

THE **N**ation.

MAY 29/JUNE 5, 2023

EST. 1865

Kissinger Still at Large at **100**

GREG GRANDIN
PETER KORNBLUH

WE FAILED
JORDAN NEELY
ELIE MYSTAL

THE LIVES
OF LYDIA
MARIA CHILD
SUSAN CHEEVER



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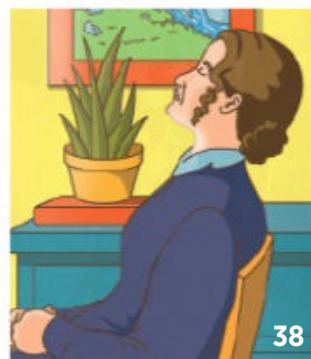
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Cover illustration:
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EDITORIAL / JAMES K. GALBRAITH FOR THE NATION

The Debt Ceiling

Hooray, hooray! / It's early May. / Debt disaster's / On the way!



AS IF THE PLANET WEREN'T BURNING OR ON THE CUSP OF NUCLEAR WAR, THE White House, the Treasury, Congress, and the press have fired up another round of Washington's favorite parlor game—Debt Disaster!TM Over at *Vox*, Dylan Matthews has explained the half-hidden politics. Both sides need a win, he reasons. Neither has the votes. So the search is on for an outcome both can live with. President Biden's nonnegotiable demand is for a clean increase in the debt ceiling. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's demand is for big cuts in federal spending—to which Biden has no principled objection. These goals are not incompatible, which means that both will be met. The rest is stagecraft, timing, optics, and spin.

With a recession looming, a year of spending cuts—to health care, food stamps, unemployment insurance, aid to states and cities—is just the ticket to deliver the Senate back to Mitch McConnell and the presidency to Donald Trump. McCarthy knows this. Does Biden? Probably. But with his approval ratings hardly better than Gerald Ford's or Jimmy Carter's, perhaps some key players on his team are less focused on the election than on preening for their next job.

Matthews might be right here, but he falters on some other issues, as set forth in these pages back in January. To restate a few key points: First, as a matter of law, the US Treasury is obligated to make payments. The debt ceiling does not override this obligation. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has no legal discretion to stop payments or to pick and choose which to make and which to defer. If payments stop going out, she will be breaking the law—and her oath of office. For that, she could and should be impeached.

The debt ceiling is also a law. It orders the Treasury not to stop making payments, but to stop issuing securities past the \$31.4 trillion limit. Yellen might also be impeached for ignoring that limit and issuing more securities anyway, which would violate the Constitution, while her continuing to make payments would not. But no jury in America would ever convict, most certainly not the US Senate.

Breaching the ceiling is also unnecessary. The trillion-dollar platinum coin would solve the problem—with no additional borrowing and no breach of the debt limit. Otherwise, would the Federal Reserve honor US Treasury checks if no securities were issued and there were insufficient funds in the Treasury General Account? Would the checks bounce?

Possibly! If they did, the bounced checks would be returned to the banks, which would know perfectly well that the issuer is the sovereign US government. Would they refuse to credit the checks? I doubt it. Those checks-in-limbo would be assets, like any other—and excellent collateral for short-term loans.

But suppose the bankers, perhaps following some regulation, did refuse to credit Treasury checks that, because of the debt ceiling, were temporarily failing to clear. And suppose this went on for more than a few days. The consequence would be a wave of real defaults—of debt defaults in the private sector. Not the public sector! But business loans, mortgages, and car and student loans would go unpaid. Who, initially, would be hit by that? Obviously, the banks. Even without a federal debt ceiling mash-up, the US banking sector is not exactly rock-solid right now. Except for a few headline cases, bankers would have to be even more suicidal than usual to refuse to credit those “bad” checks.

Long story short: Biden and Yellen are playing up the debt drama not because we face some financial Armageddon, but to make an empty victory at the last minute seem like a big deal.

When it happens, everyone involved will heave a big sigh of relief. Debt Disaster!TM will be packed up and put back on the shelf, until the impressionable grandchildren come to visit again.

For the economy, what matters is what they give away to McCarthy, in the budget and appropriations processes, to get their little success. For the election, what matters is how deep the cuts are, who suffers—and how those affected react at the polls. That's the poisoned apple in another children's story. Just a few bites now could put the Democrats to sleep for 2024—and erase what remains of the Biden agenda. **N**

Biden has no principled objection. Spending cuts will happen. The rest is stagecraft.

James K. Galbraith teaches at the LBJ School at the University of Texas at Austin.

COMMENT / JOSH GONDELMAN

Pay Your Writers

The strike by Writers Guild of America members like me has shut down Hollywood. Here's why we walked out.

ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE STRIKE BY MEMBERS OF the Writers Guild of America (WGA), a tweet posted by the writer Emily St. John Mandel went viral. It featured a photograph of a picket sign bearing a tongue-in-cheek threat: “Pay your writers or we’ll spoil *Succession*.”

The words were presumably written by a striking television or film writer, someone like myself, who has been left to apply their creative talent to sign-length slogans. The specific threat was (probably?) fake, but the overall point holds: Writers are central to storytelling in entertainment, and when you treat us unfairly, there will be consequences.

As someone who hates conflict but loves fairness, I felt a twinge of anxiety when I joined the picket line. I don’t think I was alone. If it were up to us, we wouldn’t have had to strike at all.

When the WGA began its negotiations with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), the group representing Hollywood studios, the measures we proposed amounted to roughly 2 percent of the profits made by the increasingly consolidated corporations on the other side of the table. Given that those profits would not be possible without our writing, this didn’t seem unreasonable.

But the AMPTP offered only about 20 percent of the additional revenue we asked for and refused to engage with several of our core proposals. So, with an overwhelming 97.85 percent approval by voting members, we decided to strike.

The conditions that led to this strike (the first by the WGA since the 2007–8 walkout) have been percolating for years. While production budgets have risen sharply, writer pay has declined by 4 percent over the past decade—23 percent when adjusted for inflation. The shift in film and television to streaming has meant lower residuals (the money writers are paid when their shows get re-aired) and shorter seasons for countless productions. The proliferation of so-called “mini-rooms”—where a small writing staff works short-term on a show, often before it’s green-lighted—have forced many writers to take temporary jobs that pay less than their established rate.

Nearly 50 percent of writers are working for the minimum salary, compared with 33 percent 10 years ago. To paraphrase Chris Rock, the bosses would love to pay us less, but they’re not legally allowed to. And the people hit the hardest are those who have long been marginalized by the industry to begin with: people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ community.

What makes this so frustrating is that the money we’re asking for is readily available. Implementing the WGA proposals would net total yearly gains of \$429 million for 20,000 members. By comparison, Netflix, Paramount, Comcast, Disney, Fox, and Warner Bros. reported a total of \$28 billion to \$30 billion in operating profit

each year from 2017 to 2021. In 2021 alone, eight Hollywood CEOs pocketed nearly \$780 million between them.

The companies that make up the AMPTP are beholden to shareholders to produce year-over-year growth. They aren’t pivoting to streaming because they love innovative technology; they’re doing it because it’s profitable. Claiming that they can’t pay us fairly because they’ve chosen to distribute our work on an app rather than a television channel is disingenuous. They *can*, but so far they have refused.

It would have been bad enough if the studios merely wanted to preserve the unjust status quo. But their proposals, and their contemptuous response to the WGA, reveal deeply regressive priorities: stripping away protections for long-term employ-

ment (and attempting to create a single-day rate for comedy/variety writers); refusing to grant a fair share of profits for streaming content; and allowing writers’ rooms to continue shrinking, thanks to squeezed budgets and the specter of AI-driven scripting. At every opportunity, the studios are prioritizing

For the Hollywood studios to claim they can’t pay us fairly is disingenuous. They can, but they have refused.

shareholder greed and trying to turn writing into unstable gig work.

All of that explains why I and so many of my colleagues are making ourselves uncomfortable on the picket line. Fortunately, as I learned, the line itself is not about conflict. That takes place at the negotiating table.

Instead, the line is about solidarity, both from within our membership and from the numerous other unions supporting us, such as SAG-AFTRA, IATSE, the Directors Guild of America, the Starbucks Union, and the Teamsters. It’s about affirming our worth within the industry and our commitment to an equitable future for ourselves and for the writers who will come after us. Through this unity, as much as through conflict, we will wield the strength to get what we deserve. That is the power solidarity gives us.

That, and the fact that a select few within our ranks could, if they so choose, spoil the end of *Succession*. For our sake—and yours—let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.

Josh Gondelman is a comedian and an Emmy Award-winning television writer.

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COMMENT / ELIE MYSTAL

Our Sick Society

Jordan Neely's murder in the New York City subway is a horrifying symptom of our collective social rot.

A MAN WAS CHOKED TO DEATH ON THE F TRAIN IN New York City on May 1. The victim, who was homeless, was allegedly being “hostile and erratic,” but he wasn’t violent. He raged that he was hungry and thirsty and said that he was prepared to die. Another man, whom reports have identified as a former Marine, put him in a choke hold and killed him.

The murder happened in broad view of the other passengers and was captured on video. The alleged assailant was briefly questioned by police, then released. A few days later, the medical examiner ruled the death a homicide. No charges had been filed by the time this went to press.

Having told you all that, do I even have to tell you the race of the assailant or the victim? Does anyone think there is a Black man alive in this country who could walk up to a nonviolent white person, in public, choke him to death in full view of other passengers and on video, and then just walk away after a brief chat with the police? Barack freaking Obama would not be allowed to walk away after choking a homeless white man to death on the subway. If you think that he could, please step forward and claim your complimentary dunce cap.

The victim was Black, the assailant was white. The victim pretty much had to be Black to account for the callous disregard for his life, and the assailant had to be white to secure the disregard of law enforcement. This is a story that could happen only in America, where white supremacy and anti-Blackness combine to make the violent murder of a human being on public transportation into the kind of thing white people can do and then go home.

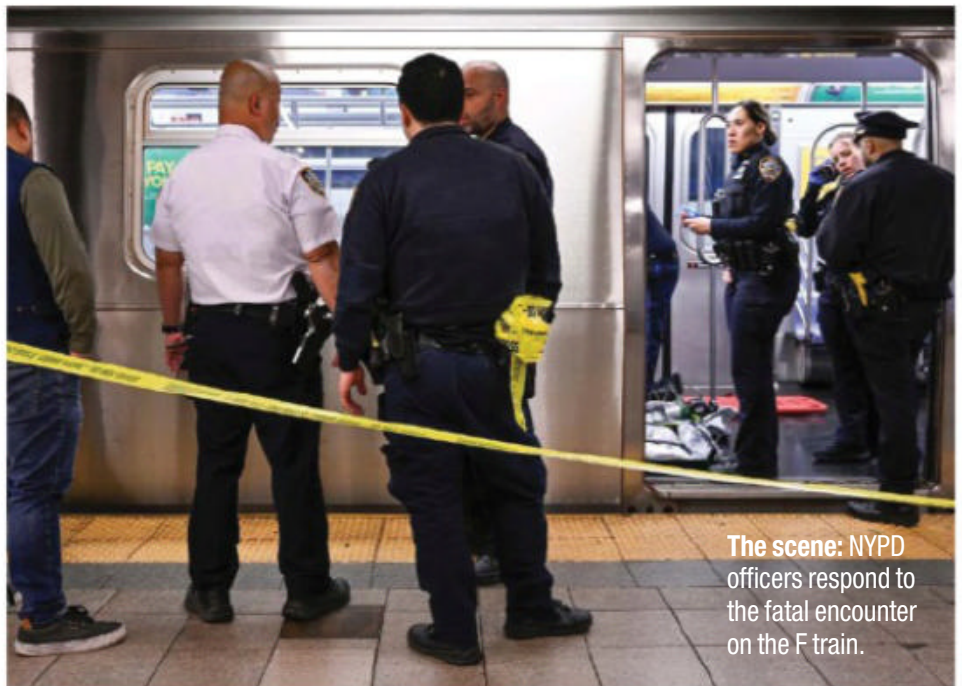
But to be honest, the racism saturating this story is only the most obvious of its horrors. This murder takes many of the problems we have in our society and throws them in a giant melting pot.

Everything starts with the plague of poverty and homelessness. New York is the world’s wealthiest city, in one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet many of us just accept that some of us are starving. Some of us are destitute. Some of us have nowhere to live. Indeed, it’s so common to see people sleeping on the street that most of us—myself included—have developed a practiced, willful blindness to the problem. I can step over a homeless person on the sidewalk without breaking stride or interrupting my train of thought, and I don’t think I’m the only one. I don’t know when or how I learned to be like this. But I know it makes me part of the problem.

People will say that the murdered man was mentally ill, and that seems to have been the case, but it’s also worth considering that screaming at people is the rational play when you live in a city where

so many people ignore your physical existence. I scream at people who don’t notice issues I think are important. I can’t imagine how “hostile and erratic” I’d become if all of society didn’t acknowledge my existence—my hunger, my misery, my struggle to stay alive—for a period of months or years.

All of it flows together. It’s costly and difficult to access mental health care, and out of reach for too many impoverished people who may be in crisis. Then we exacerbate the problem by failing to invest in one of the most effective and stabilizing interventions we have: supportive housing. We leave people struggling with mental illness or addiction to fend for themselves on the streets, but then carry out entire administrative campaigns to keep them from being seen in our public spaces. The persistence of poverty and homelessness are policy choices, and yet privileged people become annoyed when the results of those choices interrupt their subway commutes.



The scene: NYPD officers respond to the fatal encounter on the F train.

So yes, perhaps the victim was struggling with mental illness, but perhaps the assailant was suffering from mental illness as well. I’m sorry, but when I read about a former soldier reacting with disproportionate violence to a “tense” but nonviolent social situation, my knee-jerk response is empathy. My first question is whether that former soldier received the mental health services and social supports he needed to readjust to peacetime society. There is no doubt in my mind that this former Marine committed a crime: Again, he is on video choking an unarmed, nonviolent man to death. But we should be able to acknowledge, prosecute, and punish the criminal act, while also understanding that this assailant likely needs therapy at least as much as he deserves incarceration.

Saying that his culpability might be mitigated by mental health concerns is, of course, different from saying that his actions were justified. Other

This murder takes many of the problems we have in our society and throws them in a giant melting pot.

people will no doubt take this line—they'll claim he was acting in self-defense or the defense of others—but that just exposes another of the social ills at work in this story: the proliferation of firearms. This story won't register as a "gun violence" story, because no weapons were used by the victim or the assailant. But I think it is a guns story because you can't really explain the actions and reactions of everybody else on the train without the ominous threat of gun violence.

When somebody acts out in public, it is frightening because, for all we know, that

behavior is a prelude to another mass shooting. It is difficult to ignore a person who seems menacing in public because, thanks to the NRA and the Republican-controlled Supreme Court, literally every person could be packing. And it's outright dangerous to involve yourself in conflicts that appear to be happening to "other people" because you don't want to get caught in a cross fire should things get to that point. I have been known to switch subway cars if another person breaks the cardinal rule of establishing eye contact with me. My number one goal when on public transportation is to not die. Everything else is secondary to my strong preference to avoid being shot to death—not because the subway is inherently dangerous, but because the gun lobby wants to turn the entire country into a war zone.

I think that is part of the reason the other passengers did nothing to prevent the murder happening before their eyes. In fact, some of the other passengers helped the assailant hold the victim down while he was being suffocated to death. The guy who shot the video said he was "conflicted," but only after the fact, when the man was dead.

Who the hell are these people? They are me. They are you. This happened around 2:30 in the afternoon, so I'm assuming they are people who just wanted to get to their next meeting or rendezvous. In a country where it feels like any conflict can escalate from heated words to mass murder in an instant, it's not surprising that most people will just look the other way. I'd like to think that, had I been on the train, I would have said something. But would I have physically intervened? Would I have tangled with soldier boy to try to break the choke hold? I don't know. I suspect not, to my shame.

The subway murder should trigger justice, accountability, and nuanced discussions about who we want to be as a society. But it won't, because one other gigantic societal failure has gotten involved in the tragedy: the media.

The *New York Post* is already trying to paint the assailant as some kind of avenging subterranean ninja turtle. They're calling the victim a "disturbed homeless man," while calling the assailant a "straphanger" and a "vigilante." They want to turn the guy into Batman, but they'll only succeed in turning him into the next Bernhard Goetz.

In 1984, Goetz (who is white) shot four unarmed Black men on the subway. He claimed that they tried to rob him, a claim he was never able to substantiate. He was, after massive public outcry, charged with attempted murder and a number of other offenses. But he was eventually

acquitted of all charges except a minor weapons offense. The New York media turned Goetz into an icon: the "Subway Vigilante," they called him. Certain segments of the city will always treat white people who murder or try to murder Black people who bother them in some way as "heroic," and for years, the *Post* has been that segment.

Back in the present, the coverage in *The New York Times* has been almost as bad as the *Post's*. The online headline for the paper's first story? "Man Dies on Subway After Another Rider Places Him in Chokehold." Notice how they make it sound like the death is disconnected from the choke hold? That is intentional. "Man Choked to Death on Subway by Another Rider" would be more accurate. "Man Killed on Subway by Fellow Rider" would be accurate as well as pithy. Either of those might have worked. Instead, they went with the one you write when you think there is a good chance that the victim deserved to die.



Life cut short: Jordan Neely, who performed as a Michael Jackson impersonator, was only 30.

Our society is sick, and everything about this murder is a symptom of our collective rot. We treat poverty as a crime and poor people as demons; we treat soldiers as weapons that can be stowed. Meanwhile, there are literally more of us willing to hold down an unarmed man who is being suffocated to death than there are those willing to risk their physical safety to stop a murder. All of that awfulness is then repackaged by a media that makes heroes of people who kill Black people; and then that repackaged rot gets handed off to a criminal justice system that doesn't even bother to hold white men accountable until people start protesting in the streets.

The victim was named Jordan Neely. He was 30 years old. Reports indicate that he was a talented Michael Jackson impersonator. I do not know what turns befell him that brought him to the point of so much desperation. But I know that we failed him. I know we will continue to fail him. **N**

Class Notes

Adolph Reed Jr.



For All Americans

The left used to believe that universal policies were the best way to combat racial inequality. What happened?

IT IS OBVIOUS, HOWEVER, THAT JOB DISCRIMINATION based on racial or religious prejudice is subsidiary to the more pressing issue of full employment. When jobs are plentiful, all kinds of economic discrimination are minimized. When jobs are scarce, and the competition among workers for available openings is sharpened, it is relatively easy to divide employees into convenient groupings provided by the incident of race, color, or religion, and to aggravate the prejudice which leads to an exclusion of minority groups from job opportunities. The basic problem to be solved, therefore, is the problem of full employment.”

Pauli Murray, a legal scholar, civil rights activist, and important voice in Black Popular Front left politics, made this observation in the *California Law Review* in 1945, at a time when the Full Employment Bill was working its way through Congress. The legislation, which passed the Senate but failed in the House of Representatives, would have established as national economic policy the maintenance of full employment, giving both the president and Congress responsibility for carrying out that policy. Murray was expressing a conviction that was common among Black and other left-leaning civic elites during the early postwar years but has long since been abandoned: that the only way to win social justice victories for Black Americans, and to secure them once they've been won, was to make certain that they were combined with, and part of, a broader expansion of social protections.

In a 1944 volume of essays, *What the Negro Wants*, edited by the Howard University historian Rayford W. Logan, a politically diverse group of Black civic elites expressed a similar understanding, as did the social scientists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton in their magisterial 1945 case study of Chicago, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. “Race conflict in northern urban areas,” Drake and Cayton wrote, “arises when competition is particularly keen—for jobs, houses, political power, or prestige—and when Negroes are regarded (with or without foundation) as a threat to those who already have those things or who are competing for them.” The authors concluded on a speculative note: “The people are rather definite about what they want: the abolition of the Job Ceiling; adequate housing; equal, unsegregated access to all places of public accommodation;

the protection of the rights of those Negroes and whites who may desire to associate together socially. And they want to see this pattern extended to all of America—including the South.” The means best suited to realizing these goals, they argued, was a broader struggle for “full employment in the postwar world and on the development of a world program for emancipating the Common Man.”

This perspective was a common-sense presumption for a generation or more of Black and other advocates of racial justice. That is no longer the case. Far from it. In recent years, the view that Black Americans' interests are best met within the context of the pursuit of universal social benefits has been rejected out of hand by adherents of race-reductionist politics. How has this shift come to pass? And what are its implications?

Today, public voices like Ta-Nehisi Coates claim that the War on Poverty failed Black Americans because it did not address the supposedly special nature of Black poverty. In reality, that is precisely what it did, thereby failing Blacks and everyone else. MSNBC talking head Joy Reid dismisses universal social policy as resting on a discredited belief that “a rising tide [will] bring the races together.” Her stance conflates universalism with the growth politics that, since at least the John F. Kennedy administration, has been centrist Democrats' *alternative* to a redistributive policy that would provide universal, non-marketized access to necessities like health care, education at all levels, and housing, along with a commitment to a full-employment economy. This sort of misreading is what happens when history is reduced to the equivalent of a fortune-cookie factory.

The period in which Pauli Murray was active marked both the high point and the subsequent retreat of the social-democracy-inclined left that emerged from the New Deal. It was defeated by a combination of anti-communist repression and the corporate counteroffensive against labor and the social state that followed the end of World War II. Congressional conservatives defeated the Full Employment Bill of 1945 and passed a much weaker version the year after. The Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill that would have set a path toward national health care was foiled three times between 1943 and 1950, and in 1947 the conservative Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which severely restricted the power and growth of organized labor. The Cold War-era Red Scare discredited critiques and

The view that Black Americans' interests are best met by the pursuit of universal social benefits has been rejected out of hand.

The Cuban flag is shown on the left side of the page, featuring a red triangle at the top with a white star, a white triangle at the bottom, and a blue triangle on the right. The flag is partially obscured by a red diagonal shape at the bottom right of the page.

CUBA: HAVANA TO VIÑALES

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NOVEMBER 11–18, 2023

For more than 60 years, *The Nation* has called for lifting the US embargo on Cuba. The roots of our travel program to the island extend back to that commitment to forge a more sensible, sane, and productive US policy toward Cuba, a critical necessity I witnessed for myself when I traveled there on a *Nation* tour.

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

Katrina vanden Heuvel
Editorial Director and Publisher, *The Nation*

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policy proposals that could be made to seem like socialism.

Regardless, activists rooted in that Popular Front left orientation continued to press for universalist approaches to combating inequality, from the debate over the shaping of federal anti-poverty policy in the early 1960s, to the agitation for the Freedom Budget for All Americans advanced by the A. Philip Randolph Institute and endorsed by other civil rights and labor leaders in the mid-1960s, to the struggle to pass the Humphrey-Hawkins full-employment bill in the mid-1970s.

That story is well enough known. Less widely recognized is that debates in the early 1960s over the shaping of the War on Poverty and of Title VII—the employment section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—would signal the death knell of the social democratic tendency in American politics. Poverty and racial inequality in employment were disconnected from

Regardless, activists continued to press for universalist approaches to combating inequality.

political economy and relocated to the realm of culture and individual behavior. In each case, an emerging liberal narrative construed the narrower, less effective, and more vulnerable victorious option as the more radical and forward-looking. In my next column, I'll show how that happened, how we got here from there, and why the shift matters. **N**



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Thomas's Long Con

Clarence Thomas has elevated “personal responsibility” into a prerequisite for citizenship. Yet he fails his own test.



FOR FOUR DECADES, SUPREME COURT JUSTICE CLARENCE Thomas has extolled the importance of “personal responsibility.” He has chastised those who “make excuses for black Americans” and argued there is a need to “emphasize black self-help.” He has denigrated affirmative action programs on the grounds that they “create a narcotic of dependency” where there should be “an ethic of responsibility and independence.” He bemoans the “ideology of victimhood” that allows the marginalized to “make demands on society for reparations and recompense.”

In light of recent revelations that Thomas has been showered by billionaire Harlan Crow with over two decades' worth of getaways on superyachts and private jets and various other gifts, none of which he ever reported, the jurist's long con of principled advocacy for Black self-reliance and opposition to white largesse has finally run its course. Turns out, Thomas was never against reparations—he just wanted them for himself. He is and always has been precisely what he wrongly accuses Black folks of being.

It's been a con run by a self-serving fabulist all along. In 1980, Thomas caught the attention of the incoming president, Ronald Reagan, with a speech in which he used the “welfare queen” stereotype against his own sister. “She gets mad when the mailman is late with her welfare check. That is how dependent she is,” Thomas told an audience of fellow Black Republicans. “What's worse is that now her kids feel entitled to the check too. They have no motivation for doing better or getting out of that situation.” A 1991 *Los Angeles Times* investigation found Thomas's sister was, in fact, an underpaid single mother who used the social safety net during a brief rough patch; her children weren't the entitled layabouts depicted by Thomas, either.

A few years later, while serving as the second-highest-ranking Black official in the Reagan administration, Thomas observed that “to be accepted into the conservative ranks and to be treated with some degree of respect, a black was required to become a caricature of sorts, providing sideshows of anti-black quips and attacks,” adding that Black conservatives “must be against affirmative action and against welfare. And your opposition had to be adamant and constant.” Forty years later, it's hard not to think Thomas wasn't so much airing grievances as reassuring his white conservative compatriots that he understood the assignment.

Consider that there may be no single person in American history who has benefited more from affirmative action than Clarence Thomas. It is an oft-repeated fact that Thomas got into Yale Law School based on race-conscious admissions. Claiming he was “humiliated” by possessing a law degree that “bore the taint of racial preference,” he went on to

become a prominent opponent of affirmative action—even suggesting that race-based policies represented the new slavery or Jim Crow, but for white people. Nonetheless, Thomas continued to benefit from his race long after his days at Yale. He was selected for a leadership position in the Office for Civil Rights in Reagan’s Department of Education, during which time civil rights groups attempted to have him held in contempt for inadequately enforcing civil rights laws, and then was promoted to lead the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, despite lacking almost any relevant experience. Though his legacy at the EEOC was mostly a shameful one—he allowed 13,000 age-discrimination claims to expire—he was named to the federal appeals bench by President George H.W. Bush. A mere 15 months later, he was nominated for the Supreme Court. For all his bluster about self-reliance, Thomas has evidently never refused an unearned promotion.

On the court, he has treated “personal responsibility” not merely as a moral ideal but as a prerequisite for the protections guaranteed in the Constitution, apparently indifferent to the suffering of those he deems to have fallen short. In a 1992 case involving the abuse of prisoners by guards, Thomas wrote that while excessive force may be “deplorable,” he wouldn’t go so far as to label it unconstitutional. In a more recent dissent, he “appeared to urge officials in Texas to execute [a man on death row] even while the plaintiff’s efforts to obtain [potentially exculpatory] DNA evidence moved forward,” as *The New York Times* reported. And in a 2019 case that overturned a death row conviction, citing a Mississippi prosecutor’s overt “discriminatory intent,” Thomas dissented, not only voting to kill the man but opining that the lone upside of the majority opinion was that “the state is perfectly free to convict [him] again.”

Yet Thomas has no such concerns about his own record of rule bending and breaking. There is his history of alleged sexual harassment, according not just to Anita Hill but also other EEOC staffers. Stories of Thomas’s sexual harassment have continued to surface, as recently as 2016. And the current scandal over his financial disclosure omissions likely goes beyond the realm of ethics violations into potential illegality: Multiple court observers point

It turns out that Thomas was never against reparations; he just wanted them for himself.

out that he may have violated the Ethics in Government Act. There is also the matter of Thomas’s wife, Ginni, who supported efforts to deny the outcome of the 2020 election. Thomas has refused to recuse himself in cases involving groups his wife is engaged with—and is now refusing to recuse himself from litigation over the January 6 insurrection.

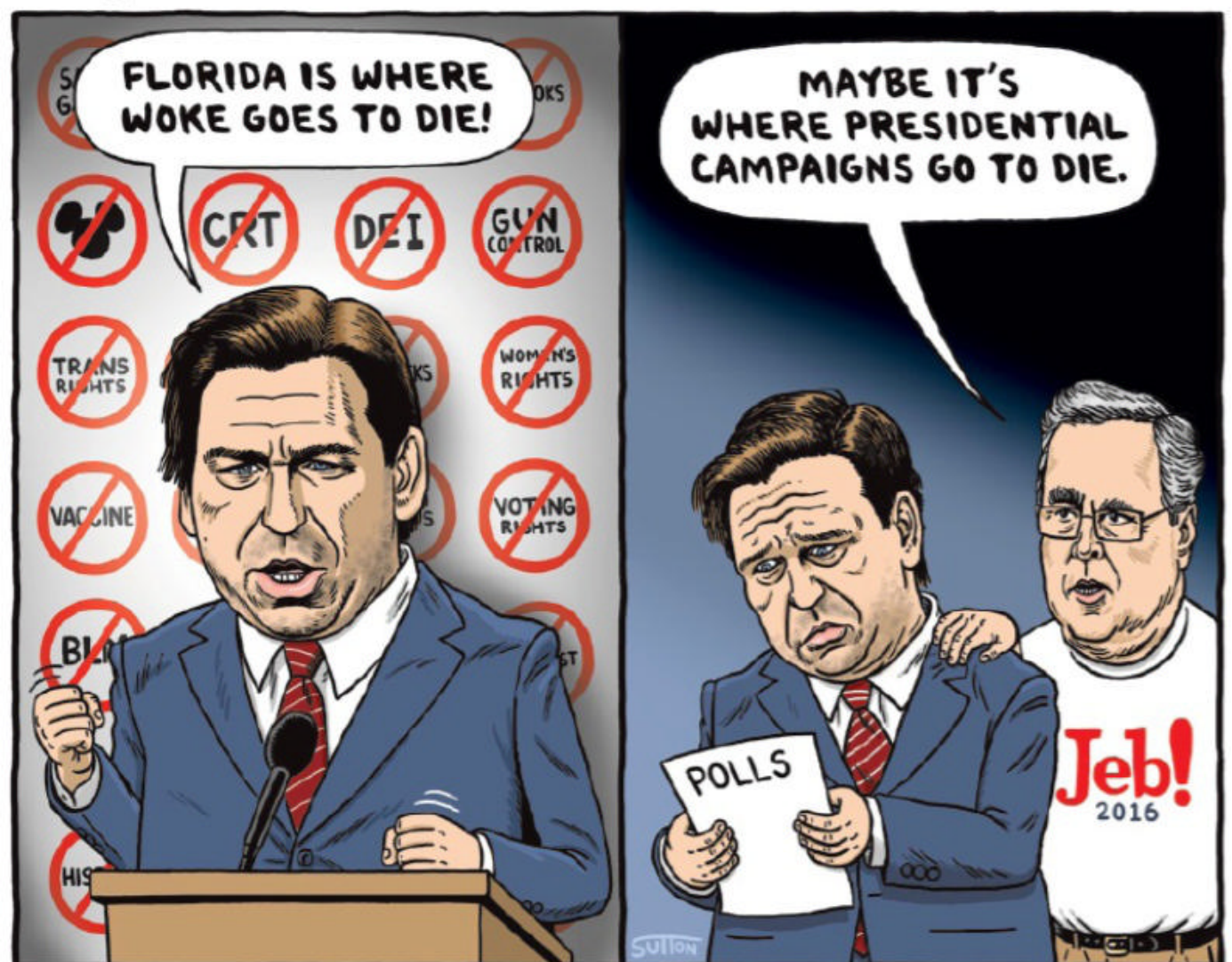
And while Thomas castigates Black folks for blaming their problems on racism, he seems to carry a full deck of race cards everywhere he goes. He insists that all public criticisms of him are the result of his status as a Black conservative who

refuses to “follow in this cult-like way something that Blacks are supposed to believe.” For a party of people who constantly accuse Black folks of being “race grifters,” white Republicans seem loath to recognize those in their midst, doing their bidding.

Some scholars have promoted the idea that Thomas has fused the philosophies of Malcolm X and Booker T. Washington, creating a Franken-philosophy rooted in the idea that the communal self-reliance that helped Black families survive during Jim Crow is the cure for what ails Black America today. But that seems too generous a reading. The truth is, Clarence Thomas has looked out only for himself, and Black folks are collateral damage along the way. I don’t expect Thomas to face real consequences for his latest scandal. But at least the image-laundering con he has undertaken has come to its inevitable end. **N**



OPPART / WARD SUTTON



Framing the Choice

Jane McAlevey



The Uberization of Us All

Established unions are challenging Silicon Valley's agenda by pushing back on AI, surveillance, and wage theft.

IN THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, START-UP UNIONIZATION efforts such as those at Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's, and Apple have been satisfying to witness for those of us hungry for social justice in the United States. We have their backs, and we'll continue to root for them.

But the workers with the best chance of actually slowing the spread of oppressive technology (which aims to supplant humans with artificial intelligence and tries to maximize productivity by surveilling workers and controlling their time down to a fraction of a second) and stopping the Uberization of the workforce (which replaces full-time workers with contractors, turning good jobs into underpaid gigs with no benefits) are in unions that are already established.

For example, in 2018, the hotel, hospitality, and casino workers' union Unite Here won its strikes against Marriott. Those victories secured language that gave members the right to negotiate over emerging technologies in their sectors. With the contract between United Parcel Service and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters set to expire in a few months, 330,000 workers covered by the agreement have declared an end to creeping Uberization—including policies that require contract drivers to use their personal vehicles for delivery.

In February, the United Auto Workers voted for new leadership after a successful fight for direct member elections of top officers. In a national conference to prepare for this September's negotiations with the Big Three automakers, that new leadership acknowledged the climate crisis but made it clear that the costs of moving toward cleaner technology, including electric vehicles, must not be borne by autoworkers. Every aspect of the shift away from fossil fuels must be carried out by unionized autoworkers with wages and working conditions that are as good as the best autoworker contracts in place today.

And on May 1, members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) announced they were going on strike. A statement to members declared, "The companies' behavior has created a gig economy inside a union workforce" and listed the employers whose labor practices led to this strike—the traditional big studios, but also the new influencers at the negotiations table: Netflix, Amazon,

and Apple. These Silicon Valley streamers have gutted the income of writers from residuals payments.

Even the increasing strangulation of public education can be traced to the no-longer-new Silicon Valley elite's crazed pursuit of profit. To the members of this executive greed club, teachers' unions are standing in the way of their next yacht, personal rocket ship, submarine, or private island villa.

The same day the WGA declared a strike—including against practices popularized by Netflix, such as the use of AI—the Oakland Education Association (OEA) announced that it too would be going on strike, citing some of the same targets, including Netflix cofounder and former CEO Reed Hastings, who has poured millions into school board races in California to elect candidates who back Big Tech's plans to supplant flesh-and-blood educators with online-teaching technologies. Hastings also funds candidates committed to replacing public education with privately run, publicly funded charter schools.

But the WGA and the OEA also share a too-rare approach to their contract negotiations: Both unions have large bargaining teams that are broadly representative of their membership and are markedly transparent to all their members about their demands. These large worker bargaining teams and their commitment to open communication with the rank and file led to high turnouts in their strike authorization votes: 79 percent of WGA members showed up to vote on the strike, with 97.85 percent in favor; and 87 percent of OEA members turned out, with 88 percent voting yes. If you track how workers effectively win big gains in contracts—the kind that raise standards for everyone—you'll find that the common thread is putting members at the front and center of negotiations.

Ishmael Armendariz, the OEA's interim president, said: "For seven months, OEA's big bargaining team—more than 50 classroom teachers, counselors, nurses, school psychologists, substitutes, early-childhood educators, and special-education teachers from every corner of the school district—has worked tirelessly, making well-researched proposals that will strengthen our schools."

At the WGA, Adam Conover, a first-time member of the bargaining team, took to Twitter to declare how proud he was of the union's transparency in its approach to these negotiations. Conover knows that the more the members and the broader community understand what the fight is about, the stronger they

To Silicon Valley's executive greed club, unions stand in the way of a bigger yacht, a personal rocket ship, or a private island.

will be. “The studios and streamers are trying to end writing as a career and turn it into a gig job, and we’re not going to let them,” he told me. “We’re on strike to remind them that without us, they have no product at all. Writers know that we owe our pension, our health care, and our quality of life to the collective action writers have taken in the past. Now it’s our turn.”

The fate of the workers, as well as the future of work, is on the line with every majority strike. From writers and educators and hospitality workers to the impending battles at UPS and the

auto companies, the members of these long-established unions are fighting on the front lines for issues that are urgent for all of society. The coming months might well make 2023 the year that workers in legacy unions showed how to challenge the likes of Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Reed Hastings—and win. What matters isn’t a union’s age, it’s whether the workers are at the center of the decisions at every level—especially in the contract fights to determine the rules that will govern their lives for most of their waking hours each day. **N**



SNAPSHOT
Eraldo Peres 

Rights Under Threat

Indigenous people gather in front of the Palácio do Congresso Nacional in Brasília, Brazil, to demand protection of their rights and action on climate change, as part of the 19th annual Acampamento Terra Livre (Free Land Camp) gathering on April 24.

By the Numbers



\$31.5T

Amount of debt the US government has accumulated over the nation’s history, as of May 4

\$16.9T

American household debt as of the end of 2022, including credit cards, mortgages, vehicle loans, and student loans

\$155k

Debt held by the average American between the ages of 42 and 57

\$26k

Debt held by the average American between the ages of 18 and 25

\$88B

Amount of medical debt reported on consumer credit reports as of June 2021

2.5%

Percentage of household debt that was in some stage of delinquency by the end of 2022

CALVIN TRILLIN
DeadlinePoet 

Hiring Tucker Carlson

Fox thought his prime-time spot was now a blot,
But other networks craved him for that slot.
Imagine all the feelers that he’s got.
The Racist-Preppy Market seems red-hot.

Q&A

Eliane Brum

For years, the Brazilian journalist Eliane Brum has been reporting on the human and environmental costs of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the Amazon. Lately, she has also called the rainforest home: In 2017, she moved to Altamira and recently bought a small plot of land with her husband. Alongside others in their community, the couple are reforesting land that was cleared for cattle pasture. Yet as Brum makes clear, this reforestation applies not only to the land but also to herself—a process akin to the “decolonization” of the forest and the violent culture that destroyed it in the first place.

In her new book, *Banzeiro Òkòtó: The Amazon as the Center of the World*, a knotty work that encompasses nature writing, ecofeminism, and biting polemic, Brum presents a striking portrait of the forest, told through a “dialogue” among “many creatures”: humans and nonhumans, exploiters and the exploited, and those who put their lives on the line to protect the earth’s most important defense against the climate crisis.

—Lewis Gordon

LG: You grew up in Ijuí, a city in the south of Brazil. How did you first encounter the Amazon?

EB: I had my first contact with the Amazon through my ears. It’s important to say that my grandparents were illiterate and that my father was the first person in my family who learned to read and write. He founded a university, and my family was left-wing in a very conservative city. I was always called the “daughter of the communist.” I first heard about the Amazon at barbecues: I listened to [some of my neighbors] say how they had bought land in the Amazon and expelled the Indigenous people. They talked about it as if it was a great thing.

Another important childhood moment for me was when an Indigenous man came to my city to give lectures. He was in a terrible place. My older brothers brought him to our house, where he lived with us for some time. He was from the Xingu River area. Then he took care of me, because my father and mother were teachers who worked from morning to evening. He taught me stories. He left a mark on me. These two visions of the forest helped me understand the side of life I was on—that of nature and the forest people.

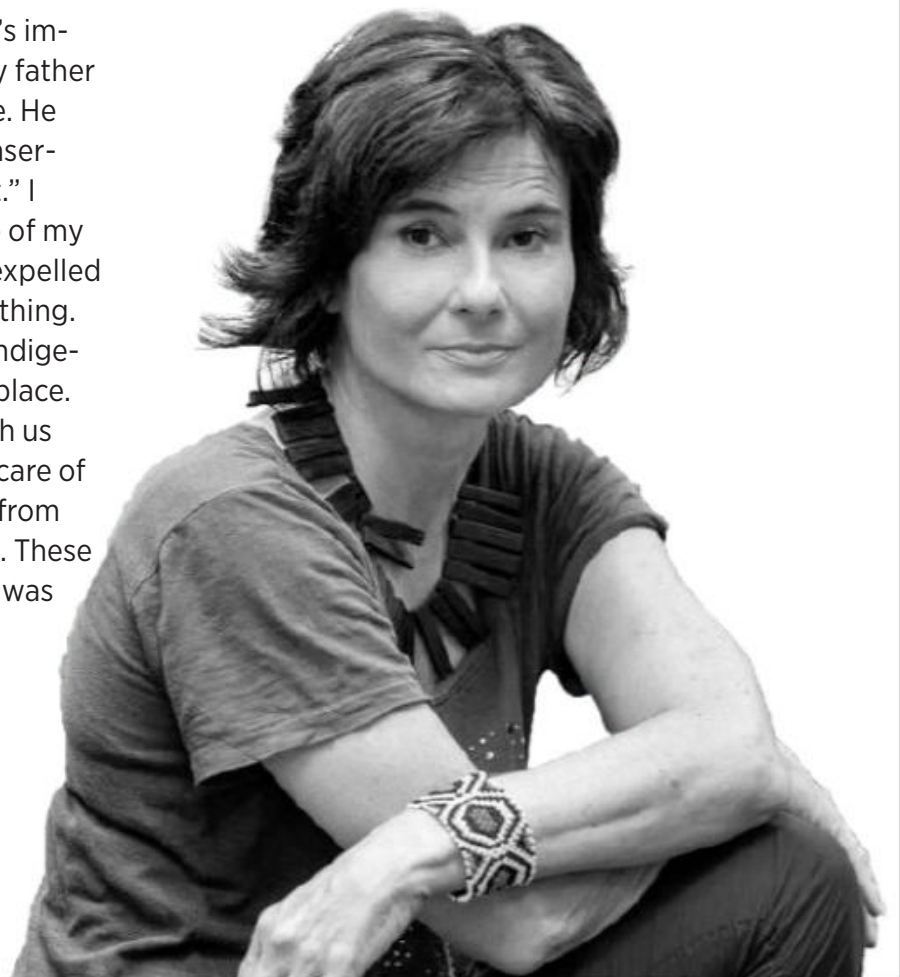
“For the Amazon, Lula did some good things, but also some terrible things.”

LG: The book is rooted in your own reporting, but there are many other elements to it: feminism, nature writing, and even philosophy. How would you answer the question “What is the book about?”

EB: The forest is a big connection, a big dialogue among many, many creatures. My book is like this: It’s a conversation across boxes, definitions, and concepts. This is also how I understand the climate crisis—across gender, race, species, and class. There are many layers to the book, and among them [is the reason why I] came here. I finally understood that it’s the center of the world during this time of climate crisis. The center of the world is where life is, not where the markets are. It was difficult because, with all my experience, I knew that I didn’t really know the Amazon. I understood that I needed to learn more, both from the land and in my body.

LG: You’ve alluded to your mixed feelings about [Brazilian President] Luis Inácio Lula da Silva’s environmental record in government. How do you assess his legacy and commitments moving forward?

EB: For the Amazon, Lula did some good things, but also some terrible things, [such as] the return of the big dams that were originally constructed during the dictatorship. This was a historic mistake, a stain on Lula’s biography that will never be erased. Now, in the latest Lula government, we need a lot to happen, because the Belo Monte dam needs a new operating license. We need real commitment: Petrobras, the state fossil fuel company, is intending to exploit oil in the Amazon. If Lula decides to continue with this project, it will be a disaster. These are the difficult decisions that will show whether Lula has changed, and if he has a real commitment to the environment, climate crisis, and the Amazon forest itself. **N**





THE ARGUMENT

A Cleaner World Lies in Nationalized Banking

MAX MORAN



ON SUNDAY, MARCH 12, TO PREVENT ANY chance of a systemic financial crisis, federal banking regulators announced that they would bail out the wealthy techie depositors of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank, overriding the normal rules of banking. The next day, the Biden administration violated a campaign promise by approving the Willow Project, one of the largest oil and gas developments on federal land in US history.

The contrast between these two decisions was jarring for environmentalists, who have pushed to protect the economy from climate-related risks. Their case is simple: Soon, oil and gas projects will no longer be viable investments, for economic, legal, and practical reasons. (The Willow Project already requires ConocoPhillips to re-freeze melting tundra.) Once investors see these investments as null, they will panic. And if the targets of that panic include banks bigger than SVB, it could trigger a global financial crash.

But as the SVB collapse made clear, even smaller banks can trigger panics. Moreover, the Federal Reserve's recent investigation into its own failures demonstrated that it missed clear warning signs and took little enforceable action on the regulatory violations it did catch. The investigation, conducted by the Fed's top regulatory official, Michael Barr, and released in April, recommended only abstract tweaks internal to the Fed and thus difficult to verify. It seems we can't trust the central bank's governors to choose to do good for the planet.

While climate advocates say there's still time before we have an all-out emergency, regulators should force financial firms to diversify their portfolios, keep larger amounts of emergency capital on hand if they invest in dirty energy, or flat-out refuse to lend to fossil fuel companies, given the high risk factor. But there is a conceptually simpler—if politically harder to enact—way to protect the rest of the economy from bank crashes and, in the process, help reorganize our economy for the climate-change era: nationalize consumer banking.

The current system of regulating banks, which are indispensable to the world economy, doesn't work. Regulators try to predict the biggest possible future financial risks, judge which firms are large and interconnected enough to crash the world economy, test how they would hypothetically respond to the predicted risks, and make

recommendations to banks from there. In other words, there is a lot of guesswork involved, and no one can predict economic shifts with certainty.

Meanwhile, most people use banks primarily to store money and access payment systems like debit cards or payroll; they don't intrinsically care about the bank's investments. If people just want a risk-free way to store money and make payments, the government can offer that. In fact, it already does: Private banks that join the Federal Reserve System get fully guaranteed accounts and access to the Fed's lightning-fast payments system. Legislation offering the public what we already offer to private banks would solve most people's problems with the financial system.

While the secondary effects would be complex, this change would make the financial sector dramatically less interconnected and prone to system-wide crashes. Regulators could let banks fail more easily; the financial lobby would be far less powerful in Washington; and it would expose the absurdity of entrusting all of our economic planning to for-profit financiers, which could prompt deeper shifts in our political economy.

Right now, we're forced to discuss everything our economy needs in terms of whether it provides a high return on investment for private financiers, offering despicable tax and regulatory giveaways in the process. But with public consumer banking, private banks would be less essential to the rest of the economy—meaning government wouldn't need to implicitly backstop the industry. Along-

side stricter traditional regulations, this would make it far riskier for Wall Street to finance fossil fuels.

A simpler financial industry would also be a less politically potent one. Without private banks as the skeleton of economic life, we could debate more democratically

which industries to build out, which to shrink, and how they should be structured. None of this would mean Soviet-style central planning. Rather, it would help create a mixed-economy social democracy.

The private financial sector already tosses a climate-conscious sheen over its normal horrific practices via environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing. But the best thing it could do for the planet would be to get very public—very quickly.

Max Moran is research director at the Revolving Door Project.

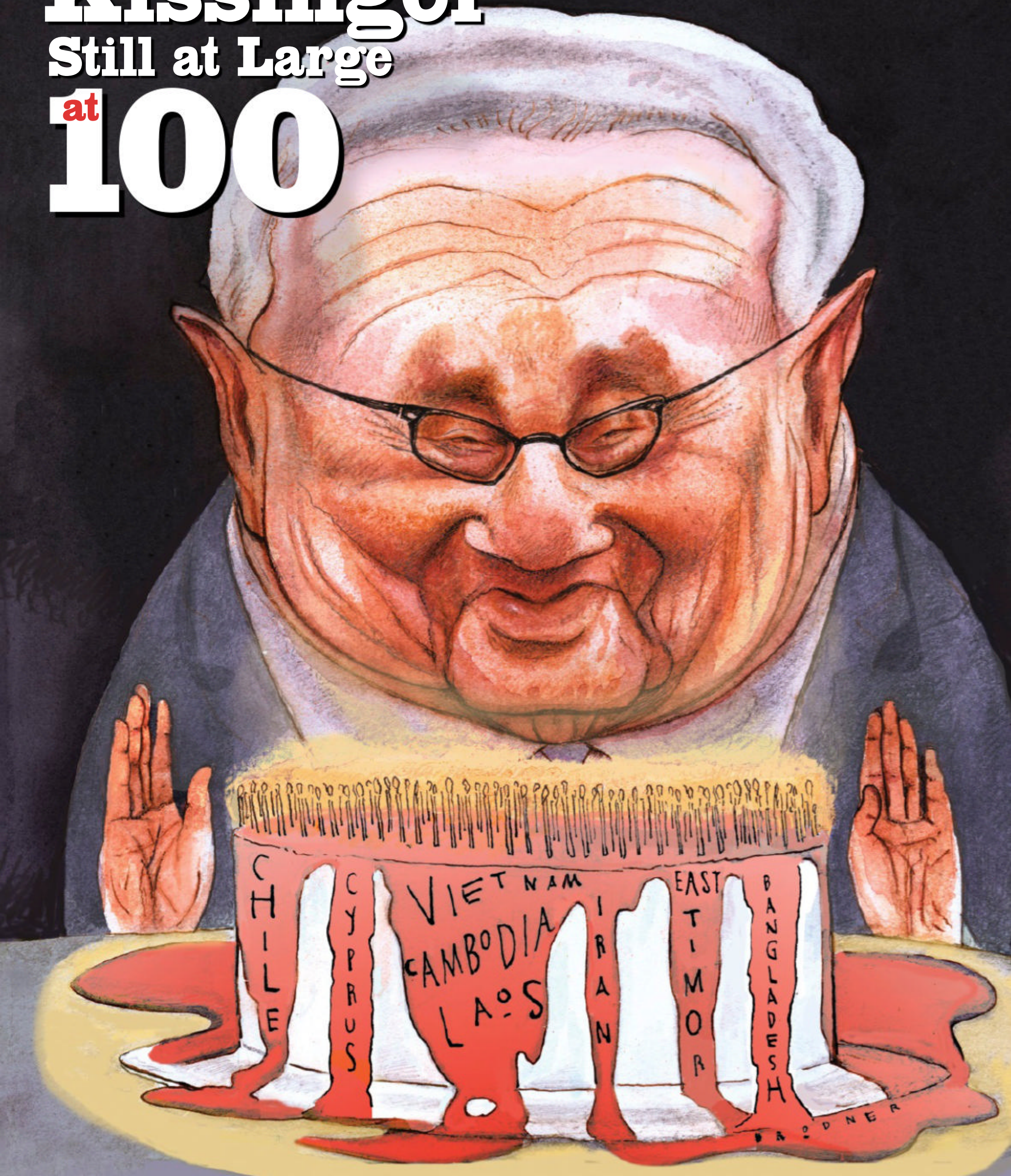
The current system of regulating banks, which are indispensable to the world economy, doesn't work.

N

Kissinger

Still at Large

at
100



BY GREG GRANDIN

HENRY KISSINGER SHOULD HAVE GONE DOWN WITH THE REST OF them: Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Dean, and Nixon. His fingerprints were all over Watergate. Yet he survived—largely by playing the press.

Until 1968, Kissinger had been a Nelson Rockefeller Republican—though he also served as an adviser to the State Department in the Johnson administration. Kissinger was stunned by Richard Nixon's defeat of Rockefeller in the primaries, according to the journalists Marvin and Bernard Kalb. "He wept," they wrote. Kissinger believed Nixon was "the most dangerous, of all the men running, to have as President."

It wasn't long, though, before Kissinger had opened a back channel to Nixon's people, offering to use his contacts in the Johnson White House to leak information about the peace talks with North Vietnam. Still a Harvard professor, he dealt directly with Nixon's foreign policy adviser, Richard V. Allen, who in an interview given to the Miller Center at the University of Virginia said that Kissinger, "on his own," offered to pass along information he had received from an aide attending the peace talks. Allen described Kissinger as acting very cloak-and-dagger, calling him from pay phones and speaking in German to report on what had happened during the talks.

At the end of October, Kissinger told the Nixon campaign, "They're

breaking out the champagne in Paris." Hours later, President Johnson suspended the bombing. A peace deal might have pushed Hubert Humphrey, who was closing in on Nixon in the polls, over the top. Nixon's people acted quickly; they urged the South Vietnamese to derail the talks.

Through wiretaps and intercepts, President Johnson learned that Nixon's

campaign was telling the South Vietnamese "to hold on until after the election." If the White House had gone public with this information, the outrage might also have swung the election to Humphrey. But Johnson hesitated. "This is treason," he said, as quoted in Ken Hughes's excellent *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate*. "It would rock the world."

Johnson stayed silent. Nixon won. The war went on.

That October Surprise kicked off a chain of events that would lead to Nixon's downfall.

Kissinger, who'd been appointed national security adviser, advised Nixon to order the bombing of Cambodia to pressure Hanoi to return to the negotiating table. Nixon and Kissinger were desperate to resume the talks that they had helped sabotage, and their desperation manifested itself in ferocity. "Savage" was a word that was used again and again in discussing what needed to be done in Southeast Asia, recalled one of Kissinger's aides. Bombing Cambodia (a country the US wasn't at war with), which would eventually break the country and lead to the rise of the Khmer Rouge, was illegal. So it had to be done in secret. The pressure to keep it secret spread

paranoia within the administration, leading Kissinger and Nixon to ask J. Edgar Hoover to tap the phones of administration officials. Daniel Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers leak sent Kissinger into a panic. He was afraid that since Ellsberg had access to the papers, he might also know what Kissinger was doing in Cambodia.

On Monday, June 14, 1971—the day after *The New York Times* published its first story on the Pentagon Papers—Kissinger exploded, shouting, "This will totally destroy American credibility forever.... It will destroy our ability to conduct foreign policy in confidence.... No foreign government will ever trust us again."

"Without Henry's stimulus," John Ehrlichman wrote in his memoir, *Witness to Power*, "the president and the rest of us might have concluded that the papers were Lyndon Johnson's problem, not ours." Kissinger "fanned Richard Nixon's flame white hot."

Why? Kissinger had just begun negotiations with China to reestablish relations and was afraid the scandal might sabotage those talks.

Keying his performance to stir up Nixon's resentments, he depicted

Ellsberg as smart, subversive, promiscuous, perverse—and privileged: "He's now married a very rich girl," Kissinger told Nixon.

"They started cranking each other up," Bob Haldeman remembered (as quoted in Walter Isaacson's biography of Kissinger), "until they both were in a frenzy."

If Ellsberg gets away unscathed, Kissinger told Nixon, "it shows you're a weakling, Mr. President," prompting Nixon to establish the Plumbers—the clandestine unit that conducted buggings and burglaries, including at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Complex.

Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward, and Carl Bernstein all filed stories fingering Kissinger for the first round of illegal wiretaps—set up by the White House in the spring of 1969 to keep his Cambodia bombing secret.

Landing in Austria en route to the Middle East in June 1974 and finding



"Nothing was beyond the capacity of this remarkable man.... [He's] the best thing we've got going for us."

—Ted Koppel, ABC News

Escape artist:

Though Watergate was as much his doing as Nixon's, Kissinger emerged unscathed thanks to his admirers in the media.

Greg Grandin, a member of *The Nation's* editorial board, is a professor of history at Yale and the author of *The End of the Myth*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 2020.

Bloody Paper Trail in Chile

The secret memo in which Kissinger plotted the murder of Chilean democracy.

BY **PETER KORNBLOH**

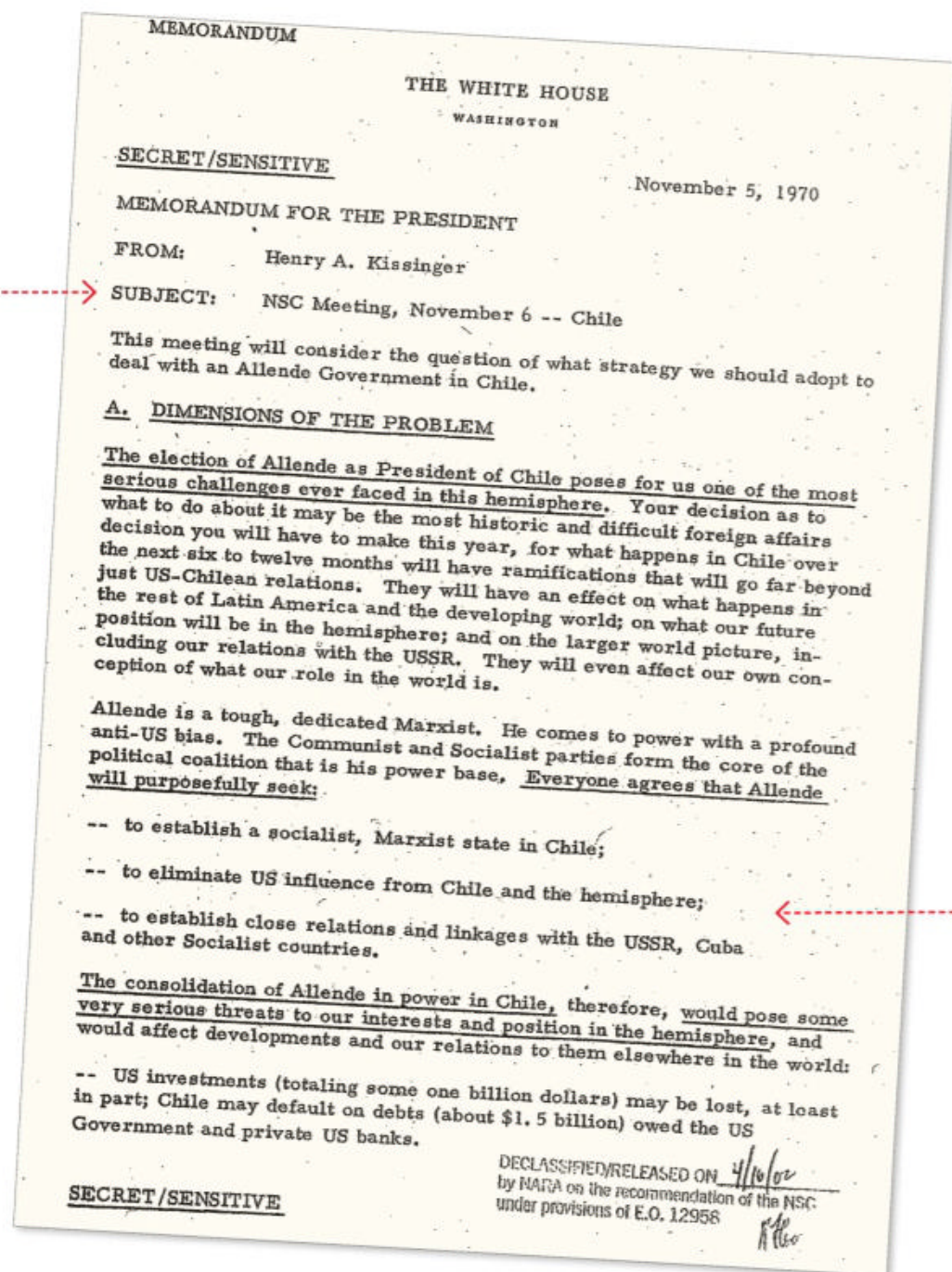
AS HENRY KISSINGER REACHES 100 YEARS OF AGE ON May 27, Chileans are preparing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bloody military coup that the former US national security adviser helped orchestrate in September 1973. Kissinger's controversial career is littered with scandals and crimes against humanity: support for mass murderers and torturers abroad, domestic wiretapping, clandestine wars in Indochina, and, as Greg Grandin reminds us, secretly sabotaging the quest for peace in Vietnam. But his pivotal role in the covert US efforts to undermine democracy in Chile, aiding and abetting the rise of the infamous dictator Augusto Pinochet, will always be the Achilles' heel of Kissinger's much-ballyhooed legacy.

The declassified historical record leaves no doubt that Kissinger was the chief architect of US efforts to destabilize the democratically elected government of Socialist Party leader Salvador Allende. Once Allende was overthrown, Kissinger became the leading enabler of Pinochet's repressive new regime. "I think we should understand our policy—that however unpleasant they act, this government is better for us than Allende was," he told his deputies as they reported to him on the human rights atrocities in the weeks following the coup. At a private June 1976 meeting with Pinochet in Santiago, Secretary of State Kissinger offered platitudes rather than pressure: "My evaluation is that you are a victim of all left-wing groups around the world," he told Pinochet, "and that your greatest sin was that you overthrew a government which was going communist."

Peter Kornbluh, a longtime contributor to The Nation, is the author of The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability.

out that the press had run more unflattering stories and editorials about him, Kissinger held an impromptu press conference and threatened to resign. It was by all accounts a bravura turn. "When the record is written," he said, seemingly on the verge of tears, "one may remember that perhaps some lives were saved and perhaps some mothers can rest more at ease, but I leave that to history. What I will not leave to history is a discussion of my public honor."

The gambit worked. He "seemed totally authentic," *New York* magazine gushed. As if recoiling from their own sudden doggedness in exposing Nixon's crimes, reporters and news anchors rallied around Kissinger. While the rest of the White House was revealed as a bunch of two-bit thugs, Kissinger remained someone America could believe in. "We were half-convinced that nothing was beyond the capacity of this remarkable man," ABC News' Ted Koppel said in a 1974 documentary, describing Kissinger as "the most admired man in America." He was,



1 Between Allende's election on September 4, 1970, and his inauguration two months later, the CIA launched a major covert operation to block his ascendance to the presidency. Ordered by President Nixon and overseen by Kissinger, the operation—code-named FUBELT—led to the assassination of Gen. René Schneider, the pro-constitution

commander in chief of the Chilean Army. But the operation failed to foment a military coup.

The day after Allende's inauguration, Nixon scheduled a meeting of his National Security Council on November 5 to establish what US policy toward Chile would be. But Kissinger requested that the meeting be postponed by a day to give him time to personally present

Koppel added, "the best thing we've got going for us."

We now know much more about Kissinger's other crimes, the immense suffering he caused during his years in public office. He green-lighted coups and enabled genocides. He told dictators to get their killing and torturing done quickly, sold out the Kurds, and ran the botched operation to kidnap Chilean Gen. René Schneider (in the hope of derailing President Salvador Allende's inauguration), which resulted in Schneider's murder. His post-Vietnam turn to the Middle East left that region in chaos, setting the stage for crises that continue to afflict humanity.

We know little, though, about what came later, during his four decades of work with Kissinger Associates. The firm's "client list" has been one of the most sought-after documents in Washington since at least 1989, when Senator Jesse Helms unsuccessfully demanded to see it before he would consider confirming Lawrence Eagleburger (a Kissinger protégé and an employee of Kissinger Associates)

D. ASSESSMENTS

As noted, the basic issue is whether we are to wait and try to adjust or act now to oppose.

The great weakness in the modus vivendi approach is that:

- it gives Allende the strategic initiative;
- it plays into his game plan and almost insures that he will consolidate himself;
- if he does consolidate himself, he will have even more freedom to act against us after a period of our acceptance of him than if we had opposed him all along;
- there are no apparent reasons or available intelligence to justify a benign or optimistic view of an Allende regime over the long term. In fact, as noted, an "independent" rational socialist state linked to Cuba and the USSR can be even more dangerous for our long-term interests than a very radical regime.

There is nothing in this strategy that promises to deter or prevent adverse anti-U. S. actions when and if Chile wants to pursue them -- and there are far more compelling reasons to believe that he will when he feels he is established than that he will not.

The main question with the hostile approach is whether we can effectively prevent Allende from consolidating his power. There is at least some prospect that we can. But the argument can be made that even if we did not succeed -- provided we did not damage ourselves too severely in the process -- we could hardly be worse off than letting him entrench himself; that there is in fact some virtue in posturing ourselves in a position of opposition as a means of at least containing him and improving our chance of inducing others to help us contain him later if we have to.

In my judgment the dangers of doing nothing are greater than the risks we run in trying to do something, especially since we have flexibility in tailoring our efforts to minimize those risks.

I recommend, therefore that you make a decision that we will oppose Allende as strongly as we can and do all we can to keep him from consolidating power, taking care to package those efforts in a style that gives us the appearance of reacting to his moves.

SECRET/SENSITIVE

2 In his presentation to the president, Kissinger acknowledged that Allende had been legitimately and democratically elected—"the first Marxist government ever to come to power by free elections"—and would adopt a moderate position toward the United States. In Kissingerian logic, that made Allende even more of a threat. Among the rationales Kissinger presented for destabilizing Allende's new government was one key factor: "The example of a successful elected Marxist government in Chile would surely have an impact on—and even precedent value for—other parts of the world, especially in Italy. The imitative spread of similar phenomena elsewhere would in turn significantly affect the world balance and our own position in it." As Kissinger advised the president, "its 'model' effect can be insidious."

3 Kissinger successfully persuaded the president to approve this clandestine destabilization policy. At the NSC meeting the next day, Kissinger reiterated his arguments for intervention. "Developments in Chile are clearly of major historic importance, and they will have ramifications that go far beyond just the question of US-Chilean relations," his talking points for the NSC meeting dra-

matically began. "The question therefore," Kissinger stated after outlining the purported threats to US interests of a successful Allende government, "is whether there are actions we can take ourselves to intensify Allende's problems so that at a minimum he may fail or be forced to limit his aims, and at a maximum might create conditions in which collapse or overthrow might be feasible."

4 At the NSC meeting the next day, according to a secret summary, Nixon backed Kissinger and parroted his position. "Our main concern in Chile is the prospect that he [Allende] can consolidate himself and the picture presented to the world will be his success," the president informed his top national security managers.

5 The objective of Kissinger's policy of hostile intervention came to fruition on September 11, 1973—Chile's own 9/11. Kissinger then ushered in a policy of assisting the new military regime, which would become renowned for murder, torture, disappearances, and even international terrorism on the streets of Washington, D.C.

"The Chilean thing is getting consolidated," Kissinger informed Nixon a few days after the coup, "and of course the newspapers are bleating because a pro-Communist government has been overthrown." "Isn't that something," Nixon mused about what he called "this crap from the Liberals" on the denouement of democracy in Chile. "Isn't that something."

Kissinger also lamented the failure of the US press to celebrate their Cold War accomplishment. As he told Nixon, "in the Eisenhower period we would be heroes."

this pivotal memorandum to Nixon and persuade him to reject the State Department's position that Washington could establish a modus vivendi with an Allende government. Kissinger lobbied the president to adopt an aggressive, if covert, effort to "oppose Allende as strongly as we can."

as deputy secretary of state. Later, Kissinger quit as chair of the 9/11 Commission rather than hand over the list for public review.

Kissinger Associates was an early player in the wave of privatizations that took place after the end of the Cold War—in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Latin America—helping to create a new international oligarchic class. Kissinger had used the contacts he made as a public official to found one of the most lucrative firms in the world. Then, having escaped the taint of Watergate, he used his reputation as a foreign policy sage to influence public debate—to the benefit, we can assume, of his clients. Kissinger was an eager advocate of both Gulf Wars, and he worked closely with President Clinton to push NAFTA through Congress.

We now know much more about Kissinger's crimes, the immense suffering he caused during his years in public office.

The firm also made book on policies put into place by Kissinger. In 1975, as secretary of state, Kissinger helped Union Carbide set up its chemical plant in Bhopal—working with the Indian government and securing funds from the United States. After the plant's 1984 chemical leak disaster, Kissinger Associates represented Union Carbide, brokering a paltry out-of-court settlement for the victims of the leak, which caused nearly 4,000 immediate deaths and exposed another half-million people to toxic gases.

A few years ago, much fanfare attended Kissinger's donation of his public papers to Yale. But we'll never know most of what his firm has been up to in Russia, China, India, the Middle East, and elsewhere. He'll take those secrets with him when he goes. **N**



BY KATIE ROSE QUANDT

*How Not to
Stop Suicides
Behind Bars*

Jails and prisons are responding to mental health crises by exacerbating trauma.

WHEN ANTHONY GAY WAS BOOKED INTO THE PEORIA COUNTY jail in Illinois in 2022, after a conviction for “possession of a firearm by a felon,” he was placed in a so-called rubber cell, a freezing solitary confinement space with a hole in the floor for a toilet. Being left alone in these conditions triggered feelings of abandonment, a result of his borderline personality disorder and the PTSD he suffers from spending decades in solitary confinement during a previous incarceration.

“It made me more agitated, more upset, feeling more rejected,” he recalled. “And I ended up stabbing a pencil into my arm.” After multiple incidents of self-harm, Gay was placed on suicide watch, where he remained for 40 days.

On suicide watch, he said, “they kept me in a holding cell where the light was on 24 hours.... It was freezing in there.” An officer positioned in an open doorway was supposed to make sure he didn’t harm himself, but was often distracted and not paying close attention. “I cut [myself] like five or six times.” In one incident, Gay cut open his scrotum, which he said saturated the cell with blood. He said officers cuffed him, kicked him, and put him in a painful restraint chair and a spit hood for three hours before he was able to see a mental health clinician and then taken to a hospital.

Gay was later transferred to a federal prison in Butner, N.C., to undergo a mental health assessment and treatment. There, too, he was placed on suicide watch multiple times, including once for 40 days, during which he said he was not allowed to shower or brush his teeth. “I smelled so bad it caused me nausea,” he recalled. He said incarcerated people, not staff members, were assigned to watch him at times, and security staff had the power to put him in restraints without the consultation of mental health staff. He continued to harm himself and said he was admitted to the hospital five or six times.

In both the county jail and the federal prison, the suicide watch conditions reminded Gay of the 22 years he spent in solitary confinement in Illinois prisons after an initial arrest for stealing a hat and a dollar bill in a 1994 altercation. In prison, Gay’s mental health deteriorated, he racked up punishments, and his prison sentence—and time in solitary—snowballed. (He was finally released in 2018 but was rearrested in 2020 for possession of a weapon, which he maintains was planted.)

Jails and prisons typically place people considered to be at risk of suicide or self-harm on suicide watch. In federal prisons like the one Gay went to, people can be kept on watch for as long as staff determine them to be suicidal. Federal courts have ruled that in mental health detention units, “treatment must entail more than segregation and close supervision of the inmate patients.”

But in practice, suicide watch cells typically offer little or no furnishings, clothing, programming, activities, family visits, or human interaction—conditions that exacerbate trauma.

“In my opinion, most suicide observation cells are de facto

solitary confinement, and not at all therapeutic,” Terry Kupers, a psychiatrist and expert on the mental health effects of solitary confinement, told *The Nation* in an e-mail. “There is a window or video monitoring, and a mental health clinician comes by (hopefully daily) to ask if the individual is still feeling suicidal. But rarely have I seen any actual psychotherapy or much talk at all occur. The individual is in the observation cell 24 hours per day without recreation and with nothing to do, and usually without clothes.”

Despite these stark conditions, some people on suicide watch find desperate and excruciating ways to harm themselves, such as diving headfirst onto the floor or swallowing items during the often 15-minute intervals between checks. In some facilities, staff have been found failing to conduct the required checks and falsifying logbooks. While there is little data available, a study of 696 jail suicides in 2005 and 2006 found that 8 percent occurred on suicide watch. (More than one-third occurred in various types of isolation units.)

How prisons and jails respond to suicide risks is more critical than ever. In 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, the Bureau of Justice Statistics recorded an 85 percent increase in state prison suicides since tracking began in 2001, even as state prison populations grew just 1 percent from 2001 to 2019. Over the same period, suicides rose 61 percent in federal prisons. In jails, where suicide rates have always been high—accounting for close to one-third of all jail deaths—suicides rose 13 percent.

“This might sound ironic, but I don’t like engaging in self-harm,” Gay said. “However, after years and years and years of being tortured [in solitary confinement] and becoming accustomed to it, it alleviates the psychological pain. It’s to the point where now I have a low tolerance for psychological pain but a high tolerance for physical pain.... I never had these types of problems before I went to prison and solitary.”

Suicide prevention services in the US are often severely lacking or traumatizing. They are even worse behind bars.

Katie Rose Quandt is a freelance journalist who writes about criminal justice, incarceration, and inequality.

“In my opinion, most suicide observation cells are de facto solitary confinement and not at all therapeutic.”

—Terry Kupers, solitary confinement expert

Support for this article was provided by the Alicia Patterson Foundation.

Demonstrators in New York City call for an end to solitary confinement and other inhumane conditions at the Rikers Island jail complex.

SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES in the United States are often severely lacking or traumatizing. They are even worse behind bars, where someone expressing suicidal thoughts is unlikely to receive hospital care, a suicide treatment plan, or therapeutic intervention.

In Richland County, S.C., a lawsuit against the Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center brought by Disability

Rights South Carolina in 2022 alleges that people with serious mental illness on suicide watch are “often placed naked into non-therapeutic, filthy cells where they are behind metal doors with small windows and often cannot be seen by security staff.”

The suit alleges that one plaintiff with serious mental illness and persistent suicidality is frequently confined for extended periods to a restraint chair, where he is forced to urinate on himself. Even while on suicide watch, he has accessed wires and shards of glass to mutilate himself. Another plaintiff was denied access to psychotherapy, counseling, recreation, and showers for two weeks while on suicide watch, where he was forbidden toilet paper and any hygienic supplies other than a bar of soap the size of his thumbnail.

The jail also has an unrelated open case with the state to develop a strategic plan for improving the general conditions at the facility following several deaths, including a 27-year-old man who was found dead of dehydration in his cell with rat bites on his body.

Around the country, lawsuits, reports, and investigations reveal similar conditions in suicide watch cells.

In Massachusetts state prisons, suicidal individuals are put on “mental health watch” and locked in restrictive cells, where they are “at substantial risk of serious harm,” according to an investigative report by the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division released in November 2020.

One man, identified as “GG” in the report, was repeatedly cycled on and off of prolonged mental health watches. Despite constant observation by a prison staff member, GG harmed himself more than a dozen times while he was on watch. Many of the incidents, which included inserting pieces of razors, paper clips, or spoons into his eyes and penis and swallowing about 15 pills, led to hospital stays. “The pain takes the voices away,” he told Department of Justice staff.

The report notes that GG flourished during a nearly 30-day stay outside the prison at Bridgewater State Hospital, where he had no incidents of self-harm, participated in mental health group sessions, journaled, played cards with others, and was compliant with his medications. But these types of hospital placements are rare and temporary.

Although Massachusetts policy limits mental health watch to four consecutive days, the Justice Department found that over a 13-month period, 106 people were held for more than 14 days, including some for longer than six months. Four of the eight people who died by suicide in Massachusetts prisons over the study period were on mental health watch or had been recently, and more than 56 percent of 1,200 “self-injurious behavior” incidents occurred in mental health watch cells.

In December 2022, the Massachusetts Department of Correction entered into an agreement with the Justice Department and will be overseen by a federally appointed independent monitor. The state also agreed to provide people experiencing mental health crises with support staff interaction, including three mental health contacts a day; to develop a new unit for intensive mental health treatment; to provide better documentation; and to give mental health staff a say in patients’ cell conditions and privileges.

IN AN ONGOING LAWSUIT IN LOUISIANA, FOUR named plaintiffs at David Wade Correctional Center allege that people on suicide watch in the prison are given only paper gowns, are denied phone calls and visits, and receive no acute mental health care and no suicide risk assessment. They further allege that incarcerated people have their mattresses removed from their cells every day from 5 AM to 9 PM when on Policy 34—an independent disciplinary sentence “deployed at staff discretion with no due process protections or hearings.” Those placed on an “extreme” version of suicide watch are restrained in a chair all day.

“Due to lack of human contact and uncontrolled mental illness, many will scream, laugh, and talk to themselves,” the plaintiffs allege in their complaint. “Others rock in place or deteriorate to more severe manifestations of their conditions, such as smearing blood or feces.” In September, a federal judge found that these conditions violated people’s constitutional rights and allowed a second hearing to proceed in January. The parties are currently waiting on the court’s order for a remedy.

In California, the family of Logan Masterson sued the Santa Rita Jail after he died by hanging himself in an isolation cell in 2018, two days after he was transferred from a suicide watch cell. Before that, Masterson had been held in a “safety cell.”

According to the lawsuit, which was settled in 2021, jail staff placed people in psychiatric distress into safety cells, “rather than individually determining the least restrictive environment in which a suicidal prisoner can be safely housed.” The complaint alleged that the safety cells had no furnishings, no toilets, and usually no outside windows. It stated, “The only features of the cell are the door, which has a slot through which food can be delivered, and a grate in the floor that serves as the toilet. Without toilet paper in these cells, and no way to wash, feces makes its way across the cell, on the floors and walls.”



The complaint also noted that people in these safety cells often have their clothes confiscated. “There is no mattress or pad, let alone a bed, in the safety cells for prisoners to sit or sleep on,” the complaint alleged. “Prisoners are thus forced to sit, sleep, and eat on the same cold, dirty floor on which the grate for the toilet is located.”

THE DEMEANING, DEBILITATING conditions in suicide watch units can deter people from being honest with medical professionals. “Many otherwise suicidal inmates may be reluctant to share their suicidal ideation for fear of being placed in an environment they perceive as punitive,” wrote Jeffrey L. Metzner and Lindsay M. Hayes, leading national experts on correctional suicide, in a 2020 textbook published by the American Psychiatric Association.

In a 2013 paper, Hayes painted a picture of how this scenario often plays out. “Take, for example, the inmate who is on suicide precautions for attempting suicide the previous day,” he wrote. “He is now naked in a cell with only a suicide smock, given finger foods, and on lockdown status. The mental health clinician approaches the cell and asks the inmate through the food slot (within hearing distance of others on the cellblock): ‘How are you feeling today? Still feeling suicidal?’... Will this inmate’s response be influenced by their current predicament? How would any of us respond?”

Repeated suicide attempts, especially when followed by claims of improvement, can cause people to cycle on and off suicide watch units. Kupers noted that in the hundreds of investigations he has conducted following prison suicides, the individual frequently cycled between suicide watch and solitary confinement, and ultimately died by suicide in a solitary confinement cell.

Kupers finds this pattern alarming. “In my opinion, anyone at high enough risk to be sent to observation should never be sent back to a solitary confinement cell and should be monitored for suicide risk, at a tapering-off level of monitoring, for quite a while after the stay in observation,” he wrote to *The Nation*.

Admire Harvard, a trans woman incarcerated in a men’s prison in Florida, has experienced this type of cycling in the extreme. Harvard, who has been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and gender dysphoria, was the lead named plaintiff in a solitary confinement lawsuit brought against the state Department of Corrections by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2019. At age 18, Harvard was sent to solitary confinement for 60 days for allegedly lying to prison staff to



get a high-calorie meal. Her stint in solitary ballooned to almost 10 years as she racked up more than 125 infractions, most of which were for nonviolent behaviors related to her mental health, such as kicking the cell door or disrespecting staff.

As her mental health deteriorated, Harvard was hospitalized for psychiatric reasons around 20 times and cycled on and off suicide watch more than 50 times. The plaintiffs and their attorneys sought class-action status on behalf of all people held in solitary confinement in Florida prisons, but that status was denied in 2022 by a Donald Trump–appointed judge. After losing on class certification, Harvard and the other named plaintiffs voluntarily dismissed the case.

CORRECTIONAL STAFF OFTEN BELIEVE THAT SUICIDES IN JAILS AND PRISONS are impossible to predict and prevent, an attitude that can impede meaningful prevention efforts, write Metzner and Hayes.

Hayes wrote that instead of taking a more comprehensive approach, prison officials “appear preoccupied” with using suicide watch technology such as closed-circuit television monitoring and so-called suicide-resistant jail cells and safety smocks. There is an entire industry dedicated to manufacturing and selling products like anti-suicide smocks and blankets for prisons and jails.

Hayes believes that correctional officials are also often overly focused on whether someone is suicidal at intake. Incarcerated people are constantly at risk of poor mental health outcomes from the dismal living conditions, exposure to violence, and reliving of past trauma behind bars. Receiving bad news from home, a negative trial decision, or a denied parole application can also set back their mental health.

“Screening for suicide risk during the initial booking and intake process should be viewed as something similar to taking one’s temperature—it can identify a current fever, but not a future cold,” Hayes wrote. “Suicides are prevented and suicide rates reduced when correctional facilities provide a comprehensive array of programming that identifies suicidal inmates who are otherwise difficult to identify, ensures their safety on suicide precautions, and provides a continuity of care throughout confinement.”

Professional health organizations recommend that prisons and jails establish clear written policies; allow only qualified mental health professionals to make decisions about suicide watch placement; hold better and more frequent staff trainings on suicide prevention and first

A person held in the psychiatric unit at the Pierce County Jail in Tacoma, Wash., lies under a blanket on a bunk.

“Anyone at high enough risk to be sent to observation should never be sent back to a solitary confinement cell.”

—Terry Kupers

(continued on page 33)

Where there's smoke: A thick black plume rises over East Palestine, Ohio, on February 6, after a controlled burn of the toxic chemicals on the derailed Norfolk Southern train.



TESTING THE TOXIC TRAIN

Why is Norfolk Southern using a firm with a history of cover-ups to monitor air quality at the site of the Ohio crash?

BY JESSE MARX & NICOLAS NIARCHOS



BEFORE FEBRUARY 3, EAST PALESTINE, OHIO, WAS THE kind of place that balanced bucolic idyll with the convenience of urban living. The town, home to fewer than 5,000 people, is both far enough from Pittsburgh and close enough to it for residents to be able say, “We’re a bit in the city, but we’re a bit in the country.” That was before a portion of a 150-car freight train slipped off a track and burst into flames.

In the wake of the derailment, East Palestine was transformed into a vision from the Book of Revelation. “That fire was pretty long. It was, what, three or four city blocks long,” said Jim Figley, a lifelong East Palestinian who owns the Sparografix sign shop, a few hundred feet from the crash site. “It was like a horror show.”

The locals had good reason to be terrified: The train was packed with toxic chemicals. So did Norfolk Southern, the railroad that’s potentially liable for the crash, and the company quickly took responsibility for the cleanup. At a Senate hearing just over a month later, Norfolk Southern’s CEO, Alan Shaw, said he wanted to “make it right.” (This is a sound bite that has been repeated over and over in the media—even Norfolk Southern’s cleanup website is called “Making It Right.”) Shaw told Senator Bernie Sanders that everything was on the table in terms of providing for all of the town’s health care needs. “I am going to see this through. There are no strings attached to our assistance—if residents have a concern, we want them to come talk to us,” he said in prepared testimony.

What Shaw hadn’t told the senators was that within hours of the derailment, Norfolk Southern had hired the Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health (CTEH), a company with a long history of questionable practices, to conduct the air monitoring that helped to indicate whether the air was safe to breathe.

On February 8, the governors of Ohio and Pennsylvania told residents that it was safe to come back—partly on the strength of the CTEH data. Yet after they returned home, East Palestinians began reporting headaches, respiratory issues, and rashes, among other symptoms. Figley’s wife, who works next to the crash site, said she had trouble breathing when she returned to work.

None of this should have come as a surprise. Eleven of the derailed cars had been full of toxic chemicals like butyl acrylate, ethylene glycol monobutyl ether, ethylhexyl acrylate, and isobutylene. The worst among them was vinyl chloride. When vinyl chloride is inhaled at high concentrations, people have reported tasting something sweet, as well as, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dizziness, drowsiness, headaches, and hallucinations. The gas is quickly dissolved in the blood and spreads from the lungs to the liver, spleen, kidneys, and brain. If inhaled in high enough doses, vinyl chloride depresses the central nervous system and can be fatal.

The effects of long-term exposure to vinyl chloride are horrific. It can warp the skin and bones of the hand, maim



Who’s sorry now: Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw promised Senator Bernie Sanders that the company would provide for all of the town’s health care needs.

the lungs, and promote cancers in the brain and liver. In pregnant women, it crosses the placenta and enters fetal blood. In animal studies, the chemical has reduced the weight of the testes and the speed with which they are able to regenerate; the CDC says that men who work with the chemical have experienced a loss of sex drive.

In East Palestine, the chemicals quickly killed more than 43,700 fish as well as other wildlife. The last residents near the site were evacuated on February 5. A day later, chemicals from the derailed cars were dumped into a trench and burned. The thick black plume of smoke could be seen all around town.

IN A PROMOTIONAL VIDEO FOR NORFOLK Southern released on February 21 and staged to look like a news clip, Sarah Burnett, a scientist at CTEH, tells residents, “We have detected no vinyl chloride or other constituents related to this incident in the air” and that “all of our air monitoring and sampling data collectively do

“Air monitoring and sampling data do not indicate any risks to [residents], their children, or their families.”

—Sarah Burnett, CTEH scientist

not indicate any short- or long-term risks to [residents], their children, or their families.”

The CTEH air monitoring data is posted on the “Making It Right” website. Green dots on maps of the town indicate no chemicals in the air. Until

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show that in the late 1990s, CTEH was retained by law firms representing Big Tobacco and provided testimony raising doubts about the risks of secondhand smoke.

CTEH has been hired during some of the worst environmental disasters in American history—often by the very companies that caused them. CTEH conducted environmental testing after an oil storage tank spilled into a New Orleans suburb during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and again after the Deepwater Horizon explosion spewed billions of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. When Exxon-Mobil’s Pegasus pipeline burst in Mayflower, Ark., in 2013, CTEH did the monitoring. And in Paulsboro, N.J., in 2012, CTEH employees monitored a Conrail crash site where vinyl chloride was released into the atmosphere.

During each of these incidents, CTEH was criticized by environmental groups or government agencies, and residents or workers reported becoming sick after they were told it was safe to return to normal life. In 2012, another derailed train—this time in Kentucky—blew up after an air monitor employed by CTEH indicated it was safe to ignite a cutting torch. Two cleanup workers were disfigured for life and settled a lawsuit against CTEH and the rail companies in 2016. (Nony disputed the criticisms of CTEH in all of these instances; in Kentucky, he insisted, the CTEH employee had not given the OK.)

East Palestine residents are now calling for truly independent testing—paid for by Norfolk Southern but administered by independent scientists—followed by years of medical monitoring. It could take that long to determine whether residents have been affected by dioxin poisoning. (“All environmental monitoring activities performed by CTEH are done so under plans approved by and frequently in concert with the U.S. EPA, and Unified Command in East Palestine,” said Spielmaker, the Norfolk Southern spokesperson.)

Even though Ohio Governor Mike DeWine reported that the state EPA’s tests at the five wells that feed into East Palestine’s municipal water supply have all come back clean, it can take months before chemicals enter the water supply. A Purdue University scientist who has collected and analyzed samples told Indianapolis’s WRTV in March that he was “shocked at how much contamination remained in the creeks...and how the public wasn’t warned about these issues.” In the meantime, a hazardous waste incinerator in nearby East Liverpool that has been repeatedly accused of emitting gases containing high levels of toxic chemicals—violating the Clean Air Act nearly 200 times between 2010 and 2014 alone, according to the EPA—was selected to burn the toxic dirt.

In previous cases involving CTEH, when

recently, three yellow or blue dots inside the cleanup site indicated low or moderate levels of chemicals in the air. For people who might be concerned, the website assured them that “these detections do not extend beyond work area boundaries and pose no health risk to the community.” The narrator of the Norfolk Southern video says, news-anchor style, “They’ve collected hundreds of thousands of data points, giving them the confidence to say the air is safe.”

But people still felt sick, and CTEH’s monitors—which are being called “independent” even by the Environmental Protection Agency, despite CTEH having been chosen and paid for by Norfolk Southern—were deployed around the cleanup site. “Some residents have been affected by odors of butyl acrylate, a simple irritant also involved in the derailment, at levels that would present a nuisance odor,” Dr. Paul Nony, one of CTEH’s principal toxicologists, wrote in an e-mail to *The Nation*. Calling in to Glenn Beck’s radio show, Katlyn Schwarzwaelder, a

dog breeder in East Palestine, said a CTEH monitor had come to her home to test the air and tried to get her to sign a waiver indemnifying Norfolk Southern. (“A small batch of mistaken forms...were removed from circulation as soon as the issue was noticed,” Connor Spielmaker, a media relations manager for Norfolk Southern, told *The Nation* when asked about the forms.)

“One of the lessons we learned was: The more they tell you it’s all right, the worse it is.”

—Chris Irwin

Amanda Kiger, co-executive director of River Valley Organizing, an Ohio community group, said trust in both the government and big business is nonexistent in an area known historically for resource extraction. In the weeks after the crash, people returned home to find a rainbow of chemicals in a creek called Sulphur Run. “All the while, they’re saying there’s nothing to see here,” Kiger said. “Everything’s good.”

BUT VIEWERS WERE LEFT TO WONDER: WHO IS CTEH? The video didn’t acknowledge that Norfolk Southern had hired the company, whose name has the ring of a government agency. “CTEH has decades of experience handling toxicology and environmental health issues in communities around the country, working with a variety of government services and businesses,” the video’s narrator says, but there’s no further elaboration.

Since CTEH’s founding in 1997, disasters and their toxic health effects have been its bread and butter. Legal documents

Nothing to worry about? Concerned East Palestine residents gather at an informational meeting called by River Valley Organizing.

independent monitoring of the type sought by the residents of East Palestine has been done, the company's monitoring data has often been found unreliable.

For the most part, such independent monitoring has taken place as a result of local initiatives. In Kingston, Tenn., a coal ash storage facility crumbled in 2008, releasing a tide of toxic chemicals. In the aftermath, the authority responsible for the spill hired CTEH to do air monitoring. When advocates who criticized CTEH's practices started doing their own monitoring, they were harassed by local police, and one member was arrested. In the decade and a half since, more than 50 workers who were involved in the cleanup effort have died, and hundreds of others have been sickened by respiratory and other diseases linked to coal ash chemical exposure. (Nony said that CTEH was not involved in monitoring the work area.) "One of the lessons we learned was: The more they tell you it's all right, the worse it is," said Chris Irwin, a lawyer who represented the independent monitors.

A survey of CTEH's history indicates that the company has a record of playing down serious health and safety threats to residents and workers. As Anne Rolfes, an activist who criticized the work of CTEH in 2005, told *The Nation*, "They're in the business of not finding a problem."

Responding to these allegations, Nony wrote that "CTEH's results and methodologies do not depend upon who has hired CTEH. We report the health risks that are indicated by the data we collect." He insisted that CTEH has found

health risks on nearly every project the company has worked on in the past 25 years. "CTEH reports the results to regulators, provides scientific interpretation of the results, and is not involved in downplaying or otherwise commenting on the results beyond scientific interpretation," Nony said.

The story of CTEH is in many ways the story of the United States in the early decades of the 21st century. The US government and US companies have come to rely on contractors for just about everything: for defense, intelligence, technology, and—with



companies like CTEH—disaster response. (A subsidiary of another company involved in the monitoring in East Palestine was sued by the US Department of Justice.)

"I believe consulting firms like CTEH are tangled in irreparable conflicts of interest," David Michaels, the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration during the Obama years, recently wrote in *Time*. "If they produce results showing the clients' products are harmful, it seems likely that their client base would quickly disappear." Nony disputed this characterization: "CTEH's fees are paid for the work we perform, not the results of our work," he wrote to *The Nation*. "The data generated by CTEH are scrutinized by other third parties, and the data speak for themselves."

In East Palestine, as elsewhere, money provides its own logic. Huge quantities of vinyl chloride are transported in pressurized rail tanks around the United States every year. The chemical is used to make PVC, a plastic used in plumbing, electrical lining, and simulated leather products. In 2019, the US produced 7.2 million metric tons of PVC, with a value of around \$6.2 billion. This is not a market that will sit around and wait for East Palestine to be cleaned up.

"If you want reliable independent monitoring, you should have independent monitors, not people who are hired by one of the parties," Stanton Glantz, a retired professor at UC San Francisco and cofounder of its Truth Tobacco Industry Documents Library, said recently. "He who pays the piper calls the tune." **N**

Additional reporting and research by Andrea Navarro and Jesse Newman.

"If you want reliable independent monitoring, you should have independent monitors. He who pays the piper calls the tune." —Stanton Glantz

The fire last time: A Coast Guard photo of the Deepwater Horizon rig, which leaked 1,000 barrels of oil a day into the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010.

The fire this time: A drone photo taken on February 4 shows the extent of the East Palestine wreck—with portions of the train still on fire.





The Parents' Crusade

How the right's school-themed extremism has triggered a nationwide backlash.

BY JENNIFER C. BERKSHIRE

KARIN CEVASCO WAS KEEPING A WARY EYE ON THE VOTING RETURNS. For months ahead of this spring's election, the school board of the southern New Hampshire town of Milford had been the site of intense acrimony. Conservative parents pushed to remove a gay-themed memoir from school libraries and demanded that bathrooms and locker rooms be segregated by sex, not gender identity, all in the name of parental rights. After the school board, dominated by conservatives, banned some students in the town's middle and high schools from using urinals or shared spaces in locker rooms, more than 100 students walked out in protest.

Now local voters had a chance to turn the tide. For months, Cevasco, the mother of two children in the Milford schools, had been organizing parents and community members to fight back. What started as a lonely effort by a handful of parents was ballooning. When Cevasco put together an event to show support for the district's LGBTQ students last fall, parents came from all over the state to participate. And in the run-up to the election, Cevasco and other parents spent weeks organizing and canvassing, trying to translate the backlash against the school board's controversial policies into votes.

It worked. Voters turned out in robust numbers for an election that had been pushed back for two weeks because of a blizzard, selecting an incumbent and a newcomer who'd run on the need for safe, affirming schools for all kids. More important, says Cevasco, voters said "no thanks" to a former GOP state senator and member of the right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council who'd sought to cement the board's conservative direction. "This was really a statement by our voters about the kind of schools and community we want," Cevasco says.

After the town moderator announced the results of the vote, the conservative board members, who'd been huddled together in the Milford High School gym, slunk out. The scene was an apt metaphor for the state of the right's wide-ranging bid to wage a school culture war for political gain. Instead of luring disaffected suburban voters back into the GOP fold, the increasingly extreme rhetoric about schools, teachers, and even kids appears to be having the opposite effect. An issue that was supposed to usher in a po-

litical realignment is not just falling flat beyond the GOP base—it's galvanizing opposition. Now, as Republicans double down on their incendiary claims about schools, Democrats and progressives have an opportunity to turn the issue against them, winning over a key voting bloc in the process.

STOKING FEARS ABOUT THE imperiled parental control of children has been second nature on the American right for more than a century. The first time parental rights emerged as a rallying cry was in response to the Progressive Era effort to ban child labor. Conservative industry groups tapped into parents' unease over what they saw as state encroachment into the private realm of the family. Variations on this theme would play out again and again over the decades, always fueled by the same combustible mix of political opportunism and parental anxiety about the pace of social and cultural change. In the 1970s, the newly created Heritage Foundation would rush to West Virginia to fan the flames of a battle over textbooks, again warning parents about indoctrination in the schools (secular humanism! cannibalism!) to spur alarm over liberal-minded education. In the 1990s, the GOP included a parental rights plank in its Contract

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With America, and Patrick Buchanan promised that he would be the president of the parents.

We owe the most recent reappearance of the cause to the Covid-19 pandemic and the profound disruptions to the domestic order of the country wrought by school closures. But the marquee struggle in the current parental rights moment began in earnest on September 28, 2021. That was when the Democratic candidate for governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, discussed the appropriate role of parents in schools during a debate. “I’m not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decision,” McAuliffe said—a remark that now feels prescient, however ill-advised it seemed to political strategists at the time. His opponent, Republican Glenn Youngkin, quickly seized on what many considered a blunder in McAuliffe’s campaign messaging.

The exchange and its aftermath quickly became the stuff of legend. Parental anger—over school closures, Covid mitigation, and the alleged excesses of “woke” curriculums in the public schools—had fueled Youngkin’s upset win, went the story. The same constellation of issues was now poised to power a “red wave” in the 2022 midterms, the likes of which the land had never seen.

Lost in the fog of myth was McAuliffe’s unique awfulness as a candidate. His dogged efforts to nationalize the election by painting Youngkin as Virginia’s version of Donald Trump never caught on with voters who were as tired of Trump as they were of McAuliffe himself. Lost, too, was Youngkin’s more complicated appeal to parents. Yes, he milked the right’s growing obsession with critical race theory and warned on the stump that George Soros had inserted political operatives onto local school boards. But to affluent suburban voters, he hammered home a different message: that Virginia’s elite magnet high school, a pipeline to the Ivies, had lowered its standards, something he would reverse. For good measure, Youngkin threw in a pledge to make the biggest investment in education in Virginia’s history.

Parent-to-privatization pipeline: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signs a bill to expand private school vouchers this spring.

Instead of a parent-powered red wave, Michigan saw a Democratic sweep that gave the party control of the state government.

The result, as Youngkin’s campaign advisers pointed out, was an unlikely coalition of voters. “Having school-choice people in the same room with a CRT person with an advanced math [person] along with people who want school resource officers in every school—that’s a pretty eclectic group of people,” Youngkin strategist Jeff Roe told *Politico*.

There were plenty of signs to suggest that the right was misreading Youngkin’s victory. In the run-up to the midterms, the Republican National Committee released a polling memo that warned against overplaying alarmist messaging on the schools. It wasn’t enough to focus on the “radical agenda Democrats have for K-12,” the pollsters argued. “Republicans must create compassion” and “reach out to a broader coalition.” The poll echoed an earlier national survey, conducted by the conservative, free-market Club for Growth, which determined that the attacks on critical race theory appealed to few voters outside the hard-core GOP base and warned that anti-teacher messaging was dangerously unpopular.

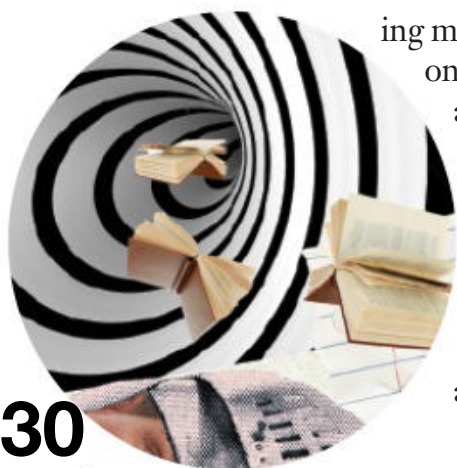
WHATEVER MORE NUANCED LESSONS there were to be mined from Youngkin’s campaign went unheeded by Republicans amid a confident new consensus on the right that parental anxiety was a bankable ticket to power. “There is a huge red wave coming,” declared Missouri state Representative Brian Seitz in January 2022. A pastor and a businessman, Seitz was leading the charge to “shut down” critical race theory in Missouri. “Virginia is just a microcosm of the rest of the United States,” Seitz said. As the midterms approached, the belief that bipartisan parental anger would power a red wave only grew more certain. “The great education reset is under way,” opined the conservative pundit Hugh Hewitt, predicting an earthquake in school board elections, not to mention

a painful reckoning for complacent Democrats.

But on the campaign trail, it was getting harder to discern precisely what GOP candidates meant when they positioned themselves as guardians of parental rights. In Pennsylvania, gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano pledged to rid elementary schools of graphic porn. In Michigan, Republican gubernatorial candidate Tudor Dixon accused teachers of “grooming” kids, while Matthew DePerno, running to become state attorney general, warned that public schools wanted to indoctrinate young Michiganders and teach them “to hate God, hate their country, and hate their parents.” In New Hampshire, GOP Senate candidate Don Bolduc told supporters that schools were installing litter boxes for kids who identify as cats. “I wish I was making it up,” Bolduc told the crowd. (Spoiler alert: He was.)

The media takeaway from the midterms was that playing up the school culture wars had produced mixed results for Republicans. While there had been no red wave, parental rights had powered Ron DeSantis’s return to the Florida governor’s mansion.

Yet most election postmortems failed to capture just how much of a flop the cause turned out to be. According to the National Education Association, pro-public-education candidates won in many competitive gubernatorial races, including in Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, as well as in 71 percent of the school board races the union was tracking throughout the country. In California, where the state GOP was pinning its



hopes for a return to relevance on school board takeovers, conservative school board candidates lost in most of their races. Even in Virginia, parental rights failed to animate voters. In a special election in Virginia's Fourth Congressional District, Republican Leon Benjamin, a pastor who embraced Youngkin's message, lost by a margin of roughly 3 to 1. For months, Republicans had argued that emphasizing parental rights would lure back moderate suburbanites. Instead, the GOP candidates' growing embrace of fringe cultural issues likely repelled them.

In Michigan and other key swing states, "the extreme language fell really flat," says Paula Herbart, president of the Michigan Education Association, which represents about 120,000 teachers, education support professionals, and higher-education employees. She points to a special election in western Michigan last spring for a seat that had previously only ever been held by a Republican. Former teacher Carol Glanville upset the GOP candidate—a parental rights advocate who wanted to abolish the state's compulsory education law.

Last year, the union endorsed candidates in more than 300 school board elections, and more than 75 percent of them went on to win. The strategy of challenging extremist candidates who ran on banning books and other extreme positions paid off beyond the local level, Herbart says. "We knew that if we could get people out for school board, they'd vote for public education candidates up and down the ballot."

Tudor Dixon, who campaigned on ridding schools of porn and transgender athletes, ended up losing to the incumbent governor, Gretchen Whitmer, by nearly 11 points. Instead of a parent-powered red wave, Michigan saw the opposite: a Democratic sweep that put the party in control of the governorship and both legislative chambers for the first time in 40 years.

THREE DECADES AGO, PARENTAL RIGHTS appeared poised to remake the educational landscape, upending electoral politics in the process. A coalition of conservative groups, including one headed by Betsy DeVos, sought to amend every state constitution to keep the government from interfering in how parents educate and raise their children. Advocates found a receptive audience among influential pundits, who cheered what struck them as a populist rebellion against state overreach.

But that 1990s effort also fizzled as voters began to understand what parental rights really meant. Then, as now, the crusade came to be seen as a stalking horse for a larger, far less popular project: dismantling public education. And the more voters saw the cause as empowering a small minority of conservative parents

to limit what kids in schools could learn or talk about—or worse, making vulnerable kids more vulnerable—the less they liked it. In Colorado, where advocates put a parental rights amendment on the ballot in 1996, voters rejected the measure by nearly 60 percent, a precipitous decline for a question that had started out polling at close to 80 percent in favor. The collapse of the Colorado initiative marked the beginning of the end for that iteration of the parental rights crusade. The more the debate shifted to what conservative parents' groups wanted to ban, the less potent the political issue became.

A similar trajectory appears to be under way today. While polls show strong backing for giving parents greater influence over their kids' curriculums, the support nosedives when that translates into narrowing the scope of instruction or banning books. In a recent Navigator poll assessing voter opinions on House Republicans, the respondents—and notably independent voters—expressed deep concern over GOP bans on teaching accurate history in public schools. According to the survey, voters are nearly as fearful of such policies as they are of cuts to Social Security and Medicare—and more fearful than they were over a national ban on abortion. Other opinion surveys indicate that book banning is broadly unpopular. A poll conducted last winter by CBS News/YouGov found that more than 8 in 10 Americans reject the banning of books about history or race from schools—opposition that crosses party lines. Nor is there much support for banning books that discuss sexuality: A survey from the EveryLibrary Institute found that just a third of voters back such bans.

The Parents Bill of Rights Act passed by House Republicans this spring was intended to be a centerpiece of the party's agenda, not to mention a source of endless attack ads against Democrats who voted against it. Instead, GOP leaders rushed to distance the bill from the growing right-wing push to ban books. Virginia Foxx, chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, pointed out that the bill, which includes a new federal requirement that parents receive a list of every book on offer in the school library and be notified regarding the bathrooms used



Pro-public-education candidates won in many 2022 gubernatorial elections, and in school board races across the country.

Wounded culture warrior: Failed Michigan governor hopeful Tudor Dixon promotes the anti-public-education moral panic.



by transgender students, didn't actually say anything about banning books. The legislation, her colleague Chip Roy from Texas insisted, "just ensure[s] that parents know what's in the libraries and what's in the curriculum. It does nothing more."

FOR REPUBLICAN CULTURE WAR CANDIDATES, THE ELECTORAL MATH IS increasingly unforgiving. Even as their rhetoric alienates voters beyond the GOP base, the coalitions of groups aligning against them are expanding. In elections this April, school board candidates who focused on critical race theory and transgender students largely flamed out in Illinois and the key battleground state of Wisconsin. Organizers in these states credited their recent wins to success in mobilizing the local Democratic Party, teachers' unions, and community groups on behalf of candidates who embraced pro-public-education messages and talked about the need to keep all students safe.

In suburban Elmhurst, Ill., a broad array of groups united in opposition to conservative school board candidates, who had cycled through a shifting litany of complaints about the local schools, beginning with masks and the teaching of critical race theory, then Marxist indoctrination, before finally settling on property taxes and declining test scores. Members of several parents' groups, including special education parents, as well as local LGBTQ advocates and the teachers' union, united to support four candidates who pledged to address the well-being of students in areas beyond test scores. They won decisively.

"That holistic vision appealed to a lot of people," says Elizabeth Collins, who helps lead a group of local parents and community members advocating for a more inclusive approach to public education. "It's really inspiring when you have all of these different groups coming together to say, 'This is the Elmhurst I want.'"



For GOP culture war candidates, the electoral math looks increasingly unforgiving.

Among the believers: Two Glenn Youngkin supporters at a 2021 rally in Leesburg, Va.

In New Hampshire, candidates who ran on censoring history, dismantling public education, and targeting LGBTQ students and families have gone down to defeat in the last two school board election cycles. This spring, progressive public school advocates once again swept local elections, continuing a trend that began in 2022. In the once reliable Republican stronghold of Wolfeboro, voters overwhelmingly approved a measure to prohibit the use of town funds to ban books from the local library. And in the conservative community of Brentwood, voters rejected a candidate who'd railed against critical race theory and repeatedly charged a local elementary school with "sexualizing" kids. It was her fourth successive defeat. "Unfortunately, Brentwood has turned 'blue,'" the candidate told her supporters.

"These are deep-red, wealthy communities," says Sarah Robinson, the education justice campaign director for Granite State Progress and a member of the school board in Concord. "And what you're seeing is that folks are showing up to say, 'This is not us.'"

In March, a parental bill of rights stalled in the New Hampshire Legislature over concerns that requiring teachers to disclose information about student pronoun use could put gay and transgender kids in danger. That

concern was not assuaged when a GOP representative, speaking in favor of the bill, seemed to imply that students who feared a violent reaction from parents were exaggerating. After the bill failed, a prominent Republican expressed frustration that so few New Hampshire parents had shown up to support it.

"They're calling it 'parental rights,' but what it really means is control for a certain set of parents to be able to harass school staff and impinge

on kids' rights," says Linds Jakows, cofounder of the LGBTQ rights group 603 Equality. "The silver lining is that we have so many more parents on our side who see this for what it is: a strategic attempt to divide parents, teachers, and students and undermine the protections that public schools provide."

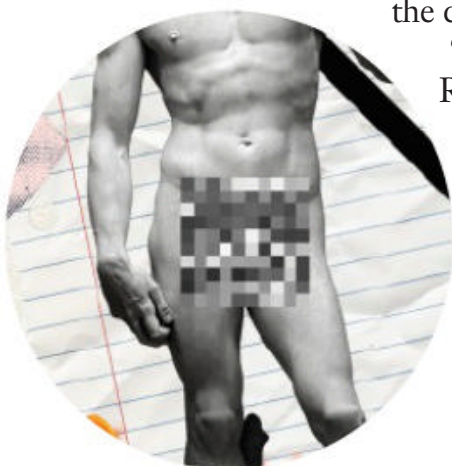
New Hampshire has been steadily turning blue in recent years, a shift driven in part by the backlash against the right's extreme culture war agenda. "Basically, what the right has tried to do is completely backfiring," Robinson says.



IN 2021, THE PROGRESSIVE GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S group Red Wine and Blue was suddenly fielding urgent calls from all over the country. Women in Ohio, Michigan, Texas, and North Carolina all had the same question: What is happening at my school board? The stories were remarkably similar: Well-organized groups, often with no connection to the local community, were descending on school board meetings. "People were describing the same messages, the same tactics," recalls Katie Paris, who founded the group in 2019.

Red Wine and Blue launched a series of Troublemakers Trainings to help instruct suburban moms on how to teach their friends and neighbors to fight back. And even as Republicans broadcast their intent to use the school wars to win back suburban voters, Paris and her colleagues were convinced the strategy would fall flat. "You're going to claw back suburban moms by scaring them? How dumb do you think we are? That lit the fire," Paris says.

While Republican candidates leaned into increasingly incendiary claims about local schools or pushed to have taxpayers pay for private religious schools, Red Wine and Blue members had completely different priorities. They stressed issues of safety, especially in the wake of high-profile school shootings, as well as adequate school funding and support for students and



teachers who are still struggling to recover from the pandemic. This stark disconnect helped propel suburban voters to vote for Democrats in the midterms, Paris argues.

Two years after parental rights emerged as the name-brand conservative cause sure to unleash a nationwide red wave, Paris says, the political landscape has completely shifted. For one thing, Red Wine and Blue is just one of many groups helping communities respond to extremist attacks on kids, teachers, and schools. And there is increasing recognition of the stakes in these battles, she continues. “People recognize that this isn’t just some fringe political movement but an effort to undermine public education, which is a pillar of our democracy.”

Meanwhile, the GOP is doubling down on educational extremism. Mike Pence is running ads in Iowa that target the gender identity policy of a small school district. Ron DeSantis, whose name is increasingly synonymous with book banning in the state he governs, recently got the Florida Board of Education to expand his controversial “Don’t Say Gay” law, which formerly applied to kids in the third grade and below, to all grades. And Donald Trump has added a line about “pink-haired communists teaching our kids” to his stump speech.

With the 2024 contest likely to hinge once again on suburban voters, the GOP’s lockstep embrace of culture war crusades that fail to resonate beyond a shrinking base is an opportunity for Democrats. But if Republicans learned the wrong lesson from Youngkin’s victory, so, too, did Democrats, who’ve been slow to push back forcefully against the right’s parental rights rhetoric or have adopted a “lite” version of it, as Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona sought to do in a recent interview. Democrats aren’t helped, of course, by the decades-long support that party leaders have voiced for school privatization in the name of innovation and student achievement. Now, as Republicans beat the drum for school vouchers, national Democrats often struggle to articulate how their particular brand of school choice is any different.

The answer to the Democrats’ messaging woes on education can be found in communities where grassroots coalitions are effectively countering right-wing extremism, making the case that public schools are essential democratic institutions. That’s a winning recipe, says Paris, one that risk-averse Democrats are ignoring at their peril: “Democrats should seize on the fact that the GOP’s messaging is backfiring, and in the process protect kids, public education, and democracy. I hope they wake up!” **N**

(continued from page 23)

aid; assess incarcerated people’s mental health periodically and after major events like court hearings; and avoid punishing suicide attempts or labeling suicidal ideation as manipulative. They also recommend placing people in the “least restrictive environment” possible.

Hayes and Metzner further advise that people on suicide watch should be housed with the general population, if possible, and that interactions with staff should be encouraged. Physical restraints should be avoided, and people should retain access to routine privileges like showers, visits, phone calls, out-of-cell exercise, and their own clothing. People expressing suicidal ideation should be observed at intervals of no more than 10 to 15 minutes. Those who are actively suicidal should be observed continuously and should meet privately with mental health staff daily.

Of course, the most effective way to limit correctional suicides would

be to stop incarcerating people with serious mental health risks. Yet this is devastatingly common: In the last comprehensive national survey of people in jails, conducted between February 2011 and May 2012, 44 percent of respondents reported having been previously diagnosed with a mental disorder, and more than 26 percent had experienced “serious psychological distress” in the 30 days prior to taking the survey.



Kupers supports shifting mental health care from the criminal justice system to a community-based one. In a 2021 statement, the American Public Health Association similarly argued that mental health treatment should occur in the community, not in jails and prisons, no matter how “humane and trauma-informed” they claim to be. Instead, the APHA makes clear that “community-based care, support, and accountability best promote health, well-being, and justice.”

Some cities, including Atlanta and Los Angeles, are in the midst of early-stage efforts to replace jails with hospital beds, supportive housing, and other non-correctional facilities. And since the trauma of incarceration can produce suicidality in people without a

history of mental illness, broader diversion programs and community initiatives, such as Offices of Neighborhood Safety, can help reduce incarceration—and therefore suicides—behind bars.

Of course, these initiatives require the public and political will to divert funds from the criminal justice system to communities.

In the meantime, Gay says he continues to fight to abolish solitary confinement and punitive suicide watch cells.

“People [self-harm] for different reasons,” he explained. “There’s people that want to kill themselves. But then there’s people who, like me, want to alleviate the psychological pain. So instead of being indifferent and creating an invalidating environment, they should help validate the person and say to the person, ‘We’re here to help you. And this is how we can do it.’”

People on suicide watch “should have a mattress,” Gay continued. “They should have a blanket. They should have mental health [staff] see them daily. They should be able to have recreation with an activity therapist. They should have more contact, as opposed to less. They shouldn’t be just left in the cell, like someone left on dry sand on a deserted island.” **N**

The most effective way to limit correctional suicides would be to stop incarcerating people with serious mental health risks.



B&A

BOOKS the ARTS



One Big Union

The Red Scare and the fall of the IWW

BY MICHAEL KAZIN



IN BUTTE, MONT., MASKED MEN WOKE up radical labor organizer Frank Little, dragged him from their car, and then hanged his lifeless body from a railroad bridge. In Bisbee, Ariz., the county sheriff organized a gun-wielding posse that packed more than 1,000 striking miners into boxcars and sent them nearly 200 miles into the New Mexico desert without food or water. In the state of Washington, a local jury convicted several working men of murder after they defended their union hall from an armed raid by American Legionnaires, four of whom were killed in the fracas. In Chicago, a federal court found all 101 national leaders of that same union guilty of conspiring to violate

the Espionage Act, passed to criminalize opposition to World War I. The trial judge sentenced most of them to lengthy terms in prison, where abuse against anti-war dissenters was common.

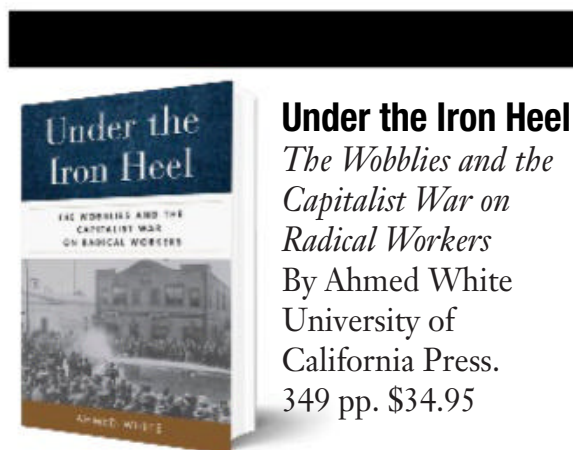
All of the victims belonged to a single, and singular, organization: the Industrial Workers of the World. Founded in 1905, the Wobblies set forth on a revolutionary mission. By engaging in frequent strikes and constant agitation, they would gradually persuade wage earners of every race, immigrant group, and gender to join their “One Big Union.” By demonstrating their ability to wrest higher pay and better treatment from recalcitrant employers, workers led by the Wobblies would learn the virtue of class solidarity. Then, some glorious day, the IWW predicted, all this organizing would pay off: Workers would show their bosses the door, take possession of every factory, mine, warehouse, and office, and run the economy for the benefit of all.

The Wobblies were Marxist in their analysis of capitalism but anarcho-syndicalist in the kind of society they yearned to establish: The state, they argued, should be replaced by a revolutionary union. In the catchy phrase of their best-known leader, William “Big Bill” Haywood, the IWW would be “socialism with its working clothes on.” That romantic vision—backed up by courageous, militant organizing—earned the admiration of such popular writers on the left as Upton Sinclair, John Reed, Helen Keller, and Jack London, and a membership as high as 100,000.

What excited many radicals about the IWW at its creation was the brash alternative it posed to the dominant forces in the labor movement and on the left, which had failed to mount a serious challenge to corporate rule. IWW leaders condemned the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a bastion of skilled craftsmen, for doing little to organize most industrial wage earners, and its leader, Samuel Gompers, for favoring mediation with employers instead of realizing that “the working class and the employing class have nothing in common.” And although the Wobblies did not tend to condemn the Socialist Party, which ran candidates in races throughout the nation, neither did they think one could topple the capitalist state by playing its rigged electoral game.

During the first decade of its existence, the IWW incurred the hatred of capitalists, the cops, and politicians from both major parties by signing up some of the poorest workers in the United States and leading them in at least 150 strikes. The Wobblies periodically disrupted production from the silk mills of Paterson, N.J., to the wheat fields of the Great Plains

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Under the Iron Heel

The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers
By Ahmed White
University of California Press.
349 pp. \$34.95

and the forests of the Pacific Northwest. They also insisted on their right to speak, without a permit, to crowds on the streets of the cities where they organized. Such actions led the authorities to throw thousands of Wobblies and their supporters in jail. The persecution intensified after the United States plunged into the Great War in 1917, when the IWW refused to stop calling for and leading strikes. By 1920, the Wobblies were broken, with most of their leaders in jail and their members hounded as pariahs. The organization survived, but it never recovered.

In *Under the Iron Heel*, Ahmed White memorializes the One Big Union by telling the lamentable story of its crushing during World War I and the Red Scare that followed. A law professor, White focuses on the legal means by which the state—on the federal, state, and local levels—tormented and persecuted its members, while offering an extended brief in defense of what the IWW was struggling to accomplish. He takes his title from *The Iron Heel*, a dystopian 1908 novel by Jack London about an anti-worker “Oligarchy” whose brutal rule presaged the history of fascism. Proceeding state by state and trial by trial, White describes, in vivid prose, “the vast scale and comprehensive reach” of this repression by governments and private

employers, illustrating “how in wrecking lives it also wrecked the union.” While White’s narrative of this legal assault is impressive, he does not wrestle with the ways in which the IWW’s own ideology and tactics limited its growth and gave its enemies an excuse to attack it. The same Wobblies who could be such skillful organizers did little to build a strong and durable organization.

In White’s telling, the most powerful legal weapon that prosecutors used to pummel the Wobblies was a new breed of laws designed for just that purpose: acts to punish “criminal syndicalism.” The statute, first passed overwhelmingly by the Idaho Legislature in 1917, set the precedent for other states. The bill, White explains, “made it a felony...to advocate or organize for, become a member of, or assemble with any organization that advocated” the newly created crime of using “violence, terrorism, and, notably sabotage” to bring about “social change.”

Since the IWW’s publications did, at times, advise unhappy workers to try a bit of sabotage when their foremen or bosses sought to lengthen their hours or decrease their pay, the new laws threw the union on the defensive. “The class struggle is a physical struggle and depends on physical force,” one IWW journalist wrote. A claw-brandishing “sab cat,” hued either tabby or black, had appeared on countless Wobbly leaflets and stickers. Organizers gently prodded workers to snarl up a machine or rip up sacks of grain. Yet while the union’s rhetoric and imagery often welcomed physical conflict, rank-and-file members rarely resorted to violence, even during strikes; they knew their heavily armed adversaries could quash their movement if they did.

In the end, however, although the IWW’s members rarely used sabotage, they were routinely prosecuted for allegedly threatening to do so. Cowed by the letter of the criminal-syndicalism laws, few juries had the courage to acquit defendants whose only true crime was to encourage working people to defend their interests, albeit in militant ways. Hundreds were arrested and jailed under these laws, and many more dropped out of the movement for fear of facing a prosecution that could have destroyed their lives.

For historians of this era, the story that White tells is, in broad terms, a familiar one. Melvyn Dubofsky devoted several chapters to the IWW's "Trials and Tribulations" in *We Shall Be All*, his comprehensive study of the union, published back in 1969. Adam Hochschild describes some of the same outrages in *American Midnight*, his luminous new saga of the tyranny visited on left-wing dissenters of all stripes during and after the United States entered the First World War.

But no one before White has given us such a precise and passionate account of the IWW's ordeal. He introduces little-known Wobbly organizers, explains the deeds that got them into such trouble with their powerful enemies, and then follows them into prison and, often, to their deaths. After being found guilty of criminal syndicalism, a California activist named Abe Shocker was dispatched to San Quentin. He resisted orders to work in the prison jute mill and was thrown into a dungeon, where he endured "weeks in darkness, on bread and water, with no bed or chair, only rags and straw on a wet floor." Driven insane by his time in that hellhole, Shocker killed himself.

White also sketches engaging profiles of the attorneys who toiled for the union's cause. One was Caroline Lowe, who studied law at a Socialist college in Kansas, then represented many Wobblies in court for free while also finding time to raise funds for their defense. Lowe belongs on any honor roll of unsung heroes of the left.

White's account of these forgotten dissenters is stirring. So too are his tales of the injustices that the Wobblies suffered, and there is no doubt this ferocious storm of legal persecution hobbled the union's ability to wage effective strikes and attract new members. But though White notes that the IWW's membership was "surging" in the months just before and after Congress declared war on Germany, even at the union's zenith, no more than 5 percent of the nation's union members were in its fold. Many of them signed up for a particular organizing push or work stoppage and then drifted away.

To continue striking during wartime did make the Wobblies vulnerable to repression, of course. But the failure to maintain their earlier momentum was not solely due to the iron heel of the state. Despite

its adamant opposition to the war, the Socialist Party continued to wage election campaigns and denounce the draft. The administration of President Woodrow Wilson censored the party's newspapers and banned some from the mail, and several of its most prominent spokespeople, such as Eugene Debs and Kate Richards O'Hare, were convicted under the Espionage Act and spent years in federal prison. But in the fall of 1917, Morris Hillquit, a union attorney and a leading voice in the party on international affairs, ran for mayor of New York City on an anti-war platform and won close to 25 percent of the vote in a four-way contest. Persecution by the state, however severe, was not the only reason the Wobblies were incapable of building their organization into the One Big Union of their dreams.

In his narration of the Wobblies' travails during the war years, White fails to look inward as well. It was not just the state and employers that hampered their efforts but also the union's ideology and freewheeling style, which kept it from becoming a serious alternative to the AFL, much less getting anywhere close to realizing a syndicalist future. Time and again, IWW organizers made daring efforts to mobilize some of the poorest workers in the nation but left no lasting presence of their power behind. Typically, the organizers would arrive on the scene, inspire people who made little and owned nothing to lay down their tools and abandon their machines, and then did little to counter the weapons, legal and otherwise, arrayed against them. Abjuring any truce in the class war, the Wobblies refused to sign contracts with employers or build many stable locals, and as a result, their beachheads of militancy soon disappeared.

A prime example was the big 1912 strike in the textile town of Lawrence, Mass., which White mentions only in passing. In midwinter, 14,000 workers walked out into the grimy snow to protest a pay cut at a string of woolen mills along the Merrimack River. The workers hailed from dozens of nations and spoke as many languages. They were able to hold out until spring, thanks to a strike committee as clever as it was energetic. Each sizable ethnic group sprouted its own relief brigade, providing food, med-

icine, and clothing to the workers and their families. The strike committee also diligently raised funds from supporters in Eastern cities, where compassion for the underdog ran strong. Friends of the union arranged for hundreds of kids whose parents were on the picket lines to stay with middle-class families in New York and Philadelphia.

About two weeks after this "Children's Crusade" had begun, local police blocked a large group of children who had gathered at the train station with their mothers and sponsors from embarking for Philadelphia. According to eyewitnesses, "The police...closed in on us with clubs, beating right and left.... The mothers and children were thus hurled in a mass and bodily dragged to a military truck, and even then clubbed, irrespective of the cries of the panic-stricken women and children."

Three weeks later, battered by awful press coverage, the company essentially surrendered: In all six mills that had met with the strike committee, workers got a big wage increase and the mill owners agreed not to discriminate against any employee who had walked off the job. "The strikers of Lawrence," declared Big Bill Haywood, "have won the most signal victory of any organized body of workers in the world."

The euphoria did not last long. A year following this triumph, the polyglot proletariat of Lawrence was once more at the mercy of its employers. Haywood and his fellow IWW leaders had left town soon after the strike to fan the flames of revolt elsewhere in America. The firms in Lawrence temporarily closed down several mills and encouraged each immigrant group to compete with the others for the jobs that remained. In the 1930s, employers did come to terms with a union. But this one was the Textile Workers of America, an affiliate of the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which signed a contract with the companies and won higher wages and better working conditions for its members.

The Lawrence uprising had been a thing of beauty for the textile workers and their radical spokespeople. Upton Sinclair dubbed it the "Bread and Roses" strike, after a contemporary poem which remarked that "hearts starve as well as bodies." But the aftermath of the strike revealed that, for all its romantic élan, the IWW did not know how to win.



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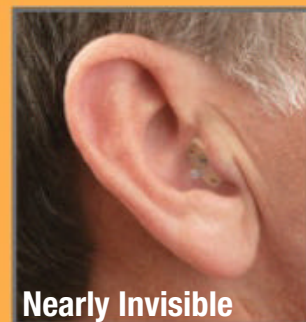
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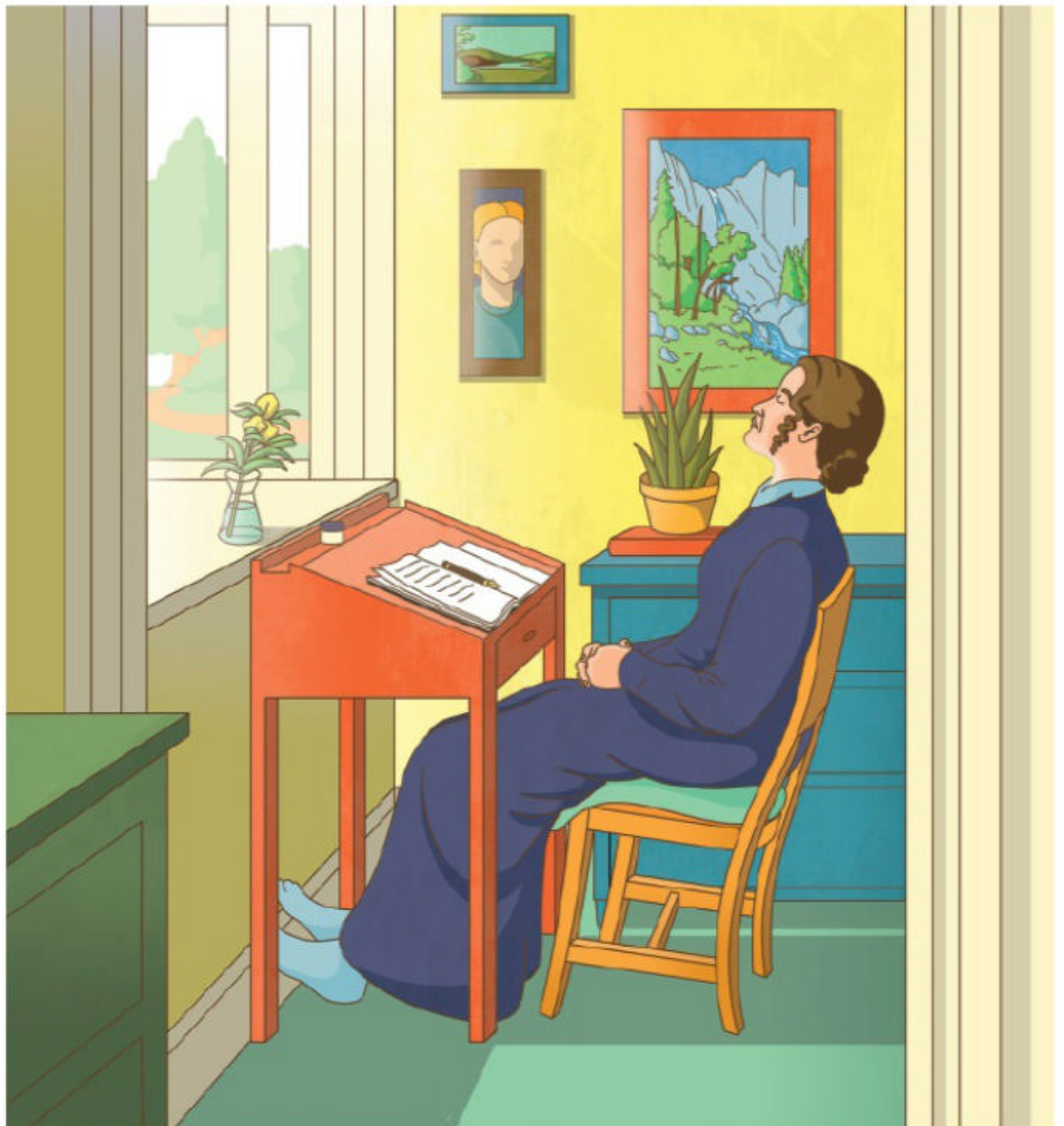
White is not merely a sympathetic historian of the Wobblies; he shares their politics and hails them as oracles of radical defeat. What the “story” of the war on the IWW “really does,” he writes, “is confirm the Wobblies’ own, darker anticipations as to the nature of capitalist rule, which align with the dismal fate of the labor movement and the radical left since the IWW’s decline, as well as the prophecies of the Wobblies’ most famous champion” Jack London.

The historical reality defies this fatalistic judgment. With the help of mass strikes and liberal politicians like Robert Wagner and Franklin Roosevelt, the “dismal” labor movement, spearheaded by both the AFL and the CIO, signed up 15 million workers by the middle of the 20th century. Its unions won job security and decent pay for most of their members—none of which the Wobblies managed to achieve for more than a small number of their members.

Of course, the American left has certainly not triumphed, but its vision and organizing played an essential role in winning Social Security and Medicare, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, and marriage equality—while radicals are among the leaders of today’s exciting, if still quite modest, revival of union organizing. And if the state had outlawed all opposition to capitalist domination, as London feared, neither White’s book nor this magazine would get published today.

The repression of the Wobblies was indeed a tragedy—the vicious squelching of an organization that strove, however imperfectly, to better the lives of working people—as well as a blatant violation of the First Amendment. But White’s pro-Wobbly take on the history of the last century undercuts the power of his meticulously documented and well-crafted narrative.

“When the union’s inspiration through the workers’ blood shall run / There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun” begins “Solidarity Forever,” the famous anthem written by Ralph Chaplin, the IWW’s poet laureate. For unions to boom again, they will need a brigade of organizers committed to the ideal of class equality. But without a realistic strategy for persuading millions to join them—and for overcoming the resistance of their powerful foes in politics, the courts, and the corporate suites—that vision will never come to pass. **N**



A Wider Embrace

The life and times of Lydia Maria Child

BY SUSAN CHEEVER

B

IOGRAPHY WAS ONCE THE ELEGANT Matriarch of nonfiction. Smelling faintly of lavender, she clutched her pearls when the story got too personal, or the author intruded on the narrative to address the reader, or the political machinery showed through the corseted layers of her heaving bodice. No more.

Her skirts are shorter now, her research notes briefer. Her authors prance through their pages telling us what to think and feel within a hodgepodge of genres—memoir, philosophy, even a bit of self-help.

Lydia Moland’s thorough, fascinating biography of the 19th-century writer Lydia Maria Child fits all of the above. “There’s a lesson here,” Moland writes of Child’s political awakening, in an aside that would wake up even the sleepest undergraduate. “Even if you resolve never to live your life the same way again, center before you stretch. Gather your

resources, find your arguments, get your facts straight. Uninformed enthusiasm helps no one.”

A growing number of 21st-century biographers are in the middle of a 19th-century restoration project. Skipping the 20th century, they are interested in giving voice and paying attention to the formerly visible—and currently invisible—women of the 1800s. There

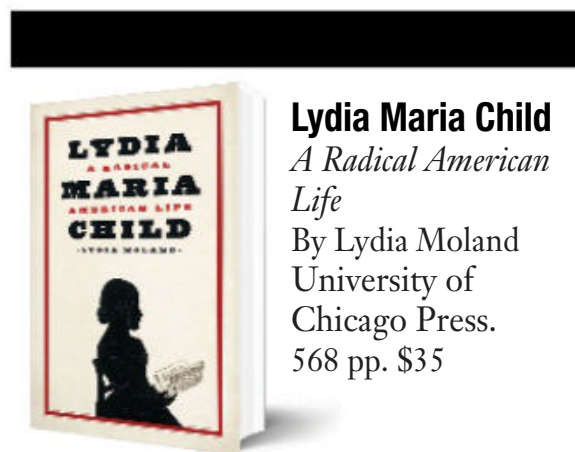
have been recent biographies of Margaret Fuller, the Grimké sisters, and Louisa May Alcott's youngest sister, Abigail May Nierike—all prominent figures in the 19th century who are often overlooked now. Meanwhile, *The New York Times*, worried about past omissions, is in the process of printing obituaries of the 19th-century women it once ignored.

In the old days, women did not go to college, couldn't own property, and didn't have the vote. Worse, they were also left out of their own history. Women could be of considerable importance in their time and then be almost entirely forgotten. Many 20th-century books about the 19th-century American Renaissance in literature, for instance, fail to mention that Louisa May Alcott was an important link between Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, or that Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne fell out over their shared passion for Margaret Fuller. The women who washed Emerson's dishes and raised his children, cooked for Thoreau when he walked into town from Walden Pond, mended Herman Melville's black waistcoat, and put up with Bronson Alcott's loony ideas have all been rendered invisible.

Lydia Maria Child is another famous 19th-century woman you have probably never heard of, although you may know one of her poems by heart. In 1844, Child—who by that time was already famous as an abolitionist and women's rights advocate—wrote the sentimental poem “The New-England Boy's Song About Thanksgiving Day,” with its famous opening lines: “Over the river, and through the wood, / To Grandfather's House we go....” It was an oddly cheery choice for a political rabble-rouser who would offer to join John Brown in prison for his final days when the time came. “I think Child was trying something different,” Moland speculates regarding the Thanksgiving poem: “hoping that since all truths were interconnected, she could help her readers towards antislavery sentiments by encouraging a wider embrace of humanity.”

Although she had no children herself, Child was one of the first American writers to address children directly. When she was still in her 20s, she made a name for herself with the first periodical for children, *The Juvenile Miscellany*. Working as a teacher, she quickly wrote the first of a series of popular historical novels about New England, *Hobomok*. Her lifetime of writing included not just novels but poetry, essays, and self-help books. Child's *The American Frugal Housewife: Dedicated to Those Who Are Not Ashamed of Economy*

Susan Cheever is the author of Drinking in America and American Bloomsbury. Her next book, When All the Men Wore Hats, will be out in 2023.



Lydia Maria Child

A Radical American Life

By Lydia Moland
University of
Chicago Press.
568 pp. \$35

was hugely popular, and she also wrote helpful guides for mothers and for girls. Her biographical subjects ranged from Madame de Staël to the Quaker elder Isaac Hopper. Her *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833, was cited by people as varied as Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner in the 19th century and *Invisible Man* author Ralph Ellison in the 20th. Yet it took more than 100 years for Child to rate a biography: Carolyn Karcher's *The First Woman in the Republic*, published in 1994. Moland, who had never heard of Child until a chance encounter at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute, seeks to restore this prolific, passionate writer and activist to her former revered status.

Child was born in 1802, one of six children in the family of a Medford, Mass., baker. From her earliest years, she was fearless and great-hearted and witty, and as she got older, she wrote as if she had nothing to lose. In fact, she often did have something to lose: Her antislavery work sometimes cost her readers, even if it attracted oth-

ers, especially when she combined her sass with her furious commitments. In a heated correspondence on the subject of maternal care with John Brown, Virginia Governor Henry Wise, and Margaretta Mason, a Virginia senator's wife—which became a pamphlet that immediately sold 300,000 copies—Child responded to Mason: “Here at the North...after we have helped the mothers, we do not sell the babies.”

There are dozens of wonderful stories in this stew of a book, which covers Child's life and loves as well as the significant events of the era—including abolition, women's rights, Native American rights, John Brown's failed uprising, the Civil War, and the repulsive inhumanity of slavery. There is Col. Robert Gould Shaw, a white soldier leading the Black troops of the 54th Regiment as they marched triumphantly through Boston on their way to fight in Charleston, S.C., where Shaw would be killed. (His mother, Sarah, was Child's old, close friend.) There is the disheartening 1869 meeting of the American Equal Rights Association, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton sparred angrily with Frederick Douglass over which rights were more important—those involving gender or those involving race. And in the midst these stories is Child herself. As a fierce abolitionist—she controversially called for emancipation without reparations to slave owners—she was friends with Wil-

liam Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips as well as Charles Sumner. As an advocate of women's suffrage, she supported Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

The sweetest of the stories, and in some ways among the saddest, is her long and complicated marriage to David Child, a Harvard lawyer from a modest background who had distinguished himself by fighting in Spain on behalf of the liberal reformers against the French king, Louis XVIII. Lydia was a best-selling author by the time they met, and David wooed her by writing about her hugely successful romantic novels in the *Massachusetts Journal*. “He is the most gallant man that has lived since the sixteenth century,” Lydia wrote after meeting him again, “and needs nothing but a helmet,

**Context is always
a problem when it
comes to biography.**

shield, and chain armor to make him a complete knight of chivalry.”

Lydia and David were married in 1828 and stayed together through all manner of better and worse, sickness and health, wealth and poverty, including his absence for years at a time without much communication and her falling half in love with another man. There was also the con-

stant, unsettling, depressing lack of money. Child’s astonishing ability to earn through her writing was balanced by her husband’s astonishing ability to spend those earnings on cockeyed ideas. For example, David thought that he could bring an end to slavery by planting sugar beets in a field in Northampton, Mass. The sugar crop from the beets, he predicted, would become

much more profitable than the South’s existing cane sugar crop. Slavery would no longer have a viable economic basis and thus would come to an end all by itself. Loyal, his wife moved in with him in Northampton, poured money into the project, and cultivated this doomed crop.



History is how we understand ourselves, as people and as a nation, but writing biography across the centuries creates a problem of context. Should the writer try to reproduce the age she is writing about, or should she use her modern knowledge to critically reinterpret the past? Lydia Child may have been a brilliant writer serving a noble cause, but she lived in a world where the spread of disease was mysterious and few understood how the planets orbit the sun. In 2023, we have far more information than was available in the 1800s, to say nothing of the benefit of hindsight; should we not take advantage of this? Using the present to pass judgment on the past—“presentism,” as it’s sometimes called—is everywhere in modern biography, including this one.

Moland doesn’t hesitate to use her own voice and experience as a lens for understanding Child. She is outraged by the laws of coverture, which in 19th-century Massachusetts meant that when Lydia married David, everything she had, including her copyrights, automatically became his legal property. Yet Moland doesn’t speculate on why the couple never had children. “They probably never knew,” she writes, “and neither will we.”

Moland ends the book in the 21st century, having breakfast with her husband one October day. The leaves are turning; there’s a chill in the air; and frost shimmers on the meadow. Her husband asks how Lydia Child died. A heart attack, Moland replies, at the age of 78. At the time, Moland was at work on her Civil War chapter, but she confesses that Child’s end haunted her throughout the writing of the book. Lydia is buried in Wayland, Mass., about 14 miles from where she was born, Moland tells us, next to David and with an epitaph written by him. “You call us dead: We are not dead; We are truly living now.” Lydia Maria Child may or may not be “truly living” in another world now, but in the pages of this book she is certainly alive, vibrant and inspiring. **N**

Proper Fat

Thin with disgust

Fat with wordless joy

And patience

Thin like the opening of the gate

You pray you’ll make it through

Fat like the other side

Fat with pubescence

With moonstone or pearl

Thin protection

Fat as the ripe earth, before it was turned

The black soil, a dense fruit, unwavering

The fat trench of the womb

You share with your sisters

Fat like forgiveness and

God’s Grace that delivers you

From the enemy of yourself

Proper fat

Fat like a second, third and fourth chance

As the number of tries it takes

For you to finally get right

Dear, don’t mistake generous for infinite

Every abundance that can be chewed,

Can be expelled

Fat like the girl you always knew you were

The fat redemption

Hope, the innocence they couldn’t kill, swells

With its daughter

Always looking for the nearest rest stop?

New Prostate Discovery Helps Men Avoid “Extreme Bathroom Planning”

Men across the U.S. are praising a revolutionary prostate pill that’s 1000% more absorbable. Now the visionary MD who designed it is pulling out all the stops to keep up with surging demand...

Among the all-too-familiar, occasional problems like sleepless nights, frequent urination, late-night wake ups, a bladder that’s never quite empty, and constant, extreme planning for rest stops and bathroom breaks.

These are the common signs of inconvenient urinary issues. But men nationwide are now reporting they’ve found help these occasional problems thanks to a major breakthrough in nutrient technology.

Prosta-Vive LS is the new prostate pill sweeping the nation. Men say they feel they’re now having strong, complete, effortless urine flow they enjoyed in their 20s and 30s.

The key to its success is a new nutrient technology that makes the key ingredient 1000% more absorbable, according to a study by endocrinologists at Washington University in St. Louis.

Nick Summers is the spokesman for Primal Force Inc., the firm in Royal Palm Beach, Fla. that makes **Prosta-Vive LS**. He reports demand is surging due to word-of-mouth and social-media.

“We knew **Prosta-Vive** really worked to ‘support healthy, stronger urine flow,’” Summers stated. “But no one could have predicted the tens of thousands of men looking for a truly supportive prostate pill.”

NEW PROSTATE FORMULA DRAWS 5-STAR REVIEWS

It’s not the first time Dr. Al Sears, the Florida-based MD who designed the breakthrough formula, has shaken up the status quo in men’s health.

A nationally recognized men’s health pioneer and the founder of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Royal Palm Beach, Fla., Dr. Sears has been featured on ABC, CNN, and ESPN.

He’s authored more than 500 books, reports, and scientific articles, many focusing on prostate issues that may affect virtually all men sooner or later.

“By age 60, I find about half of my male patients feel the need for prostate support,” Dr. Sears explains. “By the time they reach age 80, it’s over 90 percent.”

Prosta-Vive LS has reportedly made a life-changing difference for

these men. One appreciative thank-you letter came from Jim R, a patient.

“I had immediate results,” Jim R. wrote in his thank-you note. “I slept through the night without going to the bathroom.

“Last night was the most amazing of all,” he added. “I slept for 10 hours without going to the toilet.”

Results like these explain the flood of phone calls the company’s customer service department is handling from men who want to know how the new formula works...

PROSTATE PILL BACKED BY CLINICAL RESULTS

Prosta-Vive LS’s extraordinary success is being attributed to advanced innovations in nutrient technology.

Most prostate pills rely on either outdated saw palmetto ... or the prostate-soothing compound Beta-Sitosterol.

But Dr. Sears cites growing evidence that saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol work much better together than either does on its own.

In fact, a recent clinical trial involving 66 men taking a combination of saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol reported “significant” improvement across the board.

Among the results: Fewer of those occasional late-night wake ups, a stronger stream, less starting and stopping, and complete emptying of the bladder.

That’s why **Prosta-Vive LS** includes both saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol, to ensure men get the extra prostate support they need. Frustrated men say it’s giving them tremendous support.

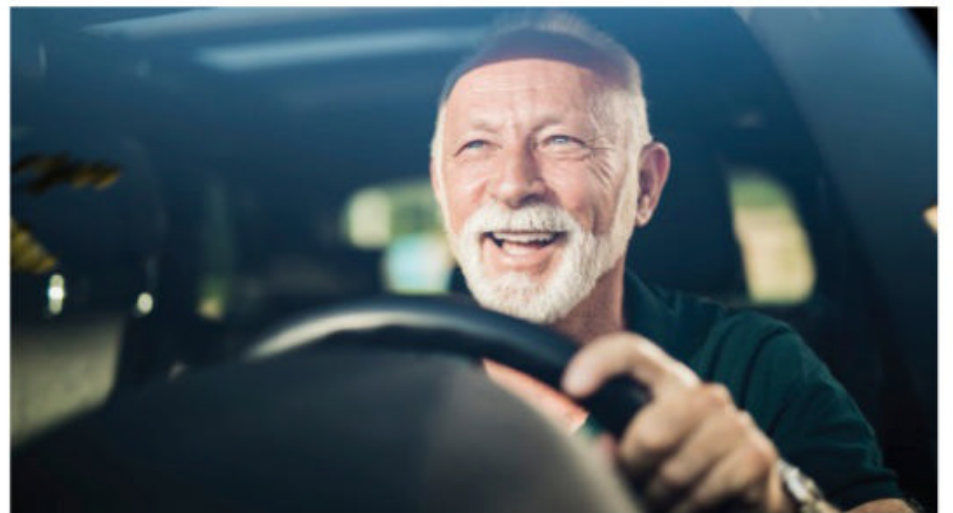
But there’s another key reason **Prosta-Vive LS** is helping men get back control in the bathroom.

YOUR PROSTATE IS HUNGRY FOR HEALTHY FAT

The other key innovation in **Prosta-Vive LS** is its addition of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

“It turns out what’s good for your heart is also good for your prostate,” says Dr. Sears. “That’s why I put heart-healthy omega-3s in a prostate pill.”

Researchers have long known Beta-Sitosterol has a great potential to support healthy prostate func-



NO more extra “pit stops”, NO more interrupted meetings - Men are free of bathroom woes and feel RELIEF.

tion.

But Beta-Sitosterols are “hydro-phobic” -- they don’t mix well with water. And that can make them much harder for the body to absorb.

That’s where long-chain omega-3s come in. The latest research shows they boost Beta-Sitosterol absorption by 1000%.

Dr. Sears explains, “Most people only get trace amounts of Beta-Sitosterol because it can be hard to absorb. In this respect, the long-chain fatty acids in **Prosta-Vive LS** are a real game-changer. They supercharge the absorption.”

This improved absorption is proving to be a revolutionary advance. **Prosta-Vive LS** is changing men’s lives, quickly becoming the No. 1 support supplement for supporting men’s prostate health nationwide.

Now, grateful men are calling almost every day to thank **Prosta-Vive LS** for supporting a renewed sense of empowerment over their own lives.

One patient, Ari L., wrote, “I used to get up on occasion at night to go to the bathroom. Now I only get up once... and I feel it has supported my prostate, keeping my PSA levels in the normal range.”

Patients report they have more energy, sleep better, and no longer feel embarrassed by that occasional sudden need to use the restroom.

Thanks to **Prosta-Vive LS**, thousands of men feel more confident about their urinary health and are no longer being held hostage to pee

problems and feel more confident about their urinary health.

They say they’re getting great sleep and finally feel back in charge of their own lives.

HOW TO GET PROSTA-VIVE LS

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique nutrient technology that effectively relieves the urge to go is with Dr. Sears’ breakthrough **Prosta-Vive** formula.

To secure a supply of **Prosta-Vive**, men need to contact the Sears Health Hotline directly at **1-800-341-4879**.

“It’s not available in retail stores yet,” says Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer and we’re racing to keep up with demand.”

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Prosta-Vive**’s effectiveness that all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I’ll send you your money back,” he says.

Given the intense recent demand, the Hotline will only be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for restocking. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again!

Call **1-800-341-4879** NOW to secure your limited supply of **Prosta-Vive** at a significant discount. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **NATPV523** when you call.



The Last Cosmopolitan

Elias Canetti's 20th century

BY FARAH ABDESSAMAD

ELIAS CANETTI BELONGED TO EUROPE'S 20TH CENTURY. It was a period of extreme horrors that gave way to a slow but determined effort to heal. The scale of the suffering that he and millions of others witnessed in the first half of the century led to the pledge—"Never again!"—that was supposed to define its second half. But history has a way of relapsing. While no conflict since then has matched the violence of World War II, and no catastrophe has found its equal in the more than 50 million people who died—including in extermination camps—Europe in the 21st century has seen a reawakening of the far-right nationalist and racist ideologies that engulfed the continent during that horrible era. Authoritarian governments, nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant sentiments, the scapegoating of minorities, and the fight over territory have all gained a new intensity over the past decade.

Canetti's work, which often focused on many of these phenomena, once appeared to be about the past, but it can now be read as about the present, too. Over the course of 60 years, Canetti wrote nearly 20 works of history, sociology, and cultural commentary, as well as essays, memoirs, travel diaries, and plays. While many others have interrogated the origins of the 20th century's horrors through the new methods of social science, Canetti took a sui generis approach that was often unclassifiable in its range and polyphony. *Crowds and Power*, his 1960 magnum opus, captures his wide-ranging scope: Prompted by the mass politics of the early 20th century, it considered how crowds, throughout human history, have needed no leader to exist, to grow, and to become powerful. This fact, Canetti argued, remade modern politics as we know it.

A new book edited by the novelist Joshua Cohen, *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole: An Elias Canetti Reader*, collects samples from the sprawling mass of Canetti's writings to revisit his legacy. Excerpting memoirs, his novel *Auto-da-Fé*, his 1969 travelogue *The Voices of Marrakesh*, a first-time English translation of *The Book Against Death*, and the aphoristic notes-to-self of *Aufzeichnungen*, among others, *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself* pays homage to Canetti's often unpredictable and unusual approach to thinking about modern life and its travails. The book also offers us insights into Canetti as a person, revealing some of his inner torments—as found, for instance, in his crepuscular notes on aging and dying—and the uncertainties and anxieties that followed him throughout his life. While this is a different Canetti than the authoritative voice found in *Crowds and Power*, the preoccupations in even the most personal of his essays are the same: to understand the contradictions of modern society and social relations and work out the tensions between the self and others.

Canetti was born in Ruschuk, or Ruse, in 1905. The Bulgarian city was then under Ottoman control, which explains in part how the Canettis had ended up there. Young Elias was the eldest son of Jacques Canetti, a businessman, and Mathilde Arditti, a woman proud of her Sephardic ancestry and protective of her family. Writing about his early years, Canetti would later recall how his mother's in-

quisitive mind, “schooled in the great works of world literature as well as in the experience of her own life,” would prove to be a formative influence on him as he grew up. His mother, who spoke German at home, tied him to the language, and it became his language of choice for writing, but she also helped create a childhood for him marked by relative wealth, proximity to relatives, religious festivals, and an interest in languages and books in a world undergoing a state of rapid transformation. His was a polyglot’s home: His first memories were of speaking in Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish Romance language that proliferated among Spanish Jewish exiles, as well as in Bulgarian; other languages were acquired later.

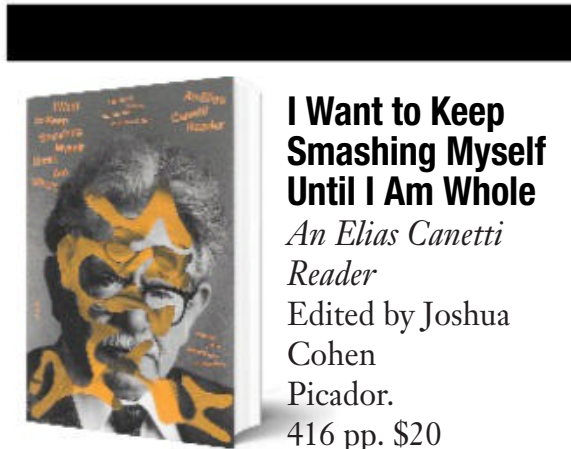
As a result of his father’s business opportunities, Canetti lived a cosmopolitan life to match his multilingual upbringing. At the age of 6, he left with his family for Manchester, England. There, young Elias learned English and devoured translations of *The Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, and a children’s adaptation of Dante’s *Inferno*. Along with this intellectual curiosity, there came a life-altering loss in England: his father’s untimely passing. Shortly after, war broke out in the Balkans, which meant there was no returning to the Bulgaria of his early childhood. His mother moved the family to Switzerland, then Austria.

During an early life defined by uprootedness and displacement, no place left a stronger imprint on Canetti’s personal and intellectual formation than Vienna. In Vienna, he became an adult, perfected his German, and worked toward a university degree in chemistry. He acquainted himself with the literary and intellectual scene and forged decisive ties, notably with the circle around the Austrian satirical writer and editor Karl Kraus. Canetti recalled that in those days people described Kraus as “the strictest and greatest man living in Vienna.”

For Canetti, Kraus was many things: a guru, a cultural icon, a dark pessimist, and the author of a brick-thick play, *The Last Days of Mankind* (1918). Above all else, he was the man who embodied the criticism and longings of a generation of young artists coming of age in Austria after its defeat in World War I. Canetti met his first wife through Kraus, too: At one of his lectures, Canetti encountered Venetiana (Veza) Taubner-Calderon, a Sephardic writer active in socialist publishing circles, whom he would marry in 1934.

The next year, at age 30, Canetti began to make something of himself. He published his novel *Auto-da-Fé*, which explored the madness and self-destructive tendencies of interwar Vienna through its protagonist, Peter Kien, a tall, asexual, taciturn, misogynistic philologist with a penchant for “oriental” languages. Nar-

Farah Abdessamad is a critic whose writing has appeared in Jacobin, The Atlantic, Hyperalergic, and Middle East Eye.



I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole

An Elias Canetti Reader

Edited by Joshua Cohen
Picador.

416 pp. \$20

rating Kien’s descent into an abyss of mental illness, spurred by his fatal obsession with books and words, the novel was a work of modernism but also one of social criticism—especially of Canetti’s fellow intellectuals.



There was good reason to worry about the fecklessness of intellectuals in the interwar years. Vienna, the new capital of the First Austrian Republic, was a magnet for radicals as well as reactionaries, with violent clashes breaking out between advocates of socialism and anti-Semitic nationalists. Writers needed to consider whether their place was in cafés and salons or in the streets, given the stakes at play.

Canetti also reflected on the space in politics and public life that intellectuals should occupy. His own interest in the political confrontations of the day informed his thinking in the years to come. When protests erupted in Vienna after a verdict acquitting nationalist militia members of killing social democrats, Canetti joined them. He did not suspect what was to follow: The demonstrations soon led to a popular revolt and the storming of the Palace of Justice. “It was the closest thing to a revolution that I have physically experienced,” he wrote 55 years later in his memoir, *The Torch in My Ear*, and it led him to a question:

How does a crowd become powerful?

Canetti was sympathetic toward the palace stormers, but he was ambivalent about the use of violence. Witnessing a blaze destroy the palace’s archives, he recounted the despair of an archivist on the scene (“The files are burning!”). There was more to a crowd than just an assembly of disparate people; crowds had their own energy and took their own actions. They were, Canetti wrote in *The Torch in My Ear*, “the most crucial enigma, or at least the most important enigma, in our world.”

These insights led him to write *Crowds and Power*, a treatise in which he examined the dynamism of the masses and the distinctions between what he called a “crowd instinct” and a “personality instinct.” A crowd instinct, he explained, is the pull that individuals feel to abandon themselves and blend in with the mass, while the personality instinct is the pull that individuals feel when it comes to retaining a notion of self.

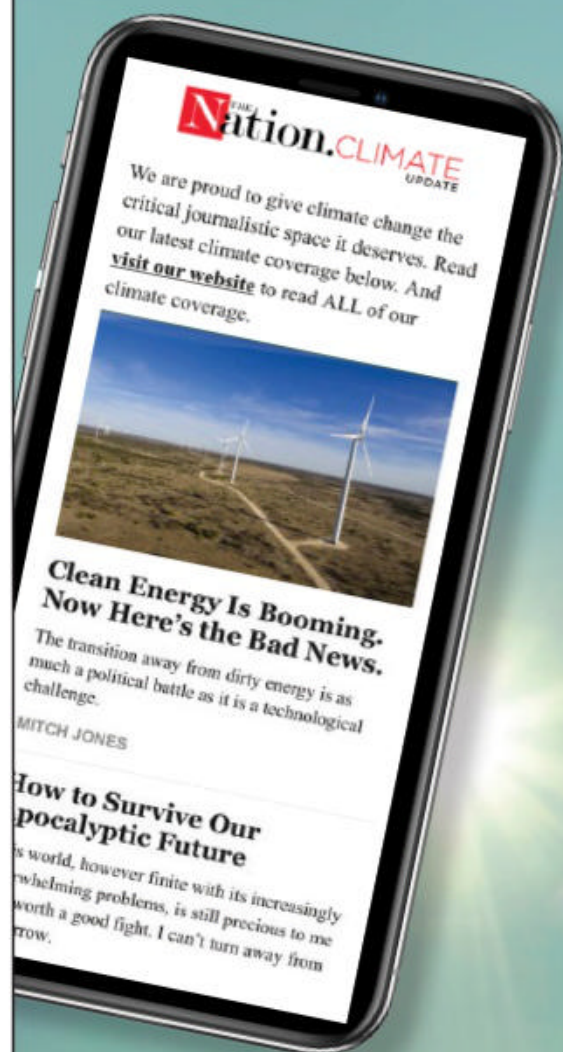
Canetti also proposed an original and sweeping understanding of mass gatherings—from the haka of the Maori people to the dances of the Pueblo Indians. Contrary to the dominant view at the time, he insisted that crowds are not monolithic; they can be divided into “open” and “closed” masses that dissolve and re-form, each carrying elements of communion and solidarity or the thoughtlessness of “packs.” Unlike other social and political phenomena, Canetti noted, crowds do not require leaders, nor are they structurally predetermined. Instead, they are driven by fear and by a desire to form a community. Canetti called this a “reversal of the fear of being touched,” providing a conceptual framework largely inspired by natural and meta-historical considerations.



For Canetti, topics that may at first appear trivial yield the resonance of wider philosophical propositions. *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole* has many examples of this. No matter his subject or mode of expression—from discussions of rhythm and language under the lens of theater, to donkeys in Morocco and Muharram processions—Canetti is always willing to investigate something that others might find pedestrian or unworthy of consideration and turn it into an inquiry

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into the contradictions of modern society.

This tendency is found throughout the essays in the collection. Divided into five loosely chronological parts, *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself* moves from early childhood memories to melancholic reflections on old age. We read about his earliest memory, in which a man's playful warning that he will cut Canetti's tongue suggests the significance of voice.

We also perceive the oddly human parallels in his description of the social nature and fears of camels in Morocco, while a digression on the fingers of monkeys observed in the London Zoo serves to connect touch and language.

There are several works of Canetti's left out here: his plays, including *The Wedding* (1932) and *The Numbered* (1956); his analysis of the complicated and toxic nature of love in *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*; and his more intimate correspondence. Cohen considered several of these "unexcerptable," he explains in his introduction, while other texts remain unpublished in the family's archives—but even with their absence, it is impossible to miss the eclectic nature of Canetti's interests. In *I Want to Keep Smashing Myself Until I Am Whole*, we are offered studies on power, the complexity of social relations, the problems of friendship and the unmet expectations of love, the desire for loyalty, and the numerous dislocations of modern life. When everything around us changes, Canetti asks, what remains? How does everyday language shape our outlook and the possibility of a more fulfilling inner or social life? If the collectivity of the crowd can draw individuals into mass action, what kind of activities and behaviors does the subjectivity of solitude stimulate?

Canetti has often been considered a "writer's writer." One likely reason is the effortless way he writes—his ability to document the way one hears and sees

events, to capture the almost cinematic extraordinariness that can erupt from even the most ordinary situations of life. He was the kind of intellectual who can both evince the particularities of his milieu and transcend them—a rare enough quality in the intellectuals of his time, and perhaps even rarer today. Canetti was also a scholar without being an academic. He was neither a sociologist nor an anthropologist, neither a full-time novelist nor a conventional poet. Rather, he was many writers at once.

Canetti has long been considered a "writer's writer."



In his lengthy introduction to the book, Cohen discusses Canetti's universalist outlook and how different it is from an age in which the opposite is embraced: "identity and politics and their conflation in what's now called 'identity politics.'" But Canetti's legacy is more

than just a worldview that does not flow from a particular identity. He was a resolute cosmopolitan and viewed the world as his country. He saw language and culture as a lexicon of emancipation and responsibility to help make sense of life's complexities, but he was also fascinated with languages and cultures that were not his own. Nothing in the world, he believed, should be defined by the physical and symbolic borders of nation-states. In an age in which nationalist discourse is so sharply on the rise, this is perhaps Canetti's most appealing insight and most significant contribution: his desire to affirm a vision of humanity undivided by the artificial lines of a nation or state and standing as one collective whole.

Writing in 1945 in *The Human Province*, Canetti outlined the principles of this humanism: "I would like to become tolerant without overlooking anything, persecute no one even when all people persecute me; become better without noticing it; become sadder, but enjoy living; become more serene, be happy in others; belong to no one, grow in everyone; love the best, comfort the worst; not even hate myself anymore." **N**



Surprise!

The Freudian high jinks of Ari Aster

BY JORGE COTTE

THE CRITICS AGREE: *BEAU IS AFRAID* IS A FREUDIAN farce, a nightmarish horror-comedy, a tragicomic Oedipal odyssey. But what does all this mean—that it's about mommy issues? That it's funny and scary? That the protagonist takes a long journey; that the film itself is long? Ari Aster's latest begins in a birth canal and ends with a passage through a murky birthlike tunnel. We cut from newborn Beau's perspective of the birthing room to his spot on a therapist's couch. This is a movie in which everything is expelled and nothing is left out.

Beau Is Afraid has so much going on that it solicits verbose description, but it is not, as one reviewer has opined, “a heightened reality that's not meant to be read literally.” It is not a film that maps onto some subterranean topography of meaning. Instead, it presents a flattened

reality; it is a film excavated of subtext. Though *Beau Is Afraid* is shot through with paranoia and oozes with Oedipal symptoms, it conveys no interiority, no underground, no unconscious. Its symbols are literalized, and everything is as it seems. The only surprising thing is that there is nothing surprising. The film is telling you this the whole way through.

Beau Wassermann (Joaquin Phoenix) is a man with complex feelings about his mother, a wealthy woman named Mona. His life is overdetermined by their relationship; it might be his only one. He has no friends, no life, just severe anxiety. He does, however, have therapy sessions, during which he talks about her.

Beau has a trip planned to visit his mother, but he is delayed by the tides of a world bent on tormenting him. All he knows about his father is what Mona has told him: that he died at the moment of Beau's conception from a congenital heart defect that can make ejaculation fatal—one that Beau himself has inherited. As a result, Beau carries his father's death within him, and for most of the movie, sexuality and romantic interest exist for him only in flashback.

The film proceeds episodically, beginning in a dilapidated apartment situated at the intersection of multicultural poverty and urban decay. Beau is delayed when, after he sleeps through his alarm, his keys are stolen out of his door. But his journey really begins when he calls home and learns that his mother's body has been found, a shattered chandelier where her head should be. A stricken Beau climbs into the bathtub and grieves, but he isn't given much time to wallow. Soon he is fleeing assailants, running naked through the street, fleshy and pink. Next comes a truck, a crash, and everything goes dark.

As Beau wakes up, the film once again takes his perspective: a black frame lightning, the room coming into focus. It is as though he is being born again. Beau finds himself in a pink room plastered with boy-band posters. He meets Grace (Amy Ryan) and Roger (Nathan Lane), who have lost their own son to war and who nurse him back to health in their suburban home. The two are implacably upbeat, and Beau soon finds himself somehow railroaded into the role of their adopted son, surrounded by a domestic horror show of too-green lawns and suburban niceties. Families like Grace and Roger's appear happy even if they've been broken apart by state-waged violence. That killing machine has also come home to roost. Beau is introduced to Jeeves (Denis Ménochet), a traumatized war veteran who then slips into jungle gear and chases Beau throughout the rest of the film.

E

ach section of *Beau Is Afraid* opens in a similar fashion, with his movement from darkness to consciousness. Even after the literal birth scene of the beginning, we continue to follow Beau as he enters into successive new disorienting contexts that shift the movie's tone.

After his brief hiatus in the leafy but murderous suburbs, Beau awakens, lost, in a verdant forest, and comes across a woman who leads him to a clearing where a stage is erected. There, he meets a traveling theater troupe about to put on a play. Beau is a spectator, but he soon finds himself literally absorbed into the play, a sequence told with colorful hand-drawn scenes and stop-motion animation. The play's main character, who is now also Beau, builds a life in a village, where he marries and has three healthy boys. But a historic flood separates him from his family and carries him to foreign lands, where he must resume his wandering life. He spends the next decade looking for his family, alienated from the world around him.

When the man-who-is-also-Beau finally stumbles upon his old village again, there is a play going on in the forest. The performance has already started, but the man recognizes the details from his own life and sees his three sons onstage. A cathartic reunion follows, full of tears and sweet embraces. This moment, though fanciful, is the most sentimental in the film, but then a wrench is thrown into the heartrending story: As one of the man's sons asks, how could they all have been conceived if Beau can't have sex without dying?

The family idyll is just a fantasy after all. Realizing this, Beau steps back out of the role and returns to the audience. The play-within-a-play-within-a-movie throws into sharp relief what is truly fantastical in the film: not the comic violence and death rained down upon our beleaguered protagonist, but the dream of an art that can, if only momentarily, reunite him with the things that he has lost.

B

Beau Is Afraid hews closely to its namesake, playing out from his perspective and lingering on his visage throughout the film. Rather than the wiry freneticism that he brought to *The Master* or *Joker*, Phoenix invests Beau with a tender passivity and wide-eyed inertia that takes over his whole posture. He can barely speak, except for the apologies that stumble out of him. We watch Beau vacillate over whether to pack dental floss for his trip home and what to do when his keys are stolen. He gets pushed around by the gregarious Roger and his spiteful teenage daughter. Though Phoenix tries to imbue Beau with personhood, his blankness is kind of the point. His anxiety is debilitating, driving him ever inward to a place we cannot follow.

Instead of interiority, Beau has flashbacks in which he appears just as flat and affectless as his middle-aged self. In a dream, he

watches from the bathtub as his double asks Mona, "Where is my dad?" In another, we see Beau as a younger man, stuck on a cruise ship with his mother. He meets a girl, Elaine, who is forward and confident; they share a kiss, but then she is torn away from Beau before he has a chance to tempt fate and take things further. These flashbacks color in some details about his relationship with Mona, but they do not complicate anything; they are a straight line to Beau's current self.

When mothers and dreams are involved, it is hard not to think of Freud. But *Beau Is Afraid* makes a setting out of the symptoms and does little to interrogate the underlying causes. The film leaves us with a world that, for all its absurdity, must be taken at face value, since nothing shows up to lend it depth: no twists in the characters, no mythology, no secondary system of reference. Beau's blankness makes him both fitting and frustrating as a guide into this world. Like a filmmaker's camera, he is the locus of perspective. He absorbs the life around him without living it.

I

n the final act of *Beau Is Afraid*, Beau returns to the family house in Wasserton, a towering glass terrarium where he grew up and where Mona lived and died. Ever the steady camera, Beau tours his former home, which is decorated with clues to the conspiracy that has enveloped his life this entire time. If you look closely, the movie seems to say, everything that was complicated and unclear is actually pretty simple.

The revelations we do get are simplis-

tic; rather than enrich the film, they stamp out any interpretive wiggle room. There is no wider world, it turns out, just a mother-son dyad. Beau is a story vehicle, and Aster puts every detail of the film to work as evidence in exploring his plotted fate.

The film's overdetermined outcome is lightened by its gross-out body humor: There are genitals, expelled fluids, pharmaceutical side effects, and Beau's cartoonish resilience. The laughs were sparse at the screenings I attended, but that may be because the audience was not quite ready to be amused by a nudist serial killer dubbed the "Birthday Boy Stab Man," whose member flops with every stabbing motion.

There is something else at work, too. In *The Odd One In*, her book on comedy and psychoanalysis, Alenka Zupančič observes that one way to distinguish between comedy and tragedy is that, in tragedy,

there is nothing behind the veil, nothing in the closet or attic; the tragic hero opens the hidden door only to find himself. In comedy, the opposite happens: The mystery is revealed, but what is

revealed is hilariously trivial. Imagine if, in *Othello*, a tragic story about jealousy, a sheepish lover had popped out of the closet: "Yet the comic point," Zupančič writes, "is that what is behind is—Surprise, surprise!—nothing but what we would expect (from the surface of things)."

Beau Is Afraid contains just such an unsurprising surprise. At the end of the film, we meet Mona (Patti LuPone) for the first time outside Beau's dreams and she monologues on the mysteries that have long perplexed us. Beau's mother, it turns out, is both more and less than a simple villain—after so much buildup. Beau finally meets his father as well, who has been hidden away for decades, and the exposure is both horrific and hilarious. Popping out from behind the hidden door—or, in this case, the attic—his father is a literal penis. But because the film can't deal with the truth's deflating triviality, he is a penis monster, 16 feet tall, with praying-mantis claws. Despite its absurdity, you don't need too much time on the couch to get that one. **N**

Beau Is Afraid offers us a world that, despite its absurdity, requires little interpretation.

Jorge Cotte is a critic based in Chicago. His essays and reviews have appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books and The New Inquiry.



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