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ED MORALES
The war in Ukraine is in its fifth week, with casualties on both sides continuing to mount. Unexpectedly stiff resistance by the Ukrainians has so far prevented Russian forces from seizing Kyiv and other key cities. One danger of the current stalemate—that Russia’s frustration will lead to escalation—can be seen in the relentless bombardment of Mariupol. But Russia’s failures on the battlefield also create real opportunities for peace, possibly involving some form of regional autonomy for the Donbas along with neutrality for the whole of Ukraine.

That, ultimately, is a matter for the Ukrainian people to decide—which is what made President Biden’s ad-lib in Poland that Vladimir Putin “cannot remain in power” such an egregious misstep. Instead of posturing about regime change, the United States—and Europe—should be working to provide off-ramps for both sides. The risks of nuclear confrontation demand no less.

Whatever the outcome in Ukraine, the world we are entering because of the war will be very different from either the old Cold War balance of terror or the deceptive stability of recent decades. We can only begin to gauge the contours of this new world. The role of China, for example, remains far from clear. Yet some things appear reasonably certain: NATO will emerge more powerful and politically popular—at least in Europe—while Russia will become a pariah state, largely walled off from the continental economy. Europe itself will be divided along a new Iron Curtain, with the opposing forces prepared to engage at a moment’s notice, nuclear weapons at the ready.

But that is only the beginning. Military spending will rise while other priorities—education, health care, climate action—are accorded secondary status. The seismic impacts of the Ukraine war will reach deep into societies, altering political allegiances and popular attitudes. In Germany, a government led by Social Democrats and the Greens has just approved a dramatic increase in military spending, at the same time canceling the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline—a fundamental shift away from reliance on Russian energy. Similar moves are evident throughout Europe, where commercial ties with Russia are being severed and discredited politicians like Boris Johnson have exploited the crisis to burnish their credentials.

But the war’s long-term impacts won’t be restricted to Europe. The unabashed militarism on display during Biden’s trip to Poland is likely to reverberate not just on Capitol Hill—where Democrats and Republicans are competing to raise the Pentagon budget even higher and impose yet more extreme sanctions on Russia—but in Asia, Africa, and South America, where rearmament serves to further entrench privileged elites and the authoritarian rulers who serve their interests. Cessation of wheat deliveries from Russia and Ukraine, two of the world’s leading grain exporters, may well lead to a global food crisis.

All this is being accompanied by an ideological offensive the likes of which have not been seen since the onset of the Cold War. Biden’s conveniently polarizing narrative—posing the question as “Who is going to prevail? Are democracies going to prevail…? Or are autocracies going to prevail?”—is already saturating the media, think-tank discourse, and the political arena and, if history is any guide, may soon be accompanied by restrictions on dissent.

Under such conditions, progressive thinkers and activists would be wise to reconsider our strategies and adapt our messaging. At the very least, we need to find new means to resist the headwinds of militarism and contest the arguments for a permanent war economy. We cannot abandon our fundamental objectives, even in a time of heightened international tensions. Otherwise, the battle for other priorities, such as health and education and social and economic justice, will surely be lost.

This, too, poses both challenges and opportunities. The climate action movement, for example, might show how global militarism and fossil fuel addiction are two sides of the same coin—a case progressives have been arguing for a long time. With Putin threatening to use nuclear arms, peace activists have a fresh opportunity to highlight the danger posed by atomic weapons.

The global impact of the Ukraine war is still unfolding. It is essential that progressives analyze the situation carefully, mobilize deliberately—and, where possible, seize opportunities to advance our priorities in this new environment.
Our Justice

Black women have been waiting for this nomination to the US Supreme Court for a very long time.

We are witnessing a historic moment. For the first time in our nation’s history, the president has nominated a Black woman to sit on the United States Supreme Court. As a Black woman attorney, I can confidently say that I have been waiting for this nomination for a very long time. Civil rights attorney Maya Wiley put it perfectly: “It meant that our qualifications had some chance of finally being judged on our success, rather than dismissed because of stereotypes.” That Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is a highly qualified, über-competent, and all-around powerhouse of a judge is no surprise. There have been so many Black woman legal scholars, judges, and advocates who have been wrongly overlooked and who deserved the opportunity to sit on the Supreme Court bench. But I’m still so grateful that this moment is happening.

During her nomination hearings, Judge Jackson taught a master class in diplomatic poise in the face of racist and sexist dog whistles. We witnessed “the strength that Black women have to pass on to our daughters,” the author and UC Irvine law professor Michele Bratcher Goodwin said. “We are taught to walk through fire. This poise is about survival and the attempt to attain a thin slice of thriving, bit by bit.”

When Senator John Kennedy “complimented” Judge Jackson for being articulate, she responded with a cool and collected candor that told me she has been training for this exact moment her entire life. Her response was accompanied by a familiar Black woman facial expression. It is the face I saw my mom assume as she smiled and responded calmly when clerks in expensive stores looked at us with suspicion, wondering, “What could they possibly be shopping for?” She also gave a polite but I-know-what-you’re-really-insinuating smile to the parents of my white high school friends who told us they were happy that affirmative action policies exist because they allowed me to gain access to a college that their children did not get accepted into. Appearing unbothered in the face of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia is the only way to survive as a Black woman in America.

But Judge Jackson’s nomination and confirmation process is not only important for Black women like me; it is also a necessary step toward achieving the long-sought goal of representation and inclusion that our Constitution promises: “We the people.” We have more than earned this seat at the most powerful table in our country, and I, like Senator Cory Booker, am not letting anything or anyone take away my exuberant joy.

I had the privilege of speaking with fellow Black woman lawyers and advocates about what this moment means for them. Here are my questions and their answers, in the hopes that you too take the time to reflect on and luxuriate in this special occasion.

As Black woman lawyers and/or advocates, what does Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson’s nomination mean for you?

Monica Simpson, executive director of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective: “I am overjoyed. Watching her face, seeing [her] natural hair and brown skin, and watching such a beautiful Black woman holding her composure, sitting in her power, and holding it down during these hearings is everything. As a Black lesbian Southern creative, I root myself in the firm mantra of #TrustBlackWomen as I do my work in reproductive justice, and she is the epitome of that to me. If #TrustBlackWomen had a face, it would be hers.”

Victoria Kirby York, deputy executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition: “Our judicial history is filled with pages of primarily white people interpreting laws that had specific impacts on people of color—
particularly Black people. Judge Brown Jackson’s confirmation means that at least on the highest court, we would be closer to gender and racial parity than ever before, with an additional perspective of someone not born with generational wealth.”

April Dawson, associate dean of technology and innovation and professor of law at North Carolina Central University: “I have studied the US Supreme Court for many years, and the significance of having a Black woman on the precipice of becoming a justice…cannot be overstated. I am personally inspired by Judge Brown Jackson, and her journey motivates me in my role as a professor of law to continue to support and encourage the next generation of Black woman attorneys and judges.”

Kim Tignor, cofounder of #SheWillRise: “When we started #SheWillRise, because we need a Black woman on the Supreme Court, one of the first questions that we would get, even from Black folks, was, ‘Does that woman exist?’ Not only does she exist; we created an entire slate of women who could step into those shoes. The goal is that no one ever asks us that question again. Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is the first, but she will not be the last.”

Christopher M. Bridges, professor of law at UC Berkeley School of Law: “When President Biden said he was going to nominate a Black woman, and the immediate response was ‘But she is unqualified’ before they even knew who the nominee was going to be, [it] was personally offensive, because the implication was that there was not one Black woman out there qualified to sit on the Supreme Court. The implication was that I wasn’t qualified to sit on the Supreme Court, and neither were any of my brilliant legal Black feminist colleagues—and that is just not true.”

Monica Simpson: “The number of times we’ve had to hold our composure, whether they were throwing food at us at a lunch counter or trying to trample us as we are walking through a school for the first time—that needs to be acknowledged. We need to have a whole day of celebration for the countless Black women who have had to walk through violence to make history happen. We are witnessing another example, at countless Black women who have had to walk through violence to make history happen. We are witnessing another example, at the highest court in the land, of a Black woman having to endure violent rhetoric and disrespect to make history happen.”

Michele Bratcher Goodwin, Chancellor’s Professor at UC Irvine and author of Policing the Womb (2020): “We are witnessing in real time the many different ways of dog whistling. There is an overt dog whistling which our country has been explicit about in law and society. But there is also a kind of dog whistling that takes place when one makes road-kill of the US Constitution to make a point that somehow [Judge Jackson] has done something wrong in her career by actually upholding the Constitution and representing people who are criminal defendants.”

Victoria Kirby York: “I hope the beautiful way Senator Cory Booker had Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson’s back during the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing echoes with more brothers fighting for issues that specifically impact Black women and LGBTQ+/SGL people.”

How have you been taking care of yourself as you witness the white cis heteronormative supremacy and misogyny on display throughout this process?

Fatima Goss Graves, president and CEO, National Women’s Law Center: “I, in community with other Black women, took the time to prepare ourselves as we entered this moment. We began the week with pure joy. We had the best joyful affirmation brunch with #SheWillRise. We had a joyful, inspiring rally outside of the Supreme Court. For me, Black women celebrating other Black women is the best thing ever, and I didn’t even know then how much I would need that preparation.”

Kierra Johnson, executive director of the National LGBTQ+ Task Force: “In some ways it has served as an affirmation that I am not making [the racism and sexism that are still prevalent] up. The affront to our humanity—my humanity, my leadership, my gender, my femme expression, my race—it’s real. These micro- and macro-aggressions are deeply hurtful, pervasive, and debilitating, and although we’ve come a long way, we still have a long way to go. And while it can be daunting, I am taking care of myself by reveling in hope, because this moment shows me that anything is possible.”

Candace Bond-Theriault is a Black queer feminist lawyer, writer, mom, and social justice advocate.

FROM THE PRESIDENT
BHASKAR SUNKARA

Nation News

I’m thrilled to be joining The Nation—a publication I’ve long admired (and have written for numerous times)—as president. For more than 150 years, The Nation has been on the right side of history: opposing every form of exploitation, standing against militarism, and articulating a vision of American progress that benefits the many, not the few. This is a legacy that we’ll all need to draw from in the difficult years ahead. As national politics seems to be shifting from commonsense discussions about life in a grossly unfair economy to a culture war that will benefit only the right, the political establishment offers even fewer answers than usual—making it absolutely essential that The Nation’s voice be heard.
The Politics of Covid

Democrats must figure out how to discuss the hard truths about the pandemic, or it could cost them.

Throughout the 21st century, Democrats have identified as the party of science, and that has served them well. Against the threat posed by Republicans who deny climate change, thwart stem cell research, and ridicule infectious disease protocols for public spaces, Democrats have argued that Americans need to respect scientific data and the health and safety standards that protect us all. Yet as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to vex the United States, with the death toll moving toward 1 million, Democrats lack a coherent strategy for projecting their seriousness about tackling a lingering health care challenge—which is one variant away from again becoming a crisis—and for holding to account those who failed to take it seriously in the first place.

That’s a dangerous approach in a midterm election year where the pandemic and the social and economic chaos that have followed from it will continue to define our lives. People will still need to be vaccinated and boosted, mandates will still be required in some regions, and concern about inflation—much of it rooted in patterns of profiteering that began during the pandemic—will be a front-burner issue.

President Biden and his team have, for the most part, brought better intentions and better management to the fight against Covid-19. Biden has shown the respect for scientists that Donald Trump eschewed; and Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House’s incoming Covid response coordinator, has a track record of following the data and advocating for public health equity. But a year into Biden’s presidency, the Democrats have not delivered on his proposal to “Build Back Better” and continue to shy away from the logical response to a public health crisis of such magnitude: developing a single-payer Medicare for All plan so that our health care system serves patients rather than profits. Nor have they adopted a serious approach to investigating all the reasons—Trump’s lies, inadequate workplace protections, vaccine skepticism—for why the United States has had a higher death rate than comparably wealthy countries. And now, with so much left undone, Democratic governors are busy lifting mask mandates and optimistically suggesting we’ve entered some ill-defined “next phase of the pandemic.”

Stephen Morse, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University Medical Center, has warned against “complacency as we decide we no longer need masks, making it harder to take action when the next variant comes along.” That’s not a radical view. A majority of Americans think mask mandates should be maintained wherever cases are high, while only 21 percent indicated in a February poll that they thought the US should “open up and get back to life as usual with no mandates or requirements.” Polls from around the country also show that local vaccine mandates are popular, often gaining 70 percent support or higher.

Americans are right to remain worried about the pandemic. One period earlier this March had roughly twice the death toll of the same period last March. Numbers have been surging and declining and then surging again for two years. “Historically, even during this pandemic, every time we thought we could discard our masks, another variant came along to disturb our complacency—Delta, now Omicron and perhaps its relative BA.2—and we were almost right back where we started,” Morse noted. That’s a scientific fact Democrats need to get better at discussing.

Even as Biden generally gets the policies right, he misses practically and rhetorically. As an example, the president’s Covid-19 preparedness plan has sound components: a continued emphasis on the importance of vaccinations; a proposal to rapidly deploy vaccines where necessary; a commitment to keep vaccines, testing, and masks available for free; and a promise to prioritize treatment for immunocompromised people. Yet the plan subtly shifts more of the burden onto individuals, especially those who are most vulnerable, abandoning recognition of the pandemic as a societal challenge. And in his State of the Union address in March, Biden seemed unfocused and, at times, desperate—such as when he said, “Let’s use this moment to reset. So, stop looking at Covid as a partisan dividing line. See it for what it is: a god-awful disease.”

That’s never going to happen during a midterm election year in which Republicans have already signaled that they will exploit every opening to reclaim Congress. They can be counted on to make the most of the fact that, as Biden has acknowledged, Americans are “tired, frustrated, and exhausted.” At the same time, they will blame Democrats for rising inflation and for the chaos that unfolds if a new variant spreads.

For Democrats, no good can come from downplaying lingering threats. The president and his party should aggressively and unapologetically renew their emphasis on following science—even when that requires
telling hard truths—and on challenging pandemic price gouging by corporations that keep announcing record profits while hiking costs for consumers. Instead of sending confused signals, which invariably allow Republicans to control the narrative, Democrats should bring clarity to the Covid conversation by highlighting the stark inequities that the pandemic continues to reveal and by working to address them. They should demonstrate an expanded commitment to public health and workplace safety and be unequivocal advocates for needed components of the Build Back Better plan that the GOP rejected. The Democratic leadership should never let the American people forget that top Republicans have repeatedly failed to respect science and the common good—and will continue to do so if they prevail in the midterms.

People can handle the truth if it is delivered consistently and seriously. Biden should borrow a page from Franklin Roosevelt, who during the Great Depression used everything from national speaking tours to fireside chats to give Americans the facts about hard times. With so much on the line, Biden and the Democrats must communicate a whole lot more about the pandemic challenges that remain—and about the Republican charlatans who would play politics with life and death. 

Democrats should demonstrate an expanded commitment to public health and workplace safety.

An Immodest Proposal
Mothers just can’t win. In our consumer society, maybe it’s time for a market solution: Let’s start charging men to have babies.

OMEN HAD A GOOD PANDEMIC THE LAST TIME AROUND—something actually came of it!—compared with this one, which is total shit. Just over a century ago, the 1918 flu pandemic may have vanquished a decent chunk of the global population, but after witnessing mass death, plus the loss of their children from other preventable diseases like diphtheria and meningitis, women decided to actually do something about it. When (white) American women got the vote two years later, they used their newfound political power to immediately pressure local and federal governments into action, resulting in the largest expansion of public health spending in US history up until that point. It was wildly successful, fueling later large-scale door-to-door household hygiene campaigns and driving an 18 percent decline in childhood infectious diseases, with 20,000 fewer annual deaths compared with pre-suffrage mortality rates. Then, as now, women were overwhelmingly the early adopters of that revolution—washing their hands, boiling milk to kill bacteria, and refrigerating meat—while men generally resisted even the most basic public health directives, much as they’ve resisted wearing masks today. Quite simply: More children lived because politicians actually responded to the flush of new female voters and their demand for less death.

This must sound like a sick joke to the over 3.5 million mothers who’ve watched Covid-19 kill their careers and then West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin cancel any hopes of paid leave or state-subsidized child care. Now, as we’re staring down the complete loss of Roe v. Wade and a new bill in Missouri where the party of life—as long as it’s cis, straight, male, and white—just proposed (and scuttled after a massive outcry) a ban on abortion for nonviable pregnancies, women everywhere are taking shallow breaths. It’s a death cult of motherhood that treats child-rearing as a moral redemption for the sin of womanhood. A compulsory test of character for which there can be no cheating, like accessing modern health care, having a job, or securing affordable daycare.

Withholding social infrastructure to push women out of the workforce while making them privately finance raising their children is peak capitalism and pure evil. The only solution is to lean into our exponentially consumer-driven society and deploy a market strategy: Women need to start charging men to have babies.

It’s really very easy. As long as we still have access to hormonal birth control, women can control the means of production as a bargaining position. I know, it’s not as good as having actual rights, but if conservatives are going to complain about falling birth rates, we may as well leverage the demand.

MOORE ONLINE
thenation.com/highlights

› Interracial Marriage Under Attack: Thinking the Unthinkable
   JANE DAILEY

› Kanye the Careerist
   JORDAN COLEY
CoQ10’s Failure Leaves Millions Wanting

Use this pill to supercharge your brain and think better than ever.

Millions of Americans take the supplement CoQ10. It’s the “jet fuel” that supercharges your cells’ power generators, known as mitochondria.

As you age, your mitochondria begin to die. In fact, by age 67, you lose 80% of the mitochondria you had at age 25. But if you’re taking CoQ10, there’s something important you should know.

As powerful as CoQ10 is, there is a critical thing it fails to do. It can’t create new mitochondria in your cells.

**Taking CoQ10 is not enough**

“There’s a little-known NASA nutrient that multiplies the number of new power generators in your cells by up to 55%,” says Dr. Al Sears, owner of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Royal Palm Beach, Florida. “Science once thought this was impossible. But now you can make your heart, brain and body young again.”

“I tell my patients the most important thing I can do is increase their ‘health span.’ This is the length of time you can live free of disease and with all your youthful abilities and faculties intact.”

**Medical first:** Multiply the “power generators” in your cells

Al Sears, M.D., recently released an energy-boosting supplement based on this NASA nutrient that has become so popular, he’s having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of over 500 scientific papers on anti-aging and recently spoke at the WPBF 25 Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz, and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people listened to Dr. Sears speak on his anti-aging breakthroughs and attended his book signing at the event.

Now, Dr. Sears has come up with what his peers consider his greatest contribution to anti-aging medicine yet — a newly discovered nutrient that multiplies the number of tiny, energy-producing “engines” located inside the body’s cells, shattering the limitations of traditional CoQ10 supplements.

**Why mitochondria matter**

A single cell in your body can contain between 200 to 2,000 mitochondria, with the largest number found in the most metabolically active cells, like those in your brain, heart and skeletal muscles.

But because of changes in cells, stress and poor diet, most people’s power generators begin to malfunction and die off as they age. In fact, the Mitochondria Research Society reports 50 million U.S. adults are suffering from health problems because of mitochondrial dysfunction.

Common ailments often associated with aging — such as memory problems, heart issues, blood sugar concerns and vision and hearing difficulties — can all be connected to a decrease in mitochondria.

**Birth of new mitochondria**

Dr. Sears and his researchers combined the most powerful form of CoQ10 available — called ubiquinol — with a unique, newly discovered natural compound called PQQ that has the remarkable ability to grow new mitochondria. Together, the two powerhouses are now available in a supplement called Ultra Accel II.

Discovered by a NASA probe in space dust, PQQ (Pyroloquinoline quinone) stimulates something called “mitochondrial biogenesis” — a unique process that actually boosts the number of healthy mitochondria in your cells.

In a study published in the Journal of Nutrition, mice fed PQQ grew a staggering number of new mitochondria, showing an increase of more than 55% in just eight weeks.

The mice with the strongest mitochondria showed no signs of aging — even when they were the equivalent of 80 years old.

**Science stands behind the power of PQQ**

Biochemical Pharmacology reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants.

“Imagine 5,000 times more efficient energy,” says Dr. Sears. “PQQ has been a game changer for my patients.”

“With the PQQ in Ultra Accel II, I have energy I never thought possible,” says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears’ patients. “I am in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearer, move with real energy and sleep like a baby.”

**It works right away**

Along with an abundance of newfound energy, users also report a sharper, more focused mind and memory, and even younger-looking skin and hair. Jerry M. from Wellington, Florida, used Ultra Accel II and was amazed at the effect.

“I noticed a difference within a few days,” says Jerry. “My endurance almost doubled. But it’s not just in your body. You can feel it mentally, too,” says Jerry. “Not only do I feel a difference, but the way it protects my cells is great insurance against a health disaster as I get older.”

**Increase your health span today**

The demand for this supplement is so high, Dr. Sears is having trouble keeping it in stock. “My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling or looking older than their age... or for those who are tired or growing more forgetful.”

“My favorite part of practicing anti-aging medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. Ultra Accel II sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies... and they actually feel young again.”

**Where to find Ultra Accel II**

Right now, the only way to get this potent combination of PQQ and super-powered CoQ10 is with Dr. Sears’ breakthrough Ultra Accel II formula.

To secure bottles of this hot, new supplement, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-846-7008 within the next 48 hours. “It takes time to get bottles shipped out to drug stores,” said Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to the customer.”

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about this product, he offers a 100%, money-back guarantee on every order. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and I’ll send you your money back,” said Dr. Sears.

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow them to restock.

Call 1-800-846-7008 to secure your limited supply of Ultra Accel II. You don’t need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. To take advantage of this great offer use Promo Code NATUA0422 when you call in.

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**These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Results may vary from person to person. No individual result should be seen as typical. Offer not available to residents of Iowa.**
One hero is already leading the way. In a recent viral Reddit post, a 34-year-old man described his 29-year-old partner’s all-business approach to having babies, complete with a 16-page ring binder breaking down the cost-benefit analysis and its impact on her career. The TL;DR is that it sucks. By our anemic American standards, the woman in the Reddit post is lucky because her company offers six months of paid leave at 50 percent of her salary. But considering the immediate income reduction she faces and her likelihood of getting “mommy-tracked” (i.e., following a career path that offers greater flexibility to devote time to child-rearing, at the cost of raises and promotions), she proposed that her partner pay her $50,000 to compensate for the loss in earnings. This was apparently a huge “turn-off” for our author, who at no point suggests that he might take any of the leave, paid or otherwise, offered by his equally well-paying employer. It never occurs to him that his behavior might also be a boner-killer for her, or that her relatively modest proposal doesn’t even begin to make up for the lifetime hit to her finances and career prospects.

But the beauty of her approach is that it doesn’t matter whether he likes it or not. This isn’t your grandmother’s free baby store, where men get to spawn and then carry on with their lives at no cost. Welcome to the future, where men use their “fatherhood bonus”—the documented salary advantage that working fathers receive compared with working mothers and childless men—to pay for the privilege of passing on their genetic material. No more entitlements.

Now, I know it sounds great, but there are some downsides to this plan. As the psychologist Laurie Rudman discovered in her studies of bargaining power in relationships, when women deploy more competitive negotiation tactics, their husbands tend to punish them by withholding emotional labor. Defying conventional gender norms comes with a cost, so be sure to factor it into the price of having the baby. There are, of course, other expenses to consider, such as the hit to your 401(k), the cost of more therapy, etc. Just capitalize it all into the final valuation, and don’t be afraid if it reaches into the millions. You don’t want to lowball yourself like the woman in the Reddit post, who isn’t even charging for all the grief her ungrateful partner is giving her on the Internet. Remember, the goal is to make pregnancy so prohibitively expensive that men might actually insist on a government bailout.

Oh, and once all the baby-making is over: mandatory vasectomies as a condition for sex. By then, Republicans will have fully criminalized birth control—which is itself already a responsibility borne disproportionately by women, who are expected to reroute their reproductive systems to maximize male pleasure. This last part is a long shot, I’ll admit, since relying on men to compromise themselves in any way is a fantasy. But then again so is crypto, and that doesn’t stop them. Maybe the solution is to rebrand our kids as IRL NFTs, then sit back as men fall over each other to “invest.” Sure, they may be disappointed when their Bored Ape turns out to be a crying baby, but at least they’ll have gotten something out of it, which right now is a hell of a lot more than women can say.
Ending Arbitration

BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

It’s hard to believe, but Congress just passed meaningful legislation: In February, lawmakers approved the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act. Emerging from the Me Too movement and stories of women being forced into private arbitration instead of getting their day in court when they brought sexual harassment claims against their employers, the law will ban businesses from including such provisions in employment contracts.

The law promises not only to offer the individual victims of workplace sexual harassment and assault more relief by allowing them to bring their claims in court, where they have a better chance of prevailing, but also to shed more light on the epidemic of sexual harassment by making it harder for companies to push these claims out of sight.

However, forced arbitration is not just a problem for sexual harassment victims. Employers apply it to other workplace claims as well, such as gender discrimination, racial discrimination and harassment, violations of the Americans With Disabilities Act, failures to follow the Family and Medical Leave Act, and wage theft. Congress has now essentially admitted that forced arbitration is a corrupt practice—one that deprives workers of justice and keeps wrongdoing in the dark—but it has banned it only in one area. This is a fraction of the solution we need, which is to end forced arbitration completely.

Forced arbitration was once illegal. But after Congress passed a law in 1925 that allowed its use in contractual disputes, the Supreme Court repeatedly expanded its scope such that it can be applied to almost any dispute, whether between a worker and an employer or a consumer and a corporation. Instead of a hearing before a judge and a jury of one’s peers, arbitration takes place in private, in front of a retired judge or lawyer who is often picked by the corporation and is likely friendly to its position.

The practice has proliferated rapidly. Today, it’s estimated that over half of nonunion private sector workers, or more than 60 million Americans, have signed contracts that require them to file all complaints through arbitration instead of the courts. Low-wage workers are especially likely to be subject to forced arbitration.

That’s terrifying for workers, because the likelihood that they’ll receive justice in arbitration is far lower. Employees win in arbitration only about 20 percent of the time, compared with nearly 60 percent when they bring their complaints to state court. They also stand to get far less money: The average damages for aggrieved workers in arbitration are just $23,548, compared with $143,497 in federal court and $328,008 in state court.

And that’s when workers bring cases. It takes courage to speak up about mistreatment in the workplace, given that retaliation is incredibly common and workers put their livelihoods on the line. Arbitration makes it even less likely that they will bring cases, because they know the deck is stacked against them. One analysis found that over 98 percent of the claims that should be expected to be brought by workers never get filed. The cost of forgoing justice adds up quickly: In 2019, low-wage workers lost $9.27 billion in back pay that they were owed due to wage theft because they failed to file arbitration claims.

The practice doesn’t just hurt workers. Consumers often have to sign forced arbitration clauses as well; in a 2014 study, nearly 88 percent of mobile phone provider agreements included them. The process is extremely lopsided. While companies are almost always represented by a lawyer, only about 60 percent of consumers are. The average consumer will end up paying a financial institution, not the other way around.

The good news is that some federal lawmakers won’t let the issue rest. In March, the House of Representatives passed the Forced Arbitration Injustice Repeal Act, which would ban the practice in all employment and consumer disputes. But the bill didn’t have the same bipartisan support that the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act enjoyed—just one Republican backed it, compared with the 113 Republicans who voted for the Me Too bill—and the Senate has yet to act on its version.

Sexual harassment and assault victims deserve their day in court. But so do people of color who are called racial epithets at work, restaurant servers whose bosses steal their tips, and people with disabilities who aren’t given the accommodations they need to perform their work. Congress shouldn’t leave them behind.

Bryce Covert
A More Perfect Union

Congressional staffers have a tough job. No wonder they're unionizing.

Working on Capitol Hill can be grueling. Many of the staffers for some of the most powerful people in the world make poverty wages—barely enough to survive in one of the most expensive cities in the country. Some junior congressional staffers rely on food stamps or have to take on second jobs and gig work to get by. They deal with abusive bosses, brutal hours, and demoralizing work environments, and they lack legal protections to organize and collectively bargain.

In February, a group of staffers announced the launch of the Congressional Workers Union, an effort to “unionize the personal offices and committees” of Congress members that they’d been quietly organizing for over a year. “While not all offices and committees face the same working conditions, we strongly believe that to better serve our constituents will require meaningful changes to improve retention, equity, diversity, and inclusion on Capitol Hill,” the union said in a statement. “That starts with having a voice in the workplace.”

Top Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and President Joe Biden, immediately expressed their support. Michigan Representative Andy Levin, a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor and a former assistant organizing director for the AFL-CIO, introduced a resolution to formally recognize House staffers’ right to organize, which gained more than 160 Democratic cosponsors. A recent House Administration Committee hearing on Levin’s resolution also gave the organizing push some momentum.

Yet despite this apparent support, Democrats are dragging their feet on the issue—and aides are not buying their excuses. Congressional staffers have technically had the right to unionize and collectively bargain since 1996, under the Congressional Accountability Act. But the final step to formally authorize these legal protections was never taken, and aides have not seriously attempted to unionize until now, largely out of fear of getting fired or blacklisted. In 1996, a resolution that extended legal protections to the employees of some legislative support agencies, such as the Library of Congress, was introduced, brought to the floor, and passed in both the House and the Senate the next day. In the case of Levin’s resolution, it would only have to pass the House—no Joe Manchin or Kyrsten Sinema to worry about.

“There aren’t really great excuses for why they’re walking so slow,” a member of the Congressional Workers Union organizing commit-

tee told The Nation. “If anything, they’re making it harder for themselves because it’s giving us the opportunity to agitate.”

A January survey by the Congressional Progressive Staff Association found that 39 percent of the 516 staffers polled had taken out loans to cover living expenses, and about half of nonmanagers said they’d struggled to “make ends meet.” The turnover among House staffers has reached its highest point in at least 20 years, according to a new study.

Last month, the House received a boost to the Members’ Representational Allowance, the pool of money that funds office budgets, including staffer salaries. “My chief hasn’t brought it up at all or discussed it with us,” another member of the organizing committee told The Nation. “We’ve had multiple staff meetings internally since that increase came through, and it’s been total radio silence.” The inaction has helped the union drive win over skeptics.

Republican lawmakers are largely against the push, but that hasn’t stopped some current and former GOP staffers from reaching out to the union, organizers said. At the hearing on Levin’s resolution, House Republicans previewed their union-busting arguments. “Not only do most congressional staff already have the benefits most unions fight for, voting to unionize congressional offices and committees would create serious problems and lead to even more dysfunction in Washington,” said Representative Rodney Davis of Illinois. He went on to say that a union “could create numerous conflicts of interest and impact members’ constitutional responsibilities to the American people.” Another Republican, Representative Barry Loudermilk of Georgia, insisted that a union would bring “several pitfalls” that could impact constituents.

Some Democrats are privately worried about using the MRA increase to close the pay gap among staffers; they also fear that the unionization drive could provide fodder for Republican attack ads. But mostly Democrats say they support the fight. Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland countered the Republican arguments at the hearing, saying that he doesn’t think the unique conditions of a Capitol Hill job represent insurmountable obstacles.

“We can design it the way we think we need to design it in order both to vindicate the interests of staff, to have a fair workplace where their interests are recognized and taken into account, as well as the paramount interests of the government in legislation,” Raskin said. “And I think we can do both.”

Despite apparent support, Democrats are dragging their feet on the issue—and aides are not buying their excuses.
People walk through an art installation made from plastic water bottles in the city of Malang in East Java, Indonesia, as part of an awareness drive for World Water Day, March 22. In 1993, the United Nations created World Water Day to inspire action and highlight the importance of fresh water. The theme for 2022 was “Groundwater, Making the Invisible Visible.”

**By the Numbers**

- **460** Number of square miles of a previously stable ice shelf in East Antarctica that collapsed in March
- **3.5T** Number of tons of Greenland’s ice sheet that melted between 2011 and 2020
- **70°F** Number of degrees warmer than average that locations in East Antarctica were in mid-March
- **70%** Portion of Arctic infrastructure at high risk of damage from thawing permafrost by 2050
- **120** Estimated number of gigatons of carbon that will leak into the atmosphere from thawing permafrost by 2100
- **200** Minimum number of rural Alaska Native communities experiencing worsened water scarcity as a result of climate change
- **0.13** Number of inches of sea level rise each year caused by climate change

**Tucker Carlson on the War in Ukraine**

“There are no autocrats he can’t abide, so Carlson seems to be on Putin’s side. Thus, Russian television runs his shows. He’s sort of like a preppie Tokyo Rose.” —The Guardian
Black Like Me

Bridgerton and the fantasy of a non-racist past.

BY GARY YOUNGE
When I first moved to the US from London, I asked an American journalist what kind of reception I might expect as a Black Briton.

“Well, when they hear an English accent, Americans usually add about 20 points to your IQ,” he said. “But when they see a Black face, they usually don’t.” Recalling that the authors of the book The Bell Curve had claimed that Black people have an IQ 15 points lower than whites, I figured that, at the very least, I would still come out at least five points ahead.

There were moments during my 12 years as the US correspondent for The Guardian when I needed all the help I could get. It could be a particular challenge when reporting from Republican events. Englishness, the American journalist had made clear, carried cultural cachet; Blackness did not. The two arriving in the same body could mess with some people’s heads. When I introduced myself as a British journalist, I was occasionally subjected to an interrogation of my credentials. “Were you born there?” they’d ask. “I don’t hear an accent.” (I sound like Ricky Gervais, with nary a hint of a transatlantic twang.)

But my point here is not partisan. Republicans could be, as it happens, ruder than most. But despite Oscar-winning director Steve McQueen, acclaimed author Zadie Smith, and actors Idris Elba, David Oyelowo, and Thandie Newton—to name but a few—the general American image of Britain (particularly outside the big cities) remains ossified in a time before the large-scale migration of Black people to Britain following the Second World War. (My parents came from Barbados in the early 1960s.) When I wrote an article for The Washington Post about being Black and British in the US, it ran alongside a picture of a Black man in a bowler hat carrying an umbrella in one hand and a cup of tea in the other.

So I can imagine that Bridgerton, the Netflix period drama set in 1813, which portrays a multiracial British elite complete with a Black queen, duke, and dowager aunt as well as debutantes and suitors of virtually every hue, might test credulity in the US and beyond. (Growing up in Britain, where I was born, people would frequently ask me where I was really from, too.) Whatever issues people may have had with this clearly didn’t stop them from watching the show: Its first season was the second-most-watched Netflix original series of all time; the second season will be available from March 25.

Bridgerton’s appeal is not difficult to fathom. Set in some of Britain’s grandest stately homes, with elaborate costumes, flamboyant coiffures (Queen Charlotte’s wigs deserve a series all to themselves), quaint rituals, and plenty of sex, it promises a great deal. (It didn’t hurt that it was released in December 2020, during what was then the deadliest month of the pandemic, when we had little else to do but watch TV.) To the undiscerning eye, it’s basically Downton Abbey with a bigger budget, better locations, more bonking, and a diverse cast.

While the series is named after the Bridgerton family, it might better be named “Lady Whistledown.” That is the nom de plume of the anonymous scandalmonger whose newsletter spreads well-informed word of the 19th-century haut monde’s romantic entanglements—as well as tart commentary on their consequences. Each new edition provides fresh gossip, revealing secrets, exposing trysts, and assessing the progress of the (debutante) season in all its lustful, scheming glory. We learn at the end of the first season that Lady Whistledown is Penelope Featherington, the youngest daughter of a family struggling to escape ruin.

Season 1 is set, appropriately enough, at the beginning of the “social season” of 1813, when debutantes and eligible bachelors are presented to high society in what is essentially a marriage market. Male suitors call on young ladies for a delicate courtship dance in which status is key. The Bridgertons are a family of eight children (named, in alphabetical order, Anthony, Benedict, Colin, Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Gregory, and Hyacinth, and headed by Violet, a widowed viscountess). Queen Charlotte crowns Daphne, the eldest daughter, the season’s “diamond,” making her the most sought-after maiden of the moment. Along with welcome attention, this gives her the onerous responsibility of making a match worthy of both the queen’s favor and her own affections.

Englishness carried cultural cachet in the US. Blackness did not. The two in the same body could mess with some people’s heads.

Sex is as key to the spectacle as it is incidental to the story line. Virtually all the main characters are at it like undergrads on spring break in Cancun. There is oral sex, masturbation, a threesome, sex education (even as
Daphne seeks a husband, it transpires she does not know about the birds and the bees), sexual assault, and an attempted abortion.

Season 1 charts Daphne’s fraught romance with the Duke of Hastings. Though they profess to despise each other, a fissile courtship ensues after they concoct a mutually beneficial pact to hoodwink high society. Daphne calculates that encouraging the belief that she’s already being pursued is her best hope of buying time to find the right match. Hastings—a gorgeous, brooding, Byronic figure—has no interest in marriage, but the prestigious title attached to such an Adonis makes the debutantes swoon. He believes that his only hope of avoiding the besotted hordes is if they think he is already attached. So the pair decide to pretend—including with their closest relatives—they are embroiled in a serious but yet-to-be-sealed courtship. Only the ruse works a little too well, and they fall in love with each other.

Season 2 starts with the beginning of the next year’s “marriage market” events. Daphne’s oldest brother, Anthony, the season’s most eligible bachelor, decides this is the year he shall take a bride. But a romantic connection couldn’t be further from his considerations, as he sets about interviewing the candidates for future Bridgerton matriarch with clinical rigor. “Love is the last thing I desire,” he declares at a ball, describing his future wife in language a horse breeder might use to refer to a prize mare: “But if my children are to be of good stock, then their mother must be of impeccable quality. A pleasing face, an acceptable wit, genteel manners enough to credit a viscountess. It should not be so hard to find. And yet, the debutantes of London fall short at every turn.”

The rest of the season essentially tests this proposition, as Anthony is torn between his duty to marry a woman with the appropriate attributes and his barely repressed desire to give himself to a woman on whom he has developed a monumental crush. Unfortunately for him, those two women are related.

The Sharma sisters, Kate and Edwina, have arrived from India and, along with their mother, Lady Mary Sharma, are guests of Lady Danbury, the dowager godmother to Hastings from Season 1. Kate effectively acts as Edwina’s governess and has come only to secure her sister the marriage she deserves. Headstrong, sharp-tongued, and quick-witted, she insists she has no interest in finding a husband for herself—many consider her too old at 26 anyway.

Demure, accomplished, and intelligent, Edwina ticks all of Anthony’s boxes. He courts her determinedly, and she falls in love with him. Everyone up to Queen Charlotte herself agrees it’s a great match. There is only one dissenter: Kate, who overheard Anthony’s comments at the ball and was not impressed. “I take issue with any man who views women merely as chattels and breeding stock,” she tells him. “When you manage to find this paragon of virtue, whatever makes you think she will accept your suit?”

But Kate’s loyalties are divided: Not only does she believe Anthony is too arrogant; she also fancies the breeches off him. Anthony feels similarly, though it takes both a while to admit it to themselves, let alone each other. Several times—too often to be plausible—they are caught in romantic near misses with fingers touching, eyes locked, breathing into each other’s mouths, only to be interrupted or rein themselves in. At one point Kate clasps his hand to her breast and holds it there to prove she has not been stung by a bee—which, unless things have changed radically in terms of courtship in the last couple of centuries, is a pretty unambiguous play for a straight man’s attention.

Elsewhere, Queen Charlotte becomes obsessed with discovering the identity of Lady Whistledown, whose commentaries she finds increasingly impertinent, while Penelope tries to remain anonymous and her family, the Featheringtons, still struggle for money and respectability. The only really standout actor is Adjoa Andoh, who plays Lady Danbury—an omniscient elder and friend of the queen whose mixture of tough love, hard truths, strategic plows, and playful manner are made credible by Andoh’s consistently robust performance.

T hat the Duke of Hastings, Queen Charlotte, and Lady Danbury are Black and the Sharma sisters South Asian are facts that do not intrude into the story line. Their presence is not entirely fanciful. Some Black people did make it into British high society at the time. It has been argued that the real Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III, had some African ancestry, through a branch of the Portuguese royal family who supposedly mixed with the Moors in the 13th century. After six centuries the phenotypic evidence would have been negligible. But according to the historian Mario De Valdes y Cocom—who has done more than any other to extol Charlotte’s African heritage—the royal physician described Charlotte as having “a true mulatto face,” while one prime minister wrote of the queen that “her nose is too wide and her lips too thick.”

Of course, there have been Black people in Britain since Roman times—even if they began...
arriving in significant numbers only in the 1950s. Initially, their presence usually centered around the ports of Cardiff (home of Shirley Bassey), Bristol (home of the slave importer Edward Colston, whose statue was torn down during the Black Lives Matter protests), Liverpool (home to the country’s oldest Black community), as well as London. They numbered in the hundreds during the 16th century, rising to 20,000 as the Atlantic slave trade took off, only to subside with abolition itself. Across Europe throughout this time, a handful of Black people made their way, through one fashion or another, into the elites. There was Juan Latino, of Ethiopian descent, embedded in the Spanish court in the 16th century; Joseph Boulogne, made a member of King Louis XV’s Royal Guard in the 18th century; and Abram Petrovich Gannibal, brought to Russia (probably from Cameroon) as a gift for Peter the Great in the late 18th century, eventually rising to become a military engineer, a nobleman—and the great-grandfather of Alexander Pushkin.

Few made it that far in Britain, but in literary classics set only slightly later, Black characters are scattered among the beau monde, usually coming from the colonies. Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847) includes the character Bertha Mason, a Creole from Jamaica described as having “dark” hair and a “discoloured,” “blackened” face—whose parents approved of her marriage to Edward Rochester because he was “of a good race.” Bertha, portrayed in bestial terms, is hidden from view as she rages with mental illness in the attic before throwing herself from a burning building. In William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair (1848), there is Rhoda Swartz, the “rich, woolly-haired mulatto” heiress from St. Kitts whom Mr. Osborne tries to force his son George to marry. George refuses: “I don’t like the colour, sir,” he says. “Ask the black that sweeps opposite Fleet Market, sir. I’m not going to marry a Hottentot Venus.”

Britain’s colonial relationship with India also produced a significant, if relatively small, Indian community in Britain long before the arrival of the post–World War II migrants. With a broader range of classes, including seafarers, scholars, and diplomats, there was less need for white patrons (though Queen Victoria’s favored attendant, Abdul Karim, became famous after a film about him, starring Ali Fazal and Judi Dench, was made in 2017). Indian maharajas even funded the sinking of wells in a range of British towns during the 18th century; and Abram Petrovich Gannibal, brought to Russia (probably from Cameroon) as a gift for Peter the Great in the late 18th century, eventually rising to become a military engineer, a nobleman—and the great-grandfather of Alexander Pushkin.

Rhimes’s other hit shows—Grey’s Anatomy, Scandal, How to Get Away With Murder—have for the most part followed the same logic. “Grey’s Anatomy has differentiated itself by creating a diverse world of doctors—almost half the cast are men and women of color—and then never acknowledging it,” wrote the New York Times critic Matthew Fogel in 2005.

This omission, Rhimes explained to Broadcasting and Cable a year later, was deliberate. “I don’t think anybody is color-blind in this world. I think I’m a product of being a post-feminist, post-civil-rights baby born in an era after that happened, where race isn’t the only thing discussed. And I just felt like there’s something interesting about having a show in which your characters could just be your characters.”

This is problematic. It suggests that your characters live in a void in which a key determinant of their life chances is irrelevant: that they can either be themselves or have a racial identity—but not both. It reminds me of the crowd of Barack Obama supporters in South Carolina chanting “Race doesn’t matter!” after he beat Hillary Clinton in the primary there. It didn’t make sense, not only because they were in the only state that, at the time, still flew the Confederate flag from its capitol. But because if it really didn’t matter, then why shout about it in the first place? By the time Obama’s tenure was over, it was pretty clear that race did matter: not least because nine African Americans had been shot dead in a
church in that very state by a young white supremacist. Race matters.

“The success of [Grey’s Anatomy] and of Rhimes as a producer,” argues Kristen J. Warner, an assistant professor at the University of Alabama, in a 2015 paper, “is tethered to the use of racialized bodies as signifiers of historical progress in the struggle of televusional racial representation, as well as undermining the diversity of those bodies through a laundring or whitewashing of social and cultural specificity.”

There is an important debate to be had that goes beyond popular television to the kind of diversity we’d like to have: one where the world looks different—or one where the society actually operates differently. But since this is fiction and not a documentary, it should also be stressed that Rhimes can create whatever world she pleases and is not bound by the constraints of social realism.

The world she creates in Bridgerton is not post-racial—after four years of Trump, a place where race no longer matters and people can just be themselves seems not hopeful but deluded. But, at first sight at least, it does pose as pre-racial: a society in which race was never an issue and people wouldn’t know any other way to be. The fact that slavery has only just been abolished and colonialism is in full throttle—meaning race was very much an issue—is a point for pedants and killjoys. A world where people are this handsome and life is this plush that has not been contaminated by “race” is too good to pass up.

However, what Rhimes can’t plausibly do is create a world in which racial difference has no meaning—only to then subject her creation to a racial critique. This is precisely what she does, twice, in Season 1, rendering the entire premise untenable.

First comes a conversation between Lady Danbury and Hastings in which she tries to convince him that romantic love has made “a new day to begin to dawn in this society.”

“Look at our queen. Look at our king,” she says, referring to Charlotte and George III, as though Charlotte were Nelson Mandela and Meghan Markle all rolled into one. “Look at their marriage...everything it is doing for us. Allowing us to become. We were two separate societies divided by color until a king fell in love with one of us. Love, your grace, conquers all.”

Hastings is not convinced. “He may have chosen his queen,” he replies, “and elevated us from novelties in their eyes to now dukes and royalty. But with that same whim he may just as easily change his mind. A mind that is hanging on by one very loose and tenuous thread.”

These “separate societies” are never mentioned again in the series—and we see no evidence of them. In the absence of any reference or sign of an old day, this “new day” remains a peculiar abstraction.

The second time is when Baron Featherington attempts to persuade the Black boxer Will Mondrich to take a dive. “I know you have a fighting spirit, passed down by your father, no doubt: a soldier [who] managed to flee the colonies after serving in Dunmore’s regiment. Do you think he sought his freedom all for his future son to become some exhausted fighter, stumbling into the ring to put food on the table for his family?” Without any other mention of colonialism or racism, the

“Rhimes’s success...is tethered to the use of racialized bodies as signifiers of historical progress.”

—Kristen J. Warner
When it comes to gender, we are presented with the opposite narrative contradiction. Rhimes creates a world in which antiquated gender norms not only govern society but drive the story. Men pursue women, who literally drop their handkerchiefs and feign fainting so that they might be assisted or literally caught mid-swoon. For a woman, merely to be alone with a man without a chaperone is to risk disgrace. At one point, the brother of a fallen soldier who impregnated his girlfriend before going to war marries the girlfriend to preserve her honor. “You have no idea what it is to be a woman,” Daphne tells Anthony at another point. “What it might feel like to have one’s entire life reduced to a single moment. This is all I have been raised for. This is all I am. I have no other value. If I am unable to find a husband, I shall be worthless.”

But when the rules of such a society have not only been laid down but form the basis for the ensuing drama, you cannot then have a man tell a woman how to masturbate (possibly the worst case of mansplaining ever). Nor does it make sense, at the very end, to have Hastings in the room holding Daphne’s hand as she is giving birth—a practice still frowned upon in the PBS show Call the Midwife, set 150 years later. The problem here, once again, is not one of accuracy but of dramatic consistency. It is difficult to take their buttoned-up courtship seriously when Hastings has told Daphne, just a few episodes earlier “When you are alone, you can touch yourself...anywhere on your body, anywhere that gives you pleasure.... But especially between your legs.”

The second season avoids both such jarring commentaries and contradictions—and pretty much all of the sex. But it doesn’t replace them with much. Anthony is fond of Edwina and thinks she’ll make a good wife, while she is enamored with him. Given the prevailing culture, that’s as close to a love match as most are likely to get. Anthony and Kate, on the other hand, have barely had a civil conversation and have spent most of the time sputtering. The downsides of consummating their infatuation grow with each episode. In a culture that sets so much stock by propriety, pursuing their relationship is as impulsive and reckless a scenario as you’re likely to get. Since they are neither impulsive nor reckless, their mutual obsession is unsustainable.

Rhimes creates a world in which the historical crime of racism has been resolved, through a royal love match, and nonwhite people are fully integrated into the dominant classes. We find its modern iteration in the royal wedding between Meghan Markle and Prince Harry, which some commentators claimed illustrated how far Britain had come racially—and which took place even as the Windrush scandal, in which thousands of elderly Caribbean citizens were deported or deprived of their citizenship, was unfolding. Bridgerton suggests that the only thing wrong with racial inequality is that nonwhite people are not allowed to share in the spoils—as though adding points to my IQ for having an English accent would be OK so long as they didn’t take them away for being Black.

It offers viewers a society in which color is segregated from race—so that things look different but remain the same. “There’s a model of diversity,” Angela Davis once told me, “as the difference that brings no difference and the change that brings no change.” For all the from coats and corsets, bonking and balls, that’s precisely the kind of diversity we can do without.
The degrowth movement argues that shrinking the economy is the only way toward an ecologically sustainable world.

By Kyle Paletta
America, I’m afraid to report, teeters on the precipice of inexorable decline. Our once limitless horizon is suddenly contracting, our outlook increasingly grim. Ross Douthat, The New York Times’ preeminent moral handringer, lives in fear of the “stagnation, loneliness, alienation” our future has in store.

The cause for all this doomsaying? Not heat waves, wildfires, floods, or any of the other manifestations of the climate crisis. No, far more concerning for those in the halls of power is the 2020 census, which found that the US population is growing at a slower rate than at any time since the Great Depression. Fifty years ago, fears ran rampant that the “population bomb” announced by biologists Paul and Anne Ehrlich would produce a world without enough space to feed its untold billions of inhabitants. Now it’s a population “bust” we must prevent, what political scientist Darrell Bricker and journalist John Ibbitson describe as “a relentless, generation-after-generation culling of the human herd” in their 2019 manifesto Empty Planet.

While the demographic slowdown that might produce this frightful culling is currently limited to the United States, Europe, and East Asia, Bricker and Ibbitson argue that even South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—the regions whose growth most terrified the Ehrlichs in the ’70s—will see their populations peak by mid-century.

For many economists, the coming demographic apocalypse is a problem only insofar as it will damage the gross domestic product. Though the GDP does not speak in any meaningful way to people’s actual quality of life, it remains an obsession of policy-makers around the world, who accept the premise that a growing GDP is a sign of a healthy economy and that a rising population is a key component of that equation. In a March working paper, Charles Jones, a professor of economics at Stanford University, wrote, “When population growth is negative...living standards stagnate for a population that gradually vanishes.” Conversely, “an ever-increasing population benefits from ever-rising living standards.” As is typical in mainline economics, “living standards” here are defined by GDP per capita, the number you get when you divide a country’s gross domestic product by its population.

By this metric, life in America has never been better. GDP per capita is over $59,000, more than twice what the country enjoyed in 1980. But by most other measures—not the least of which is common sense—it has only gotten harder for Americans to prosper over the past half-century. The federal minimum wage has lost more than a third of its value since the late ’60s, while the rising cost of housing regularly outpaces both inflation and wage growth, as does the price of health care and college tuition.

Making matters worse, the United States has emitted 300 billion tons of greenhouse gases over the same period, and average temperatures here last summer were up 2.6 degrees Fahrenheit. With each passing year, the climate crisis ravages a different population—fires burning down homes in the Sierra Nevada, rainstorms flooding basement apartments in Queens, heat waves broiling the Pacific Northwest. When so many Americans find it difficult to get by and are gripped by encroaching fears of climate disaster, is it any surprise that they aren’t rushing to become parents?

Pronatalists like Douthat are hardly interested in addressing rising living costs or climate change, given their devotion to liberal orthodoxy. In an essay last spring titled “How Does a Baby Bust End?,” Douthat suggested that pairing European-style parental benefits with a rising GDP might do the trick. “Call this the Joe Biden-baby-boom hypothesis,” he wrote. “If you spend on family benefits and run the economy hot enough, maybe fertility rates will finally begin to float back up.” To put it more simply: The solution to the thing preventing growth is more growth.

There is, however, an alternative economic model to look to, one that sidesteps the growth paradigm and focuses on creating an ecologically sustainable country that might actually give its residents a shot at a decent life.

Growing pains: The Club of Rome’s 1972 report argued that ever-increasing population endangered the planet.

The Limits to Growth in 1972, a report arguing that ever-increasing population and capital would create “negative feedback loops” that would eventually compromise both. Of the several loops the authors detailed, pollution and the depletion of nonrenewable resources posed the greatest risk to humanity.

“The delays inherent in the action of these negative loops tend to allow population and capital to overshoot their ultimately sustainable levels,” they wrote. “The period of overshoot is wasteful of resources. It generally decreases the carrying capacity of the environment as well, intensifying the eventual decline in population and capital.”

This school of thought came back into vogue in the years after the Great Recession, when GDP was bouncing back while real wages remained stagnant. Proponents of degrowth hold that conventional economics needs to be abandoned in favor of a system that prioritizes the eradication of disparities in wealth and a rollback of carbon capitalism. While the authors of Empty Planet contend that the earth is approaching a population tipping point, after which global deaths will outpace global births to disastrous economic effect, degrowthers argue that this dynamic is unfolding already, as the climate crisis indicates the global economy has overshot its ecological limits and needs to contract to a sustainable level. In their view, old arguments about population control are irrelevant: Since the population is already shrinking, degrowthers want to push legislators to embrace the decline and redirect their economies away from the market imperatives that are ravaging the environment.

Tim Jackson is something of a pied piper for the movement. An ecological economist at the University of Surrey in England, Jackson wrote the degrowth handbook Prosperity Without Growth in 2009, as well as last year’s Post Growth: Life After Capitalism. Jackson told me that the alarm over the United States’ baby bust was symptomatic of the nation’s untenable fetishization of economic expansion. “The growth imperative and the population imperative go together,” he said. “Ultimately, I think we need to be working our way to a state of stable population.”

While government-subsidized child care and generous parental leave are worthwhile progressive goals, the adoption of these policies in Japan and across Western Europe has done little to reverse declining birth rates. Instead, Jackson and other degrowthers offer a forward-looking solution: Accept that people don’t want to have as many children as they once did and think about the baby bust as a step toward a more sustainable economy. If the graphs of birth rates in most countries already show a clear inflection point, why not seize the moment and create a similar inflection point when it comes to economic production? As Jackson put it in his first book: “Our technologies, our economy, and our social aspirations are all badly misaligned with any meaningful expression of prosperity.” It’s time to try something new.

While some have accused the Club of Rome of playing into the racist fearmongering about overpopulation that the Ehrlichs stoked in The Population Bomb (such as when they described a slum in Delhi as having a “hellish aspect”), today’s degrowthers don’t see the demographic rise of the Global South as a trend to be stopped. They argue that as the poorest nations begin to attain the standards of living currently enjoyed in the Global North, their populations will also stabilize, at which point the global economy can shrink to an ecologically sustainable level.

When I e-mailed Samuel Alexander, a lecturer and researcher at the University of Melbourne, to ask about the economic pain a degrowth policy might entail for industrialized nations in the near future, he responded: “Given that billions around the world still live in conditions of material destitution, they have every right to increase their material living standards in sustainable ways. This makes it an ecological imperative that the high-impact economies (like the US and Australia, and those in Western Europe) reduce their impacts.”

Of course, convincing the hundreds of millions of people in wealthy countries that they should accept a stagnant standard of living, however elevated, presents a herculean political challenge. Complicating matters are the doubts among many leftists that a degrowth world would be the idyll its proponents suggest. British journalist Leigh Phillips derided the program in a 2019 essay, “The Degrowth Delusion,” which argued that the most practical socialist alternative to free-market capitalism is for the government to assume control of the existing economic levers. “Let’s take over the machine, not turn it off!” he writes. In Phillips’s view, “de-growth unwittingly endorses what would be an imposition of austerity on the Western working class far beyond anything a Thatcher, Cameron, or May could imagine, this time in the name of the planet.” Yet while Phillips casts the degrowthers as the modern heirs to overpopulation alarmism, his critique fails to contend with the trends articulated in Empty Planet and instead takes an ever-increasing population for granted.

The mere mention of the word “austerity” is enough to cool the blood of any committed leftist. But as Jackson demonstrates in Prosperity Without Growth, there’s little reason to be satisfied with the diminishing returns that the Global North sees from its focus on growth when compared with developing nations. Using political scientist Ronald Inglehart’s measure of “subjective well-being,” or SWB, as a proxy for life satisfaction, Jackson shows that as GDP per capita rises, SWB increases steeply for countries whose income is below about $15,000 per
capita. The gains taper off as you move up the income spectrum, though, before flatlining at around $25,000—less than half of the United States’ current GDP per capita.

The explanation for how GDP per capita could become so inflated without any significant gains in well-being? Consumerism. While replacing your laptop or trading in your sedan for an SUV does a wonderful job of stoking GDP growth, neither has much of an effect on your overall quality of life, and both are made possible only because of the labor of lithium miners and assembly-plant workers overseas. In conventional terms, this is a sign of a healthy globalized economy, as it means that countries like Vietnam and Panama are growing at the same time Denmark and Canada are. In ecological terms, though, the system requires ever more resource extraction and a nightmarishly complex maritime shipping network, which emits more greenhouse gases than commercial aviation.

Rather than entertain a pullback from consumerism, liberals in North America and Western Europe have embraced so-called green growth, believing reforms like the Green New Deal will allow the world to avoid the worst excesses of climate change without fundamentally altering capitalism. The biggest issue with these initiatives is their time scale: Gentle market interventions may put the economy on a more sustainable course, but they’re unlikely to act quickly enough to decouple emissions from GDP growth at the rate necessary to seriously impede climate change. Giorgos Kallis, an ecological economist at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, warns that even the most ambitious reforms being floated today will not prove sufficient in the long term. “The Green New Deal is the best proposal out there for moving us in the right direction,” he said. “But when people put numbers to it—a Green New Deal with the economy growing at 3 percent—it’s like running up a down escalator. You cannot [sufficiently reduce emissions] with the economy growing so fast.”

The efforts of the city of Phoenix to draw down its water use while also growing at a rapid pace provide a clear illustration of Kallis’s point. In 2019, Kathryn Sorensen, then the director of Phoenix Water Services, bragged about her agency’s success in reducing residential water use when she told a journal published by the Yale School of the Environment, “We’ve decoupled growth from water…. We use the same amount of water that we did 20 years ago, but have added 400,000 more people.” This is a remarkable achievement, but one undercut by the fact that maintaining the same level of water use is itself unsustainable, given that the two decades Sorensen is referring to coincided with a megadrought that has left the city’s reservoirs with less water than at any time since they were first filled.

The idea of running up the down escalator only grows more foolish when you consider the long horizon over which many decarbonization efforts are taking place. Many large companies, including major polluters like American Airlines and Ford, have committed to becoming “net zero” by 2050, a date that allows them to continue fouling the atmosphere under the assumption that new technology will come along in the next 30 years that will make it possible for them to simply remove as much carbon as they’re emitting. Even fast-tracked plans, like the Australian mining concern Fortescue’s bid to become fully green by 2030, still mean another decade of emissions from a company that currently burns 185 million gallons of diesel a year.

Embracing degrowth might mean that a company like Fortescue will have to suspend operations until it can resume work in a sustainable manner, or that a city like Phoenix will have to limit the number of new homes to those it can realistically supply with water over the next century. Both are tough sells in a status quo that demands year-over-year growth no matter what, but such measures are becoming increasingly necessary as the window for avoiding catastrophic climate change closes.

Putting any of this into effect would of course require a much stronger regulatory state. But look no further than Texas’s disastrous experiment in letting the utility market run wild to see how untenable the conservative preoccupation with deregulation has already become. When then-Governor George W. Bush signed the legislation creating the state’s free market for power in 1999, he promised, “Competition in the electric industry will benefit Texans by reducing monthly rates and offering consumers more choices.” By 2012, analysts were estimating that the new market had instead passed $22 billion in new costs along to consumers. The situation became disastrous last winter, when a cold snap sent rates soaring as much as 7,400 percent and left customers with electric bills as high as $17,000. As Kallis observed, “The government can stay out, deregulate things, and let the system decide how to keep the lights on.”

A more muscular government that would prevent such free-market failures could also implement what Alexander calls policies that “directly redistribute wealth, policies that ensure a dignified material baseline for all people, and policies that structure the economy in ways that ensure corrosive and undemocratic inequalities of wealth do not arise in the first place.”

A population that isn’t constantly increasing may translate into a lack of economic growth, but what a focus on those metrics misses is the fact that the United States is already fabulously wealthy. Rather than continue waiting around for the

(continued on page 31)
“What a celebration this is!” Kathy Hochul kvelled in mid-February as she accepted the New York State Democratic Party’s nomination for governor, a job she’d been doing ably for six months. A parade of powerful New York women preceded her at the podium: US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, state Attorney General Letitia James, state Senate majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, US Representative Carolyn Maloney, and, finally, the woman who introduced Hochul, former US senator (and so much more) Hillary Clinton. The message: While the state has never elected a woman governor, it has nonetheless elevated some badass female leadership. The steely, diminutive Hochul stepped up to the microphone beaming.

But soon the thrill was gone. After her introductory remarks, Hochul faced hecklers demanding support for tenant protections and the state’s expiring Excluded Workers Fund, a program extending Covid aid to undocumented laborers. “Excluded workers kept this city running!” they yelled. It was hard to hear them; Hochul supporters drowned them out by chanting “Kathy, Kathy, Kathy!” as the governor soldiered on with her speech.

It was the first time I’d seen Hochul rattled. She attempted to press on, then tried to joke: “It wouldn’t be the same without a lot of ruckus—this is who we are!” She didn’t acknowledge the protesters’ concerns.

It was just a moment, and it passed—but it was a moment.

For six months, Hochul had soothed as the un-Cuomo, earning praise largely for what she wasn’t: mean, arrogant, abusive to women (and some
men), and often neglectful of state business. Advocates and legislators alike described working in Cuomo’s Capitol as akin to surviving PTSD; one used the term “Stockholm syndrome.” Hochul is almost universally praised as warm, collegial, and supremely competent. But the absence of bullying and fear has also made room for a new spirit of rebellion. “Cuomo would have punched us out personally,” said one individual who helped plan the February demonstration.

While New York’s surging progressive movement pulled even the former governor to the left over his not quite three terms in office, Andrew Cuomo also liked to remind them who was boss. The convention fracas signaled to the new governor that the left wouldn’t be placated by symbolism or lovely meetings with her staff. It wanted results.

A few days later in her office in Albany, Hochul admitted that she’d been flustered during her convention speech. “I was looking at my dad, who was in the front row, and talking about my family,” she told me. “I’m getting choked up here… I really wanted to make sure that was heard. That was the most important part to me: to thank my family. I felt a little bit off that that wasn’t being delivered the way I wanted it to.”

It was a rare moment of vulnerability for a woman who, in a 28-minute conversation with me, used a variety of expressions to describe her toughness—“tough as nails,” “steel,” “battle-tested”—17 times. In the context of the convention, she explained, “I also know that people are watching my reaction. I gotta show: ‘I got this!’”

But does she? Obviously, she meant that in the colloquial sense—that she wouldn’t fold under pressure. But what would it mean to say “I got this” to refer to the near-crushing job of being New York governor? Her supporters say it means that she knows how the state runs and that she has an uncommon empathy for the less fortunate. Her detractors retort that what she’s “got” is support from some of Cuomo’s most powerful donors—in real estate, development, and finance—and that they’ve “got” her. If Hochul is the un-Cuomo, how did she raise an astonishing $21.9 million in her first six months as governor, with a roster of donors remarkably similar to those of her predecessor?

Unbelievably, though, Hochul may also be trying to prove to Cuomo that she’s “got” his office—and he can’t have it back. About a month before the April 7 filing deadline for Democratic primary candidates, Cuomo began running ads claiming that the lack of criminal charges against him exonerated him from charges of harassment—as if only actual criminality is disqualifying. There are rumors he could challenge Hochul as an independent in November.

Progressives already have a champion in the governor’s race: New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, who’s been endorsed by the city’s Working Families Party. (Congressman Tom Suozzi of Long Island is running against Hochul from the right.) Hochul says she still plans to vie for progressive votes—and even WFP folks say nice things about her.

“We’ve all been traumatized by Cuomo. She moves very differently politically,” said Sochie Nnaemeka, the Working Families Party of New York director, about the new governor. “She has shown real ability to collaborate, to consult.” Hochul even sought the party’s nomination, Nnaemeka noted, while knowing it would surely go to longtime WFP stalwart Williams.

On top of her campaign funds, Hochul has expanded the public coffers thanks to federal Covid relief and infrastructure spending. As 2022 dawned, the state announced that it was sitting on a $7 billion surplus, and Hochul proposed a $216 billion budget. With such means—public and private—at its disposal, what can Hochul’s campaign not do?

For one, it can’t dispel all progressive doubts about her.

“In a way, this is a very progressive moment in New York State, especially in the legislature,” Nnaemeka said. “Will she shift? She already has, somewhat,” she added. “There’s a real willingness to meet with us—but what would it take for the governor to work in collaboration with the left?”

We’re about to find out if that’s possible.

For seven years, Hochul worked tirelessly toward a job almost nobody expected would be hers. With a staff of nine, the Buffalo native traveled the state’s 62 counties for ribbon cuttings, roundtables, and state agency conferences, plus campaign events for Democrats up and down the ballot. It was perfect training to be governor—except her path was blocked by Cuomo, the titanic Empire State narcissist, whose father had served beside him and who seemed to perceive the job and its power as his birthright.

In hindsight, it’s impossible to miss that Cuomo, who was eventually brought down by his mistreatment of women, conducted his most open bullying campaign against his female lieutenant governor. He chose Hochul in 2014, telling New York Democrats that she “knows the needs” of upstate and western New York, where she grew up. Then he tried to push her off the ticket in 2018, fairly publicly, and again in 2021. Because he thought someone more progressive, ideally a person of color, would be of greater benefit to him. Cuomo almost never included her in his nationally televised Covid briefings in 2020; his book glorifying his Covid response didn’t mention her once.
Hochul ignored Cuomo’s pressure to exit as assiduously as she continued to perform her mostly ceremonial duties. And then she wound up with her boss’s job.

At one time, Hochul had been something of a darling among progressives. After the famed Democratic “shellacking” in the 2010 midterms, she won a special election to Congress in 2011 in a red upstate district by zeroing in on Medicare and other programs the new Tea Party–infused House Republican majority was coming for. The Working Families Party endorsed her in that race, even though she was known as a centrist. First elected to the town board of Hamburg, a suburb of Buffalo, in 1994, Hochul gained wide attention as the Erie County clerk in 2007 when she resisted then-Governor Eliot Spitzer’s call to issue drivers’ licenses to undocumented New Yorkers and threatened to report applicants to the immigration authorities. She also hewed to her party’s center on gun issues and gay marriage.

When Hochul got to Congress, and despite support from the left, she kept to the right, voting to weaken the Affordable Care Act and against toughening the Clean Air Act. The League of Conservation Voters gave her a score of just 68 percent during her time in Washington. Hochul skipped the 2012 Democratic National Convention, as though reluctant to be associated with the Obama-era party brand, and was one of only 17 Democrats to vote to hold US Attorney General Eric Holder in contempt of Congress over a scandal exaggerated and amplified by the GOP. The National Rifle Association even endorsed her reelection campaign.

Running for Congress established Hochul’s ambition—and toughness. Top Democrats told her not to run again. “They sent people to tell me, ‘The cavalry is not coming,’” she said. “I said, ‘Screw this. Nobody will outwork me. I’ll go to every diner, every farm.’” And she was capable of bravery. After her district was redrawn to favor Republicans, she knew her 2012 vote against repealing the Affordable Care Act (despite previous votes to weaken it) and her strong support for reproductive rights would probably doom her reelection that year. In the end, she lost to Republican Chris Collins by less than 2 percent, in a district that Obama lost by more than 12.

Two years later, The New York Times endorsed Tim Wu, a technology lawyer and academic, over Hochul in the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor. By then, Hochul had changed most of her more conservative positions, and the paper wrote that she showed a worrisome “willingness to shift politically” and “has a deeply troubling record on health reform, gun control and environmental deregulation.” Hochul remains a little tarnished by that 2014 Times un-endorsement. She has indeed shifted over the years, coming to support gay marriage, drivers’ licenses for the undocumented, and tougher gun safety legislation, though Hochul notes that the sentiments of New Yorkers have also changed. “I had taken a position that has now evolved. And that evolution coincides with the evolution of many people…in the state of New York,” she told reporters after becoming governor.

Senator Gillibrand, a longtime Hochul booster, compares the new governor’s evolution to her own. Both represented red New York congressional districts that hadn’t elected a Democrat for more than a decade—Gillibrand won hers in 2006—and then became statewide leaders. “She has the tension I had as a House member,” Gillibrand told me. “You have a responsibility to lead, as well as a responsibility to represent. When you represent a 2-to-1 GOP district, there are a lot of people who want you to represent, and not lead, on some issues. I suspect she has a more progressive view than her first district on many issues. When she had to represent the whole state, she had to listen to more views.”

Gillibrand saw that in practice when Hochul became lieutenant governor. Given almost no responsibilities by Cuomo, Hochul wrote her own agenda. As Gillibrand recalled, “When I was traveling the state to talk about sexual assault on college campuses, [or] about affordable day care or universal pre-kindergarten or nutrition, summer meals, changing how people got access to food stamps, we’d collaborate—she’d do the state version, and I’d do the federal. We did many events across the state over these last few years. I love Kathy.”

“When you represent a 2-to-1 GOP district, there are a lot of people who want you to represent, and not lead.”

—Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

One thing that makes Gillibrand and progressive Hochul loyalists trust her values is her family background. She’s the child of Irish Catholic working-class parents in Buffalo, Jack and Pat Courtney, whose first home together was in a trailer park; her grandfather, uncle, and father worked at Bethlehem Steel. Beyond those working-class roots, the Courtneys...
were active on myriad social justice issues, supporting civil rights and opposing the Vietnam War through the Christian Family Movement. Devoted to “integration, ecumenism and political activism,” according to a review of its history in the National Catholic Reporter, the CFM was a powerful conduit of Catholic social teaching in the 1960s. America, the Jesuit magazine, saw the organization following in the footsteps of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker program, at least in its ministry to the poor.

At a time of white backlash, when many families like the Courtneys were moving right, not left, their activism put them on the front lines of the battles of the day. And even as they were organizing food and clothing drives for the less fortunate, Hochul’s sister Sheila told The New York Times, the family bought its own clothing at secondhand stores.

“I remember everything from 1968,” Hochul told me. “I remember [the assassination of] Dr. King—my family was devastated—and then losing Bobby [Kennedy] a few months later, and then watching the implosion of the [Democratic] National Convention, rioters in the streets, police shooting hoses at the young people…. And then Kent State—you slaughter kids protesting on a campus? All that really had an effect on me. My family was very involved, trying to integrate housing in Buffalo. They called us commies.” Her father helped lead the local chapter of the CFM-affiliated Housing Opportunities Made Equal, or HOME. One Sunday, Hochul said, “we were passing out [HOME] literature in the back of the church, and they spit at my mother.”

The Courtneys were friends with Daniel and Philip Berrigans, the Catonsville Nine, two radical activist Catholic priests (and brothers) known for their direct action opposing not just the Vietnam War but military interventions more broadly. “My parents knew the Berrigans, the Catonsville Nine,” Hochul said, referring to the nine anti-war activists imprisoned after they destroyed hundreds of draft records in Catonsville, Md. “They came to our house; they became our friends.” She said the overall message she imbibed was “We care about poor people.”

But for some, that radical up-bringing makes Hochul’s early centrist political posture even more disturbing. An otherwise sympathetic profile in New York magazine last November was topped with a headline that questioned “what, if anything, she believes in.” When asked about her reaction to it, Hochul flinched.

“My family was very involved, trying to integrate housing in Buffalo. They called us commies.”

—Kathy Hochul

“I thought, ‘You don’t know me.’ They’ll prejude me based on their perception that everybody has to be defined in a certain way. I defy labels. I’m pragmatic. I have an incredibly progressive heart and soul, but I also know I have to get stuff done. And that means sometimes meeting people where they are, getting them to my side. That does not mean I don’t have core values and beliefs.”

One example she offers is abortion. “When I ran for town board, they said if I didn’t take the [New York] Right to Life [Party’s] line, I’d never win. I said, ‘I’m not doing that.’” She won anyway. The National Right to Life Committee endorsed Hochul’s GOP opponent in her 2011 race, and again, she won. State Senator Liz Krueger, an abortion rights crusader and friend of Hochul’s, told me, “I have no concern about reproductive rights with her.”

As another example of her values, Hochul points to the Jails to Jobs initiative she unveiled in her State of the State address in January, which she said would refocus the corrections system on rehabilitation, restore state funding for college study, provide resources for job training, and connect people leaving prison with employment. “Nobody in upstate New York wants me talking about that,” she said. In fact, Hochul has gotten pretty high marks overall from progressives for the way she’s handled the polarizing issues of criminal justice—or at least she did until the middle of March, when she released a proposal to toughen the state’s landmark bail reform legislation.

Weeks after taking office, Hochul won plaudits for signing a progressive parole reform bill as well as the so-called Lower the Age legislation, which takes children under 12—the age had been 7—out of the juvenile justice system and instead treats them with community-based care, except those charged with homicide.

Yet only days after she announced her Jails to Jobs plan, Hochul faced a right-wing backlash as issues of crime, guns, and public safety exploded in a series of horrendous violent acts, mainly in New York City. In just two weeks in January, a teenage Burger King worker was shot and killed in Harlem; an Asian woman was pushed to her death in front of a subway train in Times Square; a New York police officer was shot and wounded in the Bronx; a baby was hit in the face by a stray bullet, also in the Bronx (she lived); and a detective was shot making a drug arrest in Staten Island (he lived too). The very next day, two NYPD officers were shot while replying to a domestic violence complaint in Harlem. One died immediately, the other in the hospital a few days later.
It felt like the bad old days, only it wasn’t, despite what the local media breathlessly reported. Yes, there were 488 murders in New York City in 2021, up from 319 in the last full year before the pandemic. But that’s still less than the 673 in 2000, when Rudy Giuliani was mayor, and far below the worst year for murders, 1990, when the number was 2,245. Major felonies—including murder, rape, armed robbery, and other violent crimes—jumped modestly in 2020 and 2021, but again, they remained at just over half the number of the Giuliani days. Major crimes continued to rise in the first two months of 2022, but murders declined, year over year, for the bloody month of January—by only one, though if you’d read New York City media, you’d have thought the toll had skyrocketed.

The carnage was unnerving, but so were the politics. Hochul stood between the city’s new mayor, Eric Adams, an ideology-defying Black former cop elected on a tough-on-crime platform, and the state’s two top legislative leaders, Senate majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, who are also Black. The pair had pushed through several criminal justice measures, including bail reform, which recognized the unfairness of a two-tier system that let nonviolent offenders with resources get parole while awaiting trial, even as low-income suspects got jail indefinitely. Meanwhile, Manhattan also elected its first Black district attorney, Alvin Bragg, a career prosecutor who had nonetheless run on a platform of seeking alternatives to incarceration. In his first days in office, Bragg issued a memo to his district attorneys appearing to urge leniency for gun possession if the accused had committed no other crime. (Allies said he’d intended it as a draft for discussion and refining.) The memo immediately got to the media. Rupert Murdoch’s right-wing New York Post called on Hochul to fire Bragg—she technically has that authority—and Suozzi, her centrist primary opponent, made the same demand. Suozzi’s very first TV ad targeted Bragg, almost as if he were running against the Black DA, but it was clear he was painting Hochul as soft on crime. (His later ads did that directly.)

After a private meeting with Bragg, Hochul defended him. “He needs to do his job, and he’s doing it right now,” the governor said at a press conference. “You judge by the balance. I mean, you’re going to see, again, someone who’s been on the job a very short time—I cut some slack.” She also resisted calls by Adams, Suozzi, and others to go after the new bail laws.

That is, until March 17, when the Post obtained a memo in which Hochul proposed to restore bail for more categories of crime, especially gun crime, and to give judges more discretion to impose bail if a defendant had multiple arrests and appeared to be a “danger” to public safety.

The Post, of course, praised the plan, while advocates reacted with outrage. “The Legislature must reject outright any bail rollback proposal, including a ‘dangerousness’ provision, from Governor Hochul that will only increase jail populations, disproportionately impacting Black and brown New Yorkers,” Marie Ndiaye, the supervising attorney of the Legal Aid Society’s decarceration project, said in a statement. “Proposing rollbacks to hard-won civil rights victories…is submitting to disingenuous and racist fearmongering,” said the Working Families Party’s Nnaemeka, who had been optimistic about working with Hochul when we’d talked earlier.

Several bail reform backers in the state legislature told me they hadn’t gotten a proposal from Hochul and didn’t want to comment on the plan. “I haven’t seen anything [from her office] yet,” Krueger, who’s also a staunch bail reform proponent, told me a day after the fearmongering New York Post article.

Diplomatically, Krueger shared where she thinks Democrats broadly agree. “People are very concerned about dangerous people in the streets,” she said. “I’m concerned about dangerous people in the streets. But I don’t believe the data shows a connection with bail reform.”

In fact, a few days after the news of Hochul’s proposal broke, Brad Lander, the New York City comptroller, released a study finding no correlation between the state’s bail reform and rising violent crime—which is spiking in cities across the nation, whether or not they’ve implemented criminal justice reforms. Hochul basically agreed in an op-ed explaining her position: “Blaming bail reform for the increase in violence that cities across America are facing isn’t fair and isn’t supported by the data.” But she went on to propose that more crimes become “bail eligible,” including gun crimes by juveniles and crimes by repeat offenders.

Mayor Adams, not surprisingly, released a statement applauding Hochul’s move: “The governor’s proposal includes significant steps, which I have advocated for, that would make New York safer, while not undoing important reforms.”

With Hochul’s shifts on bail, some criminal-justice reform advocates worry that Adams is prevailing in a contest between him and progressives for influence. But Krueger predicted that “there will be a compromise,” adding: “We all want to get guns off the streets and make sure there’s less gun violence.” How far Hochul moves in either direction on that compromise might tell us whether she’s more concerned about losing support on her left or right flank.
“‘You say you will fight for women, but will you fight for working-class women?’ And she didn’t answer.”

—Angeles Solis

Progressives also wonder about Hochul’s campaign war chest, which is brimming with cash from many of Cuomo’s once-loyal donors. (This is also what makes many doubt that the disgraced former governor can launch a comeback bid.) Hochul’s backers include Stephen Ross of the Related Companies, the developer (and Donald Trump supporter) behind the bloated Hudson Yards project in Manhattan, and Steven Roth of Vornado Realty Trust, which has a huge stake in Hochul’s lavish Penn Station redevelopment plan; both maxed out (at $69,700) for her, as did some of their companies’ executives. There are various Tishmans, Rudins, and Speyers (names that adorn big buildings all over New York City), whose combined contributions top $400,000; the family behind the mega commercial real estate firm RXR Realty; and the company presiding over large projects with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and at John F. Kennedy International Airport. It was rather an embarrassment of riches for Hochul, coming after only a few months in office. Sure, incumbents rake in cash, but what did these wealthy and powerful people assume they were going to get from the brand-new governor?

Critics say that they expect comparable pro-developer policies. In Manhattan, they’ve blasted a Cuomo-era plan to provide enormous tax breaks—potentially to some major Hochul donors—to build 10 towers with 18 million square feet of office space in the workaday, somewhat seedy neighborhood surrounding the new Penn Station. The state is sacrificing tax revenue it needs, these critics charge, for office space that, post-Covid, it doesn’t.

Progressives have also questioned some of Hochul’s appointments, with special concern reserved for two. She tapped Adrienne Harris to head the Department of Financial Services, whom Cuomo’s 2018 challenger Cynthia Nixon has called a “fox in the regulatory henhouse” after statements by Harris that seemed to support weaker financial regulations; Harris also had a seat on the board of the online for-profit LendingClub, which was sued by the Federal Trade Commission for its essentially predatory lending practices and forced to pay $18 million in damages. And Hochul kept on Cuomo’s budget director Robert Mujica, a former fiscal director for the state’s Senate Republicans, whom one advocate described as Cuomo’s “architect of austerity.” Krueger, the state Senate’s finance committee chair, flatly told the New York Post, “If I were governor, I would replace Rob Mujica.”

The concern that Hochul shares Cuomo’s bent toward austerity, even though the state is flush with Covid aid and other federal dollars, helps make the battle over the Excluded Workers Fund so bitter. Ironically, one of Hochul’s biggest progressive challenges to date comes from what might have been her most tangibly progressive moment. As the pandemic-driven federal eviction moratorium expired last summer, progressives held a sleep-in on the steps of the US Capitol begging Congress or the Biden administration to do something—and Hochul did something.

Brand-new on the job, and without much staff, “I called the legislature back,” the governor recounted, and extended eviction protections into January. She and her small team had enough experience to know that billions of dollars meant for Covid relief—including help for tenants, landlords, and undocumented workers—had never been disbursed by the Cuomo administration.

“My predecessor had nearly $2 billion that, over the summer, because of the distractions, never got out to the people,” Hochul said. (That’s as close as she came to discussing her “predecessor” or his “distractions” during our interview.) Hochul won high praise from advocates for struggling New Yorkers for those quick moves. “She sprang into action,” said Angeles Solis, the director of worker organizing for the immigrant advocacy group Make the Road New York. Solis lauded Hochul for her “quick, effective handling [of the crisis]. She was like, ‘Let’s get the money out the door and let agencies partner with advocates to do it right.’”

Public agencies and advocates worked so well together, Solis said, that the money went quickly, and an estimated 75,000 New Yorkers who were eligible for help couldn’t get it when the fund ran dry in October. The Fund Excluded Workers Coalition began lobbying Hochul to create a new pot of relief money: They’re asking for $3 billion and have been staging sit-ins, fasts, and protests over the past six months. So far, Hochul has balked, committing to only $2 billion in new pandemic relief, to be spent at the legislature’s discretion.

Advocates aren’t happy. “Legislators must not give in to the Hunger Games set-up of allocating one pot of money for ‘pandemic relief’ and making communities fight against each other to show their needs are a priority,” Make the Road New York’s co–executive director Theo Oshiro told me.

As it happens, it was Solis—the Make the Road leader who still credits Hochul for assisting the excluded workers neglected by Cuomo last year—who helped organize the protest at the Democratic state convention and who was up front, closest to Hochul. Without my bringing it up, Solis shared what it meant to “disrupt the nomination of New York’s first female governor.” She had shouted a simple question, Solis said: “‘You say you will fight for women, but will you fight for working-class women?’ And she didn’t answer. It was disappointing. Of course, it had to be unsettling for her to face,” Solis added. “But she didn’t answer the question.”
The confrontation isn’t over. In mid-March, roughly 1,000 people organized by the Fund Excluded Workers Coalition trekked 150 miles from New York City to Albany, hoping to press their demands into the state budget.

For her part, Hochul insists her differences with progressives are minor. She praised the Working Families Party, for instance, noting that “I had their endorsement when I first ran for Congress, in a seat no one thought we could win.” She went on, “I’m going to need them in November. I’m gonna do what I need to win big, and the Working Families Party is an important part of that coalition.”

It might be a measure of progressive optimism about Hochul that advocates have been so tenacious on the excluded workers issue. A governor steeped in Catholic social teaching might be expected to eventually listen. On the other hand, as a western New York politician “who didn’t have the greatest track record on immigrant concerns,” Solis said, Hochul might be listening to “rising anti-immigrant rhetoric” from conservatives.

Most of the progressives I spoke to held out the hope that, despite her war chest, her centrist past, and her recent disappointing moves on bail reform, Hochul is worth trying to work with. She is compassionate and capable of change, and could still put New York’s vulnerable communities light years ahead of where they were under Cuomo. Most progressive activists have endorsed Jumaane Williams, or will. But most expect Hochul to win, both in the June primary and against whatever Trumpy Republican she faces in November.

Solis, for one, still believes Hochul can make the right decisions on the most important issues for low-income New Yorkers and the undocumented. “We felt hope and an opportunity for partnership” when the first female governor took office, she said. Hochul “still has the opportunity to lead. She can still bring this home.”

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Whose Revolution?

The history of the United States’ founding from below

BY ERIC FONER

O THE SURPRISE AND CONSTERNATION of scholars, history has recently emerged as a battlefield in the ongoing culture wars. Generally, historians welcome public debate about the past. But new state laws banning from classrooms any discussion of the history of racism have been accompanied by so much demagoguery and misinformation on the part of legislators, school board officials, and agitated parents that one is tempted to believe it would be more edifying to ignore history altogether for the time being.

In these debates, the American Revolution plays an outsized role. The 1619 Project, which began life as a special issue of The New York Times Magazine consisting
Eric Foner is the DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University and the author, most recently, of The Second Founding.
Partly because it has been caught up in recent debates, *Liberty Is Sweet* has attracted an unusual amount of public attention for a volume that runs to over 700 pages and includes a 60-page bibliography and more than 100 pages of endnotes. Not long ago, Holton and Gordon Wood, a major scholar of the revolutionary era and one of the 1619 Project’s vocal critics, engaged in a livestreamed debate at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Wood used the occasion to castigate the last generation or two of scholars for, in his view, hostility not only to prominent founders but to the revolution itself. Holton identified Wood with what he has called the consensus account of the revolution, which he claims privileges American elites. Surprisingly, given their substantial differences, Wood provided a prepublication endorsement for *Liberty Is Sweet*. It appears on the back cover and calls the book “a spirited account of the Revolution that brings everybody and everything into the story.” Since it is an axiom of historical scholarship that constructing a narrative of past events requires careful selection from an endless array of available facts—as a professor of mine once said, “What makes a book good is what you leave out”—this must qualify as one of the least complimentary blurbs on record.

As one reads *Liberty Is Sweet*, one gets a sense of why Wood might have struggled to compose a more enthusiastic accolade. Holton’s take on the most prominent founders—seen by Wood and many other historians as exemplars of self-sacrificing devotion to the common good—is less than celebratory. In Holton’s account, they were land speculators, smugglers, and slave owners for whom self-interest often took precedence over principle. One reason for the colonists’ opposition to the Quebec Act of 1774, he tells us, was that it extended the boundaries of that province, recently acquired from France, to include the land between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, a blow to colonial land speculators with claims there. In the same year, when the Continental Congress suspended trade with Great Britain to protest the punitive Coercive Acts, Virginia obstinately demanded and received the right to sell tobacco to the mother country for another year, while South Carolina secured permission to continue to export rice. During the conflict, leading merchants were denounced by ordinary folk as “Engrossers” and “Monopolizers” for holding scarce goods off the market to drive up prices.

Readers familiar with Holton’s earlier books may be surprised by how much of *Liberty Is Sweet* consists of detailed accounts of troop movements and military engagements, large and small. By the end, they may feel that they have personally walked the battlefields, waded through swamps, and traversed forest paths with Holton as their guide. He reminds us that despite Britain’s military strength, the geography of eastern North America, with its dense woods and numerous stone walls, gave American forces a considerable advantage. They knew the terrain far better than their opponents and found it easy to find defensive positions from which to fire on advancing enemy units.

Holton takes a dim view of the military commanders on both sides. British generals shuffled troops from one colony to another to little apparent purpose. Holton credits George Washington with economic shrewdness, calling him “the gold standard against which lesser [land] speculators were judged.” But when it came to the war itself, he chastises Washington for an obsession with heroically driving the British from New York or Philadelphia, an idea that, fortunately, he never acted on. Indeed, Holton writes, Washington’s “single greatest contribution” to American victory was changing his mind and abandoning the notion of storming British lines.

Often, it was not the decisions of generals but rather misperceptions, accidents, and sheer luck that determined the outcome of battles. Unanticipated contingencies—a smallpox epidemic, storms that delayed the arrival of troops—wreaked havoc on military plans. But the actions of ordinary folk lost to history also helped to determine the course of events. An unknown American officer in 1775 disobeyed orders and fortified Breed’s Hill overlooking Boston rather than nearby Bunker Hill. His decision helped bring about a battle (erroneously named for the latter hill) that became, for the British, the deadliness of the entire war.

In Holton’s account of the revolution, Native Americans play a central role. By the eve of the war, the nearly 2 million white colonists and approximately 300,000 slaves greatly outnumbered the over 90,000 Indigenous peoples living east of the Mississippi River. But the Indians’ determination to retain their land shaped the war’s origins and conduct. One of the first precipitants of colonial anger against British policies was the Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited land-hungry white settlers and speculators from encroaching on Indian holdings beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The British government was not particularly sympathetic to Native peoples; it simply wished to avoid endless military conflict on the frontier. Indeed, the decision to leave some 10,000 British soldiers in North America after the Seven Years’ War with France ended in 1763—what Holton, with a nod to today’s politics, calls “a western border wall”—stemmed from a desire to avoid combat between colonists and Native peoples. Troops, however, cost money; hence the government in London experimented with new taxes to raise revenue. The “principal purpose” of the Stamp Act, one of the best-known mileposts on the road to revolution, was not to undermine Americans’ liberty, as so many colonists charged, but, Holton writes, to fund the troops intended to prevent a war with Native Americans. Not surprisingly, when the War of Independence broke out, Indians mostly sided with the British.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson expressed the common colonial view of Native peoples, calling them “merciless savages” whose only “rule of warfare” was one of destruction. (Over half a century later, in his speech on the meaning of the Fourth of July to slaves, Frederick Douglass would brilliantly reverse Jefferson’s dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. Given the brutality of slavery, Douglass insisted, white Americans were the ones guilty of “crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.”) As for the laws of war, patriot forces violated them with impunity where Native peoples were concerned. In 1779 Washington dispatched a contingent of soldiers to upstate New York to burn Indian towns and crops.
and seize hostages “of every age and sex.” The following year, while serving as governor of Virginia, Jefferson ordered troops under the command of George Rogers Clark to enter the Ohio Valley and bring about the expulsion or “extermination” of local Indians.

What of the complex question of the revolution’s relationship to slavery? Among the 1619 Project’s more controversial claims is that the “primary reason” American colonists (in the recently published revised edition, “some of the colonists”) fought for independence was to safeguard slavery from future British interference. Although a number of historians questioned this statement, Holton argues that protecting slavery was in fact a significant motivation for many American patriots, especially in colonies where the slave plantation was the foundation of the economy.

In recent months, Holton has posted on Twitter documents that underscore the tremendous impact of the 1775 order by the Earl of Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, offering freedom to slaves who enlisted in the British Army. Holton does not claim that Dunmore’s proclamation “caused” the American Revolution, but he does insist that it played a significant role in transforming resistance within the British Empire into a movement for outright independence. Following Dunmore’s proclamation, Washington—who initially rejected the idea of allowing Black men to serve in the Continental Army—changed his mind, allowing those already free to enlist, and as time went on some Northern states offered freedom to slave soldiers. Black men and women chose to ally with whichever side they considered most likely to assist them in gaining freedom. Holton tells us that around 9,000 Black soldiers served in Washington’s army during the war, and a similar number chose to fight for the Crown. Overall, however, the enslaved identified the British, not the revolutionaries, with the promise of freedom and acted accordingly. Their knowledge of the local geography often proved vital to British forces. In 1778, for example, Sampson, a Black pilot, guided British warships upriver to within two miles of Savannah, leading to the city’s capture.

During the war, slaves fled by the thousands to the areas under British control. To be sure, as Holton makes clear, offering freedom to the slaves of an enemy nation was common practice in wars in the Western Hemisphere. This was a military strategy aimed at depriving the enemy of manpower and supplies, not an expression of hostility to slavery. Some British commanders saw the slaves who flocked to their lines as an annoying burden. While ensconced with his army at Yorktown before his surrender in 1781, the British commander Lord Cornwallis expelled hundreds of runaways who had helped build his fortifications, allowing their former owners to seize them. As a result, Jefferson himself recovered six who had run away. He gave one as a gift to his sister and sold the rest as punishment. In the treaty ending the war, the British promised to return the Americans’ escaped slaves. But some generals declined to do so, saying it would be a breach of the “national honor” to reenslave people who had been promised freedom. When the British evacuated New York, Charleston, and Savannah, they took thousands of former slaves with
them. Many ended up free in Nova Scotia, Great Britain, or Sierra Leone. Others were sold into West Indian slavery.

The Black desire for freedom forced both sides to modify their military plans. Britain felt it necessary to transfer troops from mainland North America to the Caribbean to secure the lucrative sugar islands there against both French invasion and slave uprisings, thus weakening the campaign against the American colonists. Similarly, the need to “prevent insurrections among the Negroes,” as the South Carolina legislature explained to Congress, meant that a significant number of able-bodied white patriots were exempted from military service. (Something like this occurred during the Civil War, when the Confederacy excused from the military draft one white man for every 20 slaves on a plantation.) Patriots took other steps to bolster slavery’s stability. When the British invaded South Carolina, the patriot leader John Laurens proposed arming thousands of slaves to defend the colony, but the legislature rejected this idea. Instead, to attract white recruits, the lawmakers offered slaves as enlistment bonuses: One could fight for freedom and end up owning slaves. With money scarce, a number of the new state governments used the enslaved as a kind of currency. Georgia’s legislature, Holton observes, paid the governor’s salary in slaves seized from loyalists.

After his detailed account of the coming of the revolution and the war itself, Holton’s brief final section on the origins and writing of the Constitution comes as something of an anticlimax. As in earlier chapters, he emphasizes how the actions of ordinary Americans helped to shape events. Here his focus is on the small farmers suffering from a postwar economic downturn, who opposed, sometimes violently, efforts by creditors to force the payment of outstanding debts or to foreclose on farms. Some states suspended the collection of debts or printed paper money that rapidly deteriorated in value but, to the alarm of creditors, could be used to pay existing obligations. “Farmers’ resistance,” most notably what came to be known as Shays’s Rebellion, and the pro-debtor actions of some state governments convinced elite patriots of the need to create a stronger central government to keep popular passions in check. With its ban on states issuing paper money and “impairing the Obligation of Contracts,” the Constitution, Holton writes, was “above all, an economic document,” and Shays and his followers its “inadvertent coauthors.”

In some ways, Holton’s account echoes Charles Beard’s An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States, which over a century ago argued that the framers were mainly concerned to establish a federal government powerful enough to ensure the repayment of government bonds and prevent states from interfering with the rights of property.

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**Green Tomatoes in Fire Season**

There is smoke in the air when I go pick them.

I go despite panic, also because inside I’ll make chutney.

For an hour or so, I unlatch them. It is late fall. They will not ripen.

Firm pale green skins, fine-coated in ash.

Our fire season goes all autumn now, though today’s fire is not yet near to us. But the green tomatoes: I love their pale lobes.

Tonight, god-willing, we will fry some with cornmeal & fish.

Inside the air purifier whirs: I will boil them with molasses & raisin.

Jar them for friends & the winter. Disaster, we say, meaning bad star.

These are good green stars, this is also their season.

Mask on, I bend & bend to the vine: I bend & salvage what I can.

TESS TAYLOR
Beard’s iconoclastic takedown of the authors of the Constitution opened him to widespread condemnation. Then, as now, most Americans preferred a more heroic portrait of the nation’s founders.

Holton’s entire book might be viewed as a reckoning with what he calls “the ambiguity of the American Revolution.” One can only admire the wealth of information he has assembled and the clarity with which he narrates this complex history. Ambiguity, however, does not constitute an overarching interpretation. Instead of a fully worked-out conclusion, Holton at the end offers a brief assessment of how the achievement of independence affected various groups of Americans. It is not an inspiring balance sheet. “Agrarian radicals” were mostly disappointed. “Ordinary free men” made “modest gains” via the expansion of political democracy in the states, but these were partly reversed by the Constitution. The status of free women barely changed. For the Native population, American independence was a disaster. The expulsion of the British deprived Indians of a powerful ally. And by agreeing to the Treaty of Paris, which recognized the new nation’s control of all the territory as far west as the Mississippi River, the British unconsciously abandoned their Native allies.

The only people who experienced a genuine enhancement of freedom, Holton writes, were African American slaves, who pursued their own revolution alongside the one pursued by white Americans. Tens of thousands served and departed with the British or acquired liberty by fighting in the Continental Army. Revolutionary rhetoric about liberty and equality helped inspire laws in the Northern states for the gradual abolition of slavery and provided a language with which African Americans staked their own claims to freedom. Lemuel Haynes, a Black clergyman and soldier, for example, published an antislavery essay in 1776 titled “Liberty Further Extended,” which began by quoting Jefferson’s words “All men are created equal.”

Yet against these gains, Holton asks us to weigh the fact that the vast majority of enslaved men and women remained in bondage, and their owners quickly came to dominate the new national government. In its three-fifths and fugitive-slave clauses and the provision empowering the federal government to put down insurrections, the Constitution offered powerful protections to slavery. And to the extent that Black people’s supposed racial inferiority became a convenient explanation for the existence of slavery in a land purportedly dedicated to liberty, the American Revolution reinforced white racism. Overall, Holton offers a stark assessment: The revolution “produced more misery than freedom.”

Holton’s title, *Liberty Is Sweet*, is taken from a 1775 letter by Lund Washington to his cousin George. It could easily be mistaken as an epigram for the entire struggle for independence. Yet Lund Washington did not have in mind the white patriots fighting to throw off the yoke of British tyranny. Rather, he was explaining why some of his cousin’s slaves were certain to try to escape to the British. Lund Washington understood that, unlike many white Americans, Black men and women saw freedom as a universal entitlement, not one limited by race. In that sense, the slaves and their descendants were the true inheritors of revolutionary ideals. That is an insight that ought to be taught in every classroom in the land.
Niki de Saint Phalle could be iconic even anonymously. In a 2014 interview, Gloria Steinem recalled passing the French American artist on the street in New York City “a long time ago” without knowing who she was. “She was walking on 57th Street and she had on one of those Australian raincoats…it was flowing out behind her,” Steinem said. “She had a cowboy hat and cowboy boots and no purse…. And I thought, ‘That is the first free woman I have ever seen in real life. I want to be just like her.’”

Despite Saint Phalle’s aristocratic lineage and moneyed upbringing, her freedom was hard-won. She fled a family shaped by strict class and gender norms and freighted with sexual abuse. She started a new family with a childhood acquaintance, only to suffer a nervous breakdown, which helped jump-start her artistic career. She became a successful woman in a male-dominated art world and the only female member of the one artistic group to which she belonged—the avant-garde Nouveaux Réalistes, many of whom drew on Marcel Duchamp and incorporated the everyday objects of life in order to better represent it in art. She struggled with relentless health problems and never had enough money to keep up with her creative ambitions.

These challenges are laid out in various forms in What Is Now Known Was Only Once Imagined, a new book about Saint Phalle by the writer Nicole Rudick. The unconventional volume is a selection of prose writings and graphic material by Saint Phalle—drawings, prints, and sketches—compiled to tell the story of her life and work. The subtitle dubs it “an (auto)biography,” which feels right in its hybridity: This is a highly subjective critical endeavor that’s almost frustratingly faithful to its source. Rudick has written a foreword and an afterward, but otherwise her hand is mostly invisible. In this way, the book posits that the best way to understand an artist is not by considering some combination of private and public encounters, but almost solely through their own work and words. “What could be closer to
the artist’s voice than the artist’s own voice, closer to her sensibility than that produced by her own hand?” Rudick asks. Coming from a biographer, that question feels both radically and deceptively simple.

Like many artists, Saint Phalle used her work to animate and unpack the challenges and concerns of her life. “I WOULD SHOW EVERYTHING,” she wrote to her mother. “I would show fear, anger, laughter, tenderness in my work.” In fact, she so heavily shaped the public narrative about herself that “her life story...has become inextricable from her art, providing its overdetermined discursive context,” argues the art historian Amelia Jones in the catalog for a recent Saint Phalle exhibition co-organized by the Menil Collection in Houston and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

For Rudick, this is not a problem but a gift. “Her work is a diary, and she made it for all to see,” Rudick writes in her afterword. Building on this premise, What Is Now Known uses the work to reveal the process of its creation. Across disciplines—drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, printmaking, writing—Saint Phalle crafted a mythical world filled with symbolic angels and dragons, snakes and trees, brides, goddesses, and guns. She came to see her life in related terms, as a series of trials that were required to fulfill her ambition. “Today, I believe THESE DIFFICULTIES WERE NECESSARY,” she reflected concerning the Tarot Garden, a massive sculpture park that she worked on for more than two decades. “Every fairy tale contains a long quest before you find the treasure.”

To some extent, we all practice this kind of narrativizing of the disparate events of our lives. For Saint Phalle, though, one gets the sense that her calling was the forging of her story as much as it was making art. Ultimately, her most feminist gesture may have been the creation of herself.

Catherine Marie-Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle was born in Paris in 1930, the second child of an American mother and a French father from a noble family whose business collapsed during the Great Depression. When Niki was a few months old, she was left at her grandparents’ château in France while her family moved to New York City. She rejoined them at age 3 and grew up in the rarefied world of the Upper East Side, visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art and summering on Long Island and in Connecticut.

This world, however, was stifling. “I felt that my virginity, looks, charm, and a certain social veneer were important to Mother and Father,” she wrote. “Their desire for me was that I should marry a rich and socially acceptable man. I would spend my life proving I had the right to exist.” Saint Phalle, who was expelled from two private schools, was resistant to the mores of her class and her predestined confinement to the domestic sphere. “Very early, I got the message that men had power, and I wanted it,” she recalled.

That message came from observing her parents: her mother, who was stuck at home with “little liberty or privacy” and unleashed her anger on the children, and her father, whose career outside the house and affairs with other women demonstrated his freedom. He took brutal advantage of his power when he raped Saint Phalle when she was 11. According to her writings, she had repressed all memories of the trauma until 1953, when her father sent her a letter of confession that began, “I’m sure you remember when you were eleven and I tried to make you my mistress.” She did not give her own account of the event until 1994, when she published the short book Mon Secret, which takes the form of a letter to her daughter. “I felt expelled from society,” Saint Phalle wrote. “I understood that everything I was taught was false.” She went on: “I learned to live with it and to survive with my secret. This forced solitude created in me the space necessary to write my first poems and to develop my interior life, which would later make me an artist.”

Saint Phalle’s encounter with the worst of male violence set her on her path: She would use art to refashion and expel her suffering and rage, as well as to explore the profound possibilities of joy. Her work, which created a connection to her younger self, gave her a way to continually imagine another world.

At first, Saint Phalle followed the script of a somewhat more conventional life. At 18, she eloped with Harry Mathews, with whom she shared a love of high culture. Mathews was studying music (he’d go on to become a writer), and Saint Phalle had done some modeling and was studying acting. “We both did not want to grow up having a life resembling that of our parents and their friends,” she wrote. “We found another altar to worship: ART.”

The pair moved from New York City to Boston to Paris and then traveled around Europe, mingling in a milieu that included the poets John Ashbery and Robert Graves. Even after having two children, they remained itinerant and bohemian to a fault. For her part, Saint Phalle could not bring herself to become a housewife. She piled dirty clothes under the bed until the family ran out of things to wear, because doing the laundry was “just too boring.” Mathews seems to have been receptive to her complaints, but the problems ran deeper.

While they were living in southern France, she began contemplating suicide. Saint Phalle amassed an arsenal of knives and other sharp objects, again hiding them under the bed. When Mathews discovered the cache, he sent her to a psychiatric clinic in Nice, where she received electroshock treatment. A harrowing drawing in What Is Now Known shows a wide-eyed woman lying like a mummy on a bed surrounded by rats. The sun shines through a barred window floating above her. Handwritten text floats around the page, asking, “Are the rats inside of me? Or will they make a feast of me?” Although undated, the drawing seems to be an early example of her gift for distilling complex, often dark situations into a storybook style.

At the clinic, Saint Phalle started making art, which the doctors saw as therapeutic: They discharged her after six weeks. Saint Phalle later wrote that the breakdown was “good in the long run, because I left the clinic a painter.” She added, “Painting put my soul-stirring chaos at ease and provided an organic structure to my life, which I was ultimately in control of.”

s she asserted that control, Saint Phalle confronted an impossible decision—choosing, like so many women, between domestic and creative life. She embarked, at first, on a one-year reprieve to live alone and make art; it became a permanent arrangement, though she continued to visit the kids, who were raised by Mathews. Saint Phalle accepted her choice but also acknowledged the guilt it produced: “I felt that I had done such a terrible thing in leaving my family that I buried myself 100% in my work for the rest of my life to make up for it.”

By this time, she had also opted to forgo formal art training, a characteristically defiant decision that would leave her vulnerable to critical dismissal her whole career. Encouraged by an early mentor, she started out making figurative oil paintings and assemblages in a flat, colorful style that foreshadowed her later work. But encounters with Abstract Expressionism and the conceptual experiments of Duchamp and Yves Klein rattled her, prompting what she called her “first big artistic crisis.” She resolved it by a method she’d return to in the future: “metamorphosis.”

Although Saint Phalle had wanted to be independent, she quickly found herself enmeshed in an intense and complicated relationship with Tinguely that would last three decades. The pair were never monogamous and didn’t marry until their romance had already fizzled, but they remained devoted collaborators. “Jean is a great catalyst,” Saint Phalle wrote. “Always provocative, he knows how to goad me into surpassing myself.”

At the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Saint Phalle, Tinguely, and the artist Per Olof Ultvedt created Hon—en Katedral (She—a Cathedral), an 82-foot-long reclining Nana that was a building unto itself. Visitors—more than 70,000 of them in three months—entered the sculpture through its vulva; in a comical and surreal sight, well-dressed museum patrons lined up between the huge, brightly painted spread legs. Inside, they encountered a milk bar (in one breast), a theater, a gallery of fake paintings, and more. In a collage reproduced in What Is Now Known shows Nanas prancing around the names of some of her artistic forebears (including Gaudí), Saint Phalle calls Hon “a first small attempt to beat these guys.”

Part of Saint Phalle’s goal with the Nanas was to transform the built world, to “reimagine [it] as one that was hospitable,” Dawsey writes. Saint Phalle had been inspired by her encounters with fantastical works of architecture, including Antoni Gaudí’s Park Güell, which features colorful tile mosaics and curving, naturalist structures on a hilltop in Barcelona. In one drawing, Saint Phalle mapped out a “Plan for Nana Town,” a village constructed solely out of Nana figures; it includes a “Nana empire state building” entered through the heels of a woman’s shoes. Saint Phalle, whose physical autonomy had been violated at a young age, wanted to reclaim space with and for women’s bodies by imagining a place in which her fellow women contained and provided everything.

Saint Phalle never built the town, but in 1966 she did make a Nana the size of a building. By this time, she was enmeshed in an intense and complicated relationship with Tinguely that would last three decades. The pair were never monogamous and didn’t marry until their romance had already fizzled, but they remained devoted collaborators. “Jean is a great catalyst,” Saint Phalle wrote. “Always provocative, he knows how to goad me into surpassing myself.”

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Her calling was the forging of her story as much as it was the making of art.
glass, they are simultaneously creepy and enchanting, rising from the tree-filled landscape like a cast of monsters from a children’s movie. Saint Phalle envisioned the park as “a place to dream in.” It opened to the public in 1998, 20 years after its foundation was laid and four years before her death.

Creating such a place was neither easy nor cheap. The garden cost roughly $5 million, a portion of which came from past and present lovers. Saint Phalle herself raised a third of the money by making and selling commercial products like jewelry, vases, and perfume. The art establishment looked down on such endeavors, but they proved to be a savvy business strategy and a boon to her wider reputation. More important, they allowed Saint Phalle to be the “master of my own ship” when it came to the garden: “I could work at my pace, in my way, which wasn’t always logical…. This was complete freedom.”

One of the tragic ironies of Saint Phalle’s story is that the zeal of her practice exacerbated the health problems that plagued her all her life. In 1974, she was hospitalized for a lung abscess brought on by the liquid polyester she used to make the Nanas. In 1981, soon after starting the Tarot Garden, she began suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. Refusing to see a doctor, she moved into the Empress sculpture, where she made a bedroom in one of the breasts and lived alone, deteriorating for two years. Finally, when she could no longer sculpt or even walk, she ended up in the hospital, but after receiving treatment and medication returned to the Empress, where she nearly lost her grip on reality. “In the magic space, I lost all notion of time, and the limitations of normal life were abolished,” she wrote. In her delirium, she would sometimes see “thousands of shiny, little black devils with horrible wings…coming out of all my orifices.”

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critic, I wonder about the limits of analyzing someone’s art entirely from within their own subjectivity. As Amelia Jones asks in her catalog essay, “How can we ‘know’ the significance of the link between [her] life and the objects and remnants that survive today as her work, no matter how directly [she] seems to have associated them with each other?”

On the other hand, you will find gaps in the recounting of anyone’s life (there are plenty in my version here), and all biographers must make choices regarding those disjunctures. Rudick grapples with this in her introduction, when she asks “where… the borders of a person’s life lie” and writes about seeking “a bigger picture of Saint Phalle’s inner world.” And her book makes a compelling case: This Saint Phalle feels different—more outré, more contemplative, and more mortal—than the one I encountered at her survey exhibition at MoMA PS1 in New York City last year. I think I understand her better.

The most misinterpreted aspect of Saint Phalle’s art is that it is childlike. This quality has been used to dismiss her work as naive, especially because she never had any formal training. *What Is Now Known* makes it clear that this quality was, like so much else in her life, an intentional choice. Forgoing a traditional art education gave Saint Phalle a unique, unaffected style, and using fairy tales and myths as a framework gave her a way to assert her agency as an artist and a woman. Saint Phalle recognized that without evil, there is no good; without chaos, there’s no need for order. Over time, she learned not to romanticize her suffering but instead to accept it as fuel.

That isn’t to say she idealized balance or perfection (she once called the right angle “an assassin”). In lieu of symmetry, she embraced duality. Several images in the book contain opposing halves combined into a whole, including the cover, which reproduces a lithograph of the tree of life. One side, rendered in color, contains love, nature, beauty, art; the other, in black and white, holds tragedy, injustice, sadness, death. The two grow from the same base, and nestled between them is a woman—her features are indistinct, but it’s hard not to imagine that this is Saint Phalle. “I always felt that the Garden of Eden was right next to Hell,” she observed late in life. “Just a step away”—and maybe both equally impossible to reach.

OTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES, IT HAS become increasingly obvious that the need for wealth redistribution—“the issue that blocks the horizon,” as Frantz Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*—is the central issue for any future era of progressive change. Wealth inequality has accelerated throughout the world over the past four decades in what many perceive as the triumph of neoliberalism: Individuals and nations are rewarded or punished according to their ability to accumulate wealth and participate in the financialization of all aspects of their existence.

When it comes to Puerto Rico, the questions of wealth inequality are central to both the everyday life and the colonial reality of the island, as Rocío Zambrana argues in her new book, *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico*. The island’s status as an unincorporated territory and de facto colony has made it vulnerable to an extreme form of austerity imposed on it by the United States. But this austerity comes with high personal costs, too, undermining the very health of the island’s people.

In Zambrana’s account, Puerto Rico’s debt is symptomatic of both imperial practices—in that its agriculture, trade, and taxation have been refashioned to

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*[Image of Puerto Rican flag with the words “SE VENDE”]**

**Colonialism’s Ledger**

*Puerto Rico in the shadow of debt*

**BY ED MORALES**
favor US interests—and a neoliberal colonialism of capital extraction through tax exemption and bond speculation. Offering an account that weaves together philosophies of debt, American exceptionalism, and a description of attempts by various coalitions of leftists, students, women, and workers to resist, Zambrana not only details the experience of economic exploitation in Puerto Rico but confronts its particular effects on an array of marginalized groups, thereby showing that debt knows no divisions between identity and class and that the inequalities it imposes or creates must be met by an equally undivided left.

In the United States, the politics of debt has mostly focused on personal debt and, in particular, student debt. Recent figures show that Americans owe just over $800 billion in credit card debt, and when you add in mortgages, car loans, and student debt, the total rises to over $15 trillion. Beginning in the years after Occupy Wall Street, activist groups like Andrew Ross and Astra Taylor’s Debt Collective have lobbied for aggressive student debt forgiveness—a policy that was originally part of the 2020 Democratic Party agenda but now seems to be flagging as a serious consideration for the Biden administration as it struggles to maintain the party’s majorities in Congress in the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections.

Yet debt has become a central engine of the US economy, not only for consumers but for cities and states. In the US, local municipalities take on onerous amounts of debt to keep functioning. Meanwhile, throughout the world, debt is employed as leverage that allows wealthier countries to extract concessions from poorer ones. This practice was evident in the United States’ “dollar diplomacy” interventions throughout the Americas in the early 20th century, justified under the Monroe Doctrine, and has been repeated in the 21st century through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the European Union in order to sustain a capitalist hegemony over most parts of the globe.

In Colonial Debts, Zambrana situates Puerto Rico’s current turmoil within the politics of debt. The island had accumulated $74 billion in bond debt and $123 billion in debt overall, with pensions included, which spurred Congress to create PROMESA, a law designed to restructure and reduce the level of debt so that Puerto Rico can eventually reenter the sphere of capital markets and resume borrowing in a supposedly more responsible fashion. On March 15, a debt restructuring plan approved by the PROMESA-mandated Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) officially kicked in, ostensibly bringing Puerto Rico “out of bankruptcy,” but the plan’s austerity measures are still provoking protests and discontent. “Debt is an exchange that has not been brought to completion,” Zambrana writes. “During the time that the debt remains unpaid, the logic of hierarchy ‘takes hold.’” In Puerto Rico’s case, this hierarchy is embodied by the FOMB, which has had the effect of eroding democracy on the island.

For Zambrana, the story of PROMESA is really the story of colonialism reinventing itself. The debt crisis in Puerto Rico is not a simple case of an incompetent government borrowing beyond its means; it is the result of the many years in which the island served as a profit machine for US corporate interests, a dumping ground for US manufactured goods, and a tax shelter for businesses and, increasingly, individuals. Puerto Rico’s debt grew, Zambrana shows, because most of the profits generated there were siphoned off into US and offshore banks, not reinvested in the island, and because a series of laws allowed US interests to treat it as an American state when it was convenient and as a foreign country when it wasn’t. Unable to make autonomous trade arrangements with its neighbors, and subject to laws like the 1920 Jones Act, which made it overly dependent on US maritime commerce, Puerto Rico could never grow enough economically to create an adequate tax base and keep its government out of the red, even after it developed a manufacturing industry in the postwar years.

As an appendage of the US economy, Puerto Rico, which had enjoyed a period of prosperity in the 1950s and ’60s, ran into trouble with the economic convulsions of the 1970s, and it began to borrow in the form of bond issues in the millions of dollars just to pay for essential government services. The market for Puerto Rican bonds has grown rapidly since then as banking was deregulated and bond investment became more volatile in the 1980s, while in 1984, Puerto Rico’s status under Chapter 9 bankruptcy law was changed to that of a state, which had the effect of making it ineligible to declare bankruptcy. As the island became increasingly shackled to its debt, Puerto Rican bonds became more and more attractive for speculators. Since 1917, with the passage of the Jones-Shafroth Act, the bonds have been triple tax-exempt, and as speculators jockeyed for position in the 1980s, they became a hot investment, especially for Wall Street underwriters and hedge and vulture funds, the latter always on the hunt for “distressed” economies from which to extract profits.

Zambrana tells this story of colonial manipulation and financial speculation, but she also does something else interesting: Fusing the theorist Aníbal Quijano’s idea of the “coloniality of power” with Saidiya Hartman’s notion of “afterlife,” she argues that Puerto Rico’s “decolonization,” ostensibly accomplished in 1950 with the creation of its “commonwealth” status, allowed its original colonization to have an afterlife in the form of this debt. It was more than just a way for Wall Street speculators to get rich, Zambrana notes; Puerto Rico’s debt was a means to reassert US dominance over the island “within and through the strictures of financialized neoliberal capitalism.”

Hitting from the past to the present, Zambrana then turns to the Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato to examine how debt and debt crises not only exploit and discipline Puerto Rico but also transform its everyday life. In his books The Making of the Indebted Man and Governing by Debt, Lazzarato argued that a new debt model emerged in the 1970s and ’80s that reversed the mid-century Keynesian model of deficit spending. This model created not only new states but new subjects:

Ed Morales is the author of Fantasy Island and Latinx.
Instead of going into debt itself, the state began to pass that financial burden on to individuals. Individual life became a “site of value creation and extraction,” imposing on the people not just the guilt of living on an indebted island but that of being personally indebted, too. In this way, debt became “at once material and ‘affective.’”

As Zambrana shows, Puerto Rico’s debt has had many devastating effects on the average Puerto Rican. The 11.5 percent sales tax—the highest of any US state or territory—is one of the strategies that enable Puerto Rico to circumvent the limits in its Constitution in order to sell bonds, but it also overburdens consumers. A mortgage crisis exacerbated by the island’s economic woes has pushed realtors to favor wealthy Americans who want to buy property in places like San Juan, squeezing out the local residents. The privatization of the island’s electrical authority, airports, and toll roads and the breakup of its telephone company have allowed entities that were once administered in the public interest to be run in pursuit of private profit.

Zambrana examines how personal debt crises have taken a particular toll on women and queer people in Puerto Rico. Using the work of the Argentine activists Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, who wrote about how debt often “does not allow us to say no when we want to say no” during their own country’s crises, she shows how women’s bodies are threatened and subjugated by economic burdens and the imposition of patriarchal morality. The rates of femicide and violence against women have skyrocketed during the debt crisis, and there is currently a mass mobilization of teachers, most of whom are women, in Puerto Rico protesting incredibly low wages and diminished pensions, both of which are concessions to the debt adjustment plan.

The debt crisis has also undermined the limited democratic control that Puerto Ricans did have. The privatization of the electrical authority was carried out with little public input, and the contraction of the educational system, with its numerous school closures, as well as the deterioration of the University of Puerto Rico system, has been widely condemned. Despite proposed legislation in the US Congress about the resolution of the island’s territorial status, debt has made Puerto Ricans’ desire for either independence or statehood less achievable.

So how can Puerto Rico escape from the debt trap? Zambrana’s answer is simple: politics. Soon after Puerto Rico’s debt was declared unpayable by then-Governor Alejandro García Padilla in 2015, a movement that brought together various sectors, from university students to labor activists, emerged demanding a forensic debt audit in order to expose the unfair conditions imposed on the island. As I reported in The Nation at the time, a preliminary investigation by these groups showed that much of the debt was illegal—violations of constitutional limits, which had been subverted by Wall Street’s machinations in concert with Puerto Rico’s government bank. The FOMB commissioned a report in 2018, but it fell far short of revealing the depth of the irregular practices that created the island’s $74 billion debt. The debt commission, which had been initiated by García Padilla, was disbanded by his successor, Ricardo Rosselló, just months into his term.

While the protests calling for a forensic debt audit did not achieve their goal, Zambrana argues that protest is still the most effective way to liberate Puerto Rico and its residents from debt—pointing as an example to the protests that pushed Rosselló from office in the summer of 2019, which also called for the removal of the Financial Oversight and Management Board. In the meantime, Zambrana adds, Puerto Ricans can take matters into their own hands in a multitude of ways: by occupying public beaches; by establishing mutual aid organizations like the Apoyo Mutuo centers, which exist in several municipalities; and by demanding that the debt not be paid until it is forensically audited. Given the island’s current status of “belonging to the metropole itself.”
Letters

Sequim for the Win

Thank you for putting Sequim, Wash., on your cover (“High Noon in Clallam County,” by Sasha Abramsky, Feb. 21/28). For a small town, this is unusual. Even though I’ve spent most of my life just 17 miles away in Port Angeles, there was much I didn’t know about our “younger brother.” But I do know about my hometown. We have a big drug problem and a lot of white racism and religious bigotry, and the Democratic Party does nothing about it. If Democrats lose in 2022 and 2024, it will be because of their neglect of small towns.

Bill Bokamper
Port Angeles, Wash.

We are writing to thank you for Sasha Abramsky’s hard-hitting article on our success in ousting the QAnon-connected “Gang of Four” from the Sequim City Council on November 2. Our victory is a model for how we can defeat the Trump Republicans who scheme to strip millions of their voting rights in the upcoming midterm elections and make rural America their reliable “base.”

A few points in the article need to be stressed. Abramsky led his exposé with an interview with Dr. Allison Berry, a public health officer for the North Olympic Peninsula, who was threatened with assassination by anti-vaxxer fanatics. Our grassroots movement defended her, and voter support for her courageous leadership was a major factor in our landslide win.

The election was also a victory over white supremacy. So-called Save Our Sequim (SOS) began spreading their racist poison two years ago, their main targets being the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and the opioid MAT clinic soon to open in Sequim. When the tribe’s family clinic took the lead in providing thousands of Covid-19 vaccinations in Clallam County, we submitted a draft proclamation to the city council thanking the tribe for their leadership. SOS and Sequim’s QAnon now ex-mayor, William Armacost, publicly rejected the acknowledgment, and in response, a broad grassroots coalition organized and fought back. Several months before the election, we formed the nonpartisan Sequim Good Governance League, which played the key role in recruiting the five “Good Governance” candidates. It was the unity and high visibility of this coalition that won the day. Voter turnout was 58 percent, very high for an off-year election.

“Good Governance” candidate Vicki Lowe is the first descendant of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe ever elected to the Sequim City Council. We call her “Sequim’s daughter.” If other communities form multi-racial and multi-generational coalitions, work to educate voters, and mobilize them in defense of democracy, we can win a nationwide victory next November.

Tim Wheeler
Acting Chair
Voices for Health & Healing
Sequim, Wash.

A key takeaway is that progressives worked with moderates and, gasp, even some moderate conservatives. This is a winning strategy in much of the country, but is seldom championed in articles.

Charles Rosengard

Comment drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com
Please do not send attachments
A TRIBUTE / DAVID BACON

Dolores Huerta’s Legacy

At 92 years old, the iconic labor activist continues to fight for workers’ rights.

Last fall I walked from Poplar to Delano, Calif., in honor of Larry Itliong, who started the 1965 grape strike and boycott there, with Dolores Huerta, cofounder of the United Farm Workers (UFW). She was 91 then, and I had a hard time keeping up. She sent me a note afterward that ended, “Sí Se Puede con El Rojo Tocino.” It was a beautiful joke.

“Sí Se Puede” are three words we all use now, but she invented this confident way of saying “Yes We Can!” “Tocino” was the nickname the union gave me in the years I worked as an organizer—it means “bacon,” my last name. And calling me “El Rojo,” or “The Red,” in this way honored my politics.

When I came back from a solidarity work brigade in Cuba in the 1970s, I landed in New York City with no place to sleep. I called Dolores’s daughter, Lori, a friend from California. Not only did I get space on the floor of the NYC boycott’s headquarters, but Dolores and her partner, Richard, César Chávez’s brother, took us out to eat. Over pizza I enthused about the island. I had stars in my eyes, for both Cuba and Dolores, and still do. I went to work for the UFW as an organizer a few months later. There was often tension in the union about radical politics, and being called a red was sometimes the route out the door. But for Dolores and Eliseo Medina, stalwart leaders of the union, being a good organizer was the bottom line—doing what the workers needed.

Over the years, long after I had left the UFW and worked for other unions and then as a photojournalist, I would see Dolores again and again. Going to Watsonville to cover the organizing drives of strawberry workers or to Salinas for the strikes in the vegetable fields, I knew she’d be there. It was a profound experience to watch her in union contract negotiations—this diminutive woman facing off against the beefy growers across the table—and see the sense of power it gave workers.

Returning from Iraq, where I photographed workers after the 2003 US invasion, I took her picture in the front line of marchers against the war. When we were in Sacramento trying to stop the anti-immigrant, anti-affirmative-action, anti-bilingual initiatives, she was the first to speak out.

So when she called me El Rojo Tocino, I thought, “What a compliment!” I hope I live up to it.

Many Voices, One Nation.

Martin Luther King Jr.
“The Last Steep Ascent”

John Steinbeck
“Dubious Battle in California”

Howard Zinn
“Finishing School for Pickets”

Toni Morrison
“No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear”

Naomi Klein
“Capitalism vs. the Climate”

Ralph Nader
“The Safe Car You Can’t Buy”

Carlos Fuentes
“Mexico: Land of Jekyll and Hyde”

Ralph Ellison
“Tell It Like It Is, Baby”

Bill McKibben
“Too Hot to Handle”

Tony Kushner
“A Socialism of the Skin”

Michelle Alexander
“Why Hillary Clinton Doesn’t Deserve the Black Vote”

Langston Hughes
“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

Hannah Arendt
“What Is This New Philosophy They Call ‘Existentialism’?”

Freda Kirchwey
“One World or None”

Gore Vidal
“Some Jews & the Gays”

Arthur Miller
“Our Bloodless Coup”

Laila Lalami
“Against Easy Stories”

James Baldwin
“A Report From Occupied Territory”

Melissa Harris-Perry
“Trayvon Martin: What It’s Like to Be a Problem”

Noam Chomsky
“Magna Carta Messed Up the World, Here’s How to Fix It”

Kai Bird
“The Case for Disengagement in the Middle East”

Kurt Vonnegut
“The Worst Addiction of Them All”

Aileen Mioko Smith
“Will Japan’s Nuke Plants Be Next?”

James Agee
“The Salt of the Earth”

For over 155 years, The Nation has published groundbreaking independent journalism that shapes the public discourse and advances a more progressive future for all. From the birth of America’s consumer rights movement with Ralph Nader’s 1959 “The Safe Car You Can’t Buy” to Bill McKibben’s breakdown of global warming in 1997’s “Too Hot to Handle” to essays from James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, the protest art of Ai Weiwei, cultural critiques by James Agee and Kurt Vonnegut—The Nation has long been a home for vision and truth-telling, debate and dissent.

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Like millions of older Americans, I struggle with mobility. For years, I watched my quality of life slip away, as I was forced to stay home while friends and family took part in activities I'd once enjoyed. I thought I'd made some progress when I got a mobility scooter, but then I realized how hard it was to transport. Taking it apart and putting it back together was like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Once I had it disassembled, I had to try to put all of the pieces in the trunk of a car, go to wherever I was going, and repeat the process in reverse. Travel scooters were easier to transport, but they were uncomfortable and scary to drive, I always felt like I was ready to tip over. Then I found the So Lite™ Scooter. Now there's nothing that can hold me back.

Years of work by innovative engineers have resulted in a scooter that's designed with seniors in mind. They created Electronic Stability Control (ESC) that makes it virtually impossible to tip over. If you try to turn too quickly, the scooter automatically slows down to prevent it from tipping over. The battery provides powerful energy at a fraction of the weight of most batteries. With its rugged yet lightweight aluminum frame, the So Lite™ Scooter is the most portable scooter ever—but it can hold up to 265 pounds—yet weighs only 40.8 pounds without the battery! What’s more, it easily folds up for storage in a car seat, trunk or even on an airplane. It folds in seconds without tools and is safe and reliable. Best of all, it’s designed with your safety in mind, from the newest technology and superior craftsmanship. Why spend another day letting your lack of mobility ruin your quality of life? Call now and find out how you can get a So Lite™ Scooter of your very own.

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