the face—for speaking against the official favorite, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, as well as for trying to break up the party by “passing himself [off] as a Democrat.”

In the years since, Sanders has gotten much better at passing himself off as a Democrat—not in order to break up the party but to transform it through popular struggle. But as the 2020 primary takes shape, some have wondered if he will become a victim of his own success: With a slate of Democratic candidates who now endorse much of his 2016 platform, what distinguishes him from his progressive rivals?

On foreign policy, the gaps between Sanders and Democratic Party orthodoxy remain considerable. A reliable opponent of US defense spending and military interventions, from Vietnam to Libya, Sanders can boast an equally long record of skepticism toward America’s alliance with Saudi Arabia, which he spent three decades denouncing as a “feudalistic dictatorship.” In the 2016 campaign, he largely steered clear of international affairs, but he has devoted much more attention to them since. He worked alongside Senator Chris Murphy to end US support for the Saudi war in Yemen; more generally, as he describes in Where We Go From Here, he has sought to connect his anti-interventionist instincts to a broader global confrontation with economic inequality and climate change.

Much about a possible Sanders foreign policy remains uncertain, including its approach to trade relations with China, its attitude toward Israel and Palestine, and its outlook on the 800-some military bases that the United States maintains around the world. Denouncing the “military-industrial complex” is one thing; dismantling it, quite another. Nevertheless, a view of international politics that rejects the premise of US global hegemony, as Sanders does, is already worlds apart from anything dreamed up within official Democratic circles, where enthusiasm for a new Cold War against Russian and Chinese “neo-authoritarianism” is brewing.

On domestic politics, too, Sanders remains distinctive. Since 2016, Democrats have remembered what Clinton’s campaign somehow contrived to forget: that rhetorical class war, including a defense of wage earners against the ultra-rich, is an effective electoral strategy. Yet the rest of the party envisions class politics primarily as a tool of partisan politics, a cudgel to bash Trump’s Republicans for their heartlessness and hypocrisy. Fundamentally, this is nothing new: “The Democrats’ 2012 platform, for all its barrenness of vision, contained plenty of digs at the GOP as the party of ‘the wealthiest Americans.”

Sanders, by contrast, understands that the rise of the 1 percent is a bipartisan phenomenon. “Our economy, our political life, and the media,” he writes, “are largely controlled by a handful of billionaires and large corporations.... I believe that the Democratic Party bears an enormous amount of responsibility for this sad state of affairs.” And unlike the party’s leadership, he recognizes that the power of the ownership class extends far beyond the nebulous special interests that every politician denounces. While no other national Democrat, Warren included, even uses the phrase “corporate media,” Sanders rightly makes it a recurring theme in his critique of billionaire rule.

If this diagnosis of the problem diverges from the rest of the Democratic field’s, too does his proposed remedy. A number of candidates now say they want to tame the ultra-rich with new taxes and regulations, while making essential goods more affordable for those earning lower incomes. But in contrast to means-tested programs like Harris’s LIFT Act, Sanders champions unapologetically universal programs: medical care, college education, living-wage jobs, retirement income, and environmental safety for everyone.

Contrary to much disingenuous criticism, this does not mean that Sanders refuses to recognize historically specific inequalities of gender and race. On questions of discrimination, pay equity, mass incarceration, and civil rights, his rhetoric and record have been far in advance of the Democratic Party’s mainstream for quite some time. (Many surveys have shown that Sanders’s strongest national support comes from women and people of color; the vast majority of black voters, regardless of their 2016 primary choice, continue to view him favorably.) The difference is not what Sand-
ers does not say but what he does say: that every American, including those who voted for Trump, is entitled to the universal protections of social democracy.

Rather than battle Republicans by targeting a “Democratic base” defined by strict demographics—the preferred strategy of many progressives today—Sanders seeks to overcome the power of the ultra-rich by rallying a much larger coalition of the working and middle classes. Bernie’s America is not divided between red and blue states or vicious and virtuous voters but between the rulers and the ruled. This may be one reason Sanders, alone among the politicians classed as “progressive,” has remained popular with independent voters.

Even without a Hillary Clinton–like juggernaut in the race, Sanders faces a tough fight for the 2020 nomination. Despite his broad popularity, there is little evidence that he has made inroads with his most difficult demographic, the very reliable voters over the age of 65. Nor is there much reason to believe that the politicians and donors atop the Democratic Party will view this Sanders campaign more favorably than the last one—and if an inconclusive primary race leads to a brokered convention, it is difficult to imagine him emerging as the nominee.

Above all, Sanders must contend with a mood inside the Democratic Party—powerful among its leaders and voters alike—that the only issue of consequence in 2020 is defeating Trump. Bernie’s struggle, from Chicago to Burlington to Capitol Hill, has always been much larger than defeating a single opponent. As he said in his March 2 speech in Brooklyn announcing his 2020 run, his goal is not simply to win an election but to build a movement that can “transform this country.”

From Weaver to Ocasio-Cortez, nearly every progressive figure today is urging the Democrats to reclaim the bold mantle of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Yet Sanders rounds out the introduction to Where We Go From Here with a quotation from another president who led an even bolder movement and whose election spurred an even greater transformation. The hoariest words in American history—Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg vow to defend “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”—are also, Sanders reminds us, some of the most radical. To overthrow an entrenched oligarchy and claim a “new birth of freedom” based on democratic equality for all: That would be a political revolution worth fighting for.

**BUILDING ANOTHER WORLD**

Elaine Mokhtefi and the dashed hopes of postcolonial Algeria

by ELIAS RODRIQUES

In William Gardner Smith’s 1963 novel *The Stone Face*, we follow Simeon Brown, a black journalist who flees American racism by moving to Paris. At first, France feels like a color-blind sanctuary to him, until he inadvertently causes the police to harass several Algerian men. “We’re the niggers here!” one of the men later tells him. Troubled, Simeon seeks out other Algerians living in Paris, who relay harrowing tales of French military torture and other atrocities during the Algerian War of Independence. By the book’s end, Simeon realizes that the “stone face” of racism can never be escaped, that only the locales and the victims change, so he decides to return to the United States to fight for “America’s Algerians.”

Elaine Mokhtefi makes a similar comparison in her memoir, *Algiers, Third World Capital*. Born into an American Jewish family that moved around frequently, she witnessed racism and anti-Semitism throughout the country, and her strong early disdain for both led her to join a global anticolonial movement while in college. Several years later, she moved to Paris and was struck, like Smith’s protagonist, by the similarities in the treatment of black people in the United States and Algerian immigrants in France. “Something in me associated those gaunt olive-skinned men on the Faubourg Saint-Antoine with the darker wayfarers trailing along the dusty roads of the South,” she recalled, and she threw in her lot with those in France opposing the colonization of Algeria.

Mokhtefi’s activism eventually led her to work for the Office of the Provisional Government of Algeria. After Algeria won its independence in 1962, she moved to Algiers the same year and became a civil servant in the new government. During this period, a number of anticolonial organizations set up shop in Algiers as well, and Mokhtefi once again found herself involved in various national-liberation struggles. After stints in several branches of the new government, she became a trusted aide to Eldridge Cleaver Elias Rodrigues is a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania.
who had moved to the city and established the International Section of the Black Panther Party there.

As an observer and participant, Mokhtefi occupied a unique position in the world of black and anticolonial liberation struggles of the 1950s and ’60s that enables her to offer a rare chronic of the intersection of these movements. In Algiers, Third World Capital, she captures the camaraderie, shared ideals, and frequent miscommunication among the various struggles for liberation in these heady and ultimately frustrating years, and in particular the conflicts that emerged between the Panthers and the Algerian government in their competing visions of emancipation. The Panthers sought to run their organization in the city with as little official oversight as possible, and they struggled to reconcile this with their dependent position on the Algerian state. Meanwhile, the Algerian government sought to assert its sovereignty over the newly independent country and likewise struggled to come to terms with the tensions between its own nationalist and internationalist projects. Both groups also struggled to address contradictions within their movements, especially between their tendencies to reassert hierarchies and authority and their desire to be free of earlier forms of them. By focusing on these tensions, Mokhtefi tells several richly layered stories at once—her own and those of several intersecting groups of people who hoped to forge a new kind of internationalism out of the antiracist and anticolonial struggles of the 1960s.

Born in New York in 1928, Elaine Mokhtefi attributes her antiracism to her mother, who taught her early to treat people without prejudice. It was also spawned by personal experience. As the family moved around the country after her father went bankrupt, Mokhtefi frequently encountered anti-Semitism, including in the suburban town of Ridgefield, Connecticut, where they settled in the late 1930s and where she was often called the “little Jewish girl.”

In 1945, Mokhtefi matriculated at Wellesley College in Georgia, where she struggled to fit in and found herself enraged by the brutal system of segregation all around her. After being expelled, she entered the Latin American Institute in Manhattan, where she found a home among the large, left-wing student body and faculty. In 1946, after a speaker from the United World Federalists gave an address at the college advocating for world government and an end to war, half of the institute’s students—Mokhtefi among them—joined the group. Later in the decade, she became the director of the United World Federalists’ student division, denouncing racism at home and abroad and calling for an end to empire.

In a climate of incipient McCarthyism, Mokhtefi and her peers found themselves under surveillance, but she was undeterred. If she’d stayed in the United States, she likely would have been blacklisted, like many others on the left, and if she’d persevered, she may have later joined the struggle against segregation. But in 1951, she moved to Paris, tempted by the romance of life in the City of Lights; once there, however, she was exposed to a “subclass and subculture of Algerian immigrant labor” that “was engaged in an existential battle for recognition and freedom” in the streets of Paris and throughout Algeria. So she took up a new cause: the fight for Algeria’s freedom.

At the time, it was not a popular cause with everyone on the French left. Interior Minister François Mitterrand, a member of the ruling Socialist Party, insisted that “Algeria is France” and “the only negotiation is war.” Likewise, some unions were silent on the issue, if not downright hostile to Algerian independence. A few months after Mokhtefi arrived in Paris, she attended a May Day rally at which the General Confederation of Labor prohibited the Algerian Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties from marching, out of a fear that the French police would crack down on both groups.

The failure of the French left to support its Algerian comrades in their struggle shocked and enraged Mokhtefi. Tales of France welcoming African-American troops and artists with open arms had given her the impression that France was color-blind; the truth proved to be far different. In the years after World War II, the French government cracked down with a vengeance on Algerian anticolonialists living in both countries, and some on the left tacitly supported it. For Mokhtefi, the experience was radicalizing.

As the struggle for Algerian liberation intensified, Mokhtefi’s support for the cause brought her face to face with the French state’s atrocities. Meeting several leading Algerian organizers in the course of her work—including Mohamed Sahnoun, who later became Algeria’s representative to the United Nations—she learned of the French military’s use of torture in Algiers.

Throwing herself into anticolonial activism in Paris, Mokhtefi helped organize a publicity campaign against French rule in Algeria. In 1960, at the World Assembly of Youth International Congress in Accra, Ghana, she found herself working alongside Sahnoun and Frantz Fanon to persuade the organization’s delegations to adopt resolutions supporting Algerian independence. The same year, she returned to the United States, after Sahnoun helped her get a job with the Algerian provisional government’s office at the UN.

In New York, she and her colleagues wrote press releases, pamphlets, and other informational publications calling for Algerian independence. For them, Mokhtefi writes, the war was being fought in two places at once: in Algeria and “on the world’s playing field.” This two-pronged approach finally succeeded in 1962, when the French electorate and Algerian nationals voted overwhelmingly in support of Algerian independence. For Mokhtefi, the victory confirmed that oppressed racial groups could win anticolonial battles if they were waged on the international stage.

Healing the war’s wounds after independence turned out to be no easy feat, however, and approximately two-thirds of Mokhtefi’s narrative examines the many difficulties that followed Algerian liberation—both for the Algerians themselves and for people like her, who had moved to Algiers in the wake of the French withdrawal and hoped that the country would become a beacon for antiracist and anti-imperialist activism.

Algeria at the time had a population of roughly 10 million. French soldiers and police had killed hundreds of thousands of people, tortured tens of thousands, and incarcerated about 2.5 million in concentration camps. At the time of independence, approximately 2.5 million children had tuberculosis or rickets. Moreover, many of the French settlers had made up the skilled labor in the country, and with their departure, Algeria struggled to maintain a modern economy.

Dissension within the provisional government only made matters worse. In late August, Houari Boumédiène, formerly a colonel and at the time chief of staff of the FLN’s military, grew frustrated with the power allocated to his rival Benyoucef Benkhedda’s FLN flank and marched his
troops from Tlemcen to Algiers, killing many political opponents along the way. A brief civil war raged as “men who had spent years battling the French military now faced their own kith and kin.” Even after the fighting ceased and Ahmed Ben Bella assumed the presidency, Algerians faced the tremendous task of creating an independent nation out of a war-torn colony. The economy was in shambles, nearly 90 percent of the population was illiterate, and there was a crying need for people able to build a new infrastructure.

To aid in the country’s recovery, Algeria’s wartime allies—including Cuba, Yugoslavia, and China—sent specialists and medical teams; at the same time, thousands of FLN supporters and activists in other countries moved to Algeria. Mokhtefi and some of her comrades from New York were among them: “idealists,” she writes, who wanted to “build a new world, visionaries whose consciences told them they had to come.” Reunited with Sahnoun, whom she began to see romantically, she found work as a translator in a variety of government-funded positions, beginning her career as an Algerian civil servant.

Despite this help, Algeria still struggled to rebuild. Aiming to utilize the resources that rightfully belonged to Algerians, Ben Bella initiated the auto-gestion with his March 1963 decrees. This policy transferred 7 million to 8 million acres of land, 200,000 to 300,000 homes, and most industries from French to Algerian ownership. (Mokhtefi lived in one such apartment, still furnished with the belongings of the settlers who had fled.) Yet even after Algeria reclaimed its land and natural resources, there was no clear path forward; Ben Bella “launched new national projects every day,” she writes, “but neglected the measures to implement them.”

As a civil servant, she had a close-up view of these projects. At the National Office of Algerian Tourism, she helped organize receptions for foreign functionaries, an essential task for any nation formalizing its diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. At that office, she also saw the ways that civil service transformed revolutionary activists into government employees: Many of her colleagues were the FLN’s former overseas activists or intelligence agents, deployed there “for the essential purpose of receiving a salary while waiting to be called to other posts.” Meanwhile, her visits to a hospital staffed largely with foreign medical specialists made it clear to Mokhtefi that multilingual speakers were in high demand.

But Ben Bella’s improvisations were not universally well regarded. He too often struggled to get his national projects off the ground—and even worse, in Boumédiène’s eyes, he had sequestered the military from the political realm. On June 19, 1965, Boumédiène organized a coup that ousted Ben Bella, dissolved the National Assembly, and put himself in control.

Mokhtefi carried on in the wake of Boumédiène’s coup, but she was now living in an Algeria that was becoming increasingly authoritarian. The breakthrough of Ben Bella’s Algerian republic paralleled the turmoil in her private life: The previous year, she and Sahnoun broke up, and she found herself even more adrift within the country. Yet the thought of leaving Algeria never crossed her mind. “I had found a home,” she recalls, and new relationships and sources of comradeship were on the horizon.

In the early years of Algerian independence, activists and liberation groups from around the world flocked to Algiers. “We were fellow militants,” Mokhtefi writes, “and the future was ours.” A contingent from the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam arrived, as did one from the African National Congress (ANC). The Algerian government publicly welcomed them, with Ben Bella calling for an African popular front against colonialism in a 1963 speech and Boumédiène supporting the presence of liberation groups in the country even after he deposed Ben Bella. Algeria aspired to become a major hub for Third World freedom movements, and Mokhtefi was eager to participate in all of this activity.

The group she spent most of her time with in the years after the coup was the Black Panthers. After federal and local law-enforcement agencies in the United States repeatedly tried to incarcerate many of them, including Eldridge Cleaver, one of the Panthers’ most vocal and prominent figures, a cohort of Panthers decamped for Algeria. Cleaver and his wife, Kathleen Cleaver, were among the first, traveling to Algiers in June 1969 by way of Montreal and Cuba. The day they arrived, a representative of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union called Mokhtefi and told her that the Cleavers needed her help. Mokhtefi met them and the journalist Robert Scheer at the Victoria Hotel, where the Panthers enlisted Mokhtefi as a translator and asked her to help them get settled. Advocating for the Panthers with Shimane Hoffman, who headed the FLN office overseeing liberation movements in Algiers, Mokhtefi helped them get a government residence and a phone line to organize a local headquarters. A month after his arrival in Algiers, Eldridge Cleaver held a press conference. “We are an integral part of Africa’s history,” he said. “White America teaches us that our history begins on the plantations, that we have no other past. We have to take back our culture.” Living in Algeria, the Panthers could continue this work, linking up with other revolutionary struggles, black and Arab alike.

Soon after the Cleavers and Scheer set up shop in Algiers, Donald “DC” Cox (the Panthers’ field marshal), Sekou Odinga and Larry Mack (of the Panther’s New York 21), and Pete and Charlotte O’Neal (heads of the Kansas City chapter) followed, helping solidify the Panthers’ presence there. As the city became more and more of an international hub for the Panthers, Mokhtefi became more and more important to the party’s International Section. Using her insider knowledge and connections to push for the Algerian government to recognize the Panthers, she became one of their main liaisons in Algiers.

At first, the Algerian government seemed fully inclined to support the Panthers, granting them a cash stipend as well as free rein to travel in and out of the country. The Panthers, in turn, used their increasing stability to cooperate with other liberation movements, helping, in their own modest way, to make Algiers the titular “Third World Capital” of Mokhtefi’s memoir. This cooperation helped internationalize them in several ways:

The Panthers’ orientation, at least among those party members who were abroad, became increasingly internationalist, understanding the struggle against racism in America as one part of a broader struggle by colonized people against Western imperial powers.

The Panthers also became internationalists in practice, establishing close ties with many other national-liberation movements; serving as unofficial guards for Oliver Tambo, then head of the ANC, when he was in Algeria; traveling to North Korea and North Vietnam “to express their solidarity and condemn US imperialism”; and training in the use of arms with other move-
ments. But the Algiers Panthers in general and Cleaver in particular were not used to state support, and they were certainly not used to life in decolonizing Algeria. In the United States, they had created semiautonomous spaces under surveillance and persecution by a hostile federal government. In Algeria, however, the government’s position was much less clear. It provided aid to revolutionary organizations, proclaimed the country a refuge for people fleeing from racism, and turned a blind eye to some of the Panthers’ questionable activities, yet it was also at times unresponsive to their requests and occasionally intervened in affairs that the Panthers assumed were their own business.

Not that the Panthers made things easy—for themselves or the Algerian government. By the time Cleaver arrived in Algeria, he had publicly renounced his past, when he had committed heinous acts of rape and claimed that sexual violence was “an insurrectionary act.” But he continued to treat women terribly, and this led him to flout Algeria’s laws when he wanted to. In November 1969, he told Mokhtefi that a comrade of theirs, Rahim, had tried to run off with their money, so Cleaver and another comrade, Byron Booth, had killed Rahim and buried his body in the hills. Later, a friend told Mokhtefi that Rahim had been seen kissing Kathleen Cleaver, and Mokhtefi surmised that Eldridge Cleaver had murdered Rahim not for theft but for sleeping with his wife—a theory later confirmed by Cleaver himself, who justified the murder to Cox in a letter rife with misogyny, proclaiming, “What is mine is no one else’s.”

While the Algerian government never questioned the Panthers after Rahim’s body was found, the Panthers and the Algerian government did have a set of run-ins over other matters. In September 1970, Timothy Leary and his wife, Rosemary Leary, arrived in Algiers after his escape from prison in the United States, where he was serving a 20-year sentence for marijuana possession. Both Learys regularly used LSD, among other drugs, irritating the Panthers, who tried to get them sober. When the Panthers placed the Learys under arrest and confiscated over 20,000 doses of an undisclosed substance, the Algerian government was nonplussed. Though the authorities did not punish the Panthers then, the Panthers and the Algerian state began to grow wary of each other.

Two years later, two American radicals, Willie Roger Holder and Cathy Kerkow, hijacked an airplane and, after securing a $500,000 ransom, flew to Algiers to donate it to the Panthers. The Algerian authorities confiscated the money upon their arrival, and soon tensions between the Panthers and the Algerian government came to a boil. “All was not well,” Mokhtefi notes laconically. Whatever patience the Bounédiène government still had for the Panthers was growing thin.

A schism between the American Panthers and the International Section made this situation even more precarious. The previous year, news had reached Algiers that Huey Newton had become increasingly authoritarian and was embezzling party funds. When Cleaver confronted him on a San Francisco radio show, Newton ended the broadcast and called Cleaver directly. In that conversation, each man expelled the other from the party. One month later, Cleaver attempted to reconcile with Newton, who threatened to kill Cleaver.

After the conversation, the International Section broke from the Panthers and renamed itself the Revolutionary People’s Communication Network. This splintering coincided with the decline of Black Panther chapters in the United States and growing fractures within the Algerian group. “I suddenly saw them as survivors,” Mokhtefi recalls of this increasingly bleak period for the international Panthers. “I imagine they felt the same.” Isolated from the organization that had helped radicalize them and facilitated their entry into the international liberation movement, they now had few people they could turn to—and their strained relations with the Algerian government only made matters worse.

Low on funds, the international Panthers tried to raise money in Europe. After that effort failed, they were elated to hear that another group of American radicals had hijacked an airplane and secured a second hefty ransom for the Panthers, but when the plane landed, the authorities once again seized the money. This time, the Panthers issued a public complaint, denouncing the actions of the Boumédiène government. Angered by the Panthers’ actions, the authorities soon cut off the Panthers’ communications lines and placed them under house arrest. “With a broken organization in the United States and international support sliding fast,” Mokhtefi recalls of this turning point, “the International Panthers were close to stateless.”

When the Algerian government finally released the Panthers six days later, Cox—who opposed publishing the complaint to begin with—resigned from the group. The following year, Eldridge Cleaver moved to France, his children returned to the United States, and Kathleen Cleaver set out on her own in Europe. The remaining Panthers dispersed elsewhere: The group’s time in Algiers had come to an end.

From the early ’70s on, Mokhtefi’s life in Algeria also began to come apart. Although she had started dating Mokhtar Mokhtefi, a writer and veteran of the independence war whom she would marry in 1991, nearly every other aspect of her life was uprooted. With the Panthers on their way out, she increasingly found herself at odds with the Algerian government. Matters were only made worse when one of her friends married Ben Bella,
then under house arrest, and a pair of men showed up at her apartment, took her to the Ministry of Defense, and interrogated her, insisting that she now spy on Ben Bella. If she refused, they said, they would deport her. She declined to collaborate, but with the help of some friends in the government, she was able to stay, although “the evening’s message was clear. I was not free.”

Mokhtefi’s situation grew even more precarious in the months that followed. After going on a trip abroad, she had her passport confiscated by the Algerian government and then was deported to France. Six months later, with the aid of one of the architects of the coup that brought Boumédiène to power, she returned to Algeria. But on her arrival, officials once again deported her. “I was estranged from my own existence,” she writes, and she and Mokhtar Mokhtefi were forced to settle in France and later in the United States.

Elaine Mokhtefi does not offer much critique of Algeria in these years, even after she was expelled from the country. Her love for Algeria was in many ways too hard to break, but she does allow Mokhtar Mokhtefi, in a series of paraphrased conversations, to state his own growing ambivalence about the trajectory of national liberation in Algeria. Of his last days in the country, she writes:

He warned his friends that Algeria was racing at top speed toward total control by forces of darkness. Soutien critique, or constructive criticism, the watchword of the moment for progressives, was a compromise that would only provide fuel for the engines of reaction. For democratic thought and process to take hold required a progressive insurrectionary movement.

For Mokhtar Mokhtefi, the stifling regulation of public speech by the Algerian government paralleled the “total control” of French colonialism. What Algeria needed in its early years was a robust civil society, in which all could think and speak freely. For him, this project was never realized.

Elaine Mokhtefi doesn’t add much of her own perspective here; perhaps she feels that it should be he who does the criticizing, not a white American. But, late in the memoir, she does give us a clue concerning how she feels about her forced departure: “My story with Algeria has invaded and occupied my being like only one’s country and people can”—and she is now in exile.

Mokhtefi’s memoir claims to correct various accounts of the early years of Algerian independence, including those by Ben Bella and Cleaver. She wants to offer a more accurate statement of both the promise and the limits of what was, briefly, the “Third World Capital.” But the most significant portion of her memoir comes less from correcting the historical record than from her firsthand account of the kinds of tensions that arose among the different liberation movements of the 1950s and ’60s. As a beneficiary of the international anticolonial struggle, Algeria was eager to help other countries gain sovereignty, but as a new nation itself, it struggled under Ben Bella and then Boumédiène to assert its authority over those anticolonial and antiracist movements that had made Algiers their home. Because the Panthers were a body of self-proclaimed revolutionaries also in pursuit of liberation, they represented an ally in both Algeria’s and the Third World’s anticolonial struggles, but as they spent more time in Algiers, it became clear that they were not always aligned with Algeria’s interests, nor were Algerian interests all that aligned with theirs.

Mokhtefi’s place in the country and these movements was equally ambiguous. Her dual roles in anticolonial activism and government bureaucracy often led her to move between the extraordinary and the mundane. For every story of sobering up Nina Simone for a performance in Algiers or trying to find lodging for the Panthers, there are others of her dealing with the authoritarianism of the Algerian government or the rank misogyny of Cleaver.

In the end, while the tensions between the Panthers and the Algerians stemmed from the strong personalities on either side, Mokhtefi’s experiences underscore the fragility of these different movements’ internationalisms and struggles for liberation. Besides the internal contradictions between their avowed commitments to liberation and egalitarianism and their tendency to fall back into authoritarian structures, both groups made the mistake that Stuart Hall cautions against in his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”. They assumed a superficial form of solidarity, one that doesn’t acknowledge the other group’s differences, and as a result failed to recognize that the work of internationalism, like the work of all political identity formation, is “a production,” as Hall put it, “which is never complete, always in process.”

Any international left organization with a hope of being successful today must continually build shared goals within its constituent groups as well as with their collaborators. These organizations must be more willing to confront their own contradictions and also be more honest about the tensions that occur across groups. Intersectional politics requires allowing others to guide the intersections between different groups’ understandings of liberation. One cannot merely assume that allies are united in goals and approaches.

This is an idea that feminists of color have long known. As Ann Russo points out in her recent study of black and brown feminism, feminists of color have built noncarceral forms of accountability precisely because intragroup harms have been borne disproportionately by women of color in political organizations that have, at the very same time, experienced hostile state persecution. For the sake of liberation, these feminists of color have insisted that groups must root out state harm as well as intragroup harm. In the case of the Panthers, Cleaver’s treatment of women at least foreshadowed, if not bolstered, the group’s conflict with the Algerian government. And when that conflict fractured the group, all that remained, as is the case in Mokhtefi’s memoir, was nostalgia: a rejuvenating feeling for the author, a hope for those of her comrades still alive and active in politics, but unfortunately inaccessible to the rest of us.

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COSMIC AMERICA

Harmony Korine’s boomer fable

by ERIN SCHWARTZ

Many Americans have misgivings about Florida. This could originate with the state’s famously lurid crime stories—“Florida man threatens to kill man with kindness,” uses machete named ‘Kindness’; “Florida man arrested outside Olive Garden after eating pasta belligerently”—its pastel suburbs sprawled out across swampland, or its friendliness to guns. Florida is home to alligators, 18-foot pythons, and a town built by the Walt Disney Company. It is also, in the world of Harmony Korine’s The Beach Bum, home to Moondog, an inexplicably wealthy deadbeat poet whose wife says he is “from another dimension,” played by Matthew McConaughey in a wheaten-terrier-colored wig and sequined Uggs. Moondog tornadoes his way from Key West to Miami and back, purportedly to release his wife’s fortune from escrow after her death but actually to rip people off. The worst bit of violence comes when he and a JNCO-jeans-wearing rehab patient played by Zac Efron (whose hairstyle, Korine said, was inspired by the grill marks on panini) knock a stranger off his mobility scooter and steal his wallet—something you could imagine happening in Paul Blart: Mall Cop. And The Beach Bum fixes not on an underclass but on something Korine calls “cosmic America”: a blissed-out vestige of the 1960s whose uniform is the Hawaiian shirt, spiritual center is Key West, anthem is “Margaritaville,” and financial resources are bafflingly limitless.

In effect, Korine has made a film about baby boomers—themselves, tiny, overlooked libertarian wing, but boomers nonetheless. Its protagonist is a lethally irresponsible late-middle-age Buffett fan who has no idea where his money comes from and doesn’t particularly care, just knows that it’s there, waiting for him to need it like a bottle of Qualudes stashed in a glove compartment. At the start of the film, when Moondog boats to Miami for his daughter’s wedding, he gapes at his waterfront mansion. “I forgot how rich we were,” he shouts to Minnie, waiting on the pier in a slinky black bodysuit, holding a mimosa and a cranes looming in the background, Moon dog tells Vulture as a “Jimmy Buffett ballad that’s derailed.”

Korine is known for delighting in the perversity of certain nooks of American culture—backwoods poverty in Gummo, hot girls breaking laws in Spring Breakers. He has accordingly been criticized for exploiting his subjects: If his gaze is an outsider’s, the morbid acts of cruelty his characters dole out and receive seem like a voyeur’s fantasy. But this doesn’t capture the surrealism of his films, their interest in anarchism as an end in itself rather than as a kind of ethnography. In 1998, he filmed himself challenging random diverse passersby to fight him, a kind of urtext for his career. He abandoned the project soon after a bouncer snapped his ankle and gave him a concussion.

The Beach Bum’s narrative unsprings languidly, like a cloud of vape smoke. Its hazy, neon-washed, often hilarious vignettes document a mood and a place more than the emotional lives of its characters; even after the death of Minnie (Isa Fisher), Moondog’s wife, no one deviates from a rota of feelings limited to bored, stoned, horny, and an urge to start breaking things. Korine told MovieMaker magazine, “I want the movies to work like energy; I sometimes call it a ‘liquid cinema,’ because it’s not about continuity, it’s about chasing a kind of energy and color and mood.” He also described the film to Vulture as a “Jimmy Buffett ballad that’s derailed.”

Erin Schwartz is a co-editor of Natasha.
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**Puzzle No. 3499**

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

**ACROSS**

1 and 4A The French woman is skeptical about the French attorney’s pairs, four of which are displayed in this diagram (though one member of each pair is not clued) (5,8)

4 See 1A

9 Unimpressive individual conceals disparity in amplifier (9)

10 Not clued (5)

11 Invalid removing contents of nutshell (4)

12 Compelling return of electronic credit card by American agent (10)

13 Not clued (6)

15 Hang around with worker, swapping sources of trouble and litigation (6)

16 Help is not great when incomplete (3)

18 Look inside slit for shoe (6)

20 Assumption in here: mistreated cow (6)

23 Putting off announcement about piano functioning (10)

24 Old South American hiding in mountain cabin (4)

26 Halt the start of elections, in case… (5)

**DOWN**

27 …one survey in Ohio confused the masses (3,6)

28 Not clued (8)

29 Get rid of errors in an alphabetical sequence where Boston University is failing (5)

1 European newspaper covering a child’s retail merchandise (8)

2 Escorts set up unaccompanied concert date (7)

3 Raise head of drowsy friend in California heat? (4)

4 Took the plunge, winning love and the heart of Carey Mulligan (2–4)

5 One kind of strength, mostly found in our gang’s tools (8)

6 Vital cure reformulated to make it profitable (9)

7 Use an ax when cutting into sap’s television drama (3,4)

8 Iron roundabout, without a charge (4)

14 Chew so messily when eating dessert that’s a masterwork (9)

16 Populous city in Ghana is unfortunately getting hot (8)

17 Second-rate rule entails similar violation (8)

19 Never drink red wine without beginning to darken (7)

21 Blunder involving party led by Mandela’s supporters as a group (3,4)

22 Lacking leadership, bank’s business is close (6)

23 Shakespearean character found on the ice? (4)

25 Not clued (4)

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