LITTLE RED WOLF AND THE BIG BAD HUMANS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is supposed to protect endangered species. So why did it let the wild red wolf population collapse?

JIMMY TOBIAS
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Stranded: A train sits at a station in Kordel, Germany on July 15, surrounded by floodwater from the Kyll River.

Features

14 Little Red Wolf and the Big Bad Humans
JIMMY TOBIAS
The government let this endangered species almost go extinct—but why?

4 Editorial
They Have No Shame
ELIE MYSTAL

5 Comment
Saving the Library
Defying long odds, New Yorkers rescue a vital public institution.
SCOTT SHERMAN

6 In Memoriam
Athan Theoharis
BErR TEDGER

7 Comment
The Final Frontier
Billions jet to space while the planet burns.
A.M. GITTITZ

22 Chain of Command
ZOE CARPENTER
The problem of sexual assault in the military has reached the boiling point.

26 Coastal Landfills Meet Rising Seas
DAVE LINDORFF
Along our shores sit hulking mountains of waste growing bigger by the day.

Columns

8 Back Talk
The collapse of the Dianne Morales campaign is a workplace lesson.
ALEXIS GRENELL

10 Morbid Symptoms
Like JFK before him, Joe Biden faces extremism in the military.
JEET HEER

12 The Score
A Brilliant Plan
MIKE KONCZAL

13 Deadline Poet
Milley Earns His Stars
CALVIN TRILLIN

45 Letters

46 Q&A
India Walton
JOHN NICHOLS

B&A

32 The Cornerstone
What is living and what is dead in the New Deal?
MICHAEL KAZIN

37 The Odyssey
Barry Jenkins’s The Underground Railroad.
STEPHEN KEARSE

40 The Scion
What happened to Andrew Cuomo?
RAIN LIPSITZ

42 Celebrate Good Times (poem)
FRANNY CHOI

43 A Violent End (poem)
BEN PURKERT

There are maybe 100,000 landfills across the US, half of them along the coasts.
They Have No Shame

Utah senator Mike Lee, a raving hypocrite who abandoned his stated principles to play lackey to Donald Trump, is fond of saying, “We’re not a democracy.” Lee thinks that’s a good thing. He’s written: “Democracy isn’t the objective: liberty, peace, and prosperity [sic] are.” When Lee says these things, he’s not merely playing the role of an overzealous high school social studies teacher trying to use “cool facts” to deflect the hail of spitballs. He’s also channeling the deepest fears of the slavers and colonists who wrote the Constitution. Those guys understood, as Lee does, that a true democracy, in which everybody gets to vote and participate in self-government, would be a threat to white male hegemony in the New World.

They’re not wrong. The founders and Lee and Jefferson Davis and Ron DeSantis—and all the other white guys who have stood against the right to vote throughout American history—are correct in their assessment that universal suffrage and equal representation are the surest ways to end white male political supremacy.

That is why the “right to vote” is not spelled out in the Constitution, and why voting rights are under near-constant attack by conservative forces. It’s almost certainly why Lee thought that HR 1, the bill designed to restore and secure voting rights, was “written in hell by the devil himself.”

It’s no accident that the current assault on voting rights started not with the failed reelection of Donald Trump but with the successful election of Barack Obama. After the 2010 midterm elections and the new US census that followed, Republicans promptly used the gains they’d made to go on a gerrymandering rampage. Their allies on the Supreme Court then used two cases—Shelby County v. Holder (2013) and Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee (2021)—to effectively neuter the Voting Rights Act.

Those moves set the stage for the legislative attacks on democracy that white conservatives have launched this year. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 17 states have enacted 28 new laws to restrict voting access. A total of 48 states have proposed a staggering 389 voter restriction bills, which run the gamut from obtuse (requiring notaries to sign absentee ballots), to cruel (denying water to voters waiting in line), to downright racist (excluding from early voting the times Black people get out of church).

The GOP’s current eruption of voter suppression is unrelenting and ferocious, but it’s not a new phenomenon. The solution to these cyclical outbursts has never been incremental change. Radical legislative interventions (the Voting Rights Act), new constitutional protections (the 15th and 19th amendments), and a judiciary willing to uphold them (Earl Warren protected the voting rights John Roberts is now destroying) have been some of the ways people have fought to limit the antidemocratic instincts of the white men in power.

But the current Democratic Party can’t take such bold action. Even though the mass of the party’s Congress members are willing to do whatever it takes, including nuking the filibuster, to ensure that Jim Crow–style voter restrictions never come back, they are all too easily hamstrung by a few timid white senators who seem to think that full and equal access to the rights of citizenship is just one option among many and that basic democratic rights should be put on the bargaining block in the name of bipartisanship.

In his “big speech” about voting rights in July, President Biden was reduced to making a moral appeal to the bigots in the minority. “We will be asking my Republican friends—in Congress, in states, in cities, in counties—to stand up, for God’s sake, and help prevent this concerted effort to undermine our elections and the sacred right to vote,” Biden said, adding: “Have you no shame?”

If that’s all he’s got, we’re going to lose. Because conservative white people have no shame. They’ve never had any. Throughout American history, they have shamelessly regarded the right to vote as the ultimate white privilege.

We are not a democracy. The question has always been whether enough white people even want one.
Saving the Library

Defying long odds, a broad coalition of New Yorkers worked for two years to rescue a vital public institution.

ook! Books! The Tired Old Mid-Manhattan Library Gets a Crisp New Identity.” This Curbed headline, for a glowing piece by Justin Davidson, referred to a new circulating library in central Manhattan, renamed the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library. Davidson celebrated the light-filled atrium, elegant staircase, rooftop terrace, and innovative children’s area. A famously decrepit and malodorous building has been utterly transformed.

A reader of Davidson’s piece could be forgiven for thinking that the Stavros Niarchos, a major branch of the New York Public Library, resulted from an act of benevolence by the NYPL trustees. That is hardly the case. The new library, which cost $200 million and occupies 180,000 square feet, owes its existence to two and a half years of tenacious activism against the NYPL, whose trustees, from 2007 to 2014, were bent on selling the property, on 40th Street and Fifth Avenue, to real estate developers.

How did one of the world’s greatest libraries get into the real estate business? It’s a sordid case study of how corporate logic has penetrated nonprofit institutions, including large, urban public library systems.

In 2007, on the advice of the corporate consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton (which was paid $2.7 million), the NYPL trustees quietly enacted a radical plan entailing, in the words of its then-COO, the “monetizing of non-core assets.” This amounted to selling NYPL property in central Manhattan so that the library could profit from the city’s real estate boom. Three popular libraries would be sold: the beloved Donnell on 53rd Street, the Mid-Manhattan, and the relatively new Science, Industry, and Business Library on Madison Avenue.

The trustees knew they had embarked on a risky course of action, one that would arouse public rage, so they proceeded in absolute secrecy. According to the minutes of one crucial trustee meeting in 2007 (a document that I obtained for my 2015 book Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library), the chair of the NYPL board, Catherine Marron, “reminded all in attendance of the importance of maintaining confidentiality.”

The secrecy held for four years as the plan crept forward. The Donnell—admired for its ambience, wide-ranging book collection, and performance space—was sold for a pittance; it is now a lackluster library in the basement of a luxury tower. But the 2008 recession made it difficult for the trustees to sell NYPL property, and in 2011 The Nation reported the full details of the Central Library Plan, under which the three libraries would be sold and the main building at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue would undergo a $300 million renovation entailing the demolition of its historic book stacks and the removal of 3 million books.

Two and a half years of controversy followed the Nation report. An indefatigable group of citizens came together to save the libraries—indeed, freelance writers, professors, architects, historic preservationists, bookworms, and retired librarians. Their strategy combined activism and persuasion. Among many other things, they picketed the trustee meetings and the library’s annual fund-raising dinner; they arranged for thousands of e-mails to be sent to elected officials in New York City; and they filed two lawsuits against the plan. Their shrewdness and determination paid off when they persuaded mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio in the summer of 2013 to oppose the NYPL’s plan, which he did at a noisy press conference on the steps of the 42nd Street Library. Alarmed by the energy of the activist campaign, NYPL president Tony Marx, at the height of the row that year, signed a $25,000 contract with a lobbying group to mobilize construction unions, Teamsters, and clergy on behalf of the trustees’ ambitions. It was doomed to fail. In May 2014, Mayor de Blasio honored his campaign promise and canceled the plan to sell the Mid-Manhattan and renovate the main building. Instead of selling the library at 40th and Fifth, Marx’s task would now be to repair it.

While the activists and the mayor had saved the Mid-Manhattan and halted the demolition of the core of the 42nd Street Library, much was still lost. Norman Foster, the architect hired to renovate the latter building, kept the $9 million he was paid for a project that was never undertaken. The NYPL admitted, when it was over, that it had squandered $18 million on its ill-fated plan, but the true figure is certainly much higher. It was an unconscionable waste of funds by a library system that is perennially underfunded and whose infrastructure and staffing needs are vast.

The NYPL wars of 2011–2014 were about saving the libraries and preserving the books on the shelves. When the trustees hatched their plan in 2007, they mistakenly assumed that e-books would replace actual books. That faith impelled them to hastily remove 3 million volumes from the 42nd Street facility; those books were never returned to the stacks under the Rose Reading Room. It is appropriate that the new Stavros Niarchos Library has 400,000 books.

But the NYPL wars were also about preserving democracy at the library. For much of its long history, the institution was democratic both in its internal structure and its relationship with the public. But under Paul LeClerc, who led it from 1993 to 2011, the library’s trustees behaved more like high-handed corporate executives than...
keepers of a public trust. When I reported on the NYPL story, a number of the wealthy and influential trustees who had executed the plan to sell the libraries—and who held elevated positions in banking and finance—refused to speak with me and would not even share their résumés. That behavior runs counter to the values of a great public library system.

The NYPL’s most influential trustee is Stephen Schwarzman, cofounder of the private equity firm Blackstone, who gave $100 million to the library in 2008. He was a fierce advocate of the plan to gut the main building, which is named after him, and sell the three nearby libraries. After de Blasio canceled the plan, the NYPL trustees’ powerful executive committee met to cast a pro forma vote to officially terminate it. Only one member abstained from that vote: Schwarzman.

I had an opportunity to speak with him in early 2014, following a trustee meeting at the 42nd Street location. The event had just concluded, and the trustees wereretreating to their cocktail hour in a grand old room. I asked him if the $9 million paid to the architect, Foster, had come from his $100 million gift. Schwarzman, a man famously enamored of micromanagement, looked down at his shoes and said, “I’m not sure how the library is spending my money.” He added, “Don’t be an adversary. The renovation [of the 42nd Street building] will be great.” The renovation soon went to the graveyard.

The NYPL has become somewhat more transparent since 2014, but it reflexively clings to secrecy. It has never shared the details of Schwarzman’s colossal gift and the ways in which it has been used. The pertinent question remains: How is the NYPL spending that $100 million? Today, New Yorkers have the midtown circulating library they deserve, the Stavros Niarchos; but they also deserve rudimentary information about the library’s most powerful benefactor.

The library’s trustees behaved more like high-handed executives than keepers of a public trust.

IN MEMORIAM/BETTY MEDSGER

Athan Theoharis (1936–2021)

A consultant to the Church Committee, he spent years investigating J. Edgar Hoover’s abuses.

Than Theoharis, a preeminent historian of the FBI, was a master at unlocking the secrets of J. Edgar Hoover and his bureau. His 21 books and scores of articles, most of them reports on Hoover’s massive surveillance efforts and his illegal secret operations that were designed to destroy individuals and organizations whose opinions he disliked, provide the most extensive record of Hoover’s near half-century reign of terror.

Theoharis died on July 3 in Syracuse, N.Y., from pneumonia. From 1969 until his retirement in 2006, he was a professor at Marquette University, to whose archives he donated his thousands of FBI files.

Nearly as important as Theoharis’s deep knowledge and insight into Hoover’s years as FBI director, from 1924 until his death in 1972, were the skills he developed to unearth the bureau’s secrets—skills he shared with generations of students and journalists.

With his Nation article as impressive evidence of his competence at researching documents in presidential libraries, Theoharis was hired as a consultant to the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, popularly known as the Church Committee.

The first documentary evidence of Hoover’s illegal operations, including the bureau’s extensive surveillance of activists, had come from files stolen from the FBI’s field office in Media, Penn., in March 1971, by a group of anti-war activists. A simple routing slip with the mysterious term “Cointelpro”—short for “Counter Intelligence Program”—turned out to be the most important file taken from the office. What that program involved was so shocking that it compelled Congress to investigate.

As a consultant to the Church Committee, Theoharis helped it uncover a host of illegal FBI operations. The voluminous research he continued from that point on was, in effect, a sustained expansion of the historical record of FBI abuses established by that committee.

In a 2013 interview with Johanna Hamilton and this writer, Theoharis reviewed some of the cruel history he’d helped uncover. He told us that after assessing many thousands of files that documented the bureau’s operations in those years, he had concluded that Hoover had destroyed what was supposed to be the essential purpose of the FBI: its law enforcement capacity. “I know of no case,” Theoharis said, “where there was a benefit to society…. It was harassment and destroy rather than investigate, prosecute, and convict.”

Betty Medsger, a former Washington Post reporter, is the author of The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover’s Secret FBI.
The Final Frontier

While the planet burns, billionaires are lining up for a private jet to the stars.

Welcome to the dawn of a new space age,” said billionaire Richard Branson after the successful launch and landing of his spaceship the VSS Unity. The test flight for Branson’s space tourism venture, Virgin Galactic, was indeed a fitting inauguration of this new, neoliberal space age, which substitutes corporate noblesse oblige for the cosmic vision of collective progress that space travel once represented.

With this test run completed, more people may now be able to experience suborbital spaceflights. Fellow billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos have lined up for their own 11 minutes of heaven, the result of decades of work, billions in investment, and endless campaigns portraying their respective vanity NASA clones, SpaceX and Blue Origin, as laying the groundwork for humanity’s salvation. Their sojourns, however, bear more resemblance to extreme tourism, like skydiving or zero-gravity flights, than to the lunar commuter jets of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Despite the technical innovation of these spaceplanes, the voyages themselves fail to surpass even that of the earliest cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, a former steelworker who traveled 203 miles above the surface of the planet to complete a full orbit of it in 1961. Sixty years later, Branson’s hour-long flight reached a peak altitude of 53 miles, yielding a brief weightless glimpse of Earth’s curvature. But more galling than the footage of his barrel rolls was his dedication of the flight to a new generation of aspiring astronauts, now potential Virgin Galactic customers. Gagarin, on the other hand, returned stunned by the beauty of our fragile planet, with a determination to “preserve and increase this beauty, not destroy it!”

These luxury flights also represent a reversal of American astronaut Neil Armstrong’s declaration that space travel was in the interest of all mankind. Armstrong’s words not only articulated the sentiment of many of the 650 million people who watched his first steps on the moon—the single most unifying event in human history—but of international law. The 1967 United Nations–ratified Outer Space Treaty legislated that “exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind.” That the space race was a Cold War proxy did not deflate the hope that the US and USSR flags carried to the moon—the single most unifying event in human history—but of innumerable workers, and everyone else immiserated by the barbarity of the current order. There is only one way to escape.

Yet even billionaires are forced to use the language of collective that space travel, both scientific and science-fictional, has always carried with it. Bezos’s Blue Origin claims a larger vision of “millions of people...living and working in space to benefit Earth.” Branson says Virgin Galactic, whose flights currently start at $200,000 a ticket, will “open space to everybody.” While SpaceX promotes Mars colonization as having the potential to make humanity a “multiplanetary species,” Musk admitted in an interview with Joe Rogan that “if this species is going to survive, we kind of have to escape.”

This nihilistic sentiment inadvertently reveals the anxieties of the one percent. We are already in an era of civilizational catastrophe fueled by political, economic, and environmental instability. Elite schemes of private islands and apocalypse bunkers no longer seem adequate to repel the inevitable billions of climate and war refugees, unemployed and precarious workers, and everyone else immiserated by the barbarity of the current order. There is only one way left to run: up.

Ironically, there are few better examples of how human cooperation can overcome such seemingly impossible challenges than the original space race. At its peak, those who made it into orbit reported a common epiphany upon seeing the entirety of Earth: that we must unify as a species to protect our only home. Half a century later, the world’s richest men fancy themselves astronauts, rendering that vantage point just another commodity.
**Back Talk**
Alexis Grenell

**Bosses Aren’t Family**

Morales campaign staffers wanted something that no workplace could—or should—ever give.

The complete meltdown of Dianne Morales’s New York City mayoral campaign was like a live-action parody of Tolstoy’s opening line from Anna Karenina: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Family really shouldn’t have had anything to do with it, but it sprang to mind precisely because Morales herself invoked the F-word in one of her many multi-paragraph servings of BS: “I sat with campaign staff—many of whom I consider family—for hours to listen to concerns on a myriad of issues.” Anytime someone likens the employment relationship to a family, it should set off alarm bells. Seeing a supposedly anti-capitalist campaign engage in rhetorical manipulations long derided as the tools of the oppressor confirmed that it was all a farce.

Put simply: You don’t have to pay your family. Domestic workers—the very Black and brown immigrant women Morales repeatedly claimed to represent—have specifically rejected that framing because it’s how their employers have historically denied them formal workplace protections.

As Sarah Jaffe, the author of Work Won’t Love You Back, explains, “The history of the family is the history of women’s unpaid work, so the idea of ‘work is like a family’ is saying that it’s not real work. It’s extraneous. Something you do for love, not money.” Big Tech’s variation on this ploy offers tempting pay but positions work such that it supplants domestic life itself: Employees get all their needs met on the job—laundry, meals, counseling, even a social life. And like the language that’s become endemic to progressive campaigns—where every e-mail seems to end with “Join our movement!”—everyone from conventional corporate overlords to grassroots upstarts is trying to foster a higher purpose in order to extract more time and devotion from willing hands. The goal is total enmeshment, so that employees derive their entire sense of worth from work.

In Morales’s case, she used movement-speak to avoid paying her staff appropriately, leveraging her identity as an Afro-Latina running a highly dysfunctional one. There’s no doubt that campaigns attract passionate people who find fellowship and community around a common purpose. But things took a particularly frenzied turn here: Campaign staffers appeared to experience personal betrayals driven by expectations well beyond the limits of work. This emotional intensification shows how social-media-inflected affects have distorted reality, and also perhaps reflects a broader need for something we can’t and shouldn’t get from our employer. At the risk of extending the metaphor too far, the diagnostic literature offers some (very conditional) insights into how the campaign took on a family dynamic.

The psychiatrist Murray Bowen, best known for his family-systems theory framework, first described his concept of “fusion” in 1978: Those who don’t achieve sufficient self-differentiation from their family of origin can develop maladaptive relationships with others. A “fused” subject, still soldered to their family, is prone to recreating unresolved dynamics at work, failing to establish appropriate boundaries and expectations, and finding themselves less capable of coping with conflict. Such a person becomes preoccupied with acceptance and rejection.

We generally recognize this as immaturity, but the conventions of social media have exploded the tendency into a full-blown pathology. In a social feed, the experience of politics is one long stream of consciousness, even public therapy, with some performative “shitposting” to signal passion, but mostly self-righteousness. The algorithms are quite literally

“The idea of ‘work is like a family’ is saying that it’s not real work.... Something you do for love, not money.”
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Over 150 years of truth-telling journalism
calibrated to play to our most extreme feelings, and they condition a charged response to any number of scenarios that could be managed with less intensity in real life. Because candidates couldn’t campaign in person this past year, politics for many young people went fully digital, merging—fusing?—with the very online existence that already characterized much of the left. Your politics is now an extension of your personality, fully branded on Twitter with your chosen campaign’s colors. The May- orales Union logo, with its inverse gradient of the candidate’s once-ubiquitous flaming sunrise, immediately signaled a new brand identity.

In poaching progressive rhetoric for a personal image-building exercise aimed at eager acolytes in search of a collective experience, Morales only proved the value of good branding over actual substance.

Some staffers fled to the Maya Wiley campaign. Although she lacked Morales’s Pied Piper appeal, Wiley offered something better: paid time off, full health benefits, an employee handbook, and standardized salaries for staff at the same level. This was never something she boasted about or wore as a badge of honor, because it’s, quite simply, basic.

But if you believed the Twitterati, Wiley wasn’t the real progressive. The Internet gods are false, indeed.

The Department of Justice arrested approximately 500 people for participating in the January 6 insurrection, at least 45 of whom were veterans or active-duty soldiers. Of those 45, a quarter belonged to extremist groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. Responding to the military involvement in January 6, Lloyd Austin, Biden’s secretary of defense, has made cracking down on right-wing extremism in the ranks a priority, pushing for an updating of the definition of extremism.

The extent of insurrectionist sentiment was further underlined in June when Michael Flynn, a retired general and onetime national security adviser under Donald Trump, explicitly called for a Myanmar-style military coup. After complaints, Flynn walked back his remarks. In May, a letter signed by more than 120 retired generals and admirals cast doubt on the 2020 election and accused the Biden administration of pushing the United States toward a “Marxist form of tyrannical government.”

Since March, right-wing agitators like Tucker Carlson of Fox News have been deriding what they call the “woke military.” This new propaganda line is best understood as an attempt to blunt Biden’s efforts to weed out right-wing extremists in the military.

The spectacle of a liberal Catholic president butting heads with reactionary military men and veterans echoes the Kennedy presidency. The bipartisan Cold War consensus had created an opening for the far right to use extremist anti-communism as an entry point to the military rank and file. In 1960 a scandal erupted when an Air Force manual accused the National Council of Churches—a mainstream Protestant organization—of being riddled with Reds. The next year, a similar story emerged about Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker teaching troops that Harry Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt were “definitely pink” and journalists Edward R. Murrow and Walter Lippmann (both centrist liberals) were “confirmed communists.”

Walker wasn’t the only right-wing general in the military at the time. The historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who served as Kennedy’s aide, records that military leaders “hunted and fished with right-wing politicians, supplied them aircraft for trips home and showed up at their receptions. The alliance between the military and the right disturbed the Kennedys.”

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With his direct attacks on Democratic politicians, Walker had gone too far. Kennedy cashiered the general, who immediately became an openly racist agitator, helping foment an anti-civil-rights riot in Mississippi in 1962 that resulted in two people dead and 300 injured. In a speech before the riot, Walker called for white Mississippians to “rally to the cause of freedom in righteous indignation, violent vocal protest, and bitter silence under the flag of Mississippi at the use of Federal troops.”

Though Walker quickly recanted these words, Attorney General Robert Kennedy had him arrested for insurrection. But as the historian Paul Matzko, writing in The Washington Post, notes, “The administration then went too far. The Justice Department claimed, with no substantiation, that ‘it held some doubt as to General Walker’s competence to stand trial,’ and had him placed in isolation in a maximum-security ward at a federal medical center for a 90-day psychiatric evaluation. After protest from the ACLU and the noted psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, the Justice Department freed Walker after five days.” With this overstep, the Kennedy administration turned Walker into a martyr and enhanced the prestige of this dangerous veteran.

John F. Kennedy’s response to military insurrectionists offers mixed lessons. His political response, including the deft use of cultural messaging, was successful. In a much-noted speech, Kennedy warned of extremists looking for a “man on horseback.” He also admired the novel Seven Days in May (1962), by Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II, about a faction in the Pentagon trying to overthrow a liberal president.

“It’s possible,” Kennedy said privately, musing about what would unfold if there were more failures like the botched invasion of Cuba. “It could happen in this country.” He also gave his imprimatur to the novel by allowing the director John Frankenheimer to film scenes at the White House for the Hollywood adaptation. (The movie was released in 1964, after Kennedy’s assassination.) In effect, the political strategy was to foreclose a coup by calling attention to the dangers.

Walter Reuther, the head of the United Auto Workers, wrote an extensive memo with his brother Victor that guided the responses of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Some of the Reuthers’ advice, notably using the IRS to go after right-wing groups, was of dubious constitutionality, an overreaction similar to the attempt to confine Walker to an asylum. But as Matzko notes in his fine book The Radio Right, the Reuther memo also “called for toning down anti-Communist rhetoric by Democrats, [who] had gotten used to a kind of rhetorical arms race with Republicans in the McCarthy era.” This is the most crucial lesson of Kennedy’s run-in with the reactionary military. Just as the Cold War consensus created the hothouse environment in which Strangelovian lunatics like Walker could flourish, so the Michael Flyyns of our own time are a product of the Global War on Terrorism, which has allowed all sorts of unhinged conspiracy theorists a path to power—not least of them the former president.

Extremism in the military is a political problem first and foremost and a law enforcement problem only secondarily. To solve the political problem, Biden has to stand firmly behind anti-racist education in the armed forces (now attacked by the right-wing media as “critical race theory”), be ready to sack any uniformed officer who steps out of line—and constantly and loudly remind the military that its oath is to the Constitution and not to any political faction.
The economy is bouncing back. The announcement of 850,000 new jobs in June adds to other signs that people are aggressively looking for work and that wages are going up. This recovery is different from the anemic growth that followed the Great Recession, thanks to the $1.9 trillion in spending allocated in the Biden administration’s American Rescue Plan. The legislation expanded aid to states and municipalities, extended unemployment insurance benefits, sent people $1,400 checks, and far more. The plan is expected to get us back to the country’s pre-pandemic employment levels by the end of 2022.

The success of the American Rescue Plan is such that it’s already receiving blowback. The criticisms, however, often contradict one another. Some detractors argue that the money was too front-loaded and will be spent too fast, while others say that too many people benefited and that the funds will largely be saved. It is difficult for both of these claims to be true, but the arguments will blur and fuel attacks that the government shelled out too much. Yet it’s important to remember the plan’s political brilliance: By eliminating the need to go back and secure more funding later, the American Rescue Plan took the question of recovery off the table, so that the Democrats can focus now on passing large-scale economic reforms.

This is where it contrasts the most with President Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which was too small and a mix of short- and long-term investment efforts. Many in the Obama administration assumed they’d be able to go back and pass an additional stimulus bill if necessary. But high unemployment and weak job growth intensified discontent with the Democratic Party, and austerity programs imposed by the states offset the federal response. The Democratic Party had to split its priorities between transformative change and simply getting the economy going again. Centrists and Republicans, in turn, used their power to block bills that would increase temporary spending as leverage to demand long-term cuts and austerity.

The American Rescue Plan does the opposite. By spending at the scale of the problem, it takes pressure off the tense political negotiations that are consuming the Senate. As Jake Blumgart, a reporter at Governing, noted, this has left the Democrats free to focus on trying to overhaul the economy for the future. No one knows what will happen in the Senate, or whether the administration will be able to spend enough to address the long-term problems we face. But the mere fact that President Biden and the Democratic leadership can attempt to secure trillions of dollars for these priorities without having to debate how to address the unemployment rate is a massive political win. To the extent that the Democrats—and Joe Biden—accomplish anything, addressing stimulus spending first will have played a central role.

In this sense, the most obvious political comparison is to another Democratic senator turned president, Lyndon B. Johnson. Taking office after John F. Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson wanted to push for a major civil rights bill. But he had seen how, for decades, the racist Southern Democrats in the Senate had kept bills from passing whenever it seemed as if civil rights legislation might move. And Johnson also needed a tax plan to boost the economy and cement the budget. As LBJ biographer Robert Caro described the situation, the “most important hostage being held to stop the civil rights bill was of course [Johnson’s] tax cut bill.”

This had happened with Kennedy’s tax plan as well. As vice president, Johnson had tried to warn him, advising Kennedy to get his bills “down in the storm cellar and get it locked and key, and then...I’d make my attack” on civil rights.

Johnson, using his mastery of Senate rules and the relationships he’d built over the years, persuaded the conservative Virginia Democrat Harry Byrd, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, to let the tax bill pass in early 1964. To do so, he had to accept a smaller budget than he’d wanted. But Johnson was able to then clear the way for a showdown over the Civil Rights Act.

Unlike Johnson’s tax plan, the American Rescue Plan doesn’t sell anything short. It spends enough to get the economy back on track, and the investments in climate, care work, and the extension of child allowances being considered this summer would help sustain the recovery. But the fact that we are even in this position speaks to the genius of putting full employment priorities first.

Mike Konczal
SNAPSHOT/Matias Delacroix

After the Assassination

Members of the press surround supporters of the slain Haitian President Jovenel Moïse as they bring flowers, cigars, and candles to a memorial outside the Presidential Palace in Port-au-Prince on July 14. A week earlier, a squad of gunmen raided the president’s compound, killing Moïse in a hail of gunfire and wounding his wife. The assassination came amid escalating violence in the country.

By the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93K</td>
<td>Estimated number of Americans who died of a drug overdose in 2020, a 30 percent increase over 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>4x</td>
<td>Number of times more likely a Black man in Missouri is to die of a drug overdose than a white person</td>
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<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Approximate increase in drug overdose deaths in 2020 among Black men in Massachusetts</td>
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<tr>
<td>50x</td>
<td>Number of times more potent the prescription pain-killer fentanyl is than heroin</td>
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<tr>
<td>$4.5B</td>
<td>Minimum amount that Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of OxyContin, is required to pay out in the most recently settled case of the opioid crisis</td>
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Milley Earns His Stars

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared to thwart any coup attempt by Trump.

—As reported by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker in I Alone Can Fix It

A presidential coup! Did that seem silly?

Well not, apparently, to Mark A. Milley,

Who braced his troops because of thinking, “Will he?”

So that’s how grave this coup threat was. Yes, really.

—Gloria Oladipo
The US Fish and Wildlife Service is supposed to protect endangered species. So why did it let the wild red wolf population collapse?

JIMMY TOBIAS

LITTLE RED WOLF AND THE BIG BAD HUMANS
THE KILLING OF RED WOLF 11768F WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE BAD TIMES FOR THIS COUNTRY’S MOST CRITICALLY ENDANGERED CANID. IT WAS MID-2015, AND 11768F WAS A SIX-YEAR-OLD Matriarch With a Mate and a Large Family. She’d Already Given Birth Several Times Before, and the Evidence Suggests She May Have Been Caring for More Newborns in the Wet Coastal Forests That Flourish Near North Carolina’s Outer Banks. She and Her Family Were Supposed to Be Safe, Thanks to the Strong Protections of the Endangered Species Act, Which Makes It a Crime to Harm or Harass Listed Animals Like Red Wolves. But Then, in a Foreshadowing of Events to Follow, the Federal Government Issued Her Death Warrant: It Gave a Private Landowner Permission to Gun Her Down. By Late June, She Was Dead. She Was the First-Ever Federally Listed Red Wolf Shot and Killed by a Private Individual with Explicit Government Consent.

“The Cause of Death in This Well-Nourished Adult Female Red Wolf Was Multiple Shotgun Wounds,” a Government Autopsy, Obtained by The Nation, Determined. If She Did Have a Batch of New Babies, No One Knows What Happened to Them.


The Red Wolf Program Offered Hope That These Keen Animals, With Their Strong Family Bonds and Fascinating Social Behaviors, Might Have a Future on this Continent.


But It Shouldn’t Be a Big Surprise. The Story of the Red Wolf Comes With a Broader Context: It Is Emblematic of an FWS That Is Increasingly Loath to Govern, All Too Often Folding Under Pressure From Powerful Interests. Indeed, Despite the Agency’s Duty to Protect and Recover Imperiled Species, Its Top Leaders Sometimes Appeared Determined to Turn Their Back on the Endangered Species Act When Political Expediency Suggests It. And When It Comes to Wild Wolves, the Politics Are Particularly Treacherous.

For Reasons Ranging From the Obvious to the Almost Mystical, the Agriculture Industry, Certain Well-Heeled Hunting Groups, and the Lawmakers Who Represent Them Have Long Harbored a Profound Antipathy Toward These Animals. Collectively, These Groups and Others Like Them Have Pushed an Anti-Wolf Agenda That Has Increasingly Taken on the Tones of a Broader Culture War—One That Sees Many Wildlife Conservation Programs as the Embodiment of Overzealous Environmental Regulation and Creeping Government Tyranny. Wild Red Wolves Have Been Some of the Most Significant Casualties to Date, But the Trouble Won’t Stop With Them.

Within the United States, Red Wolves Are Among the Roughly 2,300 Species Granted Protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Growing Extinction Crisis, Which Threatens as Many As 1 Million Species Globally, Means That Many More Plants and Animals Will Need Federal Protection in the Years to Come. It Also Means That Bold Efforts Will Be Required to Reverse Their Declining Numbers. If the Government Is Already Failing to Stand Up for Iconic Creatures Like Wolves, If It Is Already Failing to Hold the Line Against Anti-Conservation Sentiment, How Will It Handle the Daunting Future?
Fourteen of the animals became the founding members of a captive breeding program that would slowly rebuild the red wolf population.

Born to be wild: A very young red wolf near Manteo, N.C.

result of a decades-long campaign in which the federal government, bounty hunters, and American settlers trapped, shot, poisoned, and otherwise annihilated wild canids wherever they could find them. The killing was driven in part by an almost mythic fear of wolves, one that disparaged them as bloodthirsty beasts intent on harming humans and gobbling up livestock and wildlife. Barry Lopez, in his book Of Wolves and Men, describes this slaughter as an “American pogrom” in which untold numbers of wolves perished. Red wolves were among them.

Joey Hinton, a red wolf expert with a doctorate in wildlife ecology, told me that in the late 1920s and early ’30s, “there were probably several thousand red wolves killed in east Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana,” a killing spree that “blew a big hole” in one of the species’ last strongholds. Red wolves were eradicated earlier in other probable parts of their range, like New York and New England, “long before anyone was paying attention.”

What delivered the red wolf, Canis rufus, from this kind of killing was one law: the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The federal government, facing rising public concern about environmental degradation, decided to save wolves. The ESA was the legal tool that empowered the feds to embark on that redemptive effort.

In 1975, the FWS initiated a bold gambit to revive the red wolf’s depleted gene pool. The agency sent its trappers into the species’ last refuge, along the southern stretches of the Louisiana-Texas border, and rounded up every wild red wolf it could find. The trappers captured more than 400 animals, but only a few were true red wolves. Fourteen of the animals became the founding members of a captive breeding program that would slowly rebuild the red wolf population. Those special 14 are the Adams and Eves of the species: Every red wolf alive today is their direct descendant.

The grand experiment took its next tentative step in 1987, when, under the authority of the ESA, the agency released what it called a “non-essential experimental population” of eight wolves into the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. The habitat there was thought to be ideal—forested, wet, relatively untrammeled, and with plenty of deer and small game for the wolves to live off. The refuge itself was surrounded by farmland, agrarian communities, and a few larger towns. Five counties in the region were designated as the red wolf recovery area.

Between 1987 and 2014, the FWS released 134 wolves into Alligator River or other nearby wildlife refuges. It also initiated a program to sterilize the region’s growing coyote population, which threatened to dilute the red wolf’s fragile gene pool through interbreeding. With a team of field biologists and about $1 million a year in funding, the program took off. In 2007, the FWS declared that the wild wolf population had climbed to “nearly 130 individuals.” It deemed the species “restored” and called the effort “remarkably successful.”

“It was phenomenal,” says Mike Bryant, an FWS veteran who served as the project leader for the red wolf program from 1996 to 2014. “A phenomenal success.”

But a backlash was bearing down on the reintroduction effort. By the early 2010s, the accomplishments that had attended the program’s early days were about to be torn apart.

Hyde County is one of the five that fall within the red wolf recovery area. Rural and remote, it is a landscape of large farms and marshy forests, home to some 5,000 people in a part of the country renowned for its barrier islands and bear hunting.

On a warm day in late winter, I traveled south from the town of Manteo to meet a farmer whose family has lived in Hyde County for generations. He met me outside a complex of barns and sheds, where he keeps the hulking machinery he uses to raise grains in the region’s fertile soil. There were once many more farming families like his in the county, but low commodity prices and high interest rates in the 1980s drove a large share of small operators out of business. Most of the remaining farmers in the area grow crops on thousands of acres with the help of large tractors, herbicides, and a combination of federal crop insurance and other farm subsidies. The community, he said, has changed too. Where once there were many schools and stores, now there are just a few. Still, it’s a tight-knit place where “everybody knows everybody.”

The farmer, in his 60s, asked that his name not be used in this article for fear that his neighbors might look askance at his moderate views on red wolves. He is not opposed to their reintroduction per se—in fact, he expressed...
a certain tolerance for the animals—but he said that the federal government has gone about it all wrong and soured many locals on the issue.

The trouble began in earnest, he believes, in 1990. The red wolf reintroduction program had been running for several years, and the wolf population had spread from Alligator River into the surrounding landscape, where the FWS was working with some cooperative landowners. One day in October of that year, a farmer shot and killed a red wolf on his land because, he claimed in a court filing, he feared that the animal would threaten his livestock. The feds prosecuted him for the killing, and he pleaded guilty. The incident stirred up animosity in the community.

“That really put a bad taste in all the landowners’ mouths around here,” said the farmer I interviewed. It also led to a lawsuit by landowners and two counties challenging the authority of the federal government to limit the killing of red wolves on private land. The challenge failed.

Another controversy emerged in 2013, when conservation groups sued in federal court to reverse a decision by local government that allowed permissive coyote hunting practices in the five-county recovery area, including nighttime hunts. The suit argued that too many red wolves were being killed by hunters who mistook them for their smaller canine cousins. The conservationists ultimately settled with the North Carolina authorities, resulting in an agreement that outlawed nighttime coyote hunts, among other measures. Such restrictions fueled a growing fear that the red wolf program posed a danger to property rights.

Conflict over such incidents comes with the territory. The Endangered Species Act is premised on the idea that imperiled species have a right to survive and even thrive that rises above the imperatives of commerce, the whims of personal preference, and the ambitions of influential interests. That central vision is implemented by prohibitions on the killing of protected species and the destruction of their habitat—and those prohibitions can apply to private lands. Such restraints often attract the ire of property holders, notwithstanding the fact that wild animals in North America are generally held in public trust. No individual has a right to do to wild animals as they please.

How widespread were the resentments simmering in the five-county reintroduction area? Even now it is unclear. The farmer I spoke with said that “the majority of the landowners and probably residents in general are not too crazy about [red wolf reintroduction],” though he also said most people probably don’t think about red wolves much at all. On the other hand, Suzanne Agan, an environmental science instructor at Kennesaw State University, conducted a 400-person survey and additional interviews in the region in 2018 and found that “pluralities or majorities liked red wolves, supported their restoration, and disliked ‘policy that would limit red wolf protections.’”

The federal government, given time and additional resources, might have found a way to address the concerns of local residents in a manner that preserved the red wolf program. But by 2013, a group of hard-core opponents had embarked on an effort to effectively end it outright. A man named Jett Ferebee was a prominent figure in this campaign. A real estate developer, bank board member, and investor from Greenville, he owned a large chunk of property within the recovery area. Public records show that he was not happy about the program—not happy at all—and he proved capable of causing major migraines for the feds.

Jett Ferebee is a trim, middle-aged man with graying hair, a soft Southern accent, and a penchant for hunting. With a history of donations to state Republicans, he helped amplify the conflict over wolves in eastern North Carolina, where his property sits near a string of federal wildlife refuges. He and other opponents of the red wolf program accused the FWS of fraud, of wasting taxpayer money, and of operating illegally. Among other things, they believed the agency had exceeded its authority by releasing as many red wolves as it did into the wild. They relied against the recovery experiment on an Internet message board that grew to nearly 200 pages. “We are fighting an international pro wolf, anti hunting movement guys,” Ferebee proclaimed on the forum. A few days later he wrote: “The entire Red Wolf program has been kept afloat through deception. Plain and simple.”

At one point, the conservative entertainer Ted Nugent broadcast these complaints to his millions of Facebook followers, denouncing the “dreaded USFWS punks.” At another point, a large billboard was erected on a local thruway that rebuked the FWS as a “lying neighbor nobody should trust.” (It’s unclear who was behind the billboard.) Ferebee sent out communiqués complaining about the red wolf recovery program to a large
e-mail list. He provided testimony to Congress against it. Over the years, he repeatedly called for its termination. During this time, members of the Ferebee family also donated many thousands of dollars to Republican causes, including to the campaign of North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis, who would become an opponent of the program. Above all, Ferebee demanded that the FWS remove red wolves from his property.

According to government records, at least 14 wolves were trapped on Ferebee’s property by the FWS or private operators between 2001 and 2014. Most were removed and reintroduced elsewhere, but at least one died during the trapping efforts and two were later euthanized. Ferebee’s opposition to the program was summarized neatly in a 2016 local news headline: “One man can fight the federal bureaucracy!” Ferebee did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Republicans won full control of North Carolina in 2013, and critics of the red wolf program found new allies at the highest levels of state government, which aggressively turned against the program. In 2015, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission passed resolutions calling for the FWS to declare red wolves extinct in the wild and end the reintroduction efforts. More significant, it was around this time that opponents of red wolf reintroduction found sympathizers among the FWS leadership, federal officials who were apparently willing to make dramatic changes to the program to appease its critics. These changes would soon send the world’s last wild red wolf population into a drastic decline.

A day before I met the Hyde County farmer, I sat in the passenger seat of a Subaru with Ron Sutherland and his two kids as we traversed the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in search of red wolves. It’s rare to see the wolves in the wild these days—the vast majority of those that are still alive are confined in zoos and other facilities, where they are bred and managed in a manner that will preserve their gene pool. Still, we spent hours driving back and forth, stopping, scoping, hoping we might catch a glimpse of this endangered predator.

Sutherland is a large man with pale eyes, fair hair, and a doctorate in environmental science and policy. He has spent most of the past decade advocating for red wolves as a staffer at the Wildlands Network, a conservation organization. As we meandered around a low-lying landscape of open fields and damp groves, he told me about the dismantling of the red wolf program. He described a small group of key FWS officials who he believes “collapsed” the program and drained it of institutional knowledge under pressure from opponents.

One official whose name surfaced many times during the course of reporting this story was Leo Miranda. He is now one of the FWS’s highest-ranking leaders. According to court records submitted by conservation groups, Miranda first interacted with Ferebee in 2013, when Ferebee sent him and others an e-mail demanding that the wolves be removed from his property. At the time, Miranda was an assistant director of the FWS’s southeastern region, an Atlanta-based position that put him in charge of the red wolf program. On numerous occasions, Ferebee contacted Miranda to ask for wolf removal, and eventually he asked for something more: He requested that the FWS issue him a “lethal take” permit, which would allow Ferebee or a designated agent to trap or shoot the wolves themselves.
Such a permit had never been issued to a private individual in the history of the program. Under FWS regulations, the agency is entitled to issue lethal take permits to private landowners to kill wolves, but only after efforts by FWS personnel to capture the wolves in question have been abandoned. Miranda wanted to give Ferebee his permit, but he was initially dissuaded, it seems, by local staff, who told him that issuing the permit could “greatly affect our abilities to conserve the red wolf.” By February 2014, however, Miranda had decided to go ahead: He personally issued that first lethal take authorization. It was a landmark moment.

A precedent had now been set. In June 2014, Ferebee posted an example of a lethal take permit request on the Internet message board he frequented, writing, “As USFWS actions continue to create enemies throughout eastern NC… I believe the below action/letter will become contagious.” Indeed, by October 2014, local opponents of the red wolf program had flooded the FWS with more than 400 lethal take permit requests, according to court records. All of this ferment preceded the death of wolf 11768F, the mother wolf gunned down in the summer of 2015 after the FWS issued another permit, this time to an anonymous private landowner.

The agency had been willing to try to remove wolves from the anonymous landowner’s property upon his request. But the landowner refused to give the FWS access, which was apparently all it took for the agency to back down. The landowner received permission to take a wolf on his land, and a couple of weeks later, wolf 11768F was shot dead.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Miranda met with Ferebee on several occasions. He traveled from his office in Atlanta to North Carolina and toured Ferebee’s property, and they remained in contact as recently as 2020. Records I obtained show that in February of that year, Miranda personally reached out to FWS staffers to retrieve documents in response to a request Ferebee had made under the Freedom of Information Act. “I will take care of that tomorrow or early next week,” he wrote Ferebee in regard to his FOIA request. In a written statement, the FWS acknowledged Miranda’s meetings with Ferebee, writing that “FWS officials often meet with stakeholders to better understand their positions.” It added that “they are not in regular contact.”

In the end, the FWS took a hammer to the red wolf program. David Rabon, the recovery coordinator for the program, says the agency removed him from the job and offered him a new gig in a different city. Not wanting to uproot his family, he declined the position and was “terminated” in January 2015 after 15 years with the agency. He believes Miranda had a direct role in his removal. The FWS declined to comment on personnel matters.

In 2015, the agency halted its coyote control efforts in the recovery area. In June of that year, the FWS announced that it would suspend the release of captive red wolves into the wild pending an examination of the program. According to a deposition, Miranda recommended the latter action to his superior, despite some disension from field staffers. By the fall of 2015, he and other agency leaders seem to have bought into the argument, long advanced by critics, that the continued release of red wolves into the wild was a violation of regulations that the agency had promulgated in 1995 to support wolf recovery.

Though elements of the red wolf program had been validated in case law and had received approval from the Department of the Interior’s legal division, Mike Bryant, the program’s former project leader, told me that Miranda called him up to tell him that the reintroduction effort “might be illegal.”

“I said, ‘What?’” Bryant recalls. “And that is when I called my boss and said, ‘I have never been told I’ve done anything illegal in my career. Something is changing radically.’” After nearly two decades leading the red wolf program, he stepped down from his role in frustration.

“At that time, we were concerned that we lacked explicit authority to release additional wolves,” said the FWS in a written statement explaining its decisions concerning the red wolf program. “We were, and are still, concerned about ensuring the health of the captive population in order to provide for future reintroductions. We were also concerned about landowner support. These concerns culminated in a recommendation to suspend releases.”

Starting in 2015 and for the next five years, the FWS refused to release captive individuals into the wild, and the population started to plummet. Some wolves were hit by cars or died naturally, but mostly they were shot by either errant hunters or outright poachers. In a peer-reviewed study, researchers at Antioch University and the University of Wisconsin estimated that 69 red wolves were shot, whether intentionally or accidentally, between 2009 and 2018. Another 30 vanished.

While the program fizzled and the red wolf population dwindled, powerful political opponents descended like condors on a carcass. Senator Tillis helped lead the flock. He repeatedly called for an end to the red wolf program, describing it as a “failure” and denouncing the FWS as an agency with “no credibility.”

The Trump administration, meanwhile, set about rewriting the regulations that govern the red wolf.
program, hoping to radically reduce its mandate and confine the last remaining animals to federal land. It did not complete the job, however, before being booted from office.

Why did all this happen? Dan Ashe, who was the director of the FWS for much of the Obama administration and oversaw its initial pullback from the program, offers an explanation: “There were just a whole series of events that were going on in and around the red wolf recovery program that warranted taking a look at whether we could be successful with the red wolf given the resources available to us and given the political environment within North Carolina,” an environment he describes as “hostile.”

The decision to end reintroductions, stop coyote control, and more was not a “political decision,” but it did have “political dimensions to it,” he continues. It was a “fully vetted, informed policy decision.”

“Look, I think the approach that was taken was the correct approach,” he says. “Is it regrettable? Yes, it is regrettable.” It was also, he adds, “a bit of a tragedy.”

Had the FWS stood its ground, things might be very different today. North Carolina’s politics have once again shifted. In 2019, Governor Roy Cooper sent a letter to the Department of the Interior voicing his support for red wolves and arguing that “changes in management strategies over the last several years have diminished the wild population to a dangerous level.” No wolf pups were born in the recovery area in 2019 or 2020.

This “regrettable” saga has transported the wild wolf population back to where it was when the program began, effectively erasing three decades and millions of dollars’ worth of reintroduction work. As we drove through the Alligator River refuge, still searching for our quarry, Ron Sutherland put it plainly: “We are somewhere between 10 and 15 heartbeats away from having no more red wolves left in the wild.”

The US Fish and Wildlife Service’s faltering commitment to enforcing the Endangered Species Act is not confined to red wolves. Look south to Florida, where the agency has permitted the destruction of tens of thousands of acres of endangered panther habitat in recent decades. Or look west to California, where the agency’s leadership recently (and perhaps illegally) greenlighted a federal irrigation plan that benefits Big Agriculture but poses a serious threat to endangered and threatened fish. The agency almost never deploys its most powerful regulatory tool, the “jeopardy opinion,” which enables it to block some damaging developments. It resists listing many kinds of animals as endangered, from the wolverine to the migratory monarch butterfly. And when a species is listed, the agency struggles to maintain adequate and up-to-date plans that can guide recovery, as required under the ESA.

“I believe that the agency for too long has not acted with sufficient urgency. I think the agency has for too long apologized for its mission,” says Mike Phillips, the former FWS employee who helped start the red wolf program. “It is hard for a team to believe in itself if its leaders don’t,” he adds. “It just doesn’t work. They need inspired leadership.”

These problems are not solely the fault of the agency’s leadership, of course. The FWS faces serious systemic obstacles, among them a lack of adequate funding as well as regular political attacks from ESA opponents in the courts and in Congress. Whatever its source, though, the weak state of the agency has forced conservation groups to turn to the judicial system to ensure that the ESA is upheld.

This is what happened in North Carolina. In the fall of 2015, the Southern Environmental Law Center sued on behalf of several green groups in federal court, arguing that the FWS violated the Endangered Species Act when it started handing out lethal take permits in a lax manner that allowed landowners to kill nonproblem wolves like 11768F. Ultimately, the court agreed, permanently enjoining the FWS from such practices. In November 2020, conservationists sued the FWS again over its policy of not releasing new red wolves into the wild. In January 2021, the conservationists prevailed when a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the agency from continuing to prevent the release of captive wolves; the judge also ordered it to rapidly develop a new plan to restart the reintroduction efforts.
Clearly, from the court’s perspective, the FWS has not been following the letter of the law.

In February, the FWS moved two male red wolves from a Florida wildlife refuge and let them loose in Alligator River. Following the federal court’s ruling, it released another eight wolves in May. Though four of the wolves have already been killed by cars, these new releases have rekindled the hopes of conservationists, who have watched in horror all these years as the red wolf population plummeted. They hope that under President Biden, the program will finally be restored. This time, however, everyone is aware of the urgent need to build local support.

Bryant says he wishes the FWS had had enough resources to hire community outreach specialists from the start. Sutherland believes the agency should initiate robust incentive programs for landowners who make their property available to wolves. Adrian Treves, a biologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, points to models in Sweden that pay reindeer herding communities to tolerate predators. “Science and policymakers,” he wrote in a 2014 paper, “have concluded that promoting human tolerance is critical to the success of predator conservation efforts.” In fact, the FWS has recently started to experiment with such programs in the five-county recovery area.

“All sides recognize that landowner cooperation is key to success,” says Kelly Davis, a Hyde County resident who sits on the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. However, whether enough cooperation will be forthcoming and whether certain local opponents can be brought around are very much open questions.

“A hard sell, I think,” said the Hyde County farmer I spoke with. “I don’t know what they could do to win people back.”

The sun was setting on the alligator river national Wildlife Refuge when Sutherland turned the car around to make one last pass through a string of open fields where red wolves are known to roam. As the car lurched along, I suddenly saw low gray shapes silhouetted against the orange glow of the horizon. I pointed at them urgently, and Sutherland hit the brakes. He whipped out his binoculars and, after several long moments, came to a conclusion: two red wolves. In the wild! There they were, a couple of skinny things, perhaps a fifth of the entire population still roaming free. One was lying in the grass; the other was inspecting the shrubs. Sutherland’s kids gazed in amazement, and together we slunk out of the car to take a closer look.

We stared intently, not wanting to miss a moment. One of the wolves sauntered off into the brush. The other lingered, lounged, stood up, stretched, assessed its surroundings, relented itself, eased into a trot, gained speed, and finally disappeared into the sun’s fierce glare. The whole thing lasted maybe 30 minutes, but during those moments it was difficult to feel anything but gratitude for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which labored so hard for so long to restore this wild animal on behalf of the American people. Perhaps it will someday find the fortitude to do so again.
Over the past decade, the incidence of sexual assault in the military has risen. Congress may have finally seen enough to mandate reforms.

Paula Coughlin was a 30-year-old helicopter pilot and Navy lieutenant when Dick Cheney, then the secretary of defense in the George H.W. Bush administration, called her into his office at the Pentagon. It was June 1992. Days earlier, Coughlin had gone on national television to tell of being assaulted by a gauntlet of drunk service members in a hotel hallway during the Tailhook Convention, a gathering of naval aviators that took place in Las Vegas the previous September. Coughlin reported the incident to her supervisor, who failed to do anything. Then she took her complaint to Navy officials at the Pentagon. Months later, frustrated by the slow pace of the investigation, Coughlin decided to go to the media, blowing the scandal wide open.

Cheney was standing behind his desk when Coughlin entered. He wasn’t pleased. “You know, I had to fire the secretary of the Navy today because of you,” she recalled him saying. To Coughlin, this was not much of a remedy: What she wanted was to see her attackers brought to justice. Then Cheney told her that the president wanted to meet her. A car whisked Coughlin to the White House, where she had tea with President Bush and his wife, Barbara. Bush cried, Coughlin remembers, and told her that he felt bad for her father, who had also served as a Navy aviator.

“I was like, ‘What the fuck? I’m consoling the president?’” Coughlin recalled in a recent interview. Later that night, her sister picked her up at the Pentagon and they sat in the near-empty parking lot, drinking beers and talking it over. “I was shaking my head, like: ‘This is just not the way it’s supposed to go.’”

Tailhook was the first major scandal to draw public attention to sexual violence in the military. Ultimately an investigation concluded that more than 80 women and seven men had been assaulted or harassed at the convention; 14 admirals and nearly 300 naval aviators were dismissed or disciplined. “The larger issue is a culture problem, which has allowed demeaning behavior and attitudes toward women to exist,” then–Navy Secretary Sean O’Keefe said at the time. “Senior leadership” was “totally committed to confronting this problem,” he promised. But no one was criminally prosecuted, and Coughlin left the Navy soon after.

The three decades since Tailhook have been marked by repeated scandals across every branch of the military and similar promises of change from leadership, all of which have failed to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence within the ranks. Among the most notorious incidents have been the rapes and assaults at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland in 1996; the Air Force Academy scandal in 2003, when dozens of female cadets reported that they were retaliated against for reporting assaults and harassment; the dozens of trainees at the Lackland Air Force Base in Texas who were raped, assaulted, and harassed by more than 30 instructors between 2009 and 2012. The Department of Defense estimates that 20,500 service members are sexually assaulted by military personnel each year, but only 6,290 cases were reported in 2020, and fewer than 1 percent of reported cases for which information is publicly available resulted in a conviction. Despite rising assault reports, since 2015 the conviction rate has fallen by 80 percent.

Many survivors blame the low rates
The Department of Defense estimates that 20,500 service members are sexually assaulted each year, but only 6,290 cases were reported in 2020.

of reporting and conviction on the way the military justice system handles assault and harassment. Decisions about whether to prosecute allegations of major crimes are made by commanding officers, who don’t have legal training and may be friendly with the accused—all of which, victims have said, leaves them vulnerable to retaliation and conflicts of interest within the system. For the past decade, victim advocates have been pushing to take prosecution decisions out of the chain of command and make them the responsibility of military prosecutors. Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand sponsored legislation to do this in 2013, sparking a contentious debate. Gillibrand has reintroduced her bill several times since, but it’s never had enough support to pass a full floor vote in the Senate.

But that has changed now. As of June, Gillibrand’s bill—the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act—has more than 70 supporters, including Republican Senator Joni Ernst, a combat veteran and assault survivor. After a long string of broken promises and incremental reforms, survivors who have spent years telling lawmakers and the public about their trauma say the significance of the legislation is too immense to quantify. “This would mean everything to me,” said Harmony Allen, who was raped by an Air Force instructor at a base in Texas in 2000, when she was 19, and has been deeply involved in advocacy despite suffering lasting brain damage from the attack. “It’s not just about my rapist,” she continued. “It’s about changing [the system] for every rape victim.”

And yet the fate of reform remains uncertain. Still opposed by many military leaders, Gillibrand’s bill is being held up by Democratic leadership on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and supporters fear it could be weakened during the legislative process. “I think all of us are afraid to really be hopeful,” said Coughlin, referring to the group of survivors who have been engaged in the legislative debate and stay in touch through texts and social media. For three decades, Coughlin has been “beaten with the courage stick,” as she put it: praised for sharing her story by people who decline to use their power to change anything. “I have done so much face time with military leadership, with congressional leadership, even jumping in elevators and talking to senators where they look me right in the eye and say, ‘We are going to do something’… and they don’t,” Coughlin said. “I’m really trying not to think about it right now. We’ll just see.”

The debate about reforming the military justice system has never fallen neatly along party lines. When Gillibrand first proposed taking prosecution decisions out of the chain of command, two of her strongest opponents were Democrats: former senators Carl Levin of Michigan, then chair of the Armed Services Committee, and Claire McCaskill of Missouri. McCaskill and other critics argued that stripping commanders of their authority over prosecutions was too drastic a change and could undermine their ability to enforce order and discipline within the ranks. Keep commanders invested in the process, they said, and give more incremental reforms time to work. (Lawmakers have approved a number of less controversial changes to the military justice system since 2013, including making retaliation against victims a crime and eliminating commanders’ ability to overturn jury verdicts.) “If five years from now we’re having fewer sexual assault convictions… I’ll be first in line” to support deeper changes, McCaskill told me in 2013.

Eight years later, the numbers have gone in the wrong direction. Assaults and reports went up, while prosecutions and convictions plummeted. “It’s very frustrating,” said Col. Don Christensen, who served as chief prosecutor in the Air Force from 2010 to 2014 and is now retired. Christensen worked on more than 300 sexual assault cases during his time in uniform and repeatedly saw commanders let personal relationships or self-interest take precedence over justice. Under current procedure, a small percentage of commanding officers are designated as “convening authorities,” meaning they determine whether to convene a court-martial in response to an allegation. (Fewer than 3 percent of commanding officers have this authority, a fact that undermines the argument that it is central to commanders’ ability to enforce order and discipline.) The convening authorities base their decisions in part on pretrial hearings intended to determine whether there is probable cause sufficient to proceed with prosecution, but they wield significant discretion over the final decisions. To Christensen it was obvious that legal experts, rather than commanders trained as pilots or artillery officers, should be making decisions about which accusations warranted prosecution, particularly since the convening authority is usually in the accused’s chain of command. Christensen let his feelings be known within the ranks during the initial debate about Gillibrand’s legislation. He left the service in 2014 when it became clear to him that he was “not welcome anymore.”

Now he feels that legislators wasted eight years waiting to see if the military could solve the problem on its own. “The reasons to change the process haven’t changed over those eight years. They were just as legitimate eight years ago as they are today. So we’ve had to have a lot of failures to get people over the hump,” Christensen said. “I blame the generals and admirals for obstruction. If they had set aside their egos for a while and looked at the justice system objectively and realized, ‘You know what? I’m an artillery officer—I’m really not qualified to be understanding whether there’s sufficient admissible evidence under the rules of evidence to prosecute this case’… It’s just that their egos got in the way—and tradition.”
Among the high-profile failures that eroded resistance to reform in the House and Senate was Pfc. Vanessa Guillen’s murder in 2020. Before she was bludgeoned to death with a hammer by a fellow soldier and left in a shallow grave, Guillen had twice reported being harassed by a supervisor at the Fort Hood Army base. Her own supervisor and other officers failed to initiate an investigation. A subsequent review by an independent commission found a “permissive” climate toward sexual assault and harassment at Fort Hood, which left female soldiers in “survival mode, vulnerable and preyed upon, but fearful to report and be ostracized and re-victimized.” The commission’s findings called into question the previous assurances from Army leaders about their commitment to rooting out abuse. Eight years earlier, during the Senate debate on Gillibrand’s legislation, then-Army chief of staff Gen. Ray Odierno assured the Armed Services Committee that “combating sexual assault and sexual harassment within the ranks is our number one priority.”

The Fort Hood report was one of the factors that swayed Senator Ernst, who has said she was “very torn” on the issue previously. “When you have a command climate like that [at Fort Hood], you’ve already got soldiers that feel they can do bad and evil things and get away with it, and obviously in this situation, they were,” Ernst told The Wall Street Journal. “So what we need to do is remove the commander from the decision-making for these heinous crimes and focus on prevention efforts, foster a climate of dignity and respect.”

Gillibrand told me that getting Ernst’s support was pivotal, since she is the lone female combat veteran in the Senate and someone her Republican colleagues trust on the issue.

Getting President Biden’s support also helped build momentum for reform. (Biden said he supported the change when he was asked on the campaign trail in 2020 by Nancy Parrish, the founder of Protect Our Defenders, the nonprofit that has led the effort to transform the military justice system.) In April, an independent review commission established by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made a preliminary recommendation to take prosecutorial decisions regarding sexual assault and harassment charges out of the chain of command. The following month, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark A. Milley, said he would no longer oppose the reform, though he stopped short of endorsing it. “We’ve been at it for years, and we haven’t effectively moved the needle,” Milley told the Associated Press. In late June, Austin said he, too, supported taking sexual assault and related cases out of the chain of command. In July, when the commission released its final report recommending that reform and 27 others, Biden affirmed that his administration would work with Congress to implement them, calling for “concrete actions that fundamentally change the way we handle military sexual assault and that make it clear that these crimes will not be minimized or dismissed.”

But some of the top brass are still resisting reform, and expressed their reservations in memos submitted to Austin this spring. In the Senate, Armed Services Committee chair Jack Reed and ranking member James Inhofe, both Army veterans, have blocked the bill from receiving a full vote on the Senate floor, where it would almost certainly pass, insisting instead that it receive further debate in committee and be incorporated into the annual defense policy bill rather than pass as stand-alone legislation, a maneuver that Gillibrand fears could be used to weaken or kill the reform.

“The [Department of Defense] is still actively trying to prevent this provision from becoming law, and they are actively trying to water it down and narrow the focus,” Gillibrand said. A major sticking point is whether military prosecutors should take over charging decisions for all felony-level crimes, as Gillibrand and her cosponsors have proposed, or whether that reform should be limited to sex offenses, which is what administration officials, including Austin, and holdouts like Reed have argued for. (Reed’s office did not respond to an interview request.) Advocates for survivors strongly object to the idea of creating “pink courts,” or a siloed justice system for sexual assault and harassment cases. “We need a system that is unbiased and highly professional,” said Gillibrand. “Why would you limit that to just one class of plaintiffs or one class of defendants?”

“To Gillibrand, Christensen, and other advocates for reform, resistance is grounded in something larger than a difference of opinion about the structure of the military justice system. “It’s about congressional oversight generally. They don’t like to change, they don’t like being told what to do, and they want to have it the way they want it, because the current system allows commanders to hold all the cards,” Gillibrand said. “If we don’t oversee the DOD, then nobody does.”

Reforming the military justice system is a reactive response to the problem of sexual violence: Prosecution comes after the crime has already occurred. Advocates for Gillibrand’s (continued on page 31)
As sea levels rise, the landfills along the US coasts have become a ticking environmental time bomb. So why does the federal government have no plan to avoid this looming catastrophe?
As sea levels rise, the landfills along the US coasts have become a ticking environmental time bomb. So why does the federal government have no plan to avoid this looming catastrophe?

BY DAVE LINDORFF

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AE SAULENAS KNOWS THAT BEFORE LONG SHE’LL HAVE TO ABANDON THE place she’s called home for decades. Nestled by a coastal wetland north of Boston called the Rumney Marsh Reservation, her house is a short walk from the Atlantic Ocean. In recent years, thanks in part to the climate emergency, king tides and storm surges have flooded her property. Saulenas has made peace with the fact that one day the floods will force her to leave.

But across the marsh from her sits the Wheelabrator landfill, an ever-growing pile of ash created by the landfill’s incinerator, which burns all the waste collected from the town of Saugus and its surrounding communities. For Saulenas, the knowledge that the same rising sea that will swallow her home will begin eroding that half-million-ton, 140-acre toxic ash stew disturbs the peace she’s made. Not only will she be forced to move inland, but the wetland that she loves—and that, since 1989, has been classified by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as an “area of critical environmental concern”—will be poisoned.

The landfill “was supposed to close 25 years ago,” she says, “but last November 1, they were granted another provisional five-year permit to keep dumping another 500,000 tons of incinerator trash—100,000 tons a year!”

Wheelabrator has no plan to remove what will end up being 1 million tons of ash, according to Chris Kilian, vice president of strategic litigation with the New Hampshire–based Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), which unsuccessfully fought the permit extension. “When its incinerator finally is shut down, the landfill will remain,” he says, “and will inevitably be breached by rising seas.” Wheelabrator did not respond to requests for comment.

As the toxic ash pollutes the marshes near Saulenas’s home, it will destroy an important habitat for migratory and breeding birds and other terrestrial wildlife and will damage an important nursery for commercial and ecologically important fish.

Leaking landfills that pollute wetlands, whether they hold incinerator ash known to be contaminated with the highly toxic chemical dioxin or rotting garbage and miscellaneous wastes, are the last thing that already-stressed sea life needs as it confronts a host of other environmental stressors and crises, including rising water temperatures, depleted oxygen levels, ocean acidification, and a withering food chain. In this way, the story of the Wheelabrator landfill and the Rumney Marsh it abuts is sadly not unique.

“They are spilling their contents—everything from lead, asbestos, and toxic chemicals—into the water.”

—Ivan Haigh, associate professor of coastal oceanography

As he heads its Center for Environmental Studies, “When the water comes in, it will uncover and release all that waste and the industrial wastes of whatever companies were around during the life of the local landfill.”

One hint at the scale of the looming crisis facing US coastal waters and communities comes from a multiyear study of UK coastlines published in 2019. Researchers at the University of Southampton and several other British universities located around 10,000 landfills along the portion of coast they studied, according to researcher Ivan Haigh, an associate professor of coastal oceanography at Southampton whose specialty is sea-level rise. “Some of the sites we found are right on the water,” he says, “and already, their sea-facing edges have been opened and they are spilling their contents—everything from lead, asbestos, and toxic chemicals—into the water.”

No comparable study has been conducted in the United States, but the UK findings make it clear that such an analysis of US coastal landfills is desperately needed.

The Environmental Protection Agency would be the most logical place to start with questions about the risks of rising seas to coastal landfills and whether the federal government is aware of the problem. But the EPA ignored requests for information until the Biden administration replaced Donald Trump’s climate-change-denying agency leadership in March. In April 2021, the EPA gave me access to several of the researchers who had published a paper in 2019 titled “Vulnerability of Waste Infrastructure to Climate Induced Impacts in Coastal Communities.” Though the study looked at operating landfills in only one municipality, Norfolk, Va., it provided insight into the scale of the threat to the entire US coastline—and offered some assurance that the federal government was at least aware of the problem.

Based on the assumption that the sea level will rise almost four feet by 2100—the worst-case prediction of the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
at the time of the study—the EPA researchers concluded that Norfolk’s landfills would remain above sea level. But, they wrote, sea-level rise, “coupled with other climate-induced impacts such as more frequent and intense heavy precipitation events, hurricanes and resulting storm surges, and [an] increase in [the] number of tidal floods (nuisance floods), may increase recurring damage to municipal infrastructure, including waste management facilities.” The researchers noted that some of Norfolk’s larger landfills, like other coastal sites, have underground trenches that extend below the water table, and they warned of damage from below. If salt water intruded into the aquifer and replaced the fresh water that currently fills it, the EPA researchers wrote, it could penetrate the trenches’ clay liners and break through, causing the contents to become buoyant and burst out aboveground.

In April, I spoke with three authors of the EPA report, and they agreed that the threat that rising seas pose to landfills is “largely overlooked and ignored.” “A study of US coastal landfills is clearly needed,” says Susan Julius, one of the authors. But just locating and assessing all the landfills in coastal regions “would require political backing, and funding such a survey would be hugely expensive.” Under the Trump administration, the term “climate change” was virtually banned at the EPA and other agencies. It’s back in use now, but Republicans in the Senate aren’t exactly enthusiastic backers of climate action, making expensive climate projects a hard sell.

And beyond Republican obstruction, there’s an additional complicating factor: Since landfills are primarily overseen by states, an EPA spokesperson told The Nation in April, the agency has no centralized list of them—open and closed; federal, state, and municipal. The spokesperson added:

EPA researchers are aware of the need for a broad study on the impact of rising sea level on landfills in coastal areas, and areas prone to flooding.... A significant amount of study is necessary to understand all potential risks to human health and the environment associated with possible impacts from rising sea levels on operating and closed landfills and possible ways of assessing those risks.... Currently EPA is not planning any studies of this kind.

The federal government began paying attention to the environmental hazards of toxic waste in the 1970s. In 1976, Congress passed the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, establishing federal authority over the disposal of hazardous waste in industrial and municipal landfills. In general, the regulation of landfills under the RCRA was left to state and local governments. In 1997, the federal government went a step further and determined that local and state governments would be fully responsible for regulating landfills that received less than 20 tons of municipal waste per day.

In the 1980s, the EPA, as well as many state departments of environmental protection, began requiring that new landfills have liners of clay, plastic, or both to keep waste from con-
taminating the surrounding earth. Before that, most municipal landfills were unlined, meaning there was no barrier between the ground and the waste. And while some legacy dumps that have ceased operation were covered with plastic and topped with earth, countless others that were closed before the '80s were simply bulldozed over with dirt and abandoned.

The UK study framed the situation simply. “The nature of the problem is long-term as erosion will increase with sea level rise and it is likely that the landfill sites contain some of the early plastics,” the researchers wrote. “Given that these can take hundreds of years to biodegrade, it will be necessary to continue to contain the sites for the foreseeable future, as removal is unlikely to be a feasible option.”

Early plastics are just one concern. Any landfill, closed or still operating, that received waste prior to when regulations were established could contain toxic products. The Norfolk study’s authors confirmed this point.

For example, New Jersey’s Middlesex Municipal Landfill, which was established in the early 1940s and closed in 1974, received significant amounts of soil waste from other sites in the state that contained pitchblende (a radioactive, uranium-rich ore) used in the Manhattan Project during World War II. A Department of Energy report stated that remediation of that material was considered complete as of 1986 but that in 2008, New Jersey authorities reported finding radium and uranium contamination.

Also, it takes a lot less than radioactive waste to do substantial environmental damage, which makes these coastal landfills ticking time bombs that threaten their surrounding ecosystems and, in turn, the climate itself. A recent op-ed in The Hill warned that wetlands, besides being important for all the flora and fauna that rely on them for part of their life cycles, are a significant carbon sink; the wetlands surrounding the Chesapeake Bay, for example, sequester over 2.2 million tons of carbon per year. The op-ed’s author, Rodrigo Vargas, is a professor in the University of Delaware’s Department of Plant and Soil Sciences. “If these ecosystems are degraded or damaged,” he warns, “their capacity to capture and store carbon can be reduced—or even lost—resulting in CO₂ (and other greenhouse gases) being released back to the atmosphere and contributing to global environmental change.”

Harold Wanless, a professor of geology at the University of Miami who specializes in sea-level rise, says the failure to address the “colossal” problem of coastal landfills is systemic. “Because people still think sea-level rise will be limited to just a few feet over almost a century—which just isn’t true—it’s not perceived as an urgent problem. Besides, politically, these sites are the responsibility of local government—towns and counties—and the political leaders at that level tend to just kick the can down the road. They won’t be in charge when water reaches the landfill, and so why should they raise taxes to fix it now?” Twenty years from now, Wanless adds, when the reality of sea-level rise is impossible to ignore, the property values that provide the local tax base needed to pay for dealing with the crisis will have plummeted.

The concerns about long-term landfill management expressed by experts across scientific disciplines like Wanless and Sachs are shared by Nick Lapis, the director of advocacy at Californians Against Waste. “The problem with landfills is that they never go away. You have to manage them in perpetuity, and there isn’t a liner or cap that is warranted to last for that long,” he says. “And they’re not stable. They move and shrink as their contents decay, and the plastic liners will get brittle and crack as the pressures cause them to fold over on themselves. Sooner or later they will fail, as will the clay liners, and the effects of any failure can be absolutely devastating on the environment.” He adds, “From a financial standpoint the original owner, if [the landfills] were privately owned, is often long gone by the time they fail, so taxpayers will be left on the hook.”

Some communities are beginning to test whether they can sue the industries—the oil, gas, coal, electric, and perhaps automotive companies—that created, accelerated, and then denied the existence of the climate emergency. The city of Imperial Beach, Calif., near San Diego, filed a lawsuit in 2017 against ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, and others, alleging that they created a public nuisance by intensifying climate change. Dozens of other cities and states, including Baltimore and New Jersey, are suing major fossil fuel companies over the damage to their infrastructure that’s resulted from extreme weather events, including fires and storms.

Getting redress in the courts is difficult without a clear and accurate assessment of the scale of the problem. Besides the lack of hard data about the number and location of coastal landfills, the IPCC has consistently low-balled its projections of sea-level rise. Released every four years, these projections have routinely been outpaced
by subsequent predictions that take into account, for example, new evidence of faster ice melt and actual sea-level rise.

Wanless predicts that seas will have risen dramatically by 2100—by 10 or even 15 feet. Therefore, he says, dealing with the coastal landfills, which he thinks may mean moving their fetid contents inland, “should be done now, when it will be a lot cheaper, and not when they’re already underwater or, if they are mounds or hills built above ground level, islands surrounded by seawater.”

The south dade landfill in Florida offers a less than hopeful picture of what can be done to protect landfills from sea-level rise and storm surges. The monstrous man-made mound of garbage was established in 1978 less than a mile from the Atlantic Ocean along a sea-level canal. South Dade’s dump rises 150 feet above ground level, making it the second-highest point on the southern Florida peninsula (neighboring Broward County’s 200-foot landfill is the highest). It receives garbage and solid waste from all over Miami.

“When the last cell is done, we’ll have to close the operation,” says Achaya Kelapanda, an assistant director in the Miami-Dade County Department of Solid Waste Management. He says that will happen in 10 to 13 years, during which time the landfill will have grown significantly. And what then? “We’ll put a cap on it,” he says. “What else can we do? You can’t move a mountain.”

“You can’t move a mountain.”

There are mining companies in West Virginia and several other coal states that might contest Kelapanda on that, but in any event, the prospect of having to move mountains of garbage away from coastal areas is staggering. And it leaves the Sierra Club’s New Jersey director, Jeff Tittel, dismayed about the future for the northeast part of the state. “Eight of the landfills in the New Jersey Meadowlands are huge—one’s a mile long and 300 feet high! Even the smaller ones would cost a fortune to move, and the guilty parties are local counties, which don’t have the funds to remediate them.”

Monuments to human consumption dot the US coastline, poised to pollute the environment as sea levels rise.

He sighed. “They’ll try to protect them with dikes and by capping them, but none of that is going to work. We’re talking about at least an eight-foot sea rise by 2100—and we already saw that much water as a storm surge during Hurricane Sandy [in 2012], and a lot of landfills and Superfund sites got overtopped by that. It’s just a stopgap solution.”

Down in Virginia Beach, Va., stands a 60-foot-tall, 800-foot-long grassy ridge. One would never guess that six feet beneath the groomed sod lies a thick plastic liner that covers 640,000 tons of municipal waste. In the mid-1960s, city leaders greenlighted a project that would turn that mountain of waste sitting just a dozen feet above sea level and two miles from the Atlantic Ocean into a park, officially called Mount Trashmore Park.

If the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s current worst-case scenario of an eight-foot rise in sea level comes to pass, Mount Trashmore will have to be renamed Trashmore Island, at least during storms. And as Virginia Beach, with an average elevation of 12 feet above sea level, gets swallowed by the Atlantic Ocean—perhaps before the end of the century, as Wanless and others predict—wave action and storm surges will inevitably eat away at the mountain.

Virginia Beach is “looking into solutions, like perhaps floodgates,” to block storm surges, says Ben McFarlane, a senior planner at the Hampton Roads Regional Planning District Commission, which includes the city in its jurisdiction. But he admits the initial concept, which takes “fiscal constraints” into consideration, is based on a projected sea-level rise of just 4.5 feet by century’s end.

Unless an epic national campaign is mounted soon to start relocating landfills, or unless...
the world takes drastic action to significantly reduce atmospheric carbon and slow climate change, Mount Trashmore and the thousands of other landfills dotting the US coastline are on track to be overcome by rising seas—toxic waste and all.

In the process of reporting this article, I was reminded of an interview I did in 2016 with three scientists from the Netherlands. They were part of a team tasked by the Dutch government to come up with a plan to save the below-sea-level country from inundation for two more centuries. The scientists described an ambitious, multibillion-euro scheme to design barriers to withstand two meters of sea rise. I asked what would happen if the seas rose more than that in less than 200 years. They looked at each other. “Well, then we’ll have to give most of the country up and move inland, becoming climate refugees.”

In the United States, when it comes to coastal landfills, nobody is thinking so apocalyptically. There is talk from some US experts about the need to plan for managed retreats from low-lying coastal cities, but landfills so far aren’t part of that calculus. “My fear,” says the University of Richmond’s Sachs, “is that the local municipal landfills will be the last thing left behind as the cities and suburbs migrate away from the coast.”

For Fae Saulenas, the time is coming to leave her house on the edge of Runnymede Marsh and the mammoth ash pile growing in that tidal wetland. Unlike the town leaders and state regulators—who, it bears repeating, recently granted the Wheelabrator company and its incinerator another five-year permit to double the size of its ash dump to 1 million tons—Saulenas knows that reality cannot be put off any longer. “For the last 10 years, I’ve been trying to develop an exit strategy for leaving this house that my daughter and I have lived in for almost half a century,” she says. “I’ve learned long ago that denial gets you nowhere.”

CLF attorney Kilian agrees. “Instead of adding to the problem through continued operation, [Wheelabrator’s] focus should be on dealing with the present and entirely foreseeable risks of sea-level rise, flooding, and extreme storms and precipitation,” he says. “As the facility is inevitably flooded and eroded and these risks further manifest, the environmental harm will be catastrophic.”

“Every window on my house has a sign in it saying, ‘This is a flood area!’” Saulenas says. “I know that annoys some of my neighbors, but eventually the water in the marsh will rise and they’ll all be refugees.”

(continued from page 25)

P AULA COUGHLIN LEFT THE NAVY IN 1994, AFTER BEING TRANSFERRED AND barred from flying. The Navy said it grounded her because the assaults had left her emotionally unstable, but Coughlin understood it as a form of retaliation. (Investigations have found a pattern of survivors limited immunity from “collateral misconduct charges” that might discourage them from reporting assaults, such as charges for underage drinking. Still, the armed forces remain male-dominated institutions with rigid hierarchies in which superiors have an immense amount of power over subordinates, the kind of power imbalances that can incubate predation.

In 2012, Coughlin saw The Invisible War, a documentary about sexual assault in the military, for which she’d been interviewed. The film troubled her deeply. “I thought, ‘Holy shit, I’ve been living in a bubble, and this has just continued to get worse,’” she said. “Even at the time of my assault I didn’t understand the scope of the problem, so to see it on the giant screen—I mean, it messed me up. I came home from the screening and probably was suicidal for a couple of months. And I had little kids. I had such an identity crisis: ‘Why did I look away?’” She continued, “I got to a part of my life where either it got worse or it got better, and to become empowered by it was a choice.”

Harmony Allen, who has worked with Coughlin and Protect Our Defenders to build support in the Senate for Gillibrand’s legislation, said that her assault still challenges her faith. “I’m a Christian, and I do try to say that there’s a reason for everything, but sometimes I’m like, ‘Seriously—why did I have to get raped?’” Allen comes from a family with a long history of military service: Her father served 22 years, and her sister has served 19. When her own teenage daughter asked her about joining the service, Allen hesitated. “I said, ‘All right, baby, if I’m being honest, I don’t want you to go in.’” She told her daughter that she’d support her whatever her decision, but Allen is deeply afraid for her safety. “What the military is doing is not working. It’s the same thing every year. We have to get this bill passed.” Legislation can’t undo the crime committed against her, but it would give her some peace of mind, Allen said. “I’ll feel like, ‘Dang, we did something.’”

:: Members of Congress and military leaders

“Look me right in the eye and say, ‘We are going to do something’...and they don’t.”

—Paula Coughlin, Navy veteran

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The Cornerstone

*What is living and what is dead in the New Deal?*

BY MICHAEL KAZIN

Find out what a historian thinks about the New Deal, and you will quickly find out what they think about the virtues and failures of the liberal state writ large. For Arthur Schlesinger Jr., how Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to the worst downturn in US history “was a matter of seeing whether a representative democracy could conquer economic collapse,” and the aggressive actions he took restored Americans’ faith in that system. For Howard Zinn, on the other hand, the gush of new federal programs merely ended up reinforcing the shaky grip of the reigning capitalist order. When the New Deal ended, he argued, “the rich still controlled the
nation’s wealth” and “the same system that had brought depression and crisis... remained.” Recently, the conservative writer Amity Shlaes dismissed the very notion that FDR and his allies were either liberal heroes or repairers of a damaged status quo. Instead, she blasted the longest-serving president in US history for caring “little for constitutional niceties” and ramming through policies that were “often inspired by socialist or fascist models abroad.”

In Why the New Deal Matters, the historian Eric Rauchway gives us his own interpretation and suggests how liberalism might rebound in the present. For Rauchway, the New Deal altered US society in ways that many Americans neither realize nor appreciate but that often endure. One of the most learned and nimble analysts of the New Deal, Rauchway acknowledges that what Roosevelt and his liberal successors managed to achieve fell quite short of the bold appeal that FDR had made to Congress in his 1944 State of Union address: to “explore the means for implementing [an] economic bill of rights” that would establish “a new basis of security and prosperity...for all regardless of station, race, or creed.” But Rauchway illustrates what the New Dealers did accomplish by examining four areas of the country—two on the coasts and two in the agricultural midland—where they initiated ambitious programs that changed the daily lives of millions. His final chapter details how many of the sidewalks, schools, and post offices that still exist on “the street where you live” were results of the New Deal’s efforts to build a lasting infrastructure to serve ordinary people.

Beyond Rauchway’s historical travelogue lies a powerful argument: Roosevelt and his allies believed that democracy would triumph over reaction and fascism only if ordinary Americans accepted their dependence on one another and embraced programs grounded in that principle. “The results of that effort remain with us,” Rauchway writes, “in forms both concrete and abstract; the New Deal therefore matters still because Americans can scarcely get through a day without coming into contact with some part of it.”

Why the New Deal Matters
By Erich Rauchway
Yale University Press. 232 pp. $26

Rauchway next takes us to the Clinch River, a site that neatly embodies FDR’s goal of serving the needs of citizens by putting some of them to work building the infrastructure all of them needed. In the 1930s, the river watered the homesteads of family farmers in eastern Tennessee who mostly lacked electricity and whose small plots were vulnerable to flooding and erosion. Under the New Deal, the Roosevelt administration launched a new agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority, that constructed a series of 20 dams. The energy they generated lit up the homes and barns of residents for quite modest fees. The TVA also stabilized the river’s flow and spawned excellent oases for camping, boating, and fishing.

In describing the Norris Dam, the linchpin of the mammoth project, Rauchway turns briefly into an admiring art critic. The structure’s Hungarian-born architect, he notes, used a method of finishing the concrete that would create alternating squares, a checkerboard motif adapted from Viennese architecture. In this application the pattern would hide imperfections in the concrete and also break up its otherwise featureless surface. The immense structure thereby acquired a humanly comprehensible scale.

Although he admires FDR’s presidency, Rauchway eschews the kind of unalloyed tributes that liberals like Schlesinger once paid to all the works of Roosevelt the Great. “Black southerners took a more mixed view of the TVA,” he notes, than did the white families whose lives were made easier by cheap power or the artists who lauded its projects as the apotheosis of modern design. African American construction workers in the Clinch watershed earned lower wages than their white peers and had to labor in less skilled jobs. They were barred from living in the lovely model towns built for their white counterparts. Still, many felt the conditions worth enduring. As the Black author J. Saunders Redding observed after traveling through the region, “their poor little was the greatest plenty they had ever known.”

The TVA was not the only New Deal program whose aid to Americans of color fell short.
of giving them the kind of assistance they needed and deserved. For the Navajo, the Bureau of Indian Affairs brought a new respect for their Indigenous traditions—as well as new roads and sewers, hospitals and schools. “We should be proud and glad,” wrote John Collier, the bureau’s white commissioner, “to have this different and Native culture going by the side of ours.”

Yet Collier also had his own notion of how the Navajo should earn a living, and he had the power to get his way. In the early 1930s, he enforced a New Deal law that sharply reduced the herds of sheep and goats of the Navajo in the Southwest. Collier meant well: The culling boosted the value of each animal after a time of rampant deflation. But he failed to appreciate the anger of those who resisted what they correctly feared would, in Rauchway’s damning judgment, “set Navajos ruthlessly on the road to a wage economy that looked much like any other in America, only poorer.”

In the North as well as the South, the New Deal posed a fraught dilemma for Black people, who had even less hope of living apart from the institutions dominated by white elites. Rauchway’s last stop on his ‘30s history tour is Hunter’s Point, a historically Black neighborhood on San Francisco Bay that was once the location of a sprawling shipyard. During the Depression, the federal government supplied such communities with relief funds and jobs. Back in Washington, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes also persuaded FDR to set up an informal body of advisers, dubbed “the black cabinet,” to keep the president and his aides aware of what African Americans thought and needed. Leaders of the erstwhile party of Lincoln could not compete with such aid, material and symbolic, and they seldom even tried. In the election of 1936, Roosevelt swept nearly every Black precinct on the way to one of the biggest landslides in electoral history.

Yet despite his support among Black voters, Roosevelt accepted the tacit discrimination against African Americans embodied in the provisions of the National Labor Relations, Social Security, and Fair Labor Standards acts in order to get the backing of the Southern bloc in Congress, which included the chairmen of the most powerful committees. None of these acts covered workers who toiled on farms or in other people’s homes—major sources of Black employment at the time. New York Senator Robert Wagner and his fellow Northern liberals protested these exemptions, but rather quietly, lest their colleagues from Dixie reject the bills. In anguish, these most progressive New Dealers acknowledged that their hope of making lynching a federal crime stood no chance of overcoming the inevitable Southern filibuster.

Not until Black people built a mighty national movement in the decades after World War II would they secure more than the “poor little” the Democratic elite was able—or willing—to grant.
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the one that put Biden and Kamala Harris in the White House almost 90 years later. In 2020, Biden and Harris won over 15 million more votes than had Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine in the previous presidential contest. It was the greatest such leap of support for a major party since 1932, when FDR received nearly 8 million more votes in his landslide victory than had his fellow Democrat Alfred E. Smith when he lost badly to Herbert Hoover four years earlier.

Donald Trump’s chaotic term and his defeat in 2020 both fit rather neatly into the model of presidential regimes developed by Stephen Skowronek, a political scientist from Yale. Each chief executive, Skowronek writes, governs in an era of “political time” during which one party—or, at the least, its ideology and program—is either gaining or losing power and popularity. In his view, just five presidents—Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan—were “reconstructive” figures who made a decisive break with the dominant political ideas of their time. In the cases of James Buchanan and Herbert Hoover, it took a set of cataclysmic events—the coming of a civil war and the onset of the Great Depression—to reveal their inability to address or resolve the crisis of the old order.

Like Hoover, Trump faced an emergency that shook the entire country and failed to grasp its depth or respond to it effectively. That led most Americans to reject his leadership and see the status quo as morally bankrupt, ready to be tossed into the dustbin of history. “Instead of fixing things up and giving the regime a new lease on life,” Skowronek explains, such failed presidents “have consistently driven their parties to the breaking point and emboldened their opponents. Internal wrangling...has pushed the regime to indict itself and fomented its political implosion.” Both Hoover and Trump also faced large and sustained protests that helped persuade Democrats that voters would welcome a decisive break with their rule.

If Trump does prove to be the last chief executive of a neoliberal era that began with Reagan’s election in 1980, future historians may understand the debates among Americans during his term as the birth pangs of a new regime. As Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of a sizable federal welfare state, which Democrats and even Republicans like Nixon elaborated upon, so Biden will have the opportunity to enact such fundamental changes as a permanent child care allowance, free community college, a law making it far easier to organize unions, and a transition to an economy based on renewable energy. Back in January, Skowronek described the political landscape to the New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg: “The old Reagan formulas have lost their purchase, there is new urgency in the moment, and the president has an insurgent left at his back.”

The New Deal, as Rauchway makes plain, was installed in American government and politics for the simple reason that most voters liked what it did for them. The GOP had to grudgingly accept its main programs if it ever hoped to return to power. “As one popular joke had it,” Rauchway recounts, “Republicans professed to believe that the New Deal was a wonderful thing—and nothing like it should happen again.” It’s up to every progressive, as well as every Democratic politician, to prove them wrong.
THUSO MBEDU AS CORA RANDALL IN THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD (KYLE KAPLAN / AMAZON STUDIOS)

The Odyssey

Barry Jenkins’s The Underground Railroad

By Stephen Kearse

As Cora, a fugitive enslaved person in Colson Whitehead’s 2016 novel The Underground Railroad, attempts to make her way to freedom via the clandestine antislavery network—depicted by the author as a subterranean train system—a remark follows her through the tunnels. “Look outside as you speed through, and you’ll see the true face of America,” a station agent told her as her train departed. The statement appears pat at first—an aphorism that clashes with the gravity of Cora’s flight. But it later proves instructive: Both the railroad and the nation as a whole are under construction.

The comment returns to Cora after she has traversed multiple states and still has not found refuge, encountering so many horrors on the run that her ostensible freedom feels like a burden. “It was a joke, then, from the start,” Whitehead tells us, summing up Cora’s thoughts. “There was only darkness outside the windows on her journeys, and only ever would be darkness.” When Cora again finds herself on the railroad, alone after surviving a horrific encounter with slave hunters, she revisits the station agent’s dictum yet again, this time with awe and resolve. “Cora ran her hand along the wall of the tunnel, the ridges and pockets,” Whitehead writes. “Her fingers danced over valleys, rivers, the peaks of mountains, the contours of a new nation hidden beneath the old.” Despite the death and violence that have stalked her, Cora finds the darkness welcoming, its indeterminacy an opportunity to look ahead, perhaps even to dream.

Dreams and wonder are the mainstays of director Barry Jenkins’s rich adaptation of Whitehead’s novel, which imagines Cora’s escape as a Black Odyssey. Like its source, the limited series (hosted on Amazon’s Prime Video) is expansive and chameleonic,
sheding its skin as Cora, born enslaved in Georgia, makes her way through the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Indiana. Her journey is ambivalent from start to finish: Each state in this alternate 19th-century America offers a distinct flavor of freedom and thrill, the lines between them always blurred. Building on yet also departing from Whitehead’s novel, Jenkins stages Cora’s escape as a kind of spiritual quest. As she winds across the antebellum hellscape, wrestling with a survivor’s guilt that’s as capacious as the darkness of the railroad’s caverns, she confronts the misery both around her and within her.

Jenkins's storytelling focuses on slavery’s survivors rather than on the institution’s brutality. Violence is frequent, ambient, and perverse, but it is rarely central. Jenkins takes seriously fellow filmmaker Ava DuVernay’s contention that “humanity is not in the image” alone. Where previous film depictions of slavery and anti-Black violence have fixated on the grotesque and shocking—branded flesh, whip-scared backs, the dead swinging from trees—Jenkins looks to the effects of such sights. He’s uninterested in arousing sympathy or fury in the viewer. Instead, he maps the world of the enslaved, tracing how brutality becomes lodged in their bodies and minds while also relishing the moments of relief they snatch from their captors. For Jenkins, humanity is in the social and spiritual life of the enslaved subject, not in the spectacle of her body.

Jenkins introduces Cora, played by Thuso Mbedu, in free fall, her arms flailing as she descends into an abyss. As Cora plummets in slow motion, scattered images are juxtaposed with her descent: a bloody birth, a man running backward, a girl in a burning house, afterbirth buried in a hand-dug hole. In a sense, Cora’s life is flashing before her eyes—as the show slowly reveals, this montage comprises moments and people from her past and future. But there’s a strange omniscience to this vision. Though we see the fixtures and landmarks of Cora’s life, we are privy to more than she will see, more than she can see. So when the sequence ends with her unwavering gaze directed into the camera, it feels like a warning. “Do not lose sight of me,” she seems to say.

This artful, oblique opening establishes the stakes and timbre of The Underground Railroad, the story lingers on the Georgia plantation where Cora was born and raised. The Randall plantation is owned by two brothers, James and Terrance, who have split the property into north and south parcels. The northern one, where Cora lives, is implicitly less brutal, but the show glosses over that obvious allegory in order to explore the plantation as a home and birthplace. Right after Cora is approached by Caesar (Aaron Pierre), who inquires about whether she is interested in escaping—an offer she rebuffs—another plantation denizen plotting a flight, Big Anthony (Elijah Everett), crosses the grounds during a birthday celebration among the slaves. He’s visibly torn about his choice, walking with purpose but stopping to greet people and drink in the festive surroundings. He doesn’t waver, but the decision is difficult: Fleeing means abandoning his home, his people.

Cora, too, is rooted. On the night of Big Anthony’s departure, she takes food to a disabled resident of the plantation and defends a boy who is being beaten by Terrance, both gestures of care and solidarity. The latter intervention results in corporal punishment for both Cora and the boy, a scene that’s emblematic of the series’ approach to violence. The whipping opens with Cora and the boy tied to a post that’s centered in the frame while their assailants stand at the edges, administering strokes. The blows and the victims are obscured by the cloak of night, drawing attention to the sounds of the lashes, which continue when the view changes to the crowd of onlookers, who are forced to watch in silence. By focusing on the witnesses, the camera emphasizes the power of the act rather than suffering. Punishment here doesn’t just dispense pain; it maintains control.

The plantation’s hold over Cora slips after a greater act of violence. When Big Anthony is captured and returned to the plantation, Terrance turns the man’s punishment into a spectacle. Hosting a party replete with music, wine, and food, he has Big Anthony whipped and then immolated in front of the guests and the slaves. The scene is set in broad daylight, so the cruelty of the execution is overt, but again Jenkins finds ways to decenter suffering and emphasize power. Big Anthony does not die silently. As Terrance pontificates before the assembled crowd, Big Anthony hectors him. And when he can no longer speak, the scene is shown from his perspective, the camera switching to a smoky POV shot overlaid with the roar of the flames. When Cora returns to the cotton fields afterward, it is that grizzly crackle that sticks with her rather than the twisted pageant. Big Anthony wasn’t just killed; he was silenced, drowned in fire. Cora and Caesar run away that night.

The series grows more baroque once Cora and Caesar make their escape via the titular train, a narrative pivot that’s taken from the novel and embellished on-screen. Griffin, S.C., where they find safe harbor for a spell, is awash in colorful anachro-
nisms and allusions. There’s a comical mention of the clothing line FUBU, a cameo by a character from Whitehead’s debut novel, *The Intuitionist*, and a skyscraper with an elevator, among other fantastical references. These indulgences are subordinate to the plot, which follows Cora’s and Caesar’s struggles to suppress their anxieties and adjust to their new identities, but they are essential to the show’s vision. The whimsy and overt artifice of Griffin feel like direct responses to the intense vérité of the scenes on the Randall plantation, digestifs for both the viewer and the characters. *The Underground Railroad* rejects the idea that joy and pleasure taint the integrity of a slave narrative rather than enrich it.

It can’t be overstated how unusual this approach is within the history of slavery’s depiction on-screen. For decades, the standard riposte to Hollywood’s long tradition of caricatures, omissions, and distortions of slavery has been to present slaves as heroes. *Antebellum*, *Harriet*, and *Django Unchained* all traffic in triumph and valor, channeling Warrington Hudlin’s 1998 argument that “for the psychic needs of African-American audiences…we don’t need *Beloved* or *Amistad*, we need *Spartacus*.” Misha Green, the creator of the recent historical TV drama *Underground*, which stages the abolitionist network’s daring efforts as a prison break thriller, takes this idea even further: “They’re superheroes,” Green argued. Kasi Lemmons, the director of *Harriet*, expressed the same sentiment, calling Harriet Tubman “a real-life superheroine.”

*The Underground Railroad* wills its characters to be more layered and multifaceted than the hero paradigm allows. When Cora and Caesar unearth a more sinister anachronism lurking beneath Griffin’s quaint veneer—a state-sanctioned sterilization program—they respond as fugitives rather than as saviors, making plans to leave the town. Even a small act of resistance by Caesar, who destroys some of the vials of contraceptive pills that the town’s Black men are tricked into taking, is laced with guilt: He discards the drugs at night while most of his new roommates and friends are sleeping. It feels like an apology.

That sense of obligation to the Black people who can’t be whisked away to safety torments Cora even as the railroad endangers her. Griffin turns out to be one of many false paradises, a running theme that’s explored by Jenkins. If the blood-soaked but down-home vistas of the Randall plantation evoke ambivalent roots, and Griffin reifies a kind of bogus modernity, the small North Carolina town that Cora flees to next personifies naked settler colonialism. The unnamed town, which has outlawed Black people, is a white supremacist utopia. Cora’s introduction to the state is the Freedom Trail, a ghastly road lined with lynched corpses. The trailhead is presented at night with the bodies dangling between the trees in silhouette, an image that underscores the idea that the country cultivates Black death, sowing it into the landscape.

*T he Underground Railroad* is filled with such ornate tableaux, using them to draw attention to both the staggering scale of slavery and the guerrilla architecture of the Underground Railroad. This motif is the show’s clearest deviation from the book. Both outline the limits of the scrappy abolitionist network—from its meager carrying capacity to its closed lines to its unpredictable schedule—but the show is more explicitly a travelogue: a slow accumulation of sensations and perspectives, a tarrying in liminal spaces, an act of witnessing.

It’s fitting, then, that the show’s signature shot is a kind of audiovisual postcard. It first appears when Cora is in the custody of Ridgeway (Joel Edgerton), a dogged slave hunter. After capturing her in North Carolina, he drags her across a barren Tennessee that’s been razed by wildfire and sickness. The journey is arduous, and the strain of the trek burns Cora out, the apocalyptic landscape mirroring her state of mind. But during a vivid dream, the hellscapes become a sanctuary, first showing Jasper, a captive of Ridgeway’s who died in transit, now alive and unfazed by the scorched terrain. Then the view shifts to a cotton field where slaves, some of them familiar to Cora, stand in profile, their gazes addressing a drifting camera. Punctuated by the chug of a train, the vision accents the idea that Cora’s forward motion is productive, that the people and places she has been forced to leave behind are still with her.

The postcard shot depicts the trauma of a tremendous loss without reproducing an exploitative gaze, a subject that weighed heavily on Jenkins’s mind. He was reportedly so concerned about courting the wrong gaze that Amazon convened a focus group of Black Atlanta residents to determine whether Whitehead’s book should even be adapted. The group overwhelmingly sanctioned the project and encouraged Jenkins to be unflinching, but the process seems to have pushed him to be artful as well as shrewd—to portray the enslaved as they saw themselves.

The one-sidedness of such an effort is the point—Jenkins is trying to inhabit a perspective that he knows has been lost to time—but it’s also a liability. As he conjures these unknowable ancestors, summoning them to look into the camera with quiet pride, he never quite finds a way to evoke their multiplicity. There’s an inerrity to the postcard shot, tender and restorative as it is, that verges on prettified respectability. There’s no rage or relief or tension in the gathered faces of the enslaved. Their gaze is direct but unthreatening, easy to meet.

That stiffness is especially strong in one of the show’s most elaborate set pieces, a dream sequence in which Cora imagines a grand terminal for the Underground Railroad. As she navigates the concourse, overstimulated by the scale of the station and guilt-ridden because she’s once again eager to leave a place behind, the space bustles around her. The scene is stunning aesthetically, the prim and industrious Black travelers and workers indulging the fantasy of an unsullied Black sanctum. But the station is oddly calm and ordered for an atrium of fugitives and survivors, a mood that grows more suspect as Cora is shown to be the only person out of place. When she is ousted and the station goes dormant, an entire platform of riders regarding her, the image flattens. Despite all those eyeballs, “the gaze” is not plural.

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**Jenkins’s storytelling focuses on slavery’s survivors rather than on the institution’s brutality.**
The Scion

What happened to Andrew Cuomo?

By Raina Lipsitz

In the past year, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has gone from being a national media darling and fantasy presidential contender to a forlorn, scandal-plagued figure, walking the executive grounds enrobed in a blanket. Before the pandemic, most politically engaged New Yorkers knew Cuomo as a bully and a tyrant—traits despised by some and quietly admired by others. But in the depths of the Covid-19 crisis, when New Yorkers were dying by the thousands, their bodies consigned to freezer trucks in temporary morgues, media outlets crowned him the country’s no-nonsense hero. His younger brother, CNN anchor Chris Cuomo, declared on the air what many Democrats had come to believe at the time: that Andrew Cuomo was “the best politician in the country.”

Since achieving unforeseen heights, Cuomo has squandered these accolades in a matter of months. He has been credibly accused of exacerbating the pandemic’s toll, threatening his colleagues, and sexually harassing women. To add to his woes, the FBI has opened an investigation into the undercounting of nursing home deaths during the pandemic. Federal prosecutors, the state attorney general, and the New York State Assembly have opened additional investigations, ranging from sexual
harassment allegations to whether his “vaccine czar” linked support for the governor to access to the vaccine and whether Cuomo used state resources to write and promote his most recent memoir, American Crisis: Leadership Lessons From the COVID-19 Pandemic. A man considered a national savior by many less than a year ago, Andrew Cuomo is now hanging on to his political career by his fingernails.

In The Prince: Andrew Cuomo, Coronavirus, and the Fall of New York, the journalist Ross Barkan, who has been covering Cuomo for years, examines his stunning rise and precipitous descent. The title and cover are a nod to Machiavelli’s classic: For Barkan, Cuomo is not unlike the prince Machiavelli addressed in his 16th-century work. “Cuomo’s ascent, like any true prince’s, could not have been possible without his father,” he writes. “Cuomo long ago learned that to govern, it is often better to be feared than loved.” Yet, as Barkan shows, it was precisely this hubris and sense of invulnerability that led to his recent unraveling. Over the years, Cuomo has obsessively cultivated an image as a pragmatic progressive who gets things done. Barkan demonstrates that the governor, never a committed ideologue, has been far more pragmatic about building his brand than executing a progressive agenda.

A part from his current office, Andrew Cuomo is best known as the eldest son of Mario Cuomo, New York’s beloved 52nd governor. Born and raised in Queens, the elder Cuomo was the son of Italian immigrants who ran a neighborhood grocery store. His modest background cemented his commitment to the New Deal liberalism that had helped families like his survive and flourish. Starting out his career as a promising young lawyer who first became known representing Queens homeowners in a dispute with the city, he eventually served three terms as the state’s Democratic governor, from 1983 to 1994. Mario Cuomo rose to national prominence as one of the last defenders of the government programs for poor and working-class people that had once been central to the Democratic Party. In 1984, he excoriated the greed and callousness of the Reagan years in an acclaimed speech at the Democratic National Convention. But though he flirted with the prospect of running for president, he dithered too long and missed his moment, ceding 1988 to the hapless Michael Dukakis and 1992 to Bill Clinton, the fresh new face of a Democratic Party that was turning its back on the New Deal.

Andrew Cuomo, then in his 20s, served as his father’s aide and campaign manager in those years and watched with frustration as Mario, hampered both by temperament and ideology, sidestepped his chances to rise even higher. The experience sharpened the younger Cuomo’s political instincts and appetite for power. Briefly leaving politics in 1984, he became an assistant district attorney in Manhattan and, later, a partner in a powerful law firm that represented developers like Donald Trump. (His father had once worked for a law firm that represented Trump’s father, Fred.) In 1988, already weary of the law, Cuomo left his firm to run a housing nonprofit he’d founded—a move widely seen as a launchpad for his own political career—and was appointed to lead New York City’s Commission on the Homeless in 1991, before joining the Clinton administration as an assistant secretary in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) two years later. In 1996, he was promoted to head the department, where he remained until 2001. In his time as HUD secretary, Cuomo did not reveal any ambitions to rein in financial institutions. As The New York Times reported in 2010, he ignored those who lobbied him to make federally backed home mortgage companies publicly report the details of the loans they were buying, and he failed to penalize large public banks to discourage risky lending. Mortgage brokers and bankers successfully pressured him to drop his initial opposition to the broker payments known as yield spread premiums, which drove the sub-prime mortgage crisis. He enraged those who insisted the practice was predatory by ruling that such premiums were “not per se illegal.” Although he has since dodged questions about his time at HUD, he did have Howard Glaser, his deputy assistant secretary and general counsel—who later became a mortgage industry consultant—produce and circulate a supposedly exculpatory binder of facts titled “The Myth of Andrew Cuomo and the Subprime Crisis.” Despite his best efforts, the “myth” of his dubious performance at HUD followed Cuomo back to New York. He ran for governor in 2002 but failed to gain traction; fearing a humiliating loss and under pressure from fellow Democrats, he abruptly withdrew a week before the primary. Temporarily thwarted, he retreated from politics to work in real estate. Then his luck changed. Vowing to clean up Albany—and riding the coattails of New York’s popular new governor, Eliot Spitzer—Cuomo easily became Spitzer’s successor as attorney general in 2006. Two years later, in the wake of Spitzer’s resignation in the midst of a prostitution scandal, Cuomo seized his chance. He and other top Democrats elbowed aside gubernatorial hopeful David Paterson, Spitzer’s lieutenant governor and deeply unpopular replacement. With Paterson out of the way, Cuomo was elected governor in 2010 with nearly two-thirds of the vote, finally winning back his father’s old seat in Albany.

Like his father, Cuomo has often portrayed himself as a humble son of Queens. Unlike his father, he had anything but a humble upbringing or early adulthood. Married to Kerry Kennedy, the daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, from 1990 to 2005, Cuomo has spent most of his adult life in elite circles. Whereas Mario Cuomo rose from the back of a Queens grocery store, Andrew rose by working for his father, the governor of New York, marrying a Kennedy, and working in (and, later, courting donations from) the real estate industry. Where his father was perceived as a New Deal liberal—“one of the left’s last true liberal lions before the party’s Clinton-era swerve toward the center,” per MSNBC’s Aliyah Frumin—Andrew leaned into that swerve, fully imbibing the political ethos of the 1990s, which stressed the virtues of the free market and the

Celebrate Good Times

The regime is having a birthday party, so we turn off the lights and pretend we’re sick. All night, happy americans honk their horns. *We did it!* they scream into our window. In the morning, *We* is all over the floor. We sweep *We* into a paper bag and label it *EMERGENCY*. The good news is that things will go back to the way they were, which is also the bad news. Meanwhile, I cut an onion, and it’s onions all the way down, and that’s a fine reason to cry at the sink on a Monday after the empire congratulates itself on persisting again. No, thank you, I’m stuffed, I couldn’t possibly have more hope. I haven’t finished mourning the last tyrant yet. I haven’t said enough goodbyes to—oh, what was her name? And hers? How many *We’s* did they cut out of me? And whose country was I standing on, the last time we survived?

FRANNY CHOI

Evans of government spending and regulation. The era of big government, Clinton famously declared in 1996, was over. Andrew Cuomo did not mourn it.

Though more willing to embrace a practical expediency, the younger Cuomo lacked his father’s charm and ostensible commitment to principle. Whereas Mario was loved as a statesman and orator, Andrew was grudgingly respected for his ruthlessness and bullying. While Mario steadfastly opposed the death penalty at a time when it was politically courageous to do so and declared that his state had “proven that government can be a positive force for good,” Andrew was a brutal arm-twister with little interest in ideology. He backed a $15-an-hour minimum wage only after years of insisting that it was “too high.” He signed a bill legalizing recreational marijuana this year, but had opposed it as recently as 2017 on the same grounds many Republicans do: that it is a “gateway drug.” He tacitly supported the existence of a group of conservative Democratic state legislators who caucused with Republicans, impeding for years progressive legislation like the Reproductive Health Act, for which he later claimed credit. And he has frequently overstated how essential his leadership was in the fight for marriage equality, which a majority of New Yorkers supported before he took office. In the words of the law professor Zephyr Teachout, who challenged him for office from the left in 2014, “Everything he’s done for poor, working-class, and middle-class New Yorkers has been under heavy pressure.”

*The New York Times*

**FRANNY CHOI**

Even at the height of his popularity, in 2020, when he was the subject of fevered trend pieces dubbing him “America’s Governor,” the “King of New York,” and “Crisis Daddy,” the praise was often tinged with distaste. “Andrew Cuomo Is the Control Freak We Need Right Now,” declared the headline of a New York Times column Ben Smith wrote last March, which went on to cite Cuomo’s “relentlessness” and “bullying” as qualities that “drive New Yorkers crazy” in ordinary times but are soothing in a pandemic. As an accompanying caption enthused, the governor even “put state prisoners to work” making hand sanitizer. (Smith neglected to note that the state paid those prisoners an estimated 65 cents an hour for what activists called slave labor, but he did acknowledge that Cuomo had ruled New York for nearly a decade “without inspiring much love.”) Reporter Rebecca Fishbein, who penned “Help, I Think I’m in Love With Andrew Cuomo???” for *Jezebel* three days later, was full of similarly tempered praise. Lauing his “measured bullying,” she also noted that in her years as a reporter, she had developed an “intense and reasonable” dislike of Cuomo, who had “repeatedly hindered attempts to reform the criminal justice system,” manipulated the state legislature “to keep progressive legislation on reproductive health from becoming law,” and “forced out the only useful subway leader the administration’s ever seen.”

Although his inability to inspire genuine warmth has to some extent checked Cuomo’s ambitions, he has compensated with brute force and cold cunning. Unlike his father, Barkan suggests, he seems to have decided it is better to gain the world, regardless of the potential cost to his soul. Cuomo has often been transparent about these calculations. Shortly before he was elected governor in 2010, he vowed to humble big labor and empower big business. “We’ve seen the same play run for 10 years,” he told *The New York Times*. “The governor announces the budget, unions come together, put $10 million in a bank account, run television ads against the governor. The governor’s popularity drops; the governor’s knees weaken; the governor falls to one knee, collapses, makes a deal.” His knees, he implied, would never wobble. In the same interview, Cuomo warned of impending “painful but necessary” cuts to Medicaid services like home health care. Early in his gubernatorial tenure, he successfully pushed to limit
pensions and freeze state workers’ wages. The New York State Business Council endorsed Cuomo for the third time in 2018, citing his rock-solid commitment to capping property taxes, constraining state spending, and cutting corporate tax rates.

In 2014, after extracting a promise from Cuomo to bring the state Senate under Democratic control and fight for passage of the DREAM Act, a minimum wage hike, public financing of elections, and decriminalization of marijuana, the New York Working Families Party, an alliance of organized labor and progressive nonprofits, agreed to endorse him over Zephyr Teachout. Cuomo, furious with the organization for even considering Teachout, reneged on those promises, and several Cuomo-allied unions, fearing the governor’s wrath, withdrew from the WFP. When the party dared to back progressive challenger Cynthia Nixon over Cuomo in 2018, he engineered a mass exodus of unions from the WFP. It was widely reported that he had threatened to withdraw his support on key union priorities unless they abandoned the party. When the public financing of elections was finally passed as part of the budget process in early 2020, he tied it to a provision that made it harder for small parties like the WFP to keep their ballot lines.

Cuomo may have convinced himself that all of this arm-twisting and horse-trading was necessary to maintain power and to push through the kind of incremental reforms he believes are less politically risky and easier to achieve. But by 2019, after years of throwing his weight around and exacting revenge on enemies real and imagined, he’d seen his approval rating sink to the lowest level of his tenure. After fending off left-wing challenges from Teachout in 2014 and Nixon in 2018, Cuomo was still fairly sanguine about his prospects for a fourth term. His career had taught him that you don’t have to be well-liked to win, but what he arguably wanted even more than another term was to be admired and praised—and when the pandemic came along, the venal, vindictive governor sensed his moment. As Barkan shows, he was able to transform himself into the steady, reassuring presence a terrified and bewildered public craved. He held daily press briefings in which he alternated between reciting statistics and opining about hope, resilience, and family. People watched as if their lives depended on it. Cuomo later won an Emmy for his “masterful use of television,” and some commentators even suggested that the Democrats should run him for president instead of presumptive nominee Joe Biden, primaries be damned.

With the presidential election far from settled, Democrats were eager to claim a winner, especially someone that many saw as the perfect foil to Donald Trump.

But Cuomo’s romance with the national press was short-lived. In January 2021, New York Attorney General Letitia James issued a report suggesting that his administration had failed to disclose the Covid deaths of thousands of nursing home residents. State health officials confirmed that the deaths were initially undercounted. By February, nine senior state health officials had left the department; Cuomo’s top aide, Melissa DeRosa, had acknowledged to state legislators that his staff deliberately withheld data; and Democratic lawmaker Ron Kim, a Cuomo critic, had said that the governor threatened to “destroy” him.

Then came the allegations of sexual misconduct. In February, former aide Lindsey Boylan described in greater detail the sexual harassment she had first alleged several months earlier. Days later, The New York Times published sexual harassment accusations by another former Cuomo aide. A third woman, Anna Ruch, said Cuomo had touched her without her consent at a private event. A number of other women, including two current aides, have since come forward to describe similar or worse behavior; one said that Cuomo groped her breast in the governor’s mansion. By mid-March, two US senators and...
Barkan finds Cuomo’s entrenchment unsurprising. Deftly ferrying readers from the pandemic’s horrific early days to the press briefings that made the governor a star to New York’s stunningly high rates of infection and death, he argues that Cuomo’s actions (or the lack thereof) exacerbated the crisis, leading to as many as tens of thousands of preventable deaths. In April 2020, the state had more coronavirus cases than any single country outside of the US. With the exception of California, more people died of Covid in New York than anywhere else in the nation. That is partly because, as Barkan explains, Cuomo spent the past decade gutting New York’s health care infrastructure: ramming through Medicaid cuts and hiring consultants to shrink or merge unprofitable facilities, leading to hospital closures and reduced capacity in poor neighborhoods—and leaving New York’s most vulnerable residents uniquely defenseless when disaster struck.

Much has been written about Cuomo’s pointless and juvenile vendetta against Bill de Blasio, New York City’s oft-scrorned mayor, but Barkan is especially eloquent on the subject of what Cuomo’s need to assert dominance has cost New Yorkers. More than a dozen public officials, including state Attorney General James, reportedly held a conference call last March to determine how to induce Cuomo to shut down the city without appearing to defer to de Blasio, who had proposed it first. “Taking action shortly after de Blasio’s own declaration would have meant following a lower-ranked, less prestigious official in a time of crisis, and that was unforgivable in Cuomo’s orbit,” Barkan writes. “Better the virus keep spreading than Cuomo, fully in command, appear weak.”

Barkan compares Cuomo often and convincingly to Robert Moses, the power-hungry urban planner, noting Cuomo’s own autocratic tendencies and desire for control, particularly over his portrayal in the press. He also compares Cuomo to his supposed nemesis, Donald Trump. Like Trump, Cuomo at first dismissively likened the coronavirus to the flu, cautioned against US dependence on China, and sought to shield nursing homes from liability for failing to protect residents and staff. Like Trump, he faces multiple credible sexual harassment allegations and has been accused of exploiting public resources for personal profit.

As grotesque as Barkan finds the former lionization of his subject, he is careful not to sneer at the everyday New Yorkers who found comfort in the governor’s stern demeanor. Compared with Trump, Barkan writes, Cuomo seemed “like a father huddling his brood in the London Tube during the Blitz.” Barkan reserves his scorn for Cuomo himself, his staff, and those members of the press who should have known better—or did, but willfully ignored facts that contradicted their made-for-TV narratives about Cuomo’s purported heroism. Describing the media’s pivot from Trump coverage to Cuomo scandals, Barkan writes: “Trump had left the stage, his rantings confined to occasional Fox News appearances. The major media companies needed new scandals to occupy their viewers…. They lacked the self-awareness to interrogate what exactly they were doing—daily excoriating a man they had once portrayed as an American hero—but they were, at least, acting as accountable journalists, a role they had abdicated a year earlier.”

He quotes the bereft children of otherwise healthy people who died after contracting Covid in New York nursing homes and a mother whose son contracted the virus in an upstate prison. The book could have benefited from even more of these voices.

As a work of political biography, Barkan’s book is a damning portrait of a man so obsessed with his image that, according to Vanity Fair, he asked journalists how proposing to his ex-wife would “play.” As a work of social criticism, invested in examining how Cuomo’s tenure has affected life and politics in New York, it is informed by its author’s years of careful reporting on these subjects. Cuomo’s admirers may simply dismiss journalists like Barkan, and the governor’s many scandals, as politically motivated distractions. As Trump proved, once Americans are hooked on a TV star, some stay fans for life. And Cuomo’s greatest gift is his ability to cast himself—at times plausibly—as the hero of the story. But The Prince also makes it clear that the arrogance and bullying that served him for so long may ultimately cost Cuomo more than he gained. “I speak truth to power,” he declared last year, defending his Trumpian castigation of health and news organizations for supposedly failing to sound the alarm about Covid. “And while it may make the powerful uncomfortable,” he added, “the American people deserve the truth.” In Cuomo’s telling, everything that goes well is thanks to his efforts and everything that goes badly is somebody else’s fault. As a case study in the Machiavellian manipulation of public perception, The Prince is well worth reading—a fitting antidote to Cuomo’s wildly self-serving memoir.

When it was announced in 1984 that Andrew Cuomo would be leaving his father’s office for the Manhattan DA’s, Mario characterized his relationship with his eldest son as irreplaceable. “He was able to communicate to me and for me in a very special way,” he said, adding that his son had the kind of credibility with him that was “impossible to earn”: “He’s my blood.” It was an oddly blunt and unself-conscious endorsement of nepotism, and as Barkan’s book amply shows, it hasn’t benefited ordinary people. No one should mistake Andrew Cuomo’s pedigree for his father’s stated principles.
Letters

Calling Arizona

Sasha Abramsky’s article “Flipping Arizona” rightly highlights the hard work of the canvassers of Unite Here in flipping red Arizona blue in 2020 [June 28/July 5]. Also hardworking, and even more “unsung,” were the thousands of phone bank callers across the country who were not able to travel to Arizona during the pandemic but made hundreds of thousands of calls to the state’s voters. They followed with hundreds of thousands of calls to Georgia voters for the Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff Senate races. Another large group of stay-at-home volunteers penned hundreds of thousands of handwritten letters and postcards to Arizona and Georgia voters. These activists shouldn’t be forgotten.

Jenny White
Berkeley, cal.

Black Main Street

It is a testament to The Nation’s long history of progressive journalism that it published in 1921 an on-the-spot account by Walter F. White of the racist massacre in Tulsa, Okla., now republished on your website and in print (“Tulsa’s ‘Stories of Horror,’” June 28/July 5). But the decision by the editors to describe Tulsa’s Greenwood neighborhood, which white rioters ravaged, as “Black Wall Street” perpetuates a now-common myth. While there were wealthy Black residents in Greenwood, its thriving commercial streets contained mainly small retail and service establishments, with not an investment house or corporate headquarters to be found, and most Black Tulsans worked for white employers.

The “Black Wall Street” phrase originated with Booker T. Washington (though he called it “Negro Wall Street”), who believed that Black uplift would come through manual labor and tradesmanship, rather than through demanding citizenship rights and access to professions. Calling Greenwood “Negro Wall Street” was an ideological term, not an objective description; it served to limit Black aspirations as much as to unleash them. The NAACP, which White would later lead, emerged in part to challenge Washington’s conservative model for Black progress, and White does not use the “Wall Street” label in his account.

Robert Shaffer
Mechanicsburg, pa.

Privileged Information

Although I share David Bromwich’s defense of freedom of expression, I don’t believe that the First Amendment alone can save us from the hegemony of professional liars (“Censorship and the Good Life,” June 14/21). The negative freedom from government censorship must be supplemented with the positive freedom to provide ourselves with reliably honest news. Our problem is that fake news is free, whereas real news costs money. Too many people get too much fake news.

Trying to filter out the fake news (i.e., censorship) won’t work if we don’t get enough real news. Indeed, our ability to recognize fake news depends on an accurate perspective of reality that we can get only from a steady diet of real news.

Eric Paul Jacobsen

Comment drawn from our website letters@thenation.com

Please do not send attachments.
Education is vitally important, and I want to do what I can as mayor to help support that, right? City council legislation is vitally important, and I want to work with the city council to make sure that we’re passing sound legislation that benefits the majority of Buffalonians. But in order to have an impact on poverty, in order to improve health outcomes and decrease disparities in health care, and in order to close this racial wealth and homeownership gap that I keep talking about, you need the purse strings.

You have to be able to control the budget and the prioritization of the resources of the city, and that happens in the executive office, and that is the reason why I wanted to run for mayor: because we need the purse strings.

JN: If you win in November, you will be the first mayor of a major American city in decades who identifies as a socialist.

IW: It’s so exciting. It’s so exciting.

There was a term they used to describe socialist mayors in the past: “sewer socialist.” They were called sewer socialists because one of the things that they prioritized in Milwaukee was indoor plumbing, right? So this whole controversy about what socialism means, it just means that government functions in a way that is to the benefit of its residents.

It baffles me that this is a debate that we’re having right now, coming out of a pandemic where people are enjoying things like stimulus checks, like SNAP benefits for families with children, like relief from rent and past-due water bills.

In 2021, there were families—in the midst of a pandemic when they’re saying the single most important thing you can do to stay healthy is wash your hands—and they don’t have running water in their homes because they owe some company money.... People know that’s not right.

JN: Can Buffalo serve as a model for the rest of the country?

IW: Absolutely. A lot of people, when I said I was running as a first-time candidate, they’re like, “Well, why mayor? Why not school board, or why not city council?” And I said, “The things that I want to get accomplished don’t happen at the school board level or even at the city council level, right?”
As we hope and plan for a better future, we have a full schedule of departures arranged 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 for one of our popular programs, and you can cancel with a 100% refund up to 60 days prior to departure.**

Tours are filling quickly. If you’re considering a tour with us in the fall but have yet to make a final decision, we encourage you to reserve your space now. Below are a few of our fall departures.

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

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