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He’s been running hard his whole life. What’s holding him back now?

GENE SEYMOUR
Look Again

The September 23 issue was excellent, but I have two comments. First, on “Sea Change”: As a climate refugee from Miami Beach, I would point out that “barriers to shield just Miami-Dade County from sea-level rise” are not feasible. South Florida is built on porous limestone. Floodwaters do not merely wash in from the sea; they rise from under one’s feet. Another statement worth flagging appears in Robin D.G. Kelley’s excellent article “Don’t Look Now!” He writes that the efforts after the Civil War, specifically the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, were “the boldest attempt to extend democracy to all Americans before the 1960s.” Surely he cannot overlook the 19th Amendment, which finally enfranchised half the nation’s adult population in 1920—a group that was unaffected by the 15th. Carolyn Klepser Philadelphia

Blame Merle!

Katha Pollitt’s column “Break’s Over” [Sept. 23], quoting Donald Trump’s attack on four progressive congresswomen—“They don’t love our country…. If they don’t love it, tell them to leave it”—reminds me that it is the 50th anniversary of Merle Haggard’s song attacking anti-war and leftist political protesters, “The Fightin’ Side of Me.” It apparently was the first time the phrase “If you don’t love it, leave it” appeared in pop culture.

On the brighter side, it is also the 80th anniversary of the first performance (on CBS Radio) of the moving cantata “Ballad for Americans.” A celebration of ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious inclusion and tolerance—the antithesis of Trumpism—the work was first recorded by Paul Robeson (1940) and was widely performed during the 1940s. Edward Vernoff Brooklyn, N.Y.

The Last Dance?

Re “The Wallflowers at the Dance,” by Jeet Heer [Sept. 23]: This is an outstanding analysis and synthesis, one that gathers a wide view of the role of think tanks (especially “liberal” ones) and charts the way they have been turned over to corporate interests. The author even provides a guarded bit of realistic optimism that the think tanks might get with a new program. Thank you for this work, Mr. Heer! Robert Borneman

There is no question that think tanks have had a long and mostly backroom history. Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting has described the Brookings Institution variously as conservative or center right, which seems fair, given that its donors include JPMorgan Chase, CENTCOM, and Qatar.

The fact is, the neoliberal version of the Democratic Party surrendered the responsible and progressive policies of the New Deal and the Great Society long ago, choosing instead to scurry behind the neocon march to the distant right while trying to keep a safe distance. Whether Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders (or both?) ends up on the ticket, I doubt they’ll need corporate-funded think tanks to help carry out their agenda of wresting political power from corporate interests.

A footnote: One thing that struck me about this piece was the conspicuous absence of the Economic Policy Institute, probably the closest thing we have to a genuine New Deal think tank in the country. Louis Colasanti

Comments drawn from our website letters@thenation.com
The Left and Impeachment

Donald Trump will almost certainly be impeached in the next few months—but not everyone on the left is happy about it. Ukrainegate is in many ways a reprise of Russiagate, with both rooted in his arguments with the national security bureaucracy. The whistle-blower in Ukrainegate is a CIA officer.

Writing in The Guardian, Yale law professor Samuel Moyn argues, “Centrists simply want to return to the status quo interrupted by Trump, their reputations laundered by their courageous opposition to his mercurial reign, and their policies restored to credibility.”

Moyn is shrewd in pointing out that the dominant framework in which impeachment is being presented is a centrist national security narrative, with Trump’s great sin being his defiance of the intelligence community. But that is not the only narrative that can be used to argue for impeachment.

There is no reason the rising left in the Democratic Party should cede popular anti-Trump sentiment to centrist Democrats and never-Trump Republicans. It’s hardly an accident that the most insistent voices for impeachment in Congress are on the left: Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Elizabeth Warren.

What these progressive stalwarts realize is that Trump is profoundly loathed by ordinary Democrats, who want to see their party fight back against this racist buffoon. Ukrainegate is a lesser transgression than many Trump has been guilty of. In an ideal world, he’d be impeached for sexual harassment, profiting from the presidency, and obstruction of justice.

But Ukrainegate offers much for the left to work with. As opposed to the centrist narrative of national security misconduct, the left should be arguing that this is a perfect example of how the imperial presidency endangers democracy. Trump is treating the presidency as his personal fief, using the office to punish his political enemies. He has been able to get away with it because Congress has, since the early days of the Cold War, abandoned its oversight powers regarding foreign policy.

It’s telling that Trump’s defenders, no less than his critics, make a national security case. The New York Times, to its discredit, gave space to John Yoo, an infamous apologists for torture in George W. Bush’s administration, to argue that impeaching Trump would be a national security risk. Yoo claims that “the Constitution vests the president with the authority to conduct foreign policy and the responsibility to protect the nation’s security.”

This is precisely the argument the left has to combat. The Constitution, contra Yoo, vests Congress with substantial powers over foreign policy, including the decision to declare war and to impeach over presidential misconduct.

Trump is a great gift and opportunity for the left precisely because he illustrates the decadence and corruption of the imperial presidency much more clearly than earlier and soberer presidents. The Times reported on Thursday that in a private meeting, Trump fantasized about executing the White House source who fed information to the whistle-blower in the Ukraine case. He also raised the idea of arresting House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff for treason.

The question the left needs to highlight is whether Americans want to continue vesting the presidency with all the terrible powers of surveillance and death when the office could easily fall into the hands of a deranged figure like Trump.

Ukrainegate helps foreground systemic corruption. Trump embodies not just the vices of one man but an entire system in which the rich seem to live outside the law. Warren, for one, seems to be preparing an argument that presents his sundry transgressions as symptomatic of a rigged system. Bernie Sanders could easily do the same.

The devil shouldn’t have all the best tunes. Nor should national security centrists be the only ones who get to enjoy impeachment.

JEET HEER FOR THE NATION
Labour’s Gamble
Can the party afford to dodge a decision on Brexit?

For Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party, the timing couldn’t have been better. The party’s annual conference in late September, in the seaside town of Brighton on England’s south coast, had been fractious and confused. The gathering had been rocked by attempts to oust Labour’s deputy leader, the resignation of one of Corbyn’s closest advisers, and a heated clash over the party’s Brexit position. But all was eclipsed on September 24, when the Supreme Court announced its unanimous verdict on Prime Minister Boris Johnson: His decision to suspend Parliament for five weeks, at the height of the spiraling Brexit crisis, was unlawful.

The court’s decision gifted Corbyn the opportunity for a rousing and blistering attack on Johnson, who “broke the law when he tried to shut down democratic debate and accountability at a crucial moment for our public life,” the Labour leader said. Alongside policy pledges to share wealth and power to end years of brutal economic mismanagement, the speech was met with rapturous applause and became a unifying moment. Party resolve to topple the reviled Johnson government took on strength when, forced back to a reopened Parliament, the prime minister used his office to lash out in appallingly divisive, threatening language and accuse the highest court in the land of political motivations.

Johnson is goading the opposition to launch a vote of no confidence against him, triggering a general election. Labour and the other parties won’t risk that until he secures from the European Union an extension of Britain’s deadline for departure—which he refuses to do, even while the recently passed Benn Act compels the prime minister to do exactly that if he has not secured a deal with the EU by the end of the European Council summit in mid-October. Opposition groups are acting to avoid a “crash-out” or no-deal Brexit, with all the damage it would unleash, according to the government’s own reports. Yet at the same time, every day the irresponsible Johnson stays in office is another day he uses his powerful platform to pump poison and incendiary language into the public conversation. Meanwhile, Labour is currently flailing in the polls, with Corbyn’s rating the lowest of any opposition leader in decades.

The party conference in Brighton was a far cry from the one held in the same city two years ago, after Labour, campaigning on a transformative socioeconomic program, claimed a historic share of the vote in a snap election. Had that 2017 election taken place just a few weeks later, Labour likely would have won. But now the Corbyn-supporting camp is divided: Should the party support the Remain side in the country’s interminable Brexit battle, as the bulk of its membership and its MPs want? Should Labour vocally champion immigration and freedom of movement or stay quiet because it might upset some of the party’s more Brexity voters? Should the founder of Momentum, a grassroots Corbyn support group, have tried to topple Labour’s divisive deputy leader by abolishing the post, or was this an ill-advised act of self-sabotage?

With Johnson’s government vowing to take Britain out of the EU, “do or die,” by the end of October, Corbyn has committed the party to a referendum on any Brexit deal. But he wants Labour to stay neutral in a general election on whether it would side with Remain or back its own Leave deal negotiated with the EU. Campaigners who want Labour to go to the polls as a Remain party lost a conference vote on the issue. It’s clear to me, after speaking with delegates—representatives of constituency Labour parties mandated to vote on policy issues at conference—that there is some agreement with Corbyn’s strategy. But it’s not certain that this would have carried a majority on the conference floor had it not been turned into a loyalty test. One delegate, describing the pro-Remain motions, said, “They were all coming from the left of the party, from Corbyn supporters who are internationalist and socialist. I was so disappointed that by the time this came to the [conference] floor, it was seen as an anti-Corbyn position. I can tell you from the heart, that’s not what it was.”

In a party in which

(continued on page 6)
Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, comes from an activist family. His father, Chokwe Lumumba, was a legendary figure—a brilliant lawyer and organizer on behalf of communities that had been let down by both major parties. After the senior Lumumba was elected mayor of Jackson in 2013, the media described him as America’s most revolutionary city leader. When he died less than a year after taking office, his son ran to replace him and lost. That defeat did not dissuade Chokwe Antar Lumumba. He kept speaking up, organizing, and campaigning. In 2017 he won by a landslide, taking 94 percent of the general election vote. As mayor, he has addressed national issues, but his primary focus has been on the grassroots work of delivering services, participatory budgeting, and community empowerment.

—John Nichols

JN: You promised as mayor to make Jackson the most radical city on the planet. What did you mean by that?

CAL: A radical is a person who seeks change. Here in Mississippi, those individuals that we have the most reverence for—whether it’s Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hamer, or Medgar Evers—or, nationally, if we look at Martin Luther King or Malcolm X, or for those who look to Jesus Christ, we find that they were all radicals. I see it as a term of endearment.

JN: The word “radical” also speaks to going to the root of the problem. It isn’t just about changing things. It’s also trying to figure out what the core challenge is.

CAL: Absolutely. We often focus on the symptoms of our problems, as opposed to the root cause. My father talked about how people were lured into a place of complacency upon the election of Barack Obama. He said that sometimes we have to look at the presidency in the same manner as we look at the plantation.

He said on the plantation, you always had an overseer. Sometimes the overseer was white, sometimes the overseer was black. Maybe if he was black, he didn’t beat you as bad. But whether he was white or black, you were still on a plantation—you were no more free. We need to look at the structure of oppression. We need to look at multinational corporations and how they exploit people.

JN: You have said about governing that filling potholes is a part of radical change.

CAL: While potholes may not be the global issue that changes conditions for everybody, it is important that we focus on those things that people are concerned with. As you’re knocking on doors and talking to people about the larger things in life—discrimination, exploitation—you’re invariably confronted by a brother or sister who says, “Yeah, you know, that’s nice, but how are you going to fix that pothole in my street?”

For some people, that may seem minuscule in the grand scheme of things. But we have to be able to bridge pothole to pothole and community to community. People in Jackson understand that there’s a nexus between them and people in Gary, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; New Orleans, Louisiana—that in those cities, they suffer from the same infrastructure problems. Then what we learn is that your problem was never just a pothole. Your problem is that you don’t control the decision-making process that leads to a pothole being fixed.

JN: You said, “People ask me how I felt after Donald Trump was elected. I say, ‘I woke up in Mississippi.’” What did you mean by that?

CAL: It’s a recognition that Mississippi has always been at the bottom. If you were poor before Donald Trump, you’re likely still poor now. If you were poor before Barack Obama or George W. Bush or Bill Clinton, then you were poor after. It has mattered very little whether you consider yourself a Democrat or a Republican; you’ve been suffering under the same conditions. That is a unifying point for all of us—that what we do collectively will change the order of the day for Mississippi and that the calvary isn’t necessarily coming.

Adapted from John Nichols’s Nation podcast, Next Left.
members can shape policy at conference, such manipulations from the leadership aren’t unusual. As one Labour organizer said of the party under Prime Minister Tony Blair, “They used to do this massively. They’d do it more, and they’d do it better.” The trouble for Corbyn is that he has also made party democracy—building engagement and participation—a core part of his brand. In this context, loyalty tests may dampen enthusiasm among the grass roots. That much was already in evidence after Corbyn’s conference speech, when some noted the hollowness of his saying that good leaders, while having strong principles, must also “listen and trust others to play their part.”

While it is widely acknowledged that Labour, with its voter coalition split over Brexit, has complex difficulties with the issue, polling has for some time shown the party losing more votes from its Remain flank than from Leavers. Labour has been trying to avoid coming down on one side or the other on Brexit, but however sensible in intent, the strategy has had the effect of annoying all sides. The party is keen to get back to a policy platform, announcing at conference new ideas that are designed to raise the quality of life, tackle the climate crisis, and level the playing field in one of the most unequal countries in Europe. Some of these policies are a result of the grass roots pulling the party to the left, committing it via conference motions in Brighton to net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, abolishing private schools, and supporting immigration while shutting down all migrant detention centers.

But can Labour keep skirting Brexit in order to showcase these policies? “The Leave/Remain story, however you analyze why we have got to this point, is the biggest story, certainly in the 20 years since I’ve been in politics,” said Labour MP David Lammy at a conference event. “And very sadly, we have to accept that it is a bigger immediacy than the issues that we want to talk about. So deal with Brexit. Pick a side.”

For some in the Corbyn camp, the thinking is that the more Johnson goes full Donald Trump, the starker the choice will be between this reckless Conservative leader and the sensible head-teacher manner and better policies coming from Labour. It’s already the case that voters, including business figures, are seeing shadow chancellor John McDonnell as a safe pair of hands. A Labour Party that champions a left-wing social and economic program has rehabilitated these long-derided yet decidedly popular policies. Even the financial establishment thinks Labour economics are better than the Conservatives’ no-deal Brexit. All that—and experience of the polls getting everything wrong—is why several in the leadership’s office are counting on the party’s advancing as soon as an election campaign gets underway. It is hoped that Johnson’s attempts to depict Parliament as being against the people (where “the people” are those demanding that Brexit be delivered by any means) will fall apart once Labour gets to boost policies that highlight the entitlement and privilege of a Conservative cabinet claiming to be antiestablishment.

But by dodging the Brexit issue and refusing to locate racism or hostility to immigration as a key force animating the Brexit project, Labour has ceded political ground to the right while demoralizing some of its own ranks. Since the 2017 election, when it won the popularity argument on left-wing policies, the Corbyn leadership has hardly been generous or expansive in victory; even sympathetic MPs still aren’t in the loop, and control of his office is centralized and narrow. On both counts, this means party strategy isn’t getting properly stress-tested, which is facilitating unforced errors. Having horribly mishandled its anti-Semitism problem and unnecessarily alienated many Remain voters, the party is now asking that some people hold their nose and vote Labour. Facing the option of five more years of a nativist, hard-right, Trump-friendly Tory government willing to crash the United Kingdom out of the EU, this might seem a no-brainer and may well secure a comfortable Labour win. But it’s still one hell of a gamble.

Rachel Shabi

Rachel Shabi is a UK-based journalist, author, and broadcaster who has been covering the Labour Party for various publications, including The Guardian, The Independent, and The New York Times.
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No More Ms. Nice Victim

Chanel Miller’s memoir reveals how deeply not sorry her assailant really was.

I n June 2016, “Emily Doe” read her 12-page victim impact statement to the court before the sentencing of Brock Turner, the Stanford undergrad who’d been convicted of sexually assaulting her while she was unconscious. It was a brilliant piece of writing—frank, angry, straight from the heart—and it seemed to sum up everything about the trauma of sexual assault and the many ways that society, especially the legal process, makes that trauma worse.

Turner’s lenient sentence of six months in county jail and Judge Aaron Persky’s explanation (“I take him at his word that, subjectively, that’s his version of events”) set the public on fire. Within days of being published on BuzzFeed, Doe’s statement had been viewed more than 15 million times.

In the courtroom and the media, Turner and Doe were very different. He is white; she is Chinese American (although this was not reported until later). In countless articles, he was the “Stanford swimmer,” a top athlete at an elite university; she was the anonymous unconscious girl who’d been fingered near a dumpster. He got to be a person: Character witnesses from his Ohio hometown testified to his sterling qualities (as if his high school guidance counselor would know). She was a 23-year-old nobody who should have known better than to drink too much at a frat party. His open, ordinary face appeared all over; blown-up photographs of her genitals were displayed in court.

Anonymity is a double-edged sword. It protects victims from public humiliation and possible retaliation, but it also erases their individuality. In a new memoir, Know My Name, Doe has revealed herself as Chanel Miller, a UC Santa Barbara alum, dog rescuer, artist, and posessor of a silly sense of humor and a bike named Tofu. She is a beloved daughter, a protective older sister, a part of exemplary boyfriend Lucas—and a writer. What a writer!

I’d never read anything that so vividly paints the bewildering maze that a sexually assaulted woman faces: the humiliation of being seen half-naked by strangers with dirt and pine needles in her hair, the invasive procedures required for a rape kit (hers wasn’t tested for months because of a backlog—think about that), the same questions asked over and over, and God help you if your answers don’t match up with the multiple statements you gave authorities more than a year ago. Even when the people surrounding you are kind and the resources plentiful, the process itself is brutal.

The media is brutal, too. “They counted my drinks and counted the seconds Brock could swim two hundred yards, topped the article with a picture of Brock wearing a tie; it could’ve doubled as his LinkedIn profile,” Miller writes. And the media is lazy, because Turner was not the spotless youth portrayed in countless articles. As came out only after the trial, barely three months before assaulting Miller, he was caught with booze by a campus cop and tried to run away; in high school, he’d taken plenty of drugs. “I wanted to trim all the fat, all these distractions,” Miller writes of the coverage, “to show you the meat of the story. I saw: man goes to a party, kisses three women, finds one alone who cannot speak, takes her into the trees, strips her, sticks his hand up her, is tackled by two men who notice she isn’t moving. He then denies running, can say nothing about the victim except that she enjoyed it….

Miller Explodes the Comforting Bromides that many people still use when talking about sexual assault: that some assaults are less harmful than others, for example. Turner inserted “only” his fingers, not his penis, but it took Miller years to recover from that act and everything around it. We still treat street harassment as no big deal, but when she moves 3,000 miles from California to Rhode Island to take an art course, she is constantly bothered by men on the street, which is frightening and exhausting for her and puts her on constant edge. When an old man on a bench offers her a slice of his green pepper, Miller worries that he’s poisoned it or rubbed his penis on it.

When an old man on a park bench offers her a slice of his green pepper, Miller worries that he’s poisoned it or rubbed his penis on it.
degrading treatment of women; they’re famous for it. But on many a campus, they rule social life. Why? When a woman accuses a man of sexual assault, why are we so eager to believe that he might have misunderstood her, as if “yes” were the universal female default position and having sex next to a dumpster with a virtual stranger was a normal thing to do? The two Swedish grad students who saw the assault in progress and chased Turner down had no trouble sizing up the situation. What about the rest of us?

Persky’s lenient sentence rocked the world not just because it was less than the state-recommended two-year minimum but also because it seemed a reflection of racial and social privilege. As Miller points out, there are plenty of young men and women of color doing time for less. (Note, though, that in addition to three years of probation, Turner must appear for life on the sex offender registry.)

Public anger led to Persky’s recall by voters—the first time that has happened to a judge in California since 1932. That in itself is significant, but what disturbed me more than the sentence was Turner’s refusal to take responsibility. College! Swimming! Future! Would it have killed him to apologize, to acknowledge the harm he did to Miller?

To do that, he would have had to feel remorse, and at no moment did Turner or his family say “I’m sorry” for what he did. They saw only what he might lose: In his father’s unfortunate phrasing, his life stood to be ruined because of “20 minutes of action.”

According to recent reports, Brock Turner is living at home in Ohio, working in a factory and keeping his head down. He is still a young man with a shot at a future. Chanel Miller, meanwhile, is thriving, restored to her full self, an activist and a writer. Her book deserves many readers. I hope Turner will be one of them.

SNAPSHOT

A New Leaf on Life

Swiss curator Klaus Littmann planted 300 trees inside Wörthersee Stadium in Klagenfurt, Austria. Called For Forest—The Unending Attraction of Nature, the installation is based on a 1971 pencil drawing by Max Peintner and is designed to make spectators imagine a time when forests exist only as exhibition objects.

TRUMP’S DEFENSE

The transcript, he says, is the proof. The phone call was really all right, Since who would be brazen enough To do something wrong in plain sight? Any guesses?

There seems to have been no moment when Turner or those around him saw his responsibility or the harm he did.
The junior senator from New Jersey has been running for president since February 1, and his poll numbers have barely budged beyond 2 to 3 percent. It’s still early, but this sluggishness in Booker’s forward momentum seems to be diminishing some of the candidate’s bouncy confidence. His campaign staff has in recent weeks even floated the prospect that their man could end his run if it doesn’t get more money. This could be little more than a tactic to reenergize his loyalists; it’s likely he still believes he could catch a wave and ride it somewhere in Iowa, New Hampshire, or South Carolina—the states where he’s been spending much of his time over the past seven months. Meanwhile, Joe Biden remains at the head of the pack, with Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders at or near his heels and Kamala Harris, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, and various others still in the chase. Those whose numbers didn’t align with their hopes (notably Kirsten Gillibrand, John Hickenlooper, and Jay Inslee) have gone on to other things. Booker hasn’t and, as of this writing, is doing everything but jumping up and down and waving his arms among the pack of suits to get people to hear what he has to say and how he’s the Democrats’ best hope to beat Donald Trump.

Cory Anthony Booker likely wonders why you’d even ask the question. Dude, as he’d put it, he shouldn’t have to fight for attention. He should be killing this thing, lapping everybody else in the pack. He carries all the bona fides that elitists love (ex–Stanford football player, Rhodes scholar, Yale Law grad), the kind of CV that makes the anti-elitist within me curb my enthusiasm. But his rah-rah, can-do fervor matches front-runner Joe Biden’s ampere for ampere. If Booker gets too carried away with enthusiasm, he’s still packing a speaking style that’s bright, fluid, and adaptable enough to accommodate the front porch—and the talk show couch. He can come up with just as many ideas to pierce Trump’s great wall of mendacity, just as many solutions to America’s economic miasma as Sanders and Warren, reminding listeners as often as he can that he’s the only candidate who lives in a low-income, predominantly minority neighborhood. (“People on my block work full-time jobs, harder and longer hours than my parents did, and still need food stamps at my local bodega,” Booker has said.)

And though Booker, at 50, was born at the tail end of the 1960s, he identifies with that decade’s insurgent energies, deploying a rhetoric of love, compassion, and empathy toward one’s attackers that is attuned more to the soaring tones of Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement of the ’50s and ’60s than to the “It’s the economy, stupid” nuts and bolts that Democrats have been fixated on to beat Republicans since Ronald Reagan’s 1980 triumph. While his fellow Democratic challengers still strike poses as problem solvers, as their party’s neoliberal playbook has instructed for decades, Booker positions himself more as a healer, aiming his message past the incendiary polarization of the present moment. The emphasis on love and empathy at least feels distinctive enough among his competitors to be a rhetorical spin move.

“We have a common pain in our country,” Booker said. “But we’ve lost our sense of common purpose. And we have not fully learned that lesson of King that ‘injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’” He speaks often in his public appearances of love—more specifically, what he characterizes as a “ferocious” love, “one of the toughest, most durable forces ever.”

Hearing this kind of exhortation hurled toward wherever Lincoln’s better angels are hiding reminds you of why Booker was once one of the first names summoned by those casting about for a Gen Xer who could champion liberal Democratic values. You heard more and better of this in August, four days after the mass shooting in El Paso, when he appeared at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where a white supremacist gunman killed nine black people at a Bible study session four years ago. Booker dropped his prepared text for a direct assault on white supremacy, saying it has been “ingrained in our politics since our founding.” He urged its...
CORY BOOKER?

Although still polling in single digits, Booker refuses to back down. What’s he doing here?

GENE SEYMOUR
direct action in regulating firearms, declaring there is “no neutrality” in the fight against racism. “You are either an agent of justice or you are contributing to the problem.” The next day’s press accounts buried these remarks beneath those of his rivals—especially Biden, who not only remains ahead of the rest of the field but also polls higher among older African Americans than either Booker or Harris. The speech was Booker at his poised and passionate best. Still, the needle did not jump.

What’s he doing here?

T’s a question a nerd often hears at cool kids’ parties. Maybe because I was a prototypical African American nerd growing up, I recognize too well what Booker might be going through in trying to convince skeptics of his viability as a presidential candidate. He’s never more disarming than when he lets his geek flag fly, as he did by showing up on a break from campaigning at July’s San Diego Comic-Con, insisting that, as a lifelong Star Trek fan, he considers himself one with its cos-dressing, selfi-shooting, memorabilia-buying multitudes, flashing Vulcan “live long and prosper” signs at the Trek exhibits. Right-wing radio had itself a chewy snack over Booker’s impulsive “I am Spartacus” shout-out at Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation hearing last fall over the prospect of releasing a confidential set of the nominee’s George W. Bush administration e-mails. But it now sounds less like over-the-top grandiloquence than an involuntary blurt of his inner pop culture nebbish.

Barack Obama was a black nerd, too, but—as proud of being one as I am and Booker (apparently) continues to be—44 was a nerd who, once the cool kids got to know him, could cruise to a student council presidency with an implacable sangfroid that Election’s Tracy Flick and, for that matter, her real-life counterpart Hillary Clinton could only envy. Booker’s hard-charging manner is more Flickish than Obama’s ever was.

You also have to wonder if there’s a residue of been-there-done-that toward Booker on the part of Democrats for whom being an articulate black man isn’t quite enough to evoke or transcend memories of the black president they still love more than anybody who’s running now. Harris doesn’t face this issue because, as a black woman, she hasn’t been here before in the general sense. Booker does in part because, in the same general sense, he has. (Which, one would think, would be less of a handicap now than it was before 2008.) Certainly there was a time, after he finally won the mayor’s job in Newark, that the pundit class was sure Booker was a shoo-in for becoming America’s first black president. But Booker’s a very different articulate black man from Obama: a moister, less cool iteration. Booker is a lot of things, but cool isn’t the first quality that comes to mind—except, maybe, when it comes to his private life, not making a whole lot about who he has been dating, including his present great and good friend, actress (and fellow comic book nerd) Rosario Dawson. It’s the only aspect of his life and work about which he is in any way circumspect, perhaps because he doesn’t think his love life is as important in this campaign as ending Trump’s immigration horrors, reforming the criminal justice system, eradicating income inequality, and removing lead from urban water systems.

He may be onto something. Hardly anybody foregrounds Booker’s private life when he’s on talk shows or doing interviews. That could change if the needle does jump. But it’s also possible that gossip fatigue has been seeping through the cultural landscape over the last (let us say) two years because there are just too damn many far more important things to think and worry about. Gossip gets its juice from a consensus perception of shame, so I’m guessing that’s what happens when your president exhibits no shame or remorse—and is still president in spite of it.

But if we can’t talk about your private life, Senator, can we have a word with you about lead in the water? Toward summer’s end, news platforms were humming with reports of lead contamination in Newark’s water system serious enough for the EPA to urge the city’s residents to drink bottled water. After 2013, Booker’s last year as mayor, eight officials in his revamped water agency were charged with federal crimes over what a New York Times investigative story described as “a scandal involving kickbacks, no-show contracts and millions of dollars in wasted public funds.” What makes such revelations awkward (at best) for Booker is that he has made both his seven-year record as mayor and his attacks on environmental neglect in poor urban areas prominent features of his presidential bid.

What’s he doing here?

So far, the distribution of bottled water in Newark hasn’t seriously hampered Booker’s momentum—to the extent that, as of this writing, there is any momentum. But when things like this crop up, they remind you of how easy it is for skeptics to pick on Booker. Many liberals drawn to his image as a crusading mayor started backing away from him as long ago as the 2012 presidential campaign, when he told Meet the Press that he was nauseated by an Obama ad that attacked private equity companies such as Mitt Romney’s Bain Capital. Even though Booker walked back his criticism by saying Romney’s business record was fair game, the taunt of “Wall Street candidate” lingered. Then there’s his reputation in progressive folklore as the candidate of Big Pharma, though he now says he refuses to accept contributions for his presidential campaign from pharmaceutical (or any other) corporations and has ramped up his criticism of drug companies for questionable practices.

Should Booker’s campaign gain traction, he’ll have to face questions about his alliance in 2010 with then–New Jersey Governor Chris Christie to maximize school choice in Newark and encourage more charter schools in the city, which led to a $100 million investment by Facebook found-
er Mark Zuckerberg. That initiative put then—Mayor Booker at odds with public school teachers and principals who said they were being stigmatized and ultimately marginalized by the moves, whose results have been inconclusive at best. Booker has repositioned himself as an advocate for public schools without disavowing his previous advocacy of charter schools.

Every politician has to adjust, pivot, and reposition for different campaigns. But liberal-left resentment toward Booker seems especially astringent, despite his support for Medicare for All, his 14-point gun control policy (including an assault-weapon ban and gun licensing), his proposal for a “baby bonds” program that would give every child born in America a $1,000 savings account. “By the time that the poorest kids in America are 18 years old, they’d have upwards of $50,000 to invest in things, actually, that create generational wealth,” he told a WNYC interviewer this spring. “Not only will it help every kid get a fair shot...[but it also] eliminates the racial wealth gap.”

Keep in mind, though, he’s neither Joe Hill nor Malcolm X. And he has never pretended to be. Booker is a child of suburban privilege whose parents, as groundbreaking black IBM executives, had to fight hard to be able to provide their children with a comfortable home and elite education. Neither his mother nor his father ever allowed Booker to forget where they and he came from, and the guess here is that he grew to adulthood ingrained with the belief that it takes both bottom-up activism and top-down corporate involvement to make a better world. It may be one of history’s little jokes that he’s going for the presidency at a time when his base constituency’s trust in corporate input on progressive objectives has been all but exhausted. He would have been regarded as a breath of fresh air in 1992—as he was a decade later when he first challenged Sharpe James for the Newark mayor’s seat. Now he’s just another Democratic Party eminence carrying the baggage of negotiation and compromise that comes with a 21-year career. What could be the bitterest and most polarizing political campaign since... well, the last one.

What’s he doing here?

But if that’s so, then why the hell is Biden leading in all the polls? Gaffes and malapropisms aside, Biden’s old-shoe familiarity is now considered an asset among the party’s mainstream. I keep hearing that one of the (many) problems Democrats face in this presidential cycle is that nobody running has yet captured voters’ imagination. But if Biden is still—still—leading the field, then how much of an imagination do candidates have to capture?

History may be having its fun with Booker. But he thinks it—or at least time—may be on his side. On writer-comedian Larry Wilmore’s July 4 Black on the Air podcast, Booker noted that no nonincumbent candidate leading the polls at roughly this point in a presidential race has become president: not Walter Mondale in 1984, not Al Gore in 2000, and not Hillary Clinton in 2016. He likes his chances somewhere in the rear of the field. Charm, elbow grease, and his determination to aim for the electorate’s heart, as opposed to its head and gut, will do the rest. Once again, he may be onto something—only it’s by no means inevitable that Booker would be the beneficiary of a Biden breakdown between now and next spring.

Also, when I think of Booker at this stage of his life and career, I’m lately reminded of another idealistic but pragmatic big-city mayor propelled to stardom and then the Senate 70 years earlier. Hubert Humphrey was, like Booker, an effusive, relentless, and often impassioned advocate of liberal values. Humphrey’s daring push for a civil rights plank in the Democratic platform in 1948, when he was a corruption-battling Minneapolis mayor, led to the US Senate—where he immediately faced hostility from the right for his challenge to segregation and disparagement from the left for his anti-communist positions. Much like Booker, Humphrey eventually established a sound liberal record while learning how to deal productively with both sides of the aisle.

But Humphrey, like Booker, wanted more. I recently rewatched Primary, Robert Drew’s documentary that followed Humphrey and his fellow senator John F. Kennedy as they made their way through the back roads of Wisconsin for its 1960 Democratic presidential primary. Kennedy’s rock star aura (though nobody called it that back then) and campaign staff now convey an aura of inevitability that likely wasn’t as apparent at the time. But what struck me in this viewing was how effective and incisive Humphrey was when speaking to a group of farmers, articulating their aspirations, fears, and sentiments over being neglected or dismissed by big-city politicians. Booker has some of the same affinity for intimate detail when talking to voters. Yet Humphrey, though representing a neighboring state, ran uphill against the better-funded Kennedy machine, whose candidate is shown speaking in broad generalities to a predominantly Polish Catholic audience of Cold War campfires in the night. Common sense lost—and so did Humphrey in the long run, when his presidential hopes came to grief as Lyndon Johnson’s vice president, defending a war in Vietnam whose prospects for success he once dismissed. Still, Humphrey as a senator persevered and on some level made more consequential changes to the nation in that role than he likely ever would have if he had been president.

I’m not saying the analogy is in any way a perfect one. But... dude? Just think about it. You have every right to stay in this race and do what it takes to win. But at some point, you have to ask yourself, “What am I doing here?” Do you, as you’ve frequently said, want to make America live up to its promises of justice and equality for all? Or do you want to be president?
How a tool for improving performance on the field became a weapon against the players.

KELLY CANDAELE and PETER DREIER
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL FACES A CRISIS THAT COULD LEAD TO ITS FIRST LOCKOUT OR STRIKE IN 25 YEARS. THE LAST strike began on August 12, 1994, and continued for 232 days, forcing the cancellation of the World Series and the first three weeks of the 1995 season. The current collective bargaining agreement doesn’t expire until after the 2021 season. But as fans gather to watch the World Series this October, the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) and the team owners have already begun meeting.

Some of the issues in contention—including minimum salaries, the number of years a team may “own” a player before he can sign with another team, and how revenue sharing among teams is spent to the detriment of players—led to strikes or owner lockouts in the past. For the first time in decades, players are talking openly about the possibility of another strike if the owners continue to exploit the serious shortcomings in the current contract.

One key factor is the owners’ increasing use of analytics—sophisticated statistical metrics—to calculate a player’s value to the team and negotiate his salary accordingly. While many players believe that analytics can help improve their on-field performance, others remain skeptical.

“Put a computer on the mound and see if it will throw strikes, or put it at the plate and see if it can hit a fastball,” said future Hall of Fame pitcher Albert Pujols in the Los Angeles Angels’ locker room after a Labor Day weekend game. The Angels had just beaten the Boston Red Sox, the current World Series champions, with the 39-year-old Pujols contributing two hits and three RBIs.

“I don’t change my approach just because of analytics. I use the same approach that I’ve had since Day 1, when I was in St. Louis [playing with the Cardinals],” said Pujols, who is in his 19th major league season. “You have to work your butt off every day and don’t take anything for granted.”

Others worry that the analytics revolution has provided owners and general managers with a weapon to devalue players’ contributions. Traditionally they were paid based on past performance. If a player did well during the previous two or three years, he could expect a significant increase in salary that reflected his contribution.

Now players are typically paid based on anticipated performance. By analyzing so-called age curves, which supposedly show that a player’s productivity generally declines after he reaches his early 30s, owners and general managers have adopted a kind of reverse seniority: The older you are, the less valuable you are.

In the late 1970s, writer Bill James pioneered the use of statistical data to determine why teams win and lose, an approach he called sabermetrics—with a nod to the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR)—and which a new generation of business-school-trained baseball executives now calls analytics.

The Oakland Athletics were one of the first major league teams to embrace analytics. As recounted in the 2011 movie *Moneyball* (based on Michael Lewis’s 2003 book of the same name), Billy Beane, the Athletics’ general manager, was having a hard time fielding a competitive ball club against teams with much bigger budgets for player salaries. With the help of a Yale economics graduate, he used statistical analysis to find undervalued players whom other teams had overlooked—providing new opportunities for players who thought their careers were over. Despite his team’s budget constraints, Beane took the Oakland As to the playoffs every year from 2000 through 2003.

*Moneyball* celebrated the fine-grained parsing of players’ hitting, pitching, and defensive tendencies as a tool to field winning teams. Analytics proponents hoped to see baseball become more scientific, embracing big data and eschewing the intuition and gut feelings of old-time baseball scouts and managers.

While baseball has always been a game of numbers—batting average, earned run average, fielding percentage, fastball speed—the slicing and dicing of player performance has expanded exponentially. Baseball is now among the most surveilled occupations. Pitchers get printouts of spin rates measuring how fast the ball is rotating and arm-slot graphs showing when the ball is released. Batters are given launch angle stats, which measure the vertical angle at which the ball leaves the bat.

Angels infielder David Fletcher said he particularly appreciates an analytic figure called the chase rate, which tracks how often pitchers get batters to swing at bad throws. This helps make him a more disciplined hitter, he said.

Analytics helped Boston Red Sox pitcher Matt Barnes, who said he was struggling at the start of last season. Cameras and computers showed him the length of his stride while pitching and the way the ball was spinning out of his hand. “We weren’t doing it from just a visual perspective,” he said. “We had factual numbers, as opposed to the coaches sitting there watching and saying, ‘That looks good.’”
Most players have embraced the analytics revolution because they believe it helps them improve their performance—and because of pressure to do so by insistent general managers. Others still chafe at the idea that it might determine their professional destiny.

Wins Above Replacement (WAR), one of the most widely used statistics, purports to measure the number of additional wins a player is worth over the course of the season, beyond the contribution of an average (replacement) player. Owners and general managers use WAR to measure players’ productivity and value.

“Nowadays, just about everything seems to be analytics,” said Los Angeles Angels pitcher and alternative union representative Cam Bedrosian, whose father, Steve Bedrosian, won the 1987 National League Cy Young Award. “Maybe they are putting that [analytics] over the human element.”

Will Smith, a rookie catcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, also expressed doubts about computer modeling. “Everyone in [the locker room] is confident in themselves that they can hit anything, even if the computers say they can’t. And most guys in here will prove the computer wrong,” he said.

Even Angels manager Brad Ausmus, who caught for four major league teams from 1993 to 2010, understands that while analytics has changed every aspect of the game—from which players are signed to how they prepare for games—there are severe limits to evaluating players primarily by numbers.

“Analytics can’t capture the heart of a player, the ability of a player to step up in a big situation, the ability of a player to control his emotions,” he said just before a game against the visiting Red Sox. “It can’t rate work ethic. It can’t analyze the importance of a player to a clubhouse culture.”

Initially, analytics allowed general managers like Beane to spot the untapped potential in inexpensive players and to help on-field managers decide whom to play, where, and when. But if Moneyball’s narrative was all about opportunity, team owners and general managers have since turned that happy fable upside down. They now utilize analytics to undervalue players while pocketing the money that previously went to the men on the field.

Unlike several decades ago, when most general managers came from the ranks of major league players and field managers, few of today’s top executives have ever played pro ball, much less on big league rosters. Farhan Zaidi, the president of baseball operations for the San Francisco Giants, has a PhD in economics from the University of California at Berkeley, Minnesota Twins general manager Thad Levine earned an MBA from UCLA, and Chicago White Sox general manager Rick Hahn has an MBA from Northwestern and a law degree from Harvard. Eleven of Major League Baseball’s 30 GMs have degrees from Ivy League universities, and others went to such elite schools as Stanford and MIT. Every major league team now has an analytics department, with specialists trained in business, economics, and statistics.

For their part, major league players had long lived in a state of virtual indentured servitude—until they hired Marvin Miller, a former steelworkers’ union official, to serve as the MLBPAs first full-time executive director in 1966. Before Miller, who served in that capacity until 1982, players had no rights to determine the conditions of their employment. Contracts were limited to one year, but they reserved the team’s right to retain the player for the next year. Before the start of each season, the team owners essentially told players, “Take it or leave it.”

Under Miller’s leadership, players gained leverage by joining forces against the owners, including strikes in 1972 and 1981. Those strikes, along with more in 1985 and 1994 to ’95, led to increased salaries, binding arbitration, good pensions, a share of television revenue, improvements in travel conditions, and better training and medical treatment.

Players won their biggest victory in 1976, when an independent arbiter granted them the right to become free agents at the end of their contracts, allowing them to choose which team they’d play for, veto proposed trades, and bargain for the best contract—all cornerstones of an economic free market. Since 1966, the minimum player salary has jumped from $6,000 a year (or $46,000 in today’s dollars) to $555,000 in 2019, and the average salary from $19,000 (or $147,000 today) to $4.5 million in 2018.
of talented but not superstar-level older players. Instead of receiving raises based on past performance, many seasoned players have been forced to sign short-term or even minor league contracts.

For example, All-Star Mike Moustakas, who as of late September had 182 career home runs, had to settle for a one-year deal with the Milwaukee Brewers after seven years with the Kansas City Royals. Ten-year veteran outfielder Gerardo Parra, who had a .284 batting average for the Colorado Rockies last year, had to sign a minor league contract with the Giants in February because his weighted metrics did not rate highly enough compared with other hitters’ over three years. After he was released by the Giants, Parra became a free agent and signed with the Washington Nationals, making the MLB minimum salary.

Despite being an All-Star pitcher, Dallas Keuchel, a free agent, had to wait more than two months after the current season started to sign a one-year deal with the Atlanta Braves. Younger players and those approaching free agency are watching what’s happening to their teammates and seeing their own future.

While players are reluctant to use the C-word—collusion—their current grievances are exacerbated by the suspicion that the owners have been working in concert to limit players’ opportunities in free agency. History suggests that those suspicions are justified. In 1990, for example, a neutral arbiter ruled that the owners had engaged in illegal collusion and would have to pay $280 million to the aggrieved players.

David Samson, the president of the Miami Marlins from 2002 to 2017, said that “youth and inexpensiveness is the elixir of success.” But the owners’ elixir has become the players’ poison.

The average career length for a major league player is a little over four years. Rather than sign players to long-term contracts, teams increasingly view them as contingent workers who can be shuttled between short stints in the major and minor leagues, similar to employees in the growing gig economy. Last year, 1,270 players appeared in major league games—an all-time high since Major League Baseball first fielded 30 teams in 1998. But the vast majority of those players will never reach the six-year threshold for free agency, when they can put their talents in major league games—an all-time high since Major League Baseball first fielded 30 teams in 1998. But the vast majority of those players will never reach the six-year threshold for free agency, when they can put their talents into market and allow every team to bid for them.

In another trend that mirrors dynamics in the larger economy, baseball is generating more productivity from its lowest-paid players. The proportion of players making the minimum MLB salary or slightly more has gone up significantly since 2014. This year, over 40 percent of players earned somewhere between the $545,000 minimum and $599,500. New York Yankees slugger Aaron Judge is in his third full year in the big leagues and won’t be eligible for free agency until 2023. He’s among the best hitters in the game but is earning $684,300 a year—which much lower than his true value to the team.

Before the 2019 season, a few elite players made headlines for their astronomical long-term contracts. Manny Machado, who played for the Dodgers last year, signed a 10-year, $300 million contract with the San Diego Padres. All-Star outfielder Bryce Harper signed a similar deal with the Philadelphia Phillies, for 13 years at $330 million.

In fact, only a handful of players on each team make the kind of eye-popping salaries that skew the average. Although the average annual salary is $4.5 million, the median is $1.5 million. The best-paid one-quarter of players earn three-quarters of total salaries.

From an owner’s or general manager’s perspective—or any factory manager’s, for that matter—if the analytics tell you that a younger, cheaper worker not yet eligible for free agency gives you similar or greater productivity in terms of his contribution to wins, why would you overpay the older worker? If you can obtain significant WAR from Yankees slugger Judge but pay him far less than his value as a free agent, what owner wouldn’t leap at the chance? In fact, clubs are significantly underpaying him and many other players before they reach free agency.

According to Sonoma State University professor Willie Gin, the analytics revolution allows teams owners “to pay less for the same productivity because of the very precision and scope of big data’s behavioral profiling.” He writes that Beane “is celebrated as a crafty manager rather than an exploiter of underpaid baseball labor.”

The way Dodgers star pitcher Clayton Kershaw sees it, free agency and the salary structure need to be fixed. As he told USA Today during this year’s All-Star break, “We’ve got to find a way to get these [younger] guys paid during their peak years if they’re not going to be rewarded on the way out.”

Kershaw’s anger is pervasive among players. According to third baseman Justin Turner, the players’ union representative for the Dodgers, analytics can be used for good or evil. Analytics has “done wonders” for the Dodgers, he said, but there is also a downside. “You might see guys hitting .240 or .250 but are hammering the ball all over the place. The front office will sit you down and show you how productive your at-bats are. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they are going to go into an arbitration case or free agency and fight for you to give you more money.”

Another key issue is how the team owners are spend-
ing revenue-sharing money. MLB’s revenue-sharing formula is essentially a redistribution of wealth among owners, requiring teams in larger markets to send money to those in smaller ones. Last year, for example, the Yankees and the Dodgers were among the teams that made net contributions to the revenue-sharing pool. On the other end, teams like the Marlins, the Tampa Bay Rays, and the Pittsburgh Pirates received money from the pool.

But since the owners do not have to fully open their books to the players’ union—or anyone else—the MLBPA suspects that they’re cutting back salaries by claiming to be rebuilding their teams. The players view such language as a euphemism for increasing profits for the owners alone.

Before the 2018 season, the Marlins slashed their payroll by trading perhaps the best outfield in the majors, selling Giancarlo Stanton to the Yankees, Marcell Ozuna to the St. Louis Cardinals, and Christian Yelich to the Milwaukee Brewers. Obviously, cutting the payroll saves money—but it also means that fans aren’t seeing their favorite team field the best talent available.

Los Angeles Angels pitcher Bedrosian observed, “The big thing is just integrity of play—making sure all the teams are putting the best players on the field.” Having the best players “makes the game better,” said the Red Sox’s Barnes, the team’s union representative, “and it makes a better experience for the fans. We saw a little bit of a struggle [over free agency] in the off-season and even at the beginning of the season.”

The current collective bargaining agreement stipulates that teams’ revenue-sharing money has to be spent improving on-field performance, but the language is vague enough to allow owners to spend it on technological investments while skimping on player salaries, including free-agent talent.

Before this season, for example, the Marlins spent $15 million on improvements to their 37,000-seat, taxpayer-subsidized ballpark, even though they only attracted an average of 10,013 fans to their home games in 2018. Absent top-notch ballplayers, the new amenities did little to sustain fans’ interest. The Marlins finished last in their division.

The MLBPA has filed grievances against four teams—the Athletics, the Marlins, the Pirates, and the Rays—claiming they inappropriately spent their revenue-sharing money.

During the 19th century, engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor revolutionized corporate management by using time and motion studies to help employers gain greater control over workers’ bodies in the name of profit-making efficiencies. A baseball field is not a factory—far from it. But many players express ambivalence about MLB’s version of Taylorism. According to Dodgers pitcher Ross Stripling, analytics “can help you in negotiations, but it’s also a tool that [owners and general managers] can use against you.”

“It seems every day now someone is making up a new analytic tool to devalue players, especially free agents,” said Giants third baseman Evan Longoria, a 12-year veteran and three-time All-Star, in an Instagram post this past January. “As players we need to stand strong for what we believe we are worth and continue to fight for the rights we have fought for time and time again.”

“Without the union,” Barnes observed, “what we have now would be nothing.”

Each time the players went on strike in the past, the team owners and most baseball writers insisted that baseball would be ruined as a popular sport. Each time they were proved wrong. In 1967, attendance at MLB games averaged 15,005. Last year, it was 28,830, according to the league.

Meanwhile, the value of every major league team has skyrocketed. In 2004, Arturo Moreno purchased the Angels for $184 million; that franchise is now estimated to be worth $1.9 billion. The Yankees are worth $4.6 billion, the most among the 30 teams.

MLB’s billionaire owners include the Angels’ Moreno (worth $3.4 billion), the Athletics’ John Fisher ($2.5 billion), the Dodgers’ Mark Walter ($3.3 billion), the Giants’ Charles Johnson ($5 billion), the Red Sox’s John Henry ($2.7 billion), and the Detroit Tigers’ Marian Ilitch ($3.7 billion).

League revenues have also been increasing steadily, reaching a record-breaking $10.3 billion in 2018—a trend that has been consistent for 16 years. Rather than stifle baseball’s prosperity, the union simply gave players—many of them from poor and working-class families, with roughly a third now coming from out-
side the United States—the power to win a greater share of their employers’ growing revenue. But according to Smith College economist Andrew Zimbalist, the author of several books on baseball’s finances, the players’ share of the teams’ total revenue has been declining in recent years.

When calculating operating income, Zimbalist said, team owners exclude most of their ancillary income from team-owned and branded hotels and other venues near the ballparks. These profits are not counted in the team’s revenue stream or considered part of the profits from baseball operations. For example, the Cubs own a hotel with a gym near Wrigley Field that benefits from the team’s brand as well as the location, and the Braves’ parent company, Liberty Media, owns a major hotel and other real estate developments that surround the team’s new ballpark. None of these revenues are considered baseball operations, even though without baseball, they arguably wouldn’t exist.

The players’ union will try to rectify some of these dynamics in the current round of negotiations. One way would be to raise the minimum salary substantially to reflect the greater productivity—or increased WAR numbers—of younger and pre-free-agency players. This would also help restore the value of free agency for players who are not superstars, making them more attractive and affordable by comparison. The union will continue to oppose a salary cap, which the owners have wanted for years. But baseball’s so-called luxury tax, which penalizes teams whose combined player salaries exceed a certain amount, acts as a disincentive to put money into salaries.

Reducing the years required before free agency or arbitration kicks in would also help, as would more explicit contract language on how the teams’ revenue-sharing money is spent.

Ordinary fans may find it difficult to sympathize with ballplayers whose starting salary is $555,000, even if the typical player spends only four years in the majors. But what’s happening in baseball is not that different from what’s going on in the work lives of most Americans. Corporate profits have been climbing, while the share going to workers has failed to keep up. From 1978 to 2018, the compensation of corporate CEOs grew by 1,008 percent, far outstripping S&P stock market growth (707 percent); over the same period, wages for the typical worker grew by just 11.9 percent, according to a new study by the Economic Policy Institute.

When baseball players go on strike, it isn’t out of greed but out of the same fundamental labor relations principles as any worker.

Still, as the contract situation heats up over the coming year, there are a number of things the MLBPA could do to help improve the union’s image with the general public. For starters, it could stand with workers engaged in other union drives, as well as campaigns for living-wage laws in the cities where they play. Major League Baseball needs fans who make enough money to afford the increasing cost of tickets, parking, and hot dogs at the stadiums.

The MLBPA should make sure that players aren’t forced to cross other unions’ picket lines—as both the Yankees and Dodgers did last year at Boston hotels where workers were on strike. It would have been a significant gesture for a few Yankees, Dodgers, and Red Sox players to show up and join the hotel workers’ picket lines. One way to avoid putting major league players in this embarrassing situation would be to insert language in their union contract that requires teams to stay in union hotels and prohibits them from staying in hotels where the workers are in the midst of labor disputes with management. (Only three of the 26 cities with major league teams—Cincinnati, Tampa, and Arlington, Texas—don’t have union hotels.)

Boston’s hotel strikers pointed out that Marriott International uses analytics to track how much time housekeepers spend in every single room they clean. The cult of efficiency, the pressure to produce, and the means of surveillance are everywhere.

The MLBPA could support emerging efforts to unionize minor league ballplayers, who currently earn an estimated $7,500 a year and get paid only during the baseball season. Most of these players will never climb into the better-paying majors.

This year, the MLBPA tried but could not stop the New Era Cap Company, which makes caps for all major league players, from closing its union factory near Buffalo and moving production to nonunion facilities in Florida and overseas. In an op-ed in The Washington Post, Washington Nationals pitcher Sean Doolittle expressed his concern that he and other players “will be wearing caps made by people who don’t enjoy the same labor protections and safeguards that we do.” The MLBPA could insist that teams purchase players’ uniforms, bats, and other equipment from union companies—or at least from those that provide decent pay, working conditions, and benefits.

If baseball players think strategically and lend a hand to workers who are struggling, the boys of summer just might provide some inspiration to the broader labor movement—and to the country.
Health care reform has been the most hotly contested issue in the Democratic presidential debates. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have been pushing a single-payer Medicare for All plan, under which a public insurer would cover everyone. They would ban private insurance, except for items not covered by the public plan, such as cosmetic surgery or private rooms in hospitals. The other Democratic contenders favor a “public option” reform that would introduce a Medicare-like public insurer but would allow private insurers to operate as well. They tout this approach as a less traumatic route to universal coverage that would preserve a free choice of insurers for people happy with their plans. And some public option backers go further, claiming that the system would painlessly transition to single payer as the public plan outperforms the private insurers.

That’s comforting rhetoric. But the case for a public option rests on faulty economic logic and naive assumptions about how private insurance actually works. Private insurers have proved endlessly creative at gaming the system to avoid fair competition, and they have used their immense lobbying clout to undermine regulators’ efforts to rein in their abuses. That’s enabled them to siphon hundreds of billions of dollars out of the health care system each year for their own profits and overhead costs while forcing doctors and hospitals to
waste billions more on billing-related paperwork.

Those dollars have to come from somewhere. If private insurers required their customers to pay the full costs of private plans, they wouldn’t be able to compete with a public plan like the traditional Medicare program, whose overhead costs are far lower. But this is not the case: In fact, taxpayers—including those not enrolled in a private plan—pick up the tab for much of private insurers’ profligacy. And the high cost of keeping private insurance alive would make it prohibitively expensive to cover the 30 million uninsured in the United States and to upgrade coverage for the tens of millions with inadequate plans.

Public option proposals come in three main varieties:

§ A simple buy-in. Some proposals, including those by Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg, would offer a Medicare-like public plan for sale alongside private plans on the insurance exchanges now available under the Affordable Care Act. These buy-in reforms would minimize the need for new taxes, since most enrollees would be charged premiums. But tens of millions would remain uninsured or with coverage so skimpy, they still couldn’t afford care.

§ Pay or play. This variant (similar to the plan advanced by the Center for American Progress and endorsed by Beto O’Rourke) would offer employers a choice between purchasing private insurance or paying a steep payroll tax (about 8 percent). Anyone lacking employer-paid private coverage would be automatically enrolled in the public plan. The public option would be a good deal for employers who would otherwise have to pay more than 8 percent of their payroll for private coverage—for example, employers with older or mostly female workers (who tend to use more care and incur high premiums) or with lots of low-wage workers (for whom 8 percent of payroll is a relatively small sum). But many firms employing mostly young, male, or highly paid workers (e.g., finance and tech) would likely stay with a private insurer.

§ Medicare Advantage for All. The public option approach favored by Kamala Harris would mimic the current Medicare Advantage program. Medicare Advantage plans are commercial managed care products currently offered by private insurers to seniors. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency that administers Medicare, collects the taxes that pay for the program and passes the funds ($233 billion in 2018) along to the insurance companies. Under this approach, the public option would operate alongside the private Medicare Advantage plans and compete with them, as the traditional fully public Medicare program currently does.

No working models of the buy-in or pay-or-play public option variants currently exist in the United States or elsewhere. But decades of experience with Medicare Advantage offer lessons about that program and how private insurers capture profits for themselves and push losses onto their public rival—strategies that allow them to win the competition while driving up everyone’s costs.

In US Health Insurance, Good Guys Finish Last

A public option plan that facilitates enrollees’ genuine access to health care can’t compete with private insurers that avoid the expensively ill and obstruct access to care. Despite having overhead costs almost seven times that of traditional Medicare (13.7 versus 2 percent), Medicare Advantage plans have grown rapidly. They now cover more than one-third of Medicare beneficiaries, up from 13 percent in 2005. Greed has trumped efficiency, and the efforts of regulators to level the playing field have been overwhelmed by insurers’ profit-driven schemes to tilt it.

Private insurers employ a dizzying array of profit-enhancing schemes that would be out of bounds for a public plan. These schemes, which continually evolve in response to regulators’ efforts to counter them, boil down to four strategies that are legal, in addition to occasional outright fraud.

§ Obstructing expensive care. Plans try to attract profitable, low-needs enrollees by assuring convenient and affordable access to routine care for minor problems. Simultaneously, they erect barriers to expensive services that threaten profits—for example, prior authorization requirements, high co-payments, narrow networks, and drug formulary restrictions that penalize the unprofitably ill. While the fully public Medicare program contracts with any willing provider, many private insurers exclude (for example) cystic fibrosis specialists, and few Medicare Advantage plans cover care at cancer centers like Memorial Sloan Kettering. Moreover, private insurers’ drug formularies often put all of the drugs—even cheap generics—needed by those with diabetes, schizophrenia, or HIV in a high co-payment tier.

Insurers whose first reaction to a big bill is “claim denied” discourage many patients from pursuing their claims. And as discussed below, if hassling over claims drives some enrollees away, even better: The sickest will be the most hassled and therefore the most likely to switch to a competitor.

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Steffie Woolhandler is a distinguished professor of public health at the City University of New York at Hunter College, a lecturer in medicine at Harvard Medical School, and a cofounder of Physicians for a National Health Program.
§ Cherry-picking and lemon-dropping, or selectively enrolling people who need little care and disenrolling the unprofitably ill. A relatively small number of very sick patients account for the vast majority of medical costs each year. A plan that dodges even a few of these high-needs patients wins, while a competing plan that welcomes all comers loses.

In the employer market, cherry-picking is easy: Private insurers offer attractive premiums to businesses with young, healthy workers and exorbitant rates to those with older, sicker employees. As a letter this summer to The New York Times put it, like casinos, health insurers are profitable because they know the odds of every bet they place—and the house always wins.

The CMS, in theory, requires Medicare Advantage plans to take all comers and prohibits them from forcing people out when they get sick. But regulators’ efforts to enforce these requirements have been overwhelmed by insurers’ chicanery. To avoid the sick, private insurers manipulate provider networks and drug formulary designs. Despite the ban on forcing enrollees out, patients needing high-cost services like dialysis or nursing home care have switched in droves from private plans to traditional, fully public Medicare. And as a last resort, Medicare Advantage plans will stop offering coverage in a county where they’ve accumulated too many unprofitable enrollees, akin to a casino ejecting players who are beating the house.

Finally, Medicare Advantage plans cherry-pick through targeted marketing schemes. In the past, this has meant sign-up dinners in restaurants difficult to access for people who use wheelchairs or offering free fitness center memberships, a perk that appeals mainly to the healthiest seniors. But higher-tech approaches are just around the corner. Will Oscar, the health insurer founded by Jared Kushner’s brother—with Google’s parent company as a significant investor—resist the temptation to use Google’s trove of personal data to target enrollment ads toward profitable enrollees like tennis enthusiasts and avoid purchasers of plus-size clothing or people who have searched online for fertility treatments?

§ Upcoding, or making enrollees look sicker on paper than they really are, to inflate risk-adjusted premiums. To counter cherry-picking, the CMS pays Medicare Advantage plans higher premiums for enrollees with more (and more serious) diagnoses. For instance, a Medicare Advantage plan can collect hundreds of dollars more each month from the government by labeling an enrollee’s temporary sadness as “major depression” or calling trivial knee pain “degenerative arthritis.” By applying serious-sounding diagnoses to minor illnesses, Medicare Advantage plans artificially inflate the premiums they collect from taxpayers by billions of dollars while adding little or nothing to their expenditures for care.

Fighting Big Pharma: Bernie Sanders on a trip with diabetes patients to purchase lower-cost insulin at a pharmacy in Windsor, Canada, July 2019.

Ailing

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<th>Percentage of GDP spent on healthcare in the US</th>
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<th>Average percentage of GDP spent on health care in France, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK</th>
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<th>Percentage of males who survive to age 65 in the US, compared with the average in France, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK</th>
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<th>Percentage of 20-to-79-year-olds with diabetes in the US, versus the average in France, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK</th>
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<td><strong>10.8/5.1</strong></td>
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Through most upcoding stays within the letter of the law and merely stretches medical terminology, the CMS’s (rare) audits of enrollees’ charts indicate that Medicare Advantage plans are collecting $10 billion annually from taxpayers for entirely fabricated diagnoses. And that’s only a small fraction of their overall take from upcoding. Private insurers keep most of this pillfered money for their profits and overhead, but they use a portion to fund added benefits (for example, eyeglasses or slightly lower co-payments for routine care) that attract new enrollees and help private plans to seemingly outcompete traditional Medicare.

§ Lobbying to get excessive payments and thwart regulators. Congress has mandated that the CMS overpay Medicare Advantage plans by 2 percent (and even more where medical costs are lower than average). On top of that, Seema Verma, Trump’s CMS administrator, has taken steps that will increase premiums significantly and award unjustified “quality bonuses,” ignoring advice from the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission that payments be trimmed because the government is already overpaying the private plans. And she has ordered changes to the CMS Medicare website to trumpet the benefits of Medicare Advantage enrollment.

In sum, a public option insurer that, like traditional Medicare, doesn’t try to dodge unprofitable enrollees would be saddled with more than its share of sick, expensive patients and would become a de facto high-cost, high-risk pool. The CMS’s decades-long efforts to level the playing field have been thwarted by insurers’ upcoding, belying their promises of fair competition. And insurance companies have used their political muscle to sustain and increase their competitive advantage over traditional Medicare. The result: The public plan (and the taxpayers) absorbs the losses while private insurers skim off profits, an imbalance so big that private plans can outcompete a public plan despite squandering vast sums on overhead costs, CEO salaries, and shareholder profits.

Single Payer Would Save, Public Option Won’t

This year alone, private insurers will take in $252 billion more than they pay out, equivalent to 12 percent of their premiums. A single-payer system with overhead costs comparable to Medicare’s (2 percent) could save about $220 billion of that money. A public option would save far less—possibly zero, if much of the new public coverage is channeled through Medicare Advantage plans, whose overhead, at 13.7 percent, is even higher than the average commercial insurer.

Moreover, a public option would save little or nothing on hospitals’ and doctors’ sky-high billing and administrative costs. In a single-payer system, hospitals and other health facilities could be funded via global, lump-sum budgets—similar to the way cities pay fire departments—eliminating...
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the need to attribute costs to individual patients and collect payments from them and their insurers. That global budget payment strategy has cut administrative costs at hospitals in Canada and Scotland to half the US level. The persistence of multiple payers would preclude such administrative streamlining, even if all of the payers are charged the same rates. (Under Maryland's mislabeled global budget system, the state's hospitals charge uniform rates but continue to bill per patient; our research indicates that their administrative costs haven't fallen at all, according to their official cost reports.)

Similarly, for physicians and other practitioners, the complexity involved in billing multiple payers, dealing with multiple drug formularies and referral networks, collecting co-payments and deductibles, and obtaining referrals and prior authorizations drives up office overhead costs and documentation burdens.

The excess overhead inherent to multipayer systems imposes a hidden surcharge on the fees that doctors and hospitals must charge all patients—not just those covered by private insurance. All told, a public option reform would sacrifice about $350 billion annually of single payer's potential savings on providers' overhead costs, over and above the $220 billion in savings it could sacrifice annually on insurers' overhead.

Finally, a public option would undermine the rational health planning that is key to the long-term savings under single payer. Each dollar that a hospital invests in new buildings or equipment increases its operating costs by 20 to 25 cents in every subsequent year. At present, hospitals that garner profits (or “surpluses” for non-profits) have the capital to expand money-making services and buy high-tech gadgets, whether they're needed or not, while neglecting vital but unprofitable services. For instance, hospitals around the country have invested in proton-beam-radiation therapy centers that cost hundreds of millions of dollars apiece. (Oklahoma City alone now has two.) Yet there’s little evidence that those machines are any better for most uses than their far cheaper alternatives. Similarly, hospitals have rushed to open invasive cardiology and orthopedic surgery programs, often close to existing ones. These duplicative investments raise costs and probably compromise quality.

Meanwhile, primary care and mental health services have languished, and rural hospitals and other cash-strapped facilities that provide much-needed care spiral toward closure. As in Canada and several European nations, a single-payer system could fund new hospital investments through government grants based on an explicit assessment of needs, instead of counting on private hospitals to use their profits wisely. That strategy has helped other nations direct investments to areas and services with the greatest need and to avoid funding wasteful or redundant facilities. Public option proposals would perpetuate current payment strategies that distort investment and raise long-term costs.

Because a public option would leave the current dysfunctional payment approach in place, it would sacrifice most of the savings available via single-payer reform. The bottom line is that a public option would either cost much more or deliver much less than single payer.

Why Not Import German, Swiss, or Dutch Health Care?

Public option proponents often cite Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands as exemplars of how private insurers can coexist with thriving public health care systems. But they ignore the vast differences between those nations' private insurers and ours.

The nonprofit German “sickness funds,” which cover 89 percent of the population (only wealthy Germans are allowed to pur-
chase coverage from for-profit insurers), are jointly managed by employers and unions—a far cry from our employer-based coverage. The government mandates identical premium rates for all the sickness funds, takes money from those with low-risk enrollees and subsidizes others with older and sicker ones, and directly pays for most hospital construction. All sickness funds offer identical benefit packages, pay the same fees, and cover care from any doctor or hospital.

Although the details differ, a similarly stringent regulatory regime applies in Switzerland, whose system descended from Otto von Bismarck’s original German model, and as in Germany, the government funds most hospital construction. While for-profit insurers can sell supplemental coverage, only nonprofits are allowed to offer the mandated benefit package.

Since 2006, the Netherlands has been transitioning from the German-style universal coverage system to a more market-oriented approach championed by corporate leaders. However, the government pays directly for all long-term care, and a strong ethos of justice and equality has pressured both public and private actors to avoid any erosion of social solidarity. The Netherlands has long enjoyed ready access to care, and its system hasn’t descended (yet) into an American-style abyss. But under the new regime, hospital administrative costs have risen nearly to US levels, overall health costs have increased rapidly, doctors complain of unsustainable administrative burdens, and even in such a small nation, tens of thousands of people are uninsured. Insurers spend massively on marketing and advertising, and private insurers’ overhead costs average 13 percent of their premiums. Moreover, the United States and the Netherlands aren’t the only places where for-profit insurers’ overhead costs are high: They average 12.4 percent in Switzerland, 20.9 percent in Germany, and 26.2 percent in the United Kingdom.

Transforming the immensely powerful, profit-driven insurance companies of the United States into benign nonprofit insurers in the Swiss or German model would be as heavy a lift as adopting Medicare for All. Nor can we count on the cultural restraints that have thus far softened the Dutch insurers’ rapacious tendencies and prevented a reversal of that country’s long-standing health care successes.

A final point: While allowing private insurers to compete with a public plan amounts to a poison pill, the same isn’t true for supplemental private plans that are allowed to cover only those items excluded from the public benefit package. While Canada bans the sale of private coverage that duplicates the public plan’s benefits, it has always allowed supplemental coverage, and that hasn’t sabotaged its system.

The efficiencies of a single-payer system would make universal coverage affordable and give everyone in the United States their free choice of doctors and hospitals. But that goal will remain out of reach if private insurers are allowed to continue gaming the system. Preserving the choice of insurer for some would perpetuate the affordability crisis that has bedeviled the US health care system for generations. Proponents of the public option portray it as a nondisruptive, free-choice version of single payer. That may be good campaign rhetoric, but it’s terrible policy.

The Nation.

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Four hundred years ago, “about the latter end of August,” an English pirate ship called the White Lion landed at Point Comfort in the Virginia Colony carrying “not anything but 20 and odd Negroes,” wrote colonist John Rolfe. Though this is often viewed as the starting point of slavery in what would become the United States, the anniversary is somewhat misleading. Africans, both enslaved and free, had lived in St. Augustine, in Spanish Florida, since the 1560s, and since slavery was not legally sanctioned in Virginia until the 1640s, early arrivals would have occupied a status closer to indentured servants. But those ambiguities only point to how essential people of African descent were to the establishment and development of the imperial outposts that became the United States. It was their work, as much anyone else’s, that helped build the world we live in today.

In his new book, Workers on Arrival, the historian Joe William Trotter Jr. shows that the history of black labor in the United States is thus essential not only to understanding American racism but also to “any discussion of the nation’s productivity, politics, and the future of work in today’s global economy.” At a time when mainstream political rhetoric and analysis related to economic change still tend to center on white men displaced by job loss in manufacturing and mining, similar challenges faced by black workers are often examined through a distinct lens of racial inequality. As a result, Trotter contends, white workers are viewed as the victims of “cultural elites and coddled minorities,” while African

William P. Jones is a professor of history at the University of Minnesota and the author of The March on Washington.
American workers suffering from the very same economic and political conditions are treated as “consumers rather than producers, as takers rather than givers, and as liabilities rather than assets.” Reminding us that Africans were brought to the Americas “specifically for their labor” and that their descendants remain “the most exploited and unequal component of the emerging modern capitalist labor force,” Workers on Arrival provides an eloquent and essential correction to contemporary discussions of the American working class.

Trotter acknowledges that he is not the first to offer this critique and cites generously from “nearly a century of research” and prominent African American scholars in order to demonstrate “the centrality of the African American working class to an understanding of U.S. history.” These include W.E.B. Du Bois’s studies of black working-class communities in Philadelphia, Memphis, and other cities during the turn of the 20th century, as well as Sterling Spero and Abram L. Harris’s 1931 book The Black Worker. But Trotter’s achievement is to synthesize this rich body of historical scholarship into a single volume written with an eye to a general audience.

Trotter’s analysis adds to this scholarship as well: While emphasizing the breadth of black workers’ contributions to economic development and growth, he is particularly interested in their roles building American cities. Extending an analysis developed in his 1985 book on black migration in early 20th century Milwaukee, he depicts cities as spaces of economic and political opportunity not available in rural settings. They are places where people of color—and in particular black communities—have been able to thrive. Without minimizing restrictions on jobs, housing, and civil rights, he describes how Africans established important employment niches, formed religious, civil and labor organizations, and connected with the burgeoning resistance to slavery in colonial cities from New Orleans to Boston. Enslaved and free black workers built the roads, buildings, fortifications, and other infrastructure, performed essential household and service labor, and toiled in a wide variety of crafts.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of black workers in colonial America was their skill. Newspapers in Boston, New York, and Charleston carried ads for the purchase of enslaved carpenters, seamstresses, bakers, and blacksmiths, and Philadelphia slave owners turned a large “share of the ordinary trades of the city” over to black craftspeople. Some Africans arrived with canoe building, carpentry, blacksmithing, and navigational skills, but owners and employers had obvious incentives to train enslaved workers in other artisan fields, too. Skills gave these black workers a modicum of independence, providing in some cases independent sources of income, and increased their ability to escape or purchase freedom for themselves and their loved ones. The skilled trades also helped connect them to local and international political movements, especially those opposed to slavery. Once the Northern states abolished slavery after the American Revolution, free black communities, often centered on artisan work, became hotbeds for the Underground Railroad and the growing abolitionist movement.

In his discussions of the 19th century, Trotter’s tendency to focus on cities can have its limitations. Highlighting Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and others who escaped from bondage to the cities, at times he loses sight of the economic and political power wielded by those who remained behind in the rural and agricultural parts of the United States. As Du Bois observed in his 1935 book Black Reconstruction in America and as more recent studies by historians Sven Beckert, Edward Baptist, and others have confirmed, the productivity of plantation labor drove urbanization and imperial expansion on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century. Rejecting the prevailing view of his generation that enslaved African Americans were helpless bystanders in the conflict between Northern and Southern whites, Du Bois insisted that as a result of plantation labor’s importance, the black worker was the “founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world, who brought the civil war in America.” As much as free and enslaved urban artisans, enslaved agricultural workers helped make the 19th century world what it was; their refusal to continue to do this work, Du Bois added, helped end the war that liberated the America we know today.

In addition to discounting the significance of plantation slavery, Trotter’s emphasis on the liberatory nature of urban life also overlooks the degree to which many African Americans found power and autonomy in rural settings and remained committed to agriculture well into the 20th century. That commitment prompted the people emancipated from plantations not to move to the cities after the Civil War but rather to demand “40 acres and a mule” and to view sharecropping as preferable to wage labor. The historian Nell Painter reminds us that the first great migration of African Americans after Emancipation was not to Northern cities but to homesteads in Kansas, Oklahoma, and other states to the west. It is true, as Trotter claims, that black men sought seasonal employment in mines, lumber camps, and railroad construction as their “dreams [of] landownership” faded in the face of racist violence, theft, and exploitation in the Jim Crow era. Yet even then, most viewed rural wage work as a seasonal supplement to farming. Only when the boll weevil and the collapse of international markets killed Southern agriculture did the majority of African Americans head to the cities.

However, Trotter’s emphasis begins to make much more sense as his narrative moves into the 20th century. As generations of black Southerners headed north in the face of Jim Crow, urban industrial employment became central to the economic and political aspirations of black workers. Black workers established small footholds in industry through strike-breaking in the 1890s, then moved rapidly into Northern cities during World War I. Most unions remained hostile to them, so African Americans joined others or formed their own. Black newspapers encouraged the exodus by advertising employment opportunities and contrasting the political and cultural offerings of cities over the rural Jim Crow South.

The differences between urban and rural life for black workers were, in the early 20th century, only sharpened by the New Deal’s labor legislation, which excluded agricultural and domestic employment from...
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Social Security, collective bargaining, and the minimum-wage regulations that transformed industrial work in the 1930s and ‘40s and made work in the cities all the more desirable. By the beginning of World War II, roughly 3 million African Americans had moved to cities in the North and the West; by 1980, an additional 5 million had followed, turning a largely rural population into an urban working class.

Even with the Great Migration, urban black workers still had to fight their way into industrial jobs. Black women primarily supported themselves and their families through domestic and personal service work, taking in laundry and sewing, and running beauty salons, bars, and other small businesses. Men sought industrial work but often ended up working in the service sector as redcaps, porters, janitors, garbage collectors, and waiters. Like the migration itself, moving into industrial work became the focus of a social movement.

Trotter points out that black women had more success in industrial Southern cities, where they came to dominate low-wage labor in tobacco factories, industrial laundries, and canning plants. Black men pushed into the lowest-paid, most dangerous jobs in meatpacking, steel, automaking, and other Northern industries, but it would take the early organization of trade unions and civil rights activists to finally begin to open up other levels of industrial work to black Americans.

World War II marked a turning point in this struggle, as the demand for industrial employment formed a central plank of the emerging civil rights movement. Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work boycotts erupted in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, DC, setting the stage for the 1941 March on Washington Movement against racial discrimination in the defense industry. Led by A. Philip Randolph, who headed the predominantly black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, the movement grew large enough that Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order banning racial discrimination by defense contractors.

With that victory, Randolph canceled his assertion that rural white men and blue-collar base, many uncritically accept a changing economy, meant the continued persistence of hiring discrimination and aggressive policing and the rise of mass incarceration, coupled with the challenges of rebuilding unions in a changing economy, meant the continued decline of black workers’ economic and political power.

Unfortunately, the experiences of black workers are largely absent from contemporary analysis of the economic and political effects of deindustrialization. In the wake of the 2016 election, when political analysts scattered across the South and the Midwest in search of Donald Trump’s blue-collar base, many uncritically accepted his assertion that rural white men and a dislocated white working class were the principal victims of the globalization of manufacturing and fossil fuel extraction.

It was not just Republicans who claimed to champion the white working class, as Joe Biden garnered an early lead in the Democratic primary race by emphasizing his roots in Pennsylvania’s mostly white coal country while rarely mentioning the multiracial working-class communities in Delaware that had been his political base for half a century. The journalist Henry Grabar points out that the majority of voters in Youngstown, Ohio, a frequent destination for journalists’ “heartland safaris” after the 2016 election, are black or Latino. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild mentions in passing that African Americans are half the population of Lake Charles, Louisiana, yet she treats their experience as secondary to white workers’ in her best-selling ethnography of conservatism in a refinery town. “The collapse of manufacturing in the Mahoning Valley may have provoked a white identity crisis that the national media can’t get enough of,” Grabar notes of the area surrounding Youngstown, “but the upheaval was more severe for black Americans.”

This oversight is not just academic, given that a decline in black working-class turnout could be as decisive in the 2020 presidential election as the conservative views of some white workers. Grabar asked a black union leader why only 10 percent of registered voters participated in a recent primary election in Youngstown, summing up her response as, “Poverty…was crushing people’s will to participate in the political process.” The pollster Stanley Greenberg, who coined the term “Reagan Democrat” to describe the white working-class voters who shifted right in the 1980s, insists that a similar phenomenon was only part of the story in 2016. In places like Youngstown and Lake Charles, frustration with the economic policies of both parties has led more workers of all races to drop out of the political process altogether than to shift from one party to another. “The Democrats don’t have a ‘white working-class problem,’” Greenberg has argued. “They have a ‘working-class problem,’ which progressives have been reluctant to address honestly or boldly.”

Trump’s election placed the economic challenges faced by American workers at the center of political analysis, albeit in ways that distorted the racial diversity that has always defined the nation’s working class. If progressives want to understand how central African Americans have been to that history, they might start by reading Workers on Arrival.
An emblematic piece of fake news propagated during that fateful year 2016 was infamously headlined “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President.” Ross Douthat’s book To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism doesn’t have quite as much shock value, but the conservative New York Times columnist is still eager to offer a punch line that will unsettle plenty of Catholics. For Douthat, the left-leaning pope and the far-right American president do have something crucial in common: They are both deeply divisive and irresponsible populists. The two seek to connect with the people directly, they attempt to bypass existing bureaucracies and disrupt long-standing institutions, and ultimately, they don’t care much for observing the rule of law. Just as countless Americans are deeply worried about the “Trump effect” on their democracy, so too, Douthat suggests, should Catholics be frightened by the “Francis effect” on one of the world’s oldest and largest religious institutions. The man born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires in 1936 and known as “the great reformer” by his many admirers, could end up destabilizing the church or splitting it apart altogether.

Douthat is deeply upset about Francis for two reasons. One has to do with his unusual approach to church governance. Douthat disapproves of the way in which the media-savvy pontifex circumvents internal discussions over deep theological questions and takes them directly to the public, in effect launching a series of trial balloons for transformations in church doctrine. Most famous was the incident in which Francis, ruminating to reporters aboard a plane, asked, “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and he has good will, who am I to judge?” But there are also his “private letters” that have somehow become public; the tweets by Antonio Spadaro, his trusted Jesuit adviser, whom Douthat calls the Vatican reformer’s “hyperactive id”; and the innocent-looking footnotes in apostolic exhortations that, in the eyes of his critics, Francis uses to smuggle in a complete change of the church’s view on contested matters, like whether remarried couples may take Communion.

According to Douthat, there’s a method in Francis’s seemingly chaotic approach. Pursuing doctrinal transformation through the studied ambiguity of his statements, he brings theological debates out into the open and beyond the cloistered realm of church institutions. It is the very opposite of the popular misconception that all-powerful...
popes constantly make officially infallible pronouncements. Francis instead exhorts his followers, as he did on World Youth Day in Rio in the summer of 2013, to hagan lio—shake things up.

In Douthat’s eyes, this is precisely what Francis’s tenure in Rome has done, to the detriment of the Vatican’s authority: He has created an unholy mess. Instead of playing to the church’s strength—that it has a single universal representative who can make binding pronouncements for 1.2 billion people—Francis has decided to decentralize decision-making, with every priest acting as he sees fit. Catholicism now means one thing in Germany and another in Nigeria. In Douthat’s view, this means confusion reigns everywhere.

Worse still, the pope demoralizes the curia with his lack of clarity. “Like functionaries in a somewhat capricious dictatorship,” Douthat writes, the churchmen have been “effectively ‘working toward the pope,’ trying to offer guidelines that differed with one another” in the attempt to “fit what they thought his ambiguities intended.” Surely Douthat is aware that the origin of this expression is “working toward the Führer,” coined by a prominent Nazi bureaucrat. Is the antipathy toward Francis among conservative Catholics really so strong that one cannot help but compare today’s Vatican to the Reich Chancellery?

Douthat does not like the liberalizing di-rection the pontificate has been taking, and here he offers the usual talking points of US conservatives: Give an inch on marriage or homosexuality, and polygamy, ordination of women, abortion, and transgender rights will be next. Any change or admission of pluralism will make the church slide all the way down the slippery slope to total moral relativism—a generalized “who am I to judge?”

Douthat also argues that liberalization and, as Francis put it, “obsessing” less about sexual morality will not stop the exodus from the church in Europe and other places. The combination of what Douthat calls “German theological premises, Argentine economics, and liberal-Eurocrat assumptions on borders, nations, and migration” will only alienate the faithful further.

It is telling that Douthat reduces what Chappel argues, the paternal modernists played in the latter. Chappel seeks to correct the record: The crucial decade of modernization, he argues, was not the 1960s but the 1930s. It was then that a growing number of Catholics abandoned the call for “an overturning of the secular order and a reinstatement of the Church as the sole guardian of public and private morality” and also dedicated themselves to fighting totalitarianism in both its right and its left forms.

As opponents of Nazism and Stalinism, many of these modernizing Catholics came to accept the idea of a secular, pluralistic state and took their cues from the left, embracing socialism and fraternal modernism, or a more egalitarian understanding of society and the family. But in other cases, these modernizing Catholics tacked right and developed a countervailing view, paternal modernism. Although they no longer demanded a restitution of the medieval order and most opposed an alliance with fascism, paternal modernists nonetheless supported authoritarian regimes friendly to the church, as long as they got what they wanted in core policy areas.

Of these two modernizing factions, Chappel argues, the paternal modernists...
were dominant within Catholicism in the 1930s and '40s and played a much more important role in the postwar years, inspiring the large Christian Democratic parties that decisively shaped many Western European states—what Chappel calls the “most successful political innovation in modern European history.” With their conservative but anti-fascist credentials, the paternal modernizers were able to reign supreme for much of the second half of the century in Germany and Austria and even more so in a country that Chappel leaves out of his book: Italy, where the Democrazia Cristiana was continuously in government from the late 1940s to the early 1990s.

Paternal modernists made their peace with the market early on and avidly promoted a postwar consumer culture. (As Chappel observes tartly, “The apparent conflict between Catholic family values and the new consumer economy dissolved in the heat of the dishwasher.”) But the Christian Democrats also constructed welfare states based on traditional conceptions of gender and the family. In fact, even today and unbeknownst to them, many continental European citizens live in state structures—and a European Union—that bear the deep imprints of Catholicism.

With its call for “worker-priests” and more egalitarian family and social structures, fraternal modernism fared less well in postwar Europe. Chappel’s prime example of its vicissitudes is the French philosopher Jacques Maritain. In the 1920s, Maritain was close to the protofascist Action Française, and his beliefs were thoroughly antimodern. Ideally, he would have preferred to undo everything that had happened intellectually since the Reformation. But after the Vatican condemned Action Française, Maritain reconsidered his position in line with Rome’s binding decision; he began to shift left and was eventually forced to flee occupied France for the United States. Once in New York, he discovered that democracy and First Amendment guarantees were actually great things for religion. By the mid-1940s, he had become a major champion of universal human rights and called on the faithful to be a “leaven” in the democratic body politic, as opposed to pining for a confessional state.

In Maritain’s eyes, Catholics largely failed to be that leaven in the postwar period. He grew deeply disappointed by the Christian Democratic parties and declared that “despite (or because of) the entry on the scene, in different countries, of political parties labeled ‘Christian’ (most of

Tenderness

That summer I was a body. I was that body. The Body.
Overnight, a fog of linen inside the mauve Victorian down the block.
Another house empty for the season, for the season, for the season.
Hours built up on both sides of my bedroom door.
Morgan and Danez rowed in the Grand Canal at Versailles.
Morgan filled a postcard with her hands and memory.
Rose quartz? A diary? Holy water? (With what belief?) What could I have asked for?
Leaving my apartment for the first time in days,
I walked five minutes to Lake Mendota. Barking, honking, shrieking, grunting.
Men tested their bodies for each other and themselves.
Opened doors to admit the breeze, the possibility of that one guest.
When Emily Brontë wrote they’ve gone through and through me, like wine through water,
and altered the colour of my mind, she wasn’t writing about my depression.
Double tapped a photo of Morgan and Angel
posing near a green door with hinges older than the Constitution.
They read their black poems in English
 to black people who spoke English and French and Arabic.
If I sent a postcard to everyone I loved
it’d say, Sometimes I think you’re just too good for me.
The most personal question I’m consistently asked: Why are you so quiet?
That I’m getting this all down wrong. That I’m getting it down at all.

DERRICK AUSTIN
which are primarily combinations of electoral interests)—the hope for the advent of a Christian politics...has been completely frustrated.” But the later ascendency of paternal modernism also did not lead to a Christian politics. By the late 1960s, Maritain felt that it had enabled too many compromises with the modern world. He eventually retreated from public affairs and lived his last years with a religious order in France.

Maritain’s concerns foreshadowed a larger trend in the Vatican. Under John Paul II, the church systematically turned on left-wing experiments and on liberation theology in particular. While neither the Polish pope nor his German successor ever ceased to criticize capitalism, the bottom-up initiatives central to fraternal modernism, especially those fostered by worker-priests, were marginalized. Meanwhile, the “obsessing” over sexual morality that Francis would later denounce became ever more prominent. It was not until Francis achieved the papacy that fraternal modernism’s focus on solidarity and equality was rehabilitated.

While Chappel’s division of the church’s modernizers into paternal and fraternal factions is indeed illuminating—especially when contrasted with Douthat’s nostalgic understanding of the church—his argument tends to become a bit too schematic as the book’s narrative progresses. It seems that anyone not hoping to travel back to the Middle Ages ends up a “modern”; Chappel notes that many of the “Catholic intellectuals” who abandoned the church’s modernizers into paternal modernism also did not lead to social forces outside the hierarchy always—by going to the peripheries and through engaging with the faithful—in short, by going to the “funda-mentals” of sacred texts. Of course, change should not mean mindless accommodation to circumstances. It is one thing to adapt to Mussolini out of realpolitik; it is another to argue that the results of the Second Vatican Council amount to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Catholic rather than a capitulation to the fads of the modern world. True, conservatives like Douthat can still complain that this pope, with his folksy putation to the fads of the modern world. True, conservatives like Douthat can still complain that this pope, with his folksy tenth wing, has failed to make a convincing theological case for the direction in which he wants to move the church. But Douthat and his fellow nostalgists fail to plausibly show how Francis’s idea that reform happens from the peripheries and through engaging with the faithful—in short, by going to the “funda-mentals” of sacred texts.

The Nation.

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Taylor Swift has always had a healthy regard for her side of the story. Ever since “Our Song,” a bit of sparkling banjo-pop that topped the country charts over a decade ago and set her on a path to becoming one of the world’s biggest crossover acts, she has made no secret of her fanatical interest in authorship. “I grabbed a pen and an old napkin / And I wrote down our song,” she sings there, noting a writerly instinct that tracks—through explicit references to storybooks, pens, and pages—to 2008’s “Love Story” and 2010’s “The Story of Us,” all the way to “Death by a Thousand Cuts” from her latest album, *Lover.* (“But if the story’s over / Why am I still writing pages?” she sings.)

More broadly, this obsession with narrative agency is the unifying principle of Swift’s career. The majority of her oeuvre is diaristic, concerned with the ebb and flow of young love. Listeners have long seen traces of themselves reflected in her exactly rendered romances, as she has repeatedly demonstrated her ability to summon, with a few well-chosen details, the sweltering heat of a new relationship or the sting of a broken one. Vulnerability, in particular, became Swift’s calling card; she often wrote herself the role of the spurned lover—lambasting cheaters, admonishing opportunists, mourning the loss of “casually cruel” partners. She may have been heartbroken, but she had the power to articulate that pain on her own terms. In her every endeavor, she was the documentarian, with a built-in audience of millions. Consequently, she presided over the court of public opinion in regards to her own life, and she nearly always got the last word.

But *Lover* arrives at the end of a period in which Swift’s grip on her narrative has become more white-knuckled. Her music has always been grounded in her interior life, but as her influence has grown, she has seemed increasingly out of touch. Her reputation for wholesomeness began to crack, revealing a hunger for profit margins and fan retention. A litany of confusing brand partnerships (Keds, AT&T, UPS, and Papa
John’s) concretized her business-first mindset. Now somewhat infamously, she avoided alienating, well, anyone by declining to back a candidate in the 2016 presidential election. When white supremacists capitalized on her silence by naming her their “Aryan goddess,” Swift—rather than condemn them—threatened a blogger who called attention to the alt-right’s embrace of her music and suggested that Swift was tacitly embracing their politics.

Her biggest misstep, though, was in celebrity politicking. During a 2016 spat with Kanye West, she was caught in a lie about whether she had approved the use of her name in a salacious lyric. Facing mass criticism, Swift withdrew from the public eye. When she returned to deliver her sixth studio album, *Reputation*, in late 2017, she was still visibly cagey, mostly refusing to speak to the press about either the record or the controversy.

*Reputation* was full of breathless love songs befitting the old Swift—the very same that she pronounced dead in the album’s conspiratorial first single, “Look What You Made Me Do.” But they were drowned out by more spiteful tracks and a conspicuous preoccupation with public perception. She was fanning flames that had long ago died down, and she couldn’t have been less subtle about it, starting with the adoption of the snake (the emoji with which West’s fans had once ridiculed her) as her mascot.

When she announced the impending release of *Lover*, Swift did not seem to be on an upward trajectory. “ME!,” the album’s artless self-promotion anthem of a lead single (“I’m the only one of me / Baby, that’s the fun of me”), is one of the worst pop songs in recent memory. But as several writers noted, she has launched every album rollout since 2012’s *Red* with a single that does not thematically or sonically represent the record as a whole. Perhaps more to the point, each of those albums, however critically adored, is something of a mixed bag. On *Red*, for example, the exquisite relationship requiem “All Too Well” shares space with the cloying “Starlight.” On 1989 the misty romance of “Style” is revelatory; the battle cry of “Bad Blood” is deadweight.

This trend intensifies on *Lover*, where Swift is alternately at her best and worst. She primed listeners for the album with “ME!,” setting a bar that she could easily have bunny-hopped over. In several instances, she pole-vaults instead. Swift is a peerless relationship diagnostician: Over time, she has grown comfortable examining her entanglements in a way that values realism as much as fantasy, complicating her traditional narrative modes of together and happy versus apart and sad. “Cruel Summer,” written with St. Vincent, builds a sense of ambient danger that has appeared in her work before (see “Treachery,” from 2012) into an electric expression of romantic fatalism. Her singing slips into hollering, the synth-driven production surges, and digitized voices slide in and out of the mix. The song, like the blossoming relationship it describes, submits to a delightful state of overstimulation that borders on complete chaos. The stakes and the production values feel similarly heightened in “Death by a Thousand Cuts,” in which Swift examines the opposite end of a relationship. Rather than jump to cast villains and victims, as she often has, she swims in the sense of irresolution accompanying a breakup in which no one is at fault. Roll your eyes at the overblown title, but it’s one of her most genuinely tragic songs.
“False God,” a woozy take on R&B anchored by an unexpected, sensual saxophone riff, is a subter standout. It dabbles in sex, a relatively new concept in Swift’s catalog. For much of her career, she has presented a good-girl persona by tiptoeing around the topic (when “Treacherous” came out, the lyric “I’ll do anything you say if you say it with your hands” was scandalous, by her standards). She broke this pattern on *Reputation*, but there was a bit of theater-kid performativity in some of her efforts, such as when she instructed a lover to “carve your name into my bedpost.” Here, she tones it down a touch, appropriating the language of worship to play on the tension between her buttoned-up girlhood and her sexually empowered womanhood. In tilting faith toward sacrilege, she cleverly integrates her past and present.

*lover* is mostly free of the public-image eulogizing that defined the *Reputation* era. One conspicuous exception is “You Need to Calm Down,” the album’s second single. In it Swift is once again referring to snakes and addressing haters, attempting to school them with the titular refrain and a put-on nonchalance. Making matters worse, she likens her experience to the systemic oppression endured by the LGBTQ community, lumping her critics and homophobes together under the umbrella of “shade” throwers. In the song’s star-studded video, she convenes with fellow millionaires, including Ellen DeGeneres and Katy Perry, to aestheticize poverty via trailer park cosplay. The whole thing, in short, is a disaster.

Swift also examines her public image on “The Man,” this time burrowing into how it has been shaped by sexism. For the majority of her time in the spotlight, her relationship to feminism has ranged from outright rejection to surface-level engagement. In a 2015 interview with *Maxim*, she explained that she only recently came around to identifying as a feminist, not having understood how misogyny affected her. In some instances, she’d even perpetuated it: On the 2010 song “Better Than Revenge,” she misdirected her anger at an ex into a dig at his new girlfriend, singing, “She’s an actress / But she’s better known for the things that she does on the mattress.”

The story of Swift’s feminism is a chapter in the larger story of her public political awakening, which picked up last fall when she broke her electoral silence by endorsing a handful of Democrats running in her adopted home state of Tennessee. Since then, she has made a number of efforts to articulate her politics. “The Man” reads like a billboard for her burgeoning advocacy, but the kind of feminism that it espouses is individual empowerment—the least radical kind. Rather than challenge the structural inequalities that oppress women across the board, the song concerns itself with the rarefied set of obstacles that Swift faces from her perch at the top. Certainly, we cannot fault her for writing about herself; it’s her lane. That she wants to overturn the patriarchy so she can “[flash] her dollars” without judgment, though, should not be interpreted as empowering when it is purely self-serving.

Her critique is sharper on “Miss Americana and the Heartbreak Prince,” a song that repurposes the familiar Swiftian narrative of high school drama as an allegory of political disillusionment. She is once again against the spurned lover, betrayed by not one stupid boy but a whole country run by them (“Boys will be boys, then / Where are the wise men?”). Coproducer Joel Little—whose credits also include “Royals,” Lorde’s like-minded, us-versus-them takedown of the global 1 percent—hangs a trip-hop backdrop for Swift’s lament (“American stories / Burning before me”) and punctuates it with satirical cheerleader chants. On older songs, like 2008’s “You Belong With Me,” she fantasized about outsmarting the social order; returning to high school hallways as a full-fledged adult, her instinct is to reject that order outright.

*So far, Lover* has been widely praised as a return to form. And maybe Swift’s redemption—teed up by *Reputation* and crystallized by *Lover*—was, to some extent, designed. She knows as well as anyone the nature of our collective attention span: It’s a topic she addressed in a 2014 op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal*. “My generation was raised being able to flip channels if we got bored,” she wrote, “and we read the last page of the book when we got impatient.” Perhaps she threw a funeral for her reputation because she worried that no one would remember her fight with West—and with public opinion at large—long enough for her to emerge from it victorious.

In any case, power like Swift’s begets conflict. Her latest is with executives from her former label, Big Machine, which was recently sold—along with the master recordings of her first six albums—to music mogul Scooter Braun, who used to manage West and who, Swift said, subjected her to “incessant, manipulative bullying.” Because Braun controls the master recordings, he stands to profit indefinitely from licensing her work. In response, she announced her intention to create new masters of her entire Big Machine catalog.

Her cause is just: Artists obviously deserve to control their work and determine who makes money from it. Swift has been on this beat since 2015, when she withheld 1989 from Apple Music after the newly minted platform announced that it would not make royalty payments on anything streamed during a user’s three-month free trial period. (Apple reversed course, and she has partnered with it on numerous occasions since.) But this battle with Braun and Big Machine seems to have higher stakes. For one thing, there’s the resource drain to consider: Rerecording six previous albums would certainly divert her creative energy from making anything new. But more important, the move threatens to alter the nature of the music itself. Swift’s superpower is specificity. Her best writing operates in freeze frames, homing in on the details that capture the unique magic—or devastation—of individual moments in time. Rerecording songs from a decade ago would make those precious moments diffuse. Swift the writer, the documentarian, disappears from her work; the voice on the record belongs to Swift the businesswoman instead.

Then again, perhaps such bifurcation comes at the expense of the larger picture. Swift has always been both at once, in the sense that her art is deeply compliant with the conditions that govern contemporary markets. In the 21st century, selfhood—and particularly female selfhood—is a prized commodity, and she has long welcomed the idea that her highly personal songs are extensions of her. This is why the responses two years ago to *Reputation* and now to *Lover* have felt like referendums on her as a human being as much as an artist. In Swift’s core value proposition, the line between artistry and personhood is blurred.
**ACROSS**

1. Chinese food (mostly chicken) hardens political philosopher (9,6)
2. Janelle Monáe eating fruit (5)
3. Display web location with article and essay (9)
4. Hints from one in US confused about goal (10)
5. Foreign aid to secure eastern border of El Salvador (4)
6. Look at Obama’s pet in a summerhouse (6)
7. Hunter’s companion mixed dough with Don (5,3)
8. Small commotion breaks up man and beast (8)
9. Iran once remodeled a spire (6)
10. Enter back of stage box in a theater (4)
11. Like a gentleman or lady, with our blended Scotch outside (10)
12. Ancestor to sing about publication? No (3-6)
13. Biden, say, returns with empty grievance (5)
14. You and I controlling creeps with endless alarm (and large firearm) (10,5)
15. Protestant university in massive denial (8)
16. Congress doesn’t begin to back art surplus (5)
17. Iranian once remodeled a spire (6)
18. Designing a home for pigs and fish (7)
19. Legendary German doctor loses head before favoring strict simplicity (7)
20. Mature Republican, wearing dress… (5)
21.…is in possession of hot dope (4)
22. You and I controlling creeps with endless alarm (and large firearm) (10,5)
23. Host infected by species that hurts farm animal (4,3)
24. Deal with enemies’ missions and recognize escalation (7,2)
25. Actor is much obliged to retain meditative sound (3,5)
26. Mysteries of the universe? No (3-6)
27. You and I controlling creeps with endless alarm (and large firearm) (10,5)

**DOWN**

1. Hearty affair gets around international boundaries (7)
2. Protects $1 million bond with almost complete enthusiasm (9)
3. This could keep you in one place: study part of speech (in reverse as well) (6,4)
4. Claim pedestrians conceal block (6)
5. Protestant university in massive denial (8)
6. Bread, either way (4)
7. Designing a home for pigs and fish (7)
8. Display web location with article and essay (9)
9. Hints from one in US confused about goal (10)
10. Foreign aid to secure eastern border of El Salvador (4)
11. Like a gentleman or lady, with our blended Scotch outside (10)
12. Ancestor to sing about publication? No (3-6)
13. Biden, say, returns with empty grievance (5)
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Words Matter

Shortly after I came from Europe to the US, a close friend gifted me a subscription to *The Nation*. I’ve been a faithful reader and, when I was able to, supporter of the magazine. *We need *The Nation* now more than ever; its voice needs to be heard.* I like to think I’ll help keep it up for the future. It still reminds me of my old friend.

—Claudia Sole, Calif.

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