Can Biden Fix the Courts?

In order to deliver a progressive agenda, the president and his party must remake the judiciary Trump broke.

BY ELIE MYSTAL
2021 brings hope for a return to some of the things we missed most during this past year. Here at Nation Travels, while we continue to wait for the time when it is safe to travel, we have been busy working on a full schedule of departures for later in the year.

Once we do resume tours, we will follow strict Covid-19 safety protocols on all of our programs and will require vaccination for all of our tour participants and tour staff. We are also offering flexible cancellation terms for all 2021 tours. Register now and hold your place on one of our popular programs, and you can cancel with a 100 percent refund up to 60 days prior to departure.

We continue to believe in the power of travel to change lives and to enhance dialogue and understanding between peoples and nations.

As always, the proceeds from Nation Travels support The Nation’s journalism. We hope to see you on a Nation tour in 2021!

For more information on these and other destinations, go to TheNation.com/TRAVELS, e-mail travels@thenation.com, or call 212-209-5401.

The Nation purchases carbon offsets for all emissions generated by our tours.
Breath of life:
A young climate activist protests the destruction of forests and wildlife reserves at a demonstration in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on March 19.

Can Biden Fix the Courts?
ELIE MYSTAL
His progressive agenda will require remaking the judiciary Trump broke.

Why Brazil Still Matters
GLENN GREENWALD
Jair Bolsonaro’s rise to power was the culmination of trends that threaten democracies all over the world.

Crowdfunding Hate in the Name of Christ
TALIA LAVIN
Right-wing extremists have found a way to raise money on a popular Christian site.

The more the Globo stars in their Rio studios expressed horror at Bolsonaro, the more his backers delighted in the upset he triggered.
Evil Empire

S
c
t

Hortly after a man killed eight people, six of them Asian women, in Atlanta, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken denounced the violence, saying it “has no place in America or anywhere.” Blinken made the comments during his first official trip to Asia with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, where Blinken warned China that the United States will push back against its “coercion and aggression” and Austin cautioned North Korea that the United States, following its military exercise with South Korea was ready to “fight tonight.”

Yet such hawkish rhetoric echoes accusations that Donald Trump and other Republicans made against China and directly contributes to rising anti-Asian violence in the US. In fact, it is part of a long history of denigrating Asians to justify endless wars and US militarism. And this has deadly ramifications for Asians and Asian Americans.

The anti-Asian character of US foreign policy has manifested itself in the wars that have killed millions, torn families apart, and led to massive displacement; in the nuclear tests and chemical weapons storage that resulted in environmental contamination in Okinawa, Guam, and the Marshall Islands; in the widespread use of napalm and Agent Orange in Vietnam, Laos, and the Koreas; and in the sanctions that subject everyday people to economic, social, and physical harms.

This violence doesn’t happen without dehumanization, which has had dire consequences for Asian Americans, especially women. Of the 3,800 hate incidents reported against Asian Americans last year, almost 70 percent were directed at women. Exoticized and fetishized, Asian American women have borne a dual burden of racism and sexism, viewed on the one hand as submissive and sexually available “lotus blossoms” and on the other as manipulative and dangerous “dragon ladies.”

Asian women are particularly harmed by US militarism and foreign policy. From 1950 to 1953, the Korean War killed 4 million people, led to social and political chaos, separated families, and orphaned and widowed millions, creating conditions that deprived women of homes and work. As a result, many women turned to sex work, according to Katherine H.S. Moon, the author of Sex Among Allies, a study of US military prostitution in South Korea.

More than a million Korean women have worked in the camp towns that surround the US military bases in South Korea. This system of military prostitution was controlled by the South Korean government and supported by the US military. Yet the women were stigmatized, “destined to invisibility and silence,” according to Moon.

These camp towns not only facilitated the immigration of thousands of Korean “war brides” to the United States but also transported the system itself. As the US military steadily reduced its troop presence in Asia, camp-town establishments began sending their madams and sex workers to US domestic military sites through brokered marriages with US servicemen.

Today we see this anti-Asian violence in the US aggression toward China and the US military presence throughout the Asia-Pacific. According to American University professor David Vine, there are approximately 300 US bases circling China. This military presence increases the risk of a violent clash or even war between two nuclear-armed powers.

If we are to stop anti-Asian hatred in the United States, we must recognize how US foreign policy perpetuates it. The Biden administration could start by formally ending the Korean War—only an armistice was signed in 1953.

As we address violence against Asians and women and dismantle white supremacy here at home, we must also fundamentally reorient US foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region away from domination and toward true human security for all.

Christine Ahn is the executive director of Women Cross DMZ and coordinator of Korea Peace Now!

Kathleen Richards is the communications director of Women Cross DMZ.

Dr. Terry K Park is a lecturer in the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland.
Patently Unjust

Poor countries are paying more for the vaccine scraps that remain after rich countries have had their fill.

In March 2021, Kenya announced its COVID-19 vaccination plan. The government, according to its own documents, aims to inoculate just 30 percent of its 48 million residents: citizens over 50, those who work in health or hospitality, and those with comorbidities. There is no proposal for the rest of us—no aspiration even to achieve herd immunity.

This would be egregious even if it weren’t happening against the backdrop of perhaps the worst display of national selfishness in modern history. The European Union, the United States, and Canada are hoarding the vaccine, pre-purchasing doses for up to six times their population in some cases. Moreover, because of national agreements with the pharmaceutical companies, they are buying the vaccines at preferential prices. The European Union, for example, is paying $2.15 for each dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, while South Africa is spending $5.25.

Wealthy countries are using their control over lifesaving drugs to play diplomacy. The United States, for example, has ordered 300 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, nearly enough for every person in the country—but the FDA hasn’t approved the drug. At least 7 million doses have been delivered, and an additional supply of more than 23 million is expected by the end of April. The United States has already reserved enough of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines for every American, but instead of freeing up the AstraZeneca doses, it has pledged to send just 4 million to Canada and Mexico and has stayed mum about what will happen to the rest.

Meanwhile, rich countries have been slow to support the COVAX initiative. Led in part by the World Health Organization, this international body is designed to oversee a more equitable distribution of vaccines, especially to poor countries. Right now, the two most effective vaccines seem to be those made by Moderna and Pfizer. Moderna has declined to join COVAX and is charging the United States $30 and the European Union $36 for the required two shots per person, resulting in billions in revenue for an 11-year-old company that had not made a profit until this pandemic. Pfizer, meanwhile, has committed just 40 million doses of its vaccine to COVAX.

I’m not sure how to describe what it feels like to be one of the millions—perhaps billions—of people for whom there is no plan. “Abandonment” only scratches the surface of being condemned to the detritus of international greed and human folly.

But ours are not demands for pity. We are demanding justice. For one thing, the science affirms that if rich Western countries keep amassing doses, this disease will linger. A study by the Global Vaccines Alliance found that if an 80 percent–effective vaccine were distributed equitably based on a country’s population size, 61 percent of global deaths would be prevented. But if nationalistic stockpiling continues, only 33 percent of global deaths will be averted.

It’s worth pointing out that many of these vaccines exist only because of public funding. Operation Warp Speed in the United States, which accelerated the development of the Moderna vaccine, was a tax-funded initiative. Moreover, the reason these companies were able to develop their mRNA-based vaccines so quickly was that publicly funded research sequenced the coronavirus genome and made those findings available in peer-reviewed publications. There was no eureka moment in some corporate lab; their success was the culmination of years of scientific inquiry supported by taxes. These products should therefore be available in the public interest, not solely for private profit.

To stop this ongoing global emergency, India and South Africa asked the World Trade Organization to temporarily waive intellectual property rights so manufacturers in those countries could fill the gap in production capacity. Their requests have not been approved. At the WTO, the South African delegation reminded members that “the shortage of production and supply [of vaccines] is caused…by rights holders themselves who enter into restrictive agreements that serve their own narrow monopolistic purposes putting profits before life.”

Promises to donate doses of vaccines once all the people in rich countries have had their fill do not undo the injustice. There is a perverse logic embedded in the international order that requires poor countries to be on their knees in order to validate the feelings of rich countries.

At this stage, I could offer an elaborate argument about how the West is jeopardizing its soft power through its brazen avarice. But I believe we are living with the consequences of trying to make arguments for justice through the lens of geopolitical ambition. The idea that the only reason to help people is to consolidate a country’s power is part of why conflicts in places that have little geostrategic value are ignored. It is counterproductive for people who want the world to change to succumb to this fallacy. Instead, we should make a values-based argument: Help people because they are people, not because it might help you. And while I have no idea what is going to happen to me or my peers across this continent, we will continue to speak up, because that's all we can do: demand justice in this morally bankrupt system.

Nanjala Nyabola is the author of Travelling While Black: Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move.
**Justice Delayed**

In 2014, The Nation published the story of three men in prison for a crime they didn’t commit. At last, they’re free.

One day in 2012, a year into my first real job, at the Innocence Project, my phone rang. It wasn’t uncommon for intake calls to accidentally find their way to my line. For desperate family members advocating for a loved one in prison, it didn’t always matter whom they spoke to—they just needed someone to hear them. On this day, it was a far more unlikely caller: a retired New York Police Department detective from Long Island named Pete Fiorillo.

Fiorillo told me at length about a case in Queens that he was certain had resulted in a wrongful conviction—and not just of one man but of three: George Bell, Gary Johnson, and Rohan Bolt. All three were Black; all three had been convicted of a botched robbery and murder at a check-cashing facility in Queens. The year was 1996, at the height of New York’s anti-crime crusades. The victims were the owner of the check-cashing facility and the off-duty NYPD officer providing security.

Fiorillo’s story struck me as persuasive. Unfortunately, since there was no testable DNA evidence, there wasn’t much the Innocence Project could do to help. Still, Fiorillo was undeterred, insisting that a good article about the case was needed. I decided to start investigating.

A year and a half later, in October 2014, The Nation published the results of that investigation in an article titled “These 3 Men Have Been Locked Up for Almost 20 Years. Are They Innocent?” In 3,100 words, I traced the ample evidence that Bell, Johnson, and Bolt were not responsible for the crime, as well as the multiple failures of justice along the way. The case had every hallmark of a wrongful conviction: the rushed, sloppy investigation to avenge the death of a police officer; a bombastic politician (then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani) promising the case’s swift resolution; the immediate focus on three Black men, two of them still essentially children; coerced confessions, which contained notably wrong facts about the crime; the absence of evidence tying any of the defendants to the crime; the use of an unreliable witness; the use of a jailhouse informant, who could only regurgitate the inaccurate coverage he’d read in the papers; and, as time would reveal, prosecutorial misconduct.

“The case,” as Fiorillo summarized in the article, “represents a total breakdown of the criminal justice system from the bottom to the top: the police that investigated this case; the DA that prosecuted the case; the judge that tried all three cases. They just didn’t have the courage to do the right thing.”

That courage, as I noted at the time, was still missing from the people with the power to overturn the convictions. While conviction integrity units had begun popping up in prosecutors’ offices across the country to review claims of innocence, the borough of Queens, with its 2.2 million people, still lacked such a unit. “For Bell, Bolt and Johnson,” I lamented, “this means their claims of innocence will likely continue to fall on deaf ears.”

For the next five years, that’s pretty much what happened. But then, in January 2020, a change: Melinda Katz, the newly seated Queens district attorney, launched a conviction integrity unit, which began to investigate the case. It discovered, among other things, evidence showing that a member of a gang known as Speedstick confessed to his role in the robbery and murders, as well as mental health records indicating that a key witness had been experiencing hallucinations at the time of his testimony.

Attorneys for all three men had asked multiple times for the evidence that has now come to light. The Queens district attorney’s office had responded, repeatedly, that no such evidence existed. In fact, the DA’s office was fully aware of this information before the three convictions, but it tried the cases anyway, seeking the death penalty against Bell and ultimately, stealing 24 years of his, Johnson’s, and Bolt’s lives.

On the basis of this long-hidden evidence, the Queens DA and defense lawyers for the three men filed a joint motion asking the court to vacate all three convictions and set the men free. On March 5, a judge did just that, declaring, “It astounds me and shocks my conscience that...constitutional violations of this magnitude can happen in any prosecution, much less the prosecution in a capital case in which the former district attorney was seeking the death penalty [for] a 19-year-old man.”

That same day, almost a quarter century after they entered the prison, Bell, Johnson, and Bolt walked out, fists raised triumphantly in the air. Though the fight for a full exoneration continues, the three men are finally where they belong: free and surrounded by the people they love.

“For the past 24 years, I rose each day to the view of prison cell bars, and would say to myself, ‘Today is the day I am going home!’” Bell told the court the day of his release. “Today is the day I am going home!”

Hannah Riley is the communications director for the Southern Center for Human Rights and a writer.
Free Dr. Seuss!

Corporate ownership of classic works is preventing us from having a grown-up conversation about racism and children’s literature.

Hut out of the White House and reduced to a minority party in Congress, Republicans think they have found a path back to power in the unlikely form of The Cat in the Hat. On March 2, Dr. Seuss Enterprises announced it was taking six books written and drawn by the late Theodore Seuss Geisel off the market because “these books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong.”

Republicans were quick to jump on the story. “Now 6 Dr. Seuss books are cancelled too?” Florida Senator Marco Rubio tweeted. “When history looks back at this time it will be held up as an example of a depraved sociopolitical purge driven by hysteria and lunacy,” he proclaimed. A slew of other Republicans rose to defend the allegedly threatened author. With typical smarminess, Texas Senator Ted Cruz tweeted a photo showing Dr. Seuss dominating the Amazon best-seller list. Cruz commented, “Who knew Joe Biden was such a great book seller”—the big lie being that Biden was in any way responsible for the decision of Dr. Seuss Enterprises. On March 24, Republican Congressman John Joyce of Pennsylvania introduced the Grinch Act to, in his words, “safeguard kids’ access to historic stories and characters.”

Right-wing pundit Erick Erickson explained the logic of the GOP’s decision to beat the drum about Dr. Seuss, arguing that “more voters will remember Seuss when they vote than the COVID plan.”

The Republican fearmongering about Dr. Seuss being canceled is deeply cynical and dishonest. It also prevents the mature conversation that we need to have about racism in classic children’s literature. Even as we reject the right-wing demagoguery, there’s no need to accept the edict of Dr. Seuss Enterprises, a corporate entity that is much more concerned with brand management than with the sensitive curation of a cultural legacy or the need to grapple with historical racism. The decision to take some dubious books out of print smacks of branding triage, pruning some ugly branches so the whole tree can continue to bear profitable fruit.

I come to the Dr. Seuss controversy from the peculiar position of being a cartooning scholar. Over the past two decades, I’ve edited or written the introductions to more than 50 books reprinting such classic comic strips as Krazy Kat, Little Orphan Annie, Terry and the Pirates, and Gasoline Alley. Many of these comics are rife with ethnic and racial stereotypes, which were the pervasive language of American culture in the early 20th century. They come from a world where Asians are always bucktoothed, the Irish are frequently simian, Italians are prone to be organ-grinders, and African Americans are wide-eyed, simple-minded, and illiterate.

I work on producing these books not in spite of their racism but in part because of their racism. Aside from the artistic merits of the works, I think it’s important to have a historical record of how commonplace and accepted racism was—and of the ways racialized groups responded to being stereotyped. To leave these cultural artifacts to languish in decaying newsprint is to whitewash the past.

Born in 1904, Geisel grew up reading many of the comics I’ve worked to preserve and reprint. The man who would become Dr. Seuss was an aesthetic sponge, and his early line work shows all the lessons he learned, good and bad, from the classic American cartoonists. He both absorbed the racism of these cartoons and, as he matured as an artist, struggled to transform it into something different.

In his fine book Was the Cat in the Hat Black? (2017), University of Kansas literary scholar Philip Nel maps out the complexity of Geisel’s relationship to this racist visual culture. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that Nel and I have collaborated on a volume reprinting Crockett Johnson’s Barnaby cartoons.) As a young artist in the 1920s and ’30s, Geisel simply mimicked the stereotypes of that era. But as his political consciousness grew in the ’40s as a contributor to the Popular Front newspaper PM, Seuss worked diligently, although not always successfully, to dispense with racist images. His Achilles’ heel was his wartime drawings of the Japanese—although even on this issue he evolved. Nel reports that Geisel’s military training film Our Job in Japan (1945) was censored by the Army because “General MacArthur considered it too sympathetic to the Japanese.” Geisel came out of the war a committed anti-racist, writing books like The Sneetches (1961) to attack bigotry.

The delisted Seuss books contain images and words that I wouldn’t want my kids to see. But that is no reason for the books to be out of print.

The complicating factor is that Seuss’s visual vocabulary continued to be shaped by the ethnic stereotypes of his youth, although now applied to fanciful anthropomorphic
creatures. Nel, building on fellow scholar Michelle Abate’s work, plausibly shows that the character of the Grinch owes something to 19th-century iconography displaying “Irish depravity.”

The Cat in the Hat himself has an interestingly mixed heritage. Geisel was a fan of George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*, which has a strong claim to be considered the greatest of all comic strips. Herriman was a light-skinned African American who passed as white, and his strip about the love triangle between a black cat, a white mouse, and a white dog was a racial allegory. Geisel was also influenced by the sly smile of Annie Williams, an African American elevator operator. Like Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny, the Cat in the Hat is also indebted to blackface minstrelsy—the white gloves being the giveaway. But to say therefore that the Cat is Black would be to follow a cultural “one drop” of blood rule. Rather, the Cat is, as Ralph Ellison said of American culture itself, gloriously mongrel.

None of this is an argument for getting rid of the Grinch or the Cat in the Hat. But the complex role racism and resistance played in creating them is a story children should also be told when they’re old enough to hear it.

The delisted books contain images and words that I as a parent would not want my kids to see. But there is no reason for the books to be out of print. The cartoon reprint projects I work on are for adults, not kids.

It’s unfortunate that three decades after his death in 1991, a corporate entity has a stranglehold on Dr. Seuss’s legacy. If his works were in the public domain, they could be published both for children (when appropriate) and in a curated archival edition. Dr. Seuss was not just a brand. He was a great artist, and his legacy deserves a more careful preservation.

As Ralph Ellison said of American culture itself, *The Cat in the Hat is gloriously mongrel.*

**Clearing the Shelves**

*If we insist on holding cultural history to contemporary standards, what will we have left?*

EVER MIND DR. SEUSS’S SIX DISCONTINUED BOOKS. FOR the record, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* is a work of considerable genius, despite the offending cartoon of a Chinese man eating rice, and *McElligot’s Pool* is pretty great too, despite its use of the outmoded word “Eskimo,” complete with clichéd depiction of an Inuit in fur-lined parka. How hard could it have been to replace the few offending pictures and words? Many other classic children’s books—Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, for example—have been quietly edited to remove racist content, and that’s good. However, as many have pointed out, the rights are owned by Dr. Seuss Enterprises, and if it doesn’t want to keep the books in print, that’s its privilege, just the way Amazon is within its rights to drop *When Harry Became Sally* and keep *Mein Kampf*. True, it’s a little odd to find progressives defending capitalist values, as if there were no considerations other than property rights where culture is concerned. It’s a bit too close to how Nelson Rockefeller felt about his right to destroy the socialist mural that Diego Rivera was in the midst of painting in Rockefeller Center. “After all,” E.B. White put it in a humorous poem at the time, “it’s my wall.”

If we really get serious about removing from the market, or dropping from the curriculum, or banning from polite society books of the past (choose your own words—just don’t say “canceling,” because cancel culture does not exist), there won’t be much left. Classic children’s literature is full of racial, ethnic, class, and gender stereotyping, and the outdated language that goes along with that. Some of that can’t be fixed with a few cuts. A friend who is reading her granddaughter *The Secret Garden*, one of her favorite books when she was in elementary school—and recently the subject of a movie adaptation—finds herself “cringing” at “racial elements and also class elements that are really awkward to explain to a 5-year-old.” And if the books are not problematic, the author may be. Roald Dahl not only fat-shamed an overweight child in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and portrayed the Oompa Loompas as happy slaves, he was so anti-Semitic his family felt it needed to apologize 30 years after his death.

However, of all the racist, sexist, classist things children are exposed to, decades-old children’s books seem pretty low on the list. Consider our de facto segregated public schools and neighborhoods, our crumbling de facto segregated public housing, our shocking rates of child poverty, ill health, and low literacy, and the shocking violence of everyday life to which so many children are exposed. Given these serious—and growing—problems,
THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA HAVE ENTERED A PERIOD OF INTENSIFIED ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND MILITARY COMPETITION that can only be characterized as a new Cold War, with a very real possibility of becoming a hot war – even a nuclear war.

THIS REPRESENTS A TIPPING POINT, WITH PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES FOR BOTH COUNTRIES AND THE ENTIRE WORLD. We have moved from a period of deeply intertwined economic, educational, and scientific relations to one of mutual hostility and combativeness – made even more severe by the increasingly belligerent talk coming from Washington and Beijing. This new Cold War competition is having disastrous impacts on human security, most immediately through the failed international response to the Covid pandemic and shamefully inadequate efforts to overcome the climate crisis. Increased Cold War tensions are also fueling anti-Asian racism in the United States and being exploited by Beijing to justify even harsher human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

HUMAN SECURITY IS ALSO ENDANGERED BY THE GROWING U.S.-CHINA MILITARY COMPETITION. Both countries are expanding their military capabilities at a terrifying pace, diverting funds from critical human needs to military purposes. Both are also increasing provocative military activities in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, increasing the risk of a violent clash culminating in uncontrolled escalation.

WE BELIEVE THAT PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES CAN AND MUST BE PURSUED. The Committee for a Sane U.S.-China Policy seeks to avert the risks that can be expected from a U.S.-China Cold War and to promote the mutual interests of both countries and neighboring nations through the following activities:

- **Informing** the public and members of Congress of the dangers posed by a New Cold War.
- **Assessing** the divisive issues in U.S.-China relations and generating practical, mutually beneficial solutions.
- **Producing** podcasts and other educational materials, and sponsoring public events on divisive issues in U.S.-China relations and how to overcome them.
- **Supporting Track-2 diplomacy** among non-governmental representatives from the U.S., China, and other nations aimed at devising peaceful, mutually beneficial outcomes to divisive issues.

ORIGINAL SIGNERS OF OUR STATEMENT INCLUDE

Joseph Gerson* + Michael Klare*, co-founders  
- Gar Alperovitz · Christine Ahn · Richard P. Appelbaum · Liberto Bautista · Medea Benjamin · Phyllis Bennis · Salih Booker  
- Avi Chomsky* · Noam Chomsky · Tobita Chow* · Michael Christ · Helena Cobban* · David Cortright · Neta Crawford  
- John W. Dower · Carolyn Eisenberg* · Daniel Ellsberg · Richard Falk · John Feffer · Gordon Fellman · Norma Field  
- Irene Gendzier · Andrew Gordon · Mel Gurtov · Hugh Gusterson · Elaine C. Hagopian · Mark Harrison · David Hartsough  
- Ira Helfand, MD · Paul Joseph* · Anatol Lieven · Catherine Lutz · Kevin Martin · Zia Mian · Rev. Robert Moore · Betty Reardon  
- Peter Dale Scott · Mark Selden* · Adele Simmons · Oliver Stone · David Vine · Richard Vogel · Cora Weiss  
- Barbara J. Wien · Lawrence Wittner* · Ann Wright and many others*  

*Steering Committee Members, Committee for a Sane U.S.-China Policy

READ OUR STATEMENT IN FULL + TO ADD YOUR NAME, GO TO: SaneUSChinaPolicy.org

PLEASE DONATE to the Committee for a Sane U.S.-China Policy to support our activities and enable us to reprint this statement elsewhere. Donations can be made at our website, or checks can be made to “CPDCS” with “SANE” written on memo line and mailed to our office:

2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140
it’s not whataboutism to wonder why these old books get so much attention. Is it because attacking old books is easier than making the social and economic changes that would improve the actual lives of real children and their parents? It doesn’t cost money to take a few volumes out of the classroom. But to provide schools with real libraries, with professional librarians and adequate budgets—let alone school nurses, counselors, art teachers, music teachers, and all the other things children need—will require billions we collectively decided some decades ago to spend on tax cuts for the rich, unnecessary war planes, and ourselves.

It took a pandemic to pass the American Rescue Plan, which allots billions for schools and libraries and direct payments to parents and is expected to reduce child poverty by 40 percent. When that money is gone, we’ll see if the ARP represents the beginning of a serious commitment to children, parents, and communities. Ten years from now, will we look back on the Dr. Seuss kerfuffle as part of a broad social transformation or as a symbolic protest against conditions that did not change all that much?

I too find Dr. Seuss imperfect. Beyond the racial caricatures, it irks me that the featured children are almost all boys, plus the occasional little sister like Sally in *The Cat in the Hat*. The one girl with a book named after her, Daisy-Head Mayzie, is an idiot. But this is where grown-ups come in. You’re not a cassette tape; you can comment and question and explain. I have no problem talking about the lack of girls when I read Dr. Seuss’s books (or anyone else’s) to children, any more than my parents, who were atheists, had problems giving me a book of Bible stories. Children are not passive recipients, either. Bible stories did not make me a believer. The only thing I remember from that book is that there was a kind widow who let Elijah stay with her when he came to town. I can still see that picture of his room—the striped blanket on the bed, the window open to the turquoise sky. What kids take from Dr. Seuss is his hilarious, inventive language and pictures, the permission he gives children to let their imaginations run wild.

My husband and I just finished reading *D’Aulaires’ Book of Greek Myths* to our 8-year-old granddaughter on FaceTime. The stories are somewhat sanitized—Aphrodite is not born from the castrated testicles of Uranus; instead we are told “nobody knew from where she had come.” But Cronus still eats his children, Pandora’s curiosity (like Eve’s) still brings destruction on humanity, and jealousy between goddesses still sparks the Trojan War, which is still fought over a woman’s fatal beauty. The myths contain deep truths, but they are not modern, democratic, progressive ones—on Olympus or off, not everyone is beautiful or wise or strong in their own way.

“The past is a foreign country,” in L.P. Hartley’s famous aphorism. “They do things differently there.” Let’s acknowledge that, and keep reading.
Governments should consider solar geoengineering for two reasons. The first is that other ways to avoid the worst effects of climate change may not prove achievable in the world as it really is. The other is that, if there is a risk that another government might attempt to transform the atmosphere, it would be delinquent not to have thought through how to react. That means trying to understand what the effects of such engineering might be on your own country and the world.

There is little doubt that lacing the stratosphere with particles that reflect sunlight back into space would decouple Earth’s surface temperature from greenhouse gas levels, allowing for cooler temperatures than otherwise would occur. On a planet with greenhouse gas levels expected to deliver 2.5 degrees Celsius of warming above pre-industrial levels, solar geoengineering could in principle limit the actual warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. It could also allow temperatures to be decreased even as greenhouse gas levels stayed the same or declined only slowly. Both of these possibilities seem, on the face of it, worth examining as ways to avoid global catastrophe.

But there are also other, more disturbing possibilities. One is that solar geoengineering might be used to keep temperatures the same even as greenhouse gas levels continue to rise, allowing some or all countries to shirk their commitments to cut their net emissions to zero by mid-century. Perhaps even worse is the possibility that simply raising the prospect of solar geoengineering could reduce progress on emissions cuts and curb the development of all other ways to limit temperature rise.

When I worry about the possible impacts of solar geoengineering, I worry most about that last scenario. It’s a fear that I share with many who see it as a reason for the governments of the world to come together and pledge never to embark on a solar geoengineering project. But that argument is both impractical and paradoxical. It is impractical because no country can be assured that every other government will abide by the constraint in perpetuity. And it is paradoxical because if I believed that the governments of the world could be trusted to unite in solidarity and unanimity, then I would believe that they could then be
trusted to deploy a modicum of solar geoengineering and slash emissions at the same time. The possibility of such self-denial undercuts the argument that governments are so reckless that a ban is needed.

If governments should pursue solar geoengineering because they cannot be sure that others will refrain and because of the chance that it could reduce harm, how then should they move forward?

The obvious answer is through sustained research aimed at understanding as much as possible about the effects of solar geoengineering on factors other than global temperature. What could such technologies mean for the water cycle in various regions, for changes in seasonality, or for extreme events? How might they be implemented in ways that maximize benefits and minimize risks?

But research alone is not enough. The dangers—including that of a diminished appetite for emissions cuts—and the rewards of solar geoengineering do not fall on the same people, the same countries, or even the same generations. To fully consider geoengineering would be to ask questions about who it could be made to benefit and how. It would be to evaluate the contexts in which it might be justifiable and the contexts in which it should be resisted. It would be to ask whether it could be carried out in a safe and just way—and under what circumstances and modes of governance it might be likely to exacerbate tensions to the point of war.

Part of me thinks that this consideration could be a grand thing: a way of debating the great issues of the Anthropocene, what it means for democracy to enter into the arena of the Earth system, and the role of politics and purpose in the planetary economy. But I acknowledge that I am much too tempted by such ideas. The sort of consideration I envisage would be endlessly pressured by other issues, endlessly at risk of being derailed or suborned by fossil fuel interests. To hope for something better is not to deny the influence of those who want to maintain the status quo.

But unsatisfactory debate is still preferable to treating the issue as untouchable. “To govern,” the radical French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France once said, “is to choose.” Choices over moral absolutes require no consideration. In most matters, though, choices are better when options, distinctions, and consequences are considered. The possibilities of solar geoengineering fall firmly into that second, much larger camp.

Unsatisfactory debate is still preferable to treating the issue as untouchable.

The problem will not be solved by new technologies laid atop the very system that created it.

dangerous. Frank Keutsch, the principal investigator on the Harvard project, for example, told the MIT Technology Review, “I still think this is a very scary concept and something will go wrong.”

Research is always necessary, and we’re at the point where we can’t exactly turn up our noses at technological solutions and assume companies and politicians will suddenly do the right thing. I get that. My concern with geoengineering is that it’s not being accompanied by shifts in policy or investments in less sexy but better-proven energy-efficiency strategies. It’s also being embraced—and in many cases funded—by fossil fuel companies desperate for a fix that doesn’t require them to strand assets or lose profits.

But arguing over this or that approach to address the climate crisis is a fool’s errand. It will not be solved by new technologies laid atop the very system that created it in the first place. Climate change is the sort of problem you end up with when a small number of people have power over the whole world and are incentivized to put their profits before the common good. The problem is the power structure, not the power source.

In the absence of government funding for research into a wide range of climate solutions or even the political will to say that we need to stop drilling for fossil fuels, I’m also concerned that we’re left with corporate philanthropy, a system that enables wealthy individuals to create policy without participating in democracy. Let’s take the Harvard experiment. Its funding list is a who’s who of Silicon Valley: the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Bill Gates, the venture capitalist Chris Sacca. Just because the tech industry is enamored of its ability to both disrupt the world and save it doesn’t mean we want it picking the solutions to the greatest problem the world has ever known.

Keutsch said something else to the MIT Technology Review that highlights the disconnect between funders of geoengineering and the people doing the science: “I think better understanding what the risks may be is very important.” Given the quickness with which solar geoengineering could provide some sort of temporary relief to global warming, he was worried that politicians might be tempted to use it, risks be damned. Keutsch isn’t researching geoengineering because he thinks it’s cool but because he thinks it’s dangerous. Like many scientists in this field, he hopes we never use this technology. Some of the technology’s champions, however, are framing a worst-case scenario as the best case. No surprise that those who benefit most from the status quo would sooner risk the entire planet than their positions on it.

Oliver Morton is a senior editor at The Economist and a former editor at Nature. He is the author of The Moon: A History for the Future and The Planet Remade: How Geoengineering Could Change the World, among other titles.

Amy Westervelt is a journalist who reports for and hosts the podcast Drilled.
Grave Concerns

A man digs a grave in the San Miguel Xico Cemetery in Valle de Chalco, Mexico. On March 27, the Mexican government revealed that the Covid-19 death toll was likely 60 percent higher than previously acknowledged. Now officials estimate that the disease killed 321,000 people in the country. The revised number means that the only nation with more Covid-19-related deaths is the United States.

By the Numbers

20% Reduction in global nitrogen dioxide concentrations from February to November 2020

3.2°C Projected rise in global temperature above preindustrial levels if countries meet their emissions commitments

25% Portion of global emissions produced by the United States historically

2°C Limit to the rise in temperature above preindustrial levels targeted by the Paris Agreement

Alternative Facts

“It was zero threat…. Some of them went in, and they are hugging and kissing the police and the guards—you know, they had great relationships.”

—Donald Trump on the January 6 rioters

Do not believe the videos
That show assault and wrecking.
The videos that Trump must have
Show cops and Proud Boys necking.
When President Joe Biden finally took the oath of office on January 20, he inherited not merely the White House, the nuclear codes, and the reins to the most powerful government on earth, but also a mess.

The fact of that mess wasn’t altogether unusual. It’s become something of a trend in recent decades for Republicans, who don’t think government can work, to spend their years in power breaking it in order to fulfill their own prophecy; it then falls to Democrats to spend their years in power fixing what Republicans destroyed.

But Biden’s mess is somewhat bigger than the messes inherited by his Democratic predecessors, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, after other disastrous Republican administrations. The enhanced difficulty stems in part from the Covid-19 pandemic and the multiple crises it has spawned, from the enduring spread of the virus to the near-collapse of the economy. But those are fires that the Biden administration, alongside Democrats in the House and Senate, can put out—and are beginning to put out—without the consent of the Republican Party, if need be. The $1.9 trillion stimulus package passed in March has already begun dribbling relief into American bank accounts, and the administration’s mass vaccination effort is expected to bring back glimmers of normalcy by July. If there’s a message the Biden administration seems to be pushing during its first months in office, it’s that government works.

Where the clean-up effort gets complicated is around the laws and norms we’ve set up to keep our system functioning. While previous Republican administrations tried to break government, Donald Trump tried to break democracy. He did this boldly and brazenly, by attacking elections, and he did it less boldly but no less brazenly, by working alongside Mitch McConnell to take over the unelected branch of government that sets the rules for all the others: the federal judiciary. That branch is now stuffed with conservative ideologues masquerading as jurists.

When Trump took office in 2017, he inherited 108 federal judicial vacancies, thanks to McConnell’s systematic obstruction of Obama’s judicial nominees. During the next four years, he appointed 226 judges, including three US Supreme Court justices, 54 US court of appeals judges, and 174 US district court judges. Those judges represent just over a quarter of the federal bench and helped flip entire federal courts of appeals—including the Third Circuit (which covers Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the Virgin Islands) and the 11th Circuit (which covers Florida, Georgia, and Alabama)—from Democratic to Republican control. Trump also, of course, reshaped the Supreme Court, transforming it from an institution split 4-4 between conservatives and liberals to one dominated 6-3 by conservatives.

All of these Trump judges are appointed for life. Some will outlive me. If Republicans never win another election, there will still be Trump judges wielding significant power into the 2060s, warping the

ILLUSTRATION BY BARRY BLITT

Can Biden Fix the Courts?

In order to deliver a progressive agenda, the president and his party must remake the judiciary Trump broke.

BY ELIE MYSTAL
If Trump is the Chicxulub asteroid, his judges are the ensuing, cataclysmic climate change that actually killed the dinosaurs.

The Republican grip on the judiciary is an existential crisis for the progressive agenda—one that goes far beyond the conservative takeover of the Supreme Court. That's a serious matter. But Trump's wholesale reshaping of the lower courts is at least as troubling. These courts are the first responders to attacks on our basic freedoms and human rights. They are the places where policies are debated, held up, or torn back down. And most progressive policies and many of the immediate goals of the Biden administration won't survive their first contact with the reality of these revamped courts.

Raising the bar:
On March 30, Biden tapped Ketanji Brown Jackson, a former public defender and celebrated district court judge, for the D.C. Circuit.

This isn't speculation; it's already happening. Consider Biden's number one priority: Covid-19 relief. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention enacted a new moratorium on evictions after the initial one, passed through the CARES Act, expired last summer. But in late February, a single Trump-appointed district court judge, a 40-year-old who graduated from law school in 2005, scuttled the whole thing. He struck down the CDC's order, and while his opinion is embarrassingly wrong and illogical (he basically said that renting a house is not commerce, as understood through the commerce clause in the Constitution, and therefore can't be regulated by the federal government, which is like me saying this article doesn't qualify as protected speech unless I personally read it aloud), it doesn't matter. He's appointed for life, and he gets to be wrong and illogical about the law until some other judge overrules him.

The problem is that overruling a judge takes time, even when the judge doesn't know the difference between a renter and a house guest. A bad ruling from a federal judge must first be appealed to one of the 13 courts of appeals, which are regional federal courts spread throughout the country. These courts are supposed to overturn cases only when there's been a clear error in law (I believe “not knowing what commerce is” would apply). Most disputes about federal law or policy will never get further than a court of appeals. The Supreme Court hears only 100 to 150 cases out of the 7,000 appealed to it every year. This means that for the overwhelming majority, the lower court ruling is final.

In the meantime, those lower courts can act with lightning speed to stop an entire federal law in its tracks. There are 677 district court judges, and every one of them has the power to issue temporary restraining orders (or TROs) blocking the implementation of federal legislation until a full trial can be held about the law or policy.

Republicans complained about TROs when judges used them to temporarily block some of Trump's more alarming policies (such as the wall and the Muslim ban), but they aren't complaining anymore. In fact, a Trump appointee has already used a TRO against the new administration: On January 26, less a week into Biden's term, a district court judge in Texas blocked the administration's moratorium on deportations.

And more are bound to follow. There's not a single gun regulation that will survive a TRO from a Trump judge, even a massively popular reform like background checks. Not a single stringent environmental rule will make it through a Trumpian judicial gauntlet. No education reform will survive judges who helped former education secretary Betsy DeVos craft illegal policies.

And that's just the easy stuff for Republican judges to block, the stuff they do for fun; human suffering is entertainment for these people. They save their true passion for suppressing the vote.

The courts are the most critical pillar in the Republican scheme to rig elections. Red-state governments pass voter suppression laws knowing they'll be upheld by courts that conservatives control. District court judges get first crack at any constitutional issues that arise from interpreting the Voting Rights Act, or the 15th Amendment's prohibition against voter discrimination on the basis of race, or the 24th Amendment's abolition of poll taxes. By controlling these courts, Republicans can functionally control the rules of who gets to vote, when they get to vote, and how those votes will be counted.

Biden and the Democrats can't counteract this kind of entrenched Republican rule with legislation and get-out-the-vote campaigns. And they can't simply fill the open judgeships that have been left available to them: Biden inherited only 68 judicial vacancies, which is low compared to what Trump had at the start of his term. Biden is going to have to work outside of the box left for him by McConnell if he wants to secure democratic self-government. And he is going to have to work quickly.

If he doesn't, the Republicans' voter suppression efforts will likely enable them to retake the Senate in 2022 and the White House in 2024. This gives Biden a very short time to capitalize on the Democratic majority in the House and the one-vote majority in the Senate, courtesy of Vice President Kamala Harris. He can spend that time passing legislation that will be enjoined by the courts, but he must spend his political capital on fixing the courts. If he doesn't, conservative judges will make it very hard for the Democrats to hold a legislative majority ever again.

Applying, there is a solution, and that solution is to expand the lower courts. The Constitution punts every decision about the lower courts (sometimes called the “inferior” courts) to Congress, including their size. Here's the pertinent part of Article III of the Constitution: “The judicial Power of the
United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.” That means Congress determines not only the number of judges on the lower courts but also which lower federal courts exist at all.

Congress has used this authority again and again throughout history to expand the federal judiciary. The most recent regional circuit it created, the 11th, was established in 1981. The Federal Circuit, which is the only appeals court defined by its subject matter (mostly patents and other trade issues) as opposed to its geographical region, was created in 1982.

Congress could create an entirely new appeals court devoted exclusively to voting rights challenges if it wanted to, and Biden could appoint all the new judges to such a court. Or Congress could create a new regional circuit or simply expand the number of judges on the current federal appeals and district courts. We are actually long overdue for such an expansion: Between 1961 and 1990, Congress added one or two judges to each of the circuits approximately every decade, as well as a number of new district court judges.

Historically, these lower court expansions were bipartisan. We are a litigious people; as the country grows in population, so does the number of lawsuits. Adding judges is just a thing we used to do to keep the judiciary running smoothly.

But since 1990, the US population has grown by a third. During the same period, the number of district court cases has grown by 38 percent and the number of cases involving a felony defendant by 60 percent. But the number of judges has not changed. A relatively modest proposal by the Judicial Conference, a group of judges has not changed. A relatively modest proposal by the Judicial Conference, a group of judges tasked with making policy recommendations about the health of the courts, suggests adding 70 new judges, 65 of them at the district court level. The judiciary needs more bodies.

As in the past, this issue doesn’t have to break down along partisan lines. The Idaho congressional delegation introduced legislation this January to split the Ninth Circuit (the largest federal circuit, which is responsible for nine states, ranging from California to Idaho to Hawaii, as well as Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands) into two circuits, thus creating a whole new federal court. The delegation also supports adding a new district judge for Idaho, which happens to be the fastest-growing state in the union.

To be sure, the Republicans who support this plan have Republican interests at heart. They believe that the Ninth Circuit is too liberal and that splitting it up is a way to create a brand-new conservative circuit in the long run. Still, in the near term, Idaho Republicans know that splitting the Ninth would allow Biden to appoint more federal judges, and they’re more or less willing to live with it because the good-government reasons for more federal judges are so strong.

Democrats should have dealt with this issue last decade. At the start of the Obama administration, Patrick Leahy, the Democratic senator from Vermont and then-Judiciary Committee chairman, introduced a bill to add more judges to the federal courts. Conservatives called it “court packing,” and the Obama administration, which never seemed willing to go to the mattresses over judicial appointments, didn’t take up the cause.

If Democrats don’t get this done now, while they still have a chance, Republicans most certainly will. Federalist Society chair Steven Calabresi has been pushing for conservatives to do this since at least 2017. In a National Review article from November of that year, Calabresi sounded like, well, me.

He made exactly the same arguments at the start of Trump’s administration that I’m making now, at the start of Biden’s: “We believe our [court expansion] plan is necessary to deal with a caseload crisis in the federal courts, where caseloads have increased greatly since the last judgeship bill was passed in 1990. We also think the plan restores the partisan balance that was disturbed by past Democratic efforts. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter and a Democratic-led Congress passed a judgeship bill that increased the size of the lower federal courts by 33 percent. We propose that Republicans should do the same during this Congress.”

I told you federal court expansion was a bipartisan idea. I absolutely believe that if Trump had won reelection and...
ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

McConnell had hung onto the Senate, Republicans would be working on court expansion right now. There just aren’t a lot of vacancies left in the federal judiciary. Republicans can always find some casus belli for stacking the courts with conservative judges. The only question is whether Democrats will ever realize there’s a war, and they’re losing it.

In the meantime, whether the democrats move to expand the courts or fail to use their power yet again, Biden must make his appointments count. He should be appointing a slate of progressive judges who will take the legal fight to conservatives, instead of endlessly seeking compromise with people who don’t believe fundamental fairness and human dignity are parts of the Constitution. And Biden’s nominees must be diverse. Trump’s judicial appointments were overwhelmingly male (76 percent) and blindingly white (84 percent). But that simply continues the well-established Republican practice of favoring white male judges. George W. Bush’s appointees were 78 percent male and 82 percent white. George H.W. Bush appointed a slate of judges who were 81 percent male and 90 percent white. And Ronald Reagan (the worst president Twitter’s never heard about) appointed a slate of judges who were 92 percent male and 94 percent white.

To balance out those decades of inequity, Biden’s judicial appointments shouldn’t “look like America”; they should overrepresent the kinds of Americans routinely excluded by Republican administrations. Balancing the courts should mean that white male cishet liberals need some extra qualification to get an appointment in this administration, like the ability to fly or a rec letter from King Solomon. You can’t balance a seesaw by standing in the middle when an elephant is sitting on one side. Biden’s first slate of appointments are a fine start. The group of 11, announced on March 30, include three African American women as well as barrier-breaking Muslim American and Asian American nominees. Now we’ll just need 200 appointments at this level.

Diversity on the bench, however, should mean more than ethnic or gender diversity. Democratic administrations under Obama and Clinton tended to appoint people from the same professional class as Republicans: prosecutors and corporate lawyers who went to elite law schools.

There is some nuance here; prosecutors and corporate attorneys are not inherently bad judges. Indeed, many of the people who really want to be federal judges someday become prosecutors or corporate lawyers first because they’ve been told, accurately, that such jobs are the best way to position themselves for future judicial appointments. It’s unfair now to tell those people, especially the Black and brown people who have to have gold-plated résumés simply to be considered for nomination into the white boys’ club that is the federal judiciary, that their hard-earned qualifications are suddenly a hindrance to professional advancement.

But as with the white guys, the benefits of judicial diversity outweigh the unfairness to any particular careerist. Biden’s nominees should be predominately plucked from classes of underrepresented legal professionals who are routinely ignored for consideration. It would obviously be nice to have more judges who come from a criminal defense background; the current setup, in which present-day prosecutors argue before former prosecutors in robes, tilts the courtroom against defendants in federal court. But it would also be nice to have judges who are former immigration attorneys and have actually represented a client seeking asylum. It would be nice to have a few judges who have cut their legal teeth working for public advocacy organizations like the ACLU, the NAACP, NARAL, or the Sierra Club.

Fortunately, the Democrats have a deep bench of potential nominees who fit these criteria. The Alliance for Justice began its Building the Bench project years ago, kick-starting the process of identifying and vetting potential Democratic nominees, including people from outside the traditional judicial pipelines. Other
groups, like the American Constitution Society and Demand Justice, also have long lists of people ready to ascend to the federal courts. And many of the people touted for Supreme Court appointments could easily be appointed to courts of appeals while they wait for an opening on the highest court.

Unfortunately, it’s still an open question whether Republicans will allow Democrats to confirm their best picks for the lower courts. The astute reader will say, “Wait, didn’t the Republicans lose the Senate? Why should they have any say in whom Democrats appoint?” Well, as is so often the case, just because the Democrats have power doesn’t mean they’re committed to using it.

The problem is with something called blue slips. Traditionally, senators have been allowed essentially to veto potential nominees who would serve on a court in their state by returning a blue slip—a nonpublic objection to the nominee. The tradition enables just one senator to scuttle an entire nomination.

Blue slips are one way the federal courts in, say, Texas stay conservative even during a Democratic administration. They’re the reason the Idaho congressional delegation can call for additional federal judges for the state, even during the Biden administration: because thanks to the threat of this veto, even the Democrats nominated will be relatively conservative.

Republicans, of course, largely ignored the blue slip process for circuit appointments during the Trump administration. Some of the most odious Trump appointees, like Steven Menashi—the guy who helped Betsy DeVos organize an illegal loan-forgiveness program and who now sits on the Second Circuit, which covers New York and was thus in the blue slip jurisdiction of Senator Charles Schumer—could not have been confirmed if McConnell had honored the blue slip process. So he simply didn’t. That’s how Republicans roll when it comes to the courts: They try to win.

Democrats, in contrast, try to play by the rules—at least whatever rules the GOP hasn’t already thrown into the fire. McConnell did honor the blue slip process for district court appointments, so Dick Durbin, the newly installed chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has said that he too will honor them for the district courts. I’d like to imagine that after saying that, Durbin just went and handed McConnell his lunch money, to save McConnell the effort of shaking it out of him.

As a general rule, blue slips are like the filibuster: a tool that allows a single senator from the minority party to thwart the will of a popularly elected government. But Republicans have a specific incentive for keeping this antidemocratic tradition alive. Progressive or even moderate district court judges in red states might thwart the plans of Republican governors to deny women access to their constitutional rights. In swing states, these judges might stop Republican attempts to suppress the vote.

Blue slips don’t just help the party that’s out of power; they also help the party that’s trying to pass laws out of step with the Constitution. California Governor Gavin Newsom isn’t passing laws preventing Republicans in Orange County from voting. But Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is trying to pass laws to make it harder for people in Miami to vote. If Florida Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott can blue-slip a few federal judges who might stop DeSantis’s Jim Crow policies, that’s a big win for them.

We don’t have statistics on how blue slips are used and whom they’re used against: They’re a nonpublic form of objection, and there’s no data on who would have been nominated for an opening beyond watercooler gossip. But I will bet all the money in my pocket that Republicans disproportionately use blue slips against women and people of color, and especially women of color. In fact, blue slips were invented by Mississippi Senator James Eastland, the “voice of the white South” (as if it needed one), to give segregationist senators a tool for blocking judges who would enforce desegregation. They are literally a Jim Crow idea.

Giving Republicans another tool to deny appointments to women of color without even having to publicly explain why seems like a privilege of the party of white male supremacy should (continued on page 27)
Once Trump left office, the US press also stopped paying attention to Jair Bolsonaro. But with a newly vindicated Lula now eligible to run again, Brazilians hold all of our futures in their hands.
and chat logs of Brazil’s most powerful officials, including Judge Moro and the lead prosecutors who imprisoned Lula. Our reporting, beginning with a series of exposés in The Intercept in June 2019, proved that there was widespread corruption among the Car Wash leaders. Our revelations paved the way for the release of Lula from prison in November 2019, and, on March 8 of this year, the nullification of Lula’s convictions. As a result, Lula’s political rights have been restored, meaning he will almost certainly be eligible to challenge Bolsonaro in 2022. That showdown has enormous consequences, not just for Brazil or Latin America but for the future of the entire planet.

It’s not just that Brazil has oil. The country’s massive oil reserves, including much of the planet’s so-called pre-salt reserves, are of particular geostrategic and environmental importance. “Pre-salt” is a geological designation for oil that is extremely old and thus buried far deeper in the earth than standard petroleum, usually under a layer of salt. That makes its extraction more difficult and expensive, but it also provides far more potential in terms of volume than most of the world’s remaining reserves. Brazil’s Petrobras discovered the massive pre-salt reserves in 2006, but it is still unknown just how large they are. What is beyond doubt is that the oil is of immense value to a world still dependent on fossil fuels yet whose reserves are dwindling.

Beyond the sprawling, untapped pre-salt petroleum, Brazil controls the vast majority of the most important natural resource in averting climate catastrophe: the Amazon rain forest.

By Glenn Greenwald

While many in the west lamented Jair Bolsonaro’s stunning ascension to the presidency of the world’s fifth most populous country in 2018, the election outcome was sealed roughly a year earlier. That was when Brazil’s two-term center-left president, Lula da Silva, who had been legally barred from a third consecutive term in 2010 despite an 86 percent approval rating—and who was leading in all the polls for a comeback in the 2018 presidential race—was convicted on dubious corruption charges and then declared ineligible to run. With his primary obstacle out of the way, Bolsonaro cruised to victory.

Bolsonaro’s victory—propelled in large part by widespread anger toward the ruling class and its neoliberal ideology, as well as the multiple crises plaguing the country—was a major blow to progressive hopes across Latin America. Brazil had been a leader in democratizing the region since 1985, when popular protests forced the country’s military rulers—who had savagely wielded power following a 1964 coup in which the generals deposed a democratically elected president—to return to civilian rule. Ever since, it has been not just taboo but illegal for anyone to praise the dictatorship, which exiled, tortured, imprisoned, and killed thousands of artists, dissidents, journalists, and activists.

But during the 28 years that he was a member of Congress from Rio de Janeiro, Bolsonaro—who’d served as an army captain during the dictatorship—defied that taboo with abandon. He has always maintained that military rule was a superior form of government to democracy, urged the return of the most repressive military decrees, criticized Brazil’s military rulers for not killing enough people, and vowed that he would close the country’s Congress if he were president.

In May 2019, I was contacted by an anonymous source who told me he had hacked into the phone data of Brazil’s most powerful officials, including Judge Moro and the lead prosecutors who imprisoned Lula. Our reporting, beginning with a series of exposés in The Intercept in June 2019, proved that there was widespread corruption among the Car Wash leaders. Our revelations paved the way for the release of Lula from prison in November 2019, and, on March 8 of this year, the nullification of Lula’s convictions. As a result, Lula’s political rights have been restored, meaning he will almost certainly be eligible to challenge Bolsonaro in 2022. That showdown has enormous consequences, not just for Brazil or Latin America but for the future of the entire planet.

It’s not just that Brazil has oil. The country’s massive oil reserves, including much of the planet’s so-called pre-salt reserves, are of particular geostrategic and environmental importance. “Pre-salt” is a geological designation for oil that is extremely old and thus buried far deeper in the earth than standard petroleum, usually under a layer of salt. That makes its extraction more difficult and expensive, but it also provides far more potential in terms of volume than most of the world’s remaining reserves. Brazil’s Petrobras discovered the massive pre-salt reserves in 2006, but it is still unknown just how large they are. What is beyond doubt is that the oil is of immense value to a world still dependent on fossil fuels yet whose reserves are dwindling.

Beyond the sprawling, untapped pre-salt petroleum, Brazil controls the vast majority of the environmental asset scientists around the world agree is the single most important natural resource, by far, in averting catastrophic climate change: the Amazon rain forest.

Glenn Greenwald, a cofounder of The Intercept and The Intercept Brasil, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service and the George Polk Award in 2014 and Brazil’s Vladimir Herzog Human Rights Award in 2020.
forest. The Amazon’s primary value lies in its capacity to absorb carbon dioxide. As a comprehensive Associated Press article about the region explained, “Currently, the world is emitting around 40 billion tons of CO2 into the atmosphere every year. The Amazon absorbs 2 billion tons of CO2 per year (or 5% of annual emissions), making it a vital part of preventing climate change.”

The context for that AP article—and thousands more like it from around the world—was that in mid-2019, the world looked on in horror as the Brazilian Amazon burned. French President Emmanuel Macron spoke for much of the world when he posted the following tweet: “Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest—the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen—is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days! #ActForTheAmazon.”

These Amazon fires, largely the result of ranchers and farmers illegally clearing the land, were so globally alarming precisely because they signified serious regression at a time when radical progress is most sorely needed. As the AP article detailed, “Fires in the Amazon not only mean the carbon-absorbing forest is disappearing, but the flames themselves are emitting millions of tons of carbon every day.” It cited the Brazilian climate scientist Carlos Nobre, who warned that “we’re close to a ‘tipping point’ that would turn the thick jungle into a tropical savannah.”

The fires underlined Brazil’s importance to the world, largely because so many realized that they had ignited not due to natural causes but as a direct result of policy and ideology. Specifically, the policies and ideology of one man: Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro has long railed against the protections accorded to the Indigenous tribes of Brazil and to the Amazon territory where they have lived for centuries. Along with his defense of all forms of military and police violence, the aggressive exploitation of the Amazon is one of the few core beliefs Bolsonaro has championed consistently throughout his decades as a politician. For that reason, his presidential candidacy was supported by the nation’s extremely powerful, and very rich, agricultural and logging industries long before he was viewed as a viable contender. Indeed, they were eager to find a president who would unleash commercial interests without the slightest regard for the environmental value of the Amazon or the survival of the Indigenous tribes.

Nobody paying close attention to Brazil was surprised by the Amazon fires, which were caused by the very industries that now compose such a crucial part of Bolsonaro’s base. As Nobre explained, the cattle ranchers and farmers who set the fires “think law enforcement won’t punish them.” The AP report continued, “Bolsonaro has decreased the power and autonomy of forest protection agencies, which he says get in the way of licensing for developing land and accuses of being ‘fines industries.’”

Bolsonaro all but made deforestation an explicit goal of his administration; his choice for environment minister, the previously obscure Ricardo Salles, once touted bullets as the “solution” for Indigenous tribes, environmental and homeless activists, and “the left” generally. In his short stint as a local environmental official in the state of São Paulo, Salles was convicted of administrative improprieties for the forged maps for proposed environmental protection plans published by his office and was barred from seeking elective office for three years. Two weeks later, in December 2018, Bolsonaro appointed him environment minister. That a resource as vital as the Amazon is now in the hands of these two fanatics would itself be sufficient reason for the world to pay attention to Brazil.

Even in his support for the Amazon’s destruction, Bolsonaro is following the ethos of the military dictatorship that he admires. Thousands of Indigenous citizens were killed during that era by a regime intent on developing and exploiting the Amazon, regardless of the human, cultural, environmental, or other costs. Indeed, the leaders of the 1964 coup frequently spoke of Brazil’s Indigenous population with a level of contempt only slightly less explicit than Bolsonaro’s.

But an eagerness to destroy the Amazon for short-term profit is just one of the attributes that make Bolsonaro so dangerous. He is as unhinged in his comportment as he is neo-fascist in his ideology. Far more chilling than Bolsonaro’s adolescent and reckless behavior—such as his mockery of the physical appearance of Macron’s wife in response to the French president’s viral tweet—are his core beliefs, which had for years relegated him to the role of sideshow clown rather than that of a legislator of any significance.

Bolsonaro was expelled from the army in 1988 for planning to detonate small bombs on military installations in protest of what he regarded as the unjustly low salaries received by soldiers. He had previously been disciplined by the military for publishing an article in the widely circulated Veja magazine that denounced military pay rates—an act that also turned him into a minor celebrity among supportive soldiers. He then launched his political career that year with a successful run for the city council of Rio de Janeiro on a pro-military platform.

Despite his expulsion from the military, he remained an avid fan of the regime, defending the 1964 coup as a “democratic and popular...
Yet for so many reasons—from his explicit admiration for torture and killing to his unique mix of militarism, religious fervor, an antigay fixation, and an anti-communist obsession—Bolsonaro is unlike other modern far-right leaders such as Trump, Marine Le Pen, or the Brexit leaders in the United Kingdom. He's far darker and more menacing; indeed, in mentality, disposition, ideology, and ultimate vision, he is more like President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines or even General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt.

Whatever else one might say about him, Bolsonaro is a charismatic figure and talented demagogue who knows how to attract attention and mobilize people's worst, most primal drives. And he has built a political dynasty: Three of his sons are prominent elected officials in Brazil. The oldest, Flavio, was a state legislator representing Rio de Janeiro for a decade and was elected with an overwhelming vote total to the Federal Senate in the same 2018 election that brought his father to the presidency. Bolsonaro's youngest political son, Eduardo, is a federal representative from São Paulo who was reelected in 2018 with the largest vote total for a member of Congress in the history of Brazilian democracy. Carlos, the middle political son, is a longtime member of Rio de Janeiro's city council and the mastermind of his father's online network of fake news and hate-driven attacks against the family's critics.

Conjuring the image of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s sons Uday and Qusay, Bolsonaro’s sons all resemble him, yet are somehow even worse. Shortly before Bolsonaro’s election as president, Eduardo spoke openly about how easy it would be to close the Supreme Court (STF) if it ruled that his father’s campaign had violated election laws: “Dude, if you want to shut down the [Supreme Court], do you know what you do? You don’t even send a jeep. Send a soldier and a corporal.” He then added, even more menacingly: “What is the STF? It takes its power from the pen of an STF minister. If you arrest an STF minister, do you think there will be a popular revolution,” calling the era of the dictatorship “glorious,” and insisting for three decades that Brazil was better off under despotism than under democracy. Indeed, Bolsonaro has often said that his own criticism of the military dictatorship is that it did not go far enough. In a now-iconic 1999 television appearance, Bolsonaro said, “Voting won’t change anything in this country. Nothing! Things will only change, unfortunately, after starting a civil war here, and doing the work the dictatorship didn’t do. Killing some 30,000 people, and starting with FHC [Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the center-right president at the time]. If some innocents die, that’s just fine.” Similarly, in 2015, Bolsonaro responded to an Amnesty International report that stated Brazil’s police kill more people than any other country’s by saying, “I think what the Military Police has to do is kill more.” As the journalist Vincent Bevins wrote in *The New York Review of Books* in 2018: “Bolsonaro is not merely nostalgic for that era; he would reintroduce the dictatorship’s political ethos, preserved and intact, into modern Brazil.... What Bolsonaro offers is an explicit return to the values that underpinned Brazil’s brutal dictatorship.”

When his presidential candidacy strengthened through 2018, the Western press—which has never paid much attention to Brazil—struggled to convey who Bolsonaro was. They dubbed him the “Trump of the Tropics,” which they believed was an insulting nickname. In reality, it was far too cute, provincial, and ethnocentric to be anything other than wildly misleading. That nickname also had the unintended effect of normalizing Bolsonaro in Brazil. After decades of being told Brazil is a “developing country” or part of the “Third World” or “Global South,” many Brazilians felt, not unreasonably, that if Bolsonaro were similar to the president of the richest and most powerful country on the planet, he must be doing something right.
The establishment’s failure left Brazilians so angry they were willing to gamble on anyone who could pose as an enemy of the political class.

Donald Trump to the White House? Likewise, how did a country as integrated into Europe as the United Kingdom suddenly opt for Brexit, despite all the clear evidence of the harm that would ensue, especially for the members of the working classes who voted for it?

As has happened in so many countries, the failure of Brazil’s establishment—and particularly its prevailing neoliberal ideology—had left so many people so angry with the political system that they were willing to gamble on anyone who could successfully pose as an enemy of the political class that the population (rightly) blames for so much of its suffering and deprivation.

Prior to Bolsonaro’s rise, a convergence of crises had engulfed Brazil: an economic crisis that was due at least in part to the 2008 financial collapse caused by Wall Street; a crisis in public security that came with skyrocketing poverty and unemployment; a murder rate that was comparable to Baghdad’s at the height of the US occupation of Iraq; and a massive corruption scandal, revealed by the Operation Car Wash probe, that implicated almost every major political party (including the long-governing Workers’ Party), as well as the country’s richest oligarchs and its most powerful companies (with the state-owned Petrobras, once Brazil’s national pride, at the center of it all).

As in the United States, the widespread popular rage toward the political establishment that propelled Bolsonaro’s victory was many years in the making. And the tremors could be felt by anyone who bothered to listen to the Brazilian people.

Perhaps one of the first signs of the intensity and ubiquity of the disgust with the political process was the sustained and rancorous street protests of 2013. These protests began with the issue meant that relatively few people attended the protests. But soon the grievances expressed at the protests expanded; so, too, did the crowd sizes. Within weeks, the protests became the largest demonstrations Brazil had seen in decades. By the end of August, the protesters were demanding an end to harsh austerity measures at the time, there would be a restoration of AI-5—the terrifying decree that Brazil’s military dictatorship had issued to summarily abolish any residual democratic rights and establish Brazil as an absolute tyranny.

Meanwhile, almost immediately after his father’s election as president, Senator Flavio Bolsonaro became engulfed in a scandal that is still unfolding, involving the close connections on the part of the whole family to violent paramilitary gangs. These militias, composed of rogue current and former members of the Military Police, rule Rio de Janeiro with tactics that make the Italian Mafia seem like pacifists.

Another of the Bolsonaros’ most potent and reliable political weapons is religious fundamentalism—a variant that mixes ostensible Catholicism with Latin American evangelical fervor—which the entire family uses to stimulate widespread hatred against Brazil’s LGBTQ population. Indeed, anti-LGBTQ fervor has become one of their signature issues: Bolsonaro infamously told Playboy that he’d rather learn his son were dead than gay, and one of his only proposed laws in Congress was a bill to ban same-sex couples from adopting children, despite the tens of thousands of Brazilian children without parents who linger in shelters and orphanages. In 2018, Bolsonaro’s presidential campaign featured a claim that gay men were trying to infiltrate schools, using a fictitious tool he called a “gay kit,” which he told parents across the country was being used by gay people and their teacher allies to indoctrinate youth and turn their children gay.

What made Bolsonaro’s election particularly jarring was that it was such a radical shift from Brazil’s recent political history. Since the end of the dictatorship in 1985, Brazil has never been anything close to a far-right country. On the contrary, the four presidential elections before Bolsonaro’s 2018 victory were all won by the center-left Workers’ Party. Bolsonaro was preceded in office by that party’s founder, Lula—a factory worker born to extreme poverty who was illiterate until the age of 10—and his anointed successor, Dilma Rousseff, a former Marxist guerrilla and the first female president of the country.

How did Brazil leap from being a center-left country that fit comfortably into the mainstream ideological wing of the Western neoliberal order to one ruled by a figure as extreme as Bolsonaro? Here, and only here, is the comparison to Trump helpful, since a similar question can be asked—and a similar answer provided—about the United States: How did a country that twice elected Barack Obama suddenly send Donald Trump to the White House? Likewise, how did a demonstration in favor of the STF minister, millions on the streets?”

In 2019, as approval of his father’s administration plunged, Eduardo—whom Bolsonaro had tried and failed to appoint as Brazil’s ambassador to the United States—issued a public threat. He said that if street protests against Bolsonaro took place in Brazil, the way protesters in Chile were demanding an end to harsh austerity measures at the time, there would be a restoration of AI-5—the terrifying decree that Brazil’s military dictatorship had issued to summarily abolish any residual democratic rights and establish Brazil as an absolute tyranny.

Eduardo Bolsonaro was preceded in office by Brazil’s first female president, Dilma Rousseff, a former Marxist guerrilla and the first woman to be elected to Brazil’s presidency. Rousseff, a former Marxist guerrilla and the first female president of the country.

Lula’s handpicked successor and the country’s first female president, was also caught up in Operation Car Wash.
Bolsonaro is a gifted demagogue who succeeded in turning the hatred that elite institutions harbored against him to his own advantage.

The protests continued to defy easy ideological categories, but virtually no power center or mainstream institution was spared. Soon Rousseff herself became one of their primary targets—a bitter irony for a party that claimed to represent the very working-class people who were the victims of the bus fare increase. Ugly and thuggish governmental attempts to repress the protests with police violence only fueled their growth.

Efforts by Rousseff and by the Congress to appease the protesters, including rescinding the fare increase—as well as the withdrawal of a series of measures designed to make it more difficult to prosecute corrupt politicians—did little to assuage the unbottled rage. Though the protests gradually shrank in size, the reverberations extended far beyond the demonstrations themselves.

The rapid transformation of the 2013 protests was an early sign that Brazilians were deeply angry. More important, the protests showed that their anger was not reserved for any one party or any single ideology, but for anyone and everyone who wielded power in Brazil.

In this critical regard, Bolsonaro’s ascension to power was driven not so much by agreement with his ideology but rather by a pervasive and justified disgust with ruling institutions and their prevailing orthodoxies. That Bolsonaro had been ejected from the mainstream precincts of “decency,” and that he was so clearly feared and despised by mainstream institutions, became one of his most powerful political assets. Bolsonaro is a gifted demagogue who succeeded in turning the hatred that elite institutions harbored against him to his own advantage.

Anyone who is hated by the political system that we despise and the elites who control it, and who promises to burn it and them down to the ground, must be on our side. This mentality...
Brazil’s Bolsonaro, while not a billionaire or a Harvard Law graduate, is no more an outsider than Donald Trump or Barack Obama.

This article is adapted from Securing Democracy: My Fight for Press Freedom and Justice in Bolsonaro’s Brazil, published by Haymarket Books.

Leak to liberty: Greenland’s revelation of collusion between justice minister Sergio Moro and prosecutors led to Lula’s release.

Securing Democracy

Glenn Greenwald

What makes Brazil different

The more the perfectly coiffed Globo stars in their glittery Rio and São Paulo studios—or the “well-respected” members of Brazil’s political elite—expressed their horror at Bolsonaro’s latest pronouncements, the more his backers delighted in the suffering and upset that he triggered. That’s a dynamic that should sound familiar to US voters, and it’s also increasingly familiar to Western Europeans as they watch Brexit and the rise of once-unthinkable far-right parties. As Noam Chomsky has noted on many occasions, popular contempt for elite institutions and political insiders is driving such election results across the democratic world.

Brazil’s Bolsonaro, while not a billionaire or a Harvard Law graduate, is no more an outsider than Donald Trump or Barack Obama. After all, he spent three decades in politics representing the most corrupt state in the country—Rio de Janeiro—as a member of eight different political parties, several of which were implicated in the Operation Car Wash anti-corruption probe. During his 2018 presidential campaign, he vowed to empower Paulo Guedes as his economic minister, touting him as a University of Chicago–trained academic who would follow the Pinochet model of privatizing industry and slashing social benefits—not exactly an antiestablishment icon.

Like Obama and Trump, though, Bolsonaro was far enough outside of elite political circles that he could convincingly depict himself as their adversary. And all three successfully spoke to the anger and sense of betrayal of tens of millions of people.

Many Brazilians voted for Bolsonaro—including many of my and my husband David Miranda’s friends, some of whom are Black, some of whom are working-class or favela residents, and some of whom are LGBTQ or close friends of the LGBTQ community. They did so not because of his history of hateful and extremist comments, bigotry, and support for tyranny, but despite them. They did so from desperation: When you can’t find work that provides a living wage, when your children have no access to health care or drinkable water, when you have reasonable grounds to worry each day as your children leave for school that they will not come home alive because of indiscriminate street violence, and when you watch a tiny portion of the population prosper from a political system that seems to care only for its interests while harboring contemptuous indifference to your plight, it’s not irrational to send in an agent of chaos to disrupt and even destroy the political system—even if you don’t believe that he’s actually competent to fix it or well-intentioned enough to try.

At the very least, people confronting such deprivation will be highly susceptible to angry scapegoating and easy solutions: kill all criminals, restore public morality through religion, wipe out corruption. That’s the formula used by countless right-wing demagogues for the last century to seize power—and that’s what worked so effectively for Bolsonaro in 2018.

The more the perfectly coiffed Globo stars in their glittery Rio and São Paulo studios—or the “well-respected” members of Brazil’s political elite—expressed their horror at Bolsonaro’s latest pronouncements, the more his backers delighted in the suffering and upset that he triggered. That’s a dynamic that should sound familiar to US voters, and it’s also increasingly familiar to Western Europeans as they watch Brexit and the rise of once-unthinkable far-right parties. As Noam Chomsky has noted on many occasions, popular contempt for elite institutions and political insiders is driving such election results across the democratic world.

What makes Brazil different

is the speed of the transformation—and the depth of the descent into authoritarian rule. Bolsonaro’s rapid progress to the presidential palace was accompanied by a far-right tidal wave that swept into various halls of power a herd of previously obscure figures. Bolsonaro’s party, which barely existed prior to 2018, elected the second highest number of members to the National Congress, just one seat behind the long-dominant Workers’ Party. Brazilians went to sleep before the 2018 election in a seemingly stable and steadfastly democratic country—and woke up the next day in a country where democratic values remain threatened and the viability of core civic liberties is still very much in doubt.

But this reversal, though sudden, did not happen overnight. Instead, it was the culmination of trends that had grown over decades, rendering a population that had come to believe all politicians were corrupt, and that elections changed nothing, ready to blow up the political system that they held responsible for the nation’s many crises. Brazil matters because of its size, its vast environmental resources, and its political and cultural influence around the world. But it also matters as an example. Citizens of currently democratic countries who are tempted to dismiss the dangers when elites flaunt their contempt for ordinary people—or to respond, amid claims that current levels of inequality and widespread immiseration are unsustainable, that such things “can’t happen here”—need only look to Brazil. Because it did happen here. It’s still happening here.
lose. Why should the Democrats continue to act as if Republican senators were operating in good faith when so many of them are clearly not? How is it even possible that people like Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz—last seen stoking actual insurrection and refusing to acknowledge the results of the presidential election—should still be allowed to exercise a one-man veto on judicial appointments? It’s not like NASA lets the Flat Earth Society choose the astronauts.

Whomever Biden nominates, the administration will have to stand strong behind them, supporting his candidates amid an inevitable onslaught of baseless and often bigoted attacks. As we saw, Republicans were only too eager to withhold bipartisanship from a number of Biden’s cabinet appointees who happen to be women of color. Deb Haaland and Neera Tanden faced considerable backlash from Republicans, as did Vanita Gupta and Kristen Clarke, two Biden Justice Department nominees who would themselves make fine federal judges. Republicans will not give an easy confirmation process to any Biden nominee outside the centrist white male pipeline, and Democrats are just going to have to ignore them and confirm all their nominees 50-50, with Harris breaking the tie, if need be.

Republicans do not get to choose Democratic nominees to the federal bench, just like a child throwing a temper tantrum does not get to choose what’s for dinner.

The house judiciary subcommittee on the federal courts held a hearing on expanding the courts in late February. Members of Congress heard testimony from sitting district court judges about the crisis on the federal docket. The judges testified that some of them were presiding over as many as 600 hearings per year.

We need more judges. Remarkably, even Republicans on the subcommittee agreed about that basic fact—but there was a catch. The ranking Republican, Darrell Issa, said that they would go along with a bill to expand the lower courts only if Democrats agreed to break up the Ninth Circuit and also agreed to stagger the appointments so that Biden wouldn’t get to choose all of the new judges. That’s right: The same party that rushed to confirm a Supreme Court justice after people had already started voting in the 2020 election now expects Biden to hold off on appointing some new judges for years, just in case Republicans are able to take back the White House in 2024. In other words, Republicans—who control neither chamber of Congress—are willing to help fix what they themselves admit is a crisis only if Democrats agree not to use the full measure of their power.

Issa’s proposal is flatly ridiculous. But I don’t blame him for asking. I always ask it to stop raining, just in case forces completely beyond my control are listening.

The Democrats have the facts on their side, the law on their side, and right on their side. They also have the power on their side.
Crowdfunding Hate in the Name of Christ

Right-wing extremists have found a safe haven on GiveSendGo, the “#1 Free Christian Crowdfunding Site.”

BY TALIA LAVIN
HEN I ASK HEATHER WILSON AND JACOB WELLS, THE FOUNDERS OF GIVESENDGO, THE “#1 FREE CHRISTIAN CROWDFUNDING SITE,” WHETHER THEY WOULD HOST A FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN FOR THE Ku Klux Klan, the call goes dead for a few seconds.

“Some of these campaigns are situational,” Wells finally offered. “It would depend on what they were raising money for,” Wilson said.

The pair are siblings in their 40s, just two in a family of 12 children who grew up in Salem, N.H. Along with their sister Emmalie, they founded GiveSendGo in 2014 because, as a 2017 blog post put it, “Gofundme has taken a stance against Christians and has been taking down campaigns that they did not agree with.” The idea, Wells said, was not just to run a profitable business but to create a community where both givers and receivers could be inspired by the hope of Jesus. On the site’s clean, spare interface, the “Share Now” button is supplemented with a “Pray Now” button, allowing users to offer their devotions with a click.

On GiveSendGo, where “the most valuable currency is God’s love,” Kyle Rittenhouse, the alleged murderer of two Black Lives Matter protesters in Kenosha, Wis., netted almost $600,000 to pay his legal fees. A few months later, a page for Proud Boys chairman Enrique Tarrio raised more than $113,000 after his arrest en route to Washington, D.C., with high-capacity magazines two days before the Capitol riot.

“Money, money greases the wheels for whatever you want to do,” Wells told me.

There are only a few crowd-funding sites that specifically target Christians, and GiveSendGo is the top platform that surfaces when one Googles “Christian crowdfunding.” Others aimed at the same audience, like WayGiver and InHisSteps, are smaller and intended more for ministries and churches than for individuals. By comparison, GiveSendGo’s vision is expansive. A map on its home page shows the locations of its fundraisers around the world, pinpointing the sites with cartoonish gouts of fire and encouraging you to “Add Your Flame.”

At the same time, GiveSendGo offers a safe haven for far-right figures who have long struggled to find a stable place to raise money. GoFundMe, Patreon, Kickstarter, and other sites sporadically bar individual far-right figures. Tech companies purged many fascist-friendly fundraising efforts after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017. In response, far-right groups set up alternative crowdfunding platforms, creating sites like Hatreon and GoyFundMe. (“Goy” is a Hebrew word for “gentile” that has been adopted as a frequent self-descriptor among the more rabidly anti-Semitic factions of the far right.) The sites were shoddy and short-lived, quickly banned by payment processors and credit card providers. But on GiveSendGo, hate groups can prosper amid fundraising campaigns for homeless nuns, a church that provides tube socks for the unhoused, or infants with spinal cord injuries. Any backlash by payment companies risks raising the ire of a grievance-drunk right-wing media ecosystem primed to detect the traces of anti-Christian prejudice.

SPEAKING WITH WILSON AND WELLS, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT AN AUTHENTIC THEOLOGICAL IMPULSE ANIMATES THEIR ACTIONS—THE DESIRE TO, AS THEY PUT IT, “SHARE LOVE AND HOPE WITH EACH CAMPAIGN OWNER AND GIVER.” THAT THEOLOGY IS CLOSELY TIED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN RIGHT, ALTHOUGH WILSON AND WELLS ESCHEW THE LABEL “EVANGELICAL,” PREFERING TO CALL THEMSELVES “JESUS FOLLOWERS.” ON THE SUBJECT OF JESUS, THEY WAX ELOQUENT, DISCUSSING HIS EMbrace OF “SINNERS AND DRUNKARDS” AND THEIR DESIRE TO EMULATE HIM. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THEY SHOULD PASS JUDGMENT ON THOSE WHO COME TO THE SITE TO MAKE APPEALS. THIS POLICY HAS ONE IMUTABLE EXCEPTION: GIVESENDGO DOES NOT ALLOW FUNDRAISERS FOR ABORTIONS. “That would be an intentional act for harm,” Wells explained.

The questions of intention and harm

Kenosha killer: A campaign created for Kyle Rittenhouse, who allegedly killed two Black Lives Matter protesters, has raised nearly $600,000.

Talia Lavin is the author of Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy.

On GiveSendGo, hate groups can prosper amid fundraising campaigns for homeless nuns and infants with spinal cord injuries.
“GiveSendGo seems to be one of the most significant spaces in which alt-right and Christian right converge.” — Chrissy Stroop, ex-evangelical writer and researcher

ring throughout the cheery white pages of the site, with its hopeful airborne-kite logo. Some might assert, for example, that Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer who killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for over eight minutes, might have committed an intentional act of harm. His fundraising campaign on GiveSendGo, however, is still active and has raised just over $6,000. A photo of Chauvin presides over a page crowded with updates (“We feel that God has chosen Derek to be the catalyst for change and for him to take on the burden of the world”). Supporters post quotations from the Book of Psalms alongside donations and their 455 prayers.

Swathed in a blanket of theological uplift, GiveSendGo offers a Christian cover for violent insurrectionist groups. Several members of the Proud Boys—not just Tarrio—have taken to using GiveSendGo to raise money for legal battles, setting up their pages as Christian, patriotic crises de coeur. Alan Swinney, a 50-year-old Texan-cum-Oregonian with a Proud Boys tattoo on his forearm, is currently being held on charges of assault and menacing after pointing a revolver at protesters in August; a judge has denied his release, citing, among other things, Swinney’s online celebrations of a left-versus-right “civil war” in the United States. A GiveSendGo page collecting funds for his defense describes him as “a HERO.”

“He stood his ground like a proud American,” writes the page’s organizer, Chris Bailey. “He stood strong for all of us, to send a message that real Americans will never let tyranny, or a totalitarian regime take over and destroy our beloved country.”

Ethan Nordean, aka Rufio Panman, a longtime street brawler for the Proud Boys and the sergeant at arms of the Seattle chapter, has been fundraising for his legal defense since the January 6 storming of the Capitol, in which an organized cadre of Proud Boys took part. Nordean faces several federal charges, including violent entry and disorderly conduct on the Capitol grounds. On February 16, however, his GiveSendGo page, which had raised just shy of $5,000, appeared to have been hacked: It briefly read “Ethan Nordean Piss and Shit on Myself Fund” before being suspended. (GiveSendGo forbids “obscenities” under its terms of service; other Proud Boy fundraisers continue uninterrupted.)

The inclusion of some of the most infamous figures on the alt-right creates a striking juxtaposition: evangelical Christians, who number in the millions in the United States, alongside fringe extremists—white nationalist ideologues of the type that President Biden called “demented” during a CNN town hall in February.

“GiveSendGo seems to be one of the most significant spaces in which alt-right and Christian right converge,” notes Chrissy Stroop, a self-identified ex-evangelical writer and researcher. “Of course, we know there is considerable overlap in ideology between right-wing Christians, white nationalists, the manosphere, 4chan types, etc. It can be difficult to trace the direct connections and networks, so I think the existence of GiveSendGo provides us with a sort of horrifying laboratory in that regard.”

In this fizzing laboratory is a steady stream of formal and informal militia organizations. A group calling itself the Colorado Patriots, whose logo on GiveSendGo contains the iconography of the anti-government militia group the Three Percenters, created a campaign to “stay well equipped” in the event of civilization breakdown. “We are the ones standing up against evil and standing watch over the community to keep from being destroyed and people from getting hurt by BLM/Antifa,” write the organizers, adding that they hope to “keep innocent families [protected] against evil.” The Arkansas State Militia Corp, described by MilitiaWatch as an anti-government group that “believes that a second American civil war is approaching in response to overreach from the federal government,” has a page on GiveSendGo. And most glaringly, an ongoing fundraiser for My Militia—an umbrella site and message board that seeks to link up those interested in joining militias with established groups, as well as to encourage the like-minded to create militias in their area codes—serves as an emblem for GiveSendGo’s tolerant attitude toward organized extremists. Describing itself as “the de facto authority in American Patriot Militias,” My Militia has served as an organizing hub for groups like the Three Percenters, the Oath Keepers, and innumerable smaller anti-government groups around the country. “Fostering the lawful rebirth of State militia is a crucial step in preserving the Republic,” declares My Militia founder Josh Ellis on his GiveSendGo page.

In describing the ethos of GiveSendGo, Wilson and Wells laid down an elaborate groundwork for their reasons for offering a service to individuals accused of a broad range of crimes, including political violence. They spoke to me about the presumption of innocence and the right to afford a legal defense and repeatedly invoked the notion that it was not their role to serve as “judge and jury”—something that was best left to the courts and to God. “We’ve made ourselves our own gods in this omniscient type of mentality around, this knowledge that we can declare what is right and what is wrong,” Wells told me.

When asked about the consistent pattern of hate group members fundraising on the site, Wells expressed doubt that the Proud Boys really were a hate group, explaining that he had visited their website and found it lacking in statements explicitly embracing discrimination. “Unfortunately, the media does have an agenda with the things they portray, whether it’s social media or other forms of media,” Wells said. “What are their core beliefs? Is it misconstrued by the media?” When I pointed out that the Canadian gov-
ernment had recently designated the Proud Boys as a terrorist group, Wells answered that this should be just one factor to consider. “We are learning just like everyone else,” he added.

The other core principle embraced by Wells and Wilson tracks with a doctrine known as “total depravity” in Christian religious discourse: the idea that all human beings are created sinners, damned without the grace of God. In this moral framework, all sin is equal, and the path to resolution is the love of Christ.

On GiveSendGo, this plays out as a curious flattening. When I brought up the Rittenhouse campaign and its massive cash influx, Wilson countered with the fact that the site had allowed an LGBTQ fundraiser. A search for “LGBTQ” on the site brought up three pages: two for a group of “former LGBTQ individuals who have left the lifestyle of homosexuality to follow Jesus Christ” (sum raised: $7,900) and the other for the LGBTQ Freedom Fund, a nationwide nonprofit (sum raised: $0). “Politics, schmolitics,’ says GiveSendGo while at the same time giving a fundraising platform on behalf of Mr. Rittenhouse,” writes Joanna Galuszka, who set up the LGBTQ Freedom Fund page. Though the campaign hasn’t raised any money to date, it has garnered 25 prayers. When I asked whether raising funds for an LGBTQ charity was morally equivalent to raising bail for an alleged murderer, Wilson replied, “We believe that any time we disobey God, whatever it is, there’s no judgment as who’s worse.” In this moral view, causing death and being queer are not only on the same spectrum, they are identical.

“The idea that sin is sin, regardless of scale, is common if not pervasive in conservative evangelicism,” says journalist Jeff Sharlet, the author of The Fundamentalist Threat to American Democracy and The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power. “The emphasis is on authority.”

It’s this theological false equivalence coupled with a marked conservative viewpoint that has made GiveSendGo an appealing home for those seeking money for legal fees since the January 6 insurrection. According to a Washington Post analysis, some $247,000 was raised on the site for 24 campaigns looking to cover travel costs to D.C. before the event. Legal defense fundraisers have also proliferated for those caught up in the dragnet after the riot. From Jenna Ryan, the real estate agent who infamously took a private jet to D.C. before the event, to Sean Watson, a former laboratory scientist who claims to be under investigation by the FBI, the Capitol mob is clearly relying on GiveSendGo for help. For their part, the site’s founders appear to have doubled down on their stances on sin, freedom, and the money that flows from givers to goers.

In the wake of January 6, Wilson and Wells faced significant public controversy, as a collective recoiling from the events of that day by a majority of the American public—and pressure on tech companies—forced their hand. According to Wells, PayPal, which the site used to process donations, approached GiveSendGo about removing the campaigns for Rittenhouse and Tarrio. In response, he said, GiveSendGo severed ties with PayPal entirely. (PayPal issued a public statement saying that it had ended the relationship on its own; a request for comment from the company went unanswered.) It’s not the first time that GiveSendGo has clashed with financial providers over its willingness to go to bat for conservative-media darlings accused of violence. In response to a decision by Discover Financial Services to block transactions for the Rittenhouse fundraiser, Wells posted a video in which he cut up his Discover Card and encouraged others to follow suit.

Currently, GiveSendGo relies on Stripe, another major payment processor, to ferry funds from donors to recipients. According to Wells, discussions with Stripe are ongoing, and the company has imposed some conditions on the laissez-faire fundraising that GiveSendGo allows. “Stripe has said [they] don’t want Proud Boys processing through them, and we’re trying to respect that,” Wells told me. (A spokesperson for Stripe could not be reached for comment.) In the meantime, GiveSendGo is looking to develop its own payment processing capacity, free of any considerations beyond its founders’ theology.

“The idea that sin is sin, regardless of scale, is common if not pervasive in conservative evangelicism.”

—Jeff Sharlet, author of C Street: The Fundamentalist Threat to American Democracy

Proud defense: The chairman of the Proud Boys, Enrique Tarrio, raised more than $113,000 after being arrested en route to Washington, D.C.

To the end of our conversation, Wells returned to the question I’d asked earlier about the Ku Klux Klan. He had rid himself of hesitation: “If the KKK or any other group of people, if what they’re doing is within the law,” he told me, “I would consider it an honor to have them use the platform and share the hope of Jesus with them.”
Methods of Power

How do authoritarians rule?

BENITO MUSSOLINI (GETTY IMAGES)

The intellectual left reacted to Donald Trump’s election in 2016 in two very different ways. One group, like so many in the general public, immediately fell into full panic mode. The historian Timothy Snyder, for instance, rushed into print with a book called *On Tyranny* and in an interview declared it “pretty much inevitable” that Trump would follow Adolf Hitler’s example by declaring a state of emergency and staging a coup. Others urged caution. Snyder’s Yale colleague Samuel Moyn and Oxford’s David Priestland insisted in a *New York Times* opinion piece that “there is no real evidence that Mr. Trump wants to seize power unconstitutionally, and there is no reason to think he could succeed.” Trump, they claimed, was in reality a weak leader, despite his ability to exploit populist discontent. What was needed, they implied, was a focus less on his tweets and more on
the neoliberalism and endless war that had provoked the discontent that brought him to power in the first place. The debates continued right through the 2020 election, with Snyder and many others continuing to warn of jackboots in the streets and Moyn and numerous other commentators insisting that the warnings themselves mostly worked to distract our attention from the staggering structural problems that the country faces.

The events of January 6 might seem to have resolved the debate. Trump’s incitement of the Capitol attack was a treasonous crime. The ragtag rioters caused five deaths and put many other lives in danger. But what Moyn in these pages called a “parodic coup” (others dubbed it the “Q d’état”) in fact had no chance of delaying the certification of Joe Biden’s victory for more than a few hours, let alone of overthrowing the federal government.

The sharply different views of the Trump presidency reflect two very different understandings of politics. The “ring the alarm bells” camp has tended to see right-wing authoritarianism as a powerful, malevolent force that can operate in at least partial independence from prevailing social and economic conditions. It can arise and destroy democracy wherever people lack the moral and institutional force to successfully oppose it. Even the erosion of relatively minor norms can have serious consequences, because it sets a precedent for more important transgressions. The “let’s focus on the larger problems” group, on the other hand, attributes the current manifestations of authoritarianism to broader social and economic conditions. Its members hold that the United States, while pathologically dysfunctional, is pathologically dysfunctional in a different way from the societies in which fascist dictators came to power in the 20th century. There, the virtual collapse of political order and civil society as a result of world war and economic depression created an opening for revolutionary right-wing mass movements. Here, on the other hand, neoliberal forces have proved perfectly capable of preserving their economic and political power through America’s existing, deeply imperfect but fundamentally stable constitutional system. It is the very dominance of these forces that generated the recent populist upsurge—and under Trump, the same forces also managed very largely to co-opt and neutralize it. (It is no coincidence, in this view, that among Trump’s major legacies are corporate deregulation and tax cuts for the superrich.)

It is pathologically dysfunctional, is pathologically dysfunctional in a different way from the societies in which fascist dictators came to power in the 20th century. There, the virtual collapse of political order and civil society as a result of world war and economic depression created an opening for revolutionary right-wing mass movements. Here, on the other hand, neoliberal forces have proved perfectly capable of preserving their economic and political power through America’s existing, deeply imperfect but fundamentally stable constitutional system. It is the very dominance of these forces that generated the recent populist upsurge—and under Trump, the same forces also managed very largely to co-opt and neutralize it. (It is no coincidence, in this view, that among Trump’s major legacies are corporate deregulation and tax cuts for the superrich.)

The sharply different views of the Trump presidency reflect two very different understandings of politics. The “ring the alarm bells” camp has tended to see right-wing authoritarianism as a powerful, malevolent force that can operate in at least partial independence from prevailing social and economic conditions. It can arise and destroy democracy wherever people lack the moral and institutional force to successfully oppose it. Even the erosion of relatively minor norms can have serious consequences, because it sets a precedent for more important transgressions. The “let’s focus on the larger problems” group, on the other hand, attributes the current manifestations of authoritarianism to broader social and economic conditions. Its members hold that the United States, while pathologically dysfunctional, is pathologically dysfunctional in a different way from the societies in which fascist dictators came to power in the 20th century. There, the virtual collapse of political order and civil society as a result of world war and economic depression created an opening for revolutionary right-wing mass movements. Here, on the other hand, neoliberal forces have proved perfectly capable of preserving their economic and political power through America’s existing, deeply imperfect but fundamentally stable constitutional system. It is the very dominance of these forces that generated the recent populist upsurge—and under Trump, the same forces also managed very largely to co-opt and neutralize it. (It is no coincidence, in this view, that among Trump’s major legacies are corporate deregulation and tax cuts for the superrich.)

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a distinguished historian of Italian fascism and a prolific political commentator, belonged firmly to the alarm-bells camp over the past four years. Less than two weeks into Trump’s presidency, she wrote an article titled “Donald Trump and Steve Bannon’s Coup in the Making.” Her new book, Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present, elaborates on that position in a full-length survey of the ways ambitious strongmen can damage or destroy democratic regimes. The book features Trump prominently, but it sets him in a rogues’ gallery of authoritarianists and would-be authoritarians ranging from Hitler and Benito Mussolini to late-20th-century dictators like Augusto Pinochet, Moammar El-Gadhafi, and Idi Amin to present-day populists like Viktor Orbán, Narendra Modi, and Jair Bolsonaro. These strongmen, Ben-Ghiat argues, all followed roughly the same “playbook” for seizing power and holding on to it, despite the very different societies in which they emerged. The strongman, she insists, is a modern political type—indeed, the modern political type. “Ours is the age of the strongman,” she states categorically.

Ben-Ghiat’s story, like Snyder’s, is at its heart a moral drama. The crucial factors at play are not social and political conditions but rather unscrupulous ambition and greed, on the one hand, and the determination (or the lack thereof) to resist it, on the other. This point of view is provocative one. Unfortunately, like many in the alarm-bells camp, Ben-Ghiat tends to treat it as self-evidently true, and she therefore devotes far more attention to the strongmen’s own actions than to the factors that allowed them to rise and determined whether or not they succeeded. The problem, as her own book reveals, is that authoritarians do not simply prevail through violence: They seduce, they appeal, they exert charisma. And to understand why the seduction works, we cannot look at the strongmen alone; we also need to consider the people who fall under their spell.

Ben-Ghiat’s sprightly written, colorful book does not proceed chronologically but rather lays out the elements of the strongmen’s playbook from start to finish. It begins with a discussion of the various ways they tend to seize power, whether through fascist takeovers or military coups or the slow, deliberate erosion of democracy. The book then turns to the methods they use to maintain power and influence, including the deployment of racism, nationalism, propaganda, corruption, violence, and these men’s displays of virility. (For Ben-Ghiat, the strongman is a distinctly gendered type.) Along the way, we learn about Mobutu Sese Seko’s taste for roasted quail served on Limoges china, about Gadhafi’s preference for sexual partners as young as 13, and about both men’s use of television to broadcast the executions of their enemies.

As might be expected from her background, Ben-Ghiat has particularly revealing things to say about Mussolini, including the fact that the sex-addicted dictator had relations with as many as four women per day during his 23 years in power. More sobering is her reminder that in 1922, the Italian state could easily have disarmed Mussolini’s Fascists, who numbered only 30,000 or so out of a population of over 40 million. Instead, King Victor Emmanuel III “chose the path of least conflict,” as Ben-Ghiat puts it, and appointed Mussolini as prime minister. A crucial factor in the Fascist takeover, in other words, was sheer moral weakness. A final section of the book explores how strongmen finally lose power—if they don’t die in office first.

In keeping with her overall point of view, Ben-Ghiat draws very few distinctions between the various contexts in which these strongmen arose, and she plays down the massive differences in their actual historical roles. Mussolini, Hitler, and Pinochet destroyed democratic systems and established dictatorships; Silvio Berlusconi didn’t, and neither did

David A. Bell teaches history at Princeton and is the author, most recently, of Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution.
Trump, Pinochet, Amin, and Gadhafi were military officers whose rule depended on the army, but most of the men on Ben-Ghiat's list were not. (Hitler saw the army in large part as a threat.) Mobutu, Saddam Hussein, and especially Hitler practiced violence on an unthinkably horrific scale, while Berlusconi, Bolsonaro, and Trump have been violent mostly in their rhetoric. Hitler and Mussolini placed their states under the domination of highly regimented political parties; many of the others left the existing state structures largely intact.

At times, the comparisons become distinctly forced. Berlusconi, the buffoonish tycoon who served several terms as Italy's prime minister between 1994 and 2011, repeatedly flouted democratic norms while detaining and deporting migrants, and he flagrantly used his office to enrich himself and develop cozy relations with figures like Gadhafi and Vladimir Putin. But does he really belong in the company of Mussolini and Hitler? Italian democracy emerged from his terms in office bruised but in no sense destroyed. Many prosecutions of Berlusconi failed, but a court did eventually convict him of tax fraud.

The same holds for Trump, as awful as he was as president. Despite his vile language, atrocious character, and clumsy assaults on democratic norms—and despite the real harm done by so many of his policies—does he really rank among the great monsters of modern history? Ben-Ghiat suggests he does. “It may seem overblown,” she writes, “to compare Trump’s detention spaces to those of other strongman regimes.” But she goes on to do precisely that, noting for example that unlike the detainees in Trump’s ICE centers, the prisoners in Nazi work camps “had mattresses or barracks and access to washrooms.”

Ben-Ghiat also gives little justification for choosing her strongmen almost entirely from the political right. “I do not,” she writes in a quick aside, “include Communist leaders like Xi [Jinping] who take power in an already-closed system.” Men like Nicolae Ceausescu and Kim Jong-un would have fit in well in several of Strongmen’s chapters. Ceausescu’s corruption was so blatant that critics called his system “socialism in a single family.” Kim’s literally over-the-top propaganda efforts have included the construction of a sign that praises him as “the shining sun” and stretches over a third of a mile in length, each letter the size of a small building. Furthermore, some of the most prominent communist rulers (Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong, most obviously) did not take power in “already-closed systems” but violently overthrew noncommunist regimes. Communist authoritarianism has tended to rule differently, because the parties to which they belonged often retained considerable power and autonomy. This point would seem to bear out Ben-Ghiat’s decision not to include them. But it also suggests that even in the “age of the strongman,” political ideology has done quite a lot to shape how authoritarianism actually developed.

Ben-Ghiat devotes very little attention to ideology. It would be hard, of course, to find much common ideological ground between the reactionary Catholic Francisco Franco and the self-professed Islamic revolutionary Gadhafi. Still, as Ben-Ghiat notes, all of the men on her list posed as fervent nationalists, and she could have done much more to investigate their relationship to the broader history and nature of nationalism—and racist—ideas. Instead, she presents their nationalism and racism more as strategies than as deeply held beliefs. Nationalism and racism served their ambition, not the reverse. What these men shared, above all, in her view, was a naked lust for power.

Putting the focus so intent on individual ambition does make for an interesting exercise in Strongmen, especially given how history tends to be written today. Professional historians long ago abandoned the so-called great man theory of history associated with the 19th-century British writer Thomas Carlyle, according to which a few individuals shape the course of history through sheer force of will. Carlyle’s contemporary Karl Marx, needless to say, never subscribed to it. Fernand Braudel, one of the most influential historians of the past century, wrote pointedly in echo of Marx, “Men do not make history. Rather it is history above all that makes men and thereby absolves them from blame.” Braudel and his followers in the Annales school cast the human story as one of people largely in thrall to the slow, grinding operations of geological and economic forces. His great English contemporary E.P. Thompson saw more of a role for human agency but investigated it above all in the ranks of the poor and downtrodden, famously promising to rescue them from the “enormous condescension of posterity.” In the process, the systematic investigation of how powerful individuals can shape historical events was largely relinquished to biographers and the authors of popular histories. A powerful work like the historical sociologist Barrington Moore’s 1966 Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy put the emphasis squarely on social conditions, as opposed to the dictators themselves.

Ben-Ghiat is hardly arguing for a return to the great man theory. Not only does she have no sympathy for her morally repellent subjects; she has no great regard for their abilities either. Most of them come off, in her account, as whiny, unstable, sadistic, endlessly needy, and not very smart (Trump is entirely typical). They had cunning rather than political genius, and many were surprisingly lazy. Even Hitler, as his biographer Ian Kershaw famously argued, mostly left it to his subordinates to divine his wishes and to execute them, rather than working out detailed plans himself. The factors that brought the strongmen to power were an ability to project a charismatic image, an uncanny sense of how to appeal to their followers’ basest instincts, and a will to embrace the other elements of the playbook—a set of techniques that proved remarkably effective in setting after setting. The techniques mattered as much as the men.

In Ben-Ghiat’s account, these techniques are above all what allowed her strongmen to exercise influence, with considerable independence from prevailing social, economic, and even political circumstances. Most historians, in explaining Hitler’s rise to power, foreground the Weimar Republic’s failure to surmount the massive challenges posed by the Great Depression and the harsh Versailles settlement after World War I. In the cases of Gadhafi and Amin, historians emphasize the ways that imperialism had left their formerly colonial states fractured and traumatized. With Putin, they note Russia’s failures in managing the transition to capitalism and democracy and its demotion from superpower status. And as for Trump, the crucial factors highlighted are the United States’ deepening inequalities, its deep and toxic heritage of
racism, and a political system choked into paralysis by special interests. But for Ben-Ghiat, the source of a strongman’s strength lies elsewhere. In all of these cases, she contends, what also mattered, and perhaps what mattered most of all, was the way the strongmen managed to project a positive appeal to embittered and resentful sections of the population. By setting her strongmen principally in one another’s company, she highlights this positive appeal and its power; a strongman’s ability to exercise malevolent influence appears to exist independently of any particular national, social, or economic context.

For the same reason, Ben-Ghiat insists, no one should think a strongman can be defeated simply by repairing those conditions. Resistance requires a playbook of its own, and she devotes most of her short conclusion to outlining it. “We must have a clear-eyed view of how they manage to get into power and stay there,” she writes, without defining who “we” are. “We must prioritize accountability and transparency in government.” “We can carry with us the stories of those who lived and died over a century of democracy’s destruction and resurrection.” If these prescriptions sound strangely abstract and general, it is no accident. They can be applied anywhere, just like the strongmen’s playbook itself.

Ben-Ghiat makes her case for the playbook forcefully, but her emphasis on the strongman’s techniques for crafting a positive image leaves a crucial question hanging: Why do these techniques succeed—or not? To answer this question requires broadening the focus from the strongmen themselves to their followers, and in her introduction Ben-Ghiat briefly acknowledges the point. “The autocrat…is no one without his followers,” she writes. Charisma “exists mostly in the eye of the beholder.” (Here she follows the great German social theorist Max Weber, who first deployed the theological concept of charisma to illuminate political life.) In other words, however charming, brilliant, powerful, or preternaturally gifted certain figures may appear, they need to be recognized as such by followers for a charismatic bond to form. The same qualities that strike one group as intensely appealing may strike another as repellent. Just look at the wildly different ways Americans on the left and the right have seen Trump.

But understanding the workings of charisma and the development of fervent feelings for a political leader requires understanding the social and cultural conditions in which the charismatic bond takes shape. People’s relationships to political figures are influenced by everything from the sermons they’ve heard to the novels they’ve read to the films and television programs they’ve watched to their ideas about proper gender roles. Their place in the economy matters enormously as well, for one of the most powerful ways to project a charismatic image is to pose as the defender of “forgotten” men and women against economic exploiters—as is the case with virtually all of the figures in Strongmen.

Ben-Ghiat does explore some of this background. She emphasizes that the modern strongman’s propagandists draw on “the communication codes and celebrity cultures of film, television, and now digital storytelling,” while also making use of “advertising and marketing strategies.” Mussolini, she keenly observes, was an expert student of early cinematic techniques and mastered the exaggerated body gestures typical of silent film. Ben-Ghiat also notes Trump’s skillful use of Twitter as a direct channel to his supporters, suggesting that his childlike, error-prone spelling and grammar create “a curated sense of authenticity.” Her chapter “Virility” illustrates in numbing detail how strongmen like to pose as icons of overwhelming male potency, with Putin and Mussolini in particular sharing a predilection for baring their chests, as if for a cheesy calendar of male strippers.

These individual examples are revealing, but Ben-Ghiat sketches most of them out in a few sentences, offers a few anecdotal illustrations in support, and then moves on. This reader, at least, wanted more, given the vast differences among the countries she covers. To take just one question raised by her study, have people in societies as different as Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey, Mobutu’s Congo, Putin’s Russia, and Trump’s United States really perceived their displays of virility in the same fundamental way? Notions of masculinity can vary greatly among societies—and within them as well. Have all these different strongmen managed to tap into some deep, natural, universal dream of male domi-

Understanding charisma requires understanding the social conditions in which the charismatic bond is formed. It means going back, yes, to the study of the larger social, economic, and political context. If Trump did not succeed, during his four years in power, in doing more damage to American democracy, it was not simply, or even principally, because of the resistance offered to him from across the political spectrum. It was not simply because, in the end, he did little more than playact, incompetently, at authoritarianism. It was also because of deeply rooted democratic structures and habits. And it was also because of powerful social forces that achieve their ends very well within the parameters of our current political system. These things matter. The playbook only takes the would-be strongman so far, and it only takes the historian so far in the quest to understand them and their significance.
Among the Rank and File
Nikolai Gogol in the twilight of empire
BY JENNIFER WILSON

The thing about big plans is that they require people to carry them out. The problem of personnel particularly plagued Peter the Great. Convinced by his European advisers that his country was backward and stuck in a medieval mindset, he spent much of his reign on a series of modernizing initiatives intended to get Russia “caught up” with the West. To implement his reforms—which included establishing a navy, imposing a tax on beards, and eventually drafting half a million serfs to build a city (named after himself) on nothing but marshland—he needed a robust bureaucracy and a standing military that could manage the demands of his new, spruced-up empire. Peter thus made service—civil or military—compulsory for the Russian nobility, and he implemented a new class system, the Table of Ranks, under which one could be promoted according to how long and how well one served.

The Table of Ranks included 14 classes, from collegiate registrars (which included lowly copy clerks) at the very bottom to the top civil rank of chancellor. While it was pitched as the introduction of a modern meritocratic system in Russia, in practice the table produced sharp class divisions, prevented people from working in fields that did not correspond to their rank, and tied social status to the name and nature of one’s profession. A version of this system continued in Russia all the way up to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, and yet, in much of the literature of the 19th century, the civil service—which structured almost every aspect of life, particularly in the capital of St. Petersburg—feels weirdly merged into the background, more a fact of life than a facet of literary fiction, save for in the work of one writer: Nikolai Gogol.

In a new collection of Gogol’s short stories, translated by Susanne Fusso, a professor of Russian studies at Wesleyan University, readers are reintroduced to the familiar cast of characters—identified by their rank, of course—that populate many of the Ukrainian author’s most celebrated works, including “The Nose” and “The Overcoat.” There are the titular councillors, the collegiate assessors, the section heads of unnamed departments, the recently promoted (and thus insufferable). In short, the book’s stories cover nearly all manner of pompous, status-obsessed, careerist bureaucrats. It could be said that the Table of Ranks defined Gogol’s narrative landscape, but what is also true is that Gogol in turn redefined the Table of Ranks for his readers, then and now. As the scholar Irina Reyfman notes, “To a large degree, the way people now think of the world of state service is determined by Gogol’s portrayal of it in his fiction.”

When it came time to join the civil service himself, Gogol had little interest in or patience for the entire endeavor. His middling grades at his lyceum in Kiev meant that, upon graduation, he had to enter the service at the 14th rank—the lowest.

In 1828, Gogol moved from Ukraine to St. Petersburg to find work, landing first at the Department of State Economy and Public Buildings and then at the Department of Domains. Shortly after starting, he was diagnosed with hemorrhoids—which turned out to be a blessing in his eyes since it gave him an excuse to quit the post, which involved long hours sitting at a desk. “I am very glad this happened,” he wrote to a friend.

Throughout his tenure in the civil service, Gogol more than once failed to return on time from a leave of absence, though this does not seem to have had much of an effect on his career (in fact, he was promoted after one of these delinquencies). He frequently wrote his mother letters to register his misery and frustration with the entire system and its effect on the residents of St. Petersburg: “No spirit sparkles in the people, everyone here is a clerk or official, everyone talks of their departments or min-
Celebrating the Newest Releases from Ferris and Ferris Books

**NO COMMON GROUND**
Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice
Karen L. Cox

“Karen Cox is the perfect person to tell the history of battles over Confederate monuments—and now is the perfect moment to set the record straight.”
—William Sturkey, author of Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White

“Engrossing. . . . likely to become a standard reference work on its subject. . . . A well-documented history of Confederate monuments and the conflicting views they inspire.”
—Kirkus Reviews
A Ferris and Ferris Book
224 pages $24.00

**WHITE EVANGELICAL RACISM**
The Politics of Morality in America
Anthea Butler

“Butler writes with force and grace of what is, how it came to be, and why it must change. This is an American revelation, in the real, deep sense of that rightly troubling word.”
—Jeff Sharlet, best-selling author of The Family and This Brilliant Darkness

“This scathing takedown of evangelicalism’s ‘racism problem’ will challenge evangelicals to confront and reject racism within church communities.”
—Publishers Weekly
A Ferris and Ferris Book
176 pages $24.00

**BLACK SMOKE**
African Americans and the United States of Barbecue
Adrian Miller

“Miller has discovered people, places, and stories that even most barbecue experts haven’t heard of and weaves them into a compelling alternative narrative about how American barbecue came to be.”
—Lolis Eric Elie, author of Treme: Stories and Recipes from the Heart of New Orleans

“A highly entertaining, celebratory, and essential reader for history buffs and barbecue lovers alike.”
—Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews
A Ferris and Ferris Book
328 pages $30.00

**COOL TOWN**
How Athens, Georgia, Launched Alternative Music and Changed American Culture
Grace Elizabeth Hale

“Delivers more than a love song to the music. It also serves up a textured portrait of a generation caught between baby and tech booms, wriggling under the thumb of the mainstream. . . .”
—New York Times Book Review
A Ferris and Ferris Book
384 pages $20.00 paper

Learn more about Ferris and Ferris Books at www.uncpress.org/ferris-and-ferris-books

Shop our current website sale! Save 40% off free shipping for orders over $75.00!! Use promo code 01DAH40 at checkout.

UNC Press THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS
to order: 1-800-848-6224 or www.uncpress.org
visit unpressblog.com
facebook.com/UNCPress @UNC_Press
istoris, everything is suppressed, everything is steeped in the trivial, insignificant labor in which their lives are pointlessly wasted.”

It is tempting to see in Gogol’s satirical tales a kind of precursor to David Graeber’s *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, his study of corporate bloat and capitalist inefficiency. Indeed, Graeber’s taxonomy of meaningless jobs and the people who hold them—flunkies, goons, duct tapers, box tickers, task makers, and bean counters—reads similarly to Gogol’s characterizations of the mind-numbing civil service positions open to him. Yet Gogol was ultimately less interested in the drudgery of office work than in the kind of people who built their lives around titles, prestige, and arbitrary notions of superiority. He drew on the grotesque and perfected the absurd in depicting their shallow worries and pointless cruelty. He also revealed the arbitrary underpinning Peter’s supposedly meritocratic system: Mislabeling the ranks and ascribing the wrong kinds of jobs to certain titles, Gogol created his own world of random hierarchies, and in turn revealed the randomness of the real one.

Though he wrote in Russian, Gogol was born in a small village in the district of Poltava, in what is now central Ukraine. His mother was descended from Polish-Ukrainian nobility, and his father wrote plays, in Ukrainian, for the local theater. The household was trilingual; his father subscribed to both Polish and Ukrainian newspapers, and family letters show they communicated with one another in a kind of Ukrainianized Russian.

“Gogol’s language is indeed distinctive,” Fusso writes in her introduction, “whether because of his Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism or his eccentric personality or some combination of factors.” It is why he is “accordingly known as one of the most untranslatable of Russian writers.” In a move that preserves a sense of foreignness in the English translation, Fusso employs something closer to a literal translation than the more idiomatic one used by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky in their 2011 rendering of Gogol’s stories.

Fusso maintains the pacing and eeriness of Gogol’s prose while also stretching out some of the language so that an English reader, particularly an American one, might stumble a little on the prose, as Gogol’s readers would have. She achieves this through little things, like translating nizin’kogo rosta as “short stature” instead of simply “short,” or writing out “the boots she had cleaned” instead of just “polished boots” (the latter choices are Pevear and Volokhonsky’s). These examples might seem small on their own, but at scale, such choices in translation create a subtle nod to the linguistic distance Russian readers would have experienced reading Gogol’s prose.

While the specificities of Ukrainian culture and identity animated Gogol’s early work, it was his arrival in St. Petersburg in the winter of 1828 that introduced him to his most enduring subject: the Russian civil service. It would take Gogol nearly a year of job hunting—which largely amounted to seeking out help from family friends and various contacts—before he landed a post. Even before he secured employment, Gogol began to have doubts. He started writing his mother tortured letters about how lonely he felt in the capital and how soulless he found the bureaucrats he met there: “To fritter away one’s entire existence in a place where absolutely nothing looms ahead, where years and years are spent in petty occupations, this would resound in one’s soul as a heavy indictment—this would be death” (translation by Vladimir Nabokov).

Gogol soon began to fritter away his time as deputy desk chief for the Department of Domains until, in 1831, he found work as a teacher of history at the Patriotic Institute, a school for the daughters of fallen military officers, which he hoped might be more fulfilling (though his arrival at work three months late suggests otherwise). By this time, he was already writing short stories, though to little fanfare. His early foray into German Romanticism, the self-published poem “Hans Kiechegarten,” was so eviscerated by critics that Gogol burned any remaining copies he could find. That all changed in 1830, when an uprising against the Russian capital in partitioned Poland created an air of suspicion around the Poles living in St. Petersburg. Gogol, worried for his own safety and position, told his mother to stop including their Polish surname (the full form was Gogol-Janowski) when addressing letters to him.

However, while the political circumstances worried Gogol in light of his Polish heritage, they created an opening for him as a Ukrainian. With his countrymen eager to “affirm their happy belonging to the fraternal East Slavic, Orthodox Russian empire,” as the scholar Edyta Bojanowska notes, a sudden vogue for all things Ukrainian and upbeat, including literature, took over the Russian Empire. “Tsarist authorities,” Bojanowska explains, began to encourage “limited Ukrainian particularism as a way to counter irredentist Polish nationalism”—and Gogol, a bridge incarncate between Ukrainian and Russian culture, was there to oblige.

The burst of enthusiasm for anything from or about Ukraine provided fertile ground for the publication of his first major prose collection, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831), a series of short stories narrated by a folksy beekeeper. Sometimes called Gogol’s “Ukrainian tales,” the collection was an instant success, in large part because, as Fusso writes, the stories “adhere to a stereotyped image of the happy, dancing, laughing people of what was then known as Little Russia.”

Fusso includes one story from *Dikanka* in the new collection. “Lost Letter,” about a Ukrainian Cossack who gets drunk, has his cap stolen by the devil, and then must win it back in a game of cards, is a somehow jolly tale of dark forests and shape-shifting demons, and it does indeed end with someone having a dancing fit. The story, and those that appeared in a subsequent volume, *Mirgorod* (1835), appealed greatly to the tastes of the condescending Russian elite of the early 19th century, confirming national biases about their Ukrainian neighbors living on the periphery of the empire.

Later critics were less enthralled. Nabokov, in his 1944 biography of Gogol, observed, “We must thank fate (and the author’s thirst for universal fame) for his not having turned to the Ukrainian dialect as a medium of expression, because then he would be lost. When I want a good

Jennifer Wilson is a contributing writer for The Nation.
nightmare, I imagine Gogol penning in Little Russian dialect volume after volume of *Dikanka* and *Mirgorod* stuff about ghosts haunting the banks of the Dnieper, burlesque Jews and dashing Cossacks.”

Nabokov, who emigrated to the United States in 1940, knew all too well the pressures to perform one’s native identity for publishers and the reading public, and it could be that he was merely projecting his own anxieties here. But it is true that Gogol quite dramatically pivoted away from the style of *Dikanka* in his later fiction. Just as Nabokov would later eviscerate American culture in *Lolita*, Gogol too became a master of uncovering the sins of his adopted nation. Soon, his use of the supernatural in his fiction became less a folkloric motif and more a means to enhance his depictions of evil in the everyday brutalities of poverty and social isolation as they unfolded in the Russian capital.

Fusso includes three stories from Gogol’s second 1835 collection, *Arabesques*, mid-era works that show him in transition from the overtly gothic to the mildly haunted social satires of his high period: “Nevsky Avenue,” “The Portrait,” and “Diary of a Madman.” Along with two of his later works, “The Nose” and “The Overcoat,” these stories are often classed as his “Petersburg tales.” Filled with characters obsessed with rank and status, they demonstrate Gogol’s belief that St. Petersburg was a city cursed by artifice and superficiality, as vainglorious as the czar who gave it its name.

“Nevsky Avenue” depicts a pompous lieutenant named Pirogov who believes that his recent promotion in the Table of Ranks should grant him access to whatever woman he wants. When the wife of his shoemaker rebuffs his advances, Pirogov “could not understand how it was possible to resist him, all the more since his amiability and brilliant rank gave him full rights to her attention.” When her husband intervenes and kicks him out, Pirogov sets off to the authorities to have the insubordinate merchant sent to Siberia (but gets distracted by a puff pastry and forgets the whole thing).

Table of Ranks, the official’s language is not and interchangeable were these offices in Gogol’s imagination). Poprishchin’s entire vocation consists of sharpening quill pens for his director—an actual job, Fusso informs us in the notes: “The low-level clerks who performed this task sometimes made a specialty of sharpening quills to the particular taste of their superiors.” The story follows Poprishchin’s descent into madness shortly after he becomes enamored with the director’s daughter, a woman well beyond his reach as a mere titular councillor. When the head of his section castigates him for “dangling after the director’s daughter,” Poprishchin says to himself, “What am I, a commoner, a tailor, or a non-commissioned officer’s child? I am a nobleman. I can earn a good rank myself. I’m only forty-two years old—that’s the time when your career gets going in earnest. Just you wait, my friend! I’ll get to be a colonel, too, and maybe, God willing, something even bigger.”

By the end of the story, Poprishchin has become entirely delusional, having convinced himself that he is heir to the Spanish throne and that the year is 2000.

To a modern audience accustomed to hidden hierarchies and the unwritten rules of elite spaces, the Table of Ranks seems almost refreshingly transparent. But as Gogol reminds us, transparency itself can be something of a mask. Meritocracies are always loudly announcing themselves; this is precisely how they drown out the voices of their victims. On the surface, Peter’s system seems fair—everyone has a chance to work their way up through service. But this only tends to make those inclined to be cruel to people on the bottom feel justified, righteous even, in their actions and attitudes.

That comes through especially in what is perhaps Gogol’s most famous short story, “The Overcoat,” a sad, masterfully written tale about a copyist named Akaky Akakievich, whose coat is stolen in the middle of the freezing St. Petersburg winter. Attempting to seek aid in recovering it, he solicits a high-ranking and well-connected official, but the man brushes him off, offended that someone of Akaky’s rank would appeal to him for help. “Do you know who you are talking to?” he scolds the hapless copyist. “Do you understand who is standing in front of you?” In the logic of the Table of Ranks, the official’s language is not condescension; it is a respect for procedure. Akaky is the one at fault for failing to follow protocol, to work through proper channels, to recognize the order of things. Akaky eventually dies after catching cold, but he gets his revenge in the afterlife: Soon after he passes away, rumors begin circulating around the capital about a ghost who wanders the city pulling coats off people’s backs “without distinguishing rank and title.”

Despite the importance of the Table of Ranks to his stories, Gogol’s use of the system has always been odd and inconsistent. He offers such acute and exacting renderings of how obsessed his characters are with where they fall in the system, yet he plays fast and loose when it comes to depicting the ranks themselves accurately. As Reyfman notes, the title of titular councillor would have been unlikely for someone like Akaky Akakievich to hold: “Akaky’s service abilities are so obviously deficient that his having this rank is simply not plausible.” She identifies a similar issue in “The Nose,” the story of a vain-glorious collegiate assessor named Kovalev who wakes up one morning to discover that his nose has disappeared. Kovalev watches in shock as his nose steps out of a carriage wearing “a uniform with gold embroidery and with a large stand-up collar,” as well as a plummed hat that suggests to Kovalev the rank of state councillor. But Reyfman says this makes no sense: The uniforms of state councillors did not have plumes. This error may seem like minutia to us, considering the greater strangeness of the story, but as Reyfman notes, it would have been instantly identifiable to Gogol’s contemporaries.

Gogol’s precise motivation for creating this messiness is impossible to know, but one recalls how his earlier works, saturated with humorously overblown stereotypes about Ukrainian life, were perceived by his readers as faithful representations. It must have been intoxicating on some level to know how easily reality could be supplanted by a fictional account of it, especially for a writer like Gogol, who felt so at odds with the world around him. Perhaps this is why he chose to do the same when it came to the bureaucratic elites in Russia. Through his tiny mistakes—misplaced plumes and miscategorized clerks—Gogol not only created a fictional world of his own but also mapped the unstable hierarchy and shaky ground of the actual one.
The Age of Care
Deindustrialization and the making of a new working class
BY NELSON LICHTENSTEIN

DOZEN YEARS AGO, I VISITED THE CHICAGO OFFICES OF the National Nurses Organizing Committee on the city’s West Side. Visible through a large window was a gigantic parking garage, an annex to one of the equally huge hospitals clustered within a dozen blocks. Cook County, Mount Sinai, and three other medical complexes employed tens of thousands of workers. Among those seeking to organize them was an African American NNOC staffer. She told me she was the daughter of an autoworker in Flint, Mich., who’d been a militant in his union during the heyday of the battles waged between the United Auto Workers and General Motors. In Flint, she became a radical activist, inspired by the power of the UAW and the moral energy of the civil rights movement, and in time made a career as a union organizer of nurses and other health care workers.

Hearing her story, I was moved by this example of intergenerational working-class militancy, from her father’s activism in a manufacturing sector now in brutal disarray to her own shop-floor organizing in the booming world of metropolitan health care. But what I did not understand was the degree to which these two kinds of employment were dialectically connected, not just in terms of the consciousness of the workers but also as a product of the very same political economy that had decimated Chicago’s steel mills and Michigan’s auto plants. The old industrial unions had bargained not just for higher wages but for pensions and health insurance. As these unions declined, the private welfare states they had done so much to construct became central to the economies of these Rust Belt cities. With money from the federal government, new hospital complexes arose across the Midwest and Northeast, and with them, a new working class filled the economic and social vacuum left by derelict mills and factory towns.

Gabriel Winant charts the rise of this new political economy and working class in his terrific new book, The Next Shift. A study of the decline of steel and the rise of a medical-industrial complex in Pittsburgh, it explains how and why this great social, economic, and moral transformation took place in regions like Western Pennsylvania, where an old world of mid-20th-century steel mills, coal mines, and metal-bending shops was soon replaced by a new one of care work, low wages, racial stratification, and heavily female employment. Offering fine-grained details of shop-floor industrial relations, the book is at once an ethnographic probe into the lives of working-class families and a comprehensive analysis of the larger dynamics of the US political economy, and it gives an expansive new meaning to the community study, which has long been a staple of labor history.

At 64 stories, the US Steel Tower dominates downtown Pittsburgh. Completed in 1971, the modernist skyscraper once represented the power and hubris of the largest corporation in one of the nation’s largest and most profitable industries—a company that employed more than 100,000 workers in the metropolitan Pittsburgh region alone. But by 2007, US Steel had become, like many of its rivals, a shadow of its former self, and a new enterprise, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, was the building’s largest tenant. As the employer of 92,000 health care workers in the region, the UPMC had spent nearly $1 million to place its initials in giant illuminated letters on the building. Looming over the city from all three sides of the tower, the letters symbolized more than just the medical center’s growing dominance over Pittsburgh’s economy; they were also evidence of a profound occupational transformation. The most recent regional census recorded 190,000 health care and social assistance workers, compared with just 30,000 still employed in the metal fabrication industries.

Pittsburgh was not alone in this transformation. Early in his book, Winant lists...
the other postindustrial metropolises where health care employment is disproportionately high, constituting a fifth or sixth of the entire workforce. Almost all of them are Northern cities like Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York (the boroughs of Brooklyn and the Bronx in particular). And like Pittsburgh, these are cities where strong unions and collectively bargained health insurance plans once thrived, and where the money negotiated by labor from corporate coffers seeded a care economy that took on a life of its own.

As Winant shows, hospital growth was not just a question of money, bargaining clout, or political influence. The care economy in Pittsburgh and similar cities expanded not only because of the achievements of organized labor but also because of what happened after union members retired: Industrial workers in these cities relied on the hospitals, nursing homes, and health care services as they aged and the giant mills shut down.

As deindustrialization took root in Pittsburgh, Winant argues, the communalism and solidarity that the working class had once invested in parishes, neighborhoods, and union locals were now to be found in health care and its allied social services. This was an epochal transformation, but it was hardly triumphant. The construction of this new economy, and the proletariat that sustained it, was deeply racialized, highly dependent on the devaluation of women’s labor, and protective of only a limited stratum of the overall population.

To understand the impulses that gave rise to these urban welfare states and the dysfunctions they embodied, Winant offers a penetrating examination of mid-20th-century working-class Pittsburgh, both on and off the job. Today, a great deal of nostalgia colors the picture of blue-collar America from the end of World War II to the early 1970s. Liberals and labor partisans call this era the Great Compression, one in which unions were powerful, real wages doubled, inequality declined, and the civil rights movement transformed the nation; conservatives hail the social norms and practices that put the male breadwinner at the head of the household, kept wives at home, assured the loyalty of workers to their employer, and maintained the stabilizing influence of the parish church in close-knit ethnic communities.

Winant’s narrative draws from and transcends both of these perspectives. Work in the steel mills did generate a sense of dignity, masculinity, and comradeship, but these were combined with enough danger, insecurity, and petty humiliation to subvert Fortune magazine’s claim that unionism and postwar prosperity had made the American worker a “middle-class member of a middle-class society.” If you didn’t bring a dinner pail to work, the rats would often eat your lunch. There was no place to sit, and the heat and smoke could be debilitating. Almost every steelworker had a near-death experience at some point.

The USW pushed the companies to pay their workers enough to afford a house and raise a family, Winant writes, but the postwar decades were punctuated by recessions and strikes that slashed take-home pay and generated the kind of anxieties that deformed family life for years. The historian Daniel J. Clark makes the same point in his recent Disruption in Detroit: Even as the automakers set new production records, layoffs, plant closures, and short workweeks were an endemic experience, and neither the union nor the Big Three could do all that much about it. Working-class precarity is not entirely new.

Poor conditions in the factories were exacerbated by the relentless management drive to increase shop-floor productivity. Steel industry capitalists were conservative in the most profound sense: They feared debt, overcapacity, foreign competition, and union or government efforts to shape steelmaking’s future. To maintain profitability and avoid the inflationary price hikes that weakened the US dollar, managers tried to squeeze their employees by slashing crew sizes, intensifying work, and turning foremen into compliant disciplinary agents. All this culminated in the largest strike in US history, a four-month work stoppage in 1959 that Winant calls the “apex of proletarian manhood for a generation of steelworkers,” though it is now long forgotten. At the time, the sociologist Daniel Bell called it something close to a sham, a “subversion of collective bargaining,” because he thought both management and union leadership cynically used the long strike to channel and demobilize worker discontent.

As Winant argues, the 1959 strike was far more than just a way for the rank and file to blow off steam over workplace frustrations. It was as raw a contest between labor and capital as anything Friedrich Engels or Eugene V. Debs witnessed in the mills of 19th-century Manchester, England, or the Chicago rail yards. The capitalists wanted the unilateral right to extract more labor power from nearly 1 million workers without an investment in new technology. The fight eventually made its way to the halls of Congress and the White House, where even Richard Nixon, then the vice president, saw that working-class militancy in the Steel Belt was genuine and potentially dangerous. As a result, the steelworkers won: They stymied the management offensive and even got more money in every paycheck. But as with so many other strike battles and political fights in the heyday of postwar unionism, the labor movement lacked the power, the political allies, or the vision to transform momentary victory into a lasting triumph. Many unions, including the USW, were becoming as stolid and complacent as the steel industry’s management. They thought American capitalism was on an upward trajectory that required little more than a Keynesian economic tweak and a collective bargaining routine to see that workers got their fair share of the profits. Yet with the rise of foreign competition and the failure of either government or management to modernize the mills, the 1970s instead inaugurated a disastrous decade for heavy manufacturing and its workers.

Except for Pentagon-backed programs, the United States had no Japanese- or German-style industrial policy that might have preserved steel industry jobs. Neither did the government attempt to find some other kind of dependable and humane employment for this shrinking industry’s workers. Winant might well have explored such alternative possibilities, which in the 1970s and

Nelson Lichtenstein, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is writing a history of economic policy during the Clinton era.
42

In the mill towns, women stretched the family budget, borrowed from relatives, or went out to work themselves. In the late shift, a spouse or daughter had to have a midnight dinner on the table; during a long layoff, the women stretched the family budget, borrowed from relatives, or went out to work themselves. Women in the mill towns learned what different sirens and whistles meant. “We used to run to grab our clothes off the line when we saw big clouds of smoke coming from the mills!” declared one housewife, who described herself as “an unpaid clean-up woman for industry.”

But regardless of how grueling and constant the women’s work was, this mythology of the early postwar decades—that men’s work deserved to be paid while women’s was an innate labor of love—remained largely intact. Yet as the city’s industrial economy began to weaken in the 1970s, workers started to look for an institutional mechanism that could sustain this often feminized work in an era of economic chaos, and they found it in the hospitals and social services that were the one segment of the US welfare state that continued to have funding.

Many of these hospitals, built or expanded upon in riverside steel towns, seemed to embody the communitarian values that had flourished in the ethnic neighborhoods that hugged the hills above the mills. Not unexpectedly, hospital visits were disproportionately high in southwestern Pennsylvania. By 1978, the region generated 1,366 inpatient days per 1,000 people, compared with a national average of 1,192. The population was aging, the pollution rife, and the work hazardous, but steelworkers and their families also saw health care as the keystone of a communal welfare state they had helped to build. Hospital visits were “very good experiences,” one working-class spouse recalled. “The nurses were always nice and the doctors were always there to take care of any problems.”

And the money was there as well. Once the Supreme Court ruled in 1949 that collective bargaining over health insurance was a legitimate union goal, the total annual Blue Cross payments to hospitals in Western Pennsylvania more than doubled in just five years. In Homestead, which had lost half its population since 1940, the local hospital was booming. When Medicare came into existence in 1965, it generated a raft of new clients over the age of 65, accounting for more than one-third of the inpatient days there.

The financialization of hospital construction and operation soon followed. With the interest rates on semipublic hospital bonds a couple of percentage points lower than on comparable debt, and with a cash flow guaranteed by the federal government, Pittsburgh’s hospitals became machines for turning Medicare and Blue Cross payments into debt service for private bondholders. Thus, in 1973, a hospital executive in Homestead defended a controversial expansion program by saying, “Investment bankers were willing to buy $27.5 million worth of bonds. That’s good enough for me.” Throughout the 1970s, as the steel mills crumbled, long-term hospital debt doubled.

One of the most remarkable features of this financialized system of health care became apparent in the era of austerity that started after 1979, when Federal Reserve Board chair Paul Volcker pushed interest rates to nearly 20 percent in his merciless attack on chronic inflation. Capital-intensive industries like steel were devastated, with the impact rippling through every segment of Western Pennsylvania’s society and government. That disaster was followed by the Republican assault on the welfare state during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, with sharp cutbacks to food assistance and Aid to Families With Dependent Children, a tightening of unemployment insurance requirements, and the underfunding of job retraining programs.

Yet even as the Reagan Revolution rolled on, the health care segment of the welfare state seemed exempt from austerity. This was partly because mass unemployment generated an avalanche of maladies, from alcoholism and depression to heart attacks, thus doubling the Pittsburgh region’s volume of care from 1982 to 1985.

The peculiar organizational structure of health care, which combined public subsidy and regulation with private profit-making administration, also encouraged the proliferation of hospitals and...
an increasingly larger sector of nursing homes, clinics, and home health care providers in Pittsburgh. In Allegheny County, Medicare spending did much to dull the Reaganite fiscal knife, with public assistance programs accounting for more than half the revenue of Pittsburgh-area hospitals. Meanwhile, investment in those institutions soared. In terms of growth, their only rivals were jails and prisons, which were also designed to deal with the social dysfunction generated by the aftershock of radical deindustrialization.

The working-class determination to preserve company-funded health insurance played a significant role in the maintenance of these expenditures. By the late 1980s, battles over employers’ efforts to slash their health insurance expenses precipitated 90 percent of all strikes. At Pittston Coal in West Virginia, the fight went on for months, with plant occupations and mass arrests reminiscent of the 1930s. In the Pittsburgh area, the effort of Pittsburgh—the conglomerate that had swallowed the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company—to terminate retiree health insurance coverage generated such an uproar that Congress got involved, forcing LTV’s management to backtrack. As the 2017 mobilizations on behalf of Obamacare demonstrated more recently, a defense of health insurance, public or private, can generate a militancy just as potent as that evoked by issues concerning pay.

The most consequential role played by working people came from inside the hospitals and nursing homes. These institutions depended on the labor of women, African American women in particular. Black men and their families had always had a far less secure purchase on the social citizenship negotiated by the USW and other unions, so it was Black women who filled the (usually nonunionized) bottom ranks in the health care industry. By the late 1960s, 70 percent of all hospital workers were Black, and 10 percent of all African Americans employed in the Pittsburgh region worked in hospitals—a proportion that would rise in subsequent decades.

Because of the high wages paid in the steel mills, white women had mostly stayed home in the 1950s and ’60s, but hard times now drove thousands of them into the hospitals as nurses, clerical workers, paraprofessionals, and other care workers. As a 1986 management proposal for recruiting home health care aides argued, “The displaced homemaker is tailor-made for [this job] and could be said to have been in training for the position for years.”

Winant offers an exceptionally fine analysis of the time pressures and staffing shortfalls that often made life in the care economy stressful, not to mention poorly paid. What began to take place in the 1980s was the 1959 steel strike in reverse: Hospital work was far more labor-intensive than factory production, so the communalism of the small-town hospitals never stood a chance. Service work, from the retail store to the hospital ward, is notoriously difficult to Taylorize at the point where a nurse lays hands on a patient or a cashier rings up a sale. So managers became disciplinarians of the clock and shift, rationing work time while insisting that each employee satisfy the needs of an increasingly large number of clients, customers, or patients.

Management’s determination to squeeze hospital workers was exacerbated by a government revision to Medicare in 1983 that was designed to slow health care inflation by paying hospitals a fixed price for any given diagnosis, rather than for each medical procedure. This made hospital stays shorter and surgical interventions more frequent, and it put more pressure on hospital labor, now 60 percent of all expenses. Medical intervention and care provision thus became increasingly distinct endeavors—one capital-intensive, the other labor-intensive. Hence the consolidation of Pittsburgh-area hospitals into what would become the UPMC empire and the proliferation of nursing facilities and home care arrangements throughout the region. Congress had enacted the new mandate with little debate, but its consequences were huge.

Winant calls this Reagan-era innovation the health care equivalent of the Volcker shock: Squeezing consumer demand, it punished overcapacity in the old industrial centers. By the early 21st century, UPMC had become one of the several health care behemoths that play an outsized role in the political economy of metropolitan America, as influential in their own way as the steel and railroad barons of another era.

The Next Shift offers us a useful guide to the sweeping social changes that have shaped a huge segment of the economy and created the dystopian world of contemporary service-sector work. But is its narrative overdetermined? Did the collapse of the steel industry and the USW necessarily lead to such an overpriced and underpaid health care system? Were there points at which the history of the care economy might have turned a different corner?

Two instances come to mind. The first arose in the early 1970s, when it seemed as if hospital workers might follow the same union path as the school teachers, postal clerks, sanitation workers, and municipal employees who also saw racial justice and worker rights as insoluble. Health care workers proved to be drawn to unionism by the same civil rights ethos. Hospital Workers Local 1199, which sought to organize health care workers on the East Coast, lived by the motto “Soul power, union power.”

But hospital executives in Pittsburgh and elsewhere countered this appeal in a variety of ways. Claiming that Local 1199 was more of a disruptive civil rights organization than a union, they appealed to the sanctified philanthropic ideal inherent in health care service: It was one thing not to pick up the garbage, another to neglect sick patients. Those management strategies would fade as health care became increasingly bureaucratized, but by then hospital executives across the nation had found a new strategy: hiring a phalanx of highly sophisticated union-avoidance law firms to snuff out organizing. Union density among health care and social service workers has long been stuck at 7 percent nationwide, which means that whenever the reform of health care does happen, the voices of hospital and nursing home workers will remain largely absent.

A second turning point came in the 1990s, when Bill and Hillary Clinton advanced their plan to reduce the costs and expand the coverage of US health insurance. Their plan was more radical than the one eventually enacted by the Obama administration. It would have forced low-wage service-sector businesses to cover their own employees and thereby pay a much larger share of the nation’s total health care expenses. That would have incentivized the Walmarts, the McDonald’s, and the hospitals to offer more full-time employment. And despite the Clintons’ denials at the time, their plan approached a de facto single-payer system at the state and metropolitan levels. Under this plan, a series of quasi-governmental health insurance purchasing alliances would have virtually
monopolized payments to hospitals, nursing homes, and doctors for all employers except the largest.

The steel industry, along with other unionized manufacturing firms, were solidly in the Clinton plan’s camp: They would have saved a huge sum of money if the federal government had cracked down on hospital costs and helped pay for the insurance of their retirees while making the low-benefit freeloaders in the service sector pay their fair share. But as with unionization efforts, this reform was still-born. The Clintons’ legislative effort was tardy and maladroit; more important, the GOP was intransigent, and the big insurance companies bailed on the plan when they saw themselves being turned into government-regulated utilities.

Had the steel industry and other manufacturers retained their mid-20th-century power, had their unions been as large and as potent, they might well have countered the political hostility of the big hospitals, insurance companies, and retail-sector employers to push some version of the Clinton plan over the finish line. But Big Steel, as well as its unions, no longer occupied the commanding heights of the American economy. When it came to social policy, the terrain of conflict had shifted to the economic world of sales, care, and services. But while the steel industry may have been doomed to wither, there is nothing inherent in service work that consigns the millions laboring in such occupations to precarity and poverty.

The low pay and insecurity of service workers became abundantly clear last year when they won the honorific “essential workers.” Frontline hospital workers—not to mention grocery clerks, nursing home employees, and warehouse workers—briefly achieved the visibility and applause long denied them. Winant wrote The Next Shift before the Covid-19 pandemic added another layer of social trauma to our already misshapen economy. But his book makes clear that only a radical reconfiguration of the way that health care and other services are delivered to the American people can enhance the dignity and well-being of workers in the caregiving economy. American hospitals and their satellite enterprises must be stripped of their profit-making, empire-building propensities. And for that to happen, we will need to embrace the inherent socialization that must govern health care in our time.

Reaching Out

Arlo Parks’s songs of isolation and hope

BY JULYSSA LOPEZ

Arlo Parks’s lyrics achieve what so many earnest, self-conscious adolescents aim for when they scribble solemnly in a journal, hoping to arrive at profundity by documenting the familiar confusions of youth. But while some teen diaries are heavy with self-indulgent melodrama, Parks is a quiet writer, and her observations tend to be plainspoken and disarming. “Let’s go to the corner store and buy some fruit,” she sings on “Black Dog.” The song, from her debut album Collapsed in Sunbeams, is a sincere message to a friend battling depression. “I would do anything to get you out your room / Just take your medicine and eat some food.” Her work has a private tenderness to it, as if it weren’t meant for our ears. Except, of course, it was. For the last two years, fans have flocked to hear the 20-year-old singer’s understated vulnerability. Parks, the daughter of Nigerian and Chadian French parents, began writing poetry as an adolescent in London. Eventually, she composed music to accompany her verses. When she was 17, she collaborated with the producer Gianluca Buccellati to create the 2018 song “Cola,” which became her breakthrough single and garnered her a star-studded fan base: Billie Eilish name-dropped her in a Vanity Fair video; Michelle Obama included her on a summer Spotify playlist. Billboard and The Guardian singled Parks out as “one to watch,” and Collapsed in Sunbeams, released in January, was touted as one of 2021’s most anticipated projects. On the surface, that may seem a surprising choice given the maximalist disco sounds of 2020 pop music, but the album’s popularity makes sense given how Parks’s consoling messages seem almost tailor-made for this past year of isolation. She explores mental health, queerness, and loneliness, and while she may still be in quest of an exact sound, she emerges on this album as a distinct songwriter with the rare ability to reach out to people trapped in a tough time.
Parks recorded much of the album during the pandemic, and there’s a pointed resonance to its songs, which confront the bleakness and alienation consonant with entering adulthood. Still, her music never comes across as downbeat, exactly; instead, she filters everything through a sense of warmth and affirmation. Pairing her narratives with a velvety voice slightly reminiscent of singer-songwriters like Corinne Bailey Rae and Lianne La Havas, she presents her singing unadorned, without flourishes or effects, keeping her tone conversational in a way that tempers the emotional lines and keeps them from becoming mawkish. *Collapsed in Sunbeams* starts with a spoken-word piece of the same name and then transitions into “Hurt,” a bouncy yet even-keeled song meant to uplift anyone going through inner turmoil. The message, she told Apple Music, was inspired by the Audre Lorde observation that “pain will either change or end.” Parks paints a picture of a man’s despair, singing, “Charlie drank it ’til his eyes burned / Then forgot to eat his lunch / Pain was built into his body / Heart so soft it hurt to beat,” before offering support to the Charlies of the world in the chorus: “I know you can’t let go / Of anything at the moment / Just know it won’t hurt so / Won’t hurt so much forever.”

The album’s tempo is meant to soothe as it weaves in strains of jazz and R&B without shifting the mood. These sonic choices help build cohesiveness; each song fits neatly into the next like a series of nesting dolls, and the measured production, helmed by Parks and Buccellati, avoids gimmicks. The downside to such calculated consistency is that it can feel limiting in terms of how much versatility Parks is able to display across the record. That’s a shame, because in interviews her references run from Portishead to MF Doom to TLC, and one wonders what would happen if she broke out of a handful of easy-listening patterns into something more experimental. “For Violet,” with its throbbing bass line, is a wrenched song on its own, but it can get lost alongside the moody synth of “Blush.” Parks does break out of the sameness in subtle ways, as with the mild rap verse on “Portra 400,” but the variations are so refined that they almost go unnoticed.

*Collapsed in Sunbeams* is best when one fully dives into Parks’s lyricism, which might test the patience and attention span of the casual listener. Still, a few of the lyrics stand out and paint striking scenes, even when the record is playing idly in the background. Some of her writing can resemble the Gen Z angst and guileless honesty of recent artists like Clairo and Phoebe Bridgers, although Parks’s style is a bit more self-consciously literary. She scours everything run from Portishead to MF Doom to TLC, and one wonders what would happen if she broke out of a handful of easy-listening patterns into something more experimental. “For Violet,” with its throbbing bass line, is a wrenched song on its own, but it can get lost alongside the moody synth of “Blush.” Parks does break out of the sameness in subtle ways, as with the mild rap verse on “Portra 400,” but the variations are so refined that they almost go unnoticed.

There are a few moments when the album becomes a touch too twee and confessional. The chorus of “Hope” doesn’t shy away from the kind of heavy-handedness you might find on a self-help flyer: “You’re not alone / Like you think you are,” she repeats. Yet in a period of so much agitation, panic, and uncertainty, there’s catharsis in hearing Park’s gentle reassurances. Her relaxed empathy is inviting, like a hug even a curmudgeonly secret leans in to take.
doctors around, and we need to be able to know how to help somebody who is choking not choke, because we’re not going to have time to call 911. Capitalism has deskilled us from things that we should know how to do and that we should not be outsourcing. It’s going to take a lot to change that. This is why I’ve always struggled alongside and respected my anarchist friends. I wonder how we’re going to do things without a government, however that government gets reconstituted. How are we going to be able to distribute resources en masse or do things in common like build roads? I don’t know. We as individuals can do a lot, and we also need spaces where we do things collectively toward survival.

ER: The anarchist example is interesting, because you note that listeners often say they can’t imagine a world without prisons. Imagining things without the state is not dissimilar. When you find that you can’t imagine something, how do you push through?

MK: Just because I, Mariame Kaba, can’t imagine something doesn’t mean that thing isn’t valuable or that thing can’t be undone or done. It’s possible to think about statelessness, so I look to others who have spent the time doing the intellectual and practical work that it’s going to take to do something different. It really doesn’t matter if I, as an individual, can’t imagine a thing. It matters that there are people imagining that thing.

ER: What should people know about prison abolition?

MK: PIC abolition is necessarily anti-racist and anti-oppressive. Dismantling capitalism is central to PIC abolition. I hope people don’t sleep on that. PIC abolition has to be anti-imperialist, internationalist, and global, in a reciprocal way—not the US looking out at the world, but the world commenting upon the US too. PIC abolition has to be feminist. And PIC abolitionists are concerned with ending sources of all violence. Prisons don’t solve violence. They’re the most concentrated violence that exists. I love what [Ruth Wilson] Gilmore says: PIC abolition is work people already do. There’s an abolitionist horizon, but every single day abolitionists are practicing PIC abolition in multiple places, in multiple ways, chipping away at the prison-industrial complex and building new things in its place. PIC abolition is a vision of a restructured society and world.

Long before becoming a published writer, Mariame Kaba had already left an imprint on contemporary prison abolitionist thought. As the founder of Project NIA, which works to end the incarceration of young people, and as an organizer of the reparations campaign for Chicago Torture Justice Memorials, Kaba helped make Chicago a hub for abolitionist organizing.

Over the past decade, Kaba has argued in her blog, Prison Culture, and in articles in The New York Times and other venues that prisons do not end violence; they simply concentrate it among the most marginalized members of society. Her new book, We Do This ’Til We Free Us, collects a number of her essays, interviews, and more.

—Elias Rodriques

ER: Many people know you as one of our foremost abolitionist thinkers, but you’ve also been a staunch critic of the government’s response to Covid-19. How has the pandemic shifted your understanding of abolition?

MK: My understanding of prison-industrial complex [PIC] abolition is that it’s a vision of a restructured society where we have everything that we need to live dignified lives. What this pandemic shows is the limits of personal responsibility and the importance of a systemic response that enables people to take the actions that are needed to have community safety and wellness. If the government had acted appropriately by paying people to stay home and by ensuring that folks have everything they need, then we would have been through this pandemic a lot quicker. We wouldn’t have lost so many people.

ER: What skills do you think people should develop to build a world without prisons?

MK: We need to skill up on de-escalation, mediation, and resolving conflicts. We need to be able to do medic work. The folks that created CPR models were onto something. They realized that sometimes there are no
Scientists Target New Digestive Aid Pill for Anti-Aging Research

Surprisingly, the secret to slow the aging process may reside in a new digestive aid treatment; studies find the pill to help protect users from fatigue, cardiovascular issues, and serious conditions that accompany premature aging.

Seattle, WA – A published study on a leading natural digestive aid shows that its key ingredient improves digestive health while supporting healthy inflammation response that slows down signs of premature aging in men and women.

And, if consumer sales are any indication of a product's effectiveness, this 'GI-tuned anti-aging phenomenon' is nothing short of a miracle.

Sold under the brand name AloeCure®, its ingredient was already backed by research showing its ability to neutralize acid levels and improve gastric discomfort.

But soon doctors started reporting some incredible results...

"With AloeCure, my patients started reporting, better sleep, more energy, stronger immune systems...even less stress and better skin, hair, and nails" explains Dr. Liza Leal; a leading integrative health specialist and company spokesperson.

AloeCure contains an active ingredient that helps improve digestion by acting as a natural digestive aid that improves the pH balance of your stomach.

Scientists now believe that having optimal acid levels could be a major contributing factor to a healthy immune system.

The daily allowance of AloeCure has shown to optimize the acid levels needed to manage healthy immune function which is why AloeCure is so effective.

It relieves other stressful issues related to GI health like discomfort, excess gas and bloating, and bathroom stress.

Now, backed with new scientific studies, AloeCure is being doctor recommended to help improve digestive function, help build better bones, support healthy joint function, and even help reduce the appearance of wrinkles - helping patients look and feel decades younger.

**FIX YOUR GUT & SUPPORT HEALTHY INFLAMMATION**

Since hitting the market, sales for AloeCure have taken off and there are some very good reasons why. To start, the clinical studies have been impressive.

Virtually all participants taking it reported stunning improvement in digestive symptoms including gastric discomfort.

Users can also experience higher energy levels and endurance, less discomfort and better sleep, healthier looking skin, hair, and nails.

An unhealthy gut can wreak havoc on the human body. Doctors say this is why AloeCure works on so many aspects of your health.

AloeCure's active ingredient is made from the famous polysaccharide compound found in Aloe Vera. It is both safe and healthy. There are also no known side effects.

Scientists believe that it helps improve digestive health by acting as a natural digestive aid that improves the pH balance of your stomach and helps the immune system maintain healthy functions.

Research has shown that acid imbalance contributes to premature aging and is why AloeCure seems to be so effective.

**EXCITING RESULTS FROM PATIENTS**

To date millions of bottles of AloeCure have been sold, and the community seeking non-pharma therapy for their GI health continues to grow.

According to Dr. Leal, her patients are absolutely thrilled with their results and are often shocked by how fast it works.

"For the first time in years, they are free from concerns about their digestion and almost every other aspect of their health," says Dr. Leal, "and I recommend it to everyone who wants to improve GI health before considering drugs, surgery, or OTC medications."

"All the problems with my stomach are gone. Completely gone. I can say AloeCure is a miracle. It’s a miracle." Another user turned spokesperson said, “I started to notice a difference because I was sleeping through the night and that was great. AloeCure does work for me. It’s made a huge difference."

With so much positive feedback, it’s easy to see why the community of believers is growing and sales for the new pill are soaring.

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND ALOECURE**

AloeCure is a gastric and digestive tonic. The pill is small. Easy to swallow. There are no harmful side effects and it does not require a prescription.

The active ingredient is a rare Aloe Vera component known as acemannan.

Millions spent in developing a proprietary process for extracting acemannan resulted in the highest quality, most bio-available levels of acemannan known to exist, and it’s made from organic aloe.

According to Dr. Leal and leading experts, improving the pH balance of your stomach and restoring gut health is the key to revitalizing your entire body.

When your digestive system isn’t healthy, it causes unwanted stress on your immune system and that might lead to unhealthy inflammation.

The recommended daily allowance of AloeCure has been proven to support digestive health, manage healthy immune function, and promote healthy inflammation response without side effects or drugs.

This would explain why so many users are experiencing impressive results so quickly.

**REVITALIZE YOUR ENTIRE BODY**

With daily use, AloeCure helps users look and feel decades younger and defend against premature aging that can make life hard.

By helping acid levels stay optimal and promoting gut health, AloeCure's ingredient supports joint health...helps skin appear smooth...maintains healthy cholesterol and oxidative stress...improves sleep and associated weight loss...and supports brain function by way of gut biome...without side effects or expense.

Readers can now support their energy, vitality, and youth regardless of age.

---

**Aloecure Taken Daily**

- Helps End Digestion Nightmares
- Reduces appearance of Wrinkles & Increases Elasticity
- Supports Healthy Immune System
- Supports Joint Health
- Promotes Healthy Inflammation Response
- Supports Bowel Health & Regularity

**HOW TO CLAIM A FREE SUPPLY TODAY**

This is an exclusive offer for our readers. And so, AloeCure is offering up to 3 FREE bottles and FREE S&H with their order. While supplies last you may also receive a FREE book on Aloe Vera health benefits.

A special hotline number has been created for all residents. This is the best way to try AloeCure with their 100% satisfaction guarantee, and any free gifts are yours to keep no matter what.

Starting at 5:00 AM today the phone lines will be open for 48 hours. All you have to do is call TOLL-FREE 1-800-746-2980, the special promotion will automatically be applied.

Important: Due to a surge in sales supplies are not guaranteed beyond the next 48 hours. Call now to not lose out on this offer.
Big money talks.
You can talk back.

The secret to making a difference is small. It’s one individual, believing. It’s one community, sharing. It’s one organization, listening. It’s one founder, creating. It’s one fund, caring. It’s thousands of investors coming together with a care that’s mutual in a fund that is too, ready to tell the big financial world, welcome to Domini, where the power of small is the greatness of all.

Invest in the Domini Impact Equity Fund℠

1.800.225.FUND | domini.com/nation | @DominiFunds

Before investing, consider the Fund’s investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses. Contact us for a prospectus containing this and other information. Read it carefully. The Domini Impact Equity Fund is not insured and is subject to certain risks including impact investing, portfolio management, information, market, recent events, and mid- to large-cap companies’ risks. You may lose money. Shares of the Domini Fund are only offered in the United States. DSIL Investment Services LLC, Distributor. 3/21