The Fight for Abortion After Roe Falls

AMY LITTLEFIELD

SPECIAL ISSUE

LARADA LEE-WALLACE
ELIE MYSTAL
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GLOBAL CONNECTIONS TELEVISION
WITH BILL MILLER

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“...Forced birth is evil and barbaric and cannot be compelled by a legitimate government.”

Cover illustration: HANNA BARCZYK

Day of awareness: Demonstrators outside the Wisconsin State Capitol commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls on May 5.
Now What?

In the wake of Justice Samuel Alito’s leaked draft decision overturning Roe v. Wade, it’s tempting to blame the pro-choice movement. Blaming ourselves: Isn’t that what we progressives, especially women, love to do? Somehow, it’s our fault—for being too white/middle-class/respectable, too beholden to the Democratic Party in return for too few crumbs. Always throwing money at unwinnable races, allowing abortion to be stigmatized (“safe, legal, and rare”), maintaining bloated organizations that lumber and creak and resist change. It’s all true—I’ve written that piece many times. But today I’m not so sure any of that would have mattered. The truth is, Donald Trump came to power despite losing the popular vote by almost 3 million, enabling Mitch McConnell to ruthlessly engineer the current right-wing Catholic anti-abortion Supreme Court majority, and here we are. The crisis of abortion is a crisis of democracy.

Whoever is in Alito’s majority, none of them care about public opinion, which is majority pro-Roe. Nor, apparently, do they seriously consider the many terrible consequences of forcing so many women into unwanted childbirth. (They can always give the baby away, as Amy Coney Barrett suggested helpfully.) They’re in their own theocratic bubble, where anything goes if it supports the holy cause—where, for example, Alito can approvingly cite Matthew Hale, a 17th-century British jurist who sentenced two women to execution as witches and wrote an influential treatise permitting men to rape their wives. Superstitious? Misogynistic? They just don’t care.

In the face of this disaster, it’s tempting to rant and rave. There’s been a lot of that, in print and online, and that’s fine. We need passion, articulate and splendid passion, to spur us to the work ahead. But this time I’m going to leave the rage and fire to others—take it away, Rebecca Traister! Instead, I want to think out loud here about what that work might be.

First, we need to bolster abortion rights and access wherever possible, and that means winning elections wherever possible. Frances Kissling, the former president of Catholics for Choice, tells me that the pro-choice movement has little to show for its electoral efforts in red states (remember the massive shower of gold for Wendy Davis?) and should shift its focus to shoring up blue states and providing actual services, such as organizing travel from abortion-ban states. I’m with her on strengthening blue states, but I don’t agree about abandoning the red ones. Taking back state legislatures and governorships will be the work of many years—and we can probably be smarter about choosing our battles—but whittling away at anti-choice majorities in the red states has to be on our to-do list, or our problems will only grow worse.

Kissling is certainly right, though, that there’s work to be done in Blue America. Currently, 15 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have enshrined legal abortion in their constitutions or statutes; we need all blue and purple states to do so, because the forces that came for abortion in the red states will come hard at them now. My part-time home state of Connecticut is a shining star here. This month it passed not only state constitutional protection of abortion, but laws protecting providers, abortion travelers, and those who help them from the legal reach of abortion-ban states. Connecticut now explicitly codifies the right of some non-MD medical workers to perform some abortions and give out abortion pills.

Second, Kissling argues, we need to energize (polite word) the whole medical profession and hold it to account. Many medical schools don’t teach the procedure. We need to force them to do so as part of routine gynecological care, because that is what it is. And what about hospitals? The economics of running a stand-alone clinic can be pretty daunting, especially...
given low reimbursement rates from Medicaid. That is one reason clinics have been closing, even in blue states. Hospitals could take on some of this work, but few do: In 2017, they performed only 3 percent of abortions, and that includes secular, non-Catholic hospitals. Why? Maybe a big donor is anti-choice. Maybe management fears being targeted by anti-abortion activists. There’s not a lot of money in an uncomplicated first-trimester abortion, and potentially a lot of tsuris. Tough. We need to pressure hospitals to rise to the challenge and give women an uncomplicated, legal service that one in four of them will need during their fertile years. Indeed, not to do so is a kind of malpractice akin to refusing to treat someone for a widespread, easily cured, but potentially fatal condition because it’s just too much of a bother.

Third, we need to push the blue states to fund abortion directly: to subsidize clinic and hospital services, raise Medicaid reimbursements, expand Medicaid to include undocumented immigrants, and make grants to abortion funds that help low-income people pay for their procedures. (The New York City Council has led the way here: Since 2019, it has granted $250,000 annually to the New York Abortion Access Fund.) What about blue states setting up bus services to bring red-state patients to clinics? Paying for hotel stays for abortion travelers?

Fourth: Donors—i.e., you—need to step up your giving. There are already way too many women who have to travel for their procedures. That is going to be magnified many times over in the 26 states poised to ban or greatly restrict abortion once Roe is overturned—and those women will be traveling farther as neighboring states pass bans of their own. Now is the time to give generously to travel funds like the Brigid Alliance, which covers the cost of transportation, plus food, lodging, child care—whatever the patient needs. Give to regular funds as well—the more money they have, the more they can fund first-trimester procedures before patients reach the far more expensive second trimester. The National Network of Abortion Funds is holding its annual fundraiser right now (fundathon.nnaf.org). On its home page, you’ll find a map of all its member funds, probably including one or more in your region. And don’t forget: Right now, abortion is legal in every state.

Fifth: Use your imagination. Can you host a traveling patient in your spare room, or even on your sofa? If you run an Airbnb, can you volunteer it one or two days a month? Can you drive someone from a banned state to the nearest clinic? Volunteer as a clinic escort? Mind a patient’s children while she’s having her procedure? Call your local clinic and ask how you can help. Pro tip: If you are feeling short of money to donate, look over your credit card bills. Believe it or not, there are women who are prevented from ending their pregnancy because they can’t pay for a babysitter or a bus ride. Fifty dollars could make all the difference. The fees for that streaming service you never use (ahem!) and that Substack you haven’t looked at in months could be transformed into a monthly donation to the Frontera Fund, which helps low-income residents of the Rio Grande Valley access abortion, or Just the Pill, which sends affordable abortion pills by mail and is starting a mobile clinic.

Sixth: Do more. If you are reading this, chances are you are already voting, donating, writing your legislators, and so on, like the good citizen you are. So, go further: Demonstrate incessantly, like the feminists of Argentina and Mexico. Walk out of that anti-choice church you still go to for some reason, like Polish feminists did in 2016 when the government threatened to ban abortion. Put up informative stickers, as Irish pro-choicers did back when it was against the law even to give out the phone numbers of UK clinics. Stand with your friends outside your local crisis pregnancy center, aka fake abortion clinic, and politely hand out leaflets telling people what the place really does.

Remember, though: It’s not the 1960s. For every kind of activism you want to get involved in, there are groups working on it already. You don’t need to start your own secret network to get pregnant women out of Texas—give to Fund Texas Choice, which already does that. Nor need you personally smuggle abortion pills into states with bans. Even in Texas, people can order pills online and, if necessary, have them mailed to a forwarding address in another state. Thousands of women have already gotten pills this way. What would be helpful? Smith College professor Carrie N. Baker, who studies the abortion pill, suggests you spread information about abortion pills and how to get them safely. Go to planpills.org for details.

Finally, don’t let yourself feel pre-defeated. We can win this eventually, but despair will make it harder. Just concentrate on what you can do now: protecting and expanding rights where possible, supporting abortion services, and, above all, getting pro-choice legislators into office at every level. The progressive activist Heather Booth, a founder of the Jane Collective, which provided clandestine abortions in Chicago pre-Roe, told me, “I took two big lessons from the civil rights movement, which also seemed an impossible struggle. One is, sometimes you have to stand up to illegitimate authority. The other is, if we organize, we can win. Even in the face of bad decisions and conflict and trouble, we still need to be agents of hope.”
Roe Was Never Enough

In spite of having made up my mind, I still had to face unnecessary barriers in order to access medical care that I could have received online and by mail.

As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: I wanted to get an abortion. But, almost instinctively, all of the worst-case scenarios that I could think of popped into my head. It was March 2020, and the pandemic was raging. What if I had to travel out of the state for the abortion? What if I couldn’t get it in time and had to carry the pregnancy to term?

I was 19 and a student at Ohio State University. I was adjusting to my new role as a member of University Student Government and fresh out of a relationship with the partner who had impregnated me, and who had absolutely no desire to have children.

Sitting on the toilet with the positive pregnancy test still in my hand, I texted one of my close friends who volunteered with the local abortion fund, Women Have Options: “Hey I’m pregnant and don’t want to be, what do I do?” She replied, “Well, you’ve come to the right place,” and immediately connected me to the fund, which helped cover the cost of my abortion. As a Medicaid recipient, I did not qualify for coverage. (The Hyde Amendment prevents Medicaid from covering abortions except in certain circumstances. But research shows that even in those cases, Medicaid recipients or their providers struggle to receive reimbursements.) I had only $100 to put toward my abortion, and the fund was able to cover the remaining $450.

Next I had to schedule an appointment at a clinic. The Ohio attorney general had just issued a letter urging clinics that provide abortions to stop performing “non-essential” and “elective” surgeries, effectively exploiting the pandemic to halt abortions under the cover of preserving personal protective equipment for health care workers. Knowing that, it became even more imperative for me to schedule my appointment as soon as possible.

But when I arrived at the Planned Parenthood clinic on the day of my appointment, the door was locked. Apparently its only doctor was out sick. When I called the facility from the parking lot, the person on the line said the next earliest appointment was six weeks out, unless I wanted to travel over an hour and a half outside the city for an appointment in 10 days. I was surprised and annoyed about being delayed, but fortunately I had scheduled a backup appointment at an independent abortion clinic for the following week. Still, I was pregnant for about two and half weeks longer than I wanted or needed to be because of scheduling delays. In that moment, it felt as though I would never get the abortion.

The day of my first appointment at the independent clinic, a Friday, I had to endure state-mandated counseling aimed at trying to discourage me from having the abortion and an ultrasound during which the clinic assistant told me that at that point in my pregnancy, I had a 75 percent chance of carrying the pregnancy to term. There’s only one explanation for why the state would require clinics to deliver this information to people seeking abortions: to shame us into making a different decision. But as researchers have found, people seeking an abortion are sure of their decision. After handing me the ultrasound image, the clinic provider apologized for having to relay that information, explaining that they did so only because it’s Ohio law. And since the state has a mandatory and medically unnecessary 24-hour waiting period, I had to return the following Monday and wait three more hours, alone (because of Covid restrictions) in a waiting room of masked strangers, to see the provider in order to receive abortion pills. I took the first medication (mifepristone) at the clinic, and the second (misoprostol) at home.

As I sat at home waiting to pass the pregnancy tissue—it took about four hours after taking the second medication—I couldn’t get over the absurdity of the entire experience. I knew even before I took a test confirming my pregnancy that I would seek an abortion. But in spite of having made up my mind, I still had to face unnecessary barriers—during a pandemic, no less—in order to access medical care that I could have received online and by mail, with friends by my side. It shouldn’t have been this way.

Ohio officials have made it harder than ever to obtain an abortion in the state, from mandatory clinic closures during the Covid-19 lockdowns to a forced waiting period to a 20-week ban that has made it impossible for many pregnant people to exercise their right to an abortion. Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in the United States in 1973, but sweeping restrictions on abortion care and abortion providers across the country have left many in dire situations and have some questioning whether abortion is even legal in their respective states. Overturning Roe may be unimaginable to some, but for many of us—particularly Black, brown, queer, trans, low-income folks—it was never enough.

I haven’t lost all hope, though, because as the data shows, the majority of Americans support abortion rights. Regardless of what the Supreme Court decides this summer, reproductive justice organizers and practitioners will continue to work to ensure that even when politicians or people in power go against what many of their constituents support, we will never turn our backs on each other. We never have, and we won’t start now.

Larada Lee-Wallace is an Abortion Out Loud youth activist at Advocates for Youth; serves on the board of directors for ACCESS Reproductive Justice, California’s only statewide abortion fund; and is an abortion storyteller with We Testify.
The Moral Fight

It's time to stop ceding the mantle of righteousness to anti-abortion theocrats. Ours is the righteous cause.

We now live in a country where the government cannot force you to wear a mask on a plane during a pandemic but can force you to carry a pregnancy to term against your will. It is a country where the government won't ban certain kinds of assault rifles but will ban certain kinds of medical care. We live in this country because five justices in thrall to a fundamentalist Christian orthodoxy have taken control of the Supreme Court—and because the majority of Americans who reject that orthodoxy have too often ceded the moral ground to the monsters who claim to have legitimate, enforceable interests over women's bodies.

Women's rights organizations and advocates have been in the trenches, fighting this fundamentalist sect, at literal physical risk to their lives, for decades. They've been fighting in the streets and fighting in the courtroom, but their alleged allies in Congress, in the media, and in the boardroom have rarely had their back. Fundamentalist Republicans have spent the better part of 50 years acting like they are on a holy crusade to stop baby murderers. Democrats, many of the elected ones at least, have hung on to Bill Clinton's formulation that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare” like a dude trying to combat global warming with a parasol. Is it any wonder which side is winning?

It's understandable why advocates and allies have long embraced less strident language when it comes to abortion rights. The moral case for “choice,” for instance, is nice and easy to make, and has the benefit of being the only sane way to run a free society: If you think abortion is murder, then please do not get an abortion! But while “pro-choice” was a fine argument when we were trying to persuade people, it's insufficient as a fighting posture. I am done ceding the moral space to Christian fundamentalists. Forced birth—literally commandeering a person's womb and forcing them to incubate cells against their will—is evil and barbaric and cannot be compelled by a legitimate government.

To claw back the basic human rights the Supreme Court is set to strip, the fundamentalist program will have to be opposed. Centrist Democrats don't want you to know this, but opposing this program politically is, far and away, the easiest of the three. As a start, President Joe Biden could make abortion services available at federal installations. Doctors could then lease the space from the US government out of their own pocket; this would protect them from draconian state laws as well as the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding of abortion services (and even if it doesn't get around the Hyde Amendment, who cares, because Democrats could just repeal the amendment if they wanted to). Biden should already be taking these steps in Texas, where abortions have been functionally unobtainable since September.

The Senate, if it would ever deign to help, could pass legislation that protects abortion rights. It could enact safe-passage legislation, which would mandate that states that deny reproductive services have to allow pregnant people to travel to other states where those services are available, and then earmark federal funding to pay for that transportation, lodging, and time off work.

The most direct approach would be for Democrats to restore through legislation what the Supreme Court has destroyed through judicial fiat. Pass a law that enshrines the key holdings in Roe v. Wade—and end the filibuster to get it through the Senate if that's what it takes. But, of course, Democrats, two in particular, won't, which brings us back to fighting the right's theocratic agenda through the courts.

The simplest thing would be to expand the courts with judges and justices who believe that the 14th Amendment is a rule, not a suggestion, and will uphold the notions of equal protection and due process. In some ways, Samuel Alito's draft opinion is a gift, legally, because he was so bad at doing his job. Alito did not really engage in the complicated and often mind-numbing analysis justices normally do when overturning settled precedent. He just came out and said that Roe was “egregiously wrong” and that women did not have fundamental rights because the slavers and misogynists who wrote the Constitution didn't think they should.

To combat Alito's opinion, you don't need fancy legal footwork. You just need: “This Court was egregiously wrong when it held that Roe was egregiously wrong. While women's rights are not deeply rooted in the misogynist founding of this country, we find the inability of long-dead sexists and slavers to recognize the fundamental humanity of others to be their problem, not ours.” Give me 20 justices who agree with that, and I've solved the problem of Alito's opinion.

But I fear Democrats will not take all these ambitious if obvious steps unless they first learn how to fight the moral battles. I think of the many courageous people, mostly women, who serve as escorts to those simply trying to walk into abortion clinics. Every day, they bravely walk pregnant people through a gauntlet of vitriol so they can access medical services, while the haters—who yell and scream and threaten—somehow think they have the moral high ground. But we know that it is the abortion advocates who have always been on the side of truth and righteousness. They are the ones with the superior claim to moral clarity.

Now that Christian fundamentalists have claimed control of uteruses that don't belong to them, perhaps it's time for Democrats to take their cues from the brave clinic escorts instead of the people who think zygotes have more rights than rape survivors. Perhaps it's time to stop trying to compromise with them and start trying to fight them.
**Back Talk**

**Alexis Grenell**

**Don’t Boycott Amazon**

*They’re too big to be hurt by individual consumer choice. Instead, hit them where it really hurts.*

After years of dominating American capitalism by grinding workers into the dust, Amazon is on a hot losing streak, and it’s absolutely invigorating to watch. If the Amazon Labor Union had only organized workers in a blowout vote on Staten Island, it would’ve been enough. And if Amazon had only spent $4.3 million fighting them just to fail, it would’ve been enough. But, */dayenu/*! A judge also just threw out the company’s motion to dismiss a case of race- and gender-based discrimination filed by a corporate worker, too!

Except it’s not actually enough.

Until a few weeks ago, the last time I bought anything on Amazon was in 2017. Then my vet told me that I had to get special diagnostic strips to monitor the sugar content of my cat’s urine (long story). When I asked her if I could just buy them at my local pharmacy, she sent me a link to Amazon, where I could get them delivered in two days for $16. I clicked. Immediately, I felt the anger and guilt that comes with trying to stop me from reading the paper of record. Zephyr Teachout calls it *stop me from reading the paper of record*. Zephyr Teachout calls it *the ‘vote with your feet’ model has a lot of appeal, in being futile, she writes, symbolically avoiding mega-corporations is also*.

I felt foolish for imagining that ethical consumerism can do anything other than temporarily assuage those feelings. The fact that *The New York Times* uses Amazon Web Services—something it’s disclosed while also publishing exposés about Amazon’s atrocious labor practices—doesn’t stop me from reading the paper of record. Zephyr Teachout calls it the “too big to boycott” trap in her most recent book, *Break ‘Em Up: Recovering Our Freedom From Big Ag, Big Tech, and Big Money*. Beyond being futile, she writes, symbolically avoiding mega-corporations is also masturbatory: “The ‘vote with your feet’ model has a lot of appeal, in that it allows people to import virtuousness into their lives without the struggle of organizing and building a coalition.”

Chris Smalls, who was fired by Amazon following his organizing efforts in Staten Island, has done that hard work. That includes appearing on Tucker Carlson’s show to speak to the masses of old white people mainlining the signature Fox blend of racism and Reaganonics, a move that was seen as controversial by some on the left. Charlotte Newman—the head of Underrepresented Founder Startup Business Development at AWS—tried to do the work when she sent memos and e-mails to corporate leadership outlining the steps Amazon could take to address the discrimination she faced as a Black woman in the workplace. No one ever responded to her, but David Zapolsky, the same executive who’s presumably lived to regret calling Smalls “not smart or articulate,” sent an e-mail to Amazon employees inviting them to call his cell phone and tell him how it feels to be Black in America. *Derp.*

Even though she’s now suing the company, Newman told me, she doesn’t recommend a boycott. “There’s this idea—could an organization be so corrupt that people shouldn’t seek employment or work with it? But I don’t see Amazon through that lens. Given the size of the company and gridlock in Congress, I don’t think we’ll see a space where Amazon ceases to exist. The more likely change that we’ll see is if consumers ask more of the company. Amazon is customer-obsessed, and I think if customers start to ask more questions about Amazon’s practices, that would move the needle more than anything.”

Walking away isn’t an option for Newman either. The first in her family to attend an Ivy League school, she told me how proud her parents were when she got a job offer from Amazon. She loved working in public service for people like New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, but she also felt selfish for not pursuing a career that would better support her family. So, encouraged by management, she took the job even though it was lower-level than the one she had applied for, learning only later about the dramatic pay disparity between her and her white peers with similar qualifications. As soon as she assumed the role, she encountered shocking levels of discrimination, which left her wondering how she could spend her weekends marching for Black lives and then keep her head down during the week: “I’ve tried to keep working through the comments, low[er] pay [than white peers], being promoted slower, through the harassment. But who am I if I don’t say anything?”

In essence: how to be a person of conscience in a culture of pathological convenience. And I felt foolish for imagining that ethical consumerism can do anything other than temporarily assuage my own guilt.

I felt foolish for imagining that ethical consumerism can do anything other than temporarily assuage my own guilt.
New Joint Pill Trounces Leading Products In Clinical Studies

Breakthrough joint performance ingredient is shown to be a safer and more effective way to support mobility, comfort, and flexibility. Users reported results in just 72 hours.

Researchers at Seattle based American Global Health Group, a supplement maker that’s been around for over 20 years, have announced a game-changing breakthrough for supporting comfort, mobility, and flexibility.

Sold under the name VeraFlex, it features a patented ingredient called UP446, providing clinically proven, fast-acting benefits that experts believe will transform the way joints are supported. And for good reason...

The secret behind VeraFlex is backed by over $2 Million in safety studies. It’s featured ingredient has also undergone two double blind placebo controlled clinical trials.

In the first, 60 participants were randomly placed into four groups. The data collected by researchers was stunning.

The groups taking the VeraFlex ingredient were shocked at its effectiveness over a 30-, 60-, and 90-day periods of testing that included flexibility, comfort, and joint mobility.

A second study was conducted to ensure the data was accurate. But this time, the study was done to see how quickly it worked, and again, the results participants experienced while taking UP446 blew away researchers.

Shockingly, both men and women experienced results in as little as 3 days. At the end of the day 7, the subjects scored highly for joint comfort and passed their walking tests with flying colors.

One of the most respected joint management specialists in the US, Liza Leal, MD, has enjoyed the benefits of VeraFlex so much she has become the product’s spokesperson. She explains why.

A New Approach for Joint Performance

“Maintaining mobility and joint health isn’t all about age, research has shown it has a lot to do with supporting immune and enzyme health,” explains Dr. Leal. “And if you cannot stay active it can make life hard.”

The VeraFlex formula is the only known joint formula available today that targets the 3 enzymes known to support mobility, comfort, and flexibility. It’s no wonder the potent featured ingredient possesses eight US patents.

Most joint supplements target a single enzyme for joint health. VeraFlex targets all of them, which is why it works so effectively and for so long.

“This is a great new approach,” adds Dr. Leal, “it is so well studied.”

“I have recommended VeraFlex to patients on a Monday, and they have called me back on Friday to thank me.”

Dr. Leal appreciates the science and safety behind VeraFlex. “There are more than 20 published studies, including human clinical trials, and lots of safety studies.”

VeraFlex also contains super-antioxidants that help support your bodies maintain cartilage health.

Even with the most skeptical users, VeraFlex almost immediately becomes trusted.

Everyday Americans Are Thrilled

Results are not just for the clinical study participants. Since hitting the market every day uses are thrilled too.

Been using Veraflex because it works! - B.

Great Product - helps keep my Joints Comfortable. Love the Product. - A.

My experience has been good. It definitely makes a difference. This allows me to keep walking comfortably. - A.

These are great. Totally different than your typical joint supplements. I can seriously feel a difference in my movement. Definitely recommend for supporting comfort and mobility. – Paula J.

Developed Using a Super Computer

By deploying triple-action support for joint wellness, including COX-1, COX-2, and LOX-5 enzymes, combined with 24/7 support for health oxidative stress levels, VeraFlex users report amazing results.

Like the research subjects in clinical trials, you too, can benefit in as little as 72 hours!

Unlike older joint care ingredients developed decades ago, the VeraFlex formula was created by the PhytoLogic system.

The system identified two time-proven medicinal herbs, scutellaria baikalensis and acacia catechu, for their ability to rapidly support healthy enzyme function.

It resulted in the award winning and featured ingredient of VeraFlex called UP446®.

VeraFlex gets an additional boost from an Aloe Vera powder called Aloprin® that has been studied for supporting gastric health, enhanced nutrient absorption, and good gut flora (gut flora is linked to too many health benefits to list but joint health is one of them...)

Together, these potent ingredients are combined at a leading American facility that is GMP certified with pharmacy grade testing for capsule purity before being shipped to your door.

Sold in Research Level Doses

Each dose contains 250mg of UP446 and 160mg of Aloprin®. When taken as directed users get the same precise dosage levels used by clinical researchers and participants in peer-reviewed, independent clinical research over a ten-year period. And you’ll be surprised by how little it costs.

VeraFlex is offering a risk-free opportunity to support your joints, digestion, and energy.

100% Satisfaction Guarantee

Test this fast acting, joint breakthrough with VeraFlex’s 100% Satisfaction Guarantee. For a limited time, we’re also offering up to 3 FREE bottles with every order.

How To Get A FREE 3 Month Supply

Simply pick up your phone now and dial 1-800-583-5956 and one of the company’s US based and friendly agents will make sure you get the bottles of VeraFlex you need … and enjoy the same results as so many other users – in as little as 72 hours!

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None of this is necessarily going to make you feel good. Just less compromised, and possibly more effective.

In a society where monopoly power is omnipresent, it can feel like everything and nothing is enough. And it’s made worse when we’re asked to put aside our moral outrage for the convenience of next-day delivery, while Jeff Bezos inconveniences the masses to accommodate his yacht. Still, we don’t get to abandon the field. We have to stay and fight, no matter how confused or conflicted we feel.

Editor’s note: Alexis Grenell has worked on campaigns for both Brad Lander and Zephyr Teachout.

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LONG AGO, IN ANOTHER AMERICA, YOU HAD TO TURN TO the underground press if you wanted to conjure up images of wholesome Disney cartoon characters fornicating. In 2022, Republican lawmakers now provide that service. In 1967, The Realist, a gleefully subversive journal founded by Paul Krassner, published Wally Wood’s “The Disneyland Memorial Orgy,” a two-page spread that showed Mickey Mouse and the gang, impeccably rendered, engaged in all manner of X-rated activity. Krassner and Wood were countercultural anarchists, but by some strange alchemy, what they presented as satire is now a part of Republican rhetoric.

On his podcast, Verdict With Ted Cruz, the junior senator from Texas added his voice to the chorus of Republican lawmakers who have suddenly started to accuse Disney of pushing sexual propaganda on kids. In an April episode, Cruz sputtered, “Now they’re going to have, you know, you know, Mickey and Pluto going at it.” Even Cruz’s guest was nonplussed, responding, “Thank you for that image, senator.”

Cruz’s comments may be (the pun is inescapable) goofy, but they are also part of a much larger wave of bigotry. Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, predictably, provided the crudest expression of the opinions echoed by many of her colleagues. “The Democrats are the party of pedophiles,” Greene said in early April. “The Democrats are the party of princess predators from Disney. The Democrats are the party of teachers, elementary school teachers trying to transition their elementary-school-age children and convince them they’re a different gender.”

These comments by Cruz and Greene are part of the recent revival of a brand of homophobic rhetoric rooted in the belief that LGBTQ identity is intertwined with pedophilia and the sexual “recruitment” of children. Such rhetoric was a staple of the anti-gay movement of the 1970s led by figures like the singer Anita Bryant. In the years after the 2015 Supreme Court decision Obergefell v. Hodges, which legalized marriage equality, this type of homophobia seemed to be in abeyance.

Itkowitz argues that this revived homophobia is motivated by short-term
electoral concerns: “The efforts ahead of the midterm elections are intended to rile up the Republican base and fill the campaign coffers of its candidates, without offering evidence that any Democrat had committed a repugnant crime.”

This is true, as far as it goes. Obviously, measures like the notorious “Don’t Say Gay” law pushed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis are designed to energize the Republican base, particularly the religious right. When DeSantis’s efforts met with resistance from Disney (which faced an uprising by LGBTQ employees urging opposition to the bill), Disney became a target as well. But the grooming and pedophilia smears go beyond being a particularly nasty example of political hardball.

These deranged accusations of grooming and pedophilia have a more immediate, and more sinister, antecedent than Anita Bryant–style homophobia: They also derive from the Pizzagate conspiracy theory (which held that Democratic elites were part of a satanic pedophile cult run out of a Washington pizza parlor) and QAnon (which spun this conspiracy theory into a saga involving a hidden war between Donald Trump and the “deep state”).

It’s this fusion of partisan conspiracy theories with a homophobic moral panic that makes the current grooming smears a threat to the physical safety of LGBTQ people—and to the survival of US democracy. Such charges go beyond mere political mudslinging designed to discredit opponents. The horrific nature of the accusations—combined with the imputation of powerful conspiracies—suggests that the accusers have no other goal than dehumanization and destruction.

Few pundits have thought through the underlying logic of this smear campaign. The two major exceptions are Josh Marshall of Talking Points Memo and Sarah Jones of New York magazine. Both have used the word “eliminationist” to describe this rhetoric. “These aren’t so much purported factual claims or even conspiracy theories,” Marshall argues. “They are libels designed specifically to stir elemental primal fears, render their targets so evil and threatening as to be less than fully human and set the stage for mass violence against them.”

Jones usefully links this eliminationist rhetoric to the GOP’s authoritarian turn (evident in the Trump presidency, the January 6 insurrection, and subsequent antidemocratic activities). Jones says she is “concerned that QAnon’s creep toward mainstream respectability lowers the probability that there will be a significant backlash, at least within the bubble of the right wing. They’ll certainly anger liberals and alienate younger voters, but I think that’s why we see this fixation on LGBT rights occur alongside an assault on voting rights and a gradual turn toward anti-democratic beliefs.”

The Democratic Party has been so discombobulated by the grooming/pedophilia accusation that it hasn’t come up with an adequate response, aside from a few individual exceptions like the fierce and eloquent rebuke of homophobia made by Michigan Democratic state Senator Mallory McMorrow. A clip of her speech got 12 million views, indicating an audience among voters for a strong offense.

It’s not enough to say that the grooming/pedophilia smear is a lie. Nor is it enough to respond by pointing to evidence of grooming and pedophilia in the Republican ranks (although the case of former House speaker Dennis Hastert is real enough).

Rather, Democrats need to build on McMorrow’s condemnation of homophobia by noting that their opponents are reviving an old bigotry to make a wholesale assault on American democracy itself. The current Republican rhetoric will get LGBTQ people killed and inspire future insurrections. The eliminationist logic of this Republican smear has to be spelled out and condemned—along with the party’s war on democracy.
Actually Fight Crime

BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

Republicans are trying to terrify the public with stories of rising crime, sending Democrats scrambling to prove that they’re tough on the issue. In President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address, he promised to do something about people killed by guns. The solution, he said, is not to defund the police—a rallying cry from the racial justice protests of summer 2020 calling to move resources from police departments to other social investments. “The answer is to fund the police,” he declared.

While headlines have blurred stats about rising crime, not all crimes have increased, nor are they at historically high levels. Most property crimes continue to decline, and the rise in violent crimes was largely driven by a spike in homicides. Even so, the murder rate is still 40 percent lower than it was in the 1980s and ’90s. And despite Biden’s call to send in more police, the data is mixed on whether adding more officers reduces crime.

But the idea has taken hold that we are awash in a crime wave. So if we really care about reducing crime, we should make the kinds of investments that have been proven to lower crime rates rather than direct endless sums of money to the police.

We should, for example, spend more money on public schools. In two natural experiments in Michigan, researchers found that when elementary schools were given more funding, students became less likely to encounter the justice system as juveniles and were less likely to be arrested as adults.

Investing in high-quality education in earlier years also reduces crime. A long-running study of participants in a high-quality preschool program in Michigan found that it significantly reduced their involvement in violent crime and their interaction with the criminal justice system, even through age 54. A comparable program in North Carolina similarly reduced students’ involvement in the justice system. While those programs focused on low-income and at-risk students, a much larger universal preschool program in Boston also significantly reduced juvenile incarceration.

Giving kids something to do during the summer helps, too. A study from 2021 found that New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program, which is the largest in the country, decreased arrests and convictions among participants. Other analyses of programs in Boston and Chicago also found large reductions in arrests.

We don’t just need to invest in people when they’re young to combat crime. A 2020 study found that expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act reduces violent crime rates, and another found that it reduces recidivism, particularly by keeping people from committing the same types of violent or public order crimes for which they had previously been convicted. Losing Medicaid coverage, meanwhile, leaves people at greater risk of being incarcerated.

Helping people buy food reduces the likelihood that they will commit crimes. Children whose families receive more food stamps are less likely to be incarcerated as adults. When food stamps run out toward the end of the month, rates of theft go up. Banning people from food stamps based on criminal offenses leads to more recidivism, particularly in financially motivated crimes. Indeed, banning people convicted of drug offenses from public assistance increases recidivism rates.

Housing people works, too. Developing affordable housing in poor neighborhoods significantly reduces violent crime. Children who either grow up in public housing or whose parents get housing vouchers are less likely to be incarcerated later in life.

This is not the strategy we use. A 2017 analysis of 12 urban areas found that police departments consumed huge portions of their budgets—as much as 41 percent. Eleven states spent more on prisons and jails than on higher education in 2013. While the US does spend, in total, more on education and social programs than our penal system—courts, prisons, and police departments—the ratio is far lower here than in other countries. We spend between four and 12 times as much on addressing the root causes of crime as we do on criminalizing people, but in other advanced countries, the ratio is around 22 times as much. “The United States combines the harshest penal state in the advanced world with its stingiest welfare state,” the historian John Clegg and the sociologist Adaner Usmani write.

If this country actually wants to combat crime, it should invest in the things that make people happier, healthier, and whole. But that, of course, would take changing our entire approach.

Bryce Covert
Rally for Abortion

A crowd gathers in New York City’s Foley Square on May 3 following the leak of a draft Supreme Court opinion that would overturn Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 decision legalizing abortion in the United States. Protesters around the country took to the streets in defiance of the conservative supermajority’s anticipated ruling this summer rolling back reproductive rights.

By the Numbers

- 61% Portion of adults in the United States who say abortion should be legal in most or all cases
- 1,327 Number of state-level abortion restrictions enacted since the Roe v. Wade decision
- 546 Number of abortion restrictions introduced in state legislatures in 2022
- 18% Rise in pregnancy-related deaths in 2020
- 17.4 Number of pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births

To the Hypocrite

Mitch McConnell refused to schedule hearings on the nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court on the novel rationale that a presidential election was too close, and he then rushed through the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett when a presidential election was even closer. —news reports

To the Hypocrite

MacConnell managed to provide
The votes to toss old Roe aside.
Yes, Mitch knows how to play the game.
It helps a lot to have no shame.

Deadline Poet

To the Hypocrite

Go the Spoils
The Fight for Abortion After Roe Falls

AMY LITTLEFIELD
It will be a battle with 50 different fronts.

BY AMY LITTLEFIELD

ONE AFTERNOON LAST SEPTEMBER, 20 ACTIVISTS LOGGED ON TO ZOOM to learn how to support people who manage their own abortions with pills. Some wore clerical collars; some wore T-shirts. Elaina Ramsey, her black hair piled on her head and a cross visible on the wall behind her, welcomed them with a call for faith communities to fight the stigma around abortion. Then she and a colleague, Kelley Fox, outlined the steps involved in inducing a medication abortion while an orange cat licked its paw in the background of Fox’s screen. Later, in breakout rooms, participants fumbled through a role play, taking turns acting the part of a pastor counseling a desperate woman who is working two jobs and can’t get to the nearest clinic three hours away. Most of the people logged on for the training were from somewhere in Ohio.

“Thank you. I feel much more equipped to help my community!” a youth minister from southwest Ohio typed into the chat afterward.

This training, led by the group Faith Choice Ohio, is the future of abortion rights activism. Already, many people seeking abortions in Ohio have to travel to reach the nearest of the nine remaining clinics in the state, down from 45 two decades ago.

In the coming weeks, when the Supreme Court rules in a pending case concerning Mississippi’s 15-week ban, Ohio is expected to heavily restrict if not ban abortion. A draft of the court’s decision leaked by Politico confirms that the justices intend to reverse half a century of precedent, allowing as many as 26 states to ban abortion outright.

Ohioans would be forced to travel an average of 186 miles one way to reach the nearest clinic.

Even with Roe in place, abortion has been a state issue. Over the past half-century, almost all of the more than 1,300 restrictions on abortion have been enacted by states, not the federal government. So have almost all of the measures meant to maintain access to abortion. Despite the impending fall of Roe, Congress has so far failed to pass the Women’s Health Protection Act, which would protect the right to legal abortion in every state. This lack of support for abortion in Congress is rooted in the same place where access has always been shaped: state political battles. In the years to come, the struggle to transport abortion patients hundreds of miles to out-of-state appointments, to shore up a waning number of clinics, to elect candidates who support abortion rights, and to push back against efforts to criminalize abortion providers, activists, and patients will take place exactly where it always has: on more than 50 different fronts. Part of this fight is the deep, slow educational work that Ramsey’s organization is doing—organizing that she hopes will not only help people safely access abortion in the short term but will change how people of faith think about abortion in the long term. Part of it is the more immediate task of raising money to get people to appointments, which has long been the realm of abortion funds. Part of it is politics—electing pro-choice candidates and lobbying for measures like Oregon’s creation of a $15 million fund for abortion access or Connecticut’s move to protect providers and patients from anti-abortion laws in other states. And part of it will be the efforts to free people arrested for self-managed abortion—people like Lizelle Herrera, whose arrest in Texas in April galvanized the nation, but only because grassroots groups in South Texas rallied outside the jail and helped provoke a media firestorm that forced the prosecutor to apologize for wrongly charging her.

“How do you disrupt the criminalization of people effectively without being in the community?” Kellie Copeland, executive director of the former NARAL affiliate Pro-Choice Ohio, said. “You can’t do that sitting in an office in D.C.”

Yet state-based organizers face an impending crisis that has come about not only as a result of the Supreme Court’s pending ruling but because the abortion rights movement has underinvested in critical state battles and relied on the inconsistent generosity of a handful of billionaire-backed foundations. Planned Parenthood’s recent announcement that it would spend $16 million on ads to “educate and increase urgency around the abortion access crisis” in states like Arizona, Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, Ohio, and Florida only underscored how much of the movement’s funding remains concentrated in the hands of national organizations. Planned Parenthood’s single ad campaign—albeit one focused on states where access is in jeopardy—cost far more than the entire annual budget of many abortion rights groups. The shortfalls in funding are particularly dire for reproductive justice groups run by women of color that support the people most affected by abortion restrictions and that tackle other urgent issues those communities face, including voting rights and HIV/AIDS.

“We’re working on everything,” Michelle Colon, a cofounder of the Mississippi reproductive justice group Sisters Helping Every Woman Rise and Organize (SHERo), told me. With Mississippi at the center of the Supreme Court case that will fundamentally reshape access to legal abortion by this summer, Colon has been busy. In Mississippi, a state where rates of infant and maternal mortality are among the country’s highest, where the decision...
not to expand Medicaid has left 13 percent of residents uninsured, and where almost 16 percent of the voting-age Black population has been disenfranchised because of a felony conviction, Colon and her fellow cofounders can’t afford a single-issue fight. “You cannot be someone who says that you’re pro-abortion and you want to protect abortion rights if you’re not someone who’s working to protect and expand voting rights, because they work hand in hand,” Colon said.

But that doesn’t mean SHERO has the money to support its vision. The organization has a budget of less than $100,000. Colon still hasn’t been able to quit her job as a consultant—not have her two cofounders quit their jobs.

“Just a couple years ago, I didn’t have Internet in my house. I was using the Internet from my neighbor,” Colon said. “For those of us Black and brown people who are doing this work, we often sacrifice ourselves and our well-being and our health care to make sure our movement and our mission is still thriving.”

As the movement faces the fall of Roe, Colon said that pattern needs to end. Making that happen will require an unprecedented investment in state reproductive justice groups.

“A lot of our groups have been organizing on the ground for decades at the local and the state level, and a lot of philanthropic institutions have been single-mindedly focused on the federal level,” said Meenakshi Menon, interim co–executive director at the Groundswell Fund, a major funder of the reproductive justice movement. Perhaps the most compelling recent example is Texas, where state-based groups that tried to stop passage of a six-week abortion ban felt like they were shouting into the void, without the attention or support they needed. The ban has now been in effect for eight months, and money has been pouring in—too late to prevent the crisis.

By contrast, the most successful national abortion rights campaign of the past decade—the effort to repeal the Hyde Amendment, which bans the federal funding of abortion—has involved organizing at the national, state, county, and city levels. While generating support for a bill in Congress to repeal Hyde and successfully pressing President Joe Biden to reverse his support for the ban and omit it from his budget, the national groups All* Above All and the National Institute for Reproductive Health have worked with local organizers to get cities like Austin and New York to direct public funding to abortion access. More than 20 cities and counties have passed resolutions calling for repeal of the Hyde Amendment, including in battleground states like North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Yet in response to the crisis surrounding abortion access, some national groups appear to be retreating from state fights. The Washington, D.C.–based organizations NARAL Pro-Choice America and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) have chosen to dissolve their state affiliate networks just as the state fight is poised to intensify—baffling state organizers.

“Why, at the point where this has become a state battle, would you disengage your state assets?” asked Ann Hayman, who leads the California affiliate of the RCRC, comparing the decision by the national office to being “dumped.”

As they gear up for their biggest fight in half a century, state abortion rights organizations are networking with one another and finding new ways of operating to sustain themselves for the marathon struggle ahead.

“There are people out here who are working for near-poverty wages carrying this thing on their backs with little support—just grit, determination,” said Pro-Choice Ohio’s Copeland. “A lot of people have been content to allow that to happen. We want to change that.”

SINCE SEPTEMBER 1, WHEN TEXAS BANNED ABORTIONS AFTER APPROXIMATELY SIX WEEKS, NEW MEXICO HAS SEEN A SHARP INCREASE IN OUT-OF-STATE ABORTION PATIENTS. ON THE RECEIVING END OF THIS INFUX IS AN ORGANIZATION WITH AN ANNUAL BUDGET THAT ONLY RECENTLY TOPPED $500,000—THANKS TO A SPIKE IN FUNDING GENERATED BY THE TEXAS CRISIS. THE LONGEST-STANDING ABORTION FUND IN THE STATE, THE NEW MEXICO RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE HAS RELIED ON A ROSTER OF VOLUNTEERS AND PART-TIME STAFF TO SHEPHERD PATIENTS TO ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING CLINICS IN THE COUNTRY WHERE ABORTION IS AVAILABLE AFTER 24 WEEKS. IT ARRANGES TRANSPORTATION, GIVES PATIENTS CARE PACKAGES CONTAINING FROZEN DINNERS, MICROWAVABLE SOUP, TISSUES, HEATING PADS, AND NOTES OF SUPPORT FROM VOLUNTEERS, AND PUTS THEM UP IN A HOTEL. SINCE THE SIX-WEEK BAN WENT INTO EFFECT, THE COALITION HAS BEEN HELPING FACILITATE AIRLIFTS OF TEXAS ABORTION PATIENTS, FLYING IN GROUPS OF THEM ON COMMERCIAL AIRLINES. NOW, EVEN AS IT FACES A SURGE IN NEED FOR ITS ASSISTANCE, THE NEW MEXICO RCRC IS GOING THROUGH THE MESSIER PROCESS OF WHAT ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOAN LAMUNYON SANFORD, COMPARED TO A “DIVORCE.” THE PARENT ORGANIZATION VOTED IN DECEMBER TO DROP ITS 11 STATE-BASED AFFILIATES.

A LEADING INTERFAITH ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO MOBILIZING FAITH LEADERS IN SUPPORT OF ABORTION RIGHTS, THE RCRC GREW OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND NETWORK KNOWN AS THE CLERGY CONSULTATION SERVICE ON ABORTION, WHICH HELPED PEOPLE ACCESS ABORTION BEFORE IT BECAME LEGAL NATIONWIDE IN 1973. IN THE YEARS SINCE, THE RCRC HAS RALLIED FAITH LEADERS IN SUPPORT OF THE RIGHT TO ABORTION, CONDUCTING CLINIC BLESSINGS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON THE MORAL CASE FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM. THOUGH THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION’S SUPPORT FOR ITS STATE AFFILIATES HAD BEEN LIMITED AT BEST, LAMUNYON SANFORD SAID THE “DIVORCE” WAS STILL DESTABILIZING.

“The work happens in the states, and our opposition knows that and invests in it deeply,” Lamunyon Sanford told me in an interview. “And it seems that whenever the threats escalate, our movement’s response—or at least of the national changes.”
organizations, some of them—is to pull back into their bubble in D.C. rather than proactively and aggressively invest in the states.”

This long-standing disinvestment in the states is one reason the anti-abortion movement has gained so much ground since Roe. Over the decades, anti-abortion groups focused intensely on chipping away at access by targeting state legislatures, rendering abortions off-limits to many low-income people over time. Meanwhile, national abortion rights groups have tended to prioritize national organizing and efforts to fight against restrictions in the federal courts. Facing a loss in funding, the RCRC seemed to double down on this strategy.

In a statement late last year, the RCRC’s board said the group had decided to focus on “education and spiritual care” and no longer had the “capacity to support state-based advocacy.”

“This really was about organizational capacity,” said the Rev. Katey Zeh, the RCRC’s chief executive officer. She pointed to monthly virtual gatherings, note taking, and listserve maintenance as tasks related to the state affiliates that her staff could no longer handle.

But state affiliate organizers say there is a deeper story behind the split. Like many other organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C., the RCRC has had a tense relationship with its state-based groups for years. “There’s always been tension there, which is not uncommon between national organizations and state affiliates,” said Lamunya Sanford.

Zeh said this tension is caused by the underfunding of the movement overall. “When resources are scarce, that causes tension,” she said.

This tension pervades national organizations with state affiliates across the progressive movement, from Black Lives Matter to the Sierra Club. National organizations tend to have greater name recognition and deeper pockets than the local groups that share their names. Meanwhile, state-based reproductive health groups, often operating as independent nonprofits on shoestring budgets, bear the brunt of policies passed by state lawmakers, whom they often don’t have the resources to unseat.

“What I always heard is, ‘I’m sorry there are no resources for the states,’” former RCRC board chair and Indiana affiliate copresident Sue Ellen Braunlin said of the RCRC’s attitude toward the affiliates.

The way national groups with local affiliates share or don’t share resources varies across organizations, and not just within the abortion rights movement; the ACLU, for example, has a formula whereby the national and state offices share a portion of the donations each of them raise. Planned Parenthood said the vast majority of money its national office raises online goes to affiliates. But in the case of NARAL and the RCRC, the national groups provided funding to state groups only through sporadic grants—which meant donations to the national group mostly stayed there.

A lot of RCRC donors didn’t realize this, said Ramsey, the Ohio organizer; they thought that if they donated via a mailing from the organization’s headquarters in D.C., it would reach the affiliate in their home state.

“National [RCRC] has a lot more reach and resources, so they can send out their mailings and folks don’t necessarily know that when they give, that money doesn’t stay in the state—it actually goes back to national,” Ramsey said.

After what she called “a pattern of replicating our work online and not attributing it to a local affiliate,” Ramsey’s group decided to break away from the RCRC of its own accord and rebrand with a name that would distinguish it from the national organization: Faith Choice Ohio.

The bigger picture surrounding these conflicts over organizational structure and local affiliates is the underfunding of reproductive health and justice, which is partly by design. The anti-abortion movement has systematically cut public funding of abortion, leaving the abortion rights movement heavily reliant on sympathetic private donors. Because of the long-standing ban on federal funding of abortion care, enormous amounts of private dollars are raised and spent each year just on covering the cost of abortions that Medicaid recipients can’t otherwise afford. Contrast that with anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers that have received millions each year in public funds. Patching this gaping hole in the public funding of abortion are billionaire-backed private foundations. The backbone of these funders is Warren Buffett and his constellation of family foundations. Known within the reproductive health field as the “Large Anonymous Donor,” the foundation named for Buffett’s late wife, Susan Thompson Buffett, has such a titanic pull in the nonprofit reproductive rights world that the loss of its funding can cause entire organizations to restructure. I know this impact personally, having been laid off in 2019 after the reproductive health publication Rewire lost a large chunk of its Buffett funding.
The present most recent available tax forms show that a huge percentage of the RCRC’s funding came from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, including more than $2 million that was part of a multiyear grant it lost in 2019. Foundations tend to operate on these “boom/bust” cycles, said the Groundswell Fund’s Menon. And this landscape may be facing its biggest boom/bust of all, as the 91-year-old Buffett has made clear his intent to have the proceeds from all of his Berkshire Hathaway shares “expended for philanthropic purposes” within 10 years after his estate is settled. “Nothing will go to endowments; I want the money spent on current needs,” he has written. That could mark a huge funding cliff for the movement.

In 2020, another Buffett family philanthropy, the NoVo Foundation, founded by Buffett’s son Peter and Peter’s wife, Jennifer, laid off half of its staff and went through a restructuring that sent shock waves through the reproductive justice field. “When that happens—especially if that happens without a plan, which is how it felt with NoVo—it’s part of the boom/bust business,” Menon said. “One day it’s there, and the next day it’s not there—without a plan for who will fill that void. Because the scale of the money and investment is so high, others can’t just jump in and fill that without any sort of notice.”

It’s unclear whether anyone can fill the void that will be left by the departure of the Buffett fortune. The billionaire ex-wife of Jeff Bezos, MacKenzie Scott, gave Planned Parenthood its single largest donation in history this year—$275 million to the national office and 21 affiliates—and another $15 million to the reproductive health research organization the Guttmacher Institute. But the wider solution may require ending the reliance on a single billionaire, which is what the Groundswell Fund is trying to do. The foundation’s money comes from 40 national foundations and more than 1,000 individual donors. Menon said that Groundswell does not currently receive funding from NoVo or the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, though records show it has in the past.

Ninety percent of Groundswell’s funding goes to organizing led by women of color, while in the field of philanthropy overall, that number is less than 1 percent. When uprisings over the police killing of George Floyd in 2020 sparked a new level of interest in funding to address racial injustice, Groundswell and other foundations led by people of color issued an open letter encouraging white-led foundations to stop calling and asking them and help meet that need. That’s our history; and instead just give them their money.

On the ground: If the Supreme Court guts Roe this summer, local volunteers will be critical to moving abortion patients to states where the procedure is still legal.

“You cannot protect abortion rights if you’re not working to protect voting rights, because they work hand in hand.”

—Michelle Colon, Sisters Helping Every Woman Rise and Organize (SHERo)

T he anti-abortion movement has a crucial base of financial support that the abortion rights movement lacks: churches. Churches also shape how people think about abortion. Growing up surrounded by farmland in the city of Chillicothe, Ohio, Ramsey was someone who believed that abortion was immoral, because that’s what she heard in services at the Assemblies of God Church. After she was raped in college, Ramsey’s thinking shifted, because she realized that she would likely have an abortion if she became pregnant from the assault.

Now her work involves chippering away at the power of the Christian right. To do so, her group is partnering with Catholics for Choice, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that represents the majority of US Catholics who support legal abortion. Ramsey hopes the group can help her reach out to the 18 percent of Ohioans who are Catholic. Catholics for Choice will offer funding and training to Faith Choice Ohio as part of a plan to invest in a handful of states where it has strong relationships and believes it can shift people’s thinking.

“There’s a very unfortunate history of national organizations plowing into states and taking over,” said Jamie Manson, the executive director of Catholics for Choice. “That’s a model I absolutely want to dispense with.”

There’s another historical example that these state groups are drawing on—a grassroots network that was run out of churches and makeshift offices across the country in the years before Roe. Back then, pastors and rabbis used landlines and brick-and-mortar offices to help hundreds of thousands of abortion seekers reach safe providers. “These are really, really daunting times, and our work feels like it’s going backwards,” Ramsey told me. “We’re educating a lot of our folks about the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion and how that is a part of our legacy and we’re going to have revive that.”

Now, despite the advent of the Internet and the easy availability of safe abortion-inducing medication online, one aspect of this work has not changed: Both the immediate task of helping people get abortions and the long-term work of regaining political ground are local endeavors.

“Once we get to a place of Texas times 25, it will be the state organizations shuttling people between states,” Lamunyon Sanford said. “I’m confident that our other affiliates will step in and help meet that need. That’s our history; that’s what faith-rooted organizations do.”

A nother set of state groups, the former NARAL affiliates, have banded together over a painful “divorce” of their own. Last summer, NARAL announced it would dissolve its state affiliate structure and shift to a chapter model to give the nonprofit more control over messaging. The 11 remaining affiliates joined counterparts in Colorado and Texas that had already left NARAL, forming an alliance called the State Abortion Access Network; together they’ve raised $1.9 million to see one

DYLAN LOVAN / AP
another through the transition. Sources said much of that funding came from a large anonymous donor—that familiar code name.

“Those folks with good relationships with funders went to those funders and asked for help, and got it,” said Rebecca Hart Holder, the executive director of Reproductive Equity Now, the former NARAL affiliate in Massachusetts. She and the other leaders of former NARAL affiliates are trying to raise another $2 million to bolster state-based organizing. The plan is for the state groups to decide democratically how the money should be distributed—rather than having it filter through a national organization.

In some ways, these leaders said, the disaffiliation from NARAL has been a good thing, freeing up state groups to create their own messaging. In Washington state, abortion is protected under state law, but a large number of Catholic hospitals refuse to provide reproductive health care. “[We’re] a lot more focused on broader health equity and justice issues, because that’s essential for a location like Washington, where we have basic abortion protections,” said Kia Guarino, the executive director of the former NARAL affiliate Pro-Choice Washington. “We have partners in Ohio who have a very different conversation that they need to be having.”

Indeed, in Ohio, the success of advocates in keeping the state’s nine remaining clinics open has been a major victory. In North Carolina, victory has meant preventing the passage of anti-abortion laws—which state groups including the former NARAL affiliate have successfully fended off since 2015. With a wide variation in what’s achievable state to state, national messaging can move “toward the middle out of perceived necessity,” Guarino said.

For its part, NARAL says its commitment to state work is “unwavering and long-standing,” with existing chapters in Georgia, Nevada, and California, trained volunteer leaders in 49 states, and staff on the ground in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Arizona. “We will be ramping up our work in additional states as we get closer to the 2022 elections,” president Mini Timmaraju said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the former affiliates have already pushed the boundaries of what local organizing can do. In March, the former NARAL affiliate Pro-Choice Oregon announced that, as part of a coalition of fellow state groups, it had pushed state lawmakers to authorize $15 million in federal funding to create a Reproductive Health Equity Fund to support abortion access.

“That is where this movement absolutely needs to head,” Christel Allen, the executive director of Pro-Choice Oregon, told me after the victory. “That is how we are going to create conditions that ensure that folks who are forced to travel to receive essential health care like abortion are going to be received in a way that is welcoming, and that our state can actually have the capacity to provide additional care.”

Copeland, of Pro-Choice Ohio, said that in contrast to NARAL’s old model, the new network these state groups are creating “is going to be in service of the state and local organizations; it’s not going to be in charge of state and local organizations.”

“There’s an opportunity for this to be a phoenix moment,” she added, “where we build something better from whatever those ashes are.”

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From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate

“The East-West confrontation over Ukraine, which led to Moscow’s annexation of Crimea but long predated it, is potentially the worst international crisis in more than fifty years—and the most fateful. A negotiated resolution is possible, but time is running out.”

—STEPHEN F. COHEN
Republicans are pushing national wedge issues to the local level, but smart progressives are beating them.

By John Nichols

Tim Nordin checked his e-mail shortly before the April 5 local election in his northwestern Wisconsin community and found a death threat. The sender, identified only as “Kill All Marxist Teachers,” attacked the president of the Eau Claire school board for “promoting the horrific, radical transgender agenda,” adding, “It’s now time to declare war on you pedos. I am going to kill you and your entire family.” Nordin made sure his family was safe, called the cops, and alerted fellow school board members. Then, after checking with his wife to make sure she agreed that it was worth it to continue campaigning for a new term on the board, he sent a message to the voters. “This is Eau Claire’s election,” declared Nordin, a 43-year-old former high school science teacher. “Others want to control this election by inciting fear in you and driving votes with outside money and news coverage. They, quite literally, are trying to threaten us into submission. I remain unbowed. And I implore each of you to send a message that Eau Claire cannot be intimidated. Our schools are too important to cede to fear.”

Two weeks later, after mounting a campaign in which he highlighted his support for making schools “safe and welcoming for every student,” Nordin topped the vote count, finishing first in a six-candidate field. The other candidates on Nordin’s “Leadership for Stronger Schools” slate won as well, easily outdistancing well-funded challengers who mouthed right-wing talking points and were endorsed by top Republicans. Not a bad result from the largest city in a county that had voted for conservatives such as Tommy Thompson and Scott Walker in past gubernatorial races, and where Donald Trump signs frequently appear. And it wasn’t an outlier. Despite foreboding about Republican efforts to politicize school board races—with disingenuous attacks on “critical race theory,” LGBTQ rights, and sexual health programs—smart progressives have been pushing back against this cynical GOP strategy and winning hard-fought races in communities across the country.

Conservatives aren’t giving up on their drive to make school districts into battlegrounds in a culture war that has former Trump campaign strategist Steve Bannon declaring, “The path to save the nation is very simple—it’s going to go through the school boards.” They’re still determined to shake up local contests with big lies and big money from conservative donors. But evidence from around the country suggests that this is not a fight progressives are destined to lose at the local level—or in the high-stakes statewide races for governorships and US Senate seats where the right hopes to spin a new form of grievance politics into midterm gold. For progressives to prevail, however, supporters of public education must overcome the doom-and-gloom mentality that emerged last November after Republican Glenn Youngkin upset former Democratic governor Terry McAuliffe in Virginia’s gubernatorial election.

Evidence from around the country suggests that this is not a fight progressives are destined to lose at the local level.

Youngkin exploited a grab bag of school-related issues in a contest that saw the former Carlyle Group executive spin wild fantasies about CRT, run ads featuring a Republican mother complaining that her teenage son was reading Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and surf a wave of grumbling about Covid-related public health mandates. Education wasn’t the only issue in the off-year election cycle that was always going to be rough for Democrats. But McAuliffe’s missteps made everything harder, especially when he invited Republican attacks by declaring, “I don’t think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.”

The Virginia election followed a year in which Republican strategists, seeking to make up lost ground after the 2018 and 2020 elections, embraced school issues with a vengeance. CRT became a prime target and remained so, even after it was made clear that it is rarely if ever used as the basis for K-12 instruction, and even after conservatives were accused of focusing on the subject to stir racial resentment. The facts didn’t matter. “I am quite intentionally redefining what ‘critical race theory’ means in the public mind, expanding it as a catchall for the new racial orthodoxy,” admitted Christopher Rufo, a conservative polemicist who, with a boost from Tucker Carlson and other Fox News personalities, made CRT the target of right-wing wrath. Writing in March 2021, Rufo declared, “We have successfully frozen their brand—’critical race theory’—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category. The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think ‘critical race theory.’”

Republican Party leaders from Donald Trump to Ted Cruz and Ron DeSantis started griping about teachers “indoctrinating” students. Fox News amplified the complaints, as did conservative talk radio hosts. Chaos erupted at school board meetings—sometimes to the point where the police had to be called—as...
“parents’ rights” activists grabbed microphones and started ranting about “anti-white racism” and the “grooming” of children.

Youngkin’s victory seemed to confirm that the “parents’ rights” message was a potent one, especially in the suburban swing districts that Republicans are desperate to win. But on the same night that the Virginia election set pundits awitter, another election, in another battleground state, produced a result that suggested fights over the future of public education could go in a different direction altogether. In Wisconsin’s Mequon-Thiensville school district north of Milwaukee, a campaign urged on by national conservative operatives sought to recall and remove four school board members who were accused of putting CRT into practice with equity and inclusion policies and savaged for following public health mandates during the pandemic. Out-of-state billionaires put money behind the recall effort. Right-wing talk radio chimed in. Top Republicans rallied with supporters of the recall. In a county where Trump won a higher percentage of the vote than he secured in the suburbs of northern Virginia, this should have been a slam dunk. But it wasn’t.

The incumbents won 60 percent of the vote, after a campaign in which a coalition of parents and teachers pushed back against what they decried as “a national movement to politicize school boards.” When I visited Mequon on Election Day to talk to the parents who’d successfully fended off the right, I met Dr. Neda Esmaili, a mother of two elementary school children. “We had to confront an evolving list of grievances that were really aimed at attacking public education. I came to realize that all of these complaints, which we were seeing on the local level, were very politically motivated,” she told me. “It felt like we were up against a well-oiled machine that was drawing lines in the sand on political culture-war issues and that was hashing them out at the school board level. But we figured out how to respond with a campaign that exposed what they were doing and confronted all the wild claims they were making.”

American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten was impressed. “These local activists in places like Wisconsin are the ones who are showing that, when you have to fight back, and when you have people who figure out how to talk about this as a fight for public education, you can win,” Weingarten told me when we discussed what Democrats at the top of the ticket might learn from progressives at the bottom of the ballot.

The numbers back up her optimism. The political website Ballotpedia, which has been tracking efforts to recall school board members since 2006, found that there were a record number of attempts to remove board members in 2021. But of the 237 officials who were targeted, only one was actually defeated, while 10 targeted members resigned from boards during the year. That doesn’t mean conservatives won’t continue to win races in traditionally conservative communities and culture-war hot spots. But it does suggest that more attention should be paid to the places—especially in battleground states—where supporters of public health mandates, gender equity, and the honest teaching of history are beating back right-wing challenges.

Unfortunately, the results that may tell us the most about where education debates are headed rarely grab the kinds of headlines that were afforded to a high-profile recall of three San Francisco Board of Education members in February. The San Francisco result inspired a predictable flurry of “California is sending warning signals to Democrats” stories and commentary about how the city was a bellwether for education debates.

But that’s not what San Franciscans were saying. “This grew out of frustration that the school board was not moving fast enough to reopen the schools [after Covid-19 hit]...but that’s where the similarity ends,” explained state Senator Scott Wiener, a Democrat who like many liberals in the city backed the recall. Although some San Franciscans raised concerns about renaming schools tied to historical figures, the voters weren’t rejecting gender equity or curriculums that reflected concerns about racial justice, and neither were voters in other parts of the country. Results from elections a month later in New Hampshire saw progressives winning hotly contested races even in more conservative communities. But you would be hard-pressed to find cable news reports announcing, “New Hampshire results are a three-alarm warning for Republicans.”

Media reports of raucous school board meetings at which officials are attacked as “Marxist thugs” or met with a Nazi salute have formed a backdrop for the state and national election campaigns that reporters like to cover. But the more than 90,000 school board members and directors in the US should not be treated as extras in this national drama. They are on the front lines of a fight in which “national wedge issues” are being pushed down to the local level, said Everett Blair, chair of the Gwinnett County Board of Education in Georgia. “Many of the hot-button issues have taken shape here first.”

As a result, underpaid and underappreciated school board members have borne the brunt—along with teachers and administrators—of the
assault on public education. It got so rough last year that the National School Boards Association asked the Joe Biden White House for a federal intervention to protect against “acts of malice, violence, and threats against public school officials.” Attorney General Merrick Garland responded by directing the FBI and US Attorneys’ Offices to develop responses to threats he said were “not only illegal, they run counter to our nation’s core values.” A reference to domestic terrorism in the NASB’s letter sparked a fierce reaction from Fox News commentators and an apology from the association “for some of the language included in the letter.” But the fundamental fact remained: School board members, and parents who support them, had been targeted for a new kind of right-wing assault.

Old battles over school funding and “school choice” privatization schemes have taken a back seat to hair-on-fire ranting against racial and gender equity programs, history curriculums, and public health mandates. This isn’t an accident. The American Legislative Exchange Council, a corporate-funded network of conservative legislators, has been promoting a national “Reclaim Education” agenda that warns, “The 1619 curriculum is infecting our schools”—systematizing attacks on the award-winning project by racial injustice journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones and her colleagues at The New York Times to examine the consequences of American slavery and the contributions of Black Americans. Well-funded groups like Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn in Education, and the 1776 Project—which takes its name from the Trump administration’s clumsy attempt to discredit the 1619 Project—give right-wing activists talking points and strategic support for confronting board members at meetings and challenging them on the ballot.

Just as they did a decade ago with the Tea Party movement, which exploited frustration with the slow recovery from the Great Recession, conservative strategists are maneuvering to exploit anxiety and frustration after a period when schools were shuttered by the pandemic. “You’re just seeing huge frustration in a country after two years of Covid. The country has not come together to take on these challenges. It’s obvious that there’s a great deal of division,” Weingarten says. “And so, in that crack, autocrats like Donald Trump and people who want to use chaos and confusion to advance their agendas see a perfect opening for exploitation.”

The plan, she warns, is to “scare people, lie to people, create misinformation about things that just aren’t happening,” and eventually get voters to give up on public education—or, at the very least, to hand control of the schools over to rigid conservatives.

Youngkin had some success with this formula, as did Republican-backed school board contenders in suburban Denver’s Douglas County—where spending on local races exceeded $440,000—last year. But school board candidates who attacked mask mandates, diversity initiatives, and CRT lost high-profile races in Connecticut, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in 2021. And the first results from 2022 have been strikingly good for progressives, especially in battleground states like New Hampshire, where dozens of hotly contested races for school board posts saw the rejection of right-wing candidates and, in the Merrimack Valley School District, the overwhelming defeat of a proposal to ban the teaching of “critical race theory” in the schools there. “These results should raise serious doubts about any Republican 2022 election strategy that is built around pitting parents against local public schools and educators,” announced Zandra Rice Hawkins, the executive director of Granite State Progress, a progressive group that took on conservative money and messaging with an explicit campaign “to protect public education and an honest, accurate education.”

That’s proved to be a winning message all over the country. In Georgia, for instance, after the state’s Board of Education adopted a resolution objecting to the teaching of “critical race theory,” Gwinnett County’s Everton Blair pushed back against the forces that were “manufacturing outrage” in his state. “To be candid,” said Blair, who in 2018 became the first Black and first openly gay member elected to the board that oversees education in the sprawling county outside Atlanta, “America is a country with an inextricable history of racism. Because of this fact, vestiges of our racially discriminatory past show up across discrepancies in economic security, health care, educational access, and more. And I get it—we’re very ashamed.” But, he added, “masking our fear of confronting the truth by rejecting only the elements of which we are ashamed teaches our children that they can cherry-pick data, falsify evidence, and fabricate reality.”

Reaction to the statement was “largely positive,” said Blair. “Overwhelmingly, people realize that school board leadership is voluntary public service. None of us signed up to be epidemiologists. We didn’t sign up to be career politicians. Many of us just are invested in the education we provide. People recognize that, as long as you keep communicating with them.”

That’s sound advice for progressives when it comes to school board races, and for Democrats who are wondering how to address education issues in the midterms. Equally sound is the counsel from Tim Nordin. While it took fortitude for school board members to face down “a constant barrage of attacks and anger coming from both inside and outside of our community,” he told me, voters in Eau Claire, and areas like it nationwide—responded to these attacks in an encouraging way. “They were not fooled by disingenuous arguments about ‘parents’ rights.’ They rejected dog whistles about CRT and candidates who either wouldn’t even say the word ‘equity’ or outright said they didn’t support inclusion and diversity.”

“No Left Turn in Education” is the name of the 1776 Project—which takes its name from the Trump administration’s clumsy attempt to discredit the 1619 Project—give right-wing activists talking points and strategic support for confronting board members at meetings and challenging them on the ballot.

Republican leaders from Donald Trump to Ted Cruz (below) and Ron DeSantis have griped about teachers “indoctrinating” students.
What if the Wind and Sunshine Belonged to Everyone?
How letting renewables go radical can build the constituency to make climate justice a reality.

BY DAVID MCDERMOTT HUGHES

Here are old and new ways of promoting renewable energy. The difference does not center on the speed or scale of technological shifts. Certainly, we need—in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s felicitous phrase—“a solution at the scale of the crisis.” We also need solutions at the scale of the resources. That is the difference: Free-flowing wind and sunlight allow for a far more democratic energy system than fossil fuels ever have. Let’s not miss that opportunity.

The wide sky lends itself to public ownership and public rights. If utopia is anywhere, it is—and has always been—in the heavens just above humanity’s head. Our star’s fusion reaction blasts in all directions. A tiny fraction of that energy hits the surface of Earth—86,000 terawatts—of which 870 terawatts power the wind. The resource is vast, ubiquitous, and universally accessible. Compare it with the nearly 12 terawatts we get from coal, oil, and gas. Those who aspire simply to replace about a dozen terawatts are thinking small and planning narrowly. Now apparently dead, the Build Back Better bill would simply have repositioned the entire corporate battleship of electricity from one berth to another. Dating back to the Clean Power Plan of President Obama’s vice presidency, Joe Biden has sought to replace the gigawatt smokestack with a gigawatt wind farm. Such proposals merely swap energy resources, attempting to fit the round peg of wind and sunlight into the square hole of private fossil fuels.

While pollution levels would certainly decline under Biden’s plan, little would change structurally. Even small-scale, residential solar panels are mostly owned by Sunrun and other large corporations. They lease roof space from millions of homeowners, amassing oligopolies from paneled archipelagos. The sky can do so much more. Renewables can power utilities and the grid—and then empower people currently marginalized by both.

Some on the left have already suggested something slightly different from what Biden has offered: nationalizing wind farms, solar farms, transmission infrastructure, and even the whole fossil fuel sector (in order to retire it). I’m not opposed to such energy democracy. It just seems like expropriating assets long claimed and expertly defended would be a tough fight. It is also an unnecessary one. The Public Power NY Coalition wants to avoid that fight by building new infrastructure for renewables in a publicly owned utility. That form of energy democracy seems more likely to succeed in the United States. But it still misses an opportunity.

To truly control the energy system, one also has to own the root resources: wind and sunshine. Currently, almost no one is claiming them. Big-box stores seldom consider their roofs and the photons wasted there. Few landowners have even heard of wind rights. Energy resources orders of magnitude larger than oil are lying unfenced, unprotected, and virtually free for the taking. We only have to look up—to the sky—to see the widest frontier for communing and energy justice.

In fact, energy justice is not optional. Simply getting off fossil fuels would, of course, stabilize the climate and preserve life on Earth. That promise ought to be enough to make renewables wildly popular—but it hasn’t so far. In both the US and Europe, rural, anti-corporate movements are resisting solar and wind farms. They have killed projects and slowed the rate of installation dramatically. Urban communities—a huge reservoir of potential support—often oppose the smokestack down the road. But as potential supporters of specific wind and solar farms, they have been sidelined and uninvolved. To succeed politically, the energy transition needs diverse, dispersed movements. We’re not there yet. In what follows I discuss three more radical forms of post-fossil-energy justice. The sooner we explore these solutions-at-the-scale-of-the-resources, the faster Americans will mobilize for the transition away from fossil fuels.

Ladders to Socialism

Federal policy already encourages roof owners to install solar panels. It doesn’t require anyone to do so. Additional tax incentives might promote public, cooperative, and community solar projects, but the legislation doesn’t give them roof space. Sun-catching surfaces remain all too private. Hence, as the first of my proposals, let’s empower solar-minded neighbors and the neighborhood itself. Imagine the typical big-box store or warehouse. Its roof captures sunlight and—unless there is a skylight, garden, or tanning deck up there—throws it away. What if a city, a community organization, or even high-tech protesters could climb up, install panels, and wire them to a local micro-grid? Let the ladder be the next tool of socialism.

This property-busting scenario sounds far-fetched, un-American, and without legal precedent. Not necessarily. In 1862, as the US was expanding westward, President Abraham Lincoln’s
Public urban solar power could bring resilient electricity to thousands of marginalized, Black, and brown communities across America.

Setting a precedent: The 14th-century Tuscan jurist Cino da Pistoia was responsible for attaching wind rights to land rights.

The Common Wind

_The wind is equally ripe for public ownership. Right now the opposite is happening, as the air’s kinetic energy is being privatized, accumulated, and concentrated. In Texas and the big wind states north of it, wind companies make a deal with landowners: Allow us to put up huge turbines and we will pay you rent for the “pads” they occupy and a royalty on the wind itself. Landowners often go for this lucrative deal. But their neighbors—stuck with the ugliness (as many see it) of turbines with no financial compensation—often feel differently. So they sue, write to their representatives, and otherwise gum up the works. These anti-turbine activists—who are often pro-fairness—are slowing and stopping installations across North America and Europe. And the deeper battle has hardly begun. Five white families own as much land in the US as the entire Black population. Should they own all that wind above their land too? For the sake of fairness, certainly not. For the sake of reducing carbon emissions as well, advocates of renewables can hardly afford to exclude Blacks and the great majority of Americans from their ranks. Private wind rights, in short, tilt the energy transition toward elites—and give everyone else a reason not to support it._

Public ownership would make wind popular. No one will have to homestead or bring a ladder in this case. A legislature only has to “sever” wind rights from land rights. (Or, more artfully, one could reclassify private wind rights as an easement—a legal term conferring the right to use someone else’s land for a specific purpose—within the public trust of wind.)

Why should wind rights and land rights belong together in any case? Unlike sunlight—which farmers use every day of the growing season—almost no one harvests wind for production on land. How did wind rights become attached to land in the first place? This precedent goes back to Cino da Pistoia, a 14th-century Tuscan jurist who sought to adjudicate among neighbors with wide roofs. A man’s property goes _ad coelum_, or to the sky, he wrote. “From molehills grow mountains,” and this phrase now gives the planter of waist-high wheat the right to sell 30-story-high wind.

But private wind rights make no sense. “To the sky” applied to space rather than energy. That spatial principle—which airplanes violate every day—prevents your 30-story tower from rising diagonally over my adjacent lot. Fine. The wind, however, has nothing to do with any local parcel. Regional, even planetary, forces produce it far above us. Vertical resources differ from horizontal ones, as other countries recognize. Mineral and oil rights usually belong to governments, rather than to whoever owns the surface. Because of incentives for prospectors in the early homesteading era, the US almost uniquely attaches mineral rights to land. But Alaska, which has almost no private land, is different. Publicly owned oil contributes to a permanent fund that pays every Alaskan an annual dividend check. As a result, Alaskans have an emotional, political, and financial investment in petroleum. We who prefer renewables could learn from their example.

Make the wind a commons and invite every breeze-blown community into the energy transition. In Germany, Denmark, and New Zealand, communities have already erected wind farms on municipal land for the common good. Pistoia’s
“to the sky” principle allows them to sell royalties and benefit. Under a post-Pistoia wind commons, any municipality could do the same for breezes above private land. Wind rights could rest with the town, the county—or with an entirely new unit bounded by the viewed, which might help smooth the path for offshore wind farms. These collective wind-owners would sell wind rights and earn royalty checks. Private landowners would still receive compensation through rent for the pads sitting on their property. But imagine these neighbors—instead of banding together to fight a wind farm—jointly advertising their wind and recruiting operators.

Urban and suburban residents could negotiate for smaller turbines or even vertical rooftop axis machines. Those models are relatively expensive in terms of maintenance—but, when popular, are still a lot cheaper than legal fees. Wind farms could be the new community gardens.

A Right to Light

Finally, as the last, perhaps-not-so-radical proposal, let’s think outside the box of electrons. Passive solar energy—which entered modern architecture in the 1940s—refers to nonelectrical means of harvesting sunshine for illumination and heating. It is not passive at all but relies on specific building designs: wide, triple-glazed, south-facing windows to bring light inside, stone floors or other thermal masses to store heat and re-radiate it at night, and—for the sake of cooling—overhangs positioned to block the high summer sun. The US Green Building Council (author of the LEED standards) and the Passive House Institute have perfected these conservation techniques over decades. They can cut your consumption of electricity, methane, and heating oil by up to 90 percent. Programs for clean energy, however, hardly consider southerly windows and thermal masses.

Why? Passive solar houses don’t consume substantial electricity—not from a coal plant and not from solar corporations. And the equipment that captures photons doesn’t generally roll off an assembly line, as panels and heat pumps do. You have to build a passive house or apartment from the ground up and at greater expense. Except for a few start-ups, solar architecture is not profitable enough for any corporation.

Fortunately, cities and states already regulate buildings with various market-defying rules. New standards might require southern exposures, high window-to-wall ratios, thermal masses, and so on. For new apartment buildings, a passive solar code would require setbacks from the street—allowing light to enter balconies and balcony doors—and appropriate shading. New developments could include such features as light-maximizing districts. Who wouldn’t want to live in a well-lit apartment—with a terrace to boot? Few are being built, though. Rather than mandate or subsidize such structures, policymakers are simply pushing photovoltaics. In 2021, the California Energy Commission voted to require solar panels on all new houses. That’s progress, for sure. But, California, while you’re revising the building code for roofs, why not mandate a skylight too and perhaps a “solar tunnel” that would bring light through the attic to habitable space? We don’t need a huge federal bill for these reforms. We just need legislative innovation—and moxie—in the sunny suburbs where many Americans are moving. And, in northern cities like New York, we need to restrain billionaire penthouses from casting shadows over the neighborhood. The right to light is a right to the city.

Everyone lives beneath the sky—a public sky. Yet the increasing use of sky-given resources is turning them into private property, leaving most of us behind. Renewables should put something in the average person’s pocket. Biden wished to spread tangible benefits widely, as cleaner air for polluted communities and jobs for displaced oil workers. Maybe things will work out that way. When they do, those people may get very excited about the next Build Back Better bill. Because politically, this is a chicken-and-egg problem. Clean energy needs popular support in order to proliferate and provide people with the tangible goods necessary to motivate support in the first place. Right now we’re stuck: People rally against fossil fuels, but actual wind and solar farms remain marginally popular at best.

In the aftermath of Build Back Better, why don’t we reset? Start with a jubilee that confers rights to wind and sunlight to every community and jurisdiction in America. Give groups of people terawatts, and give people the right to use them for reading a book in a sunlit living room—or for making electricity. States and municipalities can direct much of this work through zoning and building codes. In Washington, a better Build Back Better bill would turn renewables everywhere into common property. Wind, sun, turbines, and panels would become common in the sense of popular too. Let these technologies spill out of corporate boardrooms and onto the streets. That is the pro-renewable movement we need—a movement wide and deep enough to actually stabilize the climate.
Raising awareness about transmission capacity is crucial to America’s transition to renewable energy—and may offer lessons about navigating political polarization and climate despair, too.

BY JESSI JEZIEWSKA STEVENS
When the US electrical grid does manage to make its way into the headlines, it’s usually with respect to its vulnerability. In May of 2020, Donald Trump caused a stir when he signed an executive order to wean utilities off ordering bulk power systems from “adversaries,” fearing that the equipment would be compromised by “backdoor” mechanisms. More immediate threats, however, have tended to be domestic and decidedly low-tech. A common cause of wildfires and blackouts is trees and other vegetation interfering with aboveground power lines. In 2013, snipers fired at a substation from a highway in Metcalf, Calif., forcing Pacific Gas and Electric to reroute electricity to avoid a blackout. When Russia launched a cyber war against the Ukrainian grid through the infamous Sandworm attacks in 2015 and ’16, US analysts took it as a sign that America might be next. Russia’s continued assault on Ukraine’s electrical grid following its invasion confirms the importance of grid security as a geopolitical issue.

Over the past year, grid-related news shifted toward climate adaptation and mitigation measures with President Joe Biden’s massive, legislatively beleaguered infrastructure proposal; the much-diminished version that eventually passed includes a more than $65 billion Building a Better Grid Initiative. Still, news coverage has been long on political gridlock and short on the grid’s potential as a foundation for building the kind of radical—yes, radical—climate activism that will be poised to help navigate our hyper-polarized, alarmist American moment.

To understand how progressives can take one of the nation’s least sexy news beats and turn it into a site of invigorated activism, it’s important to recognize that the US electrical grid is about as fragmented as America itself. Though the word “grid” suggests a single network, in reality there are three: the Eastern Interconnection, which runs east of the Rocky Mountains and includes a portion of the Texas Panhandle; the Western Interconnection, which covers the Rockies to the West Coast; and the self-explanatory Electric Reliability Council of Texas. This fragmentation—each interconnection is independently synchronized—predictably extends to mismatched regional structural and regulatory layers. In other words, as with information flow, so with electricity: Many Americans exist in echo chambers.

In few of these silos, however—either online or on the grid—do you hear much about the importance of improving the connectivity of the grid in a way that would help the US achieve its goals for reducing carbon emissions. Or, at least, in fewer than you’d think, when our disconnected state of affairs currently precludes the wide-scale adoption of renewable energy like wind and solar; expert opinion holds that the grid simply isn’t prepared to handle the influx. For those looking to galvanize momentum for an energy revolution, therefore, grid connectivity and flexibility offers a rare, nonpoliticized (or at least less politicized) arena for climate activism, sidestepping well-worn points of polarization and pulling achievable adaptation and mitigation measures into view.

Anyone still dabbling in optimism might then suggest that the national grid—fragmented, federalist, and strained beyond capacity—could provide a productive, all-too-on-the-nose metaphor for the fractured, battered infrastructure of US democracy itself—as well as a concrete framework for repairing it.

Against the (quite literally) gridlocked political backdrop of Congress, those activists who have focused on the problem of energy infrastructure are the ones gaining the greatest traction with the climate-conscious public. The Swedish activist and political philosopher Andreas Malm published his deliberately provocative How to Blow Up a Pipeline in the US last year, to vigorous debate. The thrust of Malm’s argument is more or less that, after so many years of stagnation in the effort to transition from fossil fuels, we ought to consider whether the time isn’t prepared to handle the influx.

Anyone still dabbling in optimism might then suggest that the national grid—fragmented, federalist, and strained beyond capacity—could provide a productive, all-too-on-the-nose metaphor for the fractured, battered infrastructure of US democracy itself—as well as a concrete framework for repairing it.

The US electrical grid has potential as a foundation for building the kind of radical climate activism needed to navigate this moment.

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You may not be the type to blow up a pipeline. But you may be the type to fret about democracy deteriorating through ecological crises.

Grid failure: Two women struggle to stay warm after losing power during the February 2021 winter storms in Texas.

The story of the US grid’s unruly structural development runs parallel to that of electricity itself. After much trial and error, Thomas Edison got the first small-scale grid up and running in 1882, according to Gretchen Bakke in her 2016 history The Grid. Edison relied on direct current (DC), which at the time petered out around the one-mile mark. By 1887, he was powering offices within a one-mile radius of his company’s Pearl Street Station in Lower Manhattan and could extend no further. The challenge of delivering electricity from its point of production to more distant sites of consumption would take another decade to solve and is usually referred to as the “war of the currents.” Not until it was demonstrated that high-voltage alternating current (AC), which can be transmitted over long distances, could be easily stepped up or down through the use of transformers did a workable solution for powering the nation emerge. AC debuted at scale with the Niagara Falls Power Company in 1896, and it still powers America’s transmission lines today. But partly because of continued strains on long-distance transmission capacity, the current system is incompatible with scaling up renewables like solar and wind.

You can think of the grid as a grand, automated matchmaker: There’s a constant pairing off of energy producers with energy users as they come online. Except unlike in a dating market, singles can crash the entire machine: Unsold product or unmet demand can cause a blackout. To prevent this, regulatory bodies called “balancing authorities” (which as often as not also act as utilities) step in to intervene. During the pandemic, when the widespread adoption of remote work dramatically changed demand patterns, electricity markets in Europe dipped into negative energy prices with uncommon frequency; balancing authorities were actually paying consumers to soak up excess production.

This is the main obstacle we face in switching to renewables. Solar, wind, and hydropower are governed not by someone turning on a switch at the power plant, but by the weather. They therefore dump an enormous amount of volatile energy supply onto a grid designed for predictability. Nuclear plants or “transition fuels” like natural gas pump reliable, predictable energy into the grid 24 hours a day (the latter can also be quickly fired up or dialed down to adjust to unexpected shifts in demand). Renewables, by contrast, contribute to electricity production only when the sun shines and the wind blows. This increases the risk of sudden collapses in production and of sudden increases in production (“surges”), which, in excess of demand, can damage equipment.

One solution to maintaining balance in a more volatile production environment is to boost long-distance transmission capacity by integrating the disparate grids, both physically and through standardizing local and state regulatory structures. Not only do long-distance transmission lines in a lower-friction grid allow regional markets to tap into renewables at distant locations; they also potentially help to balance volatility and demand, as production is spread among more energy users and the markets on which energy is bought and sold are simplified. They furthermore allow for full-capacity production in sunny and windy areas, where the energy potential outstrips the local consumer base; as of 2020, an estimated 755 gigawatts of renewable energy were stalled in development because the integrated transmission capacity to carry that energy to consumers simply doesn’t exist. Such bottlenecks prevent new renewable energy producers from coming to market: Even if Tesla were to introduce a grid-scale battery capable of storing solar, it is currently not possible to send that power from a crowded solar production market in temperate, sunny New Mexico to wintry New England, where consumers are cranking up the heat.

But what if it were? Expanding transmission capacity, regulating and integrating the three independent national grids (as well as regional fragmentation within interconnections), and introducing smart grid technology that minimizes the risk of blackouts are all key parts of Biden’s Building a Better Grid Initiative, which promises “cleaner and cheaper energy” for all Americans. The White House has also emphasized the ways that expanded transmission capacity would improve the ability to respond to disasters, presumably by allowing distressed regions likely to buy into Malm’s argument. It’s telling, however, that outlets like The New Republic, The New Yorker, and The New York Times greeted his provocation if not with outright support, then with a flicker of fascination. That such radical arguments are being entertained in the mainstream media indicates rising levels of frustration with the sluggish pace of politics-as-usual. The target reader of these magazines is definitely not the type who would actually blow up a pipeline. But she might be the type who would focus on another urgent infrastructure-related issue: the need to update the grid to be compatible with renewables and the mass adoption of electric vehicles. It’s an attitude that, if activated, could be a boon to organizers and activists ready to channel it.
to borrow power from more stable ones.

That said, the fact that many of these grid-related goals were shared by Biden’s Democratic predecessor presages the challenges to come: Only two of Barack Obama’s seven proposed projects to ramp up the kind of transmission capacity required for scalable renewable energy managed to evade local opposition to the arrival of unsightly power lines.

Maybe you’re not the type to blow up a pipeline. Maybe you’re even adamantly against it, vehemently opposed to direct action of all kinds. Maybe you’re also acutely worried that our democracy’s losing race against the climate countdown will stoke admiration for authoritarian regimes as well as extremist activist measures; you might be the type to fret about the further deterioration of democracy through worsening ecological crises. After all, democracy hardly thrives in a permanent state of emergency. And in recognizing the very real logic of extremist responses to stagnated climate politics, and the threat that poses to the stability of democracy itself, you just might be the type to help turn anti-transmission NIMBY-ist obstructionism into national climate news.

In the fractious American politics of the 2020s, no transformation comes for free. For the climate adaptation movement, even the lowest-hanging fruit is politically and fiscally costly.

On the other hand, as of 2020, Americans experience more blackouts than other industrialized nations, at an estimated cost of $150 billion annually. Those aboveground electrical lines implicated in many wildfires and blackouts were erected in the 1950s and ’60s (it would be safer, if more expensive, to run them underground). Other key components of the grid’s infrastructure, from wooden electrical poles to transformers, were designed to last about 50 years. That is to say, we don’t have a choice not to pursue modernization and adaptation measures.

If cost and fragmented regulatory and ownership models are major hurdles to updating the grid for new ecological realities, another, possibly even greater one is resistance to regional compromise: Who will live near the transmission lines? Can states agree to standardize regulatory measures so that electricity markets can be more nationalized, with plants in New Mexico servicing customers in New York and vice versa? In the current political environment, the fact that locals must share the benefits of improvements to their infrastructure with far-flung communities makes the push for grid connectivity an even tougher pill to swallow. Nevertheless, the negotiation process ought to emphasize concrete gains at the local level: cleaner, more affordable energy that stimulates job markets, both in the immediate area and across the country. It’s simple enough for a slogan. And yet it isn’t one.

While it’s often said that climate change is experienced regionally, the costs are national. Federal tax dollars go toward aiding fellow Americans who faced unimaginable loss in the recent December blaze in Boulder, Colo., or in the floods in Texas and the Midwest in 2019; or who will continue to lose power to record-defying super tornadoes in the Dust Bowl. Sharing the cost of electricity as well as the cost of adapting to worsening disasters underscores the very national nature of the catastrophes we face: We share a national treasury, and we almost share a grid.

Research shows that overexposure to climate fatalism can leave the public paralyzed, making defeatist alarmism about as effective as denialism: Images of disaster, shorn of any potential context for mitigation, spread as rapidly as wildfires across social media channels, leaving many consumers of climate content in impotent despair. National grid connectivity could provide just the framework—just enough of a framework—to overcome polarization and paralysis in the face of genuine alarm.

The current messaging environment makes it all too easy for individuals concerned about climate change to fall into the trap of either the hyper-micro (should I cycle to work and give up all plastic packaging?) or the hyper-macro (how can I, a single person, end the global consumption of fossil fuels?) imagination. Anyone who has stressed over such micro-level concerns knows the feeling of losing sight of the forest for the trees; those who have wrestled with slotting individual responsibility into narratives of global action can attest to feelings of helplessness in the face of the seemingly insurmountable. Infrastructure-scale projects occupy the vast gray area in between, with consequences just large enough to be meaningful, yet with a framework just focused—just local—enough for individuals to imagine themselves as part of a unified campaign.

America’s largest, most neglected machine may seem an unlikely site for galvanizing democratic politics. But there’s potential to be harnessed here if we’d like to disrupt the way we fight with and for each other to upgrade the nation that—like a jerry-rigged circuit board—for now remains only flimsily connected.
The history of the British Empire’s violence

BY HOWARD W. FRENCH

In 2005, Britain’s then–Labour prime minister, Gordon Brown, chose the backdrop of Tanzania to make a dramatic statement about his nation’s unmatched record of imperial conquest and rule. “The time is long gone,” he said, “when Britain needs to apologize for its colonial history.” The choice of locale for such a proclamation was, to be charitable, curious. A braver stage would have been Kenya, to pick an African nation that had experienced horrific violence during its independence struggle from British colonial rule, or India or Malaya, where extreme and brutal measures to sustain imperial control had been carried out on an even greater scale. But here we were, nonetheless.
Brown’s speech reflected the slow and creaky rotation of the wheel not so much of history but of historiography. Mirroring 19th-century historians’ and politicians’ polished encomiums to a beneficent British Empire, the speech brought elite assessments of Britain’s unparalleled dominion over one quarter of the globe, and over a similar fraction of the human population, almost full circle. Back in the 19th century, the task of ruling over myriad darker-skinned peoples around the world had been depicted less as a matter of self-interest than of moral obligation. It was Britain’s unique vocation to spread progressive constitutional freedoms and the rule of law, along with free trade and free labor, among the less fortunate barbarians. As the Whig politician and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote of Britain’s empire: “It is to her peculiar glory, not that she has ruled so widely—not that she has conquered so splendidly—but that she has ruled only to bless, and conquered only to spare.”

To reach even this point required 19th-century Britons to erase much of the past as well as to ignore the present. When Macaulay’s History of England was published in 1848, the British had violently taken over nearly two-thirds of India and controlled recently acquired settler colonies in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. There was little that appeared blessed about British rule. Absent in Macaulay and his peers’ accounts was also most of the history of the transatlantic slave trade and, in particular, the British role in it. Beginning in the mid-17th century, Britain had become a leader in the brutal commerce of Africans, first in places like tiny Barbados in the 1640s and then on a far larger scale in Jamaica and throughout the West Indies. Only in 1833 did the British abolish slavery in most of the empire, a belated follow-up to the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which outlawed the commerce in slaves. But instead of attesting to this horror, Macaulay and his peers embraced what became the touch points of the so-called Whiggish school of history, which associated British liberalism and empire with progress and passed over their violence and dispossession. The famous quote by Sir John Seeley, about Britain’s having acquired its empire in a fit of absentmindedness, doesn’t even begin to capture the full scope and spirit of the denialism that persisted among famous scholars at Oxford and Cambridge well into the 20th century. In 1914, for example, the historian H.E. Egerton, the first occupant of the Beit Chair of Colonial History at Oxford, wrote that British power in Asia and Africa had come about due to the passively worded “downfall of the Moghul empire” and “the breaking up of the native tribal system and the resulting anarchy,” respectively. Much later, the distinguished historian Christopher Bayly would write that the unstated purpose of the Cambridge History of the British Empire, first published in 1929, “was to demonstrate how the English values of ‘justice,’ ‘benevolence,’ and ‘humanity’ were transformed into a universal ethos of free nations through the operation of ‘the rule of law and democratic government’ under British rule.

Such views remained fairly unchallenged until the 1960s, when space for more critical, revisionist accounts of the British Empire began to open up. Most famous among these were the histories by Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, whose co-authored essay “The Imperialism of Free Trade” helped launch the so-called Cambridge School of historiography, which argued that Britain had profited from empire through trade while avoiding extensive formal control over its colonies. According to the historian Richard Drayton, these new accounts stripped the traditional emphasis of “high moral purpose” from the British narrative, replacing it with a franker acknowledgment of self-interest and realpolitik. Yet by the 1990s and 2000s, conservative British academics, followed by Tory politicians, had begun to revise the revisionists, repriming the old claims that empire, at least in its British form, had been good for the world, and they succeeded to such an extent that even Labour politicians like Gordon Brown felt confident enough in these claims of British-led progress to reiterate them before an audience of Africans.

Against this backdrop, a new wave of revisionist reconsiderations of the British Empire has resulted in a number of popular and prizewinning books. In Empireland, Santhrang Sanghera recently documented the neglect of pre-20th-century history in British education, as well as the country’s nativist attitudes toward the brown-skinned immigrants who had been encouraged to migrate to Britain in the postwar years in order to boost its economy. In Slave Empire, Padraic X. Scanlan examined the role that the wealth acquired from sugar plantation slavery in the Caribbean played in Britain’s economic rise. And in The New Age of Empire, Kehinde Andrews asserted that Western empire has continued in a new guise through Western-led institutions like the World Bank and others that still exert control over the Global South.

With Legacy of Violence, Caroline Elkins has stepped firmly into this arena—or, rather, reentered it—offering a sweeping and detailed history of the violence and brutality of the British Empire. The book marks a return to the scene of a previous battle for Elkins, whose Pulitzer Prize–winning Imperial Reckoning (2005) documented Britain’s colonial atrocities in Kenya by mining the long-buried official archives with such thoroughness that the British government was obliged to issue an official statement of regret for its actions in the 1950s and ’60s.

Kenya appears in this book, too, where Elkins brings her accounting up to date, but compared with that earlier work, Legacy of Violence also represents a formidable escalation on her part. With its enormous breadth and ambition, it amounts to something approaching a one-volume history of imperial Britain’s use of force, torture, and deceit around the world. As devastating as the details of these tactics are, even more damning is Elkins’s account of what she argues has been the persistent and perverse misuse of law to cast a veneer of justice and respectability over the remorseless exploitation of others. For all of the bluster and proclaimed moral certainty of British poli-
ticians, Elkins argues, much of Britain's zeal in clinging to its control over others, even as the Age of Empire seemed increasingly destined to end, was driven not by self-confidence but rather by insecurity over the rapid rise of rival Western powers. It was global empire alone that, in this view, had prevented England from becoming, say, just another Sweden. “There are not wanting those who say that in this Jubilee year our Empire has reached the heights of its glory and power, and that now we shall begin to decline, as Babylon, Carthage, Rome declined,” she quotes Churchill as saying in one 1897 exhortation. “Do not believe these croakers but give the lie to their dismal croaking by showing by our actions that the vigor and vitality of our race is unimpaired and that our determination is to uphold the Empire that we have inherited from our fathers as Englishmen.” As Elkins makes clear throughout Legacy of Violence, the racialized aspect of empire—meaning clear notions of Britain's Anglo-Saxon superiority over its Black, brown, and so-called yellow subjects—has been present from the beginning.

As its title suggests, Elkins's book argued that violence was not just an incidental feature of the British Empire, not simply its midwife, so to speak. Rather, it was foundational to the system itself, a fact born out in considerable detail. To flesh out the central role of violence in British imperial rule, Elkins shifts from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 to Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, to India's northwestern frontier and South Africa in the 1890s, to Ireland at the dawn of the 20th century, and on from there to a dizzying variety of more recent locales: Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, and Aden, among others.

Assembling so many examples spread widely across space and time allows Elkins to build an impressively damning account of the British Empire. But her most original argument lies not in the violence itself but rather in London's use and abuse of the notion of the rule of law, much touted by Britain as an elevating feature of modern Western civilization and a pillar of democracy. In Elkins's hands, the rule of law in Britain's many colonies becomes something more akin to lawfare: a system under which the use of codified rules was wielded to curtail freedoms rather than expand them, to expropriate land and property from Indigenous peoples, and to guarantee a steady flow of low-paid or sometimes unpaid workers to colonial mines and plantations, all under a veneer of principled legitimacy. When the genteel-seeming laws proved insufficient for these purposes, the empire was more than happy to resort to states of emergency and martial law, which conferred extraordinary authority upon its far-flung colonial governors. This “legalized lawlessness,” as Elkins calls it, meant that Britain in effect became a recurrent conqueror of its subjects. States of emergency effectively turned organized resistance against the colonial regime itself into a forbidden or, at a minimum, highly circumscribed activity, and redefined people fighting for their freedom as criminals or terrorists. The forms of violence Britain employed in the enforcement of these writs, she continues, included “corporal punishments, deportations, detentions without trial, forced migrations, killings, sexual assaults, tortures, and accompanying psychological terror, humiliation, and loss.”

Elkins documents this well-organized use of violence throughout the history of British Empire, from India and Jamaica in the mid-19th century to the South African War, the Irish War of Independence, the Arab Revolt, the Caribbean strikes, the Zionist uprising, and the states of emergency in Malaya, Kenya, and Cyprus. Writing about these different historical episodes, Elkins convincingly demonstrates that during the imperial era—indeed, she would probably say, since the imperial era as well—violence has been inherent to liberalism. Although liberalism has promised virtuous-sounding ideals like freedom, modernity, reformism, and the rule of law, it has freely used these ideals, time and again, as justifications for wreaking devastation on the subject peoples caught in its grip.

This self-serving hypocrisy will be familiar to those American readers who recall an infamous episode from the Vietnam War, when after the bloody Battle of Bêl Tre, which left hundreds of civilians dead and thousands of homes destroyed, a US Army major explained to Associated Press reporter Peter Arnett, “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.” But for Elkins, it also demonstrates how liberalism's willingness to ride roughshod over others has a long imperial pedigree that can be traced through a series of shockingly violent wars that are seldom recalled outside of the nations or regions in which they occurred.

As a result of Elkins's resourcefulness in digging into the colonial archives, we can also see how Britain's imperial project became a vast tentacular atelier, with elite public schools and universities serving as the training grounds for generations of colonial administrators who refined both the repressive techniques used against native populations and the legal arguments used as cover and justification. With a surprising degree of recurnence, England's original subalterns, the Scottish and especially the Irish, emerge as indispensable military cadres and hands-on functionaries who cycle from place to place in Britain's increasingly global colonial project as the scale of atrocity grows.

Hence we see how, in response to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, British officials began to experiment with mass confinement measures aimed at putting down the revolt. This led to the incarceration of 20,000 Indian subjects, who were swept up in aggressive, broad-brush campaigns of repression and then exiled to the Andaman Islands in the distant reaches of the Bay of Bengal. By the turn of the century, tactics like these were being applied on an even larger and more brutal scale to put down the rebellion in South Africa. There, Elkins writes, about 100 concentration camps were built, where Afrikaner rebels were confined, along with women and children, and where Black “undesirables” were herded into overcrowded detention centers by order of Lord Kitchener, in order to weaken them and “bring them to their senses.” Elkins notes that the campaign against the Afrikaners was “the first time a single ethnic group had been targeted for dete-
Elkins shows how liberalism’s willingness to ride roughshod over others has a long imperial pedigree.

It is at the ‘heart’ that we must only in effect a ‘rap on the knuckles’ and argued that “successes against banditry didn’t get any better as time progresses, even as the British Empire pursued tactical reforms. Worried about the potential spread of communism via the Chinese immigrant communities in Malaya—which, together with another commodity powerhouse, Ghana, was a leading source of financial sustenance for London in the immediate aftermath of World War II—Britain sent colonial officers to Malaya who had just overseen a brutal repression in Palestine in order to snuff out this resistance to its rule. The Chinese population, which had been growing in Malaya since the turn of the century, was declared “alien” by the British, who then forcibly removed them from their villages, burning huts to the ground and salting the farmlands to prevent their return. The victims of this extrajudicial process were resettled in unfamiliar new areas, surrounded by barbed-wire fencing and kept under heavy surveillance. This resettlement campaign became what Elkins calls “the British Empire’s largest forced migration since the era of the trade in enslaved people,” with “573,000 people, nearly 90 percent of whom were Chinese...relocated into newly created reserves of the richest soils on earth, were hardest hit by this relocation campaign, with many rendered illegal squatters or sharecroppers on their own land. Simultaneously, “pass laws” that required Africans to carry an ID showing their work history and current employer’s signature were imposed on the Indigenous population, as well as hut and poll taxes. Elkins says these taxes amounted to two months of a typical African’s wages. They fueled a stout resistance movement by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, which came to be known as the Mau Mau (a term that Tom Wolfe later trivialized and perverted when he introduced it into contemporary political usage with a clearly derogatory meaning that suggested out-of-control radical violence, usually by Black Americans). In their efforts to resist the sweeping taxation and the takeover of their lands, the Mau Mau rebels killed 32 European settlers during the emergency, triggering an enormous and often indiscriminate crackdown. In the space of 18 months, 1,040,899 Kikuyu were forcibly relocated into newly created reserves built on the Malayan model. By the end of 1955, Elkins writes, colonial authorities had penned up nearly the entire Kikuyu population, employing “the largest archipelago of detention and prison camps in the history of Britain’s empire.” One chilling paragraph gives the flavor: White and Black agents of empire perpetrated horrific crimes in defense of British rule in Kenya. They used electric shock and hooked suspects up to car batteries. They tied suspects to vehicle bumpers with just enough rope to drag them to death. They employed burning cigarettes, fire, and hot coals. They thrust bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, sticks, and hot eggs up men’s rectums and into women’s vaginas. They crushed bones and teeth; sliced off fingers or their tips; and castrated men with specially designed instruments or by beating a suspect’s testicles “till the scrotum burst,” according to Anglican church officials. Some used kiboko, or a rhino whip, for beating; others used clubs, fists, and truncheons. “Bucket fatigue” was a routine practice, as were various forms of human excrement torture. Mau Mau suspects and detainees were forced to clean nightsoil buckets barehanded and run for hours around a compound holding a full nightsoil bucket aloft, which then spilled over, encrusting the person holding it with feces and urine. No Kikuyu—man, woman, or child—was safe.

Techniques of repression, policing, and dispossession were not the only things that were copied and refined as the British colonial officers moved from place to place within the empire; so, too, were stratagems for covering up the evidence. Elkins shows that what was already being done with no lack of efficiency in Malaya was improved on yet further in Kenya, where records of the kinds of tactics described above were systematically destroyed—showing, if nothing else, a deep consciousness of guilt. Within days of the signing of the treaty that paved the way for the independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1956, colonial officials began “sorting, culling, transferring, and burning files.”

In 1958, Britain created a Public Records Act intended to preserve secret documents, including colonial records, and provide public access for all but the most sensitive after 50 years. The last chapter of Legacy of Violence...
The Many Moods

Rachel Carson's sea

BY HANNAH GOLD

Rachel Carson was a passionate and poetic writer, but she was not a particularly subtle one. When she set out to write a book, it did not end until the mountains had crumpled into the sea, all organisms dead or alive had vanished therein, and the form of life itself on Earth had been radically altered. Before Carson wrote her most influential book, *Silent Spring*, she wrote three thrilling books on the ocean's creative power over all of life's forms, each of them ending just this way.

Carson's first book, *Under the Sea-Wind* (1941), about the migratory patterns of fish and birds along North America's Atlantic coast, concludes: “For once more the mountains would be worn away by the endless erosion of water and carried in silt to the sea, and once more all the coast would be water again, and the places of its cities and towns would belong to the sea.” A decade later she published the National Book Award–winning *The Sea Around Us* (1951), whose final sentence is: “For all at last return to the sea—to Oceanus, the ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end.” And in 1955 her ode to shoreline ecologies, *The Edge of the Sea*, was yet another return to form: “As the years pass, and the centuries merge into the unbroken stream of time,
these architects of coral reef and mangrove swamp build toward a shadowy future. But neither the corals nor the mangroves, but the sea itself will determine when that which they build will belong to the land, or when it will be reclaimed for the sea.”

Unlike 1962’s *Silent Spring*, her subversive argument against the overuse of insecticides, widely credited as a crucial step toward the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency, Carson’s first three books—recently collected by the Library of America under the moniker *The Sea Trilogy*—are neither calls to political action nor calls for social change. In her second and third books, there are references to the rising and warming seas, but a man-made explanation for this isn’t put forth. Nor is there a sense of nostalgia or fatalism in these lines, some desperate desire to reach for a pristine refuge or nihiloistically hasten our demise.

For so many writers, the sea has been a beautiful, convenient image for evoking the mystery of human interiority. The sea that the narrators of countless novels have gazed out upon is like the surface of a vast, twinkling unconscious from which fathomless stories are trawled, then lowered once more. But for Carson, the sea connects rather than isolates, reveals rather than obscures. It is the substance of every story she tells.

The earth’s ecological systems, which she often refers to in her oceanic writings as “life itself,” provided her with a menagerie of fascinating terms by which to better understand the boundless energy and imagination of the sea and everything under its domain—the human and nonhuman life it sustained, punished, and inspired. Carson devoted her life to the sea as a scientist, but also for the same reasons that most serious writers commit to their subjects: because to her it was inescapable.

Rachel Carson was born in 1907 in the landlocked town of Springdale, Pa., but her life flowed inexorably toward the sea. William Souder recounts in his 2012 biography of Carson, *On a Farther Shore*, that money was “precarious” in her household when she was growing up; the sole child in her family to finish high school, she attended the Pennsylvania College for Women on a combination of scholarship funds, sales of family heirlooms, and student debt. There she majored in English, favoring Shakespeare, Dickens, Milton, and Twain, and tried her hand at short fiction, poetry, and reporting.

It was the idea of being a writer that captivated her first, from a young age, but it wasn’t until she began taking classes with an enigmatic biology professor named Mary Scott Skinker that Carson developed her famous sense of aim, switching her major to biology. (Souder writes poetically that Skinker “exuded an airy, incorporeal remoteness that may have been due to the fact that she was nearsighted and refused to wear glasses.”) Carson grew close to Skinker and described her in a letter to a friend as “a perfect knockout.” In another letter to a friend around this time, Carson confessed that she had always wanted to write. “But I don’t have much imagination,” she went on. “Biology has given me something to write about.” Another moment of inspiration came when she read Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall” for the first time. Glossing past the poem’s imperialist overtones, she fixated on its oceanic metaphors: “Let [thunder] fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow / For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.” These lines hardened her purpose, to write about a place that so far existed in her imagination alone and yet seemed to connect her to the entire world.

Carson first laid eyes on the Atlantic Ocean after she graduated, while traveling by boat from Manhattan to New Bedford, Mass., on the way to a summer job at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole. There she discovered she didn’t enjoy working in a lab nearly as much as she did observing, studying, and writing about nature. (In *The Edge of the Sea* she even expresses disgust at the thought that she might “collect” a starfish on the beach: “to disturb such a being would have seemed a desecration.”) She studied the migratory behaviors of eels in graduate school at Johns Hopkins (while working part-time as a lab assistant at the medical school, where she presided over rat and fruit fly colonies), but then left in 1935 without a doctorate to work at the US Bureau of Fisheries in Baltimore. Linda Lear recounts in her 1997 biography *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* that Carson’s supervisor, Elmer Higgins, asked her to write an introduction to one of the bureau’s brochures. The resulting 11-page piece, “The World of Waters,” impressed Higgins, but he ultimately rejected it, finding the text too literary for government purposes.

Hannah Gold is a writer living in Brooklyn.
mystery,” but it was only Dorothy whom she fell in love with, and who fell in love with her. The two began exchanging emphatic love letters (often enfolded in family correspondences addressed to Stanley), which indicate they met many times alone. The various books and articles on Carson have often been coy about her sexuality: She was secretive about her private life, worked in a heavily male-dominated field, and died in 1964 at the age of 56, a few years before the ascendency of the gay liberation movement.

In the nine years between the publication of The Edge of the Sea and her death from breast cancer, Carson’s reputation grew and changed drastically. The writer known during much of her life for her erudite portraits of nature achieved a level of celebrity and political influence that had seemed unimaginable. Yet it does not detract from the immense accomplishment of Silent Spring to know her also by the passions that defined her life, if not her legacy. Carson’s editor at Houghton Mifflin, Paul Brooks, told Sue Hubbell, who wrote the introduction to The Edge of the Sea’s second edition, that Carson had “talked for years about doing a book that was vast and unfocused, that was about Life Itself.” Brooks wasn’t in favor of the idea, but William Shaw, who brought Carson’s work to The New Yorker, wanted her to write next about the entire “universe.”

According to Brooks, Carson requested that a piece of her writing about the sea be read at the funeral. The selection—which ultimately wasn’t read, though it’s not clear why—came from a coda to The Edge of the Sea that’s pure poetic flourish reminiscent of a sermon, which speaks of distant coasts “made one by the unifying touch of the sea” and “the stream of life, flowing as inexorably as any ocean current, from past to unknown future.”

Of all her books, Carson’s first, Under the Sea-Wind, reads the most like a collection of fictional stories, yet it features the least human interiority. Its three sections follow a cast of 13 enigmatically named characters (Silverbar the sandlinter, Lophius the angler fish, Oköpk the snow owl) and myriad unnamed creatures of the western Atlantic as they fulfill their migratory destinies between the Arctic and the Florida Keys. It is a meticulously researched feat of nature writing told in a roving close third person that assumes the consciousness of its animal characters. Yet there’s nothing so fantastical about it; her animals don’t have language, but they do possess memory, appetites, preferences, ancestries, and enemies.

The book begins at night on the shores of an unnamed island that “lay across a quiet sound from which the banks shoudered away the South Atlantic rollers.” Dispensing with the pretense of direct observation allows the narrator to see deeply into her environment, reinforcing the imaginative properties of the narrative from the outset. A rat “crafty with the cunning of years and filled with the lust for blood” approaches the water “along a path which his feet and his thick tail had worn to a smooth track through the grass.” We can hear “the elfin shuffle” of a hermit crab across the sand, watch the eels feast “royally” on the plunder in a fisherman’s nets, and mark that all the while “the wind was asleep.”

In later passages, Carson’s descriptions of the smallest creatures—even those invisible to the eye—are often her most ingenious. She conjures owl eggs dying in Arctic snows: “As the snow fell on the still-warm eggs and the hard, bitter cold of the night gripped them, the life fires of the tiny embryos burned low.” On dunes, “beach grasses lean in the wind and with their pointed tips write endless circles in the sand.” My favorite passage follows some newly hatched eel larvae as they drift on the open sea: “Billions of young eels—billions of pairs of black, pinprick eyes peering into the strange sea world that overlay the abyss.”

A change in nature is always a site of spectacle for Carson, a motif throughout her work that begins in Under the Sea-Wind with a series of costume changes. Eels “in silvery wedding dress” swim back out to sea. And this is how she describes the onset of autumn: “Let the green pigments fade. Put on the reds and yellows, then let the leaves fall too, and the stalks wither away. Summer is dying.” Another, more contrived construction that binds her three sea books together is her penchant for using a “tall man” as her favorite unit of measurement: An eel appears that’s “as long as a man is tall and thick and drab as a piece of fire hose,” and later the fin of an orca is “as high as a tall man.” The Edge of the Sea introduces us to knotted wrack (a kind of seaweed) that “may grow taller than the tallest man,” to sea whips “as tall as a man,” and so forth.

Speaking of men, a few do appear in Under the Sea-Wind, but they are not afforded the privilege of destinies or names. We encounter them mainly on a fishing vessel in the book’s final section, which is devoted to the lives of eels. Like a child in a school play who has but one line shakily delivered, the lookout of the vessel shouts: “Mackerel!” Otherwise he does not speak, and his consciousness, such as it is, thinks of nothing but what might occupy a mackerel’s mind. He “sometimes thought about fish as he looked at them on deck or being iced down in the hold,” Carson writes. “What had the eyes of the mackerel seen? Things he’d never see; places he’d never go.” There is a sense here, as throughout her writing, that human life is dependent on all that is nonhuman. Meanwhile, the extent to which the opposite is true becomes a matter of attention paid. Humans are animals that perceive and think about nature; the use of these faculties have the power to keep ecologies in balance. So, in Carson’s schema, it is human forgetfulness, sloth, disinterest, and greed that have undone this pact. “In an age when man has forgotten his origins and is blind even to his most essential needs for survival,” Carson writes in Silent Spring, “water along with other resources has become the victim of his indifference.”

For Carson, the sea connects rather than isolates, reveals rather than obscures.
harder to visualize than eel larvae, like the creation of the world, the rise and fall of islands, and the force of tides.

Carson rarely refers to herself in the first person or reveals anything about herself directly, but you can tell it’s downright painful for her to imagine the earth before there was any water on it. “A Stygian world of heated rock and swirling clouds and gloom,” she calls it. But then the rains fell, and “never have there been such rains since that time.” Nor can she ever, not once, contain her passion for the moon: She bestows upon the celestial body her highest honor—making it the condition of possibility for the sea itself. She writes that the moon “may have been born of a great tidal wave of earthly substance, torn off into space…. [If] the moon was formed in this fashion, the event may have had much to do with shaping the ocean basins and the continents as we know them.” Another obsession is sediments, which she is always likening to books whose pages she longs to read, and one to “a sort of epic poem of the earth.”

It’s in this book, too, that she continues working at her great theme—hinted at in *Sea-Wind* and immortalized in *Silent Spring*—of life’s interconnectedness. “For the globe as a whole, the ocean is the great regulator,” Carson writes. Change is as inevitable as the big herring eating the tiny mackerel spawn, but it relies on patterns of monumental proportions to continuously reproduce life, and it’s these patterns that are examined in *The Sea Around Us*: the sea’s temperature, its topography, its currents. Were the oceans to rise merely 100 feet, she observes, “the surf would break against the foothills of the Appalachians.” Another 500 feet and “the Appalachians would become a chain of mountainous islands.”

Of course, the oceanic balances of power seem stable only when one looks at them as if from space, and Carson views the sea primarily as a network of transformations and tumults, especially at its boundaries. *The Edge of the Sea*—the most gorgeous, memoiristic, and riotous of *The Sea Trilogy*—is her book about the interdependency and resilience of marginal nonhuman life. “Nowhere on the shore is the relation of a creature to its surroundings a matter of a single cause and effect,” Carson writes; “each living thing is bound to its world by many threads.” Entire communities develop in the debris of mussel shells, “a sort of understory inhabited by a variety of animals including worms, crustaceans, echinoderms.” A tiny fish called the Nomeus lives among the tentacles of the poisonous Portuguese man-of-war, even though “some recent workers contend that the fish has no immunity whatever, and that every live Nomeus is simply a very lucky fish.”

Carson refines her idea of the sea as a great drama full of alliances, clashes, and anxieties, every ounce of water a voiceless, teeming argument. “In the sea there are mysterious comings and goings, both in space and time: the movements of migratory species, the strange phenomenon of succession by which, in one and the same area, one species appears in profusion, flourishes for a time, and then dies out, only to have its place taken by another and then another, like actors in a pageant passing before our eyes.”

I wake in the dark
and reach out to snug you close
and your arm
comes free. It falls from your body
like bread. Like
wet rope. And my not yet wakened
mind whispers,
This is what it means to be too
strong for this world.
To be a god, even.
And I chide myself to be more tender,
always more tender,
and as the terror of what I’ve done
begins to swell,
I grow gentle and then
gentler as I remember
you are not
here, have not
been here for years.

MICHAEL BAZZETT

T H E N A T I O N  5 . 3 0 – 6 . 6 . 2 0 2 2

**I Wake in the Dark**

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MICHAEL BAZZETT
The Final Frontier

Olga Ravn brings the office novel to space

BY JESSICA LOUDIS

There is perhaps no better setting for a workplace novel than outer space. With the exception of time taken for the necessary evils of sleep, nourishment, and hygiene, astronauts are always on the clock. In notable works of sci-fi—Solaris, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Gravity—our heroes are marooned on their ships, surveilled either by faceless colleagues in mission control or by an all-seeing operating system. Glimpses of their humanity appear only fleetingly, through flashbacks of children on Earth or a beloved object from home floating in space. As representatives of their country, their planet, and their species, they have an almost military commitment to decorum. This image of a highly efficient and restrained workplace, functioning even under the most distressing conditions, is not just genuinely fictional; it is also a manager’s ideal. It is only when work subsumes life that a person’s labor can be truly optimized.

Such dynamics are hinted at in the subtitle of the Danish novelist and poet Olga Ravn’s first book to be translated into English, The Employees: A Workplace Novel of the 22nd Century. In its imaginative world, the utopian dream of surveillance capitalism has finally come to fruition. Aboard the Six Thousand Ship, where Ravn’s protagonists live, activity and language are carefully shaped around work. The ship’s sizable crew, a mix of humans and humanoids, labor together as they carry out their designated tasks. While the humans struggle with the banalities of this work and the knowledge that they’ll never go home, the humanoids—anthropomorphic creatures who are grown in a lab—gambles do whatever is asked of them. Both are aware of their limited existence, and both are unable to do anything to change their circumstances. While the two groups are physically similar, the division between them drives Ravn’s narrative. Through asides and digressions, we learn that the first generation of humanoids were hatched from pods of biomaterial and then injected with hormones to develop emotional attachments. We learn that it takes two years for one to grow to maturity and be able to work; that they never die and instead are continually “reuploaded,” meaning their memories are erased and minds installed in new bodies. Some are sympathetic toward their human colleagues; some even fall in love. Over time, a gap widens as the humanoids recognize that merely becoming human might not be enough for them.

Al awakening is a classic sci-fi trope dating back to Karel Čapek’s 1921 play R.U.R.: Rossum’s Universal Robots, in which the robots become aware of their subervience to humans and stage a violent revolt. But Ravn is up to something different in The Employees, exchanging dystopian clichés for something closer to the emotional striving of a coming-of-age narrative: Imagine I, Robot meets Flowers for Algernon with a dash of the office novel. By doing so, Ravn aligns her compact novel with works like Spike Jonze’s Her, Kazuo Ishiguro’s Klara and the Sun, and Annalee Newitz’s Autonomous, in which robots are on the other end of the sympathy spectrum, no longer merely reflections of the dangers of human hubris but characters in their own right. Self-aware enough to recognize their own limitations yet unable to overcome them, Ravn’s humanoids express humanity’s most fundamental desires while remaining forever at a remove from them.

A slight 130 pages, The Employees is structured as a series of testimonies from both human and humanoid crew members taken by unnamed distant bureaucrats. It has the air of a classified internal document that an
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PUBLICATION DATE: JULY 2022

Learn more at www.aupresses.org, and take a design retrospective through the history of AUPresses’ look.
executive might be given during an onboarding. “The following statements,” the book begins, “were collected over a period of 18 months, during which time the committee interviewed the employees with a view to gaining insight into how they related to the objects and the rooms in which they were placed.” These mysterious “objects,” though we never learn what makes them so valuable, are the reason the Six Thousand Ship is stationed near the Earth-like planet New Discovery. There, they grow in the wild, until they are collected and taken on board. Alive and sentient, the objects are described in unnerving organic detail: One has “deep yellow grooves” that ooze a “resin-like substance”; another has a “fibrous,” “pink, cord-like thing” emanating from its abdomen. At one point, it lays an egg. There’s more than a touch of body horror to these descriptions, and the impressions they make linger in the background.

Much like listening to the black box recording from a plane crash, we know that by the time the book has reached us, something has gone terribly wrong. The objects have caused “permanent deviations” in the employees; the interviews are an attempt to understand what has happened. And indeed, for the humanoid crew, interactions with the objects do awaken emotions: empathy and longing, a desire for intimacy and love. In some ways, the humanoids recall the alien replicas in Solaris—painfully aware that they are not human, and left to struggle with that knowledge. Once this is recognized, there is no going back. “They tell me I can’t carry out my work correctly due to functional maladjustments with respect to certain feelings,” reads one humanoid’s statement. And another:

All I want is to be assimilated into a collective, human community where someone braids my hair with flowers and white curtains sway in a warm breeze; where every morning I wake up and drink a chilled glass of iced tea, drive a car across a continent, kick the dirt, fill my nostrils with the air of the desert and move in with someone, get married, bake cookies, push a stroller, learn to play an instrument, dance a waltz. I think I’ve seen all this in your educational material, is that right? What are cookies?

But the disruptions set in motion by the alien objects aren’t limited to the humanoids. Their effects are similarly jarring among the human crew. It’s as if they “came from our dreams, some distant past we carry deep inside us, like a recollection without language,” reads Statement 040. One administrator, who describes their job as ensuring that “the human section of the crew doesn’t…become catatonic,” notes that for humans, the objects have the unexpected effect of alleviating nostalgia. “To us,” one statement reads, “the objects are like an artificial postcard from Earth. To [the humanoids] they’re a postcard from the future.” At one point, the human crew members begin to suffer from “epidermal eruptions”—outbreaks of warts over patches of skin “specked with green and black dots.” The objects have something to do with this, though no one can say exactly what. Eventually the humans withdraw into their quarters, where memories of Earth color their dreams. “Being unable to leave here in our lifetimes,” reads one statement, “we have all of us long since come to terms with the prospect of facing our deaths here on board the ship, and of never returning home.”

When the humanoids are called in to talk with HR about the objects, they are unable to provide adequate accounts in the corporate-speak they have been programmed with. Asked to describe the aspirations and feelings that the objects have prompted, they find themselves lacking. Some become lonely. Some try to square their newfound sense of self with their loyalty to “the program”—the code that had hitherto given them life and continues to give them a sense of purpose. Others do not. “You made me, you gave me language, and now I see your failings and deficiencies,” declares one in a statement. “I see your inadequate plans.”

This is a social ecosystem on the brink of collapse, and we are invited to watch things unravel. Confusing things further, somebody seems to have mixed up the files—the statements are loosely chronological but out of order, jumping from 004 to 012 to 006, and so on. Eventually we gather that the humanoids are planning a rebellion. But information is disclosed sparingly. We are never told what the mission of the Six Thousand Ship is. Plot isn’t the point, though. We know from the beginning how the story will end.

There are no heroes in The Employees. In fact, it’s difficult to differentiate between characters within the chorus of voices reporting feelings of anger, self-discovery, resignation, or grief. None of the statements are attributed, and only context reveals whether the speaker is a humanoid (“I’ve never not been employed. I was made for work”) or a human (“I carry the certainty of my future death with honor”). Sometimes even the speaker isn’t sure which one they are. To add to the confusion, the statements we are reading are carefully crafted with the authorities in mind, and the expressions of longing and doubt are framed in terms of furthering the mission. But with all the voices stripped of the exterior signs of individuality, each account is distinct, marked by idiosyncratic memories and rich sensory impressions. No unifying narrative emerges out of this collection of disparate accounts. The more we read, the more we recognize that the “problem” the committee is trying to solve is that of the individual: of workers whose desires and ambitions cannot be neatly assimilated into a corporate framework.

It’s revealing that Ravn chose to describe The Employees as a “workplace” novel rather than a novel about work. Indeed, the employees rarely discuss their tasks so much as stolen moments of freedom in the working day—an encounter with a colleague in the canteen, gazing at the valleys on New Discovery, holding one of the objects. While the book can be read as a critique of capitalism or perhaps even a parable for unionizing, Ravn is also interested in the incompatibility between our private selves and the “whole self” the workplace demands while we’re on the job. The more the employees are asked to talk, to represent themselves and be present, the more these unnamed char-

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Jessica Loudis is a writer and editor in Berlin. Her work has appeared in The New Republic, Artforum, the London Review of Books, and The Times Literary Supplement.
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Learn more at www.aupresses.org, and take a design retrospective through the history of AUPresses’ look.
acters find themselves struggling with the artificial circumstances in which they are trapped, in search of any way out. Watching this unfold from the perspective of the overseers, we learn of events only after they’ve happened: after a small rebellion has been quashed, after a worker has asked to be placed in dormancy mode, and after others have isolated themselves within their quarters. Eventually, without any single crescendo, these small acts of resistance overwhelm the bosses’ ability to manage the situation, and a decision is made.

When the book came out, Ravn was already something of a star on Copenhagen’s literary scene. The daughter of a well-known Danish pop singer, she had released two books of poetry and a novel, wrote regularly for the country’s leading papers, and had founded a writing school focused on the work of female and queer writers. She had also helped resuscitate the poet and writer Tove Ditlevsen’s reputation in Denmark by editing a collection of her selected works for Gyldendal, the country’s oldest book publisher and Ravn’s then-employer. It was navigating the emotional landscape of that job that informed her writing of *The Employees*: Ravn was struck by the effective demands of the workplace, the way it altered one’s speech and behavior. In an interview with the Belgian media outlet *Bruzz*, she described the experience as akin to being lost in space before a sudden crash landing:

There was just something about coming from this very soft world, where there is no night and day, no eight-hour structure, and where everything is soft and deep and small. The clash going from caring for an infant to office-work really triggered me, and made me want to examine how to remain soft in a hard environment.

In science fiction, Ravn found a way of framing her protagonists as both recognizable and fundamentally alien—and doing the same with the world she created. This precipitated a clash not only of characters but of genres. Science fiction has always sought to expand the horizons of the possible, whereas workplace fiction tends to do the opposite. After all, one goal of the office—is with its novelistic representations—is to craft a vocabulary that allows its user to maximize ambiguity while creating the appearance of action. (See: “deliverables,” “synergy,” “touching base,” “futureproofing.”) The combination of these categories produces a novel at once totally new and intimately revealing, personal and foreign. As Ravn remarked in a recent talk, sci-fi is a genre about how we make tools out of things, and what, in turn, that tells us about ourselves.

In *The Employees*, her tool of choice is language. While the humans on the Six Thousand Ship are paralyzed by memories, incapable of communicating about anything other than the past or the weather, the humanoids begin to blossom awkwardly. “My body wants to live, and my skin is lustrous,” remarks one. “Whenever I see a child hologram it makes me feel sad, because it reminds me that I’m never going to have a child myself,” notes another. The objects have triggered a glitch in their code, and like a virus seeking to replicate itself, they have suddenly discovered the will to survive. As the tensions between the humans and the humanoids grow stronger, the differences between them seem to disappear. Death, once the primary divider, takes on a new meaning, as the humanoids come to value life not as a bug but as a singular way of experiencing the present. “We are but craft, fleeting carriers of the program,” one laments. “Shortly we will be gone, to regenerate in some other form.” Humans, in turn, have rendered themselves robotic.

Once these feelings have been awakened, things deteriorate quickly. As the humanoids begin to segregate themselves from the humans, two officers are removed from the ship and the missions to New Discovery are discontinued. A humanoid kills a human. Several humanoids are dismantled, and one human locks herself in her room with a hologram of her child back on Earth. Finally, a choice is made by the nameless corporate authorities back home to dismantle all the humanoid employees. When this fails, another decision is made: to “terminate the Six Thousand Ship,” with “all bio-materials to be disintegrated while preserving the ship itself.” Eight humanoid crew members leave the ship and descend onto New Discovery. “We wish to spend our final time in the valley,” one says into a recorder, days after the rest of the crew have died. “We’ve talked about the risk that in committing ourselves to this decision we might not be reuploaded, and this we accept.”

We read these dispatches as found material, knowing the end is coming but not knowing exactly how. The novella plays with many of the classic themes of sci-fi revolution and the elusive question of what it “means” to be human—yet refuses to commit to a single definition. However much their selves may shine through in unguarded moments, our protagonists are nameless, parts of a greater machine. Simply through this framing, we have more insight into mission control, whose motivations are the same as those of bosses on any planet: to extract the most work from their employees, to maximize profit and reduce internal friction. Ravn has chosen to place us as the silent observer, the extraterrestrial McKinsey consultant, in order to make us understand that the ship must be eliminated for the good of the mission.

*The Employees* grew out of a collaboration between Ravn and the Danish artist Lea Gulddditte Hestelund. The latter was preparing an installation and sculpture show at the time and approached Ravn about writing an accompanying fictional text. What was initially intended to be a booklet expanded into a novella, with Ravn first writing short dispatches about the works in the exhibition (the “objects” of the text) and eventually imagining her own works, some of which Hestelund went on to produce.

The strange origins of the novella are not fully reconciled in its final version—for all the description of the objects at the beginning, they soon disappear almost entirely—but the book also develops an emotional resonance beyond its initial prompt. Picking up on the unsettling, intimate, and playful qualities of Hestelund’s work—which tends to reference bodies and alien life forms and makes use of idiosyncratic smells and soft organic shapes—Ravn creates a world that is complementary to our own and yet far more menacing.
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Those who took the active ingredients lost almost 4 times more weight than the placebo group. Even more exciting was the quantity of inches they lost from their waistline.

The group taking OxiTrim’s active ingredients lost almost 5 inches of belly fat. That’s equal to 2 pants sizes for men... and... 4 to 6 dress sizes for women.

The pill even helped maintain healthy cholesterol and blood sugar levels. This is especially good news for anyone who is overweight, given the health risks they often face.

How It Works

The active ingredients in OxiTrim trigger weight loss in a way scientists have not seen before. Research shows they activate a protein in the body that breaks down fatty acids found in abdominal fat.

“You can think of OxiTrim as a match that lights the fuse in belly fat,” said Kenneth. “This fuse affects metabolic rate which results in enhanced fat loss around the mid section and other parts of the body, too.”

Kenneth also said, “Dieters should know OxiTrim is made from natural plant extracts. It is not a drug. It does not contain any stimulants or dangerous chemicals either.”

“Plus, unlike a lot of other diet pills, OxiTrim won’t increase your heart rate or make you anxious. In fact, you won’t even know you’re taking it until you begin to see a slimmer waistline,” he added.

Approved By Top Doctors

“The advanced ingredients found in OxiTrim have been used successfully in France for years. The clinical trials show they can burn fat fast for those with a few extra pounds to lose.” — Dr. Ahmad Alsayes.

“OxiTrim is the most exciting breakthrough in natural weight loss to date. It’s a proven pill for men and women who want to cut pounds of belly fat.” — Dr. M. Usman, M.D.

“I have reviewed the research and have decided to recommend OxiTrim to overweight people. That’s because OxiTrim doesn’t just reduce weight, it helps maintain healthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels, too.” — Dr. Ahmad Alsayes.

110% Money Back Guarantee

Amazing feedback from users of OxiTrim has generated a wave of confidence at the company. So much so that they now offer OxiTrim with a 110% money back guarantee.

The company’s president, Michael Kenneth, says, “We’ve seen how well it works. Now we want to remove any risk for those who might think OxiTrim sounds too good to be true.

Simply take the pill exactly as directed. You must enjoy fast and impressive weight loss. Otherwise, return the product as directed and you’ll receive 100% of your money back plus an extra 10%.

How To Get OxiTrim

Today marks the official nationwide release of OxiTrim in America. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to every person who calls before inventory runs out.

A Regional Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try OxiTrim.

The Order Hotline is now open. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE 1-888-298-7283. Then provide the operator with the special discount approval code: OTN22. The company will do the rest.

Initial supplies of OxiTrim are limited. Those who don’t call soon may have to wait until more inventory is produced. This could take as long as 6 six weeks.

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. All doctors mentioned are remunerated for their services. All clinical studies on OxiTrim’s active ingredient were independently conducted and were not sponsored by the makers of OxiTrim.
In the weeks since Vladimir Putin decided to send troops into Ukraine, the sheer number and severity of economic sanctions imposed on Russia have surpassed the expectations of almost every previous analysis. Since then, many questions have arisen about the consequences this new set of sanctions could have, both for the war itself and for the global economy. The Nation spoke with Nicholas Mulder, a professor of modern European history at Cornell University, about his new book, The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War, and the likely consequences of the sanctions on Russia.

—Pablo Pryluka

PP: How did you get interested in the history of sanctions?

NM: When I arrived in graduate school, I had a plan to work on a different kind of project, but there was a big new wave of interest in the history of internationalism, and particularly the League of Nations in the interwar period. So I found myself at the center of that.

This project, at a purely historiographical level, started with a topic that I wanted to read more about but could not find any good explanation for: why sanctions had begun to be so important in the 20th century. When did this way of thinking about the world as a set of flows that you can interdict and use as a weapon begin?

PP: In the book, you show that raw material controls and financial blockades during World War I were the predecessors of economic sanctions. How did they change the course of the war?

NM: The initial aim of the Allied blockade in World War I was to operate through the control of raw materials and, later on, to expand these controls over money flows and finance. It was basically a campaign of economic strangulation and of exhausting the fighting power of these modern industrialized trading states in Central Europe. But as the war went on, two additional aims emerged. One was to create a postwar order in which these countries could no longer be aggressors—particularly Germany. The other aim was articulated most strongly by Woodrow Wilson: that the reintegration of the defeated nations after World War I into the world economy could only happen if they fulfilled certain political conditions. And this was really the beginning of sanctions as a tool of ideological transformation, of regime change, and it tied the lifting of sanctions or the lifting of the blockade to a political move toward liberalism and away from autocracy.

PP: Moving to the present day, why do you think economic sanctions were imposed on Russia and some Russian billionaires at full strength?

NM: My sense is that sanctions became the domain into which a lot of the Western desire to act strongly against Russia has been channeled. There are three basic domains: military hard power, economic pressure or aid, and diplomatic negotiations. The softest and the hardest, basically, were off the table for various reasons. But the outcome will be determined by all three of these domains, not just by one.

PP: What could be the unintended consequences of these economic sanctions? Could they play a role in reshaping the global economy?

NM: We do have to reckon with the fact that a large part of the world—China, India, Indonesia, a lot of Latin American countries, South Africa, Pakistan, Turkey—are not necessarily keyed into this use of sanctions. That means there are more opportunities for trade diversion by countries that are under sanctions. You start to see that with Russia now, but we have already seen that with Iran, for example. And it also means that the real obstacle to sanctions in the 21st century is not going to be technical, because the West has shown that it can operate the levers of the dollar system with radical effects. The real obstacle will be political; it will be keeping the use of this tool legitimate in the face of so many countries that have a lot at stake and quite a lot to fear from the unrestricted use of this instrument. That is where the real future of sanctions will be determined—not at the level of technocratic policy-making.

“The real obstacle to sanctions in the 21st century...will be political.”

Nicholas Mulder

Q&A
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Have you ever said to yourself “I’d love to get a computer, if only I could figure out how to use it.” Well, you’re not alone. Computers were supposed to make our lives simpler, but they’ve gotten so complicated that they are not worth the trouble. With all of the “pointing and clicking” and “dragging and dropping” you’re lucky if you can figure out where you are. Plus, you are constantly worrying about viruses and freeze-ups. If this sounds familiar, we have good news for you. There is finally a computer that’s designed for simplicity and ease of use. It’s the WOW Computer, and it was designed with you in mind. This computer is easy-to-use, worry-free and literally puts the world at your fingertips.

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