The TICK APOCALYPSE

How humans disrupted the environment—and fueled a new era of tick-borne diseases.

JIMMY TOBIAS
Join The Nation’s 2022 Cruise!
December 10–17, 2022

This December, join The Nation for a week of lively debate and spirited discussion in the Caribbean. We’ll set sail from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and dock at Willemstad, Curaçao; Oranjestad, Aruba; and Half Moon Cay, Bahamas.

Join Katrina vanden Heuvel, John Nichols, Elie Mystal, Bhaskar Sunkara, Joan Walsh, Sasha Abramsky, Cecile Richards, Ben Jealous, Anand Gopal, and many more speakers to be announced soon!

Visit NationCruise.com to book today!

The Nation purchases carbon offsets to cover the emissions generated by our tours in order to help mitigate effects on the climate.
FEATURES

14 The Tick Apocalypse
JIMMY TOBIAS
How human environmental disruption led to the explosion of Lyme disease.

20 Cheney vs. Trump
JOHN NICHOLS
Liz Cheney isn’t running against Trump, but he’s running against her.

26 Big House Boondoggle
LAUREN GILL
Across the country, counties are using Covid relief money to build new jails.

EDITORIAL

4 Dear Biden: Do Better
ANDREA GRIMES

COMMENT

5 Uber’s Hired Liars
The company paid top economists to write flattering papers.
DOUG HENWOOD

6 Selective Empathy
Far from deflecting justice, asking “What about...?” promotes it.
VIET THANH NGUYEN

THE ARGUMENT

12 Farmers Need a “Bean New Deal”
MATTHEW MILES GOODRICH

COLUMNS

8 Objection!
The states bent on banning abortion won’t stop at their borders.
ELIE MYSTAL

10 Subject to Debate
Can abortion opponents who care about poverty transform the GOP?
KATHA POLLIT

13 Deadline Poet
Mohammed bin Salman
CALVIN TRILLIN

46 Imara Jones
LAURA FLANDERS

B&A

32 Pure Negation
The anti-realism of Vladimir Sorokin.
GREGORY AFINOGENOV

36 A Burning Planet
Should the climate movement embrace sabotage?
THEA RIOFRANCOS

Letters

“...Millions in abortion-ban states have neither the right to end a pregnancy nor the ability to give that child a decent life.”

FRANK GUAN

Objection!

Subject to Debate

Deadline Poet

Pulling Punches

Read this issue on July 23 at TheNation.com—before anyone else. Activate your online account: TheNation.com/register
Dear Biden: Do Better

The proclamation “I will aid and abet abortion” appeared across social media soon after Donald Trump’s Supreme Court justices did what they were appointed to do: overturn Roe v. Wade. Leaving aside the question of whether it’s a great idea to advertise one’s intent to engage in legally risky behavior, the posts signaled rising anger over the court’s endorsement of forced pregnancy. Notably absent amid that anger was any actionable outrage from President Biden, who had nearly two months after a leaked Supreme Court draft to mobilize against the elimination of legal access to abortion in at least 13, and as many as 26, states. Instead Biden has only just begun “mulling” the option of declaring a public health emergency, after taking two weeks following the decision to issue an executive order that some called a decent first step and others described as toothless.

Of course, there is no magic wand here—no one, Biden included, has the ability to reinstate Roe’s protections overnight. But the tenor of Biden’s responses to criticism of his initial inaction has been that since he can’t do much, why do anything at all?

Biden has long shown an unwillingness to champion abortion rights. But he’s also long been desperate for the presidency. His tepid response to Dobbs signals a troubling failure to understand his responsibilities to the voters who elected him, and to comprehend the power of political messaging—that messaging is, arguably, politics itself. Instead his paralysis allows the anti-abortion right to further dominate the conversation, a rookie mistake from a 79-year-old who has spent 50 years on the national political stage.

Now is the time to make sure that tens of millions of highly motivated, pissed-off voters feel heard, seen, and appreciated.

And yet the White House is blaming “activists” for getting grabby about reproductive freedom. This contempt for the abortion providers, storytellers, funders, and clinic defenders who have dared to demand better from the president and the Democratic Party while risking their careers, their families, and sometimes their lives in support of abortion access reeks of condescension toward some of the party’s most reliable supporters. And it is an unforced error that could cost Biden the one thing he really does seem to care about: his job.

While Biden has repeatedly missed opportunities to protect abortion access—he could have taken action when he took office, when the Dobbs leak dropped, or the day the decision came down, instead of appearing to be caught off guard by a ruling the entire country knew was coming in a case that has been ongoing for years—he never misses an opportunity to remind us about the next election. Large swaths of his party are in lockstep, including Nancy Pelosi, who this spring campaigned for an anti-abortion Democrat and still had the gall to use the end of Roe to raise money.

Now Americans—the majority of whom support legal abortion—are caught up in the Democratic Party leadership’s ouroboros of feigned helplessness. Democrats claim they can’t protect abortion unless we vote for them, so we must wait patiently for the next opportunity to vote for people who have not yet protected abortion, but who may do so at some future time, but only if we’ve voted enough.

“Vote in a few months” is a breathtakingly inept and cynical rejoinder to the problem of forced pregnancy today. But it reflects a systemic problem with American liberalism: a refusal to take the most forward-thinking parts of the Democratic base seriously. I’m not even talking about radical lefties—it’s the Congressional Black Caucus and popular senators like Elizabeth Warren who are calling on Biden to declare a public health emergency. Rather than acknowledge the lived experiences of people of color, the Democratic establishment panders to imagined white, middle-class, center-right voters who it believes will actually switch parties if they hear Biden say “Fund the police” enough.

Now is not the time to reluctantly do the bare minimum. From attacks on trans people to racist “critical race theory” bans, the fascism of the American right is not merely creeping—it’s accelerating, with the Supreme Court’s help. Democrats must get ahead of these battles, even if that means taking a few hits, instead of promising to jump into the ring only when victory is guaranteed.

Andrea Grimes is a writer, editor, and activist who covers the politics of reproductive health, rights, and justice.
**COMMENT/DOUG HENWOOD**

**Uber’s Hired Liars**

_The company took some of the world’s leading economists for a ride._

A **FORMER UBER EXECUTIVE HAS LEAKED MORE THAN 124,000 DOCUMENTS TO THE GUARDIAN AND OTHER NEWS OUTLETS, REVEALING A LONG CAMPAIGN OF LYING, LAWFREETING, AND OTHER CHICANEY THAT HELPED MAKE THE COMPANY A WORLDWIDE GIANT—THOUGH ONE THAT HAS YET TO TURN A REAL PROFIT. THE EXECUTIVE, MARC MACGAN, SAW THE LEAK AS A FORM OF EXPIATION FOR HIS PREVIOUS WORK. AS HE TOLD THE WASHINGTON POST, “I WAS THE ONE TALKING TO GOVERNMENTS, I WAS THE ONE PUSHING THIS WITH THE MEDIA, I WAS THE ONE TELLING PEOPLE THAT THEY SHOULD CHANGE THE RULES BECAUSE DRIVERS WERE GOING TO BENEFIT AND PEOPLE WERE GOING TO GET SO MUCH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY. WHEN THAT TURNED OUT NOT TO BE THE CASE—WE HAD ACTUALLY SOLD PEOPLE A LIE—HOW CAN YOU HAVE A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IF YOU DON’T STAND UP AND OWN YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO HOW PEOPLE ARE BEING TREATED TODAY?”**

Among other things, the documents detail the company’s strategy of invading new markets whether it was welcome or not. It was especially not welcomed by existing taxi drivers, who often attacked Uber cars and their operators. Uber’s founding CEO, Travis Kalanick, welcomed the attacks. He told his team, “Violence guarantee [sic] success.” It would make Uber look like a bold disruptor of the status quo, as if “legacy” cab drivers were a privileged class.

Of particular interest to someone on the economic beat is the company’s purchase of friendly research from esteemed economists. According to The Guardian’s article, it doesn’t seem that Uber had to work too hard to find takers. The company’s model is a neoliberal economist’s dream, a world where, like the stock market, everything is frictionlessly traded at freely floating prices, and employers are untroubled by the need to provide anything like job security or benefits.

Several high-profile German and French economists were eager to play. One hired hand, Augustin Landier of the Toulouse School of Economics, told Uber’s publicity team that he’d be happy to write a report that would be “actionable for direct PR to prove Uber’s positive economic role,” for 100,000 euros. It worked. In March 2016, the Financial Times, drawing on the work of Landier and his collaborator, MIT business school professor David Thesmar, reported that Uber was “a route out of the French banlieues” (the impoverished suburbs where much of the country’s immigrant poor live)—“but a regulatory clampdown looms.” The FT didn’t disclose the company’s sponsorship of the research, nor did it mention that the income figures it reported didn’t deduct the drivers’ costs.

In the US, Uber hired Alan Krueger, a distinguished Princeton economist, to write a paper on the company and especially its “driver-partners” (Uber’s term at the time). Krueger’s coauthor was Jonathan Hall, an Uber staff economist, and the 2015 paper was based on a company-sponsored survey of its drivers. The survey had a dismal response rate of 11 percent, so there was no way to know how representative it was, but that didn’t stop Krueger from using it. It was also poorly designed, with leading questions and numerous other flaws, as Janine Berg and Hannah Johnston showed in a 2018 paper. Uber spent a fortune trying to get riders to trust the company. Thanks to these leaked docs, we now know that Uber lied as a routine business strategy—though, as is often the case with leaks, they just confirm what we knew all along.

When I first read Krueger’s paper, I was pained to see the economist—who died by suicide in 2019—producing such propaganda. Though no radical, Krueger was a decent liberal who’d done important work in the 1990s with David Card, the Berkeley economist, showing that raising the minimum wage didn’t result in job loss, undercutting a classic right-wing argument against labor-friendly legislation. That history made him an especially attractive target for Uber, which was eager to fight its image as a ruthless exploiter of its drivers—Krueger wasn’t some Chicago school priest of laissez-faire. Yet like their French counterparts, Krueger and his Uber coauthor didn’t deduct driver costs, yielding preposterously inflated income estimates. According to The Guardian, Krueger and Hall’s paper was “widely quoted in support of Uber as a creator of good jobs,... Internal Uber emails note that [Krueger] was ‘helpful with the press.’”

When I interviewed drivers for my 2015 article on “the sharing economy” in The Nation, I asked several how much they made. When they offered some numbers in response, I asked if that was their gross—or net of their costs. Several had no idea and hadn’t thought about it. There’s currently a thread on an Uber drivers’ Web forum where they’re confronting the challenge of calculating costs. One would expect, though, that prestigious economists would understand these basic accounting issues.

In his essay “The Dismal Science,” H.L. Mencken, no anti-capitalist, argued that economists were the least free of academics. Unlike archaeologists or bacteriologists, they deal with a subject that “hits the employers of the professors where they live”—economists didn’t dare cross the rich trustees who run universities if they wanted to remain employed. Over the decades, mainstream economists have done plenty to make the plutocrats feel good about themselves, and to persuade the rest of us to feel good about the plutocrats. But could even Mencken have imagined that 100 years after his essay was published, economists, rather than seeking the truth, would happily flatter their employers for a nice six-figure consulting fee?
Selective Empathy

Far from deflecting justice, asking “What about…?” is essential to achieving it.

In the war in Ukraine and the Western reactions to it, we see a real-time example of how empathy and hypocrisy sometimes go hand in hand. Of course Ukrainians deserve sympathy—and much more—for their suffering under Russia’s invasion. But as other populations who are undergoing or have undergone bombardment, occupation, or other forms of domination—often by nations in the West or their allies—have remarked, “What about us?” This raises the issue of when one can reasonably ask this question without being accused of “whataboutism”—the practice of deflecting a demand for justice or care with a self-serving claim about one’s own victimization or that of supposedly equally deserving others.

As someone who came to the United States as a refugee fleeing the Vietnam War, I’ve asked myself “What about…?” many times. When I visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which commemorates the more than 58,000 Americans who died in the war, I wonder about the 3 million dead Vietnamese and whether a nation’s memory and moral imagination can be capacious enough to remember not only one’s own dead, but the dead of one’s enemy and allies. The problem is mirrored in Vietnam, where the government built numerous memorials to honor the 1.1 million North Vietnamese war “martyrs” but erased the more than 200,000 South Vietnamese soldiers who died.

And what about Laos and Cambodia, where the suffering was also tremendous? To draw attention to Laos and Cambodia in no way diminishes what happened in Vietnam. Rather, not discussing Laos and Cambodia produces only a partial understanding of a war in which North Vietnam sent its troops into both countries while the United States carpet-bombed them—a strategy that arguably destabilized Cambodia enough to help give rise to the Khmer Rouge.

Recently, the United Nations and the Cambodian government conducted trials of former high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials, focusing on a handful who were in power in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. But what about all the other Khmer Rouge participants who might have had a role in atrocities? The fact that the current prime minister, Hun Sen, was a Khmer Rouge officer might have something to do with the limited scope of the UN inquiry. Or what about the American bombing, which might be a war crime? Asking “What about…?” in this context does not deflect justice, but asks, legitimately, about what constitutes a crime and who qualifies as a victim or a perpetrator.

I was skeptical, then, when Pentagon press secretary John Kirby became emotional talking about war atrocities and Vladimir Putin. “It’s difficult to look at some of the images and imagine that any well-thinking, serious, mature leader would do that,” Kirby said. “I can’t talk to his psychology, but I think we can all speak to his depravity.” I am trying to remember the last time an American military or wartime official became emotional discussing civilian deaths that occurred because of American weaponry or American policy, such as embargoes and sanctions. What makes Putin depraved, versus an American president who orders carpet-bombing or drone strikes that inevitably result in civilian deaths?

The answer is apparently that the monstrous Putin intends to slaughter, but well-meaning Americans have good intentions, lawyers, and... innocence. Graham Greene depicted the consequences of this mix of innocence, naivety, and high explosives in his 1955 novel The Quiet American, in which the idealistic CIA agent Alden Pyle ends up killing dozens of Vietnamese civilians. “It was a pity,” Pyle says, “but you can’t always hit your target. Anyway, they died in the right cause…. You could say they died for democracy.”

Quiet Americans are still with us. After American drone strikes killed hundreds of civilians in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, for example, the Pentagon excused itself from culpability by noting that its troops followed the rules of engagement and the laws of war. This appeal to legality avoids the obvious point: Those who make the laws rarely see themselves as criminals. It is almost impossible to imagine an American president or general being prosecuted for war crimes at The Hague for war crimes, because the cliché is correct: Might makes right.

Gen. Curtis LeMay, who commanded the American bombers that laid waste to Japanese cities during World War II, put it this way: If the United States had lost the war, the Americans would have been the war criminals. What’s the difference between Putin’s strategy of leveling cities and LeMay’s brand of total war, which he continued in the Korean War? “There are no innocent civilians,” LeMay said. “It is their government and you are fighting a people, you are not trying to fight an armed force anymore. So it doesn’t bother me so much to be killing the so-called innocent bystanders.”

LeMay’s rhetoric is impolite and would doubtless be considered politically incorrect, but his sentiment is shared not only by Putin but by quite a few Americans. Consider the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For many Americans, the killing of Japanese civilians was justified because of Japanese military aggression and because the bombings prevented, hypothetically, the deaths of tens of thousands of American soldiers who would have had to invade Japan. American public outrage forced a
1994 Smithsonian exhibit on the *Enola Gay* to withdraw even a hint of criticism, or empathy, for Japanese civilians. Given that Ukrainian civilians have been depicted in the media as arming themselves to fight Russian soldiers, Putin may see them exactly as LeMay saw German and Japanese civilians.

For both Putin and many Americans, “our” lives are worth more than “their” lives. For the philosopher Judith Butler, writing about the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, some lives are “grievable,” particularly those of our troops and our allies, but other lives are not, particularly the ones taken by our military. In the unfortunately classic American example of such a contrast between “ours” and “theirs,” only one US soldier, Lt. William Calley, was convicted in the massacre of 504 Vietnamese civilians at My Lai in 1968. He ordered the killing of civilians and murdered 22 himself. Yet Calley’s life sentence was reduced to 10 years, and he was pardoned after three and a half years by President Nixon. A considerable portion of the American people sympathized more with the American murderer, whose actions they saw as being induced by the “fog of war,” than with the Vietnamese dead. But if war always produces a fog, and if the American military is constantly at war—because that is what our military is designed for—then the inevitable consequence of American military might is civilian death.

Intentionality and innocence are irrelevant when American policy drives us to accept this inevitability of killing and displacing civilians, most of whom have been nonwhite in the post–World War II era until Ukraine. Even if Putin is intentional in his actions, are the American military-industrial complex and its leaders any less intentional? Is a Russian “special military operation” any less euphemistic or Orwellian than an American “Department of Defense” that somehow finds itself regularly at war? If we Americans are appalled at the Russian killing of children, why don’t we teach to our own children the words of Gen. Jacob H. Smith, who ordered his soldiers to “kill everyone over 10” in the Philippine-American War? Or the 1864 Sand Creek massacre, when US Army troops massacred about 150 Cheyenne and Arapaho people, two-thirds of whom were women and children?

This is not “whataboutism” intended to render a moral equivalency and abdicate judgment, dismissing Russian atrocities by foregrounding the long history of American ones. That’s what President Trump did when he acknowledged that Putin is a killer but added, “There are a lot of killers. You think our country’s so innocent?” The same moral shrug of the shoulders is evident from some on the left who defend Putin or hesitate to criticize Xi Jinping—as if condemning them for their atrocities or excesses inevitably endorses American hegemony. The forced choice between a declining American hegemony and Russian and Chinese would-be hegemonists is a false choice between competing nation-states that weaponize, among other things, selective empathy, innocence, and outrage.

After 9/11, an innocent and outraged George W. Bush attempted to enforce selective empathy by declaring, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” Even I, an occasionally satirical novelist, could not imagine the real-world postscript when Bush criticized Putin in a recent speech, describing “the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq.” Bush paused. “I mean, of Ukraine.” He paused again. “Iraq too.” The audience laughed.

Perhaps with time’s passage they could laugh at the absurdity of the American war in Iraq, or at how both the United States and Russia have deployed narratives of rescuing innocents to support their aims. But the history of the US and Europe shows that these narratives are often excuses to enact colonialism and white supremacy, which defined white and European lives as being innocent, priceless, and worth more than the lives of Indigenous, Black, brown, or Asian people. Their lives were either worthless or only useful for their labor, land, or resources.

Even the rescue of (white) Ukrainian refugees by the West is contaminated by Western racism. Nonwhite residents and international students fleeing Ukraine were harassed or detained at the Polish border; meanwhile, Ukrainian refugees arriving at the southern border of the United States are allowed in freely, while brown immigrants—many of them refugees—continue to wait there or face deportation.

Selective empathy and grieving seek to prevent us from making connections and asking “What about…?” questions. The exploitation of Martin Luther King Jr.’s words exemplify this. Americans are eager to portray King as an anti-racist humanist committed to making America better; King the radical internationalist is forgotten. His civil rights colleagues tried to discourage him from making his 1967 speech “Beyond Vietnam,” encouraging him to stick to the liberation of Black Americans. But King argued that poor Black men were being sent from Georgia and Harlem, “in brutal solidarity” with poor white men, to kill Vietnamese people in a racist war. King could connect Black and Vietnamese experiences because he refused the politics of grievability whereby American lives were worth more than Vietnamese ones.

King also rejected the simplistic Cold War alignment of America with good and communism with evil, condemning the United States as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.” When pundits declare that “the Cold War has never ended,” we must remember that such rhetoric centers the West, which has encouraged wars in other countries to protect its own homelands. Faced with an either/or choice between the United States and Russia, us versus them, I say neither/nor. Instead I ask: What about a present and a future without sides, borders, and weapons? And if this seemingly naive question elicits cynical laughter, perhaps we need to ask ourselves on whom the joke is being played?

---

**Faced with an either/or choice between the United States and Russia, us versus them, I say neither/nor.**

*Viet Thanh Nguyen’s novel *The Sympathizer* won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.*
Objection!
Elie Mystal

Fugitive Womb Laws

Now that conservative states are free to ban abortions, will they try to prevent them outside their borders as well?

On June 24, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 6-3, revoked the constitutional right to an abortion and left it up to the states to decide whether a pregnant person can be forced to give birth against their will. This Confederate view of states’ rights has long been championed by conservatives and modern-day Republicans. They’ve lauded the court’s decision as “returning” power to the states, and glossed over the fact that the power the states are getting is control over the bodies of women, girls, and pregnant people.

And the states eager to strip away reproductive rights have no intention of stopping at their borders. Already, Republican states have moved to propose laws that would restrict the right of women and pregnant people to seek abortions in other states. Missouri has considered legislation modeled on Texas’s Senate Bill 8, that would rely on private actors to restrict the ability of people to go elsewhere for care. And Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has sent a letter to the law firm Sidley Austin threatening to bring legal action against it for its new policy of reimbursing employees who leave Texas to get reproductive health care.

These conservative gambits shouldn’t work. Traveling freely between states is a concept so old that it predates the US Constitution. Those who prefer to be ruled by historical trivia will note that the Magna Carta, written in 1215, contained protections for the right to travel. And the right to travel has been recognized by the Supreme Court numerous times over the course of American history. Courts have also ruled that the right to travel is granted under the privileges and immunities clause of Article IV and have found a right to travel under the citizenship and due process sections of the 14th Amendment.

But just like the word “abortion,” the phrase “right to travel” is not written in the text of the Constitution. The same people who think that rights must have been explicitly spelled out by the founders’ fountain pens or they don’t exist could therefore make an argument that state restrictions on travel do not violate fundamental constitutional rights. And some of those people might already be on the Supreme Court.

Indeed, the original Constitution explicitly denied the right to travel… to the enslaved people this country stole from their homes and families. Article IV included a fugitive slave clause in the plain text. It stated, “No person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.”

Meanwhile, travel for white women was also constrained in various ways, albeit through social norms, not law, even into the 20th century. It wasn’t until 1937 that the US started issuing passports directly to married women, instead of the longtime practice of issuing joint passports in the husband’s name. And of course Black women never enjoyed the freedom of movement white women did. The journalist and activist Ida B. Wells was once denied a passport because the government called her a “known race agitator.”

The right to travel, in other words, is an unenumerated right—one that is fundamental to a free and functioning society and has been recognized by the courts, but one that was not spelled out in the Constitution. Just like abortion.

In his concurring opinion overturning the right to an abortion because it was not written down by the white men allowed to participate in constitutional construction, alleged attempted rapist Brett Kavanaugh said that he supports the similarly unenumerated right to travel. “For example,” he wrote, “may a state bar a resident…from traveling to another state to obtain an abortion? In my view, the answer is no based on the constitutional right to interstate travel.” That line may seem comforting, until you remember two things: Kavanaugh has already lied about his support of precedent, and his statement skirts the real issues at play when it comes to interstate travel.

Writing in The New York Times, Adam Liptak pointed out that the “real-world issue” is not whether forced-birth states will prohibit pregnant people from leaving but what will happen to them, or the people who helped them, when they come back. It is unlikely that a state will pass a law prohibiting pregnant people from traveling for nine months, and even if it did, there’s no real way for the state to enforce it (unless the Transportation Security Administration is going to force women to pee on a stick before passing through security). But upon their return, there is a lot a state could do to punish people suspected of having an abortion or those who helped them do it.

Moreover, states might sue, or empower private-citizen bounty hunters to sue, out-of-state doctors who provide abortion services. In anticipation of this possibility, abortion clinic
Words Matter

Shortly after I came from Europe to the US, a close friend gifted me a subscription to The Nation. I've been a faithful reader and, when I was able to, supporter of the magazine. 

We need The Nation now more than ever; its voice needs to be heard. I like to think I'll help keep it up for the future. It still reminds me of my old friend.

—Claudia Sole, Calif.

A few words can mean so much.

With just a few words in your will naming The Nation in your estate plan, you can care for your loved ones now and support our mission to remain a fierce voice for truth and resistance for years to come.

Such gifts are easy to arrange, simple to modify, and adaptable to your needs, so it's easy to understand why bequests are the most popular planned gift. There are many types of bequests—let's discuss the one that best fits your needs.

Visit legacy.thenation.com to get started.
operators in Montana have begun requiring proof of residence before providing care, because they are worried about being sued by neighboring state governments. It’s worth reminding people here of the fugitive slave clause (and, later, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act), which was meant not just to recapture enslaved people but also to punish the white people who might have assisted them, criminalizing their conduct and making enslaved people believe that nobody anywhere would be willing to help.

Such, too, will be the goal of these new Fugitive Uterus Laws: Pregnant people who are vulnerable and lack the resources to defend themselves from frivolous lawsuits will be made to feel isolated and trapped. Activists seeking to give people information and options will be criminalized and dissuaded from helping. Doctors, even the ones in free states, will have to keep an eye out for the uteruscathers eager to claim a bounty on their patients.

The white people who scream the loudest about “states’ rights” have never accepted the fundamental right of nonwhite people to leave their barbaric states. Not in our enslaving past, and not now in our theocratic present. Conservatives don’t want certain people to have rights, yet they never want those people to escape.

**ACCIDENTS OF BIRTH**

**Subject to Debate**

**KATHA POLLITT**

**Abortion opponents claim to be advocates for the unborn. But they don’t lift a finger to help families facing hardship.**

**EVER SINCE SUPREME COURT JUSTICE SAMUEL ALITO’S draft opinion in *Dobbs* was leaked, some anti-abortion writers have been saying that the “culture of life” means supporting pregnant women and their babies, too. “For many pro-life and whole-life leaders,” says the Anglican priest and *New York Times* opinion writer Tish Harrison Warren, “this Supreme Court decision would represent a starting line, not a finish line.” She asked a sampling of those leaders what should come next, and to be fair, some of their ideas are what progressive feminists have been demanding for decades: paid parental leave, affordable housing, child care, and other anti-poverty, pro-family measures.

That’s all well and good, but I have questions. In the first place, why haven’t these writers been stressing poverty and lack of support for parents all along? Abortion opponents cite an old Guttmacher Institute poll to claim that poverty is the cause of 73 percent of abortions. I have my doubts about that—the poll allows multiple answers, and most people check more than one box. About half of women who get abortions are low-income, but that doesn’t mean they would have the baby if they had more money.

I suppose it’s nice that “poverty” is replacing “being a slut who wants to fit into a prom dress.” But wouldn’t it have made more sense to have provided supports before forcing people to stay pregnant, no matter what? The Hyde Amendment, barring federal Medicaid for nearly all abortions, was passed in 1976 and has been renewed every year since—plenty of time to set up meaningful help for the pregnant poor. If opponents of abortion are right, supporting parents and children would dramatically lower the abortion rate all on its own. Instead, right now, millions of people in abortion-ban states are denied both the right to end a pregnancy and the ability to give that child a decent life.

In the second place, what about birth control? The main reason poor people have more abortions per capita than the better-off is that they have more unintended pregnancies. Why? They have less access to decent, respectful health care, less ability to choose the most effective birth-control methods, and less trust in medicine in general, often with good reason. Sensible people are always urging those on all sides of the abortion debate to unite around contraception. It never happens. Why? In case you hadn’t noticed, the pro-life movement is controlled by the Catholic hierarchy, which opposes “artificial” birth control, and by fundamentalist evangelical Protestants, who are engaged in a death struggle with contemporary sexual mores. Instead of protecting couples from unwanted pregnancy, anti-abortion activists increasingly claim, falsely, that IUDs, emergency contraception, and even the pill are forms of abortion. It’s not an accident that in Warren’s *Times* column only Kelsey...
Hazzard, the head of Secular Pro-Life, calls for more birth control.

In the third place, abortion opponents wave away dangerous, disastrous pregnancies. I’d love to hear one of their pundits admit that Ohio’s decision to bar a 10-year-old from ending her pregnancy places her at serious risk, or explain who is helped by forcing someone to stay pregnant in cases when the baby is doomed to die in the womb or shortly after birth. In a *Times* op-ed, the anti-abortion bioethicist David Albert Jones argues that maternity in countries where abortion is illegal can be just as safe as in countries where abortion is permitted—even safer. As examples, he names Ireland before legalization, Poland, and Malta. That claim ignores the fact that thousands of people in those countries have had abortions by traveling to clinics abroad or taking pills at home. Moreover, it’s not an either/or: Those countries may have safer childbirth than the US, the worst among industrialized nations for maternal mortality—but in the past two years, Polish doctors let one woman die rather than complete her miscarriage and another woman die rather than evacuate her dead twin fetuses. Tish Warren seems like a nice person. What does she have to say about that?

Do abortion opponents who care about poverty have the power to transform a Republican Party devoted to savage cuts in social programs and government supports for the poor? Republican anti-poverty measures have been pretty weak tea given the onrushing crisis. I’m hearing a lot about private charity and churches, a bad sign: The government doesn’t leave things solely in the hands of Good Samaritans when there’s a hurricane or an epidemic.

In Georgia, the bill known as Betsey’s Law passed in May, making it easier to open a private maternity home. I’m sorry, but big whoop. Texas, which passed a near-total abortion ban last September, expanded emergency Medicaid for postpartum care from two months to six; doctors recommend a year. (Bear in mind that Texas, which rejected Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, has the highest percentage of uninsured people in the nation—you have to be practically destitute to qualify.) I see nothing, in short, as bold as the total abortion bans sweeping across the red states, nothing that acknowledges the crisis into which millions of women and others are being plunged. Mitt Romney’s proposed Family Security Act, which would give $350 a month to most families for each child under 5 and $250 for those of school age, comes closest. Even then, only parents earning $10,000 a year qualify, so the poorest are left out. It would be strange indeed if—thanks to Joe Manchin’s refusal to make permanent Joe Biden’s $600 child-support payments to families during Covid—Republicans succeeded where Democrats failed. I’ll believe it when I see it, though, which should be around the time the feds accede to anti-abortion socialist Elizabeth Bruenig’s call in *The Atlantic* for free pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care for all.

Six states have had only a single clinic since 2019. Indeed, with the curious exception of New Jersey, the 10 worst states for maternal mortality are all red states where abortion is now banned or soon to be so. Mississippi, which brought *Dobbs* to the Supreme Court, is just about the worst state for every measure of women’s and children’s well-being, and no doubt will continue to be. Its single clinic is now closed. If abortion opponents care about poverty, what have they been waiting for?
American Farmers Need a “Bean New Deal”

Matthew Miles Goodrich

A trip to the grocery store these days is a crash course in the toll that climate change is having on supply chains. Grocery prices have risen every month for the past year, driven by everything from the lingering pandemic, to the air pollution caused by burning fossil fuels, to farm labor shortages and corporate price-gouging. Growing seasons regularly devastated by droughts and floods only exacerbate these factors.

Fortunately, there is an answer to rising food prices: It lies in the lowly legume. In order to prosper on American farmlands, however, beans are going to need a lot more help from the US government. What the agriculture sector needs right now is a “Bean New Deal”—large-scale investment in legume production, and a snazzy brand campaign to boot.

Beans are a staple of diets across the globe. They’re rich in protein, use far less water and land than other crops, and even act as a natural fertilizer to replenish the soil they’re grown in. But while the United Nations has called pulses, the dry seeds of the legume plant, the “food of the future,” the total acreage of dry beans planted in the United States actually decreased by 113,000 acres between 2021 and 2022. This may well be another consequence of climate change: As the drought in the West reduces the amount of soil available to till, farmers have to weigh which crops will yield the highest profits. If legumes remain cheap for consumers, this may make them less attractive to planters.

That is, unless the federal government steps in to incentivize bean production for the benefit of the planet—and the pocketbooks of consumers.

Agricultural subsidies are the most powerful tool the federal government has to shape what Americans consume. Between 2015 and 2020, the feds have spent $119 billion to underwrite the agriculture market, mainly to support the growers of just five crops: corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice. These subsidies help farmers endure freezes and droughts—which have been made more intense and more frequent due to climate change—as well as nudge certain types of crops into production.

But many of these subsidies go toward the harvesting of enormous monocultures at factory farms. From 1995 to 2020, 78 percent of the $187 billion that the federal government spent went to the top 10 percent of farms. These monocultures drain the soil of its nutrients—thereby increasing the use of fertilizer, which pollutes local waterways with nitrogen—and diminish the genetic variability of the crop, leaving it susceptible to pathogens.

What’s more, because farm commodities like corn and soybeans are often used for livestock feed, subsidies for monocultures are effectively subsidies for the meat industry. Animal agriculture is already a horror show of labor abuses and unimaginable cruelty. With prices for poultry and beef continuing to rise, the government should ease its spending on meat and pay farmers to plant beans instead.

Getting more beans to the market, of course, doesn’t mean that consumers will buy them. Let’s be honest: Beans have an image problem. The United States did experience an uptick in bean sales early in the pandemic, likely as a result of their reputation as an essential of emergency preparedness. But that’s just it: Beans are reliable, not sexy. “Hard pass,” an 18-year-old told The New York Times at Covid’s onset. You can imagine her wrinkling her nose at a can of garbanzos.

The government can do a lot more to tout the virtues of the bean. The California Milk Processor Board, if you recall, once used an iconic slogan to buoy dairy sales in the state: “Got milk?” During the Great Depression, the Department of Agriculture gave Uncle Sam a wife and a radio program to share easy, nutritious recipes with the public. You can just as easily imagine that same 18-year-old discovering a tasty bean recipe on TikTok.

Investing in bean science would also make foods made from beans tastier. With more research and development into legume breeding, beans could very well be the future of meat. That’s the argument that Alex Smith and Ariel Ron make in a recent white paper. Their solution? Ramped-up federal investment in commercial alternative proteins, coordination nodes between government agencies and industry, and additional university research into the science of bean breeding.

Sounds like a Bean New Deal to me.
New Delhi police detain members of Krantikari Yuva Sangathan, a student organization in India, during a rally on July 14 in solidarity with the Sri Lankan people’s struggle against their government. Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced his resignation that day following months of protests over concerns of financial mismanagement and after demonstrators stormed his official residence.

**By the Numbers**

- 12% Portion of the total calories traded on global markets that comes from Russia and Ukraine
- 22M Amount of grain, in metric tons, stuck in Ukrainian storehouses
- 345M Number of people globally who are “acutely hungry,” up from 276 million before the Russian invasion of Ukraine
- 900K Minimum number of Ukrainians, including approximately 260,000 children, who have been “interrogated, detained, and forcibly deported” to Russia, according to the State Department
- 12M Number of Ukrainians who have fled their homes since February 24
- 343 Number of children killed so far in the Russia-Ukraine war, according to the UN
- 533 Number of children injured in the war

**Mohammed bin Salman**

He ordered the murder, our own report said,
But we remain true to the oil he commands:
Joe Biden decided to fist bump the man,
As if a clenched fist hides the blood on one’s hands.

**Deadline Poet**

Calvin Trillin
The TICK APOCALYPSE

How humans disrupted the environment—and fueled an era of tick-borne diseases.

JIMMY TOBIAS
Randall Anderson was 9 years old when his knees started swelling like soda cans left too long in the freezer. Fatigue knocked him flat for hours at a time. Red rashes ravaged his skin. Finally, the headaches began, the screams, the scans showing signs of brain inflammation. The adults didn’t know what was wrong with him. His elementary school worried that he might be carrying some contagion and sent him home with a private tutor for a month. Some nights during the ordeal he would sleep on his parents’ bedroom floor and squeeze his mother’s hand, afraid he wouldn’t make it to morning.

This was in the mid-1970s, in the little town of Old Lyme, Conn., a wooded enclave near the north shore of Long Island Sound, where active kids like Anderson could romp for hours in the gentle New England forest with little fear. Only later, after years in and out of clinics where doctors drained warm yellow liquid from his knees, did the true details of the disease that afflicted Anderson emerge. He had been infected by a corkscrew-like bacterium, a wily spirochete that we know today as *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Somewhere in the woods outside his home, a black-legged tick had injected the infectious organisms into his bloodstream. Anderson—who asked that his real name not be used in this article to protect his privacy—was one of the kids in that early cluster of childhood cases in the town that would give the disease its infamous name.

Lyme disease today, though less of a mystery, remains confounding, and it is spreading, sometimes to devastating effect. From that outbreak in New England, as well as a smattering of early cases elsewhere around the country, Lyme has been unrelenting in its march across the eastern United States and the Midwest. Carried by the black-legged tick (often referred to as the deer tick), it is the most common vector-borne disease in the country. And its incidence is increasing, with some estimates placing the number of new cases as high as 476,000 each year.

“That is a huge number,” says Dr. Ben Beard, the deputy director of the CDC’s Division of Vector-Borne Diseases. “And that doesn’t even include all the other tick-borne illnesses,” he noted, including babesiosis, the Heartland virus disease, the Bourbon virus disease, anaplasmosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Colorado tick fever, *Borrelia miyamotoi* disease, and the deadly Powassan virus disease, which can causeencephalitis and has a case fatality rate of around 10 percent.

“For us,” he says, “that is very concerning.”

How did we get here? Why did Lyme disease emerge—or re-emerge—when it did? And why has it spread with such tenacity?

**T**hough ticks were still rare in parts of the Northeast when Randall Anderson was a kid, they were common in Lyme. His house was surrounded on two sides by forest, and Anderson liked to bike in the woods, so the sight of minuscule arachnids crawling up his leg was hardly a novelty. “When I was a kid, I’d just pull them off and flush them,” he says. No biggie.

Like so many other zoonotic diseases, Lyme and other tick-borne pathogens emerged from ecosystems that have been fractured.

were experiencing painful swelling in their joints, the article reported that doctors and scientists believed they had discovered a new “form of arthritis caused by a virus carried by an insect or other biting arthropod such as a tick.”

One of the doctors was Allen Steele, an infectious disease epidemiologist and rheumatologist at Yale who took care of Anderson and other sick children during the initial years of the outbreak. Steele was instrumental in tracing the illness to ticks. Others, including Dr. Willy Burgdorfer, a researcher at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases’ Rocky Mountain Lab, showed that the disease wasn’t caused by a virus but by a species of spirochete bacterium, a type that shares a distinctive shape with the pathogens that cause syphilis and tick-borne relapsing fever. Burgdorfer, after his team’s discovery, became the pathogen’s namesake. He died in 2014. (I should mention that some people believe that Lyme disease didn’t spill over naturally. Because Burgdorfer had ties to the US military, and because the US government’s Plum Island biowarfare and animal research lab was nearby in Long Island Sound, they speculate that the emergence of Lyme was the result of a lab leak, some sort of government biowarfare program gone wrong. Ross Douhat usefully delves into this theory in his memoir The Deep Places. The scientists I asked about this theory discounted it.)

While Lyme disease was greeted as a novel phenomenon, there is now plenty of evidence indicating that *Borrelia burgdorferi* has been on this continent in various forms for thousands of years (as it has been in Europe). According to a 2017 study in the journal *Nature, Ecology, and Evolution* in which scientists sequenced nearly 150 different *Borrelia burgdorferi* genomes, the bacteria are “ancient.” They have been evolving in North America for roughly 60,000 years and were historically widespread across the Northeast and Midwest.

“Our finding of ancient *B. burgdorferi* diversification suggests that the recent Lyme disease epidemic does not reflect evolutionary processes,” the scientists wrote, “but rather was driven by the ecological change in North America beginning in the colonial period [roughly] 700 years ago.”

If the Lyme pathogen has been here all along, why was the disease absent—or at least not rampant—during this country’s first two centuries? And why has it returned in such a ferocious fashion?

“Ecological change,” as the scientists say above, is a polite way to put it. “We fucked up the ecosystem” is probably a better way to say it.

Black-legged ticks—and here I am referring to *Ixodes scapularis*, the species that lives among us here in the East; a similar species, *Ixodes pacificus*, also a Lyme carrier, is confined to pockets of the West Coast—are primarily forest creatures. These ticks need forests to survive and thrive in most of their range, which sits on the humid side of the 100th meridian. But beginning in the colonial period, the eastern forests fell rapidly as European settlers cut, burned, and girdled their way through the vast stands of oak, hemlock, chestnut, and other species that grew along the Atlantic littoral. By the middle of the 19th century, roughly three-fourths of southern New England had been deforested, transformed into fenced pastures, farm fields, and settlements, as William Cronon recounts in his classic book *Changes in the Land*. What’s more, colonists rendered large areas of New England “devoid of animals which had once been common: beaver, deer, bear, turkey, wolf and others had vanished.”

The enormous destruction visited on the Northeast’s forests wiped out the black-legged tick’s habitat in many places. And without black-legged ticks, *Borrelia burgdorferi* cannot persist. Hence the apparently scant presence of Lyme disease during the first 150 years and more of this country’s history. But that began to change after the completion of the Erie Canal, as farmers and pastoralists left the Northeast’s depleted lands for the rich post-glacial soil of the Midwest. The forests came back in a big way. By the mid-20th century, roughly 60 percent of Connecticut had returned to forest. Likewise in New York: Many once-denuded landscapes are now gorgeous with deciduous groves.

But the second-growth forests we live with today are not the same as those that preceded European colonization and conquest. The forests are back, but without the low-severity forest fires that Indigenous people used to burn away underbrush, possibly reducing tick populations. The oak trees too are back, but without the sky-darkening droves of passenger pigeons that once competed with rodents for tree nuts and possibly suppressed mouse and chipmunk abundance in the process. White-tailed deer are also back, but the wolves and cougars that helped keep their populations in check are still consigned to oblivion. The forests, in other words, are missing many ecological influences that may have played a role in regulating the various components of the Lyme disease system.

“The forest creates the stage on which the actors occur,” one scientist told me.

By the second half of the last century, the stage for the Lyme disease drama was set. It was one that was particularly well-suited for every phase of a tick’s life.
In a forest of maple, oak, and pine on the eastern side of New York’s Hudson Valley, Rick Ostfeld and his team of research scientists march through the leafy undergrowth in bright white body suits worn for protection. They climb a small ridge and arrive at a forest plot studded with small metal traps. It’s early morning, and some of the traps, baited overnight with oats, are snapped shut. The team’s senior research specialist, Kelly Ogenfuss, opens one and reaches inside to reveal a small rodent, shivering, docile, its black eyes wide with fear. It seems harmless enough, poor thing; in fact, the trembling animal in her hand is a star player in the drama of Lyme disease.

White-footed mice, along with other forest rodents like chipmunks, are what scientists call reservoir hosts. They are the long-term hosts of the Lyme pathogen, the ultimate source from which the little corkscrew bacteria sally forth to infect new organisms. Ogenfuss points to the mouse’s paper-thin ears. Embedded in them are several minute black dots, no bigger than a pencil point: larvae, the first life stage of the black-legged tick.

The baby ticks are enjoying their inaugural “blood meal” at our rodent friend’s expense (female ticks will consume a total of three blood meals over the course of their lives, while males require only two). If this mouse is carrying the Lyme pathogen—and as many as 90 percent of the adult mice around here are carriers—then these larvae will grow into infected nymphs. By early next summer, as they search for a second blood meal to fuel their nymphal life stage, these ticks will pose a danger to human health. They might also go on to infect a new crop of mice with the Lyme pathogen, thus ensuring its continued presence in the reservoir host population. After that, in their third and final form, the ticks will be full-fledged adults, and the females will seek out one last blood meal, often from white-tailed deer, before reproducing. A single female tick can give birth to thousands of healthy offspring.

To summarize and simplify: Larvae pick up the Lyme pathogen from blood meal No. 1. Nymphs spread it readily during blood meal No. 2. Female adults reproduce during blood meal No. 3 and then die. Three life stages over about two years.

Ostfeld has found that white-footed mice play a much greater role than do deer in determining the density of infected nymphs.
book *Spillover*, Ostfeld has found that smaller forest patches—forests that have been cut up and fragmented—have a higher density of infected nymphs than larger, more intact forest patches.

“It is kind of a perfect storm,” Ostfeld tells me as we stand in the forest, occasionally intercepting the ticks climbing up our big white body suits. “We have inadvertently enhanced the proliferation of infected ticks and also increasingly encroached on those very areas that we have made more risky.”

**Nymph**

**Allen Steere**, the rheumatologist who treated Randall Anderson and those other childhood cases back in the ’70s, was among the earliest witnesses to this fateful shift in both tick and human populations. Since identifying that original cluster of 51 patients—39 children and 12 adults, all with a similar type of arthritis—he has gone on to publish more than 300 papers on Lyme disease, and from his current perch as a professor at Harvard, he still sees patients. Indeed, some years ago he consulted once again with Anderson, who was experiencing eye problems, perhaps due to the lingering effects of Lyme.

To help me understand how the town of Lyme came to be the epicenter of the first known outbreak, I called Steere up one day this winter. He took me back to the early days and described the landscape around Lyme and Old Lyme, where the pathogen spilled so readily into the human population.

“It is a lovely area, right at the mouth of the Connecticut River, where it flows into Long Island Sound, with estuary areas and lakes and rivers. And it is wooded, second-generation wooded growth, but it is also inhabited,” he says. “So it was a perfect environment for deer and for ticks, and there were a lot of cases.”

It was a perfect environment for ticks—and it was inhabited. In the world of wildfire prevention and suppression, there is a concept called the wildland-urban interface, or WUI. It is the transition zone where wild land and human development mix and mingle, and it is often in such areas where wildfire poses the greatest risk to human life and property. Of course, people still build there anyway, erecting their homes amid California chaparral or thick stands of lodgepole pine, but it’s a big gamble.

One might think of the Lyme phenomenon in a similar fashion. It is in the wildland-urban interface in places like Connecticut and New York—where residential development meets forest—that human health is at heightened risk.

Consider Connecticut. By the 1970s, the degraded second-growth forests of New England, with their acorns, deer, mice, and ticks, had made a major recovery. At the same time, Connecticut had seen a huge surge in the human population, from about 900,000 in 1900 to more than 3 million by the 1970s. Many of these residents lived in homes like Anderson’s, nestled in the forests that had returned to the state. It was a WUI situation, but for Lyme disease. Indeed, across the country, since 1970, landscapes categorized as WUI have expanded by more than 50 percent as land conversion to exurban and suburban use has exploded. This trend has been particularly intense in the Northeast.

The scientific literature on zoonotic diseases suggests that their emergence is often driven by land-use changes like deforestation.
and the Midwest. Indeed, by the time Lyme had begun to spread widely, forest cover in places like Connecticut had hit its apex and was once again in decline as the human population blossomed.

“What exacerbates the risk is the fragmentation and degradation of that forest,” Östfeld told me, “because that is how we facilitate some species’ population growth, especially the weedy little rodents that are so important in the proliferation of the ticks and the pathogens.” Rodents, deer, and other hardy habitat generalists do well in degraded forests that are often fragmented or perforated, low on predator and competitor diversity, and riddled with human developments. And it’s in partially fragmented landscapes that humans are at particular risk of encountering infected ticks.

You can see how this might play out. It’s early June, and you’re living in upstate New York or Connecticut or Long Island or Michigan or Wisconsin or Massachusetts. Maybe you go for a stroll in the woods near your suburb, maybe you dog runs after that squirrel bolting up an oak tree and then comes back to cuddle, maybe you’re just lounging in a sunny backyard abutting a patch of forest. A few days later you find an engorged tick in your armpit. It’s a nymph, much smaller than an adult and hard to see—likely the life stage during which the tick is most likely to pass the pathogen to humans. A year earlier, that nymph was a larva. It had spent some time sucking on the snout of a white-footed mouse, from which it contracted Borrelia burgdorferi. You pull the nymph out of your armpit, but maybe it’s too late. Nature isn’t always nice. The tick, in its single-minded quest for a second blood meal, has regurgitated the bacteria into your bloodstream. A disease ecologist who recently completed her PhD at Columbia, VanAcker spent the past few years conducting field research into the dynamics of the Lyme disease system in urban settings. Specifically, she studied Lyme disease on Staten Island—because, yes, Borrelia burgdorferi is in New York City. Black-legged ticks are now firmly established on Staten Island and in the Bronx.

To understand why, VanAcker takes me to a place with an apt name: Deere Park. It’s a strip of forest surrounded by big single-family homes just south of Interstate 278, which cuts east-west across the northern part of the island. The first thing we see upon entering the park is the print of a deer hoof in the mud. Crucially, this park is one parcel in an interconnected complex of green space that extends to the western edge of the island, where a narrow channel of shallow water separates it from New Jersey. Deer, VanAcker tells me, can swim across that channel and as a result have managed to establish a robust presence on the island. In fact, their population here has grown so explosively in recent years that the city is leading a controversial sterilization effort to reduce their numbers. With the deer have come black-legged ticks, hitching rides like commuters on a ferry. And places like Deere Park, humid and shady with plentiful maples and oaks, provide excellent habitat not only for deer but also for mice, chipmunks, and similar creatures. Thus, Lyme disease has come to the island. Indeed, between 2000 and 2016, the case rate for Lyme on Staten Island has climbed from four per 100,000 to 25 per 100,000—a notable surge, although the case rate has dipped a bit in more recent years.

“Deer are so important for the [Lyme disease] system, but their role is important to distinguish,” VanAcker tells me. While they don’t host the Lyme pathogen and don’t pass it on to ticks, deer are critical “for distributing the ticks and amplifying the tick population,” she says. A single deer can “annually feed 500 adult ticks, which each will lay 2,000 eggs.” Deer, in other words, are key reproductive hosts for adult ticks. Without them, it is unlikely that ticks—and with them, Lyme disease—would have become established in a heavily urbanized environment like Staten Island.

To illustrate this last point, VanAcker takes me to another park in the borough, a place called Clove Lakes. This park is north of Interstate 278 and isolated from the snaking strip of green space that winds all the way to the island’s New Jersey–

(continued on page 25)
It sure sounded, on the evening of June 9, like Liz Cheney was prepared to sacrifice the political career she had spent a lifetime constructing in order to restore a measure of sanity to American governance. The Republican representative from Wyoming, who was raised amid the cutthroat politics of the Grand Old Party in the era when names like Reagan and Bush and Cheney still mattered, took a moment before the close of the first public hearing of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol to call out lifelong allies for choosing an authoritarian course that threatens America’s future as a constitutional republic. “I say this to my colleagues who are defending the indefensible: There will come a day when Donald Trump is gone,” Cheney thundered, “but your dishonor will remain.”

All the talk of honor and dishonor, duty and conscience made it seem as if the daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney was breaking not just with her Trump-adoring colleagues in Congress but perhaps even with the scorched-earth conservatism that has defined the GOP since Cheney and her ilk embraced the hate-mongering politics of racial division, xenophobia, and big lies about everything from policing to immigration to the climate crisis. But the spell was broken by regular appeals for money to fund Cheney’s uphill bid for another term as the sole US representative of Wyoming, a state that the fiercely ambitious congresswoman desperately wants to keep as the base for her political ambitions. Liz Cheney is unwilling to accept that her future as a leader of conservative Republicans is over. The 55-year-old is not merely fighting Trump’s efforts to overturn the 2020 election; she is fighting to outlast and replace him as the manager of the right-wing franchise in American politics.

“As an unapologetic conservative in the United States House of Representatives, I am honored to lead the charge for our Republican agenda and shape a better future for our Party and our Nation,” declared the fund-raising missives that arrived in late May, around the time the committee hearings were ramping up. The plea for campaign cash ranted and raved about how “the Biden-Pelosi ‘Build Back Better’ plan” would lead to “massive Green New Deal-style spending” and “an overreaching, all-controlling federal government.” “Like you,” Cheney declared, “I am a staunch fiscal conservative and strongly oppose the massive waste and liberal priorities crammed into seemingly every bill the Democrats have put forward in the first year of the Biden administration.”

Cheney’s appeal could easily have been confused with the “I Need Your Help to Drain the Swamp!” pleas for cash that conservative donors get regularly from Republican firebrands like Matt Gaetz and Paul Gosar, with whom Cheney happily joined in ardent support for Trump during the former president’s four years in the White House. A carefully constructed reference to the congresswoman’s determination to uphold her oath to defend the Constitution “at all times...not just when it’s politically convenient” only hinted at her status as Trump’s most-targeted Republican. It did little to explain to potential donors why Cheney is now regularly praised on MSNBC and in liberal journals for her “courageous” break with the former president, which began when she led nine other Republican House members in voting to impeach him following a violent coup attempt by Trump supporters that sought to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.
A solid third-place finisher in the state’s 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary, Hageman is mounting an overtly pro-Trump and anti-Cheney campaign that has made her the incumbent’s top opponent in a multi-candidate primary field. Hageman launched her media push last fall with an ad that featured cowboys talking about “the code of the West” and the state’s universally understood measure of loyalty: riding for the brand. “Instead of fighting for us, she’s fighting against President Trump,” one cowboy declares. “She betrayed us, she betrayed our values, she betrayed the brand.”

“It’s not even Hageman; it’s Trump,” Wyoming state Representative Landon Brown said of the challenger’s campaign as we listened to local candidates speak at a Politics in the Park event promoted by the Laramie County GOP. A few feet away at Cheyenne’s Lions Park Amphitheater, where sprinklers occasionally went off and scattered the amused candidates and roughly 100 partisan die-hards, state Senator Stephan Pappas, a Republican who represents the area, said of the congressional race, “There’s not a big difference on the issues. But there is one big issue: Trump.”

Hageman knows this. The top line of her campaign website declares “Endorsed by President Trump” before any mention of the issues or her background. The former president, who has made no secret of his determination to purge Congress of every Republican who voted to impeach him, flew into Casper in May with a crew of Trump White House hangers-on to rally over 9,400 Wyoming Republicans with a quick mention of Hageman and a fierce denunciation of Cheney. In another state and another race, Hageman might well have been dismissed by Trump: She once supported Cheney, and she opposed the billionaire’s bid in 2016. An ardent supporter of Ted Cruz in that year’s Republican presidential race, Hageman referred to candidate Trump as “racist and xenophobic.”

Now, mirroring the journey of the many prominent Republican insiders who have moved from “Never Trump” to a supremely cynical “If you can’t beat him, join him” stance, the 59-year-old candidate describes her most prominent backer as “the greatest president in our lifetime.” Meanwhile, for Trump, the past is forgiven because Hageman is a convenient vehicle for his rage at Cheney. Hailing from a family with deep roots in Wyoming and in the state’s Republican Party, Hageman has already run a credible statewide race and has stayed on message, declaring: “Liz Cheney cast her lot with the Washington, D.C., elites and those who use their power to further their own agenda at our expense. She doesn’t represent Wyoming and she doesn’t represent conservatives.”
candidate Doug Mastriano, have won crowded contests for open seats. But Trump’s endorsees have struggled in races against well-established Republican incumbents who have gotten on the wrong side of the former president, such as Georgia Governor Brian Kemp or Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who committed Trumpworld’s cardinal sin of refusing to help overturn the 2020 election results and then compounded his transgression by agreeing to testify before the January 6 committee. But Kemp and Raffensperger, like Idaho Governor Brad Little and other survivors of Trump’s post-2020 wrath, had long records of involvement with their state’s Republican Party and broader electorate. No one questioned their home-state credentials. With Cheney, it’s different.

“She’s not really in touch with Wyoming. She’s more a representative from Virginia,” Deborah Rich, a Laramie County retiree who proudly wore her “Ultra-MAGA” T-shirt, explained to me when I asked her about Cheney at a Republican event where Hageman was scheduled to appear. Republicans all over Wyoming told me that “Cheney’s from Virginia” and should have “R-Va.” listed after her name. Hageman’s campaign has mocked the incumbent by creating a “Cheney for Virginia” campaign website that announces, “Liz grew up right here in Northern Wyoming and bases her family here. Liz is running because she understands the priorities of Northern Virginians, like funneling money to the military industrial complex, listening to big dollar DC lobbyists, and fighting for special interest groups.” A tap of the “donate” button leads to Hageman’s site and a message that declares, “Don’t let President Trump down. Help us defeat Liz Cheney.”

Cheney has tried to counter the attack with a campaign that highlights the fact that “in June 1852, my family first came to Wyoming, walking across the Mormon Trail,” and recalls that her ancestors “built—and have served—our great state.”

But Cheney was born in the liberal college town of Madison, Wis., in 1966, while her parents—Nebraska-born Richard and Wyoming-born Lynne—were graduate students at the University of Wisconsin. The Cheneys then moved to Washington, where Dick Cheney joined the Nixon and Ford administrations and became a consummate D.C. insider. Although he did run for and win Wyoming’s House seat in 1978—replacing Teno Roncallo, the last Democrat to hold it—Cheney quickly embedded himself inside the Beltway as a fierce cold warrior and champion of what would come to be known as neoconservatism. Then he quit Congress and Wyoming to become President George H.W. Bush’s secretary of defense in 1989 and, after a brief 1996 presidential bid of his own, settled into a gig as the CEO of Houston-based Halliburton. When Cheney succeeded in positioning himself to serve as George W. Bush’s vice presidential running mate in 2000, he had to quickly change his voter registration from Texas to Wyoming.

“Liz Cheney is not really in touch with Wyoming. She’s more a representative from Virginia.”

—Republican voter Deborah Rich

Last November, the Wyoming Republican Party voted to no longer recognize Cheney as a member of the GOP, and when I visited the state party headquarters in Cheyenne in late June, I found no mention of her but plenty of Hageman paraphernalia. I also got a chance to see the party’s new “MAGA membership” card, which features a picture of Trump giving a thumbs-up to a group of cowboys.

Landon Brown, the “unapologetically constitutional conservative” Republican whom I ran into at the Politics in the Park event in Cheyenne, pushed back against the membership card, arguing that “this sensationalism around [Trump]...
Some Democrats are openly advocating for crossover voting. In a late June edition of the Casper Star-Tribune, civil rights lawyer John Robinson reflected on the debate about the January 6 insurrection and observed, “Our republic hangs in the balance. The stakes could not be greater.” He concluded, “I am a lifelong Democrat. I proudly support Liz Cheney—a courageous Wyoming Representative who has honored her oath and defended our Constitution.”

I contacted Robinson, who told me, “I was thinking about doing this for quite some time, and after I watched the hearings, I just felt like it was time to write something.” State Representative Trey Sherwood, an Albany County Democrat, said she’d heard a good deal about how the high-profile contest between Cheney and Hageman could draw a significant number of Democratic crossover voters. Democratic and Republican election observers explained the calculus: If the anti-Cheney vote were to split among Hageman and other Trump-aligned primary contenders, and if pro-Cheney Republicans and crossover Democrats backed the incumbent, Cheney might just squeak through.

But even Robinson acknowledged that the numbers might not add up. “There aren’t that many Democrats in Wyoming,” he said. That’s true: Currently, the state has 197,868 registered Republicans, 44,643 registered Democrats, and 34,925 voters who register as unaffiliated. And then there’s the reality that a lot of Democrats, while they have no taste for Trump or Hageman, are not going to skip their own party’s primaries to vote for Liz Cheney. Still others, like Peter Gosar, who has had some experience with the growing extremism within the GOP (he’s the younger brother of the incendiary Republican Representative Paul Gosar of Arizona), say they’re not prepared to vote in a Republican primary—especially “for someone who voted 93 percent of the time with the former president.”

There is desperate irony in a political calculus that looks to liberal Democrats to “save” a Republican as rigidly right-wing as Liz Cheney. But that is the calculus she has settled on in what has become a fight for the soul of the Republican Party. If Cheney somehow wins in Wyoming, she will deal Trump a blow that might just put him out of contention in 2024. If Wyoming follows the likelier path and rejects her, however, Cheney’s gambit will have strengthened Trump’s grip on the GOP, and with it the ongoing threat that he poses to American democracy.

**Cheney’s best shot at maintaining her political viability would be to win the August 16 primary in Wyoming. But that won’t be easy, if we can trust recent polling by the conservative Club for Growth that suggests Hageman has a 30-point lead over Cheney. Her only hope, I heard again and again, rests with Democrats who might pull a “crossover” and vote for her in the GOP primary. Crossover voting is not unheard of in Wyoming, where no Democratic presidential contender has won since 1964 and where Republican primaries usually settle statewide races.**

Trump was so concerned about crossover voting for Cheney that he pressured Wyoming’s legislature to do away with the rule that allows members of one party to reregister with the other party, cast a primary vote, and then renew their original registration after the primary. The bill, which Trump identified as “critically important,” passed the state Senate but failed in the House. Since then, Democrats have been getting mail from the Cheney campaign. “I’ve never voted Republican, and I got a mailer from her last week,” said Albany County Commissioner Peter Gosar, a former gubernatorial candidate who serves in one of the few Wyoming counties where Democrats often win elections.
(continued from page 19)

facing shoreline. Deer have a hard time crossing the highway, and as a result the tick population at Clove Lakes is scant.

“I wanted to bring you here because it has great habitat for tick populations...and the mice populations are really high here,” she says as we crunch through the forest understory. But the ticks are few and far between. “It is actually pretty low-risk [for Lyme disease], because [the park] is so cut off.”

But that’s not the case in many forest settings. As the number of deer has surged over the past century, amid the rise of hunting regulations and replenished habitat, they have become a key conduit for the spread of ticks in the Northeast and beyond. And with their high tolerance for human disturbance and penchant for chopped-up landscapes, backyard browsing, and the like, deer bring ticks into the places where people live, even urban areas.

“You are going to have ticks where you have people,” says Jean Tsao, a professor at Michigan State who has extensively studied the Lyme disease system in the Midwest. “[Deer] will bring ticks to the next subdivision—they are in the woods, the farm fields, and the neighborhoods.”

**Deer, white-footed mice, disappearing predators, encroaching humans, fragmented forest—they all have a role in the Lyme disease system.**

And as Ostfeld has stated in interviews with other publications, it is likely doing the same for the white-footed mouse population, which is expanding its geographic range in the Midwest and in Canada, providing a host for the Lyme pathogen further north.

And then there are all those other diseases, all those other ticks, that are grabbing headlines of late. The lone star tick, once mostly confined to the South, seems to be becoming more prevalent in the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast due to a warming climate. With it has come the alpha gal syndrome, which causes some people to become allergic to red meat. Scientists have also documented the emergence of a new invasive species, the Asian longhorn tick, which was first reported in the US in 2017. The females of this species can reproduce without mating, which means it can become incredibly abundant. In the US, these ticks have not yet been found to carry Lyme or similar diseases, but they could become a huge problem for livestock and wildlife. And the other diseases—anaplasmosis, babesiosis, Powassan virus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and more—they are still out there too, infecting people each year and with increasing frequency, though far less frequently than Lyme. What to do?

“It is an intractable, difficult problem,” Ostfeld says. “I am beginning to unfortunately come to the conclusion that there are going to have to be non-ecological solutions.” While he tries to stay optimistic, Ostfeld recognizes that preventing habitat fragmentation, keeping large forest ecosystems intact, getting deer, tick, and rodent populations under control, scaling back the WUI lifestyle that puts so many people at risk—all that can seem an insurmountable challenge in the United States today.

Ostfeld is putting his primary hope in vaccines. While an early vaccine, developed in the 1990s, was discontinued in 2002, scientists are again at work on vaccines that could protect people from the ravages of tick-borne illnesses. At Yale and other institutions, for instance, they are developing mRNA vaccines that hamper bacterial transmission and also trigger an intense skin reaction to tick bites themselves, alerting humans to the presence of the tick and allowing them time to pull it off before the little critter can inject its pathogens. It’s not particularly sexy. It won’t necessarily address the root cause of the problem. But that’s where things stand in the battle against these bloodsuckers. Upended ecosystems come with enduring costs.

“A perfect storm”—that is how Ostfeld described the rise of tick-borne disease in our time. Dr. Ben Beard of the CDC also used that phrase when we spoke on the phone. And finally, as I spent a sunny morning on Staten Island with Meredith VanAcker, I heard the apt, if careworn, phrase once again: “It’s like a perfect storm,” she said.
One afternoon in mid-March, Jeremy Kaiser sat behind his corner desk at the Scott County Juvenile Detention Center. Kaiser, the director of the facility, excitedly held up a piece of yellow paper. On it he'd written a list of the people most vocally opposed to the county's plan to build a new, bigger detention center. Kaiser wrote a check mark next to their names and shook his head. "I put a little check mark by them every time they show up," he said.

The next meeting, at which the board would vote on the detention center's budget, was scheduled for the following night. It would determine the fate of the $21.7 million plan. The board had already determined that the new jail should hold 40 beds—far more than what many felt was needed in a county that already housed more young people than any other in the state. But even Kaiser agreed that the new jail should hold more people. When it was decided that the new jail should hold 40 beds, the need for a new facility was the only thing on which Kaiser, who is known for his muscular build and closely cropped brown hair, and many residents and advocates agreed.

The need for a new facility was the only thing on which people agreed. When it was decided that the new jail should hold 40 beds, Kaiser, who has a muscular build and closely cropped brown hair, was zealous about the plan. Drafted in 2018, it was designed to replace an outdated facility that was struggling to meet the needs of 10-17-year-old children.

"I put a little check mark by them every time they show up," Kaiser said. "I put a little check mark by them every time they show up."
in the state—the opposition grew. And when officials began to consider using $7.25 million of the $33.5 million the county received in Covid-19 relief to help fund the expansion, so did people's outrage.

There was a groundswell of opposition from residents and advocacy organizations, who maintained that the federal funds should instead be spent on affordable housing, health care, food security, and stimulus checks for undocumented workers.

“That's where the money, that's where the focus...should be at, as opposed to trying to build a jail to continue to put kids in jail, to try to arrest our way out of a situation,” said Michael Guster, the president of the Davenport chapter of the NAACP.

“They choose to be blind and deaf to what we’re saying as a community and what our needs are,” said Gloria Mancilla, a Davenport resident who has urged the county to allocate funds for undocumented workers.

Throughout the country, counties are dipping into funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to build and expand jails and prisons. At least 20 counties in 18 states are using, or want to use, Covid relief money this way. The problem is, their decision to do so violates the spirit, and likely the letter, of the rules governing how relief money can be used. These rules, finalized by the US Treasury earlier this year, ban jurisdictions from using Covid relief money to build or expand correctional facilities. Yet that hasn’t stopped local officials in a number of counties from pushing their projects through, spending their ARPA and CARES Act windfalls like winning lottery tickets for long-sought expansions.

“The arrival of ARPA funds has provided an easy way out for counties that previously were having a hard time justifying [building] jails,” said Wanda Bertram, a communications strategist at Prison Policy, a nonprofit research center.

In Scott County, the push to use this money to expand a jail for children is happening at a time when the number of juvenile arrests nationwide has fallen 67 percent since 2006 and reached a new low in 2019, according to the Justice Department. Yet even as the overall numbers have been falling, the system remains as unequal as ever, with Black and brown people filling cells at disproportionately high rates.

Iowa, for instance, which incarcerates children at rates higher than the national average, ranks eighth in the US for racial disparities in the incarceration of young people, according to a 2021 analysis by the Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy organization. And within the state, those opposed to the new jail argue, Scott County is responsible for some of the worst racial disparities. “Black youth are 8.7 times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated here,” Marcy Mistrett, the former director of youth and justice at the Sentencing Project, told attendees at a 2021 panel discussion on the juvenile detention center plan. “In Scott County, this means one out of every 22 Black kids gets detained versus one out of every 457 white children.”

“I want to spend every one of those ARPA dollars,” said Ken Croken, the only person on the five-member board of supervisors to oppose funding the new jail with relief money, in an interview with The Nation before the vote took place. “I just don’t want to spend it subsidizing an abusive and racist criminal justice system.”

Scott County, on the state’s eastern border, is the third-most-populous county in Iowa. Nearly two-thirds of its population, or 101,000 people, live in Davenport, a once-bustling manufacturing hub that had been lined with flour, wool, and saw mills powered by the Mississippi River’s waters. A majority of the county’s wealthier, mostly white families live on the nearly 1,000 farms that crisscross the county. Most of the county’s Black residents—who account for 8 percent of the population—live in either downtown Davenport or the lower-income neighborhoods in the West End.

The juvenile detention center, a one-story brick building constructed in the 1970s as a car dealership, sits near the adult jail and the county administrative services building. The facility's size wasn’t an issue until 2018, Kaiser said, when the average daily population of detained children climbed to 31, up from 16 in 2017. This was the result of a combination of factors, including court backlogs caused by an increase in car thefts and diminished capacities at rehabilitation centers that left children waiting for open beds, according to the county’s annual report. This surge, however, was short-lived: The detention center’s average daily population fell to 21 in 2020 and to 18 in 2021. In a sign that the trend is continuing, the average daily population was 13 during the first half of this year.

Kaiser, who emphasized that the new jail would also offer treatment and rehabilitation services, cautioned the board of supervisors that the old facility would soon become overwhelmed. “I started ringing alarm bells,” he said.

In the summer of 2018, county officials agreed to explore the idea of building a new jail, which was to be rebranded as the Youth Justice & Rehabilitation Center. They convened a committee to make a recommendation on size, with the majority of its participants involved in either law enforcement, the courts, or jail construction. The committee recommended that the jail contain 40 beds to ensure that the county would not need to add more in the future and to prevent children from being sent out of the county to other facilities should there be an overflow.

“I felt like I was tricked,” said committee member Rev. Melvin Grimes, the executive director of Churches United of the Quad Cities Area. (Quad Cities encompasses cities and
counties in Iowa and Illinois.) Grimes, who opposes a 40-bed jail, added, “I felt like my place on the committee was [solely] so they could say, ‘We have some people here who are representative of community organizations.’”

“You don’t build a church for Christmas morning,” said Croken, who is not opposed to a new jail in principle but disapproves of its expanded size, referring to the committee’s decision. He pointed out that the county’s five-year daily average for detainees (from 2016 to 2021) was 22. (The Nation confirmed this number.)

“You’ve got to work off averages and trends.”

In June 2021, the board of supervisors met to discuss financing. Listed on a slide as a potential funding source for the project was money the county was eligible to receive under ARPA.

Scott County received the first half of its $33.5 million in ARPA funds the following month. By the fall, officials had designated up to $7.25 million for the detention center project. Other high-priority projects included installing storm sewers, improving air circulation in the administration building and the adult jail, and promoting tourism. Providing $6 million for below-market-rate housing was listed as a “medium to high” priority. The board of supervisors—an elected panel of three Republicans and two Democrats, all of them white men—designated no money to stimulus checks for undocumented workers. The new detention center, officials said, met the county’s goal of “financially responsible government.”

One supervisor on the board, John Maxwell, a fifth-generation dairy and cattle farmer, called the project his No. 1 priority for federal dollars, citing the county’s four-year-long effort to build a new facility. “I am 100 percent supporting this, and I will ride it all the way,” he declared during a meeting last October.

“It certainly meets my smell test for the spirit and the nature of the funds being deployed here,” added another supervisor, Tony Knobbe, at the same meeting.

But 10 advocacy groups, including the Iowa-Nebraska NAACP and the ACLU of Iowa, called the county’s use of ARPA dollars unlawful. Citing US Treasury Department guidelines on the use of Covid relief funds, they wrote a letter to the board of supervisors this past February asking it to reconsider its plan.

“Scott County’s proposed use of ARPA funds to build a new, expanded juvenile detention center violates the express terms of Department of Treasury rules,” the letter stated. “Furthermore, building a new, expanded juvenile detention center is out of step with national and statewide juvenile justice trends and would exacerbate the existing racial inequities in the juvenile justice system.”

The Treasury rules, released in January, are broad yet specific. They state that the ARPA money given to states, counties, and tribal governments should be spent on recovering and rebounding from the pandemic and that eligible projects must fall into one of four categories—from pay for frontline workers to “capital expenditures that support an eligible Covid-19 public health or economic response,” which is the category under which Scott County had originally planned to build its jail project. While governments have flexibility within these categories, there is one explicit restriction in the capital expenditures category that is relevant to Scott County’s plans. “Treasury presumes that the following capital projects are generally ineligible: Construction of new correctional facilities as a response to an increase in rate of crime,” according to the department’s final rules.

Despite this requirement, Scott County has not halted its plans for a new juvenile jail. Instead, officials have sought money for the project under the “Replacing Lost Public Sector Revenue” category of the Treasury Department’s rules for ARPA funds. This category enables counties to claim a $10 million allowance for “general government services” to replace revenue lost during the pandemic. Scott County budget director David Farmer told the Quad-City Times earlier this year that he considers the juvenile detention center a “general service.”

This category is the “most flexible” in the program, according to the Treasury, and Scott County officials have interpreted it as permitting their jail expansion plans. That may be because this category doesn’t explicitly bar correctional facility projects from receiving funds; moreover, the ARPA rules state that a restriction in one category doesn’t necessarily translate into a restriction in another. County leaders have read this language as a license to move forward.

“It was vetted by the county attorney’s office,” Brinson Kinzer, another supervisor, said in an interview with The Nation. “[H]e basically said it’s at the board’s discretion to use these funds.” (County Attorney Michael Walton did not respond to requests for comment.)

But the acting counsel for the Office of the Inspector General in the US Treasury, A.J. Altemus, disagreed with that analysis. In an e-mail to The Nation, he clarified that “general government services” funds cannot be used for jails. “Capital expenditure restrictions apply to the use of the $10 million for lost revenue,” he wrote.

He then referred The Nation to the overview of the final rules for ARPA funds, which states: “The use of the $10 million
standard allowance for replacing public sector lost revenue must be consistent with use of funds requirements. ... Treasury presumes that construction of new correctional facilities as a response to an increase in rate of crime is generally ineligible.”

There’s one more potential problem, perhaps more ethical than legal, with Scott County’s reliance on Covid relief funds for its new juvenile jail. The $10 million general services allowance is meant to replace revenue lost during the pandemic. While jurisdictions are not required to provide an accounting to the Treasury Department, it is also true that Scott County does not appear to have suffered much revenue loss during the pandemic. In an e-mail to The Nation, Farmer wrote that the county lost no revenue in 2020 and ended 2021 with more than $6 million in surplus funds. Indeed, those surplus funds are also going toward the detention center project, according to Farmer.

In the 16 months since Joe Biden signed ARPA, the federal government has distributed roughly $500 billion in Covid relief funds. Recipients are spending the money in a variety of ways. A February 2022 analysis published by the Brookings Institution found that large cities and counties were using the bulk of their funds to replace lost revenue, respond to the pandemic, and underwrite infrastructure projects.

But as in Scott County, a number of local governments, often skewing conservative, have embraced the relief money as an opportunity to expand their jails. The Washington County Jail in Fayetteville, Ark., for instance, has been one such beneficiary; the county is using $335,000 of its ARPA package to help fund an additional 230 beds. (It’s worth noting that just last year, the jail made headlines when prisoners with Covid-19 were treated, without their knowledge, with ivermectin, the antiparasitic medication that the Food and Drug Administration says has not proved to be effective in treating the coronavirus.) In Florida’s Pasco County, officials have authorized $20 million of ARPA funding for a project to add 478 beds to its jail. Coshocton County, Ohio, will more than double the size of its jail in a $28.4 million project that will use $3.15 million of CARES Act funding, according to documents obtained by The Nation.

These jail expansions come on the heels of successful decarceration campaigns that saw jail populations decrease by 26 percent during the first year of the pandemic. And while the number of filled jail beds has been creeping back up since courts resumed adjudicating cases last spring, criminal justice advocates say this doesn’t validate the use of relief money to increase the size of facilities.

“If we’re really going to think about rebounding from Covid, then the dollars should be spent on public health in these communities,” said Keesha Middlemass, a public policy professor at Howard University and a fellow at the Brookings Institution. At a minimum, she noted, counties should use Covid relief money on programs that address the causes of incarceration, such as food insecurity and a lack of jobs, affordable housing, or mental health treatment.

On the day of the Scott County board of supervisors’ budget vote for fiscal year 2023, which fell on St. Patrick’s Day, residents of the Heather Apartments in Davenport sat by their cars in camping chairs. Broken glass covered the parking lot; a discarded mattress stuck out of a blue dumpster. The city had ordered the residents of the complex to vacate their homes by the end of the month, because the landlord had failed to make repairs that would bring the buildings up to code.

Standing off to the side was Tonya Roberts, a mother of two young children. She wore a sapphire-blue hooded sweatshirt and a matching patterned head scarf. She’d looked at six apartments, she said, and had finally found a two-bedroom for $700 a month—$125 more than she was paying at the time. Roberts was working at McDonald’s, making roughly the minimum wage.

While county officials had designated $6 million in ARPA funds for housing—$1.25 million less than they proposed to spend on the jail expansion—Roberts said that wasn’t enough. “Why take that money [for the juvenile detention center] when you can take the money to put in these houses to help us?” she asked.

Later that night, the board of supervisors met to vote. As the board recited the Pledge of Allegiance, two dozen Latino workers and their allies stood in the back, holding blue-and-yellow signs that read “We are excluded and essential workers” and “Together we stand.” They had come to ask that some of the pandemic funds be designated for workers who had not received stimulus checks because of their undocumented status.

A dozen people spoke, asking the board to spend the Covid relief money to help people, not build a new jail.

The board voted 4–1 to approve the new budget, which included the use of $7.25 million in ARPA funds on the juvenile detention center. Croken was the lone holdout. (After the meeting, the board chairman, Ken Beck, said he couldn’t talk about his vote and did not reply to later requests for an interview.)

In a telephone call the following week, Pete McRoberts, the policy director at the ACLU of Iowa, said he was disappointed in the outcome of the vote. Shortly after, he followed through on the warning letter he and others had sent in February and reported Scott County to the Treasury, alleging that it was misusing funds.

“It seems that this county did not do their due diligence, as far as the totality of regulations,” McRoberts said. “We gave them everything that they needed in order to come to a lawful conclusion. And it’s very regrettable that they didn’t do it. So now it’s up to the Department of the Treasury and the inspector general.”
Our new monthly e-mail newsletter meets the urgency of this moment with stories, analysis, and resources on the global struggle for reproductive freedom.

Scan the QR code or visit thenation.com/repro to sign up for free.
As the Soviet Union was collapsing in 1991, the emerging Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin attended a literary conference in Munich. At the conference dinner, he raised a toast to Stalin—not as the victor of World War II or the hero of Soviet industrialization, but as “the creator of the repressive mechanism thanks to which I was able to succeed as a writer.”

Sorokin has always been the consummate troll, and it would be easy to write this episode off as an attempt to tweak the sensibilities of his Western colleagues. Yet in this case he was quite sincere. The regime he loathed had provided him a framework within which to operate, a system of tropes and signifiers he’d
made it his mission to subvert. His reputation as an author—already considerable in avant-garde circles, though not yet the massive literary celebrity he would come to enjoy—rested on his mastery of Soviet ideological language but also the ruthlessness with which he undermined it. *Their Four Hearts*, written in 1991 and now released in Max Lawton’s lively translation by Dalkey Archive Press, represents the culmination of this literary project.

Sorokin was born in 1955, shortly after Stalin’s death. His childhood unfolded against a background of popular optimism in the Soviet Union, as the country’s technological and cultural achievements seemed to portend the imminent arrival of the communist utopia. But by the time Sorokin reached adulthood, the promise of those years was already becoming a distant memory. In the era of “developed socialism,” from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, communism was forever deferred in favor of social and cultural stability.

Sorokin’s first novel, *The Norm*, was written between 1979 and 1983 and circulated widely as a samizdat manuscript before finally being published in the 1990s. A disjointed assemblage in eight parts held together by a thin narrative frame, *The Norm* relentlessly satirized the Soviet reality of the late Brezhnev era and the literary culture that sustained it. The first part is a series of naturalistic vignettes whose underlying premise is that every person in the Soviet Union is required to eat a bag of human shit every day; the concluding part is an account of a newspaper editorial meeting, written in classic Socialist Realist prose, in which most of the dialogue is replaced with gibberish, remaining nonetheless comprehensible because of its familiar rhythm of editorial interventions aimed at heightening the newspaper’s propagandistic impact. In between these two sections are devastating parodies of dozens of Soviet and prerevolutionary poets and writers. In contrast to the idealistic dissident writers who criticized the regime from the vantage point of values like freedom and democracy, Sorokin’s text is a work of pure negation, offering no alternative utopia to replace Soviet ideology.

What made *The Norm* possible was the distinctiveness of the Soviet literary culture it parodied and critiqued. The Bolsheviks took literature seriously as an engine of social transformation. For many of them, literary texts depicting social conflict and political struggle—such as Nikolay Chernyhevsky’s 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?*—had launched them on the road to revolutionary activism. For this reason, they were equally serious after the revolution about imposing censorship and creating a new literary aesthetic as well. While the 1920s produced an explosion of aesthetic experiments, in the 1930s under Stalin a conservative Socialist Realism coalesced into the Soviet state’s dominant aesthetic doctrine, enforced not just by censors but by hierarchies of promotion in the academies and the Writers’ Union, as well as by the political supervision of publishing houses and the press and literary pedagogy in schools and universities.

The centerpiece of Socialist Realist literature was the “occupational novel,” which dramatized the building of communism through formulaic, monotonously optimistic depictions of workplace conflict and romance. But despite the diversity of other genres—from science fiction to magical realism—that existed alongside it, no cultural product officially produced in the Soviet Union remained untouched by the party’s tutelage. This supervision extended not just to political questions but to form and language as well—for instance, sexuality, profanity, and obscenity were ruled out. To find works that departed from the official restrictions, readers had to turn to samizdat publications, which exposed them to the risk of political repression. *The Norm* itself begins by depicting the arrest of an authorial stand-in and the manuscript’s confiscation by KGB agents.

Yet political control was not just a suppressive force but also a productive one: From the Stalinist years to the era of perestroika, the state valued writers and artists and rewarded many of them with comfortable lifestyles and positions of cultural authority. The Communist Party was committed to a democratic vision rooted in the ideals of high culture, and it worked constantly to make art and literature accessible to the masses, inculcate classical aesthetic values, and subsidize cultural production. As a result, the Soviet people inhabited a common and integrated cultural space to a greater extent than seems imaginable in capitalist countries, where a wide gulf separates mass culture from elite literary and artistic work. All of this was cold comfort to dissident and avant-garde writers and artists, who regarded official Soviet culture as a suffocating prison patrolled at the margins by the tireless enforcers of state repression. Despite their mutual loathing, both the opposition and the Communist Party remained invested in the importance of art and literature, making artistic critique a meaningful and high-stakes enterprise.

During the late 1970s and ‘80s, Sorokin made a living as an artist and illustrator. Meanwhile, *The Norm* and his other writings gained increasing renown in the circle of writers and artists known as the Moscow Conceptualists, which included figures like Dmitri Prigov, Il’ia Kabakov, and the artistic team of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. Like Sorokin, the conceptualists played with the formal elements made available to them by Soviet culture, rearranging and recontextualizing them to subversive—and often hilarious—effect. While state repression was by this time no longer as heavy-handed as it once was, the conceptualists faced persistent harassment by the KGB; Prigov, for instance, was forcibly, albeit briefly, institutionalized in a mental hospital—a common repressive practice in the late Soviet era.

Despite not working professionally as a writer in the Soviet Union, Sorokin continued to experiment through underground media, and in 1985 his first published novel, *The Queue*, appeared in the Paris-based émigré journal *Sintaksis*. *The Queue* proved to be both a biting critique and an oddly tender depiction of Soviet society as an eternal queue for scarce goods. Narrated entire-
ly through the unattributed dialogue among the thousands of people standing in a horrendously long line, the novel explored the social norms and interpersonal relationships that Soviet citizens had habitually developed as a response to endemic shortages.

Since The Queue, like The Norm, could not be published legally in the Soviet Union, neither novel brought Sorokin widespread recognition, but that very lack of a mass audience enabled him to pursue further conceptual explorations. In 1982-84, he wrote Marina’s Thirtieth Love, which dealt with the adventures of a rapacious lesbian femme fatale who, after a whirlwind tour of Moscow’s bohemian and dissident underground, finds her way to heterosexuality and the true communist faith. Sorokin depicted this discovery in form as well as content: With Marina now a fully dedicated shock worker, the novel, too, embraces the literary conventions of Socialist Realism—but only half-seriously, first parodying the so-called occupational novel’s depictions of factory life and then transforming into a direct transcription of an issue of Pravda. Roman, written in the late 1980s, showed that Sorokin was capable of imitating more than just official Soviet prose: A pastiche of 19th-century Russian classics and filled with stock characters like the wise village schoolteacher and the cynical doctor, it offered an unbearably saccharine Slavophile rural idyll that collapses at the finale into an orgy of brutal, ritualistic violence.

Roman and Marina’s Thirtieth Love showcased two essential elements that defined Sorokin’s work until the early 1990s. Both novels were driven not by plot or character development per se but by meta-level changes in literary form and genre. They exemplified his view of characters as “simply letters on paper,” with whom the author was free to do whatever he wished. If the shit-eating in The Norm could easily be seen as a direct critique of Soviet daily life, the torments to which Sorokin began to subject his characters in subsequent books were more and more arbitrary, and perhaps not just Soviet in nature. (Indeed, several scenes depict the sexual abuse of a minor.) Yet this play of representations, too, had a political function. Graphic depictions of sex and violence represented a challenge to the enforced inoffensiveness of Soviet literature by demonstrating just how much it had excluded. On a deeper level, breaking the link between literary work and the world it claimed to depict—treating it as a series of arbitrary signs with connections only to other texts rather than an external reality—undermined the central premise of Socialist Realism: that the purpose of literature was to reflect, dramatize, and inspire the ongoing communist project.

By the late 1980s, Socialist Realism was in crisis, threatened not just by conceptualists like Sorokin but by a broader collapse. As glasnost and perestroika broke down the established censorship structures and artistic hierarchies, a new wave of film, literature, journalism, and art turned to portraying the dark sides of Soviet life. Known colloquially as cbernukha, from the Russian word for “black,” this work often seemed to be a simple reversal of earlier Socialist Realist optimism, a reflection of the social disintegration that had begun to overtake the Soviet Union in its final years. Rather than overfulfilling production plans and falling innocently in love, the characters now struggled for individual advantage and survival in a cruel, purposeless world where crime, alienation, and drug addiction had broken down all social bonds.

Sorokin’s reputation rested on his mastery of Soviet ideology and his skill at mocking it.

What distinguishes Their Four Hearts from other works of late-Soviet cbernukha is not simply the scale or arbitrariness of the violence and absurdity. It is that, like Roman, the novel is not meant to be a representation of reality at all, even if scenes drawn from daily life are occasionally interspersed throughout. (An obvious comparison might be the films of Quentin Tarantino, which only appear to be about career criminals or World War II commandos while actually being about other films about these things.) Their Four Hearts is a view from within the Socialist Realist literary universe as it buckles, cracks, and falls apart. Scenes like the casting of the steel skin mite or the protagonists’ journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway formally resemble the settings of Socialist Realist fiction, but they are stripped of any underlying narrative or political logic. The elderly war hero Henry Shtaube repeatedly attempts to embark on one of the exhortatory speeches so common in Soviet fiction as a vehicle for didactic messages, but he succeeds only in declaring random, disconnected fragments from different kinds of texts, his words ultimately degenerating into an expletive-ridden glossolalia. In its death throes, Socialist Realism also swallows up its mortal enemy, the liberal Soviet literature of the Thaw and perestroika eras, whose tropes also feature heavily in the novel.

In the most explicitly political scene in Their Four Hearts, Shtaube and the steely-eyed intelligence officer Rebrov discuss the current ideological situation as the Communist Party totters on the brink of oblivion. Rebrov is a loyal party man committed to its post-perestroika line: “In our current situation, the communists are capable of positive, truly democratic approaches. The reverse is also true: the democrats, or perhaps it would be better to say quasi-democrats, have a totalitarian approach to authority.” Shtaube, who has...
D

Despite its refusal to depict reality, Their Four Hearts is eerily prescient in other ways too. As late-Soviet social dysfunction turned into outright societal collapse in the wake of the “shock therapy” of the early 1990s—excess mortality reached millions of deaths in the former USSR over the first half of the decade—Russia became one of the most violent societies in the world. In retrospect, the bloody shootouts that make up much of the novel’s plot seem less like dreadful disruptions of the placid surface of Socialist Realist fiction and more like a preview of daily life to come. The way the novel erodes distinctions between state actors, criminals, and private businessmen is another feature that would soon become familiar.

The post-Soviet era confronted Russia’s underground writers and artists with an unexpected new problem. As Victor Pelevin put it in one of his novels, “the eternity” that his protagonist Tatarkii “once believed in could exist only with the help of state subsidies—or as something forbidden by the state, which amounts to the same thing.” Precisely because the Soviet state attached so much importance to culture, Sorokin’s and his comrades’ attack on it had real political weight. After the collapse, for anyone with real power, upholding the traditions of classic Russian literature—let alone the exhausted and irrelevant legacy of Socialist Realism—was no longer a priority. Avant-garde culture was free to subvert whatever it wanted to subvert without a KGB officer knocking at the door, but in the end what counted was money—and money had no aesthetic commitments of its own.

For Sorokin, the post-Soviet decades were a triumph. His samizdat work began to see the light of day in real publications, and new audiences were able to discover books that had previously been limited to a narrow circle of connoisseurs. As a result, his reputation grew both domestically and abroad, putting him in the very top ranks of post-Soviet novelists. In the early 2000s, he was even able to rediscover his role as a scandalous literary enfant terrible when he was targeted by the now-defunct pro-Putin youth movement Walking Together for his “propaganda” glorifying pornography and obscenity. Walking Together constructed a giant toilet outside the Bolshoi Theater, which they threw Sorokin’s books into. Yet this and subsequent scandals over the obscene content of his books brought him even more readers and commercial success.

Starting in the late 1990s, Sorokin embraced the possibilities of a new genre: science fiction. His 1999 novel Blue Lard became notorious for its depictions of sexuality, but it broke from his previous books in other ways, written in a dense and opaque Sino-Russian pidgin replete with neologisms. The plot revolved around cloning experiments in a future Siberia and a bizarre alternate history in which Stalin and Hitler are still alive. Meanwhile, the novels of his Ice Trilogy explored a mysterious cult obsessed with the quasi-magical powers of the ice deposited in Siberia by the Tunguska meteorite. His most prominent work in this vein was the 2006 dystopian novel Day of the Oprichnik (published in English in 2011), which depicted an autocratic, neo-medieval future Russia dependent on Chinese imports but otherwise literally walled off from the rest of the world. Despite the creativity and originality of these more recent novels, Sorokin’s ongoing confrontation with the philistinism, authoritarianism, and cultural conservatism of Putin’s Russia has, at times, appeared to lack the punch of his earlier works. Though the regime has gradually clamped down on public obscenity in various forms (for instance, 2013 and 2014 laws imposed fines on the use of profanity in film, literature, and theater), Sorokin’s novels don’t seem to pose much of a challenge to this consensus: His explicit scenes of sex and violence have become such a calling card that he has begun to seem like a one-trick pony. In this sense, he is a victim of his own success, having allowed the most outwardly provocative elements of his work to overshadow his deeper aesthetic goals.

For Sorokin, the end of the Soviet literary culture that he began his career by critiquing has meant the loss of a powerful and generative foil, one that the capitalist normality of the post-1991 era has never quite replaced. With Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, that normality has decisively ended. When the war started, Sorokin penned an essay in The Guardian condemning the invasion and describing Putin as the latest holder of “the fatal Ring of Russian Power,” the tip of an authoritarian pyramid constructed in the 16th century by Ivan the Terrible. Such views are commonplace among Russian liberals. What remains to be seen is whether Sorokin can once again find his way between the edifice of state propaganda and the platitudes of its well-meaning critics—as he did so powerfully and compellingly in the 1980s and early 1990s, and in particular with Their Four Hearts.
A Burning Planet

Should the climate movement embrace sabotage?

BY THEA RIOFRANCO S

In 1957, as the postwar economic boom led to a “great acceleration” in hydrocarbon energy use, a group of scientists working for a Texas-based petroleum company called Humble Oil (later renamed ExxonMobil) embarked on a study prompted by growing public concern over air pollution and new research on the consequences of burning fossil fuels. What they found was that the “enormous quantity of carbon dioxide” in the atmosphere was linked to the “combustion of fossil fuels.” Sixty-five years later, reality has proved to be even worse than their findings. With the unchecked combustion of fossil fuels releasing enormous quantities of carbon, the world is now on track to reach 5.8 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels. At the most recent UN Climate Change Conference, the assembled heads of state produced, yet again, zero binding commitments to reduce those emissions. And despite the green rhetoric, only 6 percent of the fiscal stimulus packages implemented by the G20 nations in 2020 and 2021 have contributed to emissions reductions, even as oil company profits soared to record highs. Amid government inaction, it has also become clear that the private sector will not save us. We’ve been told that benevolent investors would reroute capital away from dirty energy sectors and toward the green industries of the future. But the promise of “socially responsible finance” has proved to be mostly a scam. Despite pledges to do otherwise, Blackrock, the world’s largest asset manager, has continued to invest in fossil fuel companies, and the production of coal—the dirtiest fossil fuel—is now on the rise.

Meanwhile, with neither states nor capital doing all that much to slash carbon use, emissions have fully rebounded from their pandemic slump. In 2021, the world broke two grim records: the highest recorded carbon dioxide emissions in history and the largest absolute annual increase ever. Year after year, Global North countries delay the promised climate financing for the Global South, which contributed the least to the crisis yet experiences its worst harms. Instead of redistribution, Global South governments can expect what Daniela Gabor and Isabella Weber call “carbon shock therapy,” wherein loans from the International Monetary Fund are conditioned on adopting regressive carbon pricing and cuts to fuel subsidies. Geopolitical conditions are adding fuel to this growing fire. In the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, governments in the US and Europe are rolling back renewable energy commitments.

The reign of fossil fuel capitalism does face fierce resistance, however. During the waves of student strikes in 2019, young people around the world decried the generational injustice of inheriting a burning planet. The United States has seen a spate of successful campaigns opposing new extraction, pipelines, and power plants. In Memphis, an environmental justice coalition stopped the Byhalia pipeline, which would have run through Black neighborhoods in the city’s south side; in Louisiana, local pushback derailed the Plaquemines oil export terminal, which, among myriad other harms, would have been constructed on a burial site of enslaved people. After six years of organizing, climate activists from West Virginia to North Carolina have forced Duke Energy and Dominion Energy to cancel the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. The Lummi Nation and its allies have helped prevent a coal export terminal in Whatcom County in Washington; on the other side of the state, environmental and river protection groups have helped prevent the government from granting key permits for a
Explore *The Nation* Online
Make the most of your subscription

Activate your online access on your phone or computer to get all that *The Nation* has to offer: 
Go to TheNation.com/register or scan the QR code ▶

---

**Subscribe to our newsletters**

IN YOUR INBOX

- REPRO NATION
- BOOKS & THE ARTS
- CLIMATE UPDATE
- DAILY
- WEEKLY
- OPPART

---

**Listen to our podcasts**

ON YOUR HEADPHONES

- Nation START MAKING SENSE
- Edge of SPORTS with DAVE ZIPKIN
- THE TIME OF MONSTERS
- GOING FOR BROKE
- SYSTEM CHECK
- NEXT LEFT

---

**Over 150 years of truth-telling journalism**

IN OUR ARCHIVES

- Nation Psychedelics Inc.
- Nation Sex, Death, and Empire
- Nation Spring Books
- Nation Black Like Me
- Nation
fracked-gas-to-methanol refinery in Kalama. In the Great Plains, after more than a decade of struggle against the Keystone XL Pipeline—which would have transported tar sands oil extracted from beneath the boreal forest of Alberta, Canada, to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas—President Biden revoked its cross-border permit, and TC Energy abandoned the project.

These campaigns have used a range of strategies. Indigenous-led movements like the water defenders at Standing Rock are distinct from what Kai Bosworth calls “pipeline populism” (movements composed primarily of white rural landowners and grassroots environmentalists), and both of these in turn contrast with the Black and Latino communities fighting environmental racism. But all of these movements have shared one key feature: nonviolence. The exceptions—a handful of protesters, acting on their own militant volition, who have destroyed fossil fuel machinery—only prove the rule.

In the United States, climate activists’ commitment to pacifism is capacious enough to foreclose property damage, let alone bodily harm to fossil fuel executives. But despite these heroic efforts, corporations emit with impunity and states continue to delay any action to stop them—and all the while, the world gets hotter and hotter.

It is this consensus about peaceful activism amid elite recklessness that Andreas Malm rejects. How to Blow Up a Pipeline will not tell you how to blow up a pipeline, but it will try to convince you that efforts to physically dismantle the infrastructural tentacles of fossil fuel capitalism are historically grounded, strategically intelligent, and morally imperative. “There has been a time for a Gandhian climate movement; perhaps there might come a time for a Fanonian one,” avers the book’s penultimate line. “Perhaps” is performatively ambivalent, equal parts prediction and provocation. While slippages between these rhetorical modes pervade the text, one thing is crystal clear throughout: For Malm, the climate movement needs to attack the crisis at its root, defusing “carbon-emitting devices” one by one.

For several years now, Andreas Malm has been hot on the trail of the perpetrators of one of history’s greatest crimes: the discharge of hundreds of billions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere, with fatal consequences (researchers estimate 5 million excess deaths a year can be attributed to the extreme temperatures caused by climate change). The journey began with his book Fossil Capital. In it, he sought to refute those Whiggish energy histories that portray the past as an arc that bends toward fossil fuels and to show instead how the fossil fuel revolution of the 1820s and ’30s was the result of dynamic class conflicts rather than an inevitable progression. Water, he notes, was after all abundant and free, and water wheels more powerful and reliable than the early steam engines at the outset of the Industrial Age. The adoption of steam engines and coal was the outcome of mill owners seeking to resolve a problem that stymied their efforts to ensure a reliable, and disciplined, supply of labor: the fact that untapped sources of fast-flowing water were spread throughout a country side, while people were concentrated in towns and cities. By embracing coal and steam engines over rivers and water mills, they found a novel solution that allowed them to better dominate both workers and nature—and thus pave the way for an age of unprecedented economic growth amid smokestacks of planet-warming carbon.

In The Progress of This Storm, Malm skipped ahead nearly two centuries and shifted from the academic study of history to the theories increasingly popular among academics themselves. He trained his polemical ire on the ivory tower, where, he insists, a set of prominent philosophers, geographers, and sociologists have played the role of useful idiots for fossil capitalists by flattening the distinction between human society and nonhuman nature. Effacing ruling-class culpability for climate change was not, of course, the intent of those scholars who sought to re-embed humans in the “web of life” (to use Jason Moore’s term) or to recover the agency of nonhuman nature (Bruno Latour’s “actor network theory”) and even “matter” itself (Jane Bennett’s “new materialism”). But by mixing the social and the natural, Malm contends, these scholars refused to hold humans, and specifically capitalist humans, accountable for their wanton destruction of the earth. For Malm, the only way to counter this destruction is to retain “the uniqueness of human agency” and the social/natural dichotomy it underwrites.

Agency, after all, lies at the heart of both the complicity of elites and the capacity of the masses: “Political warfare against an ever more pestiferous ruling class demands manuals brimful with binaries.”

As if to take up his own injunction, Malm then set out to publish a slew of such manuals. White Skin, Black Fuel, written by Malm and a collective of 20 other authors, traced how the far right has rallied to the defense of fossil capital, transforming denialism from industry-saving propaganda into a central tenet of ethnocentric reaction. Corona, Climate, and Chronic Emergency ends with a vision of “ecological war communism,” in which states expropriate fossil capital without compensation and massively scale up green technologies. Malm’s latest manual, How to Blow Up a Pipeline, aims at rousing the climate movement into a state of collective rage adequate to meet the challenge of planetary catastrophe. Between a revolutionary past and a utopian future, he argues, stands the weighty impasse of the present: “The extraordinary inertia of the capitalist mode of production meeting the reactivity of the earth.” The options are fatalism or sabotage. Malm implores us to choose the latter.

How to Blow Up a Pipeline can be divided roughly into three sequential prongs: the history of climate change resistance, the strategies it has embraced and the ones it ought to embrace, and the morality of its actions. For Malm, the annals of climate activism can be understood on two related planes. The first is the short-term climate activism that showed a promising trajectory of increasing numbers and de-
We will follow strict Covid-19 safety protocols in all of our programs and will require travelers to be vaccinated and boosted.

For more information on these and other destinations, go to TheNation.com/TRAVELS, e-mail travels@thenation.com, or call 212-209-5401.
contours of Indigenous peoples and their ancestral territories, or by economic class—the workers of the world united? Is it perhaps best apprehended in generational terms, with not only today’s youth but all the unborn humans to come living with the deadly consequences of their reckless predecessors?

Who, in other words, is the revolutionary subject of the climate crisis? Who is the agent of historical change? Without an answer to these questions, the idea of organizing massive and disruptive protests that don’t shy away from destroying the property of fossil capital appears all the more daunting. Even if one could identify fossil capitalism’s structural antagonists, the empirical existence of such a group, or sets of groups, is an insufficient precondition for their taking concerted action toward a shared aim. The difference between a class in itself versus a class for itself, to borrow from Marx, is the difference between collective inaction and collective action, and Malm doesn’t identify the conditions under which masses of those most harmed by global warming could recognize their shared grievances and their combined potential to dig fossil capital’s grave (or rather, keep fossil fuels buried right where they are). In fact, if anything, Malm suggests that the most harmed groups are inadequately militant. Especially in the Global South, he notes, sabotage against fossil fuel infrastructure is particularly “conspicuous by its absence,” given the preponderance of protest targets and the disproportionate impact of global warming. People in the Global South, he argues, “might agonise over it [the climate crisis]; they rarely see a means for fighting back.”

But Malm’s narrow definition of “fighting back” risks minimizing what is arguably the most effective anti-extractive activism in the world. He may be right that these activists mostly refrain from sabotage. But they do put their bodies on the line and erect blockades and other physical barriers—and they do so in the face of state and corporate repression. And, contra Malm, this risky activism is in fact more likely to take place in countries on the lower rungs of the global hierarchy. In one recent mega-study of anti-extractive movements around the world, scholars found that between 1997 and 2019, just under a quarter of the 371 cases of protests against fossil fuel extraction, pipelines, or refining occurred in high-income countries, with nearly half of all episodes occurring in low- or lower-middle-income countries. It’s true that the vast majority of this Global South protest is “pacifist” by Malm’s definition—though that needn’t imply a lack of force on both sides. Forty percent of the instances of anti-pipeline protests resulted in state criminalization or outright violence, including murder. Given Malm’s respect for bravery, he ought to tip his hat to the Latin American land and water defenders, who are killed in higher numbers than environmental activists anywhere else in the world.

If this doesn’t count as “fighting back,” neither does the long history of blowing up pipelines in the Global South, primarily in Africa and the Middle East. Malm does devote several pages to these acts of sabotage. But none of this destruction meets his stringent criteria: “Devices emitting CO₂ have been physically disrupted for two centuries by subaltern groups indignant at the powers they have animated—automation, apartheid, occupation—but not yet as destructive forces in and of themselves.” This is a curious statement. In the aforementioned study, among the reasons given by front-line communities for their resistance to fossil fuels (again, disproportionately concentrated in the Global South) are “biodiversity loss,” “air pollution,” “contamination of soil and water,” and “loss of land”; for pipelines and fracking specifically, “global warming” is also a factor. These movements clearly see the infrastructure of fossil capitalism as Malm does: destructive in and of itself. They just don’t always see climate change as the only or primary harm, but instead focus on the localized environmental and social impacts—impacts that also have atmospheric implications. (After the fossil fuel industry, tropical deforestation is the second-largest contributor to global warming.)

The idea that sabotage and other forms of direct action against fossil capitalism count as such only if the placards and chants of the protesters refer to carbon parts per million or call out oil executives by name not only artificially minimizes the extent of the relevant resistance; it also flies in the face of everything we’ve learned about what inspires effective climate and environmental activism. Beyond the narrow confines of the already engaged, or those materially secure enough to be protected from the immediate, palpable, and therefore local ravages of fossil capitalism, a strategy that relies on an abstract commitment to mitigating climate change is one doomed to fail in organizing the very masses that Malm purports to prioritize.

Throughout How to Blow Up a Pipeline, Malm is explicitly preoccupied with the need for a broad-based climate movement that engages millions of people. Far from pushing a theory of the vanguard, he is careful to thread the needle of militancy and mass mobilization, arguing that the two are dialectically intertwined rather than mutually opposed. To this point, he critiques the eco-sabotage of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s for its nihilism and adventurism: In Malm’s view, it represented mostly a hammer without an anvil. But in a permanent state of climate emergency, Malm’s tactical calculus changes. The precarious balance between vanguardism and mass mobilization gives way to the “law of a tendency of the receptivity” to violence “to rise in a warming world.” (One might well ask if this “law” also applies to the adherents to fossil fascism, and what risks this might pose to activist saboteurs.) He suggests that this new receptivity to violence might attract new participants, would-be protesters who are repelled rather than reassured by the movement’s abiding pacifism.

While it is undoubtedly true that some would “feel summoned” by sabotage, Malm seems to have reversed the causality here. Mass movements are not spawned on the backs of lone wolves; rather, it is in moments of mass mobilization that spontaneous (or planned) violence might erupt. To wit, during the enormous uprising sparked by the police murder of George Floyd, the burning of a police precinct in Minneapolis was met with widespread approbation: 54 percent of Americans thought the act was justified. Moving public opinion on an event as incendiary as setting ablaze the very infrastructure of “law and order”
was a herculean task. It is impossible to imagine such a dramatic, if fleeting, shift in the Overton window without millions in the streets—15 million to 26 million, to be precise, rendering the months-long uprising the largest and most geographically expansive protest movement in US history. In other words, the radical-flank theory works both ways: Radicalism can legitimate stances that are moderate by comparison, but multitudinous protest that’s deemed relatively peaceful is necessary for violence to have this effect.

In all fairness, Malm would probably agree. But by framing violence as a solution to the climate movement’s current impasse, he flirts with propaganda of the deed, the notion that violent political acts on their own awaken latent masses. Malm observes that the absence of “a single riot or wave of property destruction,” usually taken as a sign of the success of pacifism, could just as well evidence the climate movement’s “failure to attain social depth, articulate the antagonisms that run through this crisis, and, not the least, acquire a tactical asset.” Is violence a result or a cause of social depth? And exactly how are “antagonisms” articulated? The same history of intermittently violent social struggle that Malm recounts provides some guidance: Abstract concepts such as the atmospheric concentration of carbon or the global workings of fossil capitalism will not on their own compel large numbers of people to engage in potentially fatal collective action. It is the palpable everyday effects of those planetary phenomena—the loss of land and livelihoods, the ruination of habitats and waterways, the meting out of intimidation and brutality—that rouse people to link arms and even risk their lives in highly asymmetric battles with multinational firms protected by the repressive arm of the state.

The challenge before us, then, lies less in persuading frontline communities to resist on the grounds of global emissions rather than local pollution or in encouraging the already committed Global North participants in Fridays for Future, Enje Gelände, and Extinction Rebellion to wake up and choose violence. Rather, the challenge appears to be in recruiting much larger numbers of people than are currently mobilized by any of these groups, regardless of the tactical choices made in the heat of battle. Malm grasps the importance of organizing the unorganized: “A climate movement that does not want to eat the rich, with all the hunger of those who struggle to put food on the table, will never hit home.” But his focus remains on inciting “social anger” rather than cultivating a social base.

In the final chapter, Malm reflects on the moral basis of pipeline sabotage and taps into a sort of secular faith reminiscent of Martin Haglund’s recent treatise, This Life. First he eviscerates climate fatalism: The “reification of despair,” he argues, is itself a “performative contradiction,” purporting to merely describe, from the comfort of an armchair, the certainty of apocalypse while actively dissuading people from taking action. It is also empirically wrong, because “every gigaton” of carbon emissions “matters.” Malm is intrigued by a different kind of fatalism, however. Taking inspiration from the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, he appeals to the “nobility” of martyrdom: “Death was certain and still they fought on. It can never, ever be too late for that gesture.”

For Malm, the moral imperative to act against all odds issues from a duty to both the past and the future. Every new generation looks backward at those preceding it, he insists, asking whether their forebears “willingly queued up for the furnaces? Or that some people fought like Jews who knew they would be killed?” But as today’s extreme weather events are only a “foretaste” of what’s to come, each generation looks forward as well, knowing that it too will be judged by its offspring. Historical consciousness is also a historical conscience; it is here that morality and strategy meet.

All movements have martyrs, whether in the literal sense of those who expose themselves to peril for the cause or, more figuratively, those who will not live to see the fruits of their efforts. But for activists to have a fighting chance of getting us off the track of dangerous warming, we need to see a dramatic change in the energy system that powers the global economy in the course of our lifetimes—not after generations of struggle. Such a rapid transformation of this magnitude absolutely requires a leap of secular faith: the tenacious belief that things both could and must be otherwise. And it may well require a hardened commitment to sabotage and the many grave risks it entails.

For all these reasons, when the millions-strong climate movement is reassembled and poised to continue its trajectory of growth and militancy, How to Blow Up a Pipeline should be required reading for the cadres. Its forceful prose, stirring paens to courage and discipline, and fidelity to the legacy of popular violence in the pursuit of emancipation make it a convincing critique of the pieties of today’s pacifism. But despite these virtues, the book does not provide answers to the abiding challenges of creating collectivities, united as much by righteous rage and hope as by shared strategy and vision, and sustaining their actions in the stormy decades to come. Who are fossil capitalism’s gravediggers, and what are their sources of leverage? What are their everyday concerns and anxieties, and how are those related to the climate crisis? What keeps them from banding together now, and what would facilitate their mobilization in the future? And how might they be convinced that, despite all appearances and lived experiences, it is truly in their power to change the world?
As a mode of recommendation, the newspaper fiction review has less to recommend it than ever before. Space limitations, personal considerations, and editorial preferences combine to force it to assume a somewhat gaunt profile: What many readers encounter are cautious judgments affixed to a skeletal summary, leaving little opening for the decisive and expansive claims on a reader's attention that make a piece of criticism valuable on its own, or even simply viral. Limited in terms of space and energy, the newspaper review also faces a raft of online competition better suited to the digital age—sites like Amazon and Goodreads that aggregate and quantify consumer-oriented opinion—as well as those longer essay reviews or works of literary criticism that appear in general-interest or so-called little magazines and tend to situate the given book in a political, intellectual, or aesthetic context.

To add to these problems, newspaper book pages as an institution are withering away. As the likes of Google rake in the advertising dollars that once kept city papers comfortably fat, anachronistic luxuries like their culture sections, and book reviews especially, have been cut down mercilessly. In 2022, only one newspaper still maintains a stand-alone book review: The New York Times. No more than a dozen staff critic positions exist to serve a nation of 330 million. From the Times on down, all the papers largely get by through occasional fiction reviews commissioned from freelancers. And yet people still agree to write them. Why?

Based on interviews with 40 active fiction reviewers for major newspapers, Phillipa K. Chong's study Inside the Critics' Circle: Book Reviewing in Uncertain Times is a game attempt to survey a flagging field of cultural commentary that's undergoing fundamental shifts. It is an index of Chong's discernment that she has focused on one of the few intriguing...
He lives in Louisville, Ky. 

Frank Guan is a critic whose essays and reviews have appeared in n+1, The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, and Bookforum. He lives in Louisville, Ky.

spaces that her profession (she is a cultural sociologist at McMaster University in Canada) has yet to examine seriously, and one from which there is plenty of sociological conjecture to be harvested. Book critics anxiously assert their authority, yet evince uncertainty regarding whether anybody else agrees that they have it. The uncertainty of the critic’s place in American culture is present from the first pages of Chong’s study: A woman with “a review career that spans decades...for the most important and influential newspapers in North America” tells Chong in her interview that the idea of her possibly being a “tastemaker” is laughable. The scene neatly illustrates the challenges faced by external analysts in their attempts to decode a world as insular and disingenuous as literary criticism. But it also points to unspoken cultural tensions that inhibit a more candid attitude toward one’s own authority: In what sort of society would such a powerful tastemaker feel compelled to present themselves as something less?

To arrive at clarity regarding these discerning figures requires discernment of one’s own. The great harvest awaits, but it demands much sharpness from the harvester. The risk of vendetta, they pull their punches, veiling deep disapproval as mild qualification and reserving harsh sentences for established literary celebrities who can afford to take a hit. And, unable or unwilling to define their own field in a convincingly positive way, they resort to outlining it through negation.

It is here that Chong’s anonymized data comes closest to busting out of the straitjacket of abstracted neutrality required of so many academic books. As she notes:

Critics frequently imagined and described amateur reviewers as inhabiting nonprofessional spaces as a way of underlining their recreational involvement in book culture. For example, when describing amateur reviewers, critics often imagined them as writing from their parents’ basement (they also imagined them to be living there), on their laptops at coffee shops, or at home, as implied by the image of the amateur as “a guy in his pajamas.”

Hesitant to self-define, her critics hasten to spell out what they are not: Incapable of owning up to their status, they manifest it by way of put-downs, caricatures. The critics hired by major newspapers tower over Amazon reviewers (“an example of the worst”), Goodreads posters (“just a bunch of moms”), and bloggers (“kind of dumb, as a general rule”) by virtue of a hazy expertise, an inimitable depth.

Yet not all expertise and depth are valued equally. Even though (or perhaps because) many of the critics she surveys are themselves professors, Chong discovers a powerful resistance to “academics’ overly pedantic and esoteric approach to books.” The “inappropriateness of using literary theories” typified by “political and ideological analyses” is insisted upon on the grounds they would alienate audiences or obscure aesthetics, even if arguably neither is the case. Ignoring the numerous instances of long-form criticism that fruitfully bring literary theories and political analyses to bear on the books under review, the newspaper critic claims to represent “the general reader,” who lacks the time and inclination for excessive erudition; art’s subjection to theory is described as “abusive, violent to the book and to the author.” A reader doesn’t have to be political or theoretical to note how a hostility to “ideology” as such has traditionally doubled as an expression of a different, no less prescriptive ideology of one’s own, but it would surely help.

It is to Chong’s credit that she observes here a striking incongruity among her interviewees: “When distinguishing themselves from reader-reviewers, critics operate as highly specialized connoisseurs. When distancing themselves from academic-styled reviews, journalistic critics represent the Everyman.” Still more striking, though, is her reluctance to pursue an adequate explanation of what she’s observed. At precisely the point that calls for a bolder analysis and a broader context to clarify the field of study, neither is forthcoming. Something more than mere equivocation or hypocrisy is at work when her chorus of critics pivots more than mere equivocation or hypocrisy study, neither is forthcoming. Something more than mere equivocation or hypocrisy...
only when they get comparative—one might examine the differences between Bourdieu's native France, with its long history of cultural education centered around monolithic state initiatives, and the United States. Here, conditioned by the absence of an unified direction from the state in cultural education, the libertarian discourse of the populist resistance to elitist taste comes naturally to elites and non-elites alike. “The portrait of book reviewers that emerges from this study points to how the fact and feeling of power can be decoupled,” Chong concludes. But it is possible that her correspondents are not oblivious to some power they lack, but are simply being honest about the fact that they don’t have as much as she believes. Once one factors in the cultural disaggregation imposed by both American and online culture, her critics’ disavowals of status are not as disingenuous as they may first appear. Tastemakers they are, but only to some—and how confident can a tastemaker be, knowing that they are not one for all? Their relatively high status fails to blind them to a broader context where the doctrine of “to each their own” saps the authority of critics, rendering them something less than magisterial.

Which doesn’t mean that literary critics don’t have tremendous power. But it’s a power inherent to the practice, amplified by the social conditions that frame it. As Norman Podhoretz put it in 1967 in *Making It*:

As a critic, editor, and writer I have continually been struck by the sheer violence of response to a strongly expressed judgment, especially a negative one, of a novel or a play almost always provokes: you would think that an issue of life and death was at stake in the decision to like or dislike a particular book. But that, it seems, is precisely how many people feel: threatened in their very being when a critic challenges their tastes, and wildly grateful, as though it were a sign of Calvinist grace, to be confirmed and justified.

Podhoretz magnified, as few others could, the intensity that naturally adheres to book reviews in a society devoid of common guidelines with regard to taste. The concern is not that no one serves the function of tastemaker or literary intellectual, but that everyone has the right to do so: Even prior to the Internet’s arrival, this democratization of cultural privilege tended toward a chaotic juncture where next to no one can be certain of which stories are good, which authors elect. The desperate pursuit of external validation that Podhoretz describes is the natural corollary of a world in which each person is free to anoint themselves the ultimate authority regarding the truth of the Word, while generally lacking the capacity to fully trust in their own judgment.

Under such circumstances, few authoritative critics can emerge, but those that somehow do will exercise an outsize influence. For in the absence of reliable institutions to brace themselves against, they must derive authority from nothing other than the resonance of their own words. It’s not accidental but providential that Edgar Allan Poe, the United States’ first major critic, was also one of its first serious poets; only a firm command of language can abolish the uncertainty regarding that of others. Once and for all, Poe proved that, possessing language, it was possible to stand apart from a critical consensus that was as imprecise regarding consequential works as it was accurate regarding works of little substance; possible, too, to surmount the fear of retaliation by the authors one sincerely critiqued, albeit not without personal cost.

Of course one must, by all means, be selective in the act of criticism. But to be finicky regarding where criticism is published—or, worse yet, to limit how criticism should be conducted—is to fight a losing battle. When critical language contains its own proof, the question of format becomes a moot point; invidious correlations between critical quality and critical venue—Amazon equals bad; bloggers equal dumb—longer-form criticism equals too academic and too specialized—can be set aside as condescension born of insecurity. (This applies equally to literary intellectuals who look down on newspaper book reviews.) And when such an overwhelming majority of writing, both fictional and critical, in every venue, low and high, is essentially inert, why blame just the amateurs? Why censure, out of hand, critiques informed (but not dictated) by politics and ideology, as if it had not already been proved, time and time again, that great fiction and great criticism can be composed with them in mind? Like strings on a guitar, sensitivity to art, historical awareness, fluency in ideology, and a lively wit are at once intrinsically connected and distinct.

To learn new chords with them can only benefit the novelist, the critic, and their readers.

---

Invidious accusations—Amazon equals bad; bloggers equal dumb—reflect condescension born of insecurity.
Letters

Whole Earth Generation

Malcolm Harris, in his review of John Markoff’s Whole Earth: The Many Lives of Stewart Brand, glosses over the vital cultural influence of the Whole Earth Catalog during the last decades of the 20th century (”The Zen Playboy,” June 27/July 4). Inspired by the most iconic photograph yet in history—the shot of Earth from space by Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders—Brand in 1968 envisioned a publication that would celebrate this stunning new holistic perspective of our planet home and contain information, resources, and tools that would encourage and empower people to take charge of their own lives.

In what reads like a sordid gossip column, Harris’s review dismisses the Whole Earth Catalog as a one-off indulgence prompted by Brand’s love of shopping, while ignoring the profound impact it had on a generation of young people (which included myself). There was no Internet in the ’60s, and the Catalog addressed a growing hunger for information, giving us access to perspectives both macro and micro. Steve Jobs called it the paperback prototype for Google. The original Catalog would spawn a sequence of 33 editions over the next 30 years, as well as over 40 issues of its sister journal, The CoEvolution Quarterly. The monumental contribution of this extraordinary body of work, all catalyzed by Brand, vastly overarches Harris’s hodgepodge of petty judgments.

Paul Winter Litchfield, Conn.

Maier and McCarthyism

Re “Candids,” by Sarah Jaffe [June 13/20]: It seems to me that the discussion of Vivian Maier and her work can also be situated in the history of photography. Surely Maier was aware of the great work of the Photo League in New York, an organization that had, since at least 1936, produced “worker photography” until closing its doors in 1951 following accusations of being “un-American.” Self-protection, at that moment, could certainly have led Maier to publicly avoid the communist left and preserve her ability to continue to work and to photograph without federal interdiction.

Paul Gottlieb Wynnewood, Pa.

As someone who just finished reading John Markoff’s biography of Stewart Brand, Malcolm Harris’s review struck me as particularly uncharitable toward its subject. Brand is one of a few individuals who changed the direction of my life, by introducing me to new ways of thinking—whether through the publication of the Whole Earth Catalog (which got me to CalArts in the ’70s) or The Media Lab, which helped lead Louis Rossetter and me to create Wired magazine in the ’90s.

There are worse things than choosing to be a wide-eyed optimist. It’s so easy to criticize from afar. Harris’s mercantile lens will never understand the West Coast yearning for new possibilities. Naive? Absolutely. And yet the future keeps getting built out here.

John Plunkett

The writer is a musician and band leader and a pioneering composer of the genre known as Earth music.
"The organizations that are driving this anti-trans hate machine are familiar names."
For more than 60 years, The Nation has called for lifting the US embargo on Cuba. The roots of our travel program to the island extend back to that commitment to forge a more sensible, sane, and productive US policy toward Cuba, a critical necessity I witnessed for myself when I traveled there on The Nation’s program this past March.

This November, Nation Travels will be returning to Cuba and we invite you, along with The Nation’s leading writer on US-Cuba relations, Peter Kornbluh, to see for yourself the effects the embargo exacts on Cuba. I hope you will join him and other progressive travelers—for mojitos, salsa lessons, and intelligent travel with humane and principled purpose.

Katrina vanden Heuvel
Editorial Director and Publisher, The Nation

We will follow strict Covid-19 safety protocols throughout the program and will require that all travelers and tour staff be vaccinated and boosted.

100% of the proceeds from our travel programs support The Nation’s journalism.

For more information, visit TheNation.com/HAVANA-VINALES, e-mail us at travels@thenation.com, or call 212-209-5401.

The Nation purchases carbon offsets for all emissions generated by our tours.

Nation editor D.D. Guttenplan will be joining us on this tour
You can’t always lie down in bed and sleep. Heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches – and dozens of other ailments and worries. Those are the nights you’d give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in: one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises your feet and legs just where you want them, supports your head and shoulders properly, and operates at the touch of a button.

Our Perfect Sleep Chair® does all that and more. More than a chair or recliner, it’s designed to provide total comfort. Choose your preferred heat and massage settings, for hours of soothing relaxation. Reading or watching TV? Our chair’s recline technology allows you to pause the chair in an infinite number of settings. And best of all, it features a powerful lift mechanism that tilts the entire chair forward, making it easy to stand. You’ll love the other benefits, too. It helps with correct spinal alignment and promotes back pressure relief, to prevent back and muscle pain. The overstuffed, oversized biscuit style back and unique seat design will cradle you in comfort. Generously filled, wide armrests provide enhanced arm support when sitting or reclining. It even has a battery backup in case of a power outage.

White glove delivery included in shipping charge. Professionals will deliver the chair to the exact spot in your home where you want it, unpack it, inspect it, test it, position it, and even carry the packaging away! You get your choice of Luxurious and Lasting Brisa, Genuine Italian Leather, stain and liquid repellent Duralux with the classic leather look, or plush MicroLux microfiber, all handcrafted in a variety of colors to fit any decor. Call now!

1-888-847-4049

Please mention code 117240 when ordering.