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MARCH 21/28, 2022

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War and Peace in Ukraine

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

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War zone: A child outside a residential building damaged by a missile on February 25 in Kyiv, Ukraine.

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Cover illustration:
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EDITORIAL / KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL FOR THE NATION

Putin's Invasion



WAR IS A TRAGEDY, A CRIME, AND A DEFEAT. *THE NATION* CONDEMNS THE DECISION of Russian President Vladimir Putin to abandon the path of diplomacy by brutally attacking and invading Ukraine, a blatant violation of international law.

We urge Russia to agree to an immediate cease-fire and all parties to seek a diplomatic solution to avert the risk of an unthinkable direct conflict between the world's two largest nuclear powers—a peril made worse by Putin's move to place Russia's nuclear forces on alert.

The Nation has consistently called for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis in Ukraine that respects international law and international borders. While Putin's actions are indefensible, responsibility for this conflict is widely shared. This magazine has warned repeatedly that extending NATO to Russia's borders would inevitably produce a dangerous reaction. We have criticized NATO's wholesale rejection of Russia's security proposals.

However unpopular it may be to point this out, the expansion of NATO provided the context for this crisis—a history too often ignored by our media. Offering future NATO membership to Ukraine—when successive US presidents and our NATO allies have demonstrated that they do not have the slightest intention of fighting to defend the country—was deeply irresponsible. Instead, Putin's demand that Ukraine remain outside of NATO—essentially that the status quo be codified—was scorned as violating NATO's “principle” of admitting anyone it wanted.

One result was to encourage parallel irresponsibility by Ukraine. In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky promised voters he would end the war in the Donbas. Upon taking office, however, his government refused to implement essential provisions of the 2015 Minsk Protocols (signed by Russia, Ukraine, the Russian-backed separatist leaders, and the OSCE) that would have guaranteed sovereignty and territorial integrity for Ukraine in exchange for its neutrality—a status similar to that of Austria, Norway, and Finland.

Sadly, Russia's illegal actions will only embolden the hawks and armament-mongers. Western armchair strategists are calling for further increases to the already bloated US military budget, while pushing the Europeans to build up their forces and seizing the chance to bleed Putin in Ukraine. The moral obscenity of viewing the loss of Ukrainian and Russian lives as a “strategic opportunity” should be obvious.

Because amid the drums of war, we must not lose sight of the human horror that will follow: from the war, the massive displacement, and the impact of sanctions.

Ukrainians are already suffering. Even if Russia succeeds militarily, prolonged occupation might trigger a guerrilla war far more costly than the Soviet debacle in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the “pu-

nitive” sanctions imposed so far will hurt not only Russia—oligarchs and ordinary citizens alike—but also Europe, the US, and the global economy's bystanders. Oil prices—already soaring past \$100 a barrel—are a harbinger of that. A revived Cold War will ravage domestic budgets here and in Europe—and sap the resources and attention needed to address pandemics, the climate crisis, nuclear instability, and debilitating inequality.

What is needed now is not a rush to arms or to hawkish bluster, but a return to intense negotiations—and a recognition of the facts of geography and history. Ukrainians have demonstrated beyond doubt that they are indeed a nation. But that their fate is linked with their powerful neighbor—which

will always have much more at stake in Ukraine's future than the United States—remains true.

As we go to press, Ukraine and Russia continue talks. The work already done by the UN, the OSCE, and the signatories to the

Minsk Protocols provides options that, if pursued in good faith, can bring the crisis to a peaceful conclusion. We have also been heartened by the brave stand for peace within Russian civil society.

Though the situation is extremely perilous, we believe the crisis can still be resolved by the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine—including the Donbas—alongside a declaration of Ukrainian neutrality. We also believe the best way for countries far from the battle line to help is by welcoming and supporting refugees from the fighting.

We urge President Biden and his administration to encourage the latest talks and, if need be, to help facilitate the hard but necessary work of diplomacy.

**Amid the drums of war,
we must not lose sight
of the human horror
that will follow.**

COMMENT / ROBERT GREENE II

Protect HBCUs

The recent attacks are proof of how much American society continues to resent Black success.

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN the United States are under attack, it seems, from multiple directions. In recent weeks, numerous HBCUs have reported bomb threats against them. Such threats have hit institutions like Howard University in Washington, D.C., Spelman College in Atlanta, and Alcorn State in Claiborne County, Miss. It augurs poorly for the current state of race relations, as these schools have long served the Black American community. At the same time, a recent report from *Forbes* indicates the extent to which land-grant HBCUs—a significant number of these institutions—have been woefully underfunded by state governments since 1987. In both cases, we see a continuing attack not just on HBCUs but on the very idea of semi-independent Black institutions in the United States.

All of this comes at an already remarkable moment in the history of HBCUs. In recent years, attendance at these institutions has risen, coupled with the rise of Black Lives Matter on the one hand and a significant white backlash against racial progress on the other. For some students, the perceived safety HBCUs provide against the feeling of alienation on the campuses of many predominantly white institutions is a valuable reason to attend one.

Yet the actions that have jarred students, faculty, staff, and alumni at these institutions should not be surprising. Since the founding of the earliest HBCUs in the 19th century, such schools have always been targets of terrorism and intimidation. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, HBCU buildings were sometimes burned to the ground. A few were forced to change location, and one was even permanently closed. For much of their history, HBCUs have provided the intellectual training for many of the nation's greatest leaders. Martin Luther King Jr. earned his undergraduate degree at Morehouse College in Atlanta. Before he graced the halls of Harvard and Humboldt University of Berlin and set out to establish that the color line would determine the course of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois studied at Fisk University in Nashville.

What these and many other stories of Black success at these schools indicate is the importance of Black institutions in a society so often hostile to Black success. That such schools are being targeted with bomb threats today is, unless further information proves otherwise, a clear indication of how that success is still reviled in some corners of American society. HBCUs produce a large number of Black professionals in numerous careers. Add to that the long tradition of student activism at many of these institutions, and it becomes clear why they are crucial not just for Black advancement but also for the continuing struggle to realize the dream of a true multiracial American democracy.

This is what makes protecting HBCUs so important. During the tumult of the civil rights and Black Power movements, HBCUs were a key site of organizing and activism. From Howard to Voorhees College

in Denmark, S.C., and numerous other colleges and universities, students tried to make change for both their universities and the broader community.

We should also all be concerned about HBCUs because of what they represent in American society. Despite their importance as institutions for Black students, they have not been immune to the problems of neoliberalism that have gripped the academy for decades. The debate between Booker T. Washington and intellectuals like Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper about the fate of Black education shows that this problem stretches back far longer than current arguments about the purpose of a college education.

Du Bois always dreamed that, because of the problems facing them, Black Americans could use their institutions to provide a new, fresh model for education. This, he believed, would turn the tide against an overwhelming tendency among those who attended school to be concerned only with their job prospects. In a commencement address to his alma mater in

These schools are crucial not just for Black advancement but also to realize the dream of a true multiracial democracy.

1958, Du Bois stated, “I found to my deep disappointment that the American nation was not interested in supporting the search for knowledge for knowledge’s sake.” Yet though he lamented what even the nation’s Black colleges and universities had become—calling Fisk “a refuge for spoiled children”—Du Bois nonetheless believed that such schools still held within them a deeper promise. “We face then,” he argued, “the preservation and cultivation of Negro talent not simply among our rich and well-to-do, but even more among the vast numbers of our poor and outcast; among those locked by the thousands in our jails and penitentiaries.”

This is a mission HBCUs must continue to fulfill today. The latest iteration of white backlash politics that infects every vestige of American life requires it. Ironically, on the day I finished writing the first draft of this piece, my current place of employment—Clafin University in Orangeburg, S.C.—received a bomb threat. The problem is not gone. But the HBCUs that serve as fortresses of Black knowledge and achievement continue to survive. **N**

Robert Greene II is an assistant professor of history at Clafin University and has written for Jacobin, In These Times, and Dissent.

Q&A

Jorge Nieto

In the first six weeks of 2022, five journalists were assassinated in Mexico. Two of those, Margarito Martínez and Lourdes Maldonado López, were colleagues of Jorge Nieto's in Tijuana. Nieto, a journalist and media fixer with 19 years of experience in the region, spoke with me in Spanish from Brisbane, Australia, where he has been reporting remotely since the beginning of the pandemic. The thousands of miles separating Nieto from his home have made it safer for him to discuss the violent conditions that have claimed the lives of his friends and threaten independent journalism in Mexico. *—Liliana Frankel*

LF: In Tijuana, what are the economic or power structures that make journalists vulnerable?

JN: Margarito worked for at least five or six different media companies. I even bought videos from him for my clients, because he was the only one who arrived at some of those scenes. But he lived in very limited conditions. And it wasn't fair, because he was a guy who worked a lot.

To constantly report on scenes of violence puts you at risk. There were occasions in which I had to report with Margarito at night. We would arrive at a crime scene, and people would show up to say, "You'd better not publish anything. You're better off going home, because if not, you will have problems." It's a guy with a ski mask, and they're saying it to you in front of a group of policemen.

You also stop thinking about it so much. You normalize it and think, "OK, it is what it is, and it's what this job involves, and nothing's going to happen to me." A lot of time had passed since there were such attacks on journalists, at least in Tijuana. Now none of us feel safe. This sensation of security was just that—a sensation of something that didn't exist.

LF: What are the security measures that a person is obligated to take to be able to produce in this context?

JN: In 2007 and 2009, when there were gunfights everywhere, we stopped thinking about each other as competition. This thing happens where you get married to the business. You think, "I want to get the exclusive." But we realized that this competition was between the owners of the brands and that it wasn't benefiting us. We began to work as a team. We created groups that would arrive together at a scene. We gave data about where we would be. Now we use WhatsApp groups to

monitor one another. The person who is at their desk can maintain a constant communication. We have groups where there are representatives from international organizations that help protect journalists. Where we believe there will be a risky situation, we alert them. There's now more than your colleagues keeping an eye on you. The collective of information workers in the trenches has generated its own strategies. But they haven't been sufficient. None of those strategies are capable of repelling bullets.

LF: How do you feel the impact of bearing witness to these assassinations in your work?

JN: In the case of Margarito, he's someone whose daughter I know, who visited my house, who I ate burritos with, who I went to cover stories with at the crack of dawn. I had a huge feeling of guilt. I felt frustrated to not be there, to not be with my colleagues, because I had always been there. At least two colleagues work under my coordination. They are putting themselves at risk and working extremely hard, and they haven't had time to sit down and cry because they have to get stories out as fast as possible. And I'm here facing the beach. Why am I so OK, and they're not? It affected me. I think they call it survivor's guilt.

LF: What motivates you to continue in this moment?

JN: It's what I most like to do. I can't picture myself doing something else. Those of us who dedicate ourselves to this, I think we have something else in our blood, because it's not very logical for us to keep doing this. Someone with a half-functioning brain would say, "Well, what are you doing? Why not work in something else?" I don't have a response. To give up is not an option. I know it's very important, what we're doing—more than anything in countries like Mexico, where our work is crucial for development. If you imagine a day when all the journalists quit, it would favor the darkest interests—they could do what they want. And I don't want that for my country. **N**



“Someone with a half-functioning brain would say, ‘Well, what are you doing?’”

Subject to Debate Katha Pollitt



Accessory to Abortion

Pro-lifers consider abortion a crime. But when their loved ones need help getting one, they tend to pitch in.

IS ABORTION MURDER? ITS OPPONENTS CLAIM IT is—that’s why they call themselves “pro-life” and abortion providers “babykillers.” That’s why people have bombed and burned down abortion clinics and murdered doctors and staffers—it’s all to “save babies.” But do abortion opponents really believe that an embryo is the equivalent of a baby, a child, a grown-up?

A great deal of ingenuity has been expended by anti-abortion intellectuals like Robert P. George and Ramesh Ponnuru to explain why, even though embryos and fetuses are children, abortion should not be punished as severely as homicide. It’s always seemed odd that anti-abortion leaders insist they would never punish women who end their pregnancy, only doctors and staffers, although by their own logic a woman who seeks an abortion is as guilty as someone who hires a hit man. When a politician—George H.W. Bush, Donald Trump—forgets where he is and says, sure, women should be punished if abortion becomes a crime, anti-abortion leaders express horror and the politician retracts it pretty quickly. Abortion opponents can exempt a woman who terminates her pregnancy only by portraying her as too desperate, irrational, ignorant, or easily led to be held responsible for her decision—it’s all the fault of a boyfriend, or parents, or “the culture of death” that tells her it’s just a clump of cells. Sometimes, although much more rarely, poverty is blamed, or a lack of support for pregnant women and mothers. But similar explanations could be given for many killers—maybe all of them—and nobody suggests we simply leave them alone.

There’s another way to look at the characterization of abortion as murder: Maybe some people who say it don’t really believe it. That is what I take away from a fascinating paper, “Discordant Benevolence: How and Why People Help Others in the Face of Conflicting Values,” recently published in *Science Advances*.

About half of Americans call themselves pro-life and the other half pro-choice—though what people mean by those labels is often unclear. Yet the authors found that, regardless of their beliefs, Americans “extend support” to friends or family members seeking an abortion. Large numbers of people who say they are morally opposed to abortion, many of whom consider it

murder, would help someone they know. A majority of 76 percent would offer emotional support. Only 6 percent would help pay for an abortion—actually, it’s surprising that any would—but over 40 percent would help with logistics like giving the woman a ride to the clinic. Why the distinction between money and logistics? Money, as the authors write, is highly symbolic—it feels personal, like a real stamp of approval. When the teenage sister of a friend of mine needed money for an abortion, a friend of hers said he was Catholic and therefore couldn’t give her any—but he gave money to a mutual friend to give to her. The truth is, money is fungible. A neighbor who fronts you gas money to get to the clinic or watches your kids while you’re having your procedure is helping to pay for your abortion, even if they tell themselves otherwise.

The study’s authors coined the term “discordant benevolence” to describe the conflict between two values: supporting those close to us, and the belief that abortion is morally wrong. It’s not that these abortion opponents are hypocritical—although surely some are, like the anti-choice married male politician who pushes his girlfriend into terminating her pregnancy. Most of them sincerely hold both values. They reconcile these in various ways: by extending commiseration (abortion is wrong, but life is hard and people are imperfect), by making an exception (abortion is wrong, but this is my daughter), or by what the authors call “discretion” (abortion is wrong, but this woman is entitled to her own decision).

“Discordant Benevolence” is a brilliant piece of sociology, proving once again that people are endlessly complicated and surprising. I was glad to find that so many anti-abortion people are kind and thoughtful and understand the suffering of women. Better discordant benevolence than none at all! We have probably all done things against our principles in order to help a friend or relative in a jam.

I want to push back a little, though. I wouldn’t call it hypocritical for a person who believes abortion is murder to help someone obtain one, but I would

Regardless of their beliefs, Americans “extend support” to friends or family members seeking an abortion.

question whether they really believe what they think they do. Murder—“babykilling”—is pretty serious! If your niece said she’d had it with motherhood and was going to kill her newborn, you probably wouldn’t offer a helping hand or tell yourself, “Well, that’s her decision to make.” Indeed, you probably

would draw the line at empathizing with a friend's or a relative's criminal plans well short of murder. Would you drive your friend to the shop he was planning to rob, even if you knew he really needed the money? Lend him a gun so he could shoot his neighbor's really annoying dog? I suppose some people might, but for most of us, personal loyalty only goes so far.

What makes the findings of the new study particularly important is that right now, in Texas, helping someone get an abortion after six weeks is illegal. That money for the procedure, that drive to the clinic, even a snack for the bus trip, all lay you open to a civil suit by any ran-

do who finds out and cares to sue. They may not win, but they can cost you—in legal fees, social ties, sleepless nights of worry. Anti-abortion forces have rendered criminal the human impulse to help friends and family, harming the very thing we

claim to value so highly: the bedrock of community. The irony is, many of the people who oppose abortion say they would do the very things that the politicians they voted for have criminalized. If *Roe* goes—or even if it stays, but laws like the one in Texas are upheld—women seeking an abortion may find out who their real friends are. **N**

The study is important because helping someone get an abortion after six weeks is illegal in Texas right now.



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DAVE ZIRIN



> I Am Russian. I Stand With Ukraine.

FINLEY MURATOVA

Objection! Elie Mystal



Biden His Time

From voting rights to police reform, Black voters are still waiting for action from the administration they helped put in power.

JOE BIDEN WON THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY THANKS TO Black voters in diverse states who repeatedly turned to him over the other contenders for the nomination. He won the presidency thanks in part to the overwhelming support he received from Black voters. Then his party was handed control of the Senate thanks to the unprecedented registration and turnout of Black voters in Georgia.

Biden has paid back the faith the Black community put in him with one of the most diverse administrations in American history. He has put forward the most diverse slate of federal judicial nominees and has nominated the first Black woman to the Supreme Court. The Biden era has been a reminder of what a pluralistic, diverse government looks like.

For some of Biden's Black supporters, that will be enough. In a world where Florida Governor Ron DeSantis can't go a fortnight without coming up with some neo-Confederate policy to excite his white supremacist base, Biden's commitment to racial inclusivity can't be taken for granted. He's a lot better than the former guy. But when I filled in the bubble for Biden in November 2020, I was hoping for something more. I was hoping for actual policies, not merely appointments and platitudes. I wanted Biden to address the state-sponsored terrorism carried out by the police as well as the Republican attacks on voting rights. And I wasn't alone. Many Black people spent an entire summer—during a pandemic—protesting in the streets, demanding reforms to policing. Meanwhile, Black activists and voting rights experts have been warning for years that Republican voter suppression policies will return us to a Jim Crow-style electoral system.

The Biden administration and congressional Democrats have done nothing to address these two critical policy concerns rising up from the Black communities who put them in power. The response to the attacks on voting rights has amounted to some speeches and bills that have passed the House, only to die in the Senate. The inability of the Democratic Party to protect its own electoral interests when it has the power to do so will be studied by future historians trying to puzzle out what went wrong in late-republic America.

Still, at least the subject of voting rights gets the occasional speech or news segment. The fight against police brutality has fallen out of fashion altogether. Democratic leaders have spent more time in the past year blaming those protesting police brutality than doing anything to stop the perpetrators of police brutality from killing again. It's like having your house burn down while the firefighters stand there and say, "You seem preoccupied with having the fire extinguished, while most Americans only support fire prevention."

The Biden administration has gotten a pass for its utter failure to address

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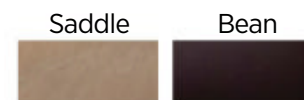
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police malfeasance for a number of reasons. Pollsters love to poll “defund the police” instead of the actual policies that enable police brutality, so “bad messaging” has been the narrative white media has latched onto. Black communities still desperately want something done about violent police forces: A Gallup poll last summer found that just 27 percent of Black people expressed “confidence” in the police. Yet Gallup spun that as a positive, because the 27 percent was “up” from 19 percent during the Trump era.

Meanwhile, since policing is primarily a local concern governed by state and municipal rules, the administration and Congress have been able to shirk their responsibility and leave it to the states, with most people accepting the inaction as proper. The federal government will take over any investigation that starts with two brown people talking to each other at a mosque. It will use federal authority to deport immigrants and their children. But when it comes time to stop a police officer from violating my constitutional right to drive while Black without harassment, suddenly the federal government pretends to be powerless.

Consider the lethal horror that is the choke hold. Within a

**When I filled
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not promulgated use-of-force guidelines, created nationwide standards for transparency in law enforcement, or revoked qualified immunity.

The federal government’s authority to make these reforms is in the Constitution. The Fourth Amendment prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures. The Fifth Amendment requires due process of law. The 14th Amendment requires equal protection of the laws. There are 50 states and over 3,000 sheriff’s offices or police zones that hold some law enforcement

power. The Constitution is supposed to apply to all of them. We need federal legislation protecting constitutional rights from violent police because, over 150 years after the Civil War, I’m sick of waiting for Alabama to get the memo.

year of George Floyd’s murder, the Associated Press reported that 17 states had banned or significantly limited choke holds—which may be “progress” but is also pathetic. I know there will be members of the white limited-government crowd who consider me insufficiently grateful that there are now 17 states where it’s illegal for an officer to choke me to death in broad daylight (unless he has a really good reason), but the power of math compels me to point out that this leaves 33 states that do not ban the practice.

The federal government has not prohibited local law enforcement from using choke holds, but it could. It has not prohibited the use of no-knock warrants, but it could. It has

not prioritized that; as with voting rights, they’d like me to blame literally anyone or anything else for the failure. I’m supposed to blame a slogan or Republican senators or Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema or the fullness of the Biden agenda.

The police killed more people in 2021 than they have since 2013, which is when people even bothered to start tracking how many lives are taken by law enforcement nationwide. Maybe the problem isn’t slogans. Maybe we need federal attention to this problem, as was promised, instead of more Democratic excuses for inaction.

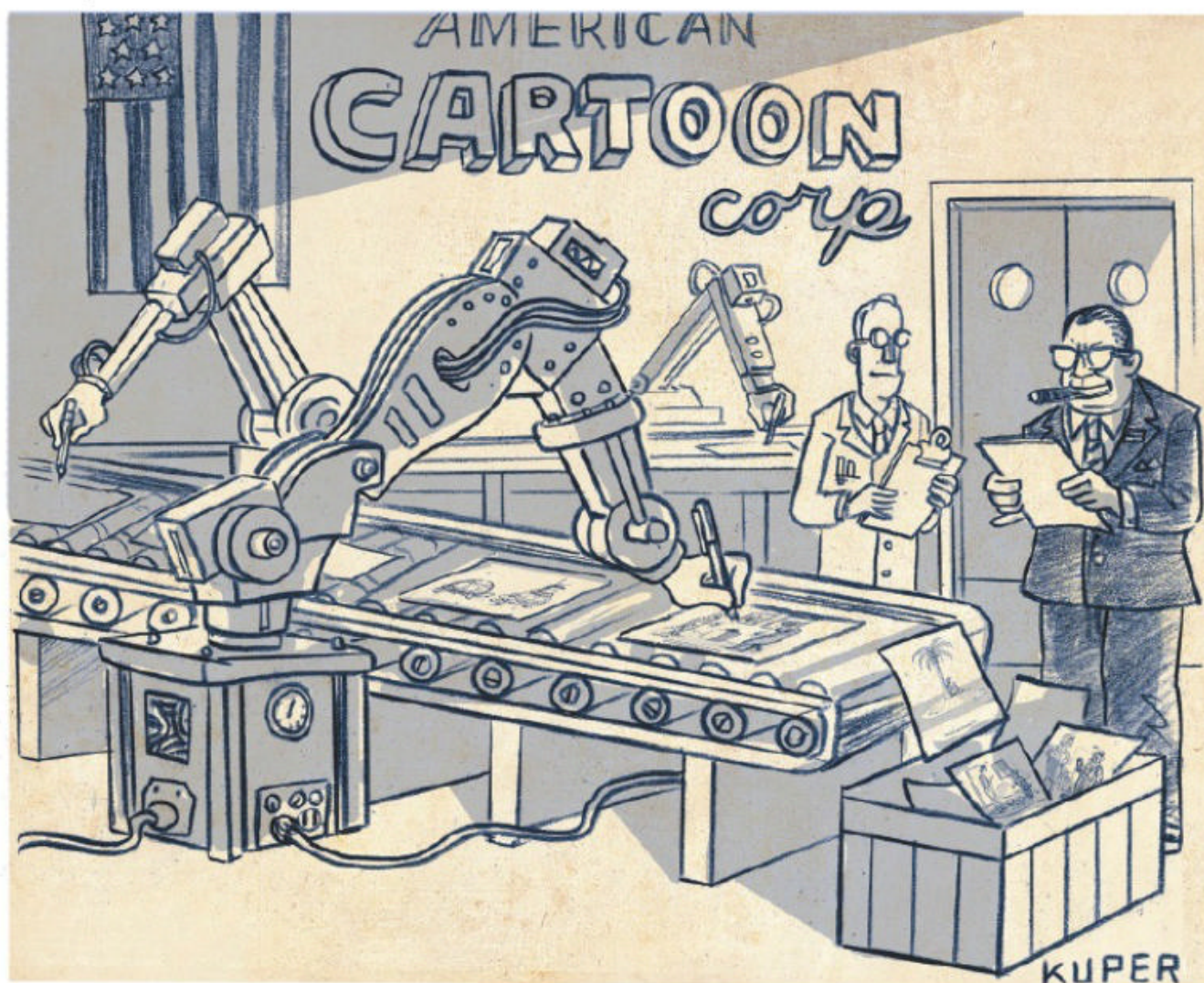
Biden said he’d have the backs of the Black people who put him in power, but Black people are still being shot in the back while the federal government exercises its right to remain silent.

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Biden said he’d have the backs of the Black people who put him in power, but Black people are still being shot in the back while the federal government exercises its right to remain silent.



OPPART / PETER KUPER



**“No nudity, no foul language, no commentary,
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N

Is There a Place for Patriotism on the Left?

Yes

MICHAEL KAZIN

No

RAFIA ZAKARIA

THERE ARE TWO GOOD REASONS WHY every American progressive should be a patriot. One is emotional, the other practical—and they reinforce one another.

I love my country. I love our passionate and endlessly inventive culture of music, sports, literature, and film, which has thrilled and influenced people all over the world. I cherish our civic ideals of social equality, individual freedom, and populist democracy—as well as the unending struggle to put their laudable, if often contradictory, claims into practice.

But you need not share my emotion to recognize a political reality: One cannot engage effectively in the democratic process without being part of a community of feeling. And for most Americans, their nation, with all its flaws, is a community they are willing to defend.

Iconic figures on the left have always understood this. They have demonstrated that American patriotism could serve tolerant, egalitarian ends as well as racist, authoritarian, and imperialist ones. Tom Paine praised his adopted homeland as an “asylum for mankind,” which gave him a forum to denounce regressive taxes and landed aristocracies. Frederick Douglass based his hopes for the abolition of slavery on “the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American institutions” as well as an interracial movement for freedom. Eugene Debs described socialism, in the American idiom, as “the equal rights of all to manage and control” society; while Mother Jones, the great labor organizer, accused coal mine operators of crushing the self-respect of their workers. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed during the Montgomery bus boycott that “if we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong” and “the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right.”

Most of these figures, in their own ways, also engaged in a transnational effort to advance equality and tolerance. But each also depended on the power and legitimacy of American ideals to gain mass support for the changes they desired.

Back in the days when the US military was scorching Indochina and killing its people, I abandoned the conviction that one could be both a patriot and a moral person. I didn’t burn any flags, but neither did I condemn those who did. However, I grew increasingly worried about the contradiction between the

THIS PAST JANUARY, AN INDIAN FAMILY died during their attempt to illegally cross into the US from Canada. Canadian police found their frozen bodies in a field—father, mother, and two children—just 12 yards from the border. They may have thought that the blizzard and poor visibility would work in their favor, keeping them hidden from the eyes of the US Border Patrol.

I recount this story because it depicts the hypocrisy of liberal patriotism. Belief in the equality of human beings and a commitment to the welfare of less fortunate others, this example shows, are readily abandoned when it comes to the rights of those who are deemed “others” by accidents of inheritance and geography. A country with a border regime that has made instant detention normal even for asylum seekers is not one that values dignity for all humans. Commentators like British author George Monbiot have likened patriotism to racism. In his essay “The New Chauvinism,” Monbiot points out that patriotism produces a proclivity to attack other countries and that national allegiance does nothing to reduce human suffering. The United States and its “patriotic” wars are examples of this phenomenon. Monbiot asks rhetorically, “If patriotism were not such a powerful force in the US, could Bush have invaded Iraq?”

As right-wing populism gains strength, some have called for the US left to embrace patriotic sentiments and not leave “love of the flag” to white supremacists. This is misguided, because the result would be to eviscerate the left’s already limited commitments to supranational humanitarianism and ending the catastrophes caused by the United States’ patriotic wars. One example is the relative silence of liberals in the face of President Biden’s decision to seize Afghan currency reserves and distribute half the funds to the victims of 9/11. The terms of this plan demonstrate that compensating Americans for an attack that occurred over 20 years ago (and in which no Afghan was directly involved) is valued more than helping the millions of people in Afghanistan on the brink of starvation. Biden’s plan invokes patriotism to cover up the administration’s outrageous cruelty and indifference to mass death. The American invasion, the botched withdrawal, and the theft of Afghan money have left Afghanistan with a famine that could kill hundreds of thousands—but

The Debate

utter transformation we New Leftists sought to bring about and our increasing alienation from the mass of our fellow citizens we would need to join us in fighting for that better USA. When I read, in 1970, the Black leftist Julius Lester's reflection that "American radicals are perhaps the first radicals anywhere who have sought to make a revolution in a country which they hate," it seemed both profound and painful.

Patriotism will continue to flourish, whether or not progressives embrace it. When left intellectuals and activists abandoned speaking in terms of American ideals in the late 1960s and after, they lost the ability to speak convincingly to their fellow citizens. Although left intellectuals can take credit for spearheading a multicultural, gender-aware revision of the humanities and social sciences, their record outside the academy has been far less impressive. The right has long set the political agenda, in part because its partisans spoke forcefully in the name of American principles that knit together such disparate groups as anti-union businessmen, white evangelicals, Jewish neoconservatives, and traditionalist Catholics.

We should take the brutal treatment of Uyghurs in China as seriously as we regard the police killings of Black people at home. And climate change obviously cannot be stopped

or reversed within national borders. But political power still resides with nation-states and their governments—and will for a very long time to come. No planetary government is on the horizon.

Leftists don't need to chant patriotic slogans or affix flag pins to their lapels or handbags. But to rail against patriotism and its symbols is to wage a losing

battle—one that marginalizes us and sets us against the overwhelming majority of Americans.

Past progressives have bequeathed a rich storehouse of statements about how to join activism to Americanist ends. Langston Hughes, for instance, expressed his vision during the Great Depression:

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above....
O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Throughout history, and still today, the most effective way to love our country is to fight like hell to change it. **N**

Michael Kazin is a history professor at Georgetown and the author of What It Took to Win: A History of the Democratic Party.

< KAZIN

> ZAKARIA

those who carry out diktats in the name of patriotism seem entirely comfortable with this.

Nationalism, from which patriotism is drawn, is deeply invested in maintaining different duties of care and then justifying that difference by attributing a greater sense of "deservedness" to citizens than to interloping others. Those "others" may be the migrants who perish just yards from the US border. They may also be among the millions of Afghans who had to endure a US invasion and occupation and must now watch as money that could provide humanitarian assistance is distributed to victims of a terrorist attack in which they had no hand. Patriotism not only gives unearned entitlement to those waging war but also places collective blame on those against whom the war is waged. If you dally with patriotism, then its mother, nationalism, will come along and tell you that noncitizens deserve their misfortune.

The left must be committed to devising a better balance between a state's responsibilities to its citizens and its responsibilities to the world community. In the past, the social welfare state has been an argument in favor of left patriotism in that it pursues a just, redistributive agenda. This premise must be rethought and its claims to justice questioned as long

as the criteria for citizenship remain limited to parental lineage and geography of birth. One possibility would be a thicker concept of citizenship that de-emphasizes arbitrary factors and creates new pathways to citizenship. In its absence, the US must at least make more allowances for asylum seekers, refugees, and economic and climate migrants.

The argument for this is not patriotism but an internationalism that values human beings no matter where they are or who their parents are.

The increasing primacy of the virtual realm in shaping our lives already points to a future in which the world will not be as bound by geographical borders. This truth, even aside from any substantive commitment to equality and justice, proves how foolish it would be to slide back into the xenophobia that patriotism implies. If we can work with, talk to, befriend, and love others who do not share our geography, then why should our ideas of community or belonging be based on territory and lineage? The nationalisms of the moment—racist, rabid, and loud as they may be—are vestiges of a past when the nation-state was supreme.

We do not inhabit that world any longer, and our efforts to force its constructs on our evolving world can only result in tragedies like the one that befell the Indian family trying to make it to America. Patriotism is an unjust, dated concept that values tribalism over equality and human dignity. **N**

Rafia Zakaria is the author of The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan and Against White Feminism.

To rail against patriotism and its symbols is to wage a losing battle—one that marginalizes us.

Biden's plan invokes patriotism to cover up the administration's outrageous cruelty and indifference.

The Debate



SNAPSHOT / Mauro Pimentel

After the Flood

People search for victims after a giant mudslide in Brazil on February 19. Rescue workers pulled bodies from the muddy wreckage left by devastating floods and landslides in the city of Petrópolis, where the death toll stands at 217, including 42 children. More than 1,500 people have died in landslides in the area in recent decades. Evidence indicates that climate change will cause even more intense rainfall.

By the Numbers



\$2.86B

Estimated cost of the delays at the US-Canada border due to protests by anti-vax trucker convoys

70

Number of bicyclists who recently participated in a car-and-bike convoy to protest Covid restrictions in Berlin

500

Number of cars and camper vans that arrived in Brussels on February 14 to protest Covid restrictions in Europe

15

Length of loop, in minutes, of Barry Manilow's greatest hits played loudly by New Zealand

authorities to dislodge demonstrators camped out in Wellington to protest the country's Covid policies

2k

Number of people who gathered in Canberra, Australia, to protest Covid-19 vaccine mandates, according to police estimates

5.2M

Number of children globally who have lost a parent or caregiver to the Covid-19 pandemic



CALVIN TRILLIN
DeadlinePoet

Mitch McConnell and Ketanji Brown Jackson

If Mitch controlled the Senate, how would he
Explain why Jackson's hearings weren't to be?
No hearings while the French election nears?
No hearings held in even-numbered years?

Darryl
Pinckney

My Norman Mailer Problem— and Ours

Digging down into the roots of white
America's infatuation with Black.

NORMAN MAILER WAS PROUD OF HIS ESSAY “THE WHITE NEGRO: SUPERFICIAL Reflections on the Hipster.” Published in *Dissent* in 1957, it was reprinted in *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), Mailer’s anthology of selections from his fiction and nonfiction. It’s easy today to forget the immediate context: Mailer’s protest against the threat of mass destruction during the early part of the Cold War. It was absurd, the argument went, to behave as though life were normal or society rational when human beings faced daily the possibility of total extinction. Americans had to cultivate values that went beyond the concerns of middle-class comfort. “What the liberal cannot bear to admit is the hatred beneath the skin of a society so unjust that the amount of collective violence buried in the people cannot be contained.”

In “The White Negro,” Mailer argues that the postwar bleakness of the 1950s saw the appearance of “a phenomenon,” “the American existentialist,” the “hipster.” The hipster had the “life-giving answer” to the threats of both “instant death by atomic war” and “slow death by conformity.” By embracing death as an immediate danger, divorcing himself from society, the hipster—who was understood to be a white male—could exist without roots. This “uncharted journey” into the “rebellious imperatives of the self” meant encouraging the “psychopath in oneself” and the freedom to explore “the domain of experience.” Most Americans, Mailer held, were conventional, ordinary psychopaths, but a select few represented the development of the “antithetical psychopath,” who derived from his condition a radical vision of the universe.

Much of “The White Negro” is devoted to analysis of why the overcivilized man cannot be existentialist. The hip ethic is immoderation, adoration of the present. The image of the rebel without a cause, the embodiment

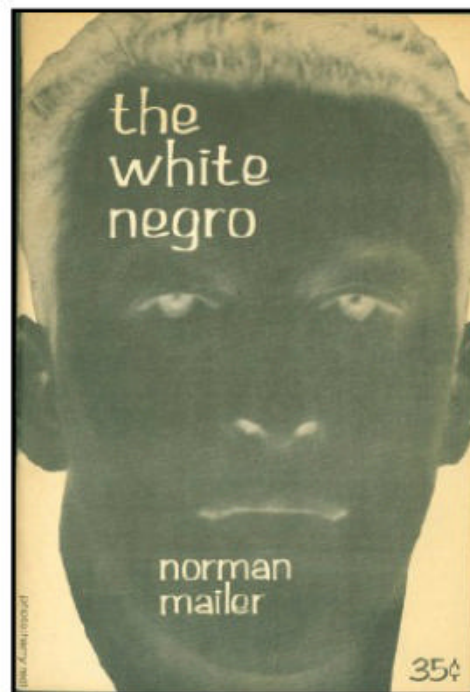
of society’s contradictions, involved for Mailer the romanticization of the psychopath. “The drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love.” Hip is “the liberation of the self from the Super-Ego of society.” There are “the good orgasm[s]” of the sexual outlaw and “the bad orgasm[s]” of the cowardly square. The hipster belongs to an elite—rebels who have their own language that only insiders can convincingly speak, a language of found and lost energy: “man, go, put down, make, beat, cool, swing, with it, crazy, dig, flip, creep, hip, square.” As Mailer writes:

The organic growth of Hip depends on whether the Negro emerges as a dominating force in American life. Since the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the White, it is probable that if the Negro can win his equality, he will possess a potential superiority, a superiority so feared that the fear itself has become the underground drama of domestic politics. Like all conservative political fear it is the fear of the unforeseeable consequences, for the Negro’s equality would tear a profound

shift into the psychology, the sexuality, and the moral imagination of every White alive.

At the time, some white writers, Mailer among them, allied themselves with Black people who were urgently calling for American society to recreate itself. Like the juvenile delinquents, these white bohemians were drawn to the culture of the urban Black. “Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger.” Unconventional action takes disproportionate courage, therefore

“it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries.” The Negro, in Mailer’s view, had been forced to find a morality of the bottom. “Hated from outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns.”



Powerful provocation: Mailer challenged the sanitized picture of postwar American life in his controversial 1957 essay.

“THE WHITE NEGRO” HAD its specific origins in a quarrel with no less than William Faulkner. A mutual friend had sent Mailer’s sketch on school integration to Faulkner. In it, Mailer had said that white men in the South feared the sexual potency of the Negro and his hatred for having been cuckolded, historically, for two centuries: “The Negro had his sexual supremacy and the white had his white supremacy.” Faulkner replied that he had heard that idea expressed by ladies, but never by a man. Mailer observed that the sheltered Faulkner’s most intense conversations had no doubt been with sensitive ladies. Yet to be so dismissed by Faulkner annoyed him, and he decided to expand on his interpretation of a sexualized racial politics.

Whatever Mailer’s reasons, James Baldwin later said that he could not make any sense of “The White Negro”—that

“Hated from outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced to explore the moral wildernesses of civilized life.”

—Norman Mailer

Darryl Pinckney is the author of the novels High Cotton and Black Deutschland and the non-fiction collection Busted in New York and Other Essays.

James Baldwin charged Mailer with maligning the sexuality of Black men—and with failing to see the limits in his point of view as a white man.

Two approaches: Jack Kerouac (left) toyed with white characters adopting Black “cool,” while Richard Wright (right) dramatized the existential conditions of Black Americans.

believe Mailer’s opinions will affect his reputation. Rather, he recalls with some eloquence the personal circumstances, differences, and similarities that prevented real friendship between the two writers. Then he takes aim: “The Negro jazz musicians, among whom we sometimes found ourselves, who really liked Norman, did not for an instant consider him as being even remotely ‘hip’ and Norman did not know this and I could not tell him.... They thought he was a real sweet ofay cat, but a little frantic.”

Mailer makes a distinction between hipster (of the proletariat) and beatnik (middle class). Baldwin didn’t—and he expressed contempt for the character in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1952) who, when alone in Denver, seeks the Black part of town because that is where real life is. In *The Subterraneans* (1958), Kerouac’s white hoodlum succumbs to his paranoia that his soft brown bop-generation girlfriend will steal his white soul. Baldwin considered Kerouac and the Beats inferior to Mailer as writers, and he would be as impatient with the hippies in the ’60s as he had been with the Beats. He said his problem with white people was that he couldn’t take them seriously. They acted like crybabies—but their innocence was a danger to people like him.

Mailer’s argument that the Black man in America was born to be existentialist in outlook, because, unless he was an Uncle Tom, he had no other alternative philosophy that honestly addressed his circumstances, had antecedents. In his novel *Native Son* (1940), Richard Wright had anticipated the existential drama that follows when the feeling of what it is to be human has been lost through racial oppression. The urban loneliness Wright portrayed descended from Dostoyevsky, one of existentialism’s precursors. *Partisan Review* published parts of Jean Paul Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew*

he could scarcely believe it had been written by the same man who recognized the complexity of human relationships in his novels *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), *Barbary Shore* (1951), and *The Deer Park* (1955). Mailer’s characters do not live on the road, Baldwin observed, yet he had fallen for the mystique of the Beats. Baldwin charged Mailer with maligning the sexuality of Negroes—and failing to see the limits in his point of view as a white man.

In his essay, Mailer reiterated the contention that offended Faulkner: that the white man feared the Black man’s sexual revenge. He himself was not opposed to miscegenation. Baldwin knew American masculinity because he’d been menaced by it enough, writing that the American Negro male was “a walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one’s own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others.” He tried to convey in his work what life for the Negro was like, but he had become weary, he said, which was why he hadn’t anything to say about Mailer’s essay when it was first published.

Yet two years later, Baldwin did respond. “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” was published in *Esquire* in May 1961 and reprinted in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), Baldwin’s second collection of essays. In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer had called Baldwin “too charming a writer to be major,” quipped that his prose was “sprayed with perfume,” and suggested that Baldwin lacked his—Mailer’s—street credibility. Baldwin admits in the essay that Mailer’s condescension hurt, but he doesn’t



in 1946, after which Wright read widely in existentialist literature. In *The Outsider* (1953), he attempted to formulate a more cogent philosophy about murder and irrational behavior. Wright eventually decided that his alienation was not due to his color but was man’s fate, and wrote another murder story, *Savage Holiday* (1954)—a so-called raceless novel, a psychoanalytical study about the singularity of existence. Some critics missed Wright’s insights into the racial context and were disappointed by the abstract application of existentialist ideas in his fiction, especially his notion of how the violent act defines human essence.

Baldwin didn’t see a quest for an authentic self in the sex and violence of Wright’s novels either. Bigger Thomas, the black murderer of both a white girl and a Black girl in *Native Son*, was based on a stereotype, Baldwin said. Wright himself was so sensitive to racial stereotypes he wouldn’t dance or play cards.

Michele Wallace agreed with Baldwin. In *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1978), she said that the white man’s love affair with Black Macho began with *Native Son*. Wallace claimed that its message was that a Black man could come to life only as a white man’s nightmare. She credited Mailer with having been accurate in “The White Negro” about “the intersection of the black man’s and the white man’s fantasies.” But this was diagnosis, not praise. Though Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice* (1968) had been outraged by Baldwin’s criticisms of Mailer, in Wallace’s judgment Baldwin had suppressed his own ambiguities and ambivalences about gender and sexuality, because Black militancy, the political face of Black Macho in the ’60s, required it of him to do so.

An obsession with the Black male also drove *The Fight* (1975), Mailer’s report on the heavyweight championship match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in Zaire in 1974. Mailer took the art of boxing seriously, and it was a subject he had some real knowledge of. However, reading him on the underworld of Black emotion, Black psychology, Black love—with Ali as exuberant as a white fraternity president and the darker Foreman the true African—we can’t help but recall Mailer saying of himself in “The White Negro,” “I am just one cat in a world of cool cats and everything interesting is crazy.”

Writing of himself in the third person—his signature move—in *The Fight*, Mailer admitted:

His love affair with the Black soul, a sentimental orgy at its worst, had been given a drubbing through the seasons of Black

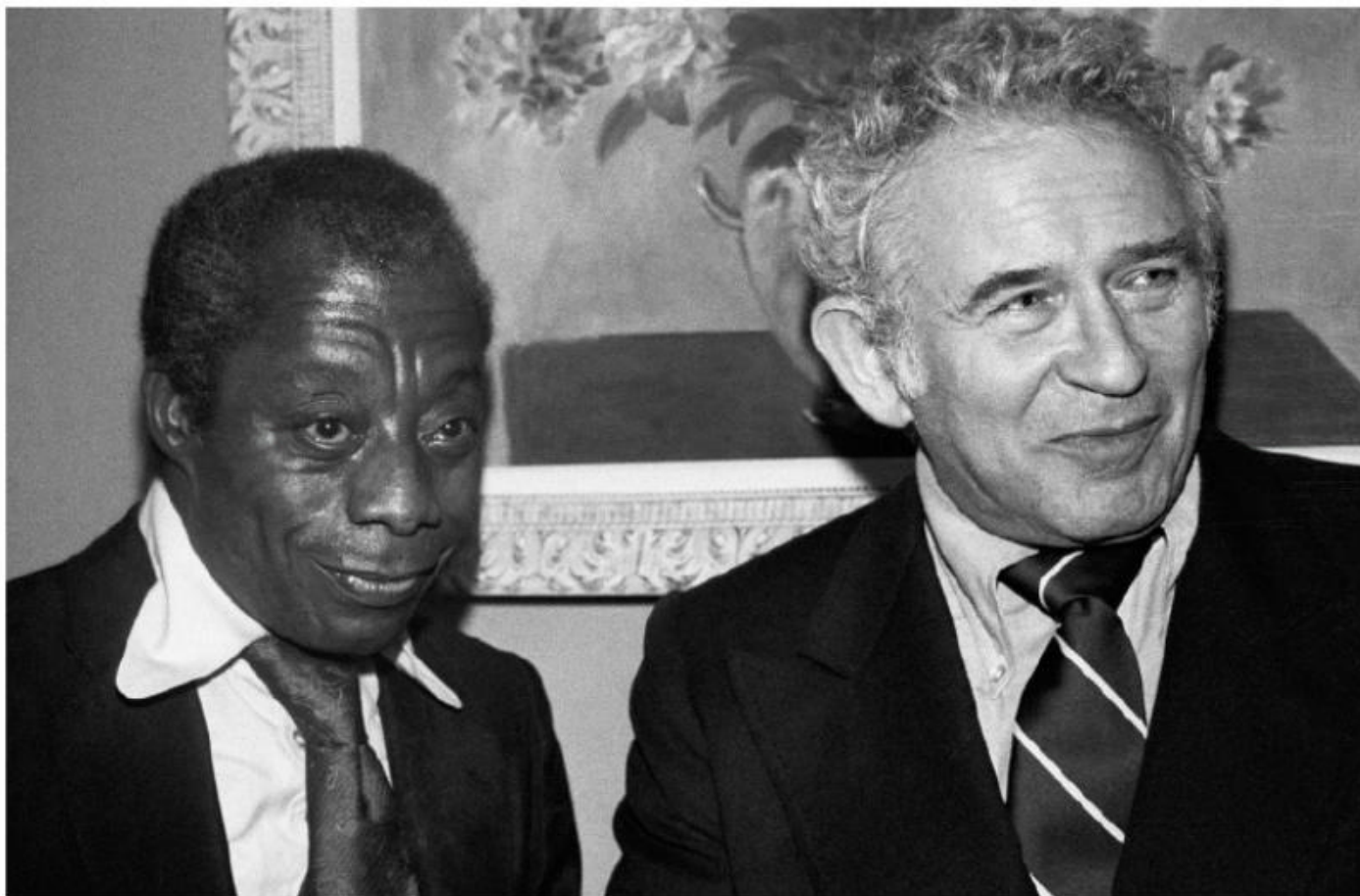
Power. He no longer knew whether he loved Blacks or secretly disliked them, which had to be the dirtiest secret in his American life.

In contrast to Mailer's fame in New York, the indifference to his presence on the streets of Kinshasa had succeeded, Mailer wrote, in "niggering him; he knew what it was to be looked upon as invisible." But the Zairois had "an incorruptible loneliness," "some African dignity," and when Mailer read *Bantu Philosophy*, by the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels, he was excited that the instinctive beliefs of "African tribesmen" were close to his own. People are forces, not beings. He rediscovered his "old love for Blacks—as if the deepest ideas that ever entered his mind were there because Black existed," and he delighted in "the mysterious genius of these rude, disruptive, and—down to it!—altogether indigestible Blacks." He also confessed once again to the old fear—the resentment of "black style, black rhetoric, black pimps, superfly, and all that virtuoso handling of the ho"—and envy that "they had the good fortune to be born Black." He felt he understood what a loss the loss of Africa had been for Black people.

ANTI-SLAVERY LITERATURE WAS OLDER than pro-slavery literature, but fear of interracial mixing was older than whatever the opposite of that was. Melanin infatuation doesn't always imply wanting to interact with or to be intimate with Black people. It can mean a person wanting to be Black, to be like Black people, to import Black, have the Black style, or, especially for white men, to copy Black men. The Black hustlers Detroit Red learned from in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* all came to a bad end. Yes to the glamour, no to the risk.

As the War on Drugs destroyed Black militant politics, hip-hop became the keeper of the real, the authentically Black. Hip-hop, an aggressive sound created by Black American youth on the East and West coasts of the United States, is "the dominant form of youth culture on earth," Jelani Cobb proclaims in *To the Break of Dawn* (2007), his study of the hip-hop aesthetic. But the love of things Black, like existentialism, is a tradition, not a movement. That is why Baldwin kept saying, This is your problem, not mine.

After the slaughter of World War I, many



white writers and artists lost faith in the supposed rationalism of Western society. This questioning marked a return yet again to the pastoral as an ideal—and Black people were thought to be close to the ways of the earth. Every negative in the depiction of Black people in American culture—shiftless, emotional, childlike, animal-like—became positive qualities. As the conventional paths to success that newly middle-class Americans chased in the 1920s were revealed to lead to the deformation of character, the exclusion of Black people turned into their supposed detachment from stress. Oppression gave Black people the freedom to want the right things from life.

The social Darwinism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries let white people put themselves at the top of the cultural pyramid, given the (to them) advanced development of their societies when compared with the decayed societies of Asia and South America and the barbaric ones of Africa. But then Picasso paid a visit to Matisse's studio in 1905, and in 1907 he had his fateful encounter with African art in the Musée d'Ethnographie. After World War I—civilization's catastrophe, as it was called—and after the 1919 exhibition of Paul Guillaume's African art collection in Paris and the arrival of jazz there, the primitive, or primitivism, spread through the arts as a virtue, a reaction to the old social order. "Our age is the age of the Negro in art," the Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay declared. "The slogan of the aesthetic art world is 'Return to the Primitive.'"

McKay himself was more interested in primitivism in literature than he was in its expression in the visual arts. *Batouala* (1921), by the Martinican poet René Maran, made a considerable impression on McKay, as it did on Hemingway, as a novel that presents the consciousness of an African. Maran enjoys a sexual frankness in his tale of love and jealousy beyond anything D.H. Lawrence could have published about white people at that time in English. The anticolonialism of the novel is part of the natural life of the

Mutual fascination: James Baldwin (left) and Norman Mailer (right) were friends and critics of each other's work.

The love of things Black is a tradition, not a movement. This is why Baldwin kept saying, This is your problem, not mine.



characters in their equatorial village. *Batouala* was one of the first literary works to present primitivism from a Black perspective as a positive political and social value.

In his study *The Negroes in America* (1923), McKay proposed that the root of the racial problem in the US was the old fear of social equality. To conceal the crimes of labor exploitation and lynch law, McKay said, the “American bourgeoisie” maintained a war between the races over sex. The sexual taboo that served the interests of the master class was a form of black magic. Sexual fear had acquired the force of instinct in the US, he contended.

Racial fixation:
Mailer reported on the 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in Zaire.

The black writer Jean Toomer belongs more to the Imagists than he does to the Harlem Renaissance, but *Cane*, published in 1923—a collection of sketches, poems, and Expressionist-like drama that Toomer called a novel—was much emulated for its nostalgia for an instinctive way of life and its eroticized Southern landscape. Waldo Frank, a novelist born into an upper-class Jewish family who became known for his radical ideas, wrote the preface for *Cane* and published his own novel, *Holiday* (1923), on similar themes. However, in Frank’s romance of primitivism a white woman’s desire for the kinds of experience she imagines is available to Blacks delivers the Black man she attempts to seduce to a lynch mob.

Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark Laughter* (1925) shows Toomer’s influence in its telegraphic prose style, mixed with lyric poetry, and its determination to contrast the fecundity of the South with the sterility of the industrialized North. A Midwestern white man—everyone must be labeled these days—Anderson’s protagonist escapes the highly organized Chicago existence that has weakened his instinct for life, finding cures for the body and soul in the ease of New Orleans, among overly enthusiastic images of sexually

anti-neurotic blacks. Anderson expresses much of what he has to say about the cultural and spiritual afflictions of white people in sexual terms.

Melanin infatuation circulated through American culture after the Jazz Age, mostly unexamined, unacknowledged. Mailer developed his hypothesis of hip during yet another postwar mood of repudiation. “For Hip is the sophistication of the wise primitive in a giant jungle, and so its appeal is still beyond the civilized man,” Mailer said in “The White Negro.” Mailer was 16 years old when he entered Harvard in 1939. Drafted upon graduation, he saw action in the Pacific in 1945. Veterans like Mailer had also seen something of the world, and the experience of meeting people unlike yourself is part of his ambitious, hugely successful first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, published when he was only 25—a book Richard Wright read in Paris but doesn’t mention in his letters. Mailer’s was an American career, though he and Baldwin first met in Paris. If Henry James was Baldwin’s early model, then Hemingway was Mailer’s—especially when it came to projecting an image of masculine prowess.

The Brooklyn-raised Mailer was a New York City character, a founder of *The Village Voice*, a onetime mayoral candidate, his moods of dread or discontent always on public display. Making a spectacle of himself gave Mailer bragging rights, always bogarting onto center stage. Pugnacious in his intellectual style, he was not a good Jewish boy like Lionel Trilling, anglicized by the Ivy League.

Oppression, this new thinking went, gave Black people the freedom to want the right things from life.

In an essay published in *Commentary* in 1963, “My Negro Problem—and Ours,” Norman Podhoretz, another working-class Jew from Brooklyn, remembers as “bad boys” the sort of Black guys Mailer casts as natural dissenters. They persecuted Podhoretz when he was growing up in Brownsville in the 1930s. Italians and Jews feared the Negro youths who embodied “the values of the street—free, independent, reckless, brave, masculine, erotic.” The qualities he envied and feared in the Negro, Podhoretz said, made the Negro “faceless” to him, just as Baldwin claimed Blacks were to whites in general. And as a white boy, Podhoretz said, he in turn was faceless to them. Mailer wanted not to have this problem of intimidation, facelessness, shared or otherwise—not after the Holocaust. Summon instead the Maccabee who can hang tough with anyone, anywhere.

WE ALL HAVE CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS to writers, and how they seem to us down through the years is not fixed and can’t be when it comes to such complicated artists. I was not a reader of Mailer’s fiction. My college friends and I struggled through *The Naked and the Dead* and then read James Jones, a peer of Mailer’s as a novelist of their war, but because of the Vietnam War we preferred Joseph Heller’s blackly comic tone to their grit. I can recall the sensations that *The Executioner’s Song* (1979) and *Ancient Evenings* (1983) were as publishing events. I have a memory of Christopher Hitchens extolling the virtues of *Harlot’s Ghost* (1991) as a CIA novel. But my heart is with *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), Mailer’s reportage on the Republican and Democratic political conventions in 1968, and *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (1968), about the march on the Pentagon in 1967. The mere memory of those two titles makes me mourn again my older sister, an anti-war hippie who brought Mailer home in paperback. It took a while for serious citizens to like him as much as the young did, Baldwin said.

Many of Mailer’s readers grew up with him. Or not. Margo Jefferson remembers that she found *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971) “insufferable.” Oddly enough, it is this book, about his views on what he accepted as the natural inequality of men and women, that reminds us of the days when race relations were spoken of as a conflict between Black men and white men, for which white women were the

prize and Black women were not in the frame. *Town Bloody Hall* (1979), the documentary about the panel discussion at Town Hall in 1971 between Norman Mailer and Jacqueline Ceballos, Germaine Greer, and Diana Trilling, captures the atmosphere of his public presence: combative, provocative, fired up. The women in the audience, plenty of whom knew Mailer, take his pronouncements on women as what they’d expect: condescending, out-of-date about equality and biology, and therefore irrelevant, just more of his shtick, which was to be outrageous. This, for the man notorious for having stabbed his second wife.

Mailer brought out nearly four dozen books in his lifetime, right up to his death in 2007. Do the biographies already out there have anything to say about Jason Epstein, Mailer’s longtime editor, who once said he really disliked “The White Negro”? Epstein, who has just died, remembered in his eulogy for Mailer in *The New York Review of Books* his “limitless ambition” and his sense of the writer’s “vocation” as being a commitment to explore “the deepest mysteries.” Baldwin said he wanted to die in the middle of writing a sentence. Time has obscured what he and Mailer once had in common, their love of purely literary qualities. Baldwin was certain that Mailer’s work would outlast the newspapers, the gossip columns, the cocktail parties. And Mailer’s own garrulity, he might have added.

Recently, news accounts have appeared claiming that a posthumous collection of Mailer’s political writings had been turned down by his publisher, Random House. The rejection was due, at least in part, according to the initial account, to the reaction of a member of the publisher’s junior staff to the word “Negro” in the title of the essay “The White Negro,” which was to be included in the volume. There were also rumors about declining sales, and speculation over how much Random House had paid Mailer over the years for his quest for the Great American Novel. Mailer’s family has stressed continued good relations between his literary estate and his backlist publisher. The estate’s literary agent also denies that any “cancellation” had occurred. In any case, the collection is to be brought out by Skyhorse Publishing, haven of the canceled.

What does this episode mean for *Advertisements for Myself*, which seems to be very much in print? Perhaps Mailer himself has become too controversial, given his misogyny, the violence in his personal history. But some people are asking, What is the difference between being canceled because you offend and your book getting turned down because your offensiveness represents a financial risk?

I don’t want to read Mailer again, but I don’t want to read any more Baldwin either, not until we get his letters. But while it may be too late for me to want to read Mailer’s books again—or even, most of them, for the first time—I wouldn’t want them not to be available in someone else’s future. As a historical document, “The White Negro” does not need to be defended, and as for Mailer’s ideas on Black primitivism, as an update on an American fetish they seem more in debt to

(continued on page 24)

Time has obscured what Baldwin and Mailer once had in common, their love of purely literary qualities.

Macho display: Mailer arm-wrestles with heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali in 1965.



The Unknown Oligarch Fighting Endless for an Korean War

BY ELI CLIFTON

Follow the money fomenting conflict on the Korean Peninsula, and all roads lead to Honolulu.

“**T**O PRESIDENT MOON JAE IN AND THE US CONGRESS: TRUE PEACE Can Only Come from True Freedom,” flashed the three-story-high digital advertisement in Times Square. “Hold the North Korean Regime Accountable & Free the North Korean People.” Rolling across the screen, the text continued, “H.R. 3446 and H.R. 826 Benefit North Korea and China. If Passed, the Bill Will Ultimately Dismantle the UN Command and Remove US Troops from S. Korea,” before ending next to the photo of a mushroom cloud.

Connecting the two House bills to such apocalyptic imagery last September was decidedly hyperbolic. HR 3446, the Peace on the Korean Peninsula Act, merely calls for the US secretary of state to “pursue serious, urgent diplomatic engagement with North Korea and South Korea in pursuit of a binding peace agreement constituting a formal and final end to the state of war between North Korea, South Korea, and the United States.” HR 826, the Divided Family Reunification Act, would require the US government to prioritize reuniting Korean Americans with family members separated after the signing of the ar-

mistice agreement in 1953, including through potential video reunions.

The opposition to these bills and the attacks against the grassroots activists who support them—many of whom are Korean American—have been led by a network of pressure groups with deep pockets, including a partnership with one of the biggest conservative political organizations in America; financial interests tied to fanning the flames of great-power competition with China; and media outlets that have amplified outlandish conspiracy theories about North Korean and Chinese interference in South Korean and US elections. Yet while this network might seem broad and disparate, a close examination of the efforts opposing diplomatic initiatives with North Korea circles back to one individual who rarely speaks or appears in public: Annie M.H. Chan, a resident of Honolulu.

According to a corporate profile, Chan “developed real estate projects in excess of \$1 billion in California and Hawaii.” She and her then-husband, Fred Chan, sold their 25,500-square-foot Los Altos Hills, Calif., home for \$100 million in 2011, and two private foundations controlled by Chan—the Chan Family Foundation and the Everlasting Private Foundation—held a combined \$18,664,694 in assets at the end of 2020.

The Times Square billboard and accompanying advertisements in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Korea Central Daily*, *The Korea Times*, and the Honolulu *Star-Advertiser* were all sponsored by One Korea Network and the Korea Conservative Political Action Conference—the South Korean branch of the Conservative Political Action Conference, which is held annually in the United States. Chan serves as the chairwoman of both OKN and KCPAC, and her Everlasting Private Foundation contributed \$932,500 to the American Conservative Union, CPAC’s organizer, between 2019 and 2020.

Peace advocates who support the legislation were stunned by the aggressive response—and the financial resources behind the advertising blitz, a campaign that appeared to pop up out of nowhere. “We were really taken by surprise,” said Christine Ahn, the founder and executive director of Women Cross DMZ, a grassroots organization that supports efforts to end the Korean War and is a target of OKN’s attacks.

One Korea Network accused Ahn of “appeas[ing] a dictatorship that is keeping its own people in chains & hell-like prison” in a November tweet. “#Sanctions are in place to curb

Eli Clifton is an investigative journalist who focuses on money in politics and US foreign policy.



TRUE PEACE
CAN ONLY
COME FROM
TRUE FREEDOM



TRUE PEACE
CAN ONLY
COME FROM
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proliferation behavior & human rights abuses. Please get the facts straight.”

“Their tone is pretty intense, but that general framework about the role of sanctions in order to improve human rights is very much what’s commonplace among those types of groups,” Ahn said. “That’s not to deny there are gross human rights abuses in North Korea. But if you try to look at the impact of these sanctions, they haven’t succeeded at the denuclearization of North Korea, and they certainly haven’t done anything to improve human rights in North Korea.”

KCPAC’s first conference, held in Seoul in October 2019, featured former US deputy national security adviser K.T. McFarland and American Conservative Union executive director Dan Schneider. Chan cochaired the event and delivered the keynote address.

“I think South Korea is on the verge of passing over to communist North Korea,” Chan said in her speech. Offering a dark vision of South Korea’s future, assertions of Chinese influence operations being carried out in broad daylight, and conspiracy theories about fraud in the upcoming US and South Korean elections—both of which were to be held the following year—Chan’s speech was an explicit rejection of a future in which the United States and North Korea can coexist.

Speaking in Korean, Chan recited a litany of conspiracy theories about Chinese infiltration and demographic replacement. “China is using all kinds of tactics to... swallow the Republic of Korea,” she charged.

“China is a terrifying, communist country with a huge population of 1.4 billion, and they think the game is not over until they die,” Chan warned. “It is not a difficult strategy for the communist government to relocate residents to live in another country and take over the politics and economy of that country,” she said, emphasizing that “Korea is no exception.”

Following the South Korean legislative election in April 2020, in which the center to center-left Democratic Party enjoyed a landslide victory, Chan’s, KCPAC’s, and One Korea Network’s messaging took on an even more sinister tone, making baseless claims of Chinese interference and election fraud that eerily foreshadowed the allegations spread by Donald Trump’s supporters after he lost the White House seven months later.

In the summer of 2020, Chan apparently wrote a letter to then-President Trump, a fragment of which was published on Daum, a South Korean web portal, accusing South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s government of being “filled with anti-America, pro-North Korea socialists.” Chan also contributed \$100,000 to Trump’s reelection efforts.

In her letter, Chan compared the US presidential election to the South Korean election in April. “I would like to respectfully warn you,” she

Give peace a chance:
Ribbons showing support for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula decorate a military fence at Imjingak peace park near the DMZ.

“China is a terrifying, communist country with a huge population, and they think the game is not over until they die.”

—Annie M.H. Chan

wrote, “of similar dangers regarding the up and coming elections here in the US.” The letter was also addressed to White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Federal Election Commission chair James E. Trainor III.

Chan claimed that “North Korean espionage or the work of Chinese youth members of the Chinese Communist Party who live near the North Korean border” were responsible for sabotaging Trump’s June 2020 rally in Tulsa, Okla., by reserving large numbers of tickets—actions widely attributed to K-pop fans and teen users of the TikTok social media platform.

Chan concluded the letter by calling on Trump to help sound the alarm about alleged electoral fraud in the South Korean election, “enact regulations prohibiting anti-U.S. activists from entering the United States,” and “institute strong economic sanctions against all of these perpetrators.”

No substantive evidence of election fraud in South Korea has ever been presented; concerns about the vote appeared to emerge only after the decisive loss by conservatives. But Chan continued disputing the election results.

ONE KOREA NETWORK’S DOMAIN name was registered on April 5, 2020—10 days before the election—and the site published its first five articles on April 13, the first of which accused the Moon administration of “covering up the clinical information of over 10,000 COVID-19 patients.” Following the decisive win by Moon’s Democratic Party, OKN quickly pivoted to a series of articles casting doubt on the legitimacy of the results. Headlines that fall included: “Suspicious Hover Over South Korean Election,” “Two Korean Election Races Which Must Be Nullified,” “Early Voting Ballots Bundled Like a Bunch of New Bills, Including Non-Official Ballots,” “The Reason Why the Moon Administration Had to Commit Election Fraud,” and “All Manipulated Mail-In Votes in Early Voting Are Invalid!”

A 267-page report published by KCPAC in February 2021 and promoted on OKN’s website included a preface by Chan, alongside forewords by Schneider and Fred Fleitz, the president of the notorious anti-Muslim and conspiracy-theory-promoting Center for Security Policy, compiling various claims of election fraud in South Korea and strongly suggesting that Trump’s 2020 loss was illegitimate and bore a resemblance to the South Korean election. “Allegations of election fraud are being sorely dismissed as baseless claims and unfounded conspiracy theories by the media and investigative agencies,” Chan wrote. “Yet, I am proud that we have been taking a serious scientific approach for

months to expose the truth of election fraud.”

In addition to providing fuel for right-wing conspiracy mongering, Chan’s allegations that China and North Korea perpetrated election fraud in the US and South Korea, like her claims about outside powers encroaching on liberal democracies on both sides of the Pacific, may have another motive: profit.

In September 2019, Chan was listed as a board member of IP3 International, according to that firm’s website. The company, which describes itself as “the lead U.S. integrator for the development and operations of peaceful and secure civil nuclear power in the global marketplace,” faced scrutiny earlier that year for its attempt to export civilian nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia via a consortium of US and South Korean firms. IP3’s roster of directors is a who’s who of national security hawks—including Robert MacFarlane, Ronald Reagan’s national security adviser; John Keane, a retired four-star general and chairman of the Institute for the Study of War; Keith Alexander, a former National Security Agency director; James Cartwright, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Mike Rogers, a former Michigan representative. Though all are veteran cold warriors, none have significant experience in nuclear power generation—or in navigating US laws intended to prevent the proliferation of nuclear technologies.

Earlier that year Representative Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, released a report detailing how Michael Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser, and Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law, promoted the Saudi nuclear scheme in possible violation of the Atomic Energy Act’s restrictions on the control and management of nuclear technology. A second report, issued in July 2019, revealed that IP3 had lobbied the White House to transfer nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia and sought a \$120 million investment from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

“Documents show that IP3 is currently pushing the Trump Administration not to require Saudi Arabia to agree to the ‘Gold Standard,’ which is a commitment not to use U.S. nuclear technology to make nuclear weapons,” read a statement released by the Oversight Committee that month. “Documents show that IP3 officials repeatedly urged White House and Trump Administration officials to abandon the ‘Gold Standard’ in any

future [Section] 123 Agreement with Saudi Arabia, complaining that it would lock them out of lucrative nuclear contracts with the Saudis.”

Chan’s arrival on IP3’s board coincided with the company’s pivot to a new business model: marketing the export of nuclear technology to Europe as a critical—and, for IP3, lucrative—component of great-power competition with China and Russia.

In *The National Interest* last October, MacFarlane laid out his vision for the export of nuclear technologies, many of which are highly regulated: “[An] allied partnership around nuclear power would constitute a strategically important move on the geopolitical chessboard to counter China and Russia—a move that would generate myriad security benefits for the West and all those hoping to join it.”

Allied Nuclear, an IP3 subsidiary where Chan serves as director of “strategy & innovation,” warned on its website that “commercial nuclear energy companies are facing an intensified challenge from the ‘China-Russia Tandem’ as the two countries leverage nuclear energy projects to claim more territory along Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative than they could take through military force.” It recommended a “consortium-based commercial model” as a response to allow the US, South Korea, France, and other nuclear suppliers to “regrow market shares.”

Molly J. Denham, a representative of IP3, denied that the company stood to profit from great-power rivalries and distanced it from Chan’s political activism in the US and South Korea. “The company has had no involvement in Korean reunification or election issues in any country,” she said.

“A reduction in great-power competition anywhere in the world would be a win for people everywhere,” Denham later added. “IP3 and Allied Nuclear’s business is based on finding effective ways to draw private capital into large, carbon-free power projects that can secure prosperity and peace among stable societies.”

CHAN’S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE EXPORT OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY FROM the US and South Korea to counter Chinese competition might be completely coincidental. But her conspiratorial statements about the dangers posed by China to the United States are entirely consistent with the business strategy undertaken by IP3, which pivoted to warning about the Chinese threat after Chan’s arrival on its board and after failing in its bid to export sensitive technology to Saudi Arabia.

“A partnership around nuclear power would constitute a strategically important move on the geopolitical chessboard.”

—Robert MacFarlane

Sign of the times: One Korea Network and the Korea Conservative Political Action Conference sponsored a digital ad in Times Square in September 2021.



Chan’s One Korea Network appears to echo the perspectives of IP3 and Allied Nuclear, cheering South Korean plans to export nuclear power technology and to maintain the country’s existing nuclear technology. A May 2021 OKN article quoted an anonymous official at the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. “There is a demand for nuclear power plants in the Middle East and Europe. If [South Korea and the US] enter the market together, it will help them gain an advantage in the competition to win new contracts to build foreign nuclear power plants,” the official said. As OKN stressed, “This will put the brakes on China and Russia that are

“The carrot will not work on [Kim Jong Un]. America needs to know that the stick is more effective.”

—Hyun-seung Lee

ultimately be paid for using “citizen’s [sic] electricity bills.” The article concluded with the caveat that “the trade ministry, for its part, said it does not plan on raising electricity bills yet.”

While the political activities undertaken by Chan, KCPAC, and OKN seem to be highly partisan in nature, OKN and IP3 haven’t completely closed the door to influencing the Biden administration. And the White House has already begun one initiative that OKN and IP3 can support. In April 2021, the State Department announced a \$5.3 million program to enable the deployment of small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) and to provide “capacity-building support to partner countries as they develop their nuclear energy programs to support clean energy goals under the highest international standards for nuclear safety, security, and nonproliferation.”

Four months earlier, IP3 had predicted the Biden administration’s support for SMRs and praised the reactors as a tool for competing against Russia and China. “As a cheaper, smaller and scalable alternative to larger light water reactors, SMRs also help sovereign governments avoid falling for the lure of debt-trap boondoggles built by Russia and China,” it said in a press release. And in May, OKN published an article—“The U.S. Is Working With South Korea to Restore Its Position as the Leading Nuclear Power”—detailing the potential for US–South Korean cooperation in exporting nuclear reactors: “There is also a possibility that South Korea and the U.S. may cooperate in the field of [the] Small Modular Reactor...which is the next-generation nuclear power plant in the industry.”

OKN has weighed in on North Korea as well. Hyun-seung Lee, a North Korean defector who is a director at OKN, told *NK News* that the Biden administration can work to improve human rights in North Korea and bring Pyongyang closer to denuclearization by doubling down on sanctions and pressure tactics. “The carrot will not work on [North Korean leader Kim Jong Un],” Lee said. “America needs to know that the stick is more effective.” OKN, KCPAC, and Chan did not respond to requests for comment.

FEARMONGERING ABOUT CHINESE AGGRESSION AND INFLUENCE, PROMOTING THE use and export of nuclear power technology, and maintaining a militarized US–South Korea alliance all serve Chan’s ideological and business interests. And her business and political agenda may benefit from the growing anti-China sentiment in both US political parties—and an increased framing in Washington of US–China relations in the context of great-power competition.

Working through IP3, OKN, and KCPAC, Chan has created a clever echo chamber for the promotion of great-power competition with China and conspiracy theories about left-wing victories in the South Korean and US elections. But public opinion in both the US and South Korea is tilting decidedly against her cause.

Nearly two-thirds of Americans age 18 to 29 believe “the United States should respond to China’s rise by decreasing the US troop presence in Asia, a seven percent increase from last year,” a Eurasia Group Foundation poll found in September. The survey also found that 58 percent of Americans want to increase US diplomatic engagement with the world.

Meanwhile, nearly 70 percent of South Koreans agree with President Moon’s proposal to end the Korean War, according to a September poll conducted by

winning most contracts on new nuclear power plants.”

Another OKN article that month, reporting on the Moon government’s decision to move away from nuclear power for safety reasons, was headlined: “South Korea Stumbles Toward Nuclear Phase-Out in Favor of Questionable Wind Power Projects.” In June, OKN again blasted the Moon administration with an article stating that the phaseout would

the National Unification Advisory Council.

Chan appears to be borrowing from a well-worn playbook in her efforts to inject money into the US political system to generate personal profits—while also influencing elite opinion to steer foreign policy in a militaristic direction in East Asia. Whether her efforts will be successful is still an open question. Public opinion may be moving in the direction of increased US diplomacy and a reduction of the US military footprint in the region. But thanks largely to Chan, a concerted and well-funded campaign is underway to maintain the costly status quo. **N**

This article was copublished by The Nation and Responsible Statecraft.

(continued from page 19)

Freud than to Sartre. Mailer said he was trying to kick benzedrine when he was writing “The White Negro,” which brings to mind Sartre going off speed in order to prove he didn’t need it. Sartre wrote his best book, *The Words*, without the aid of drugs.

Still, there is something cold turkey about “The White Negro” in its mania—but then Mailer was always on, out there. Sobriety was not one of his muses. In his time, critics talked a lot about Mailer’s saturation in the language, in the invention of his idiom, and how in his nonfiction each of his participant/observer narrators was a persona embarked on an adventure of mind and will. Writers must be free to take risks, to make their own mistakes. Mailer should be defended not for reasons of nostalgia but on principle.

There has always been a problem that what is being said about Black people and white people depends on who is saying it and where. There had always been the question of whether the superiority seen in Black vernacular culture was adequate compensation for political powerlessness and economic suppression. Intellectual heritage is now capital, and the belief that the fight for control of culture is political has become obsolete. Zora Neale Hurston resented white writers’ making money from Black material when she never got the chance to. Poachers. What separates the chaff from the wheat these days, and who decides and by what criteria? In print culture, the change in who gets to say what is grounds for expulsion from cultural memory signals a shift in power, a creation of new powers. The offended are not merely heard, they are enthroned.

I don’t believe in the non-AA use of the word “trigger.” You are not brought down by the encounter with a written work or an object of art to the extent that you would harm yourself or others unless you were already predisposed to

do so and thrived on suppositions confirmed by your paranoia.

New powers need new standards: Is the aim the chastisement of the white gaze, control over sublimated and unsublimated aggression—or the placement of an additional apparatus of surveillance and accountability over culture? The market loves what are deemed icons, while the culture has come to suspect individualism. Even David Blight's monumental *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* has moments when he regrets that Douglass thought of himself as exceptional. Never mind that Douglass could not have accomplished what he did had he not had this extraordinary sense of self. The age of auteurism is over. We all can be stakeholders in the fantasy that culture should be a safe place and that talent must be democratic, not a mystery.

I do not know how we got from wanting civilized workplace practices to imposing censorship—and doing so in the name of progressive intentions. John McWhorter was inspiring in his defense of the word “Negro” in a recent *New York Times* opinion piece. I was always told that my great-grandparents, listed either as “colored” or “Negro” in every official US Census, related to the word “Negro” in print as manifesting the respect they and

W.E.B. Du Bois had won for themselves.

Writers' works often disappear after their deaths—and then come back. Or not. Mailer has range in his subjects, but are his ideas just flawed, or are they so wrong they're harmful? Eldridge Cleaver, rapist of Black women and white women, was excused back then because of white supremacy's crimes. Did the murderer Gary Gilmore, the subject of Mailer's *Executioner's Song*, find dignity when he insisted on being executed for his crimes? Was the murderer Jack Abbott, whom Mailer helped get out of prison, worthy of what Mailer read into his miserable upbringing in the criminal justice system?

The history of ideas is unpredictable. Critic Sterling A. Brown was adamant that readers made the canon; academics seem to think they're in charge these days. Perhaps time and other writers shape these matters, which are so fluid—what to call them? Along with the objections to what Mailer represents comes an exasperation with the '60s, later generations fed up with hearing what to them sounds like the plea of impotence: that the wide cultural dimension is a crucial gauge to a free society. Artistic independence is fragile as social practice. What is being canceled is the status of art as sacrosanct, and that of the artist as belonging to an elect. Writing used to be considered a form of magic. Now it's a profession. Behave. **N**

I do not know how we got from wanting civilized workplace practices to imposing censorship.



Picture of virility? Norman Mailer as a young man, an era that apparently haunted his later writing.



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Truth, Light, and Title IX

How a cohort of Yale feminists helped launch the fight against rape and sexual harassment on college campuses.

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT

SHE ALMOST DIDN'T NOTICE THEM ANYMORE, ALL THE WHITE MEN staring out from portraits on the walls of Yale University's halls. No darker faces. No female faces. But when Pamela Price entered Yale as a proud Black nationalist with an Angela Davis-style afro in the freshman class of 1974, culture shock hit hard. It wasn't just the class differences, though those were huge.

Low, moat-like walls surrounded the stone residence colleges and many other Yale buildings, sending a subliminal message to "keep out." Somehow the school made Black students feel like foreigners, which alienated her. Black students got the message that they were at Yale only because of affirmative action, as though invisible asterisks were affixed to their records. Price could feel people assume that she was inferior because she was a Black person and assume that she wasn't serious because she was a woman. She knew that Yale had accepted Black students only because people fought and raised hell for their right to be there, to not be excluded. Price had seen worse; she would find her way through this too.

In the early culture shock of being at Yale, the Black community helped ground Price. She sang in the choir of the Black Church at Yale. She joined the Black Student Alliance at Yale and the Umoja Extended Family (now Umoja Community) of Black students and town residents. She started typing students' papers at night to make some money, and in her sophomore year she landed a job at the Afro-American Cultural Center.

Before long, she could see that her work in class was as good as anyone else's—

sometimes better—which vanquished any self-doubt about her abilities. Nor was she intimidated by the nearly three-to-one ratio of men to women students.

Price chose to major in political science. A student friend from Ghana gave her the Ashanti nickname Amma, which she adopted and used as an alias when writing some of her more provocative political articles for Black newsletters. Her inner strength as a Black activist and the alert, caring Black community around her proved crucial in what came next.

At the end of her sophomore year, Price fell sick. She requested extensions on the due dates for final papers in three classes. When she recovered, she went to political science professor Raymond Duvall's office to hand in a term paper, "Tanzanian Development and Dependency Theory." To her surprise, he opened the door and invited the 19-year-old in. Here's how Price remembers what happened next.

Duvall stepped behind his small desk as Price followed him into the tiny, messy office. "Have a seat," he said.

Price handed him the paper and sat down in one of the two chairs taking up most of the space between the door and the desk. Duvall shuffled some papers.

"Oh, I see you didn't do very well on the final," he said, not looking at her.

"Well, I was sick. That's why you gave me an extension. That's why I'm here to turn in the paper," Price said.

"I hope that this is an A paper."

"I hope so too," she said.

After a pause, Duvall slowly came around the desk. His eyes averting hers, Duvall repeated, "I hope that this is an A paper."

"OK, yeah, that's good. Me, too," Price said.

Duvall continued, "I really would hate to give you a C."

"OK, that's fine," Price agreed. "I don't want a C. I'm not a C student."

Duvall sat in the chair next to her, very close. "I really, really would hate to give you a C," he repeated.

"I don't want a C," she said, confused about the conversation.

Finally, Duvall said, "Well, will you make love to me?"

Sherry Boschert is the author of 37 Words: Title IX and Fifty Years of Fighting Sex Discrimination.

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNA BARCZYK



Sex harassment dismissal upheld

Second appeal likely

By Keith E. Hansen

A New York court Monday upheld the dismissal of a sexual harassment case which five Yale women filed against the University in 1977.

"This is not the end. We're not satisfied," said Lisa Stone, one of the plaintiffs. "We plan to do definite things. It's not if we do it—it's what," she said.

She declined to say whether the women would appeal the case once again, since they have not yet received a copy of the decision. The next appeal could take them to the U.S. Supreme Court.

William Doyle, attorney for the defense, could not be reached for

The only higher level of appeal would require petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Until all of us have had a chance to evaluate the decision, there's really nothing we can say about the future," she said.

"I'm very disappointed, I'm even sad, but I'm not surprised," Stone said. "We have a lot of decisions to make. If we have to mount another fund-raising campaign we will."

According to Stone, the decision is 50 pages long, and will take some time to review. "We have to see what it all means," she said.



YDN Sam Wilkins
CASE DISMISSED—Pam Price was the only one of the five plaintiffs whose case saw trial when five women sued Yale for sexual discrimination in 1977.

With no frame of reference for this, Price at first didn't connect the question with the rest of the conversation. Her first and only thought was, "No." Out loud, she said matter-of-factly, "No. No, I'm not," as her mind churned over his strange request. "No. I don't think that's going to happen." Her head shook side to side. "No, I don't think that's a good idea. No. No."

After a lull, still oblivious, she said, "Well, can I leave now?"

"Yes, you can leave," Duvall said. She got up and squeezed between the chairs, his eyes following her. As she walked out the door, he added, "God, you have a really turn-on body!"

Duvall later denied Price's account.

She made her way down the stairs to the ground floor. "What's wrong with this man?" she thought. "There's something wrong with him." By the time she reached the base of the stairs, the meaning of it all hit her, and made her angry.

She went directly to work at the Afro-American Cultural Center and immediately told her boss, Khalid Lum, what had happened. Lum made her sit down right then and type out exactly what had happened—verbatim—in a complaint to be delivered immediately to a dean, Eva Balogh. He sent Kevin, a football player, with her to give it to the dean. Price told Balogh that Duvall tried to extort sex for an A grade. Balogh said this kind of thing happened all the time and nothing could be done about it, Price remembers, though Balogh later said she simply advised Price to wait and see what grade Duvall assigned.

Duvall graded her paper a C and gave her a C in the course—the only C she received at Yale. The university had no grievance procedure for sexual harassment and did nothing about Price's complaint. She left for Tanzania soon after the incident on a planned junior year abroad, relieved to put the hostile weirdness of the university behind her and thrilled to be living in a Black nation that felt like going home.

Duvall moved that summer to a faculty position at the University of Minnesota.

No justice: A Yale Daily News article from September 1980 reports that Price and her sister plaintiffs had lost their appeal in *Alexander v. Yale*.

The campus activism extended efforts to stop sexual violence that had been building for more than a century, led often by women of color.

WHILE PRICE STUDIED abroad in Tanzania, the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, founded in 1974 by Ann Olivarius and five other students, developed a report on women's issues at Yale to be presented in 1977 to the Yale Corporation (its board

of trustees). Five of the report's 23 pages described three rapes by students and sexual coercion and assault by a teaching assistant. These problems were "not uncommon," it stated. Any woman brave enough to tell a professor or dean received, at most, a word of sympathy. Since there was no formal complaint process, the person they told didn't know that other students were complaining about the same perpetrator to other professors and deans. Individually, officials told each woman it was her problem to sort out.

Their stories echoed a broader movement against sexual violence starting to catch fire.

Feminists in an audience of 400 at Bay Path Junior College in Longmeadow, Mass., refused to stay silent during a lecture by rape apologist Frederic Storaska on April 26, 1975. Storaska had a book to promote, *How to Say No to a Rapist—and Survive*. During his talk, Storaska advised women to see the rapist as a human being whose frustration turns to anger and rape when a girlfriend humiliates him or makes out with him but won't go all the way, or because the rapist had an emotionally distant mother. Some people in the audience hissed their disapproval.

Women, Storaska continued, physically cannot fight off a man. If you feel you have to fight for your life, at least don't scream, because that may make the rapist angrier. Don't panic if a would-be rapist touches your breast, he said. "It doesn't fall off unless it's loose."

Thirty or so women started chanting, "Rape is not a joke." Some of them stormed the stage and unplugged his microphone. A fight broke out; ultimately police arrested one woman.

Several college campuses canceled Storaska's scheduled talks. At other talks, women handed out flyers warning that Storaska had no evidence to back up his theories; they challenged him when he took questions.

The campus activism extended efforts to stop sexual violence that had been building for more than a century, led often by women of color. Black women—including a formerly enslaved transgender woman, Frances Thompson—testified to Congress in 1866 about gang rapes by white mobs in the Memphis riots. Rosa Parks and other organizers campaigned in the 1940s and beyond to stop the raping of Black women by white men and false rape accusations by whites against Black men—both tools used to perpetuate white supremacist control.

As the women's movement evolved from consciousness-raising groups to concrete actions,

feminists at the University of Iowa, the University of South Florida, Fresno State University, George Washington University, and elsewhere founded rape crisis centers, taught self-defense classes, fought for rape-law reform, and organized annual Take Back the Night marches. The number of rape task forces in NOW chapters blew up from 15 to 66 by early 1974.

WHILE ATTENTION TO SEXUAL violence grew, so did action against sexual misconduct that wasn't quite assault, most often in the workplace. Carmita Wood, a Black woman and administrative assistant for a Cornell University physics professor, became physically ill from the stress of fending off repeated sexual advances from her white boss. She sought help in early 1975 from the university's Human Affairs Program, where three radical feminists (Lin Farley, Susan Meyer, and Karen Sauvigné) looked into her case. They found that every woman they knew had experienced something like what Wood reported, but virtually nobody talked about it. So they started an organization called Working Women United to address this, and connected Wood to a lawyer.

Before they could change the problem, they had to name it. They'd talked with Wood about "sexual abuse," "sexual intimidation," and "sexual coercion." They settled on "sexual harassment" in April 1975 because it covered a wide variety of conduct. Soon the press started using the phrase.

Wood lost her case on appeal, but other desperate and courageous women filed six influential lawsuits between 1971 and 1975. Eventually their cases established that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits sexual harassment. That mattered to a lot of women—a 1976 survey of 9,000 working women found 90 percent faced some sexual harassment on the job.

At Yale, as the Undergraduate Women's Caucus collected stories of sexual harassment, some faculty names came up again and again as repeat offenders. Olivarius approached a friendly administrator to see if something could be done about serial abusers. She and Sam Chauncey, the secretary of the university, met almost weekly for months. In order to help, Chauncey told her, he'd need the names of the accused faculty and the students. Olivarius got the students' permission to share their names and stories. All of this would be confidential, Chauncey assured her, but he broke that confidence. Chauncey told music teacher and band-

leader Keith Brion that he'd been accused of rape, Olivarius said.

The Women's Caucus had heard three accounts of Brion raping students. Other Yale students said Brion locked his office door during music lessons, kissed their ears, and placed *Playboy* centerfolds on their music stands. Many quit the lessons or the band to avoid him.

Brion started stalking Olivarius, she said. He tracked her down as she was cleaning dorm rooms to earn some money before graduation. Tall and thin, he pelted her with verbal threats. Then Brion's wife, LaRue, a secretary at Yale with access to Olivarius's records, found her in her dorm. She begged Olivarius to back off, saying the students were lying and asking Olivarius not to hurt her family if she truly considered herself a feminist. When that didn't work, Olivarius recalled later, Mrs. Brion threatened her, saying she'd "fuck with" her academic files and interfere with Olivarius's applications for fellowships and graduate schools if she didn't stop.

Unnerved, Olivarius called Chauncey for advice. "I think I've got a problem," she said.

She did, Chauncey said, and he told her an alarming lie: Brion was about to have her arrested for libel, and Yale was backing him, not her, she remembers. "You'd better get a lawyer," Chauncey told her. Olivarius would go on to be a wildly successful feminist lawyer, but at the time she didn't know that you can't be arrested for libel. Frantic, Olivarius consulted one of her instructors, Catharine A. MacKinnon, who eventually became an eminent feminist legal theorist but at that time was a graduate student. MacKinnon pointed her to the sparse office of a new community-oriented law practice, the New Haven Law Collective.

"We have to figure something out. We have to," Olivarius pleaded. Not just for herself, but for all the women students being harassed or assaulted. Lawyer Anne E. Simon suggested they fight using offense rather than defense. But how? They tapped MacKinnon, who was finishing a law school dissertation that eventually became her groundbreaking 1979 book *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*. The group adapted some of MacKinnon's thinking to an educational setting, which gave them a handle to open a new legal door.

Simon took the lead on drafting a complaint arguing for the first time that unchecked sexual harassment in an educational setting constitutes sex discrimination, charging Yale with violating Title IX of the 1972 federal education law. It wasn't clear that individuals had the right to sue to enforce Title IX. The strategy was a gamble.

Olivarius helped find other potential plaintiffs with assistance from the Undergraduate Women's Caucus. She gathered evidence and tried to poke holes in her team's draft legal arguments.

SENIOR RONNI ALEXANDER AGREED TO TELL HER STORY. ON A DECEMBER day in her sophomore year, getting out of a friend's car, she'd whacked her head on the doorframe so hard it caused a concussion. Her friend brought her to the health center but had to leave. Alexander started walking unsteadily toward her dormitory.

Brion, who was her flute teacher, saw her on the way. He offered to drive her back to her dorm. Barely able to string together a coherent sentence, Alexander said, "OK." She didn't like being near Brion. In her freshman year she'd quit taking lessons from

The complaint argued for the first time that sexual harassment in an educational setting constitutes sex discrimination.

From plaintiff to advocate: Pamela Price, a renowned civil rights attorney, during her first campaign for Alameda County district attorney in 2018.



From the start, *Alexander v. Yale* was about Title IX protection against rape as well as behaviors lumped under “sexual harassment.”

Student teacher: Ann Olivarius, leader of the Yale Undergraduate Women’s Caucus, as a student at the college in the 1970s.

John (Jack) Winkler, a classics scholar, queer theorist, political activist, and Stone’s thesis adviser. Sexual harassment at Yale led to an “atmosphere of distrust” of male professors that undermined his teaching efforts, Winkler charged. From the start, the plaintiffs decided they would not be anonymous. They were not ashamed.

Simon filed the suit on July 3, 1977, in US District Court in New Haven, Conn. *The New York Times* placed its story about the suit in the “Family/Style” section. A Yale spokesman told the *Times* that faculty sexual misconduct was “not a major problem.”

THE UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN’S CAUCUS—NOW nearly 200 members strong—learned of Pamela Price’s complaint and invited her to join the lawsuit. Price had never heard of Title IX, so she didn’t instantly say yes. Her C grade and Duvall’s misconduct bothered her, but more important, she could not abide Yale’s treatment of Ronni Alexander. The woman was raped; Price felt she had to do something about it. She joined the lawsuit. From the start, *Alexander v. Yale* was about Title IX protection against rape (which the lawsuit called “coerced sexual intercourse”) as well as behaviors lumped under the term “sexual harassment.”

Simon added Price and another plaintiff to the suit: Margery Reifler, who said she’d been harassed by the field hockey coach. The lawsuit asked for a formal grievance procedure to handle complaints of sexual harassment at Yale. A student petition for grievance procedures drew 12,000 signatures.

The Yale women’s lawsuit became the talk of the campus and the town of New Haven. It generated some national publicity, both supportive and derisive. The Women’s Caucus organized campus discussion sessions and fundraisers. But when Alexander stopped by a bar popular with working women not long after she appeared on TV

him because he started touching her breasts while “checking her breathing.” Another time he grabbed her, kissing and fondling her even though she told him to stop. But he was Yale’s only flute instructor, and she dreamed of auditioning for Yale’s Music School, so she restarted the lessons her sophomore year.

On the way back to Alexander’s dorm, Brion stopped at an apartment he kept near campus, separate from his family. He led her inside and

laid her on the bed. “The sheets smell dirty,” she thought. Then Brion raped her, she said. She didn’t resist, didn’t understand why, and didn’t tell anyone from the shame. Soon after, though, she asked a student counselor what would happen if a professor forced a student into a sexual relationship. The counselor asked a dean, who said he would call the professor and the student into his office to talk it through. Alexander said nothing. Brion raped her at least once more. Zombielike, she didn’t resist, and blamed herself. Alexander took a Greyhound bus to Canada, where a friend talked her out of suicide. Eventually she returned to Yale, moved out of her dorm into an apartment, and gave up music.

When Women’s Caucus members approached Alexander in her senior year with other accounts about Brion, she agreed to file a report with Yale and joined the lawsuit that took her name, *Alexander v. Yale*. Besides Olivarius, the plaintiffs included Lisa Stone, who roomed with one of Brion’s victims; Stone had reported Brion to an English professor, whose only response was to sexually proposition her. A lone faculty member joined them:



discussing the lawsuit, she was surprised to be met by cold, hostile faces. The women seemed to think she was a weak, spoiled attention seeker for talking about sexual harassment, something they all had put up with for years without publicly whining about it. More than a few women students at Yale felt the same way. Still, the concept of sexual harassment being sex discrimination spread like wildfire among students.

The first ruling in the case came on December 21, 1977. Federal District Court Magistrate Judge Arthur H. Latimer affirmed for the first time that Title IX can apply to sexual harassment in education because “academic advancement conditioned upon submission to sexual demands constitutes sexual discrimination in education.” And he recognized that the right to a private lawsuit exists in Title IX cases.

But he dismissed Alexander because she had graduated and Reifler because she hadn’t filed a complaint (even though Yale had no procedure for doing so). He dismissed Stone, Olivarius, and Winkler because they hadn’t claimed personal exclusion from educational opportunities, and “no judicial enforcement of Title IX could properly extend to such imponderables as atmosphere or vicariously experienced wrong”—what years later became recognized as a sexually hostile environment.

That left Price, the only plaintiff who could move forward in the case. The decision pitted a lone Black woman student against a white male professor. She and Simon asked for class-action status representing all women students at Yale, but Latimer refused.

Before this ruling, many of Price’s friends trivialized the case as “those white women” or “those feminists.” Now their tone changed. “I was subjected to the assumption of my inferiority as a black person as well as the assumption of my lack of seriousness as a woman,” Price said in a December 1977 statement. The grade Duvall gave her, she said, was “a concrete expression of his racist and sexist appraisal of me as a person—in my case the one attitude is inherently linked with the other.”

The Council of Third World Women at Yale and the Afro-American Cultural Center helped turn out support. The Women’s Caucus released press statements and a fact sheet noting the racial overtones of the case and the double jeopardy of racism and sexism that women of color faced. Price loved that the lawsuit built bridges between Black and white activists, though extensive media coverage of the case largely ignored the issue of race.

BY THE TIME THE YALE CASE—NOW titled *Price v. Yale* but still often called *Alexander v. Yale*—came to trial in January 1979, Price had graduated and was in the middle of her first year at Boalt School of Law at the University of California, Berkeley. She missed three weeks of classes for the trial. Two of her professors supported her attendance and helped her catch up afterward, but an assistant dean warned her in advance that her absence from the third class would not be excused. “You know,” he added, “I went to Yale.”

Price’s pastor showed up every day to the second-floor courtroom of New Haven’s federal district court building to support her during the two-week trial. Flyers urged spectators to attend because “This lawsuit is about: 1. Women fighting sexual harassment. 2. Women speaking out against sexual abuse. 3. Third World and white women standing together to say ‘NO to racism and sexism.’” A multihued crowd of students and others rallied on the New Haven Green repeatedly during the trial.

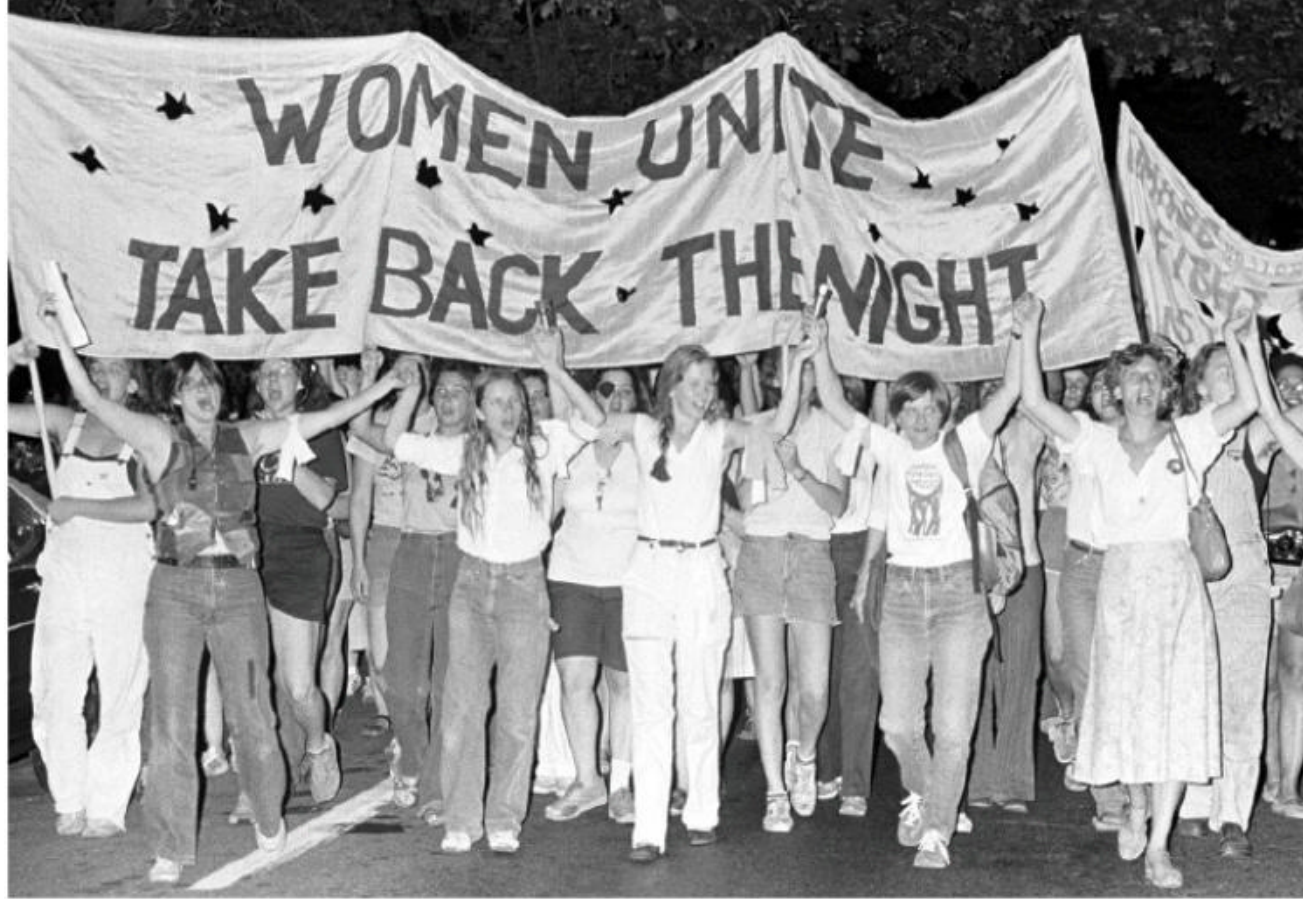
Judge Ellen Bree Burns, a Yale Law graduate, chose to conduct the trial as a tort suit, a claim of harm to one individual, instead of considering the broader harm to a group of people, as occurs in a class-action suit. She allowed only inquiries or evidence about Price’s own experiences, not Yale’s failure to comply with Title IX. “If it was an individual thing, I wouldn’t be here,” Price told the media. “It’s about more than the fact that Duvall propositioned me. It’s about all women who are sexually harassed.”

Judge Burns announced her decision on July 2, 1979: There was no proof that the alleged proposition by Duvall happened; the C grade was deserved; and because Price had already graduated, Yale’s policies no longer affected her. “It’s the same old story,” Price said in a statement. “Where sex is concerned, black women’s accusations are considered lies and white men’s denials are believed. Unfortunately, the trial, which was presided over by a woman, was merely another manifestation of the racism and sexism pervasive in society and reflected in its laws.”

All five students agreed to appeal the decision minus Professor Winkler, who had left to teach at Stanford University. Two of the best feminist litigators in the country—Nadine Taub and Liz Schneider of the Center for Constitutional Rights—agreed to steer the appeal, with amici support from a slew of women’s groups.

Yale rehired and promoted Keith Brion, the bandleader accused of raping Alexander and others.

Students at universities in at least six other states also organized to fight sexual harassment, inspired by the Yale suit and the movement against sexual harassment in general. The



American Council on Education held seminars across the country in 1979 on sexual harassment policy. Secretaries at Boston University and Harvard organized and eventually won one of the first clauses about sexual harassment in a union contract. The Alliance Against Sexual Coercion created a handbook for establishing college grievance procedures.

FOR PRICE’S APPEAL IN THE YALE CASE, SIMON, TAUB, AND New Haven Law Collective employee Phyllis L. Crocker traveled to New York for a mandatory mediation session before the court would hear arguments. Everyone around the conference table at the Second Circuit courthouse had gone to Yale or its law school: the three women and, on the other side, Yale’s attorney, its representative, and the mediator. The three men called the women ungrateful for the privilege of attending Yale and said they should drop the suit, Crocker recalled. The women replied: You just don’t get it.

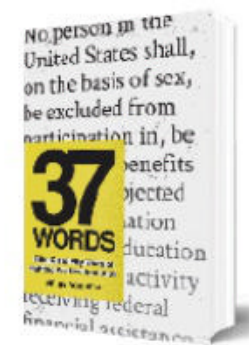
They officially argued the appeal on April 16, 1980, before three white men on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York City. By that time Yale had adopted a grievance procedure, though some found it inadequate. The appellate court backed Judge Burns’s decision in favor of Yale on September 22. Alexander’s claim that Brion’s rapes killed her desired career as a flutist was “highly conjectural,” the judges said, and Price hadn’t proved anything in her case.

Within two years of *Alexander v. Yale* ending, though, the universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin; the University of California, Santa Cruz; and Brown, Stanford, and Tulane universities had adopted formal sex discrimination policies and grievance procedures, most of which were weak but were at least a start.

Price was working as a student intern for a criminal defense firm in San Francisco in 1980 when one of her attorneys called to tell her they’d lost the appeal. “That’s it. Title IX is dead,” she thought. It would never be a useful tool to fight rape and sexual harassment.

But five years later, hundreds of colleges and universities had adopted grievance procedures. It was just the beginning. **N**

Movement roots: Women participate in a Take Back the Night rally and march in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mass., in 1970.



Coming soon: This article was adapted from *37 Words: Title IX and Fifty Years of Fighting Sex Discrimination* (The New Press).

“Unfortunately, the trial was merely another manifestation of the racism and sexism pervasive in society.”

—Pamela Price



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BOOKS ARTS



The Contours of Desire

Amia Srinivasan and the politics of sex

BY MAGGIE DOHERTY

IN MARCH 2018, NEARLY FOUR YEARS AFTER ELLIOT RODGER MURDERED six young people and wounded 14 others in Isla Vista, Calif., before killing himself, Amia Srinivasan published an essay on the horrible episode in the *London Review of Books* called “Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?” In it, the Oxford philosopher

described how so-called incels—involuntary celibates—spoke about the event. Everyone, they insisted, has a right to sex, and the women who denied it to Rodger were ultimately responsible for his homicidal spree. Nearly everyone else pointed out that no one has a right to sex and that people should not be required to

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNA BARCZYK

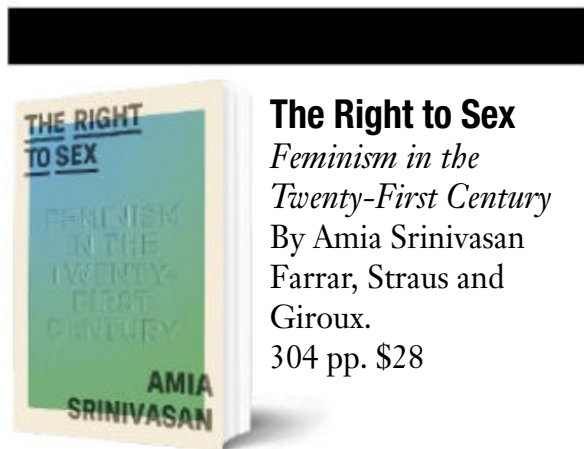
sleep with someone they don't personally desire; Rodger's actions were his responsibility alone. Srinivasan agreed with the second camp, but she was surprised by how few feminists acknowledged that sexual desires and their fulfillment are political questions that cannot be easily dismissed. The fact that Rodger desired conventionally attractive women—white, blond, “hot”—was, for Srinivasan, a “function of patriarchy,” as was the fact that these women often “don't as a rule date men like Rodger”—nerdy, effeminate, biracial—“at least not until they've made their fortune in Silicon Valley.” The incels weren't correct about the right to sex, but according to Srinivasan, they had intuited something about the way sexual appeal intersects with social hierarchies.

For Srinivasan, the question of how sexual hierarchies replicate other kinds of hierarchies—racial, class, and gender among them—is a question with which feminists must engage. In the rest of her essay, she examined how romantic coupling doesn't simply reflect idiosyncratic personal desires. Rather, she argued, people desire the bodies that patriarchy tells them to and scorn those whom patriarchy deems unattractive (not coincidentally, usually people oppressed on other axes). She offered as an example the relative undesirability of Asian men on gay dating apps and argued that this phenomenon reflected an exclusionary, racialized concept of masculinity. At the same time, she added, Asian women are often sexualized or fetishized against their will. For this reason, Srinivasan suggested that today's feminists should not take sexual desire for granted—that is, consider it “natural” or immovable—but instead should investigate the forms of oppression that shape it. If we don't, we risk “covering not only for misogyny, but for racism, ableism, transphobia, and every other oppressive system that makes its way into the bedroom through the seemingly innocuous mechanisms of ‘personal preference.’”

Some contemporary feminist thinkers insist that feminists should primarily concern themselves with the prevention of nonconsensual sex. But as Srinivasan noted in a follow-up essay, questions about sexual desire “point to what is ugliest about our social realities—racism, classism, ableism, heteronormativity.” Only through questioning our own desires and giving ourselves room to desire differently will sex—and people—truly be free.

“Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?” was a shrewd yet compassionate essay, marked by rigorous thinking as well as the hope that we might make room for desires that don't follow patriarchy's scripts, without blaming people for desiring what they've been told to want. Srinivasan gestured in the essay toward a new feminist perspective, one that would draw on the work of the second-wave feminists of the 1960s and '70s, who took questions of sexual desire seriously, without replicating some of their blind spots con-

Maggie Doherty is the author of The Equivalents.



The Right to Sex

*Feminism in the
Twenty-First Century*

By Amia Srinivasan
Farrar, Straus and
Giroux.

304 pp. \$28

cerning race and class. Such a perspective would also preserve aspects of more recent feminist thinking—an emphasis on individual freedom, an awareness of the ways different forms of oppression intersect—without suggesting that desire is inherently good or just. Her aim was not to legislate anyone's desires—that would be authoritarian—but rather to encourage readers to question their sexual preferences, to see their own desires as a starting point for inquiry rather than its end. There is no right to sex, she wrote, but there may be “a duty to transfigure, as best we can, our desires” so that they better align with our political goals

In her new book, *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*, which takes its title from that essay, Srinivasan expands on her ideas about sexual politics in a set of essays about pornography, sex work, teacher-student romances, and the supposed “conspiracy against men.” Writing from an unmistakably feminist perspective, Srinivasan reiterates a number of arguments that have become axiomatic in some feminist circles: Teachers should not sleep with their students; sex work is work; and there is no feminism that is not intersectional. Yet more than many contemporary feminist thinkers, she draws on the work of second-wave feminists, including those with whom she disagrees. Her aim

is not to rehabilitate these thinkers but to preserve some of their key insights about gender and power and to marry such ideas with more recent ones about race, class, and capitalism. For Srinivasan, it is only by building on the most useful ideas from each generation of thinkers that feminism will be able to move into the 21st century and, ultimately, create a new world. “What would it take for sex really to be free?” she asks. “We do not yet know,” but “let us try and see.”

Srinivasan doesn't always offer firm answers to the questions she poses in the book—about whether to consume porn, or how to prevent violence against women—other than to emphasize the inadequacy of carceral solutions. In part this is because, while she marshals the tools of analytical philosophy in *The Right to Sex*, she also works as a historian. Discussing a range of feminist writers and activists from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, she engages not only with the arguments of Angela Davis, Andrea Dworkin, bell hooks, Selma James, and Ellen Willis but also with the historical and political settings in which these arguments emerged and evolved over time. For her, the effort to liberate people from patriarchy requires a refashioning of the feminist tradition, not a clean break with it. By closely studying the past, we may develop new ideas for the future. As a result, *The Right to Sex* is an exciting example of new thinking in feminist political theory as well as a work of feminist intellectual history—a project of recovery and preservation, like so many feminist projects before it.



Although the history of feminist thinking about sex is a long one, Srinivasan begins in the 1960s and focuses on certain debates that emerged in the North Atlantic. It was then, she writes, that American and Anglo feminists began to offer a “political critique of desire,” one that suggested that “sexual desire—its objects and expressions, fetishes and fantasies—is shaped by oppression.” Contrary to the Freudian thinking dominant at the time, which saw sex as “natural” or beyond the social, these radical feminists argued that sex was, in Srinivasan's words, “marked by male domination and female submission.” It is “patriarchy that makes sex...what it is,” she writes, paraphrasing the feminist position at the time.

Even if they agreed about the problem, feminists disagreed about the solution. Srinivasan outlines two different approaches. She summarizes the position of the “anti-sex” feminists, who argued that women could not experience true sexual freedom while living under patriarchy and thus encouraged women to stop sleeping with men entirely. They disagreed with the “pro-woman” feminists, who argued that the solution was not to “change ourselves”—that is, to suppress sexual desire or to alter sexual preferences—but rather “to change men”: to fight for a world in which male superiority and violence was not the norm. They argued that a broader social revolution was needed and that focusing on what was then called the “personal solution”—an individual woman’s choice about whether to have sex with a man—was inadequate.

“As the women’s liberation movement unfolded through the 1970s and into the 1980s, these battle lines hardened,” Srinivasan writes. Speak-outs and conferences gave way to factionalism and internecine conflict. This intra-feminist fighting had peaked, Srinivasan notes, by the early ’80s, especially between those feminists defending women’s sexual preferences—including the preference to be dominated in bed—and those arguing that feminists should engage only in perfectly equitable sex. At the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality, the organizers planned a panel discussion on pornography and “politically incorrect sex” featuring “pro-sex” feminists like Gayle Rubin and Carole Vance. The panel was met by protests from anti-porn feminists, who, while not necessarily opposed to all heterosexual sex, insisted that dominance and submission, in a sexual context, were always anti-feminist. Showing up at the campus on the day in question, they wore shirts that read “For a Feminist Sexuality” on the front and “Against S/M” on the back and insisted that the conference had been organized by “sexual perverts” who supported patriarchy and child abuse.

As Srinivasan tells it, the “pro-sex” or “pro-woman” position, represented most notably by the activist and writer Ellen Willis, carried the day. “Since the 1980s, the wind has

been behind a feminism that does not moralise about women’s sexual desires, and which insists that acting on those desires is morally constrained only by the boundaries of consent,” she writes. “Sex is no longer morally problematic or unproblematic: it is instead merely wanted or unwanted.”

Srinivasan compares this logic to that of the capitalist marketplace: As long as buyer and seller are in agreement, one needn’t wonder why a person might need to sell her labor or why another might have the means to buy

it. But for Srinivasan, it is imperative that, while embracing a pro-woman position, we still investigate the conditions that give rise to sexual relations, even when consensual, and that we try to better understand what she calls the “political formation of male desire.” While she does not want to shame anyone for having a particular desire or to stigmatize any sexual behavior, she does want us to examine how sex and sexual desire as we know them arise and to ask how their formative conditions might be changed.

To accomplish this goal, Srinivasan revisits the supposed losers of the feminist sex wars: the anti-sex and anti-porn feminists. She’s especially interested in the work of Dworkin and the legal scholar Catharine A. MacKinnon, both of whom gained prominence in the 1980s by centering their feminism on a militant opposition to porn and sadomasochism. This narrow focus led Dworkin, MacKinnon, and other anti-porn feminists to make strange alliances with the political right. When the Reagan administration convened a commission on the dangers of porn, both Dworkin and MacKinnon cooperated, providing expert testimony that porn harmed women.

Today many of the arguments that Dworkin and MacKinnon made in the 1980s have come to seem outdated, if not downright anti-feminist. But Srinivasan insists they are worth revisiting, not because she agrees with them in all instances but because she finds in their thinking—particularly MacKinnon’s—important challenges to current feminist thinking about sex. Srinivasan is compelled by MacKinnon’s argument that the proliferation of porn shapes sexual desire, and not always for the good. Her under-

graduate students at Oxford have convinced her that mainstream porn has been a major and limiting influence on their sexual imaginations. She also agrees with MacKinnon that many authority figures—teachers, counselors, judges—have themselves been shaped by patriarchy and are thus in a poor position to adjudicate sexual conflict or to help young people develop a liberated sexuality. But most significantly, Srinivasan shares some of MacKinnon’s fundamental premises: that patriarchy dictates sexual experience and that much of the sex we have is not joyful, liberating, or equal but painful and dehumanizing. Sex, for MacKinnon and Srinivasan, is not primarily a biological experience but a social one, shaped by the forces of oppression. As such, it’s something that could be shaped differently—if we choose to do so.

The logical question, then, is how we might reshape desire and produce happier, more equitable sexual relations. On this question Srinivasan and MacKinnon diverge. MacKinnon has long advocated disciplinary or carceral solutions to the problem of patriarchal sex—that is, legally prohibiting porn and sex work on the grounds that they perpetuate women’s suffering at the hands of men. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed, MacKinnon reiterated a call for the legal prohibition of sex work and called decriminalization—a political goal shared by many sex workers—a way of legitimizing “sexual abuse as a job.” For Srinivasan, a focus on punishment—of sex workers or even their clients—will never lead to gender equality or sexual liberation: “The criminalisation of sex work does not, on the whole, help sex workers, much less ‘save’ them.”

In the book’s last essay, “Sex, Carceralism, and Capitalism,” Srinivasan expands on this position. She is against what Elizabeth Bernstein has called “carceral feminism,” a “politics that looks to the coercive power of the state—police, criminal courts, prisons—to achieve gender justice.” The state, Srinivasan argues, will always use its powers to punish the most vulnerable—queer people, poor people, sex workers, people of color—such that even an ordinance designed to “protect” women will be used to harm them. You cannot free women from patriarchy by imprisoning them or those they love. “Once you have started up the carceral machine,” she warns, “you cannot pick and choose whom it will mow down.”

How might we reshape desire and produce happier, more equitable sex?

For Srinivasan, this is one of the challenges 21st-century feminists face: How can they move beyond the consent paradigm without becoming moralizing—or, worse, authoritarian? How can they combat patriarchy without punishing those who are ultimately its victims, too? They should not appeal to the law, she insists, or to the state, or to a given university's Title IX office, which will simply mete out punishment to vulnerable students (usually poor male students of color) and focus on protecting the university's reputation. Her students think better sex education would help, but Srinivasan doesn't have much faith in "a formal program of teaching conducted by schools." "Who teaches the teachers?" she asks, assuming many teachers watch porn themselves. Can a program that appeals to students' rational minds really combat porn, which appeals to their lizard brains?

Srinivasan suggests instead that the best way for feminists to fight the patriarchal ideology that porn disseminates is to fight against capitalism. Like the socialist feminists before her, she contends that only through a socialist agenda that develops "the social and political ar-

rangements to meet the needs" of women and children will women have the power to put an end to "interpersonal violence." With universal access to housing, education, child care, well-paying and respected jobs, environmental protections, and a guaranteed basic income, women will be lifted out of poverty and empowered to make decisions freely about romance and family. But a redistribution of wealth alone will not fix sexism and racism, Srinivasan adds. We also need to adjust the way we think about bodies, sex, and desire.

Srinivasan is certainly right to argue for cultural change in addition to economic transformation. Intriguingly, her suggestions about how to enact cultural change are sometimes at odds with the rest of her argument. Though suspicious of liberalism, which puts the onus on the individual to solve collective problems, Srinivasan nonetheless maintains a certain faith in the individual's capacity for change. Several times in the book, she suggests that individuals might be able to free their erotic imagina-

tions from the constraints of patriarchy. At the end of her chapter "The Right to Sex," she advises readers that desire, notoriously unruly, might lead them away from socially approved forms of sex and love and toward something different. "Desire can cut against what politics has chosen for us, and choose for itself," she concludes.

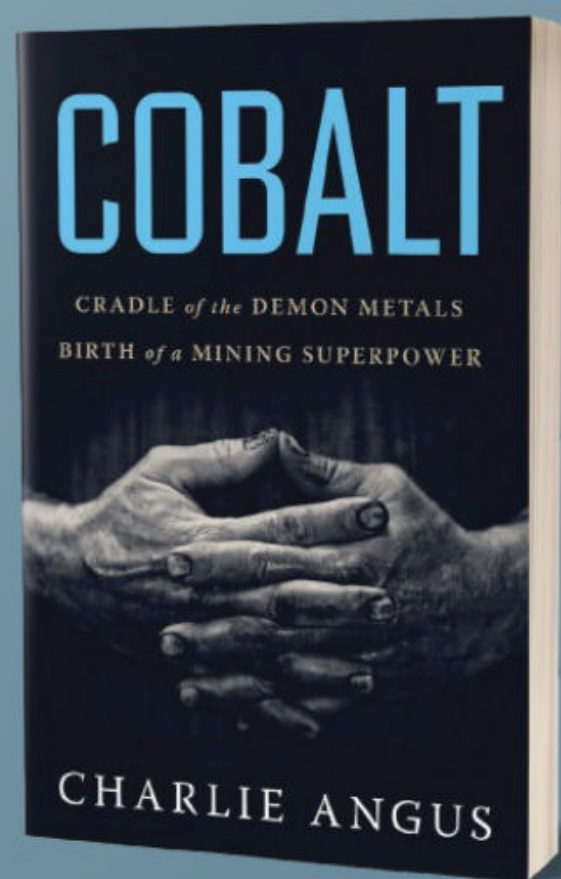
In another chapter, Srinivasan discusses a letter from a gay man who related how he'd "deliberately and consciously" worked to see his fat partner as "sexy." In his words, "we can...displace what might be getting in the way of erotic excitement." Srinivasan seems to agree: At the end of one chapter, she envisions a kind of "negative [sex] education" for students, one that would "remind young people that the authority on what sex is, and could become, lies with them." It's a version of negative capability: Young people—and, ideally, adults too—must be allowed to dwell in a space of ambiguity and uncertainty in order to discover what they truly desire.

The word "education" in this last example is telling. Srinivasan thinks good education—which is to say, education that is not merely a "formal program"

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created and disseminated by the state—can produce this negative capability. The classroom can be a space free from cultural pressures, one in which individuals can begin to think and feel anew. Under the guidance of a responsible teacher, students can read provocative essays, question what they’ve been told, understand their own lives differently, and, ultimately, make freer choices in their personal lives. (She relates stories from her own classroom that roughly follow this trajectory.) The classroom is something of a sacred space for Srinivasan; that is why it’s such a violation when a teacher mistakes a student’s desire for knowledge as sexual desire for him. The relationship between a teacher and a student, she argues, is not unlike that between a psychoanalyst and an analysand. Thus, it is the teacher’s responsibility to recognize a student’s erotic attention as a form of “transference” and to “redirect the student’s erotic energies from himself towards their proper object: knowledge, truth, understanding.” In so doing, Srinivasan contends, teachers might provide the “negative education” that allows students to free themselves.

Srinivasan’s vision of education is lovely, though, I would argue, somewhat idealized. As someone who has taught my fair share of undergraduates, I’ve found the relationship between teacher and student to be far more transactional than therapeutic. It also raises a question about the sites of feminist inquiry and who has access to them. If “negative education” is more likely to be found at Oxford or at an Ivy League university than at a public high school, then where might the “poor, abused women” whom Srinivasan discusses extensively go to free their minds and libidos? To adapt

with frustration, that “sophistication is a province found only in Caucasia,” we might ask, “Is liberation to be found only at Oxford?”

I don’t think Srinivasan would agree with this proposition. And yet her Oxford classroom is the only space of collective experience presented positively in the book. It’s juxtaposed with the many negative spaces of collectivity that most working people are exposed to: the public school classroom, the courthouse, the prison. Although Srinivasan defines feminism as “women working collectively to articulate the unsaid, the formerly unsayable,” she doesn’t offer much guidance on how to build the kinds of spaces in which these collective articulations can take place.

Srinivasan’s effort to mine the feminist tradition of the second half of the 20th century for intellectual insights serves as a good model for those looking for alternative spaces of collectivity. To better understand the relationship between collective action and collective thinking, we might return to second-wave feminism. As Srinivasan documents, second-wave feminists wrote books and law briefs, developed theories and gave speeches, staged conferences and produced pamphlets.

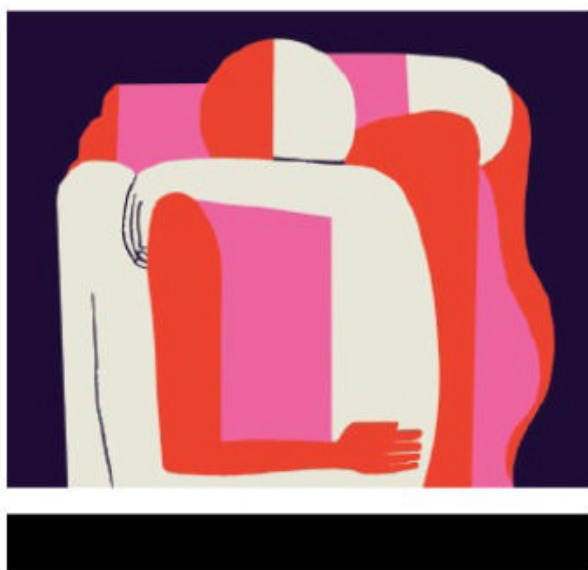
But they also took to the streets. In February 1969, the radical feminist group Redstockings disrupted a court hearing on abortion law, where 12 men and a nun were in the process of legislating women’s reproductive freedom; one month later, they staged a speak-out in the West Village. The stories they told there, in public, about sex, pregnancy, and the medical establishment changed how the listeners thought about their own experiences.

In August of 1970, women struck for equality all around the United States. In New York City, they marched arm in arm down Fifth Avenue, carrying banners and

signs and urging observers to join them. Later in the decade, the first “Take Back the Night” marches were held in Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, as women came together, sometimes in the aftermath of a violent event, to show that they had a right to move freely through public spaces.

Srinivasan doesn’t mention these actions in her book. But as feminists have demonstrated, and as Srinivasan herself argues, if women are to think differently about our lives, we have to change the spaces in which we think and speak, making private thoughts public and giving precarious groups a stable home. Second-wave feminists had many failings, as Srinivasan points out: They focused too much on the problems facing white, educated women; they were sometimes naive when it came to the dangers of relying on the law or the state. But one thing they understood was how coming together under new conditions could lead to new ideas and new social relations. This insight prompted their consciousness-raising circles and speak-outs, their sit-ins and women-only spaces. The second-wave feminists made political education a central part of their movement, something that happened alongside and in dialogue with political action. When they said that “the personal is political,” they meant not only that private life was shaped by political forces but also that supposedly personal grievances must be politicized—they must be aired publicly, made visible, taken from the home into the streets.

In a chapter that serves as a coda to the “Right to Sex” essay, Srinivasan draws attention to the “hidden, private mechanisms that enable and partly constitute” oppression: “the mechanisms of the club, the dating app, the bedroom, the school dance.” We might complement this list of private spaces with a catalog of public spaces, where women could gather to think with and learn from one another: the warehouse, the office, the child care center, the union hall, the apartment complex, the PTA meeting, the park. As Srinivasan demonstrates, we won’t think differently about sex and desire until a true sexual revolution has taken place. But we won’t get there by imagination and education alone. If we want to behave differently in the bedroom, we might start by behaving differently in the streets. **N**



Srinivasan’s effort to mine second-wave feminism serves as a good model for those seeking alternative spaces of collectivity.

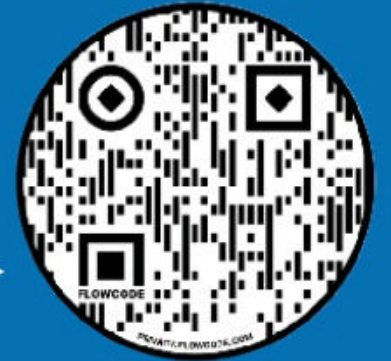


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Study and Struggle

The pragmatism of police abolition

BY MATTHEW CLAIR

IN THE NEARLY TWO YEARS SINCE THE MURDER OF George Floyd, our country has seen a renaissance of writing and organizing around the abolition of police and prisons. Alongside protests in the streets and participatory budgeting campaigns to divest funds from local police departments, the popular reception of books like Mariame Kaba's *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* reveals that more people are willing to grapple with what abolition entails.

But there has also been a backlash, and not just from the right: Democrats have closed ranks in opposition to police abolition. They instead call for a battery of police reforms—such as racial bias training and banning choke holds—that have, at least thus far, failed to eliminate police violence. Investing in police departments appears, in fact, to be a bipartisan cause:

This past August, the Senate voted 99 to 0 in favor of a budget amendment to withhold federal

funds from local governments seeking to defund their police departments. One Democratic senator went so far as to call the amendment a “gift,” underscoring how eager he and many other Democrats have been to distance themselves from abolitionist politics.

As the lawyer and organizer Derecka Purnell shows in her new book *Becom-*

ing Abolitionists, this abolitionist politics is often misunderstood and misrepresented. In the book's eight chapters, Purnell invites skeptical readers into the fold by sharing her own journey to becoming a police abolitionist and the reasons why she believes you should become one, too. She takes us from her childhood in St. Louis, where she and her friends and family used to call 911 “for almost everything,” to her years of studying and organizing alongside classmates, professors, and neighbors in college, law school, and various grassroots organizations. We learn about her intellectual influences—from Angela Davis and Rachel Herzing to Robin D.G. Kelley, who encouraged her and other radical students at Harvard Law School to, in the Black radical tradition, build “loving spaces to study and struggle, where we could experiment with democracy, accountability, mutual aid, and care.” Through these intellectual exchanges and her own harrowing interactions with police, Purnell came to see how policing mostly perpetuates—rather than resolves—myriad forms of violence and oppression.

But Purnell's account of abolitionist politics is more than just personal; into the threads of her story she weaves historical and social scientific research on police violence and community-based alternatives to make a compelling case for the practicality of police abolition, compared with reforms that have failed time and time again. The abolition of police means more than simply the absence of policing or the end of police-perpetuated harm, she writes. Rather than a quixotic demand to disband police departments overnight, abolition is a careful and collective endeavor to build a world where police—and the reasons we believe we need policing—become obsolete. Some have called abolitionism a single-issue politics; others, a utopian one. But abolition is better understood, Purnell argues, as a wide-ranging politics—one that demands strategies, resources, and mutual efforts working to reduce harm in the broader society through investments in education, employment, health care, housing, and environmental preservation. Such a politics seeks to uproot not just a system of violent policing but also interlocking forms of oppression that go well beyond it. For Purnell, this is the essence of abolitionist politics: a “paradigm to organize, navigate, and re-create the world.”

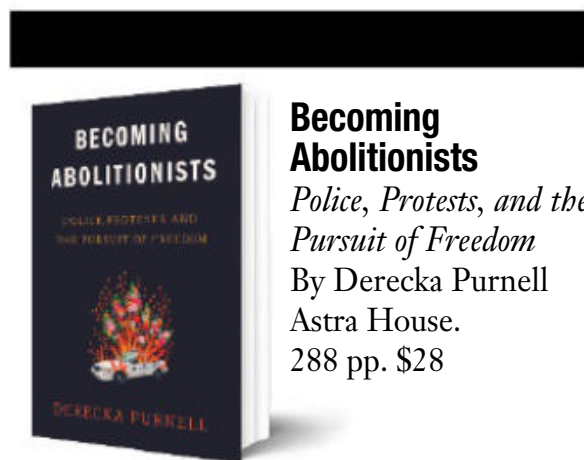
Purnell was not always a police abolitionist. For much of her life, she believed police were necessary to keep people, especially people of color, safe from interpersonal violence. She thought that the prosecution of crime and the imprisonment of those found guilty were necessary for ensuring justice. When George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin in 2012, she helped organize protests in Kansas City that demanded Zimmerman's arrest and prosecution. She and others facilitated small group discussions in the community, focused on generating strategies for de-escalating violence among Black teens as well as teaching people how to file complaints with the police to "ensure that the police arrested people for crimes, so that they wouldn't remain free like George Zimmerman."

At the time, Purnell's views on the police were not unlike those of many other organizers in the emerging Black Lives Matter movement, who viewed policing as a necessary part of any system of accountability and harm prevention. Following police officer Darren Wilson's killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, activists took to the streets to protest policing as racially biased but not as fundamentally racist. And when the St. Louis County prosecuting attorney declined to indict Wilson, they took to the streets again, demanding reform of a criminal legal system that undervalued the lives of Black victims. The solution, many activists thought, was to work to improve policing and the broader criminal law.

Common demands during the early years of Black Lives Matter organizing focused more on implementing reforms like implicit-bias training, mandating an end to stop-and-frisk policing, and improving police-community relations than on the abolition of policing altogether. Organizers devoted much time and energy to meeting with politicians and police chiefs, coming away with assurances that their departments would revise their policies concerning the use of choke holds and Tasers and apply for funding for body cameras to be worn by officers. And many police departments did just that.

But the violence continued in the face of these reforms. In 2015, police shot and killed Walter Scott as he was running away, and Sandra Bland was found hanged in a jail cell after a traffic stop. In 2016, police fatally shot Philando Castile as his family looked on in horror. In 2020, police killed Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and so many others that our news feeds seemed unable to keep up. These killings were not anomalies: Police in the United States today kill about 1,000 people each year, and marginalized people of color continue to die disproportionately from gun violence—violence that police departments have been unable to prevent, despite receiving

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Becoming Abolitionists

Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom

By Derecka Purnell
Astra House.

288 pp. \$28

billions of dollars in funding every year. Although good social scientific research has shown that some police reforms, including body cameras and increasing diversity in law enforcement, can reduce the levels of police violence (the evidence here is mixed), Purnell is nevertheless convincing in her broader claim that such reforms are largely impractical responses to recurring and entrenched police violence and abuse.

For Purnell, this is why abolition is not a utopian politics but a practical one. Tracking her own evolving thoughts on abolition, she tells her readers how, in 2015 and 2016, she and other young activists began to see policing not as an institution that simply tended to oppress marginalized groups and uphold racial capitalism but rather as an institution that was fundamentally built to perpetuate such oppression and exploitation. "Policing was, and is, deeply connected to the control of land, labor, and people who threatened white supremacy," Purnell writes. The excessive deaths of Black people, Latinx people, Indigenous people, disabled people, poor people, and queer people at the hands of police is, she argues, no accident; rather, it is a predictable outcome of an institution that seeks to control, and extract resources from, these very groups. With this diagnosis of

the problems of policing in mind, abolition becomes the only solution.

The police have long upheld a broader system of racial control and economic exploitation. In the United States, many modern police departments emerged from colonial-era slave patrols and militias. In the Southern colonies, slave patrols were established to control enslaved Africans, often in direct response to major slave rebellions that threatened the racial order and slaveholders' profits. The English militias, which had initially been focused on external threats to the colonists—from the Spanish, the French, the Dutch, or Native American nations—turned inward, assisting in the formation of slave patrols, the enforcement of slave codes, and the surveillance and punishment of not just enslaved Black people but also free Blacks and other people of color. Given this history, it is not difficult to understand why, during and following Reconstruction, the police often "joined, supported, or refused to intervene in violence from the Klan and other racist vigilante mobs," Purnell writes.

This unjust history is not confined to the United States. The policing of enslaved and Indigenous populations was a central mechanism for maintaining European colonialism throughout the world. In Barbados in the 1600s, Purnell informs us, Spanish slaveholders taught English slaveholders how to establish policing systems that would repress enslaved people's resistance and catch runaways. In South Africa under apartheid, police enforced laws meant to control the language, movement, and freedom of Black South Africans. As Black resistance to apartheid strengthened in the 1970s, police often claimed that activists who died in police custody had committed suicide. European colonial police forces shared repression tactics in the 20th century just as they had in the 17th: Apartheid police "learned torture tactics from French police and military who occupied Algeria" and "joined cooperation agreements with Argentina, Italy, Chile, France, and Taiwan to learn and share oppression and torture tactics against colonized people across the world."

Today, compared with other wealthy countries, the United States is an outlier with respect to police killings, but Purnell insists that "fewer shootings" in other countries does not

“necessarily mean good policing” is taking place there. From St. Louis, Nashville, and Boston to Puerto Rico, London, and the Netherlands, the colonial era’s systems of control and exclusion—not just death and destruction—can be found animating contemporary policing. In Amsterdam, Purnell finds that policing in the city cannot be separated from the histories of Dutch colonialism and broader European intrusions around the world. A group of immigrants from North Africa and Syria tell her that in the metropole—not just in the former colonies—“they faced immense police surveillance and violence, and that Europe’s heightened xenophobia and Islamophobia made them and their families susceptible to street violence from white Europeans.” The policing of immigrant groups in the Netherlands today works to exclude them from the economic benefits of incorporation and citizenship—one of the very same reasons Black people have been so heavily policed in the United States since Reconstruction. Such everyday exclusion is what sociologists Rory Kramer and Brianna Remster have recently called, in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, the “slow violence” of policing.

Becoming *Abolitionists* tells not only a transnational story but one that connects the crisis of policing with those created by this country’s capitalism, militarism, patriarchy, and ableism. Purnell shows how these other forms of oppression likely make policing more violent and ideologically entrenched. For instance, she analyzes case studies to show that many well-known mass shootings have been committed by men who were “either in or obsessed with the military.” The violence of US military occupations, especially in the Middle East, cannot, she notes, be entirely separated from the violence of domestic mass shootings, which police departments often leverage as a rationale for stockpiling military equipment. In addition, political and economic elites often rely on policing to manage the fallout from broader systems of oppression rather than deal with root causes. The fossil fuel industry

relied on policing to disperse Indigenous protesters at Standing Rock, and landlords call police to coerce and evict tenants struggling to make ends meet. For this reason, an abolitionist politics, Purnell argues, must be paired with “radical feminism, socialism, environmental justice, and disability justice.”

Not all police abolitionists make these connections explicit, but as Purnell reminds us, there is always a maximalist and a minimalist version of abolitionist politics. Nineteenth-century

anti-slavery activists, from whom many of today’s abolitionists take inspiration, also disagreed about how expansive their politics should be. While one faction of anti-slavery activists and

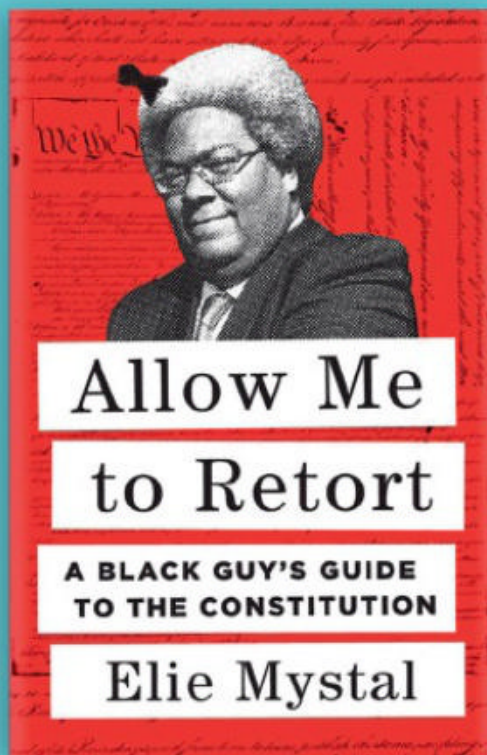
politicians viewed the end of slavery as all that was necessary, more radical abolitionists, Purnell writes, insisted that freedom for Black people meant more than participation as wage laborers in an economy defined by wealth accumulation. Instead, it also required the full in-

For Purnell, the politics of abolition go beyond just eradicating the police.

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—Publishers Weekly



corporation of formerly enslaved Black people and other marginalized groups into all aspects of society through a fundamental transformation of the capitalist economic order that had allowed slavery and colonization to flourish. For Purnell, today's police abolitionists need to embrace this more radical strain. The achievements of the 19th century's anti-slavery abolitionists were, in many instances, hampered or rolled back at the end of the century, partly because they did not advocate for more fundamental change. "Mixing abolition and capitalism was not enough to ensure the full liberation of Black people then, and it is not enough to ensure the full liberation of everyone now," she insists. Likewise, those advocating police abolition today cannot separate the end of policing from broader struggles for freedom.

Critics of police abolition often ask how we would deal with harm in a world without police. Beyond showing how policing itself creates many harms, *Becoming Abolitionists* details practical alternatives. Abolition, Purnell writes, does not mean "the end of policing overnight" but rather "incremental progress toward shrinking the police" alongside robust investment in capacity-building programs, practices, and mutual aid within local communities. Purnell documents how some communities are already building abolitionist alternatives. She describes the success of violence interruption programs like Taller Salud and Cure Violence, which "build relationships with residents who are most likely to kill or be killed by gun violence," thereby allowing them to de-escalate violent situations and orchestrate truces between rival gangs. She highlights Black and Pink, an organization that works with formerly incarcerated people as well as those living with HIV/AIDS and pools resources to provide "down payments and two months' rent for members transitioning into housing." She also discusses organizations like Survived & Punished, which works at the "intersection of ending law enforcement and gender-based violence." In South Africa during the pandemic, she writes, "groups of residents, mostly women," created "safe houses to take in anyone facing violence, which strengthened community responses to

harm and accountability" without relying on police. Growing research in sociology and criminology has also demonstrated that such alternatives can reduce rates of interpersonal violence. Following the lead of activists, researchers could direct more of their energy and resources toward carefully analyzing community-based alternatives.

Becoming a police abolitionist requires committed study and struggle—of that, Purnell leaves no doubt. It requires a willingness to question our collective beliefs about why we think we need police and to make our world one in which we no longer do. The journey toward abolition will continue to be, much

like many other radical causes, messy, politically fraught, and experimental. It is, after all, charting new ground. Some people have a vested interest in maintaining the oppressive racial and economic order that policing upholds. But for the rest of us—the vast majority of us, now and in the future—winning this struggle will make the difference between life and death. "Rather than waiting for comforting answers to every potential harm ahead of us," Purnell asserts, "let's plan. Run. Dream. Experiment." *Becoming Abolitionists* provides a blueprint for each of us to begin to run, dream, and experiment toward a just and livable future. **N**

The Falling Man

The story is missing, so I fill it in—
it's what a thinking person does to cope.
Without the details, only Death can win.

And so, the panic invariably set in,
the fires on lower floors extinguishing hope.
The story is missing, so I fill it in.

Standing on a desk, he chose the lesser sin.
The floor, too hot to stand on, began to slope.
Without the details, only Death can win.

The shattered glass, the beams then caving in,
could anyone sane maintain a shred of hope?
The story is missing, so I fill it in.

I need to know the way his mind gave in
as smoke engulfed the room. Who could cope?
Without the details, only Death can win.

And out the window, like the smoke's fin,
he flew. He plunged to something green like hope.
Without the details, only Death can win.
The story is missing, so I fill it in.

C. DALE YOUNG



Agents of Malaise

Are museums in crisis?

BY BARRY SCHWABSKY



WHY DO WE EVEN HAVE ART MUSEUMS? THIS WAS A question that Alexander Dorner began asking in the 1920s. He can't have been the first to pose such a question, but as director of the Provincial Museum in Hanover, Germany, he was in a position to do something about it. In 1927, he commissioned Russian artist El Lissitzky to upend the conventional style of displaying art at the time by installing an “abstract cabinet”—a modular space that was flexibly responsive to the art on display but that also challenged the art with its own striped patterns and color. Dorner and Lissitzky's experimental structure was provocative enough in the 1920s. But when the Nazis came to power in 1933, such ideas became heresy: The abstract cabinet was dismantled, and Dorner was forced to emigrate to the United States.

There, the question of art's function in modern society continued to consume Dorner, who became director of the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1938. He wrote a treatise on the subject, “Why Have Art Museums?” It was intended for publication by the RISD museum's press, but Dorner was dismissed by the museum board before

it was published, accused of “carelessness with objects, lack of consultation about decisions with other members of the museum and school staff, disregard for donors, and the falsification of visitor numbers.” Yet the pamphlet raised a set of questions that still haunt museums today. Dorner accused the museum world of flattering and serving elites while dabbling in an incoherent eclecticism, thanks to an outmoded philosophy that, he argued, “prevents them from becoming a functioning part of an integrated working culture.” The museum, he proclaimed, needs to “change its character from a storehouse into an active, functioning mold of our future culture.”

Since then, museums have mostly remained the same; if anything, they are storehousing more than ever before. Worldwide, the number of new museums, and in particular those devoted to modern and contemporary art, has skyrocketed: In China alone, more than 1,000 new museums were constructed between 2000 and 2011. Existing ones in the United States and elsewhere have expanded exponentially as well. Consider the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Housed in temporary quarters after it was founded in 1929, it gained a permanent home 10 years later on 53rd Street, where it has continued to reside to this day. Over the past 50 years it has grown rapidly. A 1984 expansion by César Pelli more than doubled its gallery space, followed by another, completed by Yoshio Taniguchi in 2004, which doubled the space again, and yet another in 2017, with an additional 30 percent increase in exhibition space.

Museums have perhaps begun to accept their role as agents of change—if anything, they've been trying to write history in advance through their acquisitions of contemporary art—but in doubling down on sheer acquisition at the same time, they risk committing themselves to a future that never comes to pass. At least among those who have had the means to build them, the only question put to a museum has been “How much more and how much bigger?” Oh, and also “How much money can we get, and from whom?” “Raise a lot of money for me, I'll give you good architecture,” Taniguchi apparently told the MoMA board before he received his commission to expand the museum. “Raise even more money, I'll make the architecture disappear.”



How long ago and far away that expansionary era seems now. Today, Dorner's question about the role of museums and whether they should, in fact, have any cultural authority is being asked more loudly than ever. In 1941, Dorner preached that "growing ambitions and responsibilities" had led museums to "their present crisis"—which finally seems to have arrived some 80 years later—and that they would survive only "if they are willing to begin a new chapter in their life story." These days, museums don't appear to have growing ambitions or responsibilities; they instead seem stricken by a deep malaise. Dorner, at least, still had great faith in his own supposedly authoritative analysis of what had made museums outdated. Those in charge of museums seem much less sure of themselves; museums and their curators are all on the back foot. They may continue to grow and grow in terms of their footprints, but their curators and directors no longer have confidence in their standing to make judgments of value.

Such a crisis is not primarily aesthetic or philosophical; it is above all social and political, and therefore also economic. Philippe de Montebello, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, remarked in the recent book *Living Museums: Conversations With Leading Museum Directors*, by the curator Donatien Grau of the Metropolitan, that when he was growing up, "the museum was that grand, neo-classical façade to that enormous building that projected a sense of authority, of luxury, of grandeur, and of a higher experience within." It's telling, and I think very true, that in the past—even the still recent past—"luxury" and "higher experience" were linked. That's no longer true. As Peter-Klaus Schuster, former director of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, points out in the same book, "Museums are no longer able to hide behind an authority, not even their own.... We have become more cautious, perhaps also more insecure, but certainly more thoughtful and calmer in relation to the masses of controversial opinions that public institutions today increasingly have to contend with." He concludes that museums "have to be able to justify in detail what we do and why we do it." The difficulty in doing this may be reflected in the fact that, as *Artnet* recently reported, 22 American museums are currently seeking new directors, and what they have found is, according to former Queens Museum executive director Laura Raicovich, "People really don't want to be directors right now because the jobs are emotionally unsustainable."

This loss of authority takes a number of forms. While I have been focusing mostly on museums of contemporary and modern art, the crisis goes far beyond that, encompassing institutions concerned with other periods of art and, perhaps above all, those that frame themselves as "encyclopedic" museums. Regarding the latter, there is a growing realization that their collections

were to a great extent amassed by means that are now self-evidently disreputable, even criminal—in short, by (sometimes legalized) looting via conquest and plunder. While Greece's calls to the British Museum for the return of the so-called Elgin Marbles continue to fall on deaf ears, the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris, the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., and the Humboldt Forum in Berlin are—at the time of writing—making promising noises about the return of the Benin Bronzes, which were looted from the Royal Palace of Benin in present-day Nigeria in 1897. Closer to home, American museums (albeit not necessarily art museums) have for decades been working to return sacred artifacts (and even human remains) taken from Native peoples.

However late or little, such restitutions can only be applauded. I'd like to think the erstwhile keepers of those returned objects will realize they've been relieved of a moral burden. But there's a deeper implication here: that European and North American institutions should no longer aspire to their long-held fantasy of universality. London, Paris, Berlin, and New York are rightly no longer understood to be the panoptic nodes from which all the world's arts and cultures can be surveyed, systematized, and accounted for. Some things need to be kept close to home. Yet even at the more local levels, there is now a doubt among museums as to what they can properly display, so that the director of the Uffizi in Florence, Eike Schmidt, for instance, has floated the idea that devotional paintings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance might be returned to the churches where they formerly resided—that Duccio's *Rucellai*

Madonna (c. 1285) might be sited again in the church of Santa Maria Novella across town. But then the great churches of Florence already function more like museums than places of worship, catering more to art lovers than to the devout. Schmidt's proposal is an admission that museums no longer feel up to the task of housing art and, more importantly, facilitating personal and critical experience with these objects and, in the process, expanding the range of their meanings.

The idea of sending the *Rucellai Madonna* back to the chapel where it used to hang evokes yet another historical issue—one that happens to resonate with contemporary concerns. This Madonna was not painted for the Rucellai, a Florentine mercantile family, or for the chapel they had built long after Duccio's death; it hung in a smaller chapel in the same church until the Rucellai commissioned a grander one centuries later. But why were those Florentine merchants so keen on endowing chapels anyway? One answer is guilt: Their financial activities were dangerously similar to usury, which was condemned as

a sin; and so, in order to assure a happy afterlife and respectability in this one, it was politic to spend lavishly on ecclesiastical architecture and art. Today this is called "artwashing"—

using the cultural capital attained through conspicuous patronage to burnish one's social image despite the harm caused in amassing the wealth that makes such patronage possible.

Today such artwashing is less readily passed over. Just ask Warren Kandors, who left the board of the Whitney Museum, of which he was vice-chairman, after vociferous protests from artists over his involvement with the institution when it became known that among the companies he owned was one that produces military and law enforcement equipment, including tear gas grenades that have been used at the border between the United States and Mexico, and allegedly also in Palestine and elsewhere. (Subsequently, Kandors announced that his company, Safariland, would divest itself of the part of its business that produces tear gas.) Then there's Leon Black, who stepped down from his position as chairman at MoMA because of his ties to Jeffrey Epstein. And most notorious of all,

These days museums don't appear to have growing ambitions.

What Is to Be Done

When asked *Why here?*
Mao said *We didn't pick it*

Here is a slab of If
Here is a set of appropriate roles; armed in cinema

Armed against *No one was here*
I see you, us. Someday
Our arthropod utterance

Intention alone is not dialectical
or petroleum or vaccine patents

Is it too late for analysis?

What filled me with the limbs of little girls, plumes
of suicide, what fed my grandparents rotting vegetables
rationed in the camp of illegal flowers

Unrepentant, sunlight can lay
eggs like a spider mother, a season before death

Love has ruined my life
Love made useful by class—
remnants of murdered trees, imaginary debts

Translated into adhesive, anemone venom
green slippers at the portal of beetles

I have come to terms with failure
as a contrabass in the spine,
implacable echo of *goddamn*

I still love the people
more

ZAINA ALSOUS

the Sackler family, patrons of the Met, the Tate, the Louvre, and so many more, who disclaim all responsibility for the opioid crisis they fostered, which killed almost half a million Americans.

These are not just a few bad apples in an otherwise spotless system. Rather, the Sacklers and the rest have come to exemplify a world in which the unseemly and amoral ultrarich dominate museums. And while these may technically still be nonprofit educational institutions, they are governed according to corporate values and operate according to political principles that the artists whose work is exhibited in them tend to find repugnant. The artist Michael Rakowitz, who called for Black's removal from the MoMA board, wrote, "I look forward to collectively imagining an ecosystem that does not enlist our content to go on display in institutions whose board members create the very conditions in the world that many of us are devoted to dismantling." While there are few artists as ardently activist as Rakowitz, it is not a stretch to say that many believe their work embodies values that are in conflict with those of the people who hold financial power over museums.

Yet artists are not the only ones increasingly disaffected with the current museum ecosystem: Many of the people who do the hard work of keeping museums running are at odds with their bosses. Unionization efforts have been ramping up—and so has union busting. At the New Museum of Contemporary Art, one worker even compared conditions there to those of a sweatshop. Employees found, after a hard-won fight for a union contract, that layoffs and furloughs in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were aimed at workers who had been most active in union organizing. The rhetoric from the top remained the same: The New Museum was "a diverse, exciting, and creative space for experimentation for team members and visitors." But the carefully professed and cultivated progressive image that it and many other museums hope to project was belied by the crushing hierarchy and inequality that defines these organizations.

Such a reality has made curators and directors the targets of protest, sometimes leading to their departure. In 2020, for instance, the Guggenheim Museum in New York faced a call from a group of current and former employees for the departure of its three top executives—the director, the chief operating officer,

and the chief curator—on account of the institution’s “systemic racism.” The museum’s well-respected longtime chief curator, Nancy Spector, resigned shortly afterward. In a second instance the same year, another widely admired figure, Gary Garrels, the senior curator of painting and sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, resigned after making an aside that the museum would not be freezing out white male artists; his use of the phrase “reverse discrimination”—one that has a very bad history—turned out to be a terminal offense.

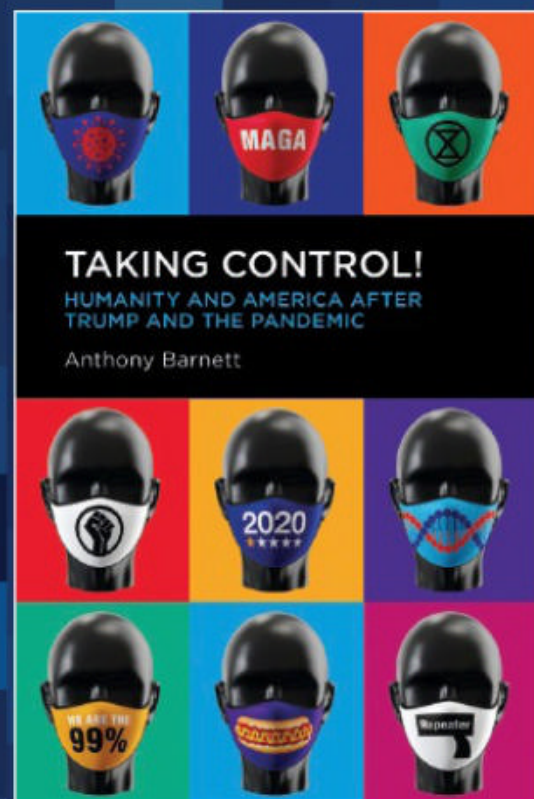
Are there any solutions to the malaise and crisis of authority faced by today’s museums? In many ways, such solutions have to come from outside the museum world first. Contrary to appearances, the problems museums face are not essentially internal ones: They have to do with the contradictions inherent in the museum’s relation to society at large, and there is a long history behind them. What has brought these problems to the fore is the ever-increasing inequality with which we live, in terms of both race and class, and for this reason, one answer to the problems of museums might simply be: socialism. Even if that’s not in the cards, however, anything to curb the power of the 1 percent will help.

But what can museums themselves do? It’s noticeable that young people, including artists, bring different questions, different demands, to artworks than do many of their elders. The change is deeper than it may seem—perhaps a tectonic shift in art itself, which will mean rethinking the very idea of the museum. Jacques Rancière, in his 2011 book *Aisthesis*, speaks of how an “aesthetic regime of art” began to dominate in Europe in the late 18th century, succeeding earlier representational and ethical regimes of art and leading to the emergence of museums such as the Louvre. This aestheticization of art, he argued, was the result of the French Revolution: The king had been overthrown, and his works of art now belonged to the people by way of the state. But many of these works were essentially visual paeans to royalty, and more still were devotional works, testaments to the power of the church, which the revolutionaries were determined to suppress. How could these royalist and clerical images be considered glories of a free and secular nation?

The solution was radical: These objects made to honor king and church were re-cast, simply, as examples of sublime art—that is, of beautiful form and transcendent skill. Precisely for political reasons, an essentially aesthetic vision had to prevail. “Only one solution was available,” Rancière insisted, “to nullify the content of the paintings by installing them in art’s own space,” thereby “training a gaze detached from the meaning of the works.” In other words, through what later came to be known as formalism, any subject, even when the content of the work was one that could no longer be supported, could be admired for the sake of art. And therefore art comes from art: “Painters, from this point onward, imitate painting.”

But today, that “aesthetic regime” seems to be receding—perhaps because the authorities that inculcated it seem less credible. I keep hearing friends who teach in art schools complain that fewer and fewer of their students are prepared to approach art as a matter of form, and the same thing from art historians about the students they teach. What young artists seem most concerned about is their subject matter, the message they want to convey—and likewise, in their appreciation of others’ art, these young people look for content that appeals to their ethical aspirations.

This shift in the sense of what art should be may represent a passing generational blip or, quite the contrary, a sea change of the sort that has not been seen for a couple of centuries. And it poses a considerable challenge for museums, which can no longer present themselves as neutral arbiters of the world’s wealth of visual forms. I don’t mind admitting that I hope it’s a blip, despite my wish for a more ethical role for museums. I’d prefer a greater role for those who have the highest stakes in both the history and the future of art—that is, the artists themselves—but I suspect my hopes are vain. What Rancière called the “aesthetic regime of art” and the art museum made each other possible, and no one knows how to have one without the other. What if today we are witnessing a return to a time when art is valued for its social utility, its edifying effect on the viewer, more than for its aesthetic valence? Art may turn out to be something very different from what it has been, and museums will have to become no less different—perhaps quite unlike those we know today. The malaise of the museums could be just beginning. **N**



“Wonderful...”

– Larry Cohen

“Superb...”

– Ian McEwan

**“Marvellous...
reads like a thriller.”**

– Ece Temelkuran

TAKING CONTROL!
Humanity and America after
Trump and the Pandemic,
by Anthony Barnett

OUT NOW

Repeater



Letters

Holding to Account

For the past 30 years, over nearly 30 books and thousands of articles, I have written about colonialism and imperialism. Some of these articles have appeared in *The Nation*, at the invitation of your editors. A brief conversation with one of your reporters on some of the themes that I have worked on for decades produced in him conjectures and fantasies about what he thinks I believe rather than what I am on the record as having written ["What Should the Left Do About China?," January 24/31].

In two sentences, David Klion considers my views, and in both sentences speculates rather than elucidates. "This is more or less" what I said, he claims, rather than share my actual words. "In his telling," Klion writes, "what is happening to the Uyghurs [in China] is analogous to what countries like the United States and Australia did to their Indigenous populations, or what the British Empire did in his native India—but somewhat to my surprise, [Prashad] didn't mean that in a bad way." This may have been what Klion wanted me to say or believe. The only problem is that this is not at all what I believe or say.

There is a large difference between a colonial project that destroys the basis of a people's dignity and subordinates them to an external force, and a people's project that struggles to find a way to undermine social hierarchies and advance the possibilities for the people. I would like to see caste uprooted from Indian society; does Klion believe that such a process is

analogous to the horrendous genocide against Native Americans? I hope not. That your reporter took my views about social advancement and twisted them to imply I support genocide is shocking, deeply shocking.

VIJAY PRASHAD
Director, Tricontinental
SANTIAGO, CHILE

It's painful to think that there are people on the left justifying the massive violations of human rights occurring in China. China today is doing what the US did to Indigenous and minority peoples and the same kind of "sphere of interest" bullying that it has done in Latin America. Nothing can excuse or justify it. I agree that the historical crimes of the US government make it a problematic vehicle for opposition, but really, folks, let's show some solidarity! Boycotts and economic sanctions are entirely appropriate. But please: Fight for a global alliance and global institutions for human rights that can hold both China and the US accountable.

MICHAEL SAPPOL

My father, Archibald Singham, was deeply anti-imperialist, respected the work of *The Nation* in the 1970s and '80s, and became a member of its editorial board. It was thus with great shock and dismay that I read the recent piece by David Klion in its pages. Klion has previously claimed that "Russiagate" is the crime of the century, not the millions of US-caused deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. His piece for *The Nation* misconstrued the words of Vijay Prashad, an important Global South left intellectual, without reference to any of his

written works. It lends support to those who seek to shame and silence anyone who dares to contradict the liberal US narratives on human rights and dares to use the word "imperialism." It is profoundly sad to see how *The Nation* has fallen into the orbit of manufactured consent and red-baiting.

The 1975 Church Committee was the last time formal disclosures were made about the number of journalists and professors under the direct or indirect control of US intelligence. *The Nation* has now taken up the "left" flank of the new McCarthyism. Times change, and we are entering a period where, thankfully, the US will not be the dominant economic force in the world. While reactionaries in the US lament this fact, history tells us that, for the first time in 500 years, the dominance of Europeans and their *enfants terribles* white-settler states is finally coming to an end. This existential crisis for the West, while a moment of danger, is also a great opportunity for the poor of the world.

ROY SINGHAM
BEIJING

Klion Replies

Last September, Vijay Prashad generously spoke to me on the record for about 79 minutes; the unedited transcript of the recording was subsequently made available to a *Nation* fact-checker. Roughly 24 of those minutes were spent discussing China's policies toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, during which time Prashad expounded his views in great detail and with multiple digressions. In compressing his comments down to a single paragraph in a piece exploring

much broader topics, I necessarily glossed them in addition to including direct quotes, but I did not write that he "support[s] genocide"; for him to suggest that I "twisted [his views] to imply" that he does is exactly the same kind of leap he's accusing me of making.

In the line he cites, I suggested that his views broadly align with those of the Qiao Collective, with which he had previously collaborated. What seems undeniable from Prashad's words in our interview, in his letter here, and in many other places is that he believes that China's policies toward the Uyghurs are not colonial or genocidal in nature, but rather a legitimate project of national development, offering educational and social advancement rather than violence and repression. During our interview, Prashad likened China's policies in Xinjiang to 20th-century New York City public schools instructing Yiddish-speaking immigrants in English in order to assimilate them into American culture. He also speculated that Indians might have done to themselves what British colonists did to them in the name of progress.

As neither Prashad nor I has witnessed these policies firsthand in Xinjiang, I'll refrain from weighing in further on the substance of his views, and simply say that I believe I accurately represented them in the context of a piece whose stated purpose was to air a range of left-wing perspectives on China.

DAVID KLION
BROOKLYN, N.Y.

Comment drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com
Please do not send attachments

IN MEMORIAM / AMY WILENTZ

Paul Farmer (1959–2022)

Farewell to a friend.

DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHEN I MET PAUL FARMER; he was so much a part of my world, especially my world in Haiti. Maybe I met him there, where he'd lived after college. Or maybe in Boston, where he was about to become a world-famous infectious disease doctor with an endowed chair at Harvard Medical School. Once I knew him, he became a touchstone for me. We had the same attitudes about power and powerlessness, but that wasn't what made him precious.

Paul had something that I didn't have: a kind of shimmering wonder and sweetness. I always called him for quotes, which, very kindly, he would never give me, while never quite refusing. "Oh, Amy," he'd say (now I'm quoting him, finally), "you know I don't know about Haitian politics. I don't really stay in Port-au-Prince. I'm out in the countryside, and there all we do is gossip about daily goings-on."

It was true that he did stay mostly in Cange, in the Haitian countryside, where there was a hospital run by his group, Partners in Health. But he did know Haitian politics. By not allowing himself to be quoted, he protected his growing turf in Haiti from controversy, and in doing that, he protected the people Partners in Health cared for from dangerous battles.

Years ago, I emceed a conference at UCLA and invited Paul to speak. We were all sitting at a restaurant in LA when a semi-infamous American journalist who had often attacked Haiti's progressive president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, sat down at the other end of the table. I saw Paul lean over to mutual friends of ours and heard what he said: "*Gen reaksyonè isit.*" ("There's a reactionary here.") I'd invited the man for balance, I later told Paul, who merely shrugged and smiled. Balance was not his thing. But justice was.

In his early days in Haiti, a friend told me, Paul went walking with her in and out of the shantytowns, and people kept calling him "*Pè*" ("Father" in Creole). Eventually he stopped in his tracks and asked her why they were calling him "Father." And she said, "Probably because of the 20-pound cross you're wearing."

Paul always wore that cross, but he somehow managed to be on everyone's level. Shantytown kids, me, wealthy Haitians, Bill Clinton, suspicious Haitian health ministers, rich donors—all

were met with equal interest and kindness, and thus he built Partners in Health from an idea into a mega global public health network that provided care in neglected communities everywhere. Via Partners in Health, Paul probably saved tens of thousands of people worldwide from the ravages of AIDS, tuberculosis, Ebola, and other human scourges.

Paul died suddenly, at 62, of a heart attack. To lose him now is hard. Haiti is at an impasse, with the US government exacerbating the situation, afraid to allow Haitians to move forward with a new democratic blueprint. Paul was watching. At the time of his death, he was trying to work with Haitian stakeholders on a satisfactory vaccination program for the country. All our recent conversations on WhatsApp seemed to be a series of in-jokes interspersed with subjects like assassinations, coups, a raging pandemic. Jokes and tragedy? Paul would say, "Well, that's Haiti." I say it was Paul, too. The place was never far from his mind and heart.

Nadia Todres, a photographer who often works in Haiti, wrote about Paul on Instagram. She met him when he spoke in Boston in 2010. The last messages Paul sent her were from Rwanda. "When I noted how late it was there," she wrote, "I asked him how he wasn't exhausted. And his response was 'who said I wasn't exhausted?'—to which I said 'I knew you were human' and he replied 'all too.'"

"All too" is right, it turns out. I certainly thought Paul would go on forever, and so did most who knew him. He was all too decent and generous; he was all too quick and perceptive; he felt pity and love for the stranger, the destitute, the outcast. Haiti helped him see ways to make the right things happen for those groups. He started there and branched out, but he never forgot. Even though he died in Rwanda, he never really left Cange.

Amy Wilentz, a Nation contributing editor, has been reporting from Haiti for over three decades.



Paul Farmer: Through Partners in Health, he saved thousands of lives.

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