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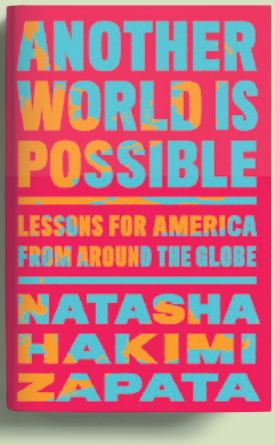

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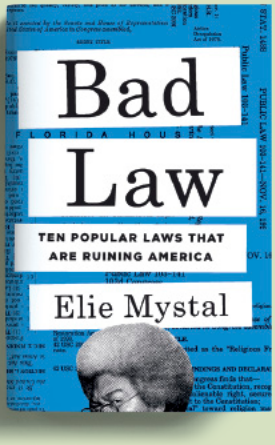

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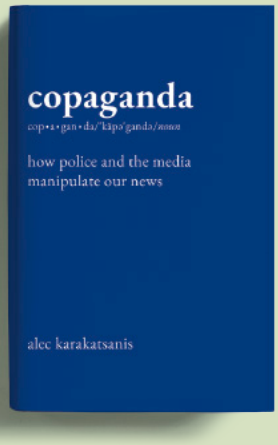

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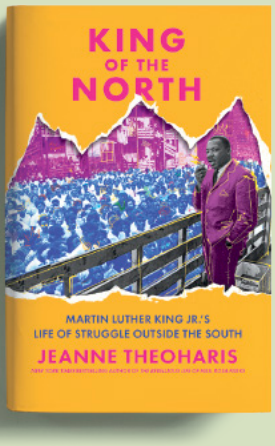
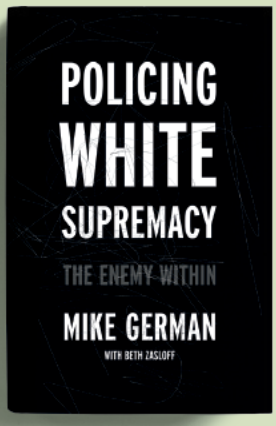


KING OF THE NORTH
by Jeanne Theoharis

"A powerful must-read that sheds new light on King and the Civil Rights Movement."
—Kirkus Reviews
(starred review)



POLICING WHITE SUPREMACY
by Mike German, with Beth Zasloff

"An urgent call for a different approach to policing and containing radical right-wing violence."
—Kirkus Reviews

THE SUSTAINABILITY CLASS
by Vijay Kolinjivadi and Aaron Vansintjan

"A scathing critique. . . . Readers will come away more savvy and empowered."
—Publishers Weekly
(starred review)

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THE NEW PRESS

Erasure: Protesters outside the Stonewall Inn in New York after the word *transgender* was erased from the National Park Service's website.

KENA BETANCUR / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

FEATURES

Cover illustration: ÀDRIA FRUITÓS

B&A BOOKS & the ARTS

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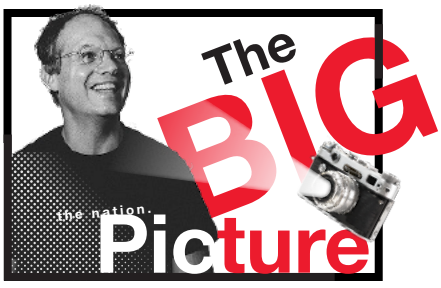

A Pair of Kings

Buenos Aires

I HAVE BEEN OVER INTO THE FUTURE, AND IT doesn't work. For anyone curious about where Elon Musk's economic storm troopers may be headed, a trip to Argentina is instructive. Even before President Javier Milei gifted the Boer billionaire a chain saw onstage at February's Conservative Political Action Conference, the US right has long been fascinated by this country's cherub-faced caudillo. And not just because he espouses a libertarianism that would sanction a free market in the sale of human organs—and, potentially, human children. Or because of his claims to have cloned his dead pet dog, whose canine counsel he reportedly consults through a medium.

Milei may be crazy enough to make Donald Trump look normal—though the red posters I saw on every avenue here asking "*¿Que hacemos con el rey loco?*" ("What can we do about the mad king?") seemed pertinent to both leaders. For political prognosticators, Milei matters because after winning the 2023 election, he issued executive orders shredding Argentina's public sector. Yet he remains popular enough to give his party, La Libertad Avanza, currently a minority in both houses of the National Congress, a decent chance to improve its position significantly in this year's midterm elections—in a country where more than half the population (and 42 percent of households) are stuck below the poverty line. Even Milei's recent cryptocurrency scandal doesn't seem to have made much of a dent.

A grim preview: So many moves in the Project 2025 playbook were tried out in Argentina first.

So many moves in the Project 2025 playbook were tried out here first, from terminating state employees with probationary status to gutting and then shuttering entire government departments (including the housing ministry, despite skyrocketing rents and shrinking pensions forcing increasing numbers into poverty and homelessness).

What's Milei's secret sauce? Deep fear of inflation plays a big role. Under his predecessor, the Peronist Alberto Fernández, inflation rose to an annual rate of 211 percent in 2023. Prices for food and healthcare more than doubled. In December of that year alone, prices rose 25.5 percent. That's more in a single month than Americans experienced during Joe Biden's entire presidency.

A year later, monthly inflation had fallen to 2.7 percent—still high by US standards, but then Argentina is not the United States. Manufacturing plays a minor role in the economy here, which is based on service industries and agricultural exports. Nor does the country enjoy the benefits of serving as the world's reserve currency, which so far has allowed the US to continue exporting its debt. Finally, at least for now, Americans are not haunted by the memory of a dictatorship like the junta that ruled here from 1976 to 1983, waging a vicious dirty war against its own citizens, during which 30,000 Argentines were murdered or disappeared.

This is a country where every cab driver can quote you the "blue rate" to exchange pesos for dollars (currently about 25 percent higher than the official rate of roughly 1,000 to 1) and where the middle class tends to keep its savings in dollars—often in cash. But it is also a place where successes in the fictitious economy preempt criticism of the actual underlying economy, whose structural weaknesses (lack of investment, reliance on imports) Milei has done little to address. Eventually, those chickens will come home to roost, though a fresh round of funding from the IMF might delay the reckoning.

Can Trump and Musk pull off a similar conjuring trick? They certainly seem eager to try. But other worlds remain possible—as we hope to remind you in this issue, which brings Natasha Hakimi Zapata on how Argentina's neighbor Uruguay achieved green energy independence in record time; Elie Mystal on how neoliberalism was born in the skies; David Montgomery on Cuba's continuing torments; and Eamon Whalen's fascinating cover story on the state of American men and boys.

Plus our new columnist David Klion reviewing the rise and rise of Stephen Miller, Karrie Jacobs on Atlanta's Ringstrasse, Bill Fletcher Jr. on the African Pasionaria Andrée Blouin, Adam Hochschild on the spy game, and Jorge Cotte on the return of *Severance*.

By the time you read this, I'll be back at my desk—and perhaps the Democratic opposition to Trump will have figured out how to actually oppose his and Musk's power grabs. A few days after I arrived here, Milei announced he was going to bypass the National Congress and name Supreme Court justices himself by decree. You can be sure our new rulers are paying close attention. **N**

D.D. GUTTENPLAN
Editor

EDITORIAL / LEAH GREENBERG AND EZRA LEVIN FOR *THE NATION*

Courage Is Contagious

FOR AMERICANS DESPERATE TO RECLAIM OUR DEMOCRACY FROM THE PLUTOCRATIC vandalism of the second Trump administration, our challenge is simple: We have to unify and fight back. Defeating authoritarianism depends on a persistent, courageous, broad-based opposition. We side with the two-thirds of Democrats who want their congresspeople to oppose Trump at every turn.

As an organizing matter, this is a winning strategy. Trump is overreaching. Voters wanted lower prices; instead, they're being served techno-dystopian fascism with a side of egg shortages. Neither Trump nor Elon Musk has a mandate for this brazen assault on democracy.

Congressional Democrats should be leading this charge, but their response has been sluggish, ineffective, and boring. Many House Democrats have professed their powerlessness. Senate Democrats have provided votes for almost all of Trump's nominees. Strategic silence and bipartisan appeals to fascists haven't worked.

We need an aggressive, creative, unified opposition. Here's what that could look like:

Slow the Senate. The Democratic minority can't magically stop everything, but they can dramatize their opposition by blocking nominees from being considered, denying unanimous consent at every opportunity, and forcing Republicans to waste time with quorum calls, among other procedural jujitsu.

Make Republicans own their complicity. Democrats should use their votes as leverage—by demanding safeguards against Musk's cuts in exchange for any votes to fund the government, and by using the budget process to make Republicans own the full political costs of their tax cuts for the rich.

We need aggressive, creative, unified opposition to Trump and Musk. Here's what that could look like.

Break norms around collegiality. GOP complicity demands the kind of loud, frequent confrontation that will cause *Washington Post* editorial writers to clutch their pearls. For Republicans who refuse to face their constituents, Democrats should travel to their districts or states. For those who share concerns only privately, Democrats should expose their cowardice.

Work with the grass roots. Democrats should treat the protests against the Trump-Musk putsch as an opportunity rather than a threat. We run Indivisible, a national pro-democracy grassroots movement organization. Since November, we've seen record-breaking numbers of new Indivisible groups and members. Volunteers are making calls, protesting, showing up at congressional offices, attending town halls, and demanding accountability from their representatives. This is, as they say, what democracy looks like; the only major pro-democracy party in the country ought to tap into that energy.

It's up to each of us to try and build this opposition. Constituents should be organizing in their communities. Rank-and-file Democrats should feed off that energy. And Democratic leaders should be corralling their caucuses to produce a unified front with aggressive, creative tactics and messaging.

Frightening times call for courageous leadership. Our enemy is not Musk or Trump—it's apathy and cynicism, the authoritarian-friendly belief that we are victims of world events rather than participants in a global struggle for freedom and justice. Each time one of us takes a step forward in this fight, a thousand pairs of eyes watch and learn. Courage is contagious.

Take that step and steel yourself with the knowledge that you are the defender of a 250-year experiment in self-governance—a real-life pluralistic democracy, imperfect as it is, striving to be more perfect.

Our predecessors deposed an addle-brained king; crushed the violent insurrectionists of a slaveholding confederacy; forced the robber barons to contend with workers and unions; kicked the Nazis' asses throughout Europe; broke the back of the Southern segregationist political bloc; and fought the terrorizing forces at Stonewall. We have planted ourselves in stubborn opposition to monomaniacal fascists of one form or another for a quarter of a millennium. No entitled reality-TV has-been backed by an addle-brained billionaire who cheats at video games is going to roll over us now. We will not finish this fight, but we can each be damn sure to do our part. Together, we are the opposition, and this is our republic—if we can keep it. This is the part where we keep it. N

Leah Greenberg and Ezra Levin are the cofounders and co–executive directors of Indivisible.

COMMENT/MAUREEN TKACIK

Raiding the Swamp

The DOGE rampage through the public sector is a classic private-equity-style shakedown, with bogus numbers and sociopathic executives.

THE NATION'S CAPITAL IS TEEMING WITH PEOPLE who serve the interests of sadists who have converted seemingly every crevice of our economy into a *Sopranos* plotline. But unlike tens of millions of Americans in every state of the union, virtually none of these people has ever personally known the peculiar hell of having had their employer annexed by a private-equity firm.

That changed quite dramatically a few days after Donald Trump's second inauguration, when the DOGE raid on the administrative state began. Scammy-looking generic e-mails began appearing in the inboxes of federal employees, and very young men in hoodies began showing up in federal buildings and demanding access to computer systems. Most of the first batch of e-mails claimed to be just "tests," though a dozen or so informed the recipients that they had been fired. Phyllis Fong, who'd just celebrated her 22nd anniversary as inspector general of the US Department of Agriculture, thought the two-sentence message with the subject line "White House Notification," which purported to terminate her "due to changing priorities," seemed so dubious that she showed up to work on Monday anyway, only to have her phone, computer, and IT systems access revoked that afternoon.

Then the checks stopped showing up. Ten emergency clinics in Syria and anti-HIV efforts in Malawi had their funding shut off; community health centers in Oregon, Maine, Nebraska, and Virginia and preschools in 23 states swiftly met the same fate, as did state programs to clean up toxic waste dumps abandoned by private-equity-owned mine operators and frackers.

It soon emerged that DOGE had detailed a doughy Florida software CEO named Tom Krause to the Treasury Department to ensure "that the Treasury DOGE Team was leveraging its unique technological expertise to help operationalize the president's policy priorities." Stiffing creditors and alienating staffers were something of a specialty for Krause, who'd been hired in 2022 by Vista Equity Partners to clean up a massive leveraged-buyout fiasco in which another private-equity firm and a hedge fund had floated $15.5 billion in high-interest debt to buy out four software companies with combined profits of $1 billion. The numbers made no sense; interest rates surged three percentage points while the bonds were being "sold," and the company ran out of cash before it could make a single interest payment. In a less stupid era, everyone involved would be in prison right now.

But Krause knew what to do: force customers into predatory subscription agreements to maintain basic systems; lay off thousands of employees and outsource as much as possible to India; and cut off funds to anyone not on the payroll or expecting an interest payment. Before Krause left the firm in January, he'd axed hundreds of workers and demanded that the remaining ones justify their value in an e-mail. Now he's cutting off churches that contracted with the government to help resettle Afghan refugees and farmers who invested tens of thousands of dollars in cost-sharing contracts with the USDA, while instructing 2 million federal employees to reply with a list of their accomplishments or face termination.

As with any Wall Street looting, everything is a lie, especially when numbers are involved. In one representative case, a debt-burdened company accumulates a more than $1,000 balance at the local pizza shop to improve its short-term cash flow while it secretly pays its CEO and the deputy defense secretary's private-equity fund a combined half-billion dollars. Thousands of IRS officials are axed to close a budget deficit that widens by $100 million for every $115,000 auditor you fire. Line cooks and Social Security Administration workers are eliminated, while bloated outsourcing contracts are doled out to insiders.

Still, DOGE's shakedown operation is different from standard private-equity raids in one respect: Most PE mercenaries speak in bland business-school pabulum; they don't brandish chain saws at public gatherings to menace displaced workers or talk about the need to inflict "trauma" on subject workforces.

As in any looting carried out by private-equity firms, everything is a lie, especially when numbers are involved.

Most of the hundreds of traumatized private-sector workers I have interviewed over the past few years voted for Trump, I assume mostly because, while neither party threatened to exact revenge on their predators, Trump had at least acknowledged the destruction these workers had endured. But none of them wish the hell they suffered on other people; if anything, their experience as casualties of private equity had highlighted the appeal of rules and regulations and institutions capable of enforcing them. What's more, when you've worked a job where resources are so stretched that every workday feels like going to war and things only ever get worse, the sophomoric nihilism of Team DOGE begins to look like what it is: a wasteful, fraudulent, and abusive indulgence no one can afford right now. N

Maureen Tkacik is the investigations editor at The American Prospect *and a senior fellow at the American Economic Liberties Project.*

COMMENT/JEE KIM AND WALEED SHAHID

A New Strategy

Democrats need to confront two foundational failures.

DEMOCRATS SEE THEMSELVES AS A LIGHTHOUSE—steady, guiding, a safeguard against chaos. But a lighthouse only works if people look to it. And more and more, they don't. The problem isn't just that the light is dimming; it's that voters have stopped navigating by it altogether. Beneath the surface, something deeper is stirring: economic frustration, cultural disillusionment, and a growing sense that the party isn't attuned to the struggles of working people. The question isn't whether Democrats can keep the light shining. It's whether they understand what's rising in the darkness, and whether they can adapt before it overtakes them.

The Democratic Party isn't in inevitable decline. It's in crisis—one facing center-left parties everywhere—resulting from two fundamental failures.

The first failure is the party's fraying connection to the working class—not just white working-class voters, whose defection to the Republican Party has been widely discussed, but also young men and non-college-educated voters of color, who have begun shifting away from the Democratic coalition at an alarming rate. A party that once cast itself as the vehicle for working-class political power now struggles to articulate what, exactly, it is delivering for working people. That failure isn't just about policy, but about perception: More and more working-class voters see the Democrats as a party of affluent professionals, more plugged in to the priorities of college-educated liberals than to the everyday economic struggles of the majority.

Voters don't just see Democrats as out of touch, but slow, weak, and ineffective.

In focus groups, voters don't just see Democrats as out of touch. They see them as slow, weak, ineffective. Slugs. Snails. Sloths. Meanwhile, they describe Republicans as lions and sharks, as tigers on the attack—aggressive, dominant, and willing to fight for what they want. That perception gap is devastating in a moment of economic anxiety. When voters feel like they're drowning under the cost of rent and groceries, they don't want a party that explains why change is hard. They want a party that picks a fight and wins.

The Democratic Party needs to throw a punch, to make it clear who is hoarding wealth and power and who is paying the price. And above all, it needs to be relentless about one thing: affordability. Billionaires like Elon Musk and Donald Trump loot from working families while using culture wars to distract, divide, and conquer. They stoke outrage over DEI, put mass deportations on daytime TV, and flood social media with spectacle to keep attention off their smash-and-grab tactics. Meanwhile, life keeps getting more expensive—healthcare, housing, childcare, groceries—and the people in charge keep telling us to blame anyone but them.

The second failure is structural, and just as consequential: Democrats are losing the war for attention. Politics isn't just about passing laws and winning elections; it's also about shaping the broader information environment in which those laws and elections take place. Conservatives understand this. That's why they've spent decades building an infrastructure that doesn't just participate in political debate but defines the terms.

Take the Conservative Partnership Institute. It doesn't just train far-right movement organizations and leaders; it is a nonprofit that supplies them with staff, strategy, media booking, podcasting platforms, and an ideological home in Washington. It ensures that when the far right takes office, they don't flounder—they build a movement and execute. It's not just a think tank; it's a media-steeped and savvy strategy hub that coordinates the insurgency inside the Republican Party.

Steve Bannon's "flood the zone" strategy wasn't just misinformation—it was volume. Trump didn't just seek headlines; he turned his base into megaphones. Texas Governor Greg Abbott's migrant busing stunt wasn't a policy proposal but a viral political weapon designed to seize the conversation and force Democrats into a defensive crouch. The actual policy debate—on asylum law, refugee resettlement, the border—became tangential. Abbott wasn't trying to win a debate; he was trying to win attention. And by winning attention, score votes and shape reality. Until we build an infrastructure that can contest at this level, we'll remain stuck playing defense.

The answer isn't just sharper messaging or a better policy agenda. Political realignment also requires a high-functioning ecosystem, an interplay between movements that mobilize pressure from below and parties that channel that pressure into governance. Movements create political will; parties institutionalize it. Often, they exist in tension. But when aligned, they don't just win elections—they rewrite history.

Think of movements, media, and parties as interlocking gears. If they aren't synchronized, nothing moves. Movements generate urgency, expand the base, and push the boundaries of what's possible. Media shapes how ideas are framed, debated, and absorbed. Politicians can harness that momentum and translate it into governance.

We must engage with surround sound, compel, and move people in this age of populism and the attention economy under Trump and Musk. N

Jee Kim has served at numerous start-ups focused on media, technology, and politics. Waleed Shahid is the director of The Bloc and the former spokesperson for Justice Democrats.

COMMENT/JEET HEER

Our Long Covid

Treating the pandemic as a temporary emergency has created a nastier society.

On February 13, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the 15th case of Covid-19 in the United States, an early sign that the pandemic was a spark on the verge of becoming a wildfire. Exactly five years later, the Senate confirmed Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a virulent foe of mainstream science, as secretary of health and human services.

Twelve days after that, RFK Jr., in keeping with his deep-seated anti-vaccination agenda, paused a Biden administration program to test a new Covid vaccine. At roughly the same time, his colleague Elon Musk, in his capacity as de facto head of Donald Trump's so-called Department of Government Efficiency, gutted government funding for Ebola prevention in Africa.

RFK Jr. might be cavalier about the need to continue fighting Covid, but his accession to power is itself proof of how the pandemic has remade America and the world. The half-decade since Covid emerged as a pandemic has seen a remarkable boomerang effect, wherein scientific and public health success has provoked an anti-intellectual and antisocial backlash that threatens our ability to fight future pandemics—while empowering extreme right-wing politics. This historic whiplash came about because politicians across the spectrum treated Covid as a temporary emergency rather than a lasting challenge.

RFK Jr.'s accession to power is proof of how the pandemic has remade America and the world.

Covid hasn't gone away. It's become less virulent, but it's still killing people. Seven million people have died, including a disproportionately large number of Americans (at least 1.2 million). Among the survivors, one study estimated, at least 14 percent of Americans have suffered at some point from long Covid, a complex mix of lingering ailments that include tiredness and brain fog. Harvard economist David Cutler estimates that in the US alone, the cumulative cost of long Covid over the lifetime of people who have it—in lost wages, medical expenses, and diminished quality of life—will be $3.7 trillion. That is the equivalent of the 2008 Great Recession, albeit spread over a longer period.

Beyond illness, there's the persistent economic problem: inflation caused by supply-chain disruptions and ballooning deficits, now used to justify austerity. In commercial business districts in the United States, the value of property has fallen by 60 percent since 2019. Behind that statistic lies the story of increasing numbers of white-collar workers doing their jobs from home, leading to boarded-up businesses and restaurants, and testifying to a desolation of urban social life.

And not just urban social life. There is a robust international literature, some of it summarized in National Institutes of Health reports, showing loneliness increased during the pandemic. For Americans, the pandemic meant not just more loneliness but also less trust in the government. Among Republicans, there has also been a steep decline of trust in the scientific community. In late 2024, Pew reported: "In April 2020—the early days of COVID-19—87% of Americans had confidence in scientists to act in the public's best interests. By fall of last year…the figure had dropped 14 percentage points to 73%. This was driven by a disproportionately steep loss of confidence among Republicans."

In the wake of Covid, Americans have become more individualistic, more conspiracy-minded, and less committed to collective social effort. This new social Darwinism helped elect Donald Trump—and now it's being put into practice by RFK Jr. and Elon Musk.

It didn't have to be this way. The initial moment of Covid brought with it a utopian burst of collective effort: Donald Trump deserves credit for Operation Warp Speed (which created the first vaccine with remarkable alacrity) and for working with Democrats to pass the generous payments that helped Americans survive the lockdown. But once out of office, Trump found it easier to harness the anger of conspiracy theorists and cranks. The Trump of 2020 listened to Dr. Anthony Fauci; the Trump of 2025 removed Fauci's security protection.

But Democrats share some blame for too quickly abandoning programs to fight Covid. In April 2023, Joe Biden declared the Covid emergency over. Well before then, economic relief for Covid had been scaled back. As the Columbia University economics historian Adam Tooze has noted, the Biden administration gave up on "supporting a generous extension of the American welfare state, which was in fact adopted during the crisis. Child tax benefits, for instance, halved American child poverty during the crisis." Biden ended those benefits in January 2022, retrenching on commitments that were still needed by struggling Americans. This cutback, combined with the Federal Reserve's decision to raise interest rates to fight inflation, created a nation of enraged and financially strapped Americans. A more equitable anti-inflation measure, controls on corporate price-gougers, was largely neglected.

In 2020, the world, and Americans, were unprepared for Covid; five years later, there has been the opposite of a learning process. The medical infrastructure and the social cohesion to deal with a pandemic have frayed rather than undergone repair. What remains is a selfish, antisocial mood that is perhaps the most pervasive feature of our time: the Covid Era. N

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Razing Hell
Kate Wagner

We're Not Prepared

After the disastrous LA wildfires, it's clearer than ever that state intervention is needed to house people safely.

THE NUMBERS COMING OUT OF LOS ANGELES COUNty are staggering: more than 16,000 buildings destroyed, some 2,000 structures damaged, and over 150,000 people ordered to evacuate. Whole swaths of Pacific Palisades and Altadena have been wiped off the map. Obliterated along with them: basic shelter; countless families' primary source of wealth; and the incalculable loss of memories, sensations, routines, possessions, and a sense of normalcy.

Whenever something like this happens, the vultures of displacement and development start circling. Mike Davis put it succinctly during the Woolsey Fire of 2018 when he was asked what he expected to see after the flames died down: "Bigger mansions.… What tends to disappear is rental properties, trailer parks, people who don't have adequate insurance." In other words, the poor and working classes suffer first—and often permanently—while the rich can just keep building. Davis's famous essay "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn" not only decried overdevelopment in a fire-prone ecosystem but reminded us that the overdevelopment was paid for by pilfering from funds intended for public use. He first made that case back in 1995, and he's only been proven more right ever since.

As firefighters struggled to contain the Palisades and Eaton fires, landlords in the surrounding area jacked up rents. This form of price gouging is illegal under California law, but in the absence of enforcement, citizens took it upon themselves to report the violating landlords. The state and local authorities, meanwhile, including Governor Gavin Newsom and LA Mayor Karen Bass, were more concerned with denouncing the alleged looting taking place and dispatched the National Guard as well as the LAPD to menacingly surveil the immolation of people's possessions.

California, along with Florida, now finds itself at the epicenter of an insurance crisis that has the potential to trigger a 2008-caliber financial collapse, as climate-driven disasters threaten to overwhelm insurers. Many insurers want to exit high-risk areas and are canceling policies en masse, including in Pacific Palisades. In California, FAIR—a state-created insurance program that offers coverage when traditional insurers won't—has been picking up the slack where private companies pulled out. But as *Bloomberg* predicted almost a year ago, questions are arising as to how much Californians can or will pay in the face of a catastrophe. One thing remains as clear as it was when Davis articulated it 30 years ago: It is neither fiscally nor environmentally sustainable to keep building single-family homes in extremely risky areas.

Many of the houses affected in the recent fires were built in the mid-20th century, a time when growth seemed limitless and land was cheap. As that changed, the houses grew and grew in value and became repositories of wealth that could be passed down to the next generation—many members of which are now unable to afford new housing of similar quality. They also often can't afford the outrageous insurance premiums, and what insurance they do have doesn't always pay out in full what a house is worth on the market. So what was once a repository for wealth on the basis of its exchange value is reduced to what it actually is: a house on land that's prone to fire.

The heart of this problem is not only climate change but the commodification of housing itself, which turned a simple concept (basic shelter) into a nest egg at best and a risky financial asset at worst. The 20th-century ideal of the house as the most stable asset—one whose value will surely go up, up, up—may seem unassailable if you browse Zillow. But California is only the start of the other shoe dropping. Almost 100 years ago, Herbert Hoover invoked homeownership as the pinnacle of prosperity, a patriotic American's ultimate goal. But it's no longer a plausible goal for most of us and won't be again anytime soon. We have yet to face that fact; we are not socially or politically ready for the evaporation of so much wealth so quickly. One can easily see a slide further into revanchism: either in the form of "I already got mine, and the state should pay for it," or by shifting the blame for these crises from the people and policies responsible for climate change to our neighbors. We are already seeing sensational social media outrage linking the fires to DEI programs, the homeless, and drug users.

Housing is the most obvious sector in society where the choice is between socialism or barbarism.

It's ugly, but insurance companies will continue to flee California. Insurance is profitable only when the risk is offset, and right now there is too much risk. Although the state will be pressured to keep the carriers there or insure these properties itself, this strategy can only work

JOE CIARDIELLO

for so many more fires before the futility becomes obvious and the risk becomes systemic. The housing system is already under tremendous strain from a lack of supply and from landlord collusion. Rents rose over 20 percent during Joe Biden's presidency, and mass displacement and homelessness are swallowing more and more families. As much as market-based solutions are touted, they do not work for the most vulnerable among us, because building supportive or truly affordable housing is not and never will be profitable. This is not to say that we shouldn't build more market-rate housing—by all means, build, build, build; upzone, upzone, upzone. But state intervention, which has long been lavished on single-family houses and now on the insurance of a way of living that is no longer feasible, will be necessary to house people safely.

Housing is the most obvious sector in society in which the choice is between socialism or barbarism. The people who have lost everything in the LA fires deserve to be treated with dignity and support and instead are being surveilled, price-gouged, and left holding the bag. But we cannot go back to 20th-century ideas of planning, growth, and wealth accumulation. If we do not start organizing for a new way of building and living together—one that is environmentally resilient and insulated from market shocks; one that will ease the inevitable mass relocations as more and more disasters make places unlivable—we will truly reach the end of the line. N

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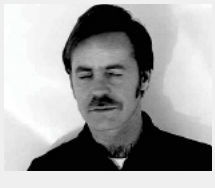
WILLOW SCHENWAR



› Ronald Johnson's American Romanticism
DAVID B. HOBBS

LEFT FROM TOP: MICHAEL NIGRO / SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES; RALPH EUGENE MEATYARD

Town Called Malice

CHRIS LEHMANN

The J6 Government

The Capitol insurrection is now Trump's model for how to carry out his authoritarian agenda in Washington.

AMID THE CHAOS AND RUBBLE OF PRESIDENT TRUMP'S assault on the US government, one telling development has received minimal attention. After Trump, under the dimwitted ideological tutelage of Elon Musk, leveled the US Agency for International Development, the lead administrator left standing over the smoldering wreckage was a hard-right federal bureaucrat named Pete Marocco. A former assistant to a chief administrator at the agency, Marocco was ousted from no less than three different executive departments—State, Commerce, and Defense—during Trump's first term for creating toxic working conditions and visiting retribution on rival staffers.

If Marocco were just another glorified brigand placed atop a government agency, that would make him a standard-issue appointee in this administration. But he brings another crucial selling point to the Trumpian table: He appears to have participated, along with his now-wife, in the attempted January 6 coup. Online sleuths identified the pair entering the US Capitol through a broken window. Marocco was never charged in connection with the insurrection. When the footage tying him to the assault was revealed, he responded with the kind of high dudgeon perfected by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and so many other MAGA figures with (to put it mildly) checkered pasts—decrying what he called "petty smear tactics and desperate personal attacks by politicians with no solutions," without actually denying his participation in the insurgency.

Marocco's J6 pedigree matters not just for its outrageousness, but also because it is a leading indicator of the dominant approach adopted by the Trump White House to enact its authoritarian agenda. Far from being an inescapable legal and moral stain on the Trumpified GOP and its far-right supporters, January 6 is the new Republican model for how to get things done in Washington.

January 6, after all, was a giant MAGA vendetta against all traditional constraints on raw executive power, up to and including duly monitored and certified election outcomes. The insurrection's notional rationale—that the 2020 Biden campaign, in conjunction with a never-specified cabal of state election officials, local vote tabulators, and shadowy foreign voting-machine contractors—was obviously a ginned-up ruse to create the momentum behind the power grab. That's why, just as obviously, all the alarms over insecure voting machines and corrupt balloting officials vanished as soon as Trump won reelection in the standard fashion last November.

But the larger lesson of January 6 proved to be that even a violent mass insurrection founded on conspiratorial lies can fall under the expansive domain of executive impunity in our decaying constitutional order.

It was entirely fitting that Trump began his second administration by

granting pardons or clemency to the 1,500-plus rioters with criminal cases stemming from the assault on the Capitol. His White House proceeded to dismiss Justice Department lawyers who'd worked on special prosecutor Jack Smith's now-mothballed case against Trump for leading the insurrection, and Trump has threatened the same fate for FBI officials who investigated the coup attempt.

These maneuvers were more than a Stalinesque exercise in manipulating and falsifying the historical record; they were also precursors to the wide-ranging and ongoing campaign of MAGA pillage that's now rolling through the federal bureaucracy.

Trump and Musk's assaults on the federal government all spring from the same toxic mythology as the January 6 attacks.

The pretext for Musk's mandate at the comically misnamed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is just as fanciful and half-assed as the basis of the 2021 "Stop the Steal" uprising—and Musk's illegal and unconstitutional seizure of payment data at the Treasury Department is in the service of a similarly slapdash effort to override congressionally mandated expenditures and abolish basic government services by following a bullshit priority list generated by an AI server.

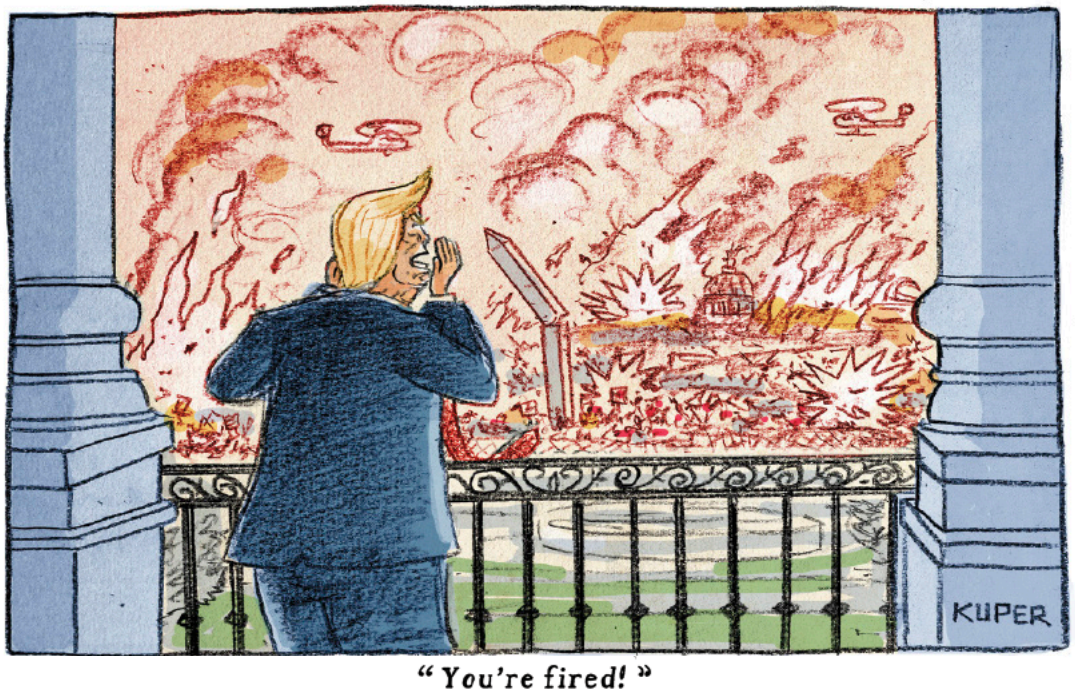
Toggle over to the allied effort to root out DEI-inflected speech, destroy government sites meant to help minority groups, and trash racial-sensitivity training throughout federal officialdom; the cruel and unjustified suspension of funding at the National Institutes of Health; the push to raze the Department of Education; the overlapping trans panics now enshrined in government policy; or the blatantly unconstitutional attempt to end birthright citizenship. It's all the same toxic mythology at the heart of January 6: Shadowy elite forces are denying you, the righteous MAGA acolyte, your fundamental nationalist birthright and abridging your racial-cum-gender purity. They must not merely be scrutinized, but delegitimized and eliminated—in the same way that Congress had to be throttled into overturning the results of the 2020 election, and Mike Pence condemned to be hanged if he didn't play along.

It's no exaggeration to say that the mood of militant J6 absolutism is the default setting of the second Trump administration. It finds its purest, and most deeply unhinged, expression in the fulminations of Trump's centibillionaire consigliere Musk.

In the midst of his controlled demolition of USAID, Musk platformed phony videos about made-up celebrity boondoggle tours financed by the agency, elevated the deranged conspiratorial imaginings of alt-right vlogger Mike Benz, and promoted his own fanciful vision of the agency as a clearinghouse of lethally weaponized wokeness. Musk wrote that USAID was "a viper's nest of radical-left marxists who hate America" and that it was clearly "time for it to die."

Trump concurred and obliged, declaring that the agency was infested with "radical left lunatics"; in short order, his team at USAID notified nearly all of the agency's "direct-hire" personnel that they were going on indefinite leave. This left little more than 290 staffers standing, out of a former roster of 14,000 employees in the US and abroad.

Trump's incoming cabinet is charged with following the same basic playbook, as they root out imaginary thought-crimes and lurch into unholy MAGA deviationism throughout the government. Trump's election is proof positive that January 6 worked—and the insurrection is now the establishment. Just ask Pete Marocco. **N**



"You're fired!"

OPPART
PETER
KUPER

Fish Oil Failure Shines Grim Light on America's Memory Crisis

America's Top Memory M.D. Reveals Why Fish Oil Doesn't Protect You from Senior Moments – and the #1 Alternative

More than 16 million Americans suffer from age-associated cognitive impairment, and according to nationwide research, these numbers are only rising.

Thankfully, anti-aging specialist and best-selling author Dr. Al Sears says there's an easy way to banish senior moments and brain fog for good.

It's a safe, natural compound called DHA – one of the building blocks of your brain. It helps children grow their brains significantly bigger during development. And in adults, it protects brain cells from dying as they get older.

For years, most people thought fish oil was the best available source of DHA…

But industrial fish farming practices have depleted the nutritional content of nearly every fish oil you can buy.

Today, roughly 20 million Americans are wasting their money on fish oils that hardly do anything at all.

And since they think they are addressing the problem, fish oil's failure has led to America's memory crisis continuing to grow practically unchecked.

Fortunately, Dr. Sears says, "there's still hope for seniors. Getting more DHA can make a life-changing difference for your mental clarity, focus, and memory."

Dr. Sears, a highly-acclaimed, board-certified doctor— who has published more than 500 studies and written four bestselling books — says we should be able to get enough DHA in our diets… but we don't anymore.

"For thousands of years, fish were a great natural source of DHA. But due to industrial fish farming practices, the fish we eat and the fish oils you see at the store are no longer as nutrient-dense as they once were," he explains.

DHA is backed by hundreds of studies for supporting razor-sharp focus, extraordinary mental clarity, and a lightning quick memory… especially in seniors.

So, if you're struggling with focus, mental clarity, or memory as you get older…

Dr. Sears recommends a different approach.

THE SECRET TO A LASTING MEMORY

Research has shown our paleo ancestors were able to grow bigger and smarter brains by eating foods rich in one ingredient — DHA.

"Our hippocampus thrives off DHA, and grows because of it," explains Dr. Sears. "Without DHA, our brains would shrink, and our memories would quickly fade."

A groundbreaking study from the University of Alberta confirmed this. Animals given a diet rich in DHA saw a 29% boost in their hippocampus — the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. As a result, these animals became smarter.

Another study on more than 1,500 seniors found that those whose brains were deficient in DHA had significantly smaller brains — a characteristic of accelerated aging and a weakened memory.

PEOPLE'S BRAINS ARE SHRINKING AND THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW IT

Dr. Sears uncovered that sometime during the 1990s, fish farmers stopped giving their animals a natural, DHA-rich diet and began feeding them a diet that was 70% vegetarian.

"It became expensive for farmers to feed fish what they'd eat in the wild," explains Dr. Sears. "But in order to produce DHA, fish need to eat a natural, marine diet, like the one they'd eat in the wild."

"Since fish farmers are depriving these animals of their natural diet, DHA is almost nonexistent in the oils they produce."

"And since more than 80% of fish oil comes from farms, it's no wonder the country is experiencing a memory crisis. Most people's brains are shrinking and they don't even know it."

So, what can people do to improve their memory and brain function most effectively.

Dr. Sears says, "Find a quality DHA supplement that doesn't come from a farmed source. That will protect your brain cells and the functions they serve well into old age."

Why the 'brain fuel' ingredient in fish oil is slowly drying up.

Dr. Sears and his team worked tirelessly for over two years developing a unique brain-boosting formula called **Omega Rejuvenol**.

It's made from the most powerful source of DHA in the ocean, squid and krill — two species that cannot be farmed.

According to Dr. Sears, these are the purest and most potent sources of DHA in the world, because they haven't been tampered with. "**Omega Rejuvenol** is sourced from the most sustainable fishery in Antarctica. You won't find this oil in any stores."

MORE IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

Already, the formula has sold more than 850,000 bottles. And for a good reason, too. Satisfied customers can't stop raving about the memory-boosting benefits of quality-sourced DHA oil.

"The first time I took it, I was amazed. The brain fog I struggled with for years was gone within 24 hours. The next day, I woke up with the energy and mental clarity of a new man," says Owen R.

"I remember what it was like before I started taking **Omega Rejuvenol**… the lack of focus… the dull moods… the slippery memory… but now my mind is as clear as it's ever been," says Estelle H.

"My mood and focus are at an all-time high. I've always had trouble concentrating, and now I think I know why," raves Bernice J. "The difference that **Omega Rejuvenol** makes couldn't be more noticeable."

And 70-year-old Mark K. says, "My focus and memory are back to age-30 levels."

These are just a handful of the thousands of reviews Dr. Sears receives regularly thanks to his breakthrough memory formula, **Omega Rejuvenol**.

WHERE TO FIND OMEGA REJUVENOL

To secure bottles of this brain-booster, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-307-3156**. "It takes time to manufacture these bottles," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers who need it most."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about this product he is offering a 100% money-back guarantee on every order. "Send back any used or unused bottles within 90 days and I'll rush you a refund," says Dr. Sears.

The Hotline is taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for inventory restocking.

Call **1-800-966-5612** to secure your limited supply of **Omega Rejuvenol**. Readers of this publication immediately qualify for a steep discount, but supplies are limited. To take advantage of this great offer use Promo Code **NATOM425** when you call.

The Front Burner
Kali Holloway

White Flops Rejoice!

DEI is being snuffed out in DC. Mediocre whiteness reigns. And we're all going to suffer for it.

In the wake of the catastrophic plane and helicopter collision over the Potomac in January, Donald Trump spoke to the nation—not to offer words of consolation or comfort, but to blame diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs for the tragedy. By turning instantly to racism, Trump skirted some difficult issues about America's worst commercial aviation disaster in 16 years. Like the fact that just nine days earlier, Federal Aviation Administration chief Michael Whitaker had resigned after months of public pressure by Trump's deputy president, Elon Musk. Or that Trump had issued a federal employee hiring freeze that failed to include an explicit carve-out for air traffic controllers, a profession that's been understaffed since the pandemic. Or that 24 hours after the crash, FAA employees were sent an e-mail containing buyout offers and the suggestion that they "find a job in the private sector." Or that Trump had gutted the Aviation Security Advisory Committee the day after his inauguration.

Instead, Trump chose to eke out a little more mileage from DEI, the right's current favorite racist bugaboo. In recent years, conservatives have twisted the term into shorthand for the idea that unqualified and unfit Black folks—and, when convenient, women and other gender and racial minorities—are undeservedly elevated to roles for which white men were denied the right of first and last refusal. JD Vance even claimed that DEI "puts stress on the people who are already there," which, as columnist Ed Kilgore has noted, suggests "that even if a white man were responsible for the crash, it was probably a white man 'stressed' by DEI practices."

DEI was always just an effort to ensure that qualified members of underrepresented groups had access to opportunities historically denied to them. But here's Trump and Musk, asserting that white men succeed purely on "merit" and presumably considering themselves living proof. The former, a man who looked directly into a solar eclipse; the latter, the heir to an apartheid emerald mine who was allegedly doing so much "LSD, cocaine, ecstasy, mushrooms and ketamine" that it worried his board members at Tesla and SpaceX, per *The Wall Street Journal*.

The good news for MAGA is that DEI is dead. Trump signed a slew of executive orders to purge it from both the public and private sector—even making a big show of signing an anti-DEI order aimed at the FAA after the Potomac crash. He also revoked the 1965 Equal Employment Opportunity rule that prohibited government contractors from discriminating on the basis of race or gender.

The bad news? The rest of us are about to reap the consequences of unrestrained white mediocrity. Take the new, DEI-less FAA. As of this writing, there have been at least five more plane accidents since the Potomac crash. It's almost as if DEI was the only thing keeping the planes in the sky.

Or check out Trump appointees like Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. His predecessor was Lloyd Austin, a Silver Star awardee with more than four decades of military experience. Hegseth's résumé includes being ousted as the head of not one but two veterans' advocacy groups because of "allegations of financial mismanagement, sexual impropriety, and personal misconduct," according to *The New Yorker*. During his confirmation hearing, he dodged questions about whether he would follow unlawful directives from Trump to shoot protesters. According to Senator Tammy Duckworth, another Army veteran, Hegseth didn't know the most "basic, 101 stuff for someone who wants to be secretary of defense."

Or what about Edward Coristine, a main character in Musk's Department of Government Efficiency? Coristine is 19, graduated high school in 2024, goes by "Big Balls" online, and is now a senior adviser at both the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department. Coristine and five other DOGE employees whose ages top out at 24 were allowed access to the Treasury Department's payment system, making them privy to millions of Americans' most sensitive private data. (A judge temporarily blocked this, but the data could still have been scraped.) Did I mention that Coristine was fired from his last internship for leaking company secrets? What could possibly go wrong?

The list goes on. Does anyone really think Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the poster child for "I did my own research," is going to be a great steward of America's healthcare agency? Or that Project 2025 coauthor Russell Vought should have discretion over federal spending as head of the Office of Management and Budget? Or that Tulsi Gabbard and Kash Patel, both of whom have been derided by scores of national security officials, can be trusted to run our intelligence agencies or the FBI?

A 19-year-old who goes by "Big Balls" is helping Elon Musk run DOGE. What could possibly go wrong?

A lot of people who voted to hurt others will learn that when a tech billionaire and a known real estate scammer unite to

ANDY FRIEDMAN

wreck the government, the resulting harm will extend far beyond the presumed beneficiaries of DEI.

If anti-DEI farmers don't care about the global death toll resulting from the demise of the US Agency for International Development, which sourced 41 percent of its food aid from US farms, they will care about the roughly $2 billion in lost food sales. If Trump voters don't care about Vought's slashing of workers at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, perhaps they will care about the wanton financial fraud inflicted by mortgage companies and banks. If conspiracists support Trump's gag orders on the CDC and withdrawal from the World Health Organization, they might care about outbreaks of tuberculosis and a quickly morphing bird flu virus. And if they still haven't bothered to look up how tariffs work, maybe they'll get interested if the $800 tax increase predicted by the nonpartisan Tax Foundation hits home.

Or maybe those people will look at the destruction to themselves and the country and still take pride in the fact that trans girls can't play girls' sports and airplane pilots keep getting whiter. N

SNAPSHOT
David Gannon

An Unwelcome Alliance

Berlin activists wearing masks of Elon Musk, Alternative for Germany leader Alice Weidel, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and JD Vance protest foreign influence in Germany's national election, which was held in February.

By the Numbers

40%
Portion of contracts canceled by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that are expected to produce no savings

0.9%
Total savings claimed by DOGE, as a percentage of the federal budget

0.12%
Amount of savings DOGE has been able to itemize

2M
Number of federal workers who were asked by DOGE to "justify their work or lose their jobs"

5K
Number of Forest Service employees who were laid off

11
Number of lawsuits filed against DOGE for violating the Privacy Act of 1974

$21B
Amount the US government has awarded or promised Elon Musk's companies since 2008

FROM TOP: AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; ANNA MONEYMAKER / GETTY IMAGES

CALVIN TRILLIN
DeadlinePoet

The Ballad of Elon Musk

(Sung to the tune of "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd")

Attend the tale of Elon Musk.
He fires folks from dawn till dusk.
He seems to treat their woes as zest.
And while he's about it, he feathers his nest.
His gestures weird, his manner brusque—
That's Elon Musk,
The chain-saw killer from Tesla.

Q&A

Roxane Gay

Roxane Gay is one of the most incisive cultural critics writing today. She landed in the center of contemporary American political discourse in 2014 with her *New York Times* best-selling essay collection *Bad Feminist*. In 2017, she published the nationally best-selling story collection *Difficult Women* and the memoir *Hunger*. She is also a coauthor of the Marvel comic book series *World of Wakanda*, a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, and writes the popular newsletter *The Audacity*. Gay's latest project is *The Portable Feminist Reader* (to be published this March by Penguin), in which she offers a nuanced look at the evolution of feminist theory, practices, and movements. I spoke with Gay about the new book in early February, just weeks after the inauguration of Donald Trump.

—Sara Franklin

SF: What effect has putting this project together had on you personally, ideologically, politically?

RG: I think it has reminded me that the canon is something that should be ever-evolving, that it shouldn't be something that is static and rigid. Of course there are going to be your mainstays, but there should always be new entries into the canon, and new ways of thinking about feminism and how we apply feminism to our lives and to the world around us.

SF: In your introduction, you talk about how people misconstrued some of the ideas you put forth in *Bad Feminist*, or how they took up those ideas in a way that was different from what you had intended. Did you do anything differently in the conception or explicit framing of this book that you hope will lead to a different result?

RG: I really tried to be both focused and expansive. What I mean by that is that I recognized it was best to focus on American feminism primarily—not because the rest of the world doesn't matter, but because I didn't want to do a disservice to global feminism and the very real issues that women are facing around the world. I did also want to acknowledge that, and so I included pieces like the one from Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," and a couple of others to make clear that, yes, feminism is a global concern, but here are pieces that focus primarily on American feminism. You can't be everything in every text. I was very mindful of that this time around.

I also wanted to go beyond theory, so I wanted to bring in a lot of applied feminism, like feminism and disability, feminism and race, transfeminism, ecofeminism—because, of course, we live on a planet. Reproductive freedom, of course. I tried to do as much as possible. And, you know, it's almost 700 pages long. So there's a lot to say, clearly.

SF: You write that it's detrimental to us to try to define what feminism is or isn't, but you also condemn "striving to emulate the worst of men as neither good nor bad feminism, but unacceptable feminism." How do you see those two assertions coexisting? Where's the line between an expansive, inclusive feminism and truly unacceptable feminism?

RG: Well, you know, "expansive" and "inclusive" are incredibly important concepts, but that doesn't mean that it's a free-for-all. One of the things that was really frustrating after *Bad Feminist* came out was a bunch of, like, pro-life "feminists" who were like, "I'm a feminist, and I'm pro-life," and it's like, "No, ma'am, you really are not." You cannot be pro-life and pro-feminism. Words mean things! And so many people were like, "Ha ha! I'm a bimbo, but I'm a 'bad feminist.'" Like, wow! It's just a lot when you see that.

I think that some of the ideas in the book did invite that kind of response, because I'm talking about the reality that we're all flawed, we're human, we are inconsistent. And I stand by that. But if I were to do the book over again, I would focus on accountability—that, yes, it's well and good that we're flawed and that we're human, but then how do we hold ourselves accountable for that and for the inconsistencies in our ideologies?

SF: Can you say a little bit more about that?

RG: A lot of times, people focus on the choices. OK, yes, we can focus on the choices that we make, and those choices do matter. But what's next? What do

(continued on page 22)

EMMIE AMERICA

"The canon is something that should be ever-evolving, that shouldn't be static."

Is Political Violence Ever Acceptable?

The Debate

Yes!

NATASHA LENNARD

WHY DO WE CONTINUE TO DEBATE THE acceptability of political violence on the left? It is a well-rehearsed and often tired debate, with familiar arguments on both sides. Yet it is evidently not something we will settle easily. But what's important is that we are still debating it on terrains in which violence is ubiquitous, structural, and consistently accepted—if not lauded.

I will not rehash the most well-worn arguments in defense of political violence here, but they fall into a few broad categories: historical—we defenders of political violence point to instances wherein some violent actions were central to success, from slave revolts to anti-colonial uprisings to the civil rights movement; taxonomical—we reject categorizations of violence as determined by the violence-monopolizing state and its sovereign, capital, wherein a broken bank window is deemed violent and the mass denial of healthcare to the poor or forced birth are not; and necessity-based—we question whether radical change is possible without some forms of organized violence against the ruling class and its interests.

For the most part, these abstracted debates don't play out during the planning of a specific political action. When questions of taking action do come up, it's almost always in the context of groups that have *already* found broad ethical agreement on acceptable militancy. If you're at an open DSA meeting and a stranger starts talking about Molotov cocktails and assassinations, that person is an idiot or a cop.

I am neither an idiot nor a cop, so I have not come here to publicly advocate that the US left, in the face of 21st-century fascism, commit to strategies of armed resistance. We are grossly out-armed, surveilled, and unready.

My point, though, is that left debates about political violence are rarely in the business of decision-making. Instead, they tend to be activities of judgment—of justification or condemnation: Something violent happens, and we are called to either condemn or justify it, and we argue accordingly. In this way, acts of political violence can work as critical interventions, drawing attention to their conditions of possibility. After a militant act occurs, we ask questions about causes and motives and grounds; we are pushed to consider whether a given state of affairs constituted acceptable grounds for a violent response, whether an existing

No!

DAVID CORTRIGHT

THE SUPPORT THAT LUIGI MANGIONE received on social media after he was arrested for the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in December and from protesters outside his pretrial hearing in February was shocking. It reflects not only the callousness and anonymity of the Internet but the false belief that violence can be an appropriate response to injustice.

We should fight against corporate and political oppression, but there are no quick solutions, and violence inevitably makes matters worse. In the struggle for social justice, there is no alternative to the difficult task of engaging politically and organizing mass movements of nonviolent resistance.

Some misunderstand the nature of nonviolence. Many people think of it as passive resistance, but nonviolent action is not merely prayerful protest or an appeal to conscience. It is a means of exercising power. It is a form of contentious politics that seeks to win the support of third parties and shift political loyalties away from the oppressor toward those failed by justice. It's based on the idea that persistent protest and performative action can reach mass audiences and communicate compelling narratives for justice.

This means that those who participate in nonviolent struggles must be prepared to sacrifice, not only because power never yields without a fight and repression is common against effective movements, but because those sacrifices, when performed by peaceful protesters, have redemptive qualities. Unjustified repression against disciplined nonviolent protest erodes the legitimacy of the oppressor and attracts the sympathy of those who were previously indifferent or opposed to the movement.

The moral logic of using nonviolent means is clear: If we strive for a more just and peaceful world, we must use just and peaceful means. Our ends and means must be compatible. Immoral or destructive means cannot bring about moral and constructive ends.

Too many think that violence is the most effective way to exert political power, but empirical research shows the opposite. The scholars Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan studied hundreds of struggles for political change and found that nonviolent methods were twice as effective as using military force in achieving the desired results.

context is more justified than an act of violence against it.

My focus here is on politically motivated and planned acts of deadly or potentially deadly violence. Many of us have been in protests that involved property damage, empty cop cars set alight, frays with police, scuffles with the far right, and so on, all of which falls into the category of violence according to the state, but the ethics of which I take to be beneath serious intra-left debate when it comes to questions of violence. No doubt some actions at riotous protests can be ill-thought, with risks poorly calculated, but it is harmful to acquiesce to the state's determinations of violence and nonviolence. Segmenting movements by the old canard of "good protester" versus "bad protester" is a gift to repression.

There are, however, serious debates to have around how we relate to political actions that are unambiguously violent. I will take a minimal stance: A leftist political position insistent on condemning all political violence is a reactionary one.

When "I condemn Hamas!" became a prerequisite for entry into public criticism of Israel's genocide, we saw all too clearly how condemnations of political violence can align with the side of greater violence. The demand that every denunciation of Israel's eliminationist violence also carry the speech act "I condemn Hamas!" worked to contain the context in which the genocide was understood. It promoted Israel's narrative, in which history seemed to start on October 7, 2023, and occluded a focus on 75 years of occupation, displacement, and apartheid. It is not the left's obligation to agree uncritically with every act of violent resistance, but it is our responsibility to reject frameworks of judgment that sustain conditions of constant, systemic violence.

A leftist political position insistent on condemning all political violence is a reactionary one.

Let's take another example. Reams have already been written on the outpouring of support that Luigi Mangione has received as the suspected killer of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. A morbid symptom? Perhaps. A rebirth of insurrectionary propaganda of the deed? Unlikely. But thousands of supporters of the assassination had little difficulty in seeing it as an act of defensible counterviolence to a death-dealing establishment of capitalist accumulation.

Writing about the assassination and its aftermath, Sam Adler-Bell noted that "we can't kill our way out of a society premised on human disposability." He's right; for one, we literally don't have the capacity, and more importantly, political violence alone cannot deliver liberatory collective futures. But a deed like the CEO assassination offers not so much an answer as a question, which should supersede our typical debates over political violence: Which violent activities continue every day without the demand for justification at all? N

Natasha Lennard is a columnist at The Intercept *and the author of* Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life.

Nonviolent action is also more likely to generate greater democracy and political freedom. Research on political transitions shows that nonviolent campaigns are more likely to result in democratic societies, while violent transitions tend to result in authoritarian regimes. These results tell us that nonviolent action is not only the right thing to do; it is the most effective way of achieving positive change.

What accounts for the success of nonviolent action? The essential ingredient is mass participation. Case studies indicate that a large following is decisive to the effectiveness of civil resistance campaigns. The single most important factor in achieving success, according to Chenoweth and Stephan, is the scale and range of popular participation.

These findings are highly relevant to the choice of using nonviolent versus violent means. Groups that engage in violent and destructive acts are by their nature small and conspiratorial, usually male-dominated, and often require specialized knowledge of weaponry. Nonviolent actions, by contrast, are welcoming to all: Women, children, the elderly, the disabled—everyone can contribute to the cause. Mass nonviolent action prefigures the diverse, inclusive society we seek to create in campaigning for peace and justice.

In the current US context, any attempt to use violence, or to emulate the assassination of the UnitedHealthcare CEO, would be disastrous. It would generate sympathy for the victims and turn people against the perpetrators and the cause of justice they claim to represent. It would activate the powers of repression and lead to the continued erosion of civil liberties. The best viable strategy for countering an assault against the foundations of our democracy is to mobilize massive nonviolent protest.

We must be prepared to put our bodies on the line to engage in peaceful resistance.

Many of us are stunned at the breadth and severity of Donald Trump's onslaught, but we cannot be silent. We must speak out in defense of the Constitution and the rule of law. We must be prepared to put our bodies on the line to engage in peaceful resistance, including civil disobedience. We must act to protect the most vulnerable and defend the institutions of government against those who seek to destroy them.

We must prepare now to mobilize mass participation in the 2026 midterm elections. The goal needs to be delivering a resounding vote of no confidence to Trumpian extremism, fielding and electing candidates who are committed to preserving democracy and restoring constitutional principles.

The task before us is to organize a true majority of Americans to oppose the current trajectory. Acts of violence are contrary to that purpose and will only deepen the crisis and entrench the forces of reaction. N

David Cortright is a scholar, peace activist, and professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.

Urgent: Special Summer Driving Notice

To some, sunglasses are a fashion accessory…

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Drivers' Alert: Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than any sunny day at the beach can… do you know how to protect yourself?

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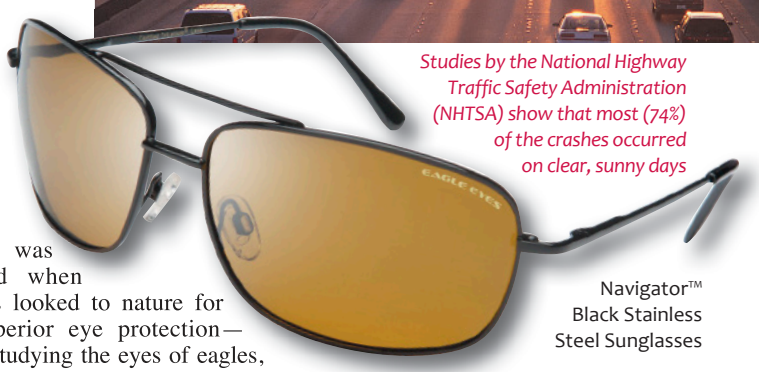

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VOICES / MICHELE GOODWIN AND GREGORY SHAFFER

Testing the Rule of Law

The American experiment depends on institutional checks on power. If there are no checks, these will be devastating times.

In the first three weeks of his second term, President Donald Trump has tested the rule of law in the United States like never before. We are in a constitutional crisis. Not since Watergate has there been such a glaring abuse of presidential power as Trump attempts to seize more control, flout checks and balances, and instill fear in government employees and, really, all Americans.

Already there have been threats against civil servants related to their employment, attacks on journalists for reporting on unlawful executive orders, vows to investigate critics of the administration, an atmosphere of hostility toward civil rights, and even threats to prosecute officials who served in previous administrations, further heightening alarm. We are reminded of the authoritarian trope "For my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law." As his first term made clear, Trump will test and defy the limits on his authority while creating a chilling atmosphere of intimidation and embedding thuggery into the national discourse and politics. But can the rule of law curtail Trump's ability to get away with what he's doing?

There are important checks on presidential authority that can be used by Congress, the courts, governors, and state legislatures. State attorneys general can push back against the executive orders and policies implemented by this administration. Congress possesses the authority under Article I, Section 8, to control the federal purse. Trump does not have that authority.

Since 1862, members of Congress have sworn that they "will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." This oath includes a provision to "bear true faith and allegiance to the same…without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and…[to] faithfully discharge the duties of the office." In other words, they need not be stunned into paralysis while staffers of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) under Elon Musk, the unelected billionaire tech mogul at Trump's side, gains seemingly unchecked access to sensitive data.

The courts also can and should check Trump's unlawful agenda. Judges can issue injunctions temporarily or permanently barring Trump's executive orders from going into effect. In fact, the national legal organization Democracy Forward has secured a number of injunctions halting Trump's numerous orders in the first week of February, and states have authority independent of the federal government.

So while Trump seeks to undo the policies of previous administrations, both Democratic and Republican, with his myriad executive orders, the president is not exempt from abiding by the rule of law. The act of signing his name to unconstitutional executive orders does not make those documents enforceable or legal.

Indeed, Trump has lost 15 times in court, where judges have blocked his executive orders related to ending birthright citizenship for American-born children whose parents are immigrants; placing 2,200 employees of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on leave; sending transgender women to men's prisons; and offering buyouts to 2 million federal employees, among others. Even though bringing litigation is an onerous process, civil society organizations have refused to back down.

The rule of law is designed to protect individuals from the arbitrary exercise of power, and yet Trump has shown time and again that he intends to disregard laws and is almost daring anyone to stop him. In too many cases, it appears no one will, which is what the administration is counting on. The Department of Education, for example, will soon be a hollowed-out shell. Referring to his secretary of education, Linda McMahon, and the dismantling he hopes for, the president said on February 4: "I told Linda, 'Linda, I hope you do a great job in putting yourself out of a job.' I want her to put herself out of a job."

Meanwhile, USAID has effectively been shut down. Most employees have been told not to return to work. And without approval, Trump froze all payments, including those previously appropriated, meaning that he blocked the United States from paying its debts. After this was challenged in court,

a federal judge lifted the freeze. Alarmingly, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was established to protect consumers against predatory lending and financial abuse, has stopped its work, and its director has been fired. As well, federal protections for employee safety may soon be gutted.

Some maintain that the only checks on Trump's lawless actions to eliminate government agencies will be the Republicans in Congress, who hold the majority. But they are not a sure bet, given how the White House successfully bullied lawmakers into voting to approve Trump's cabinet nominations. Others say the courts will fail to hold Trump accountable because he has vowed to stack them. And should even the Supreme Court rule against him, there's no guarantee that Trump would comply. His advisers have told him to ignore the courts.

Checking the arbitrary exercise of power will be the country's central challenge over the next four years.

Checking the arbitrary exercise of power will be the country's central challenge in the next four years, because Trump's attempt to expand his presidential authority is unprecedented. Richard Nixon's conduct pales in comparison.

Most of the challenges to Trump's executive orders argue that his conduct is arbitrary—a red flag in constitutional law, because laws should not be based on whim, personal discretion, or the intent to discriminate. This has been a smart and necessary tactic. Yet there are concerns in the legal community about this approach.

Historically, federal courts have refused to give safe harbor to laws whose application is deemed to be arbitrary, such as ones that do not apply to those in power. Yet the Supreme Court's decision in *Trump v. United States* last year created a new doctrine of "absolute immunity" for "core" presidential acts combined with "presumptive immunity" for other "official acts." Armed with this decision, Trump will test it when he is challenged, under the belief that the rule of law does not apply to him when he is in office. To our point, JD Vance posted this on X on February 9: "If a judge tried to tell a general how to conduct a military operation, that would be illegal.… Judges aren't allowed to control the executive's legitimate power."

None of this should come as a surprise given that Trump vowed to be a dictator "on day one." He also told his supporters, "We'll have it fixed so good, you're not going to have to vote" again. What could he have possibly meant? That voting rights under a Trump presidency would be suspended or suppressed? That voting would be rigged? Over the years, pundits have noted that Trump speaks in hyperbole, but his slew of executive orders, mass firings, and more suggest that his extreme statements are not all hot air. The president is claiming power that exceeds his constitutional authority and waiting to see what happens next.

The United States has institutional machinery to protect against such defiance of the rule of law, yet its vulnerabilities are clear. For instance, after a federal judge in Rhode Island ruled on February 10 that the White House had defied his injunction pausing its federal grants freeze, a White House spokesperson said, "Each executive order will hold up in court because every action of the Trump-Vance administration is completely lawful. Any legal challenge against it is nothing more than an attempt to undermine the will of the American people."

It's not only that the White House is brazenly ignoring the rule of the courts. It is also hiring prosecutors, civil servants, and senior military officials who signal that they will favor Trump's policies over constitutional norms. Supporters of Trump call his appointees institutional "disruptors." But it is one thing to disrupt an institution's policies; it is another to undermine institutional checks against the uncontrolled exercise of power. And there is something altogether unprecedented in the chaos unleashed on millions of citizens, who now experience considerable anxiety regarding their future. As Trump proceeds to weaponize the government, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the team of loyalists he has appointed are not meant to serve all Americans, but rather to carry out the MAGA movement's white nationalist agenda while keeping the opposition at bay.

It's important to remember that this is not a new playbook. For example, Vladimir Putin weaponized Russian law to destroy his opposition in Russia. One test will be how the Trump administration uses tax law against his political opponents. This is a tactic used by authoritarians around the globe. Indeed, Trump has warned that he will target organizations with a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status that are doing work he doesn't like. In this way, any agency of the government can be weaponized, including the Internal Revenue Service. Further, Trump has already declared three "national emergencies" and deployed the military to the border. More may follow. Such tactics aim to create openings for lawlessness and test the rule of law like no other act has.

For democracies to continue and thrive, the rule of law must be preserved. This nation's founders stressed the importance of institutional checks against "factions." As James Madison wrote, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place."

The president does not operate in a vacuum. In addition to the constitutional checks and balances, independent media outlets can be a bulwark against authoritarianism. The media must document it all.

Protecting the rule of law is a radical accomplishment in human history. It is the result of persistent, hard-fought struggles over time. The struggle is ongoing precisely because power is at stake. The American experiment depends on institutional checks on power's exercise. If there are no checks, then these will indeed be devastating times. **N**

Michele Goodwin and Gregory Shaffer are law professors at Georgetown University.

(continued from page 16)

we do after that? So much of feminist conversation and, quite frankly, all social justice conversation sort of stops at a certain point, as if we don't have the imagination to take it further, or we don't have the political will to take it further. And so, yes, we can and should think about our choices, but we also have to think about accountability and then what we do with that accountability. For example, in *Bad Feminist*, I talk about loving hip-hop, which I absolutely do. But as long as we keep consuming the supply of misogynistic music, musicians have no incentive, across all genres, to make better music that doesn't degrade and diminish women. And so at some point we have to decide what's more important: that women aren't consistently diminished across popular culture, or that we enjoy the bop? It's hard to make the better choice to say, "You know what, I'm actually not going to listen to that music." But the more that we do that, the more real and sustained change becomes possible.

"A lot of the work we have to do now as feminists is at the community level."

SF: The flip side, though, is that plenty of women and people who fancy themselves as "free" or "liberated" are keen to deny any association with feminism, as you point out in this book. Is it the same old story about wanting to be proximate to patriarchal power?

RG: It really is that simple. It's about proximity to power. I mean, we just saw that in the 2024 election. We're seeing that now. A lot of Republican women who are losing their jobs in the federal government are deep in their tears, because they're saying, "We thought you were only going after Black people." But no, that's not really what any of this was about. They want all of us gone from public life and from positions of power. And some people don't realize there is a price that's going to be extracted from them for that proximity to power. If you think that they're not also going to come for you, you are either being delusional or you are right there alongside them, committing these bad acts.

SF: Given where we are with the Trump administration, what can feminism do in this moment?

RG: Man, I wish I knew. I do. It's hard to figure out how to resist a system where you literally have no access to power and no control. The Democrats are feckless, with very few exceptions. So now we have to grapple with the reality that our democracy, such as it is, is so much more fragile than any of us thought. I believe that a lot of the work we have to do as feminists now is at the community level. But I also think that we have to figure out how we're going to protest what's going on, and it has to be more than catchy slogans and hats. Those symbols clearly mattered to a great number of people, so I'm not going to denigrate them. But we need something more forceful this time. I also think we have to agitate for a general strike, which seems logistically impossible. But the only way, I think, to really make a difference here is for everyone to just say, "No, we're not gonna do our jobs until something changes here." N

Popular CoQ10 Pills Leave Millions Suffering

Could this newly discovered brain fuel solve America's worsening memory crisis?

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA — Millions of Americans take the supplement known as CoQ10. It's the coenzyme that supercharges the "energy factories" in your cells known as *mitochondria*. But there's a serious flaw that's leaving millions unsatisfied.

As you age, your mitochondria break down and fail to produce energy. In a revealing study, a team of researchers showed that 95 percent of the mitochondria in a 90-year-old man were damaged, compared to almost no damage in the mitochondria of a 5-year-old.

Taking CoQ10 alone is not enough to solve this problem. Because as powerful as CoQ10 is, there's one critical thing it fails to do: it can't create new mitochondria to replace the ones you lost.

And that's bad news for Americans all over the country. The loss of cellular energy is a problem for the memory concerns people face as they get older.

"We had no way of replacing lost mitochondria until a recent discovery changed everything," says Dr. Al Sears, founder and medical director of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, Florida. "Researchers discovered the only nutrient known to modern science that has the power to trigger the growth of new mitochondria."

Why Taking CoQ10 is Not Enough

Dr. Sears explains, "This new discovery is so powerful, it can multiply your mitochondria by 55 percent in just a few weeks. That's the equivalent of restoring decades of lost brain power."

This exciting nutrient — called PQQ *(pyrroloquinoline quinone)* — is the driving force behind a revolution in aging. When paired with CoQ10, this dynamic duo has the power to reverse the age-related memory losses you may have thought were beyond your control.

Dr. Sears pioneered a new formula — called **Ultra Accel Q** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel Q** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel Q** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

Science Confirms the Many Benefits of PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical Pharmacology* reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants. With the ability to keep every cell in your body operating at full strength, **Ultra Accel Q** delivers more than just added brain power and a faster memory.

People feel more energetic, more alert, and don't need naps in the afternoon. The boost in cellular energy generates more power to your heart, lungs, muscles, and more.

"With the PQQ in Ultra Accel, I have energy I never thought possible at my age," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears's patients. "I'm in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearly, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and Dr. Sears receives countless emails from his patients and readers. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling old and run down, or for those who feel more forgetful. It surprises many that you can add healthy and productive years to your life simply by taking **Ultra Accel Q** every day."

You may have seen Dr. Sears on television or read one of his 12 best-selling books. Or you may have seen him speak at the 2016 WPBF 25 Health and Wellness Festival in South Florida, featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people attended Dr. Sears's lecture on anti-aging breakthroughs and waited in line for hours during his book signing at the event.

Will Ultra Accel Q Multiply Your Energy?

Ultra Accel Q is turning everything we thought we knew about youthful energy on its head. Especially for people over age 50. In less than 30 seconds every morning, you can harness the power of this breakthrough discovery to restore peak energy and your "spark for life."

So, if you've noticed less energy as you've gotten older, and you want an easy way to reclaim your youthful edge, this new opportunity will feel like blessed relief.

The secret is the "energy multiplying" molecule that activates a dormant gene in your body that declines with age, which then instructs your cells to pump out fresh energy from the inside-out. This growth of new "energy factories" in your cells is called mitochondrial biogenesis.

MEMORY-BUILDING SENSATION: Top doctors are now recommending new *Ultra Accel Q* because it restores decades of lost brain power without a doctor's visit.

Instead of falling victim to that afternoon slump, you enjoy sharp-as-a-tack focus, memory, and concentration from sunup to sundown. And you get more done in a day than most do in a week. Regardless of how exhausting the world is now.

Dr. Sears reports, "The most rewarding aspect of practicing medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. **Ultra Accel Q** sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies… And they actually feel young again."

And his patients agree. "I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry from Ft. Pierce, Florida. "My endurance has almost doubled, and I feel it mentally, too. There's a clarity and sense of well-being in my life that I've never experienced before."

How To Get Ultra Accel Q

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel Q** in the United States. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls during the official launch.

An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Ultra Accel Q**. And your order is backed up by a no-hassle, 90-day money back guarantee. No questions asked.

Starting at 7:00 AM today, the discount offer will be available for a limited time only. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE **1-888-733-8378** right now and use promo code **NATUAQ425** to secure your own supply.

Important: Due to **Ultra Accel Q** recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

Letters

Come Gather 'Round, People

Thank you for Daniel Bessner's thoughtful review of Noam Chomsky and Nathan Robinson's *The Myth of American Idealism* ["Empire's Critic," February 2025]. Bessner's main criticism is not analytical but strategic: "The left needs to spend less time disabusing people of myths they no longer believe or organizing mass protests that go nowhere. Instead, we must formulate a more effective strategy for shaping state behavior."

But is it premature to write off mass action as a dead end? The abolitionists, Populists, Socialists, early union organizers, suffragists, and civil rights activists were hardly unqualified failures. It's understandable that one would be tempted to give up on mass action just after the masses allowed themselves to be bamboozled into voting for a charlatan. But ultimately there's no alternative to keeping on trying to persuade the people.

George Scialabba
Cambridge, MA

Daniel Bessner asserts that the movement against the Vietnam War "had little policy influence." On the contrary, numerous studies, such as Carolyn Woods Eisenberg's recent *Fire and Rain: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Wars in Southeast Asia*, detail how the Nixon administration constantly took the movement into account in making major decisions about the war. One example: Nixon admitted in his memoirs that he backed down on his threat to unleash a major escalation on North Vietnam, including the possible use of nuclear weapons, because of the Moratorium and Mobilization demonstrations in the fall of 1969. This story is told in the PBS documentary *The Movement and the "Madman."*

Robert Levering
San Francisco, CA

The writer is the executive producer of The Movement and the "Madman."

Constitutional Machinations

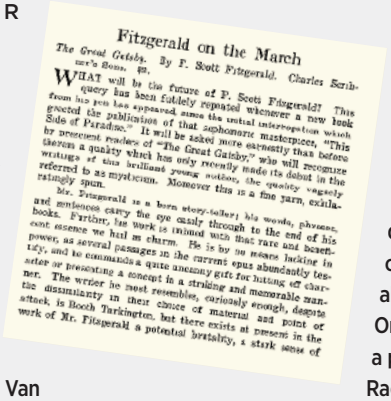
I was pleased to read that *The Nation* was calling out the Electoral College as far back as the 1870s ["A Popular Opinion," December 2024]. In his article, Richard Kreitner laments the fact that we have been unable to destroy the "decrepit piece of constitutional machinery" known as the Electoral College, citing the presidential elections it has muddied since the end of the Civil War. However, the role of that institution was even more nefarious before the war's outbreak. The concept and design of the Electoral College established in the Constitution of 1787 was directly responsible for the stuffing of all three branches of the new central government with planter/slaveholder representation. The Constitution created and blended two forms of government, constitutional republicanism and constitutional slavery, the latter of which used the tools of representative republicanism for the protection and expansion of the ownership of human beings.

Michael Smiddy
Plattsburgh, NY

OUR BACK PAGES / RICHARD KREITNER

Gatsby at 100

The classic as past and prologue.



Fitzgerald on the March

The Great Gatsby. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Charles Scribner's Sons. $2.

WHAT will be the future of F. Scott Fitzgerald? This query has been futilely repeated whenever a new book from his pen has appeared, since the initial interruption which greeted the publication of that sophomoric masterpiece, "This Side of Paradise." It will be asked more earnestly than before by prescient readers of "The Great Gatsby," who will recognize therein a quality which has only recently made its debut in the writings of this brilliant young author, the quality vaguely referred to as mysticism. Moreover this is a fine yarn, exhilaratingly spun.

Mr. Fitzgerald is a born story-teller; his words, phrases, and sentences carry the eye easily through to the end of his books. Further, his work is imbued with that rare and beneficent essence we hail as charm. He is by no means lacking in power, as several passages in the current opus abundantly testify, and he commands a quite uncanny gift for hitting off character or presenting a concept in a striking and memorable manner. The writer he most resembles, curiously enough, despite the dissimilarity in their choice of material and point of attack, is Booth Tarkington, but there exists at present in the work of Mr. Fitzgerald a potential brutality, a stark sense of

A century ago, on April 10, 1925, *The Great Gatsby* was published by Scribner. One month later, Carl Van Vechten, a novelist, photographer, and Zelig-like impresario, reviewed the novel for *The Nation.*

Van Vechten was a friend of *Gatsby*'s author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, whom he'd met several years earlier at a party that ended in a scene that could have been taken from the novel: As Van Vechten played the piano, the publisher Horace Liveright drunkenly yanked him from his seat, fracturing the writer's shoulder.

In his review, Van Vechten called *Gatsby* "a fine yarn, exhilaratingly spun," and Fitzgerald "a born story-teller" whose "work is imbued with that rare and beneficent essence we hail as charm."

In *Gatsby*, he wrote, Fitzgerald had moved beyond his earlier fascination with "the flapper" to a new preoccupation: "the theme of a soiled or rather cheap personality transfigured and rendered pathetically appealing through the possession of a passionate idealism." He noted that Fitzgerald's own potential "depends to an embarrassing extent on the nature of his own ambitions."

Tragically, the novelist fell prey to the very vices he lampooned in his work. In 1937, Van Vechten ran into Fitzgerald at lunch; aged by drink, he was barely recognizable. They went outside and Van Vechten took some of the last known pictures of Fitzgerald.

A century on, *The Great Gatsby* has lost none of its bite as an indictment of the "vast carelessness" of the rich, who live "safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor." One cannot help but see in its pages a preview of today's MAGA moment. Racist ex–football player Tom Buchanan now seems a truer embodiment of contemporary America than Jay Gatsby. Unlike Gatsby's longing for a vanished past, which was born of an "extraordinary gift for hope," Tom's nostalgia had curdled into something darker—an obsession with the superiority of the "white race."

"Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas," Fitzgerald wrote. One can easily imagine Tom these days hosting a popular manosphere podcast: "Flushed with his impassioned gibberish, he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization."

Ruled by our own posse of Internet-addled Toms, we live at the dawn of another age of "vast carelessness"—only now it's not just "things and creatures" being "smashed up," as Fitzgerald wrote at the end of *Gatsby*, but a country. N

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ARE MEN OK?

According to Richard V. Reeves, American society is failing to address the specific needs of men and boys. Are his solutions the flip side of the feminist experiment, or just another backlash?

EAMON WHALEN

ON NOVEMBER 21, 2024, RICHARD V. REEVES STOOD IN A GREENROOM AT *THE WASHINGTON Post*'s third annual Global Women's Summit. Reeves, the president of the American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM), was the only man in a lineup that included former Democratic Party House leader Nancy Pelosi, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, and actress Kerry Washington. Leaning against a wall, he made small talk with his copanelist Grace Bastidas, the editor in chief of Parents.com. The target audience for his 2022 book, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*, Reeves told her, is a liberal mom worried about her son.

At one point, Reeves himself would have been skeptical of his book's premise. He's described feminism as perhaps "the greatest economic liberation in human history." But in his work studying economic inequality at the Brookings Institution, where he was formerly a senior fellow, he had run into what he has called the "side effects" of feminism's "glorious achievements." The starkest data was in education, particularly in college. Since Title IX was passed in 1972, the gender gap in bachelor's degrees has widened, but in the opposite direction. The biggest risk factor for dropping out of college, controlling for everything else, is being a man. Those struggles have extended to the labor market. When adjusted for inflation, most American men today earn around $3,000 less than men did in 1979, which leads to a grim realization: Much of the narrowing of the persistent wage gap between men and women can be explained by the stagnating wages for men.

Today, Reeves notes, women between the ages of 25 and 34 are entering the workforce at greater rates than they ever have, while the workforce participation of men in the same age cohort hasn't grown in a decade. Fatherhood has also been destabilized:

Eamon Whalen is a freelance journalist from Minneapolis covering culture and politics.

ILLUSTRATION BY **ÀDRIA FRUITÓS**

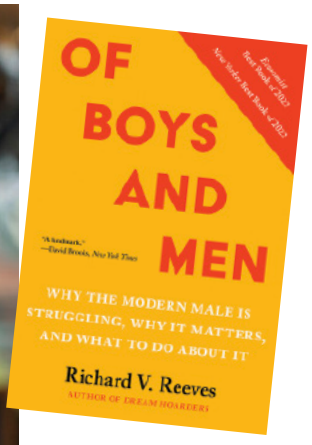
More than one in four fathers with children 18 or younger now live apart from their children. There is more bad news in men's health, both physical and mental; men fall victim to alcohol or drug overdose or suicide—so-called deaths of despair—at a rate three times higher than that of women. The suicide rate for men between 25 and 34 has gone up by nearly a third since 2010. In its 2023 "State of American Men" report, the Equimundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice noted that almost half of the men it surveyed had thoughts of suicide in the previous two weeks.

THE SUICIDE RATE FOR MEN BETWEEN 25 AND 34 HAS GONE UP BY NEARLY A THIRD SINCE 2010.

When Reeves set out to write a book on these findings, friends and colleagues advised him to drop it as a matter of career preservation. "What you're saying is true," Reeves remembers hearing. "But for God's sake, don't say it." They warned that he'd end up sounding like Josh Hawley, the Republican senator from Missouri whose 2023 book *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs* advances the issue from the right. Hawley represents the post-Trump, post–Me Too Republican Party's awkward attempt to synthesize its church-based brand of social conservatism with the "manosphere," a collection of online subcultures unified by anti-feminism. Another product of this collaboration is Vice President JD Vance, whose choice phrases like "childless cat ladies" were ripped from the manosphere podcasts he'd appeared on as he was burnishing his credentials within the extremely online New Right.

Surprise stardom: Richard Reeves initially struggled to find a publisher for his tome on how men are struggling.

Reeves felt a responsibility to take on the men question, because he thought ceding this ground to the manosphere and the New Right was wrongheaded. But he shared his doubters' reservations. The achievements of second-wave feminism—the Equal Pay Act, Title IX, and *Roe v. Wade*—had been won within living memory. In an era shaped by the grievances of conservative men, those victories have proved tenuous. Writing a book about the plight of American men seemed self-pitying at best and reactionary at worst. But Reeves noticed that even when people tried to dissuade him, they'd share concerns about the state of the men in their lives. And it's well within the feminist tradition to analyze the state of men. So Reeves set to work, assembling a manuscript bursting with data on how men and boys were falling behind. He lambasted denialism from the left and atavism from the right. Then it was rejected by every publisher he sent it to.



Reeves recalibrated. He'd need to be less polemical, lest he come off as a watered-down men's rights activist. He also didn't think his message would travel if he branded himself as an ally of feminism promoting healthy masculinity, even though that wouldn't necessarily be an incorrect way to describe him. He struck the right balance, and in 2022 Brookings published *Of Boys and Men* on its own press. Almost three years later, the project Reeves was told would ruin his career has done the opposite: It launched the mild-mannered British policy wonk into public intellectual stardom. If you've read a magazine article, watched a TV news segment, or listened to a podcast on the "crisis of masculinity" lately, you've encountered an interview with or at least a reference to Reeves. His book was on Barack Obama's summer reading list, and the philanthropist Melinda French Gates awarded Reeves a $20 million grant—$5 million for AIBM and $15 million in a donor-advised fund to give away. In the spirit of his vision of gender equality, Reeves named the fund Rise Together.

Reeves's critics, however, remain skeptical. They argue that his focus on men reproduces the very zero-sum thinking on gender equality he seeks to transcend, and that despite noble intentions, by elevating the idea that men are falling behind women—an idea that most women, who on average earn nearly 20 percent less than men, would certainly find dubious—he will further inflame the backlash he wants to contain.

Though Reeves told me that his wife describes him as a "thin-skinned polemicist," he seems to welcome the skepticism. His appearance at an event like the Global Women's Summit, just two weeks after Donald Trump defeated Kamala Harris in the US presidential election, would be an opportunity to put his message—and his ability to convey it—to the test.

As Reeves was whisked away for makeup, I chatted with another panelist, Emily Oster, an economics professor at Brown focused on child-rearing, who became both a star and a lightning rod by pushing for school reopenings during the pandemic. Oster recently launched a parenting podcast on Bari Weiss's right-leaning media outlet *The Free Press*, making her no stranger to offending liberals and leftists. Still, Oster had trouble initially accepting Reeves's premise. "Oh, men are struggling? It's harder for some of us to get our head around it," she said. "Because, at the top, it's just a bunch of penises." Men make up nearly three-quarters of the federal legislature and two-thirds of state legislatures. The billionaire and *Fortune* 500 CEO class remains an almost exclusively male domain. If you're a woman navigating an elite professional milieu,

COURTESY OF RICHARD V. REEVES

as a generous slice of the attendees of this Goldman Sachs–sponsored summit were, you might wonder what the hell Reeves is talking about. But Reeves never hesitates to point out that he is chiefly concerned with men at the bottom of the economic and racial hierarchy. "There are still places for women to go at the top, but there are parts of the distribution where men are really struggling," Oster said. "Richard has moved me on this a lot."

Reeves, Oster, and Bastidas took the stage in a standing-room-only auditorium for their panel, titled "Parenting 3.0." I stood near the back at a high-top table next to Oster's assistant. The panel's moderator, the journalist Sally Quinn, asked Bastidas about the concept of the "mommune"—a group of single mothers who raise their kids together under one roof. Bastidas explained that the nuclear family is not the norm in most of the world and shouldn't be in the United States, either. "Some of us have plans with our best girlfriends—like 'OK, when our husbands have gone wherever they need to go, we will move in together,'" Bastidas said. The audience broke into laughter. Reeves raised his eyebrows. "I knew this was going to be brutal," he muttered into his microphone, to more laughter. Quinn asked Reeves the next question, about the role of fathers. As he spoke, he turned to his right and addressed Bastidas: "Where are we going, by the way? When you say 'the fathers,' is there something you want to tell me?"

"The big disco in the sky," Bastidas responded. The audience continued to laugh.

"It takes a village—I agree. Families come in all shapes and sizes—I agree. But some of the villagers should be men," Reeves said. He explained that dads used to matter mostly because they were the breadwinners, and that's changed, for a good reason. But "dads still matter, and we need to find policies and a culture and a way of talking about this that doesn't somehow see them as second-class parents who are somehow less important," he continued. "We have to have a conversation about masculinity in a positive way. I understand it's a difficult time to make that argument. But honestly, you cannot ignore these issues. You cannot ignore these questions and then wonder why the people who are not ignoring them are getting all the attention."

The panel ended shortly after Reeves's monologue. As the lights came up, Oster's assistant turned to me and said, "Have you ever met someone who was so good at communicating?"

Thought leadership: Richard Reeves at *The Washington Post*'s 2024 Global Women's Summit.

I first met Reeves the day before the Global Women's Summit, at a coffee shop near the Brookings offices in Washington, DC. Reeves, 55, is tall and wiry, with a swoop of brown hair graying around the edges. He was dressed in business casual and would occasionally slip his glasses on when he wanted to quote a statistic from his phone or laptop. He was quick to crack a joke but would also pause and lean back against the wall for several beats, eyes closed and lips pursed as he considered a question.

Two weeks after Election Day, I wanted to learn why a man who has described himself as "proudly boring" had become the go-to expert on American manhood and a Cassandra to Democrats reeling from a campaign season that saw male revanchism coincide with an exodus of young men from the party. "People aren't worried about the first thing I say, whether it's the gaps in education or the suicide rate," Reeves said as he sipped his coffee. "They're worried about the fifth thing. They have a question in the back of their mind: 'Where is he going with this?' And that's a reasonable thing to be thinking!"

"DADS STILL MATTER, AND WE NEED TO FIND POLICIES AND A CULTURE AND A WAY OF TALKING ABOUT THIS."
—Richard Reeves

THE WASHINGTON POST

Ready to fight: Trump's 2024 strategy leaned into machismo, with the UFC's CEO, Dana White, introducing him at the Republican National Convention.

That captures what Jill Filipovic, the author of *The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness*, first thought when she encountered *Of Boys and Men*. "For a lot of feminists, it raises our spidey senses when we see someone who's arguing 'but men and boys too,'" she said. "It's like the 'All Lives Matter' of the feminist movement." But she was pleasantly surprised. "He may not approach it the same way that I do, but he is not someone who's trying to take something away from feminism," Filipovic concluded.

"Feminism has upended patriarchy, a specific social order that had the fatal flaw of being grossly unequal," Reeves writes in his book. He doesn't think that feminism has gone too far—he thinks it hasn't gone far enough. "Women's lives have been recast. Men's lives have not," he writes. What is needed is a "positive vision of masculinity for a postfeminist world." *Of Boys and Men* is a pop social science book with pithy aphorisms, plenty of charts, and several signature policy proposals. For example: to address their struggles in education, hold all boys back a year and invest in more technical schools. Start initiatives to encourage men to join the female-dominated HEAL professions (healthcare, education, administration, literacy), mirroring the efforts to get women into STEM. To help dislocated dads, institute six months of fully paid parental leave.

Reeves's role during the early days of AIBM, which he envisions becoming a DC policy shop, has been that of communicator. He or his writings have appeared in just about every outlet you've heard of and many you haven't. The idea behind the media blitz, Reeves told me, is to create a "permission space" in the mainstream and among liberals to talk about men's struggles in a way that's consistent with women's equality. "It didn't really seem like anyone had the stomach to take it on and champion it as an issue," said Christine Emba, a staff writer at *The Atlantic* who wrote a viral article on the state of American men in 2023, when she was a columnist at *The Washington Post*. Emba interviewed Reeves for her story, and he later asked her to join the board at AIBM. Emba herself felt the need for that permission space in liberal newsrooms. "There'd be a groan," she recalled, "and people would say, 'So you hate feminism? So you hate women?'"

AS YOUNG MEN'S DRIFT AWAY FROM THE DEMOCRATS CAME INTO MAINSTREAM VIEW, SOMEONE NEEDED TO EXPLAIN WHY.

"If you are a man in this country and you don't vote for Donald Trump, you're not a man," the 31-year-old conservative media star Charlie Kirk said last July as he led the Trump campaign's effort on college campuses. In 2024, Trump enlisted his sons as strategists, and he was introduced at the Republican National Convention by Ultimate Fighting Championship CEO Dana White. (Reeves pointed out that in 2016 and 2020, Trump was introduced at the RNC by his daughter Ivanka.) On election night, White thanked a list of podcasters who were part of a new media strategy reportedly masterminded by an 18-year-old named Bo Loudon, a friend of Barron Trump whose parents are Mar-a-Lago members. This strategy appears to have paid dividends: In 2020, 56 percent of men under 30 voted for Joe Biden. In 2024, 56 percent of that cohort voted for Trump—a nearly 15-point swing to the right, according to the AP Votecast Survey. "Democrats should be fighting for every constituency. And this is one that we've really left on the table for a long time," said Shauna Daly, a longtime Democratic campaign leader who credits Reeves for inspiring her new project, called the Young Men Research Initiative.

As the election results brought young men's drift away from the Democrats into mainstream

EVA MARIE UZCATEGUI / *BLOOMBERG* VIA GETTY IMAGES

view, the media needed someone to explain why. Reeves, who is a member of neither major party, became an in-demand source, and his diagnosis has been blunt. "What we had was performative masculinity from the right and deafening silence from the left: Democrats couldn't expose the lack of substance on the Republican side, because they wouldn't even acknowledge that there were problems that needed solving," he told *The Washingtonian* in a postelection interview.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Reeves said that since men delivered for Trump, "Trump now needs to deliver for men." I asked him what that would look like and how he'd engage with the White House. The worst scenario, he said, would be "if the Republicans pick up some of this pro-male policy and support it, but in a very anti-feminist, anti-woman way. That they use it to poke women in the eye." But if the Republicans are interested in an Office of Men's Health, or investments in apprenticeships and technical schools, or a plan to increase the number of male school teachers, Reeves says he will be there with his white papers.

In these polarized times, Reeves has his share of critics across the spectrum. On the right, he's portrayed as inauthentic and untrustworthy because he doesn't endorse a wholesale restoration of traditional gender roles. "His remedies are deeply unappealing," wrote the young conservatives Evan Myers and Howe Whitman III in *American Compass*, because he wants men to become "junior partners in a world increasingly shaped by women's sensibilities."

Criticism on the left is more measured. There is an uneasiness with Reeves's popularizing the idea of the beleaguered man in a climate of rising anti-feminism. "I worry that some of his rhetoric is inadvertently perpetuating a culture of woman-blame that we have in the US, in terms of fueling this perception that if men are struggling in our society, it's because of our society's efforts to support women and girls at their expense," said Jessica Calarco, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the author of *Holding It Together: How Women Became America's Safety Net*.

For Reeves, the issue hits close to home. Part of the journey began with his sons, who are now in their 20s. As teens, they'd taken to Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist who spoke empathetically to young men while railing against feminism. Reeves interpreted this partly as a rebellion against the liberal dogma they had absorbed in their upper-middle-class home and school in Bethesda, Maryland. While Reeves "disagreed strongly" with a lot of what Peterson said, he couldn't help but think that the connection between Peterson and his audience revealed "a gigantic reservoir of unmet human need."

I told Reeves that his description of Peterson as a "genuine intellectual wrestling with real issues" made me scoff when I read it. In response, Reeves lamented that Peterson has since gone off the rails, but he explained that the passage was part of a broader strategy of triangulation. There are parts of his book that trigger the same reaction from conservatives. "Part of the challenge is, do you equalize the scoffing?" he said.

As Reeves was finishing the book, his sons told him he needed to look into Andrew Tate, the brawny misogynist influencer with a Bond-villain aesthetic currently under investigation for rape and human trafficking, who peddles a cruel brand of male self-help. Around the time Reeves's book was published, Tate became a worldwide superstar. Reeves was often asked to explain the appeal of Tate, Peterson, and a growing roster of copycats who were taking the message of the once-fringe manosphere to millions. His attempts to grapple with the question solidified a tenet of Reeves's thought: Look at the demand, not the supply. "The failure of mainstream institutions…to acknowledge and tackle the real problems facing many boys and men has created a vacuum in our politics and in our culture," he wrote in 2022.

"YES, TECHNICALLY, MEN ARE SUFFERING. BUT WOMEN ARE BEING CRUSHED AND DRAGGED BACK 50 YEARS."

—Hanna Rosin, senior editor at *The Atlantic*

One of Reeves's forerunners is the *Atlantic* senior editor Hanna Rosin, whose 2012 book *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women* covered similar ground. "I was completely right and completely wrong at the same," Rosin told me. She was right about how disaffected men could wreak havoc on American politics, but she was naïve to think that somehow women would escape that backlash. "If you look around at the landscape now—yes, technically, men are suffering," she said. "But women are being crushed and dragged back 50 years."

Liberal sensibility: Reeves worked for the Tony Blair administration before writing a biography of John Stuart Mill.

REEVES WAS BORN ON JULY 4, 1969, IN THE city of Peterborough, 70 miles north of London. His mother was a part-time nurse originally from Wales, who sent him to ballroom dancing classes on Saturdays. His father worked as a manager at companies that sold kettles and washing machines. "My dad was a bit of a class warrior," Reeves told me. "He hated the aristocracy and the monarchy and any sense of hereditary privilege." After a stint working for outlets like *The Guardian*, Reeves joined Prime Minister Tony Blair's "New Labour" government in 1997 and became a true believer in Third Way ideology. Personified by Blair in the UK and Bill Clinton in the US, it was an attempt to synthesize the social democratic currents of the Labour and Democratic parties and the neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher

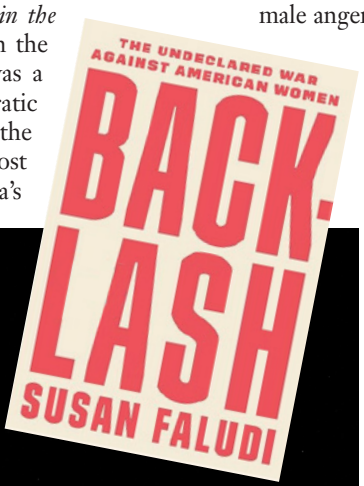
and Ronald Reagan. Reeves worked for a year in the Blair administration before going on to get a PhD in philosophy, for which he wrote a well-received biography in 2007 of the 19th-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill, a towering figure of liberalism. An early supporter of women's emancipation, Mill is Reeves's intellectual lodestar.

Partly as a result of his study of Mill, Reeves joined the Liberal Democratic Party. The height of his political career in England came in 2010, when the Lib Dems and David Cameron's Tory Party unexpectedly formed a coalition government. Reeves was named director of strategy under Deputy Prime Minister and Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg. During Reeves's tenure, his support cratered, partly because of a betrayed campaign promise to abolish college tuition fees. "It was stupid; I was a bloody idiot," Reeves said in 2012 after he stepped down from his post.

WHAT AILS WORKING-CLASS MEN TODAY IS THE DECIMATION OF AMERICA'S INDUSTRIAL WORKFORCE.

The end of Reeves's career in British politics was a perfect time for a fresh start. He moved to the United States, where he was soon hired by Brookings to study economic inequality. He'd left England partly because he found the class structure stultifying, but he quickly realized, he said, that the relative lack of class consciousness in America meant that "the rich people here are just colossal jerks" who rigged the system for their benefit, then absolved themselves by "putting the right sign in their front yard and voting the right way." His frustration with this class myopia led him in 2017 to write *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It*. In the wake of Trump's ascension to the White House, here was a polemic indicting a cloistered elite embodied by a Democratic Party that had just suffered a crushing defeat propelled by the hinterlands. That year, *Politico* named Reeves one of the most important thinkers in the country "for explaining America's class warfare." *Dream Hoarders* sowed the seeds of Reeves's next project. "The gendered nature of inequality just kept popping up," he said.

Building on *Backlash*: Reeves is indebted to Susan Faludi's landmark work on gender and inequality.

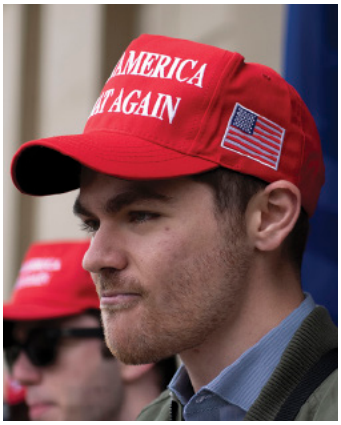


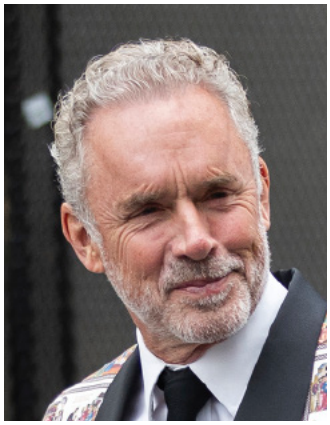
In writing *Of Boys and Men*, Reeves was partly following in the footsteps of the feminist writer Susan Faludi, whose 1999 book *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, the follow-up to her 1991 Pulitzer-winning *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, argued that as the New Deal order withered away, so too did a model of manhood that "showed men how to be part of a larger social system," one defined by traits like loyalty and service. Even before that, a study of heroic male archetypes from the 1700s by the historian E. Anthony Rotundo found that "public usefulness" was among the most valued traits—a man of the people, rather than the lone ranger traversing the frontier or the lonely gamer traversing Twitch streams. In his book, Reeves cited a study by Australian researchers who examined the words that men who have attempted suicide used the most often to describe themselves. "Useless" was at the top of the list.

By the end of the 20th century, American culture had "left men with little other territory on which to prove themselves besides vanity," Faludi wrote. She called the form of masculinity that emerged to fill this vacuum "ornamental," based in celebrity and mass consumerism, where manhood was "a performance game to be won in the marketplace, not the workplace, and that male anger was now part of the show." Though MAGA conjures a hazy nostalgia and aims to turn back the clock on social progress, Faludi has written that it is essential to understand Trump's brand of manliness—vain, image-obsessed, devoid of "old-school values" like integrity, honor, and honesty—not as a relic of the past but as thoroughly modern: the apotheosis of the ornamental.

The simplest story to explain what ails working-class men today is that of the decimation of America's industrial workforce. The Fordist wage—which enabled a single (male) worker to support a family—withered away at the same time that a new generation of women entered into higher education and the workforce. As men lost the ability to become breadwinners en masse, the story goes, the breadwinner role lost its relevance, and then men lost themselves. These changes hit Black men especially hard, because manufacturing jobs were much more likely to be

their gateway to the middle class. The loss of stable employment and the simultaneous rise of the prison system combined to alienate Black men from family life and to create the racist stereotype of the "deadbeat dad." Before "toxic masculinity" became a ubiquitous term to describe rich, powerful white men like Donald Trump, it was attached to out-of-work Black men.





While Reeves described *Dream Hoarders* as a "poke in the eye" to wealthy liberals, it was also a cheeky provocation aimed at the Occupy Wall Street and Bernie Sanders generation. Instead of targeting billionaires, Reeves pointed the finger at the upper middle class. For Calarco, the sociology professor, Reeves's failure to indict the economic ruling class in *Dream Hoarders* is a weakness that extends to his writing about gender. "If men are struggling, it's because billionaires and big corporations and their cronies have really forced us all to take care of ourselves without the kind of social safety net that other high-income countries are able to take for granted," she said.

As a nominally nonpartisan wonk trying to build consensus on a hot-button issue while causing minimal offense, Reeves is not in the business of naming the names of those preventing human flourishing. But many working-class men are angry, and they need a story about why their life sucks. The right can provide a list of scapegoats: liberal elites, DEI administrators, Marxist professors, women. "The male malaise is not the result of a mass psychological breakdown, but of deep structural challenges," Reeves writes in *Of Boys and Men*. There are no villains in this story, which leaves the field open for the right to assign blame.

"If not women, then who?" Calarco asks. "Without actually telling people who's really to blame, it's very easy for people to dismiss that disclaimer and even assume that Reeves himself might not believe it if he's not willing to point the finger somewhere else instead."

In recent years, Reeves has questioned some of the premises of neoliberalism that he'd bought into earlier in his career; his proposed parental-leave program wouldn't look out of place on a Sanders-style policy platform. But for someone writing about men and economic inequality, Reeves has little to say about unions. "The issue of power in the labor market is one that Third Way people just massively understated," Reeves told me. "If you were with Blair, it was almost a badge of pride to be anti-union. Looking back, I was a total wanker about some of that stuff."

What also remains unexplored in Reeves's work is the reason the United States doesn't have a European-style welfare state. As Calarco argues in *Holding It Together*, it's because the long-standing premise of the American welfare state is the uncompensated labor of women, who still do two more hours of household work per day than men. While Calarco applauds Reeves for encouraging men to enter into care-work sectors, she said he could do more to highlight the fact that those HEAL jobs do not pay well precisely because they have been considered women's work.

"So much of this manosphere culture is tapping into that desire to find a way to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps," Calarco added. While men may feel a specific sense of precarity, Calarco sees Reeves's vision of male-focused policies as taking us farther away from the kinds of universal programs that could help address the precarity that people of all gender identities experience. Focusing on men, Calarco said, "actually leads to more skepticism of those kinds of universal policies, and discourages men from seeing themselves as represented in those kinds of universal policies."

Toxic trailblazers: From left to right, Andrew Tate, Nick Fuentes, and Jordan Peterson typify the manosphere that Reeves seeks to counter.

When I asked Reeves why his focus wasn't on those policies, at first he replied flatly, "Because we're not going to get them." Then he paused to regather his thoughts. "I'm trying to incrementally advocate for some policies, and some changes in rhetoric, to help boys and men without really challenging the broader political economy within which that is taking place. I think that's a legitimate criticism. You might say, 'Well, in a different political economy, some of these issues would just be dealt with anyway.'"

For Niobe Way, a developmental psychologist at New York University who has studied boys and young men since the late 1980s, all of Reeves's charts and graphs obscure the absence of an important explanation of why men are struggling—culture. In her recent book *Rebels With a Cause: Reimagining Boys, Ourselves, and Our Culture*, Way writes of "boy culture": norms of masculinity that discourage boys at an early age from developing the social and emotional skills that could help them navigate a society built with women's full participation in mind. The "soft skills" that are needed to excel in school and in a postindustrial labor market are the same skills that

(continued on page 41)

"MASCULINITY NEEDS TO BE REIMAGINED? WHAT THE HELL? NO, HUMANITY NEEDS TO BE REIMAGINED."

—Niobe Way, NYU developmental psychologist

FROM LEFT: ANDREI PUNGOVSCHI / GETTY IMAGES; NICOLE HESTER / *ANN ARBOR NEWS* VIA AP; JIM VONDRUSKA / GETTY IMAGES

Uruguay's Green Power REVOLUTION

With no fossil fuel reserves to rely on and domestic demand rising, the country had to get creative or go broke just trying to keep the lights on.

NATASHA HAKIMI ZAPATA

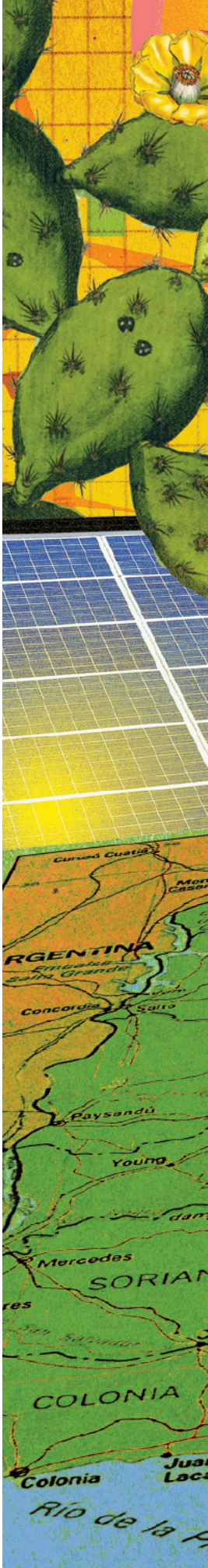


ILLUSTRATION BY **TIM ROBINSON**

Much of the vast landscape of Uruguay remains true to its historical image—down to the lone gaucho roaming the pampas. But there have been some notable additions. Towering white wind turbines and glistening solar panels are now as much a part of the iconography of Uruguay as the grass itself, though they began to pop up across the country only in recent years, and seemingly all at once. Not exactly tourist attractions, they are the most visible evidence of a green energy transformation that continues to turn heads the world over: Despite having far fewer resources than the United States, Germany, and other wealthy nations that have been painfully slow to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels amid the deepening climate crisis—as of 2023, only 21.4 percent of the US power supply comes from renewables—Uruguay greened its grid in under a decade.

Once reliant on exorbitantly priced fossil fuel imports for nearly half of its energy needs, Uruguay has gone from suffering frequent blackouts and power cuts to relative energy sovereignty based almost entirely on electricity generated from a stable mix of wind, solar, hydroelectric, and bioenergy sources. Although Uruguay's radical experiment is now largely viewed as an international success story, it was far from a given that the Uruguayans would succeed when they set out in the early aughts to achieve what no other country in the world had yet managed. And the stakes couldn't have been higher: Not only could a failure on this scale have sunk the newly elected left-leaning Frente Amplio party while continuing to plague Uruguay with periods of destabilizing blackouts; it could very well have set back the cause of green energy around the globe, vindicating those who claimed that it was simply not possible for this relatively new technology to meet an entire nation's energy needs.

Uruguay's green energy revolution, which began in earnest in 2008, has its roots in the origins of the nation. Unlike Argentina and Brazil, its much larger and more famous neighbors, Uruguay has never had any naturally occurring fossil fuels. Founded in 1825 in the age of industrialization—a time when countries would become increasingly dependent on coal, oil, and gas—Uruguay was at an immediate energy disadvantage. It wasn't until the advent of hydroelectric

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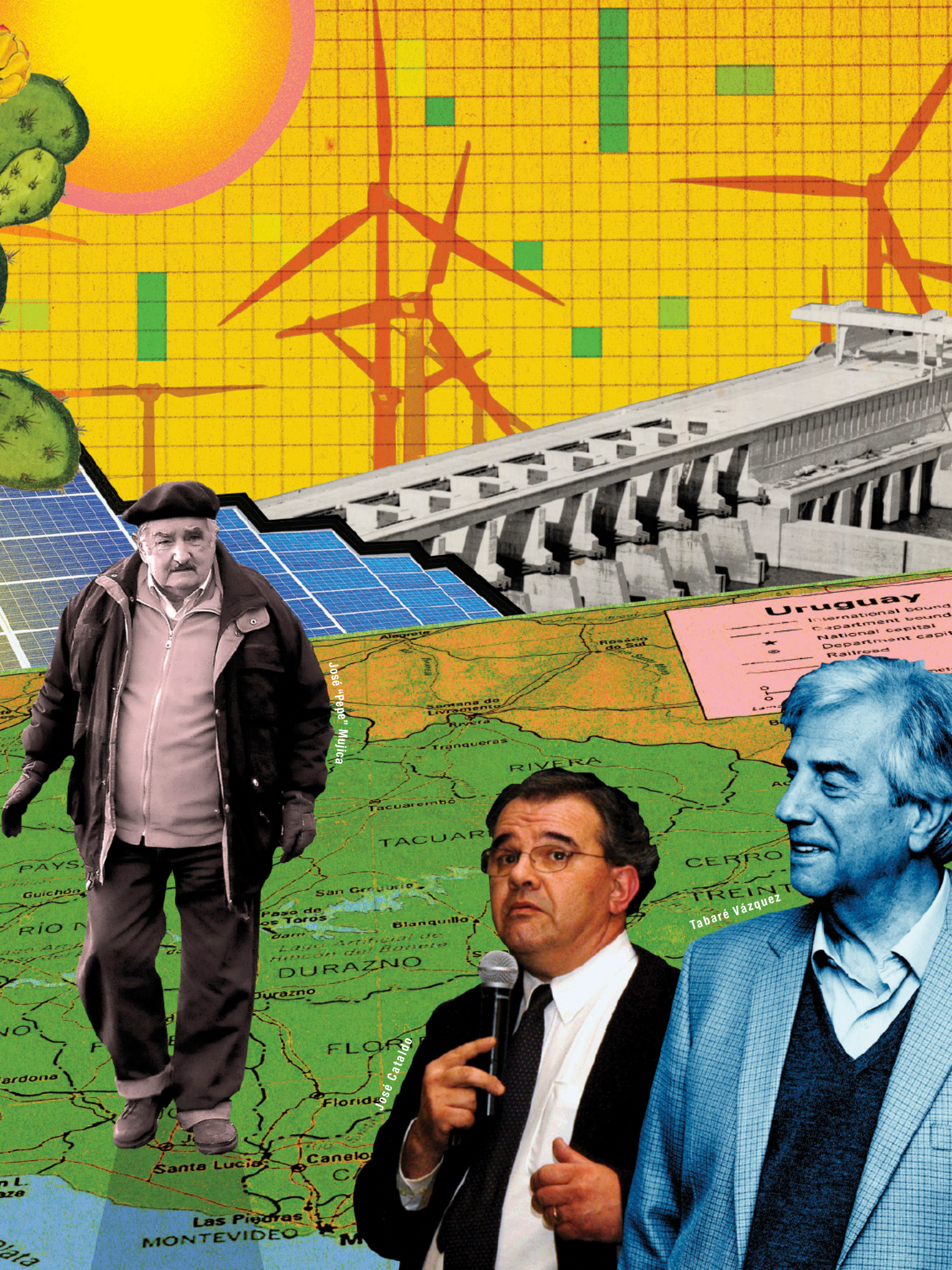

Uruguay
RIVERA
TACUAREMBÓ
DURAZNO
FLORIDA
CANELONES
MONTEVIDEO
Las Piedras
Santa Lucía
Florida
Durazno
Tacuarembó
Rivera
Rosário do Sul
Alegrete
Guichón
Paso de los Toros
Blanquillo
José "Pepe" Mujica
José Cataldo
Tabaré Vázquez

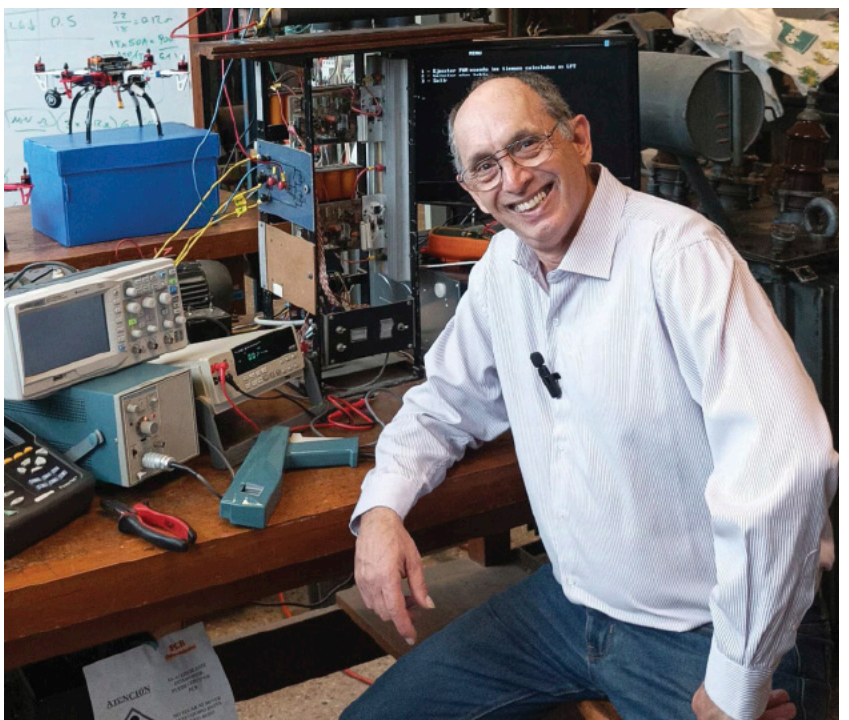
power at the end of the 19th century that the country was able to use its rivers to help meet its power needs. To this day, Uruguay continues to rely heavily on its dams, including the imposing Salto Grande on the Río Uruguay, whose power is shared with Argentina, and several on the Río Negro. For decades, electricity from those dams and from generators running on gas and oil imported largely from Argentina and Brazil met Uruguayans' energy needs. The whole system was run by the National Administration of Power Plants and Electrical Transmissions, or UTE, the state-owned electric utility that held a monopoly on the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity since its founding in 1912.

Whenever there were petroleum shortages, Uruguayans were plunged into darkness, disrupting households, businesses, and public services.

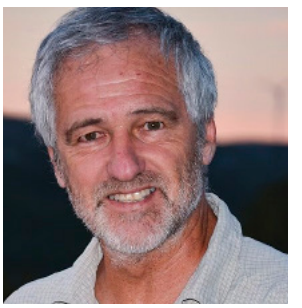
Unfortunately, that mix of hydroelectric and fossil fuel power had never been sufficient. The hydroelectric generators could provide up to 80 percent of the country's energy needs during any given year—depending on how much rain fell. Fossil fuels helped make up the shortfalls, but power cuts and blackouts were common. During petroleum shortages, Uruguayans were plunged into darkness, disrupting government functions, businesses, and households. Gonzalo Casaravilla, an electrical engineer and a professor at the University of the Republic (UdelaR), remembers having to study by candlelight when power cuts dimmed his native Montevideo. It was one of the reasons he became interested in electrical engineering, he told me. In 2000, he and the mechanical engineer José Cataldo led the team that installed the country's first modern wind generator on Cerro de los Caracoles, a hill in the southeastern department of Maldonado. Casaravilla would later work with Ruben Chaer, another electrical engineer at UdelaR, to develop innovative tools for the simulation and operation of Uruguay's electrical system.

As Casaravilla and his fellow academics gained expertise in renewable energy as a possible solution to their country's chronic energy crises, political change began to sweep through Uruguay, culminating in 2004 with the election of Tabaré Vázquez, an oncologist from a working-class background, who became head of the left-wing political party Frente Amplio and the country's first socialist president. Vázquez's election marked the end of 179 years of a two-party system—and the start of a radical experiment that would transform everything from the nation's income distribution to its energy grid. Previous Uruguayan governments had invested little in the country's grid, and Vázquez was determined to take a different route. In 2006, during power outages caused by a drought that was a harbinger of climate-change-driven crises to come, his government put out calls for renewable energy projects that could lead to energy sovereignty down the road.

These first calls were largely unsuccessful; major multinational wind and solar power firms, busy with lucrative projects in wealthier nations, showed little interest in Uruguay. Then, in 2008, as the global financial crisis was forcing governments around the world to slash investments in social programs and infrastructure projects, Uruguay experienced a record-breaking drought that dramatically shrank its rivers and reservoirs. UTE was forced to buy oil and gas from Argentina and Brazil to meet almost 70 percent of Uruguay's energy needs, causing the cost of electricity to skyrocket. Even in years with average rainfall, costs could often skyrocket to $1.1 billion a year. According to UTE, droughts and fluctuations in oil pricing threatened to more than double that, bringing Uruguay's annual energy bill to $2.5 billion. Recognizing the threat that the latest energy crisis also posed to funding for broader social projects aimed at tackling poverty, Vázquez and his government turned to addressing it with added urgency. One of their first steps was to



Lights out: Electrical engineer Gonzalo Casaravilla (below left) remembers studying by candlelight during blackouts in Montevideo.



Nationwide overhaul: Nuclear physicist Ramón Méndez (second from left) and mechanical engineer José Cataldo (below) had their work cut out as they set out to resolve Uruguay's energy crisis.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF GONZALO CASARAVILLA; KLEINMAN CENTER FOR ENERGY POLICY; PRESIDENTIAL ARCHIVE OF URUGUAY

establish the National Directorate of Energy. To lead the newly minted department, they enlisted another academic.

A physicist, Ramón Méndez had spent most of his career studying what happened in the first millionth of the second after the big bang, but he caught the attention of the Vázquez administration after he stated during interviews that the country was capable of transitioning fully to renewable energy within a decade.

"At the time, outside of academia, renewable energy sources were hardly mentioned in Uruguay," Méndez told me with a knowing laugh. "What I was saying seemed utopian. Few people believed it could happen."

In 2008, Méndez created a plan for the country's energy policy through 2030. The plan, which established short-, medium-, and long-term goals to diversify Uruguay's energy supply and green the grid by 2015, was based firmly on the idea that energy policy could be used as a tool for social justice. To Méndez and his peers on the left, access to affordable energy is a human right. Any program that addressed Uruguay's rolling energy crises, in Méndez's view, would have a lasting impact only if it also bettered people's lives and strengthened the country's democracy. From his perspective, it was essential to anchor a transition to renewable energy in public service.

Méndez, along with José "Pepe" Mujica, the former guerrilla fighter who succeeded Vázquez as president in 2010, realized, however, that the long-term success of these policies would require broad support in order to ensure continuity regardless of who later came to power. Before Mujica assumed office, he requested that cross-party political agreements be reached on various key policies, energy being one of the most important. At the start of 2010, Méndez went to work negotiating with the leaders of the three other parties in Uruguay's Parliament. As circumstances would have it, the 2008 drought, along with Uruguay's lack of autonomous energy sources, created an emergency that no one in government—left or right—could deny any longer. Over the course of two short months, 16 representatives from the Frente Amplio and the Nacional, Colorado, and Independiente parties met to chart a sustainable course for Uruguay's grid. Ultimately, all parties agreed on a plan to install "no less than 300 MW of eolic [wind] power and 200 MW of biomass," as well as to continue searching for fossil fuels on Uruguay's territory.

Most countries have been adding renewables to their grid in fits and starts; what Uruguay was attempting was an overhaul of its entire grid. The fact that no models existed for such a massive project allowed the planners to come up with solutions that suited the country's unique needs, but it also meant that they would face steep learning curves on everything from drafting contracts to stabilizing a grid that would be powered by variable natural resources.

Going for gales: Wind farms help Uruguay generate 97 percent of its electricity from renewable sources.

The cross-party agreement became the bow on a package of policies and decrees that laid the foundation for an energy revolution whose success and speed would take everyone—even its protagonists—by surprise. Fortunately, Uruguay had never succumbed to the wave of neoliberalism that had led so many other South American governments to sell off their public utilities; the country still owns its oil refinery, its telecommunications company, its water and sanitation utilities, and other public services. Recognizing the importance of publicly owned services, the Frente Amplio had begun in 2005 to invest in utilities on a scale that hadn't been seen in decades, allowing Méndez to place UTE firmly at the heart of the energy transition.

But given that Uruguay's GDP was just $41.95 billion in 2010, the government was wary of funneling an estimated $7 billion of public money into the huge renewable energy projects that would have to be undertaken in order to transform the grid. Instead, the leftist party chose to ask private companies to take on much of the financial risk. Méndez was clear from the outset that despite this involvement of the private sector, the Uruguayan public would maintain control over the energy generated through its state-owned utility. The new policy also explicitly declared that no private company would be allowed to develop market dominance Finally, by requiring private power companies to either use any electricity they generated for their own consumption or sell it to UTE, the plan ensured that electricity would become a de facto to public good, Méndez argued.

Having no models allowed Uruguay to come up with energy solutions suited to its unique needs, but it also entailed a steep learning curve.

As Méndez helped to hammer out the cross-party agreement, Casaravilla, the engineer involved in Uruguay's first wind turbine installation, was appointed director of UTE by President Mujica to lead the country's green energy revolution alongside Méndez. In 2011 and 2012, the two leftists watched as onshore wind farm

COURTESY OF NATASHA HAKIMI ZAPATA

proposals finally poured in at competitive prices. This time around, the tenders resulted in the potential to power nearly 1.2 million homes solely with wind power—nearly every residence in Uruguay.

All of the contracts with private wind farms were set up as purchase-power agreements (PPAs) between a private generator and the publicly owned electric utility, guaranteeing that all electricity generated over 20 years would be paid for by UTE, the sole entity in charge of transmission and distribution, at an agreed fixed price. The government's bidding process required companies to help bolster local economies by employing local workers, using local materials, and investing in local infrastructure to strengthen the grid.

Starting in 2010, when the cross-party agreement was signed, it took Uruguay less than a decade to reach its goals. From 2017 to 2020, 97 percent of the electricity generated in Uruguay came from renewable sources, making it one of the first countries in the world to reach that level—and, perhaps most importantly, the first to green so much of its grid in such a short period of time.

It wasn't just the timing that made Uruguay a worldwide reference point for green energy. We've all heard the tired arguments against relying on renewables: The sun doesn't always shine. The wind doesn't always blow. Uruguay's renewables revolution proved those arguments wrong, demonstrating that by diversifying energy sources it's possible to stabilize energy output under variable climate conditions—even without expensive battery storage solutions. In other words, so long as a grid doesn't rely on a single source, it can be resilient in the face of changing weather—as well as in the face of geopolitical shifts that can push energy costs to shocking highs without warning. To further diversify the grid's exposure to weather conditions, the leaders of Uruguay's energy transition also made sure to spread renewable generators across the country's 19 departments—while also spreading the country's new "green" wealth.

Uruguay's green revolution proves that a grid based on renewables can be resilient in the face of changing weather.

The map of Uruguay's electrical grid today is starkly different from that of 2008, when the majority of power was generated at a few hydroelectric dams north of Montevideo and the rest at a handful of fossil fuel plants in the capital. It's now possible for the entire grid to run several hours a day entirely on wind power. In 2016, even before several more renewables projects went online, it hit 94.5 percent green energy. In 2019, according to an analysis by the Uruguayan company SEG Engineering, the country ran on 98 percent renewable energy. Hydroelectric accounted for nearly 56 percent of generation, wind 34 percent, bioenergy 6 percent, solar just under 3 percent, with fossil fuel coming in last at 2 percent. Wind energy came in second only to hydropower, accounting for nearly 34 percent of the energy generated in Uruguay that year. And here's the real kicker: Not only did Uruguay create more energy in 2019 than it had in any previous year—14,000 gigawatt hours—but it also sold more electricity to Argentina and Brazil than ever before. For decades, Uruguay was a net importer of energy, but that began to shift in 2013 when it became a net energy exporter. In 2019 alone, Uruguay exported 2,994 gigawatt hours to Brazil through two international connections, and to Argentina from the Salto Grande Dam—over a fifth of its overall energy generation—adding over $70 million to government coffers. Since 2019, energy has become a significant export for Uruguay, with some years bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

In most of the world, when anyone mentions the need to transition to renewables, climate change dominates the public discussion. And yet in Uruguay, the greatest existential threat of our time was often an afterthought. The country's drive toward clean energy came instead from economic necessity—and is still talked about in terms of financial savings, employment, efficiency, and sovereignty. The fact that it would also reduce national carbon emissions—and boy, did it—was the cherry on top of the energy pie. Uruguay was never a huge carbon emitter. When the South American country hit its highest carbon emissions ever in 2012, the average Uruguayan put 2.6 tons of carbon into the atmosphere; that same year, the average individual American carbon footprint was more than 16 tons. In 2017, as Uruguay nearly completed its transition to renewables, that number plummeted to 1.8 tons—even though average energy consumption had actually increased.

In fact, despite a population increase of nearly a third (and economic growth multiplying by more than 20 since 1975), Uruguay consumes less fossil fuel today than it did 50 years ago. As he negotiated Uruguay's contributions to the 2015 Paris Agreement, Méndez promised an 88 percent cut in carbon emissions by 2017 compared with the 2005–09 average, a goal the country easily reached as even more of its renewable generation projects came online. A year after the Paris Agreement was signed, *Fortune*

Green transition: Uruguay now generates more energy from wind and solar power than from fossil fuels, having starkly remade its electrical grid in the years since 2010.

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magazine named Méndez one of the world's 50 greatest leaders for his role in steering Uruguay's green energy revolution.

Méndez looks a bit scruffier than his picture in *Fortune* these days, having grown out a stubbly gray beard to match his somewhat unruly gray mop, but his passion for renewable energy hasn't faded one iota. The former national director of energy has left government and gone back to teaching at UdelaR, alongside Gonzalo Casaravilla, José Cataldo, and other fellow veterans of Uruguay's energy transition. Méndez has also been helping other Latin American countries draft their "national stories" to aid in their own transitions to renewables.

To Méndez, the difference between the Frente Amplio's approach and those of other governments was the insistence on the state's responsibility to distribute electricity, guaranteeing the right to energy and treating it as a public good that should be protected and made accessible and affordable. According to his calculations, laid out in a detailed analysis he drafted for the United Nations and the World Bank's International Comparison Program, the transformation of Uruguay's grid brought in more than $6 billion in public and private investments over less than a decade—money that was distributed to all of the country's departments, with $2 billion spilling into other parts of the economy, such as construction. A 2021 study by the Uruguayan Association of Private Electricity Generators found that electricity costs would have increased $132 million every year after 2010 had the country not transitioned to clean energy. Instead, annual generation costs have plummeted: Whereas the threat of a $2.5 billion bill loomed large in dry years, the country now spends less than $700 million on average to keep the lights on. The savings, Méndez says, were used by the state to fund anti-poverty measures that helped to bring unprecedented prosperity and growth to the country.

And yet therein also lies one of the most controversial aspects of Uruguay's green transition. Rather than use the huge renewables savings to slash consumer energy costs, UTE continued to raise electricity prices—though for as long as Casaravilla was head of the public utility, the increases were kept below the rate of inflation. Neither Casaravilla nor Méndez agreed with the decision to use the savings to fund other government programs rather than allow Uruguayans to feel the benefits of green energy directly in their wallets, but it was ultimately out of their hands.

"The day the minister of economy told me the renewables savings were going to fund other programs was one of the worst days in my tenure as national director of energy," Méndez told me, vehemently shaking his head.

It was a choice that opened Méndez to a lot of criticism over the years, and still does. He's gone to great lengths to show how, because of the rise in salaries over the 15 years that the Frente Amplio was in power, the relative cost of electricity compared to purchasing power has decreased significantly. Still, ask almost any Uruguayan, and they'll tell you the price of electricity is too damn high.

Uruguay's drive toward clean energy was spurred not by concerns about climate change but by economic necessity.

"For all Uruguayan families, the electricity bill is a significant monthly cost," my landlord in Montevideo told me when he showed me how to use my apartment's new air-conditioning unit, which doubles as a heater in winter.

"Too high, just too high! We need to sign to get costs down," a group of elderly women exclaimed on a drizzly evening in Salto. The four women, lifelong friends who were eager to tell a newcomer about their grandchildren and the new restaurant in town, were referring to the Uruguayan tradition of signing mass petitions to push for governmental change. And they have a point: Uruguay's consumer electricity rates are among the most expensive in South America, according to a 2019 analysis by SEG Engineering—though they are still well below the 10 highest rates in the world.

Surplus supplies: Uruguay generates enough electricity from renewable sources like the Salto Grande Dam to sell to its neighbors.

In response to this disparity, the electric utility's own union, the Association of Employees of the National Administration of Power Plants and Electrical Transmissions (AUTE), has been campaigning for fairer energy costs for over a decade. In a 2024 interview with the German journal *Lateinamerika Nachrichten*, the AUTE's general secretary, Jhony Saldivia, argued that energy rates—especially residential rates—have been unjust, because "he who has more pays less and he who has less pays more." Studies conducted by the union have found that "the average working-class family spends 4 to 5 percent of its income on electricity, while the poorest spend 10 percent," and that "a working-class family in Uruguay pays 10 times more for electricity than a businessman," because of the difference between business and residential rates.

The AUTE has also intensely criticized the PPA contracts with private generators, a policy that represented a major departure in a country where all aspects of energy had been under the control of the state-owned utility until the green energy transition. Uruguay has been stuck with the fixed prices set in the 10- and 20-year PPAs with private companies. Those prices were competitive at the time they were negotiated, but they have become increasingly less so as the costs of renewable energy technology have decreased over the years.

And there is an even more troubling factor at play in these contracts, according to the union's president, Gonzalo Castelgrande. "The wind in Uruguay has been practically privatized," Castelgrande said in a 2017 article published by the energy justice group OPSur. "It has been expropriated in favor of a set of multinational companies, accounting for almost 40 percent of the electricity demand, and

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almost 90 percent of the resources are under their control." To Castelgrande and other critics, the fact that the transmission and distribution of electricity remained under state control is simply insufficient—and they aren't alone in that argument.

"Some people, myself included, wanted to keep renewable energy generation entirely publicly owned," Casaravilla told me. "We simply didn't have the money to do it."

Uruguay's example shows what countries can achieve today with a sufficient commitment to quitting fossil fuels.

There are plenty of good reasons for energy generation to remain in the state's hands. To begin with, that would decrease the reliance on foreign capital and private companies for the provision of what Uruguay—and many other countries—consider a public good. But large infrastructure projects require capital beyond the resources of a small national economy.

Given the level of public funds that were available, Casaravilla had set out to devise funding models that would make it possible for UTE to be involved in the newest wave of clean electricity generation, too. Under his watch, the utility successfully developed seven medium- and large-scale wind generators with various ownership models—including a number of projects funded in part by a "Small Savers" program, which allowed Uruguayan citizens to invest in UTE-run wind farms, in one case with as little as $100.

Breezy solution: Thanks to projects like the Palmatir Peralta Wind Farm, Uruguay's grid now runs several hours a day entirely on wind power.

In fact, the first wind farm in Uruguay was set up in 2008 on Cerro de los Caracoles, where Casaravilla and Cataldo had installed the country's first wind generator eight years earlier. Owned and run by UTE, it was named Caracoles I and has a generation capacity of 10 megawatts; Caracoles II was set up nearby two years later with another 10 megawatts of capacity. Although—as with every wind farm in the country—the Caracoles turbines are maintained by a private company (in this case, the turbine manufacturer Vestas), UTE's wind farms are able to generate electricity without a PPA, since the end product is not being purchased from a private company. In 2014, UTE started Juan Pablo Terra, another wind farm, this time in the department of Artigas, with a whopping 67.2 megawatts of capacity. By opening and running some of the first wind farms in the country, the utility was able to bring the technological know-how in-house, Casaravilla argued. It gave Casaravilla, among others at UTE, a detailed understanding of what it took to develop, build, operate, and maintain a wind energy generator—knowledge he relied on when dealing with private wind companies.

Casaravilla insists he's always considered the distribution of electricity a tool for the redistribution of wealth—and this was something he refused to forget during his decade-long tenure at the electric utility. One of his goals as the head of UTE was to bring electricity to every household in the country, no matter how remote—something he worked on in tandem with the renewable energy transition. Under the electrical engineer's watch, by the end of his tenure, 99.9 percent of the nation's homes had electricity—both on and off the grid. (In 2025, UTE announced that all of the remaining homes in remote places had gotten electricity at long last.) Uruguay also became the first country in Latin America to connect all of its rural schools to the national grid.

Thanks to the sweeping efforts of Casaravilla, Méndez, and many others during the years that the Frente Amplio was in power, on March 1, 2025, after a five-year pause (during which the center-right Partido Nacional took the reins of government), the Frente Amplio returned to power without having to worry about rolling energy crises. Yet the economy has been slow to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving the country struggling with higher poverty rates than before the crisis. So perhaps it is not surprising that the newly elected president, Yamandú Orsi, wants to emphasize affordability as part of a renewed commitment to the party's clean energy agenda. The history teacher and former mayor promised in his five-year plan that "renewable energies will continue to be promoted," including increasing exports of clean energy and greening public and private transportation—with state-owned utilities leading the way. As for lowering the price of electricity amid a cost-of-living crisis, Orsi has promised to reinstate the discounted energy rates he says 180,000 Uruguayans lost while the Frente Amplio was out of power. It remains to be seen whether the new left-leaning president will correct his predecessors' missteps and, at long last, help ordinary citizens feel the benefits of the country's record-breaking green energy transition in their pocketbooks.

For all the shortcomings of the Uruguayan green energy revolution, as wealthier nations around the globe struggle to achieve even a portion of what the South American nation managed in under a decade, the Uruguayan example shows not only what is possible but what is actually achievable given sufficient commitment to quitting fossil fuels in our time. **N**

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(Whalen, continued from page 33)
Way says boys are socialized from an early age to suppress.

"Boys have been telling us what's at the root of their problems and how to solve it for almost four decades now. And we're not listening," Way said. "Masculinity needs to be reimagined? What the hell? No, humanity needs to be reimagined."

In the days after Trump's reelection, a post from the Gen-Z white nationalist Nick Fuentes went viral: "Your body, my choice." "I haven't been in a meeting since the election where someone hasn't brought that up," Reeves said. He sounded impatient. "Do we think that the median 28-year-old man who voted for Trump thinks he should have control over a woman's body? I don't." In an article on AIBM's site last July, Reeves used data from the General Social Survey to argue that young men are not backsliding on their support for women's rights.

"I disagree with him on that," said Daly, the Young Men Research Initiative founder. "Men and boys are viewing equality as problematic. That's something that I certainly wish were not true." Part of this reaction, she said, is the post–Me Too moment combined with a pandemic that drove young people inside and into mostly single-sex online spaces. "Young men feel like they're being blamed for things they didn't do. We might disagree with that, but if we want to change any minds, we have to acknowledge that's some of what's causing this." Emba, the *Atlantic* columnist and AIBM board member, told me that in the days after the election, she'd attended a closed-door gathering of wonks, politicians, and journalists who were caught off guard by the male vote. "If there's a big pot of grievance that isn't being addressed, clearly something is going to happen, and something did happen," she said.

Reeves has gone to battle with men's rights activists who exploit those grievances, including the "godfather" of the manosphere, Rollo Tomassi, whom he debated, voice raised, on *Dr. Phil*. In some of those arguments, Reeves had to concede the point that mainstream sources sometimes failed to acknowledge gender disparities in cases where men were lagging behind women. But where a men's rights activist sees a feminist conspiracy, Reeves sees a robust infrastructure of organizations that advocate on behalf of women, which emerged out of a decades-long struggle against systemic discrimination. "I would not expect a women's think tank or a women's advocacy organization to be doing work on what's happening to men," he said. "It's quite literally not their job." It was in those moments that Reeves thought *Of Boys and Men* might turn out to be his life's work. "I realized it's no one's job to wake every day and think about this," he said. If there were no examples of what Reeves calls "boring institutions" advocating for men, the Andrew Tates of the world would use the silence to bolster their argument that men are a persecuted class.

Reeves founded the American Institute for Boys and Men in 2023 with the goal of having it be that mainstream institution—a responsible, empirically grounded bulwark against an increasingly ugly backlash against women. He wants to deescalate the growing gender polarization, with the ultimate goal of a country and world where one's gender identity is less salient, not more, he told me. He argues that young men are not finding a new political home on the right—they still support liberal policies on climate, abortion, and healthcare—but that they don't see a place for themselves on the left, either.

What is true is that young men today are much less likely to describe themselves as feminists. Reeves believes that's because they think "feminism is about telling men they're toxic, that they're part of the patriarchy, and they should just shut up," he said. "But that doesn't mean they don't think their sister should have the same opportunity."

While Reeves hasn't had as much success lobbying politicians as he'd hoped, he counts Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy among his biggest fans in office, along with California Representative Ro Khanna, Maryland Governor Wes Moore, and former surgeon general Vivek Murthy. "We've been on this journey since the 1980s to lionize the individual and marginalize the common good, and I think that's been really harmful for men," Murphy told me. "The left, broadly, doesn't talk about men, because we're really uncomfortable with that conversation. Richard is providing this gift, which is a safe place to talk about these issues and help on terminology and language."

Filipovic told me that part of why she thinks Reeves's work has taken hold, and why he hasn't received more outspoken public criticism from feminists, is that his book was published during a time of liberal soul-searching. "How have we gotten to this point where there is this reactionary anti-feminist movement animating our politics, animating our culture, and radicalizing young men?" she asked. Reeves's work made her reexamine rhetoric that in the past could feel playful and cathartic, like "Male Tears" on coffee mugs. "There are men who can take it on the chin. But for men without a college degree, without many job prospects, and who are looking for an organizational theory that can explain 'Why am I here? What am I doing? Why do I feel the way that I feel?'—that kind of daily message from progressives and from feminists, including myself, that there is something about you that is inherently bad and toxic, is not helpful," she said.

REEVES ARGUES THAT YOUNG MEN ARE NOT FINDING A NEW POLITICAL HOME ON THE RIGHT, BUT THEY ALSO DON'T SEE A PLACE FOR THEMSELVES ON THE LEFT.

(continued on page 51)

Who Gave Away the Skies to the Airlines?

In 1978, Jimmy Carter signed the Airline Deregulation Act. It gave rise to some truly miserable air travel—and neoliberalism.

ELIE MYSTAL

I had my first cigarette on an airplane. My father was smoking, in the smoking section, and I asked to try one. He said no, because I was 9, but two tiny bottles of Scotch later, he got up to go to the bathroom and I snuck a puff of his still-lit cigarette lying in the ashtray they used to have in the armrests. I coughed a lot. I asked the flight attendant for water, and she came by, intuited what I had done, and said, "I won't tell your dad but don't do that; it's bad for you."

A lot of things about that 1987 flight from New York to Indiana would be unrecognizable to a person under 40. My meal was free (my dad did have to pay for the Scotch, though). The flight attendant who brought my water and meal to me was dressed like a Rockette. The pilot let me rummage around the cockpit and was basically a tour guide, using the intercom to share random facts about the places we were flying over. Government officials did not molest us before getting on the plane, and I got to keep my shoes on the whole time. My aunts and cousins greeted us at the gate when we landed.

Still, my father was not impressed. He spent most of that flight, and every flight I ever took with him, cursing and moaning about the state of air travel. He said it was too expensive and too unreliable and repeatedly told me that the food, service, and liquor sucked.

My father was an awful person to travel with. The sheer technological majesty of being able to soar through the air like a bird and land safely in an exotic location (like Indiana with its cornfields and pettable farm animals and weather events like hail and tornadoes) was completely lost on him. He was a first-class curmudgeon stewing in coach. I was never going to be like him.

Fast-forward 35 years, and I found myself sitting in a plane, stuck on the tarmac outside a gate, trying to get back to New York from Seattle. I'd made the curious mental decision that I was ready to get myself arrested. The pilot had been lying to us. We landed a bit early, and, as is now customary, the airport was unprepared for our flight to deplane. Either another plane was using our gate or there wasn't a crew or


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equipment available to let us disembark. I couldn't see, but the pilot's rolling promises—"There appears to be a slight traffic delay, but we expect to be at the gate within 15 minutes"—were clearly not true. Whatever the cause of the delay, it wasn't going to take 15 minutes to fix it, and he knew it.

But he was saying "15 minutes" because somewhere in some corporate terrorist handbook it probably says that telling people they'll be freed "within 15 minutes" makes people less likely to break their bonds and riot. The plane would have erupted if he had told people we'd be sitting on that tarmac waiting to deboard (!) for more than an hour (an hour and 20 minutes was our total wait time) after a five-and-a-half-hour flight, but stringing people along 15 minutes at a time keeps most people docile.

There is a name for the discomfort, delays, overcrowding, and price gouging we all experience when we fly: neoliberalism.

Not me. I'm a lawyer. And one of the worst things about that particular affliction is an unhealthy appreciation for one's rights. I started to, quietly at first, remind people sitting next to me of the relevant federal regulations that could entitle us to use the bathroom and to force attendants to resume drink service.

What was really going to get me in trouble, however, was the fact that I was flying back from a fundraising event for *The Nation*, and was therefore surrounded by my colleagues and a bunch of crunchy liberals—surely the kind of people who could be trusted to bail me out of LaGuardia jail. I began to channel my discomfort and impatience into activism and, at increasing volume, began talking about how we needed a "Passenger Bill of Rights" and how "Federalist Society fat cats" had consigned us to this tarmac prison in their never-ending quest for greater profit margins. My goal, in my mind, was nothing less than to lead a full proletarian hijacking of the plane and its jealously guarded snacks. Perhaps, even, the squeakiness of the wheel I was trying to get rolling would inspire the fascist airport personnel to give our flight a gate.

Unfortunately for the will of the people, my mother was also on the flight. She had been shooting me "the look" for a while, but I was assiduously ignoring her. As my voice rose to the point where at least the back half of the plane could hear me, she grabbed my arm, dug her nails in, and said in that mom voice that is absolutely shouting but magically doesn't rise above the level of a whisper: "You are acting just like your father."

I relented, sunk back down into my cage in the shape of a seat, and Googled "meditation techniques" on my iPhone, using the Wi-Fi the airline stole and then sold back to me at an inflated rate. There would be no revolution this day. I, like everybody else in the country, would be forced to sit back and accept that this rapacious and dysfunctional industry had ruined flying for another generation. The airline industry is proof positive of the axiom "It can always get worse."

My time on the tarmac wasn't a total loss, though. I came up with the idea for this book sometime between "feeling my breath" and "noticing my mind had wandered," as Google instructed.

Friends like these: Edward Kennedy looks over Jimmy Carter's shoulder at the signing ceremony for the Airline Deregulation Act.

BETTMAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

THERE IS A NAME FOR THE DISCOMFORT, delays, overcrowding, and price gouging we all experience when we fly. That name is "neoliberalism." If neoliberalism were a feeling, it would be that feeling when the person in front of you reclines their seat into your lap: that feeling that somebody else's free market choice has encroached so far into the shared public space that now there's not enough room left over for you. If neoliberalism were a place, that place would be a departure gate, right after a flight has been summarily canceled and the airline disavows responsibility for the travelers they've stranded. Every time I'm marooned in an airport for hours, waiting for my flight to be inevitably canceled, I know that my suffering is not due to Delta or a snowstorm or some random act of God. I know that neoliberals have decided that wasting my time is the most efficient use of market resources.

Neoliberalism, in the American context, essentially means letting the market take over for the government when it comes to providing essential public goods and services. It means transferring the public space from the government that is supposed to use it to benefit everybody to private actors who want to use it to make a buck. It's long been the favored approach of capitalists, Republicans, and people who can ask their daddies for venture capital. But in the late 20th century, the same kinds of pro-business, anti-regulation, anti-labor, "let the market in its infinite wisdom decide our fate" notions effectively took over the Democratic Party. The country has yet to recover from this.

Neoliberalism can sound benign. After all, it's a theory of government predicated on the government getting out of the way and doing no harm. But the force that replaces the government when it abdicates its collective responsibilities is "the market," and that is a force that is inherently amoral and ungenerous. The market values profits over people and commodification over children.

More importantly, the market doesn't allow you to vote for the outcomes you want. Sure, market aficionados will say you can "vote with your wallet," but even that pallid analogy presumes people have wallets hefty enough to make a difference. In a market-driven government, the people with the most money get the most "votes." When neoliberals cede government functions to market forces, what they're really doing is giving away the power of the people to affect and change

the society they live in. From prisons to pollution, neoliberals have let the profit motive—instead of the will of the people as expressed through representative democracy—decide what kind of world we live in.

Most people trace the birth of neoliberalism to Ronald Reagan—with the Democrats hopping on board in the 1990s with the election of Bill Clinton. But Clinton merely consolidated neoliberal ideas and turned them into a national agenda. I do not blame Clinton's successful presidential campaign focus on "It's the economy, stupid" for kick-starting the party's fascination with neoliberalism in 1992. I place the birth date of neoliberalism on October 24, 1978, because that is the day that President Jimmy Carter signed the Airline Deregulation Act into law.

I will freely admit that the Airline Deregulation Act is something of a pet peeve of mine. It's a law that makes me irrationally angry, although it is objectively not as important as our antidemocratic voter suppression techniques, nor as vile and racist as our treatment of immigrants. But I believe the law to be a consequential misstep for the entire country. It is the moment when the Democratic Party turned its back on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and instead adopted the language of the free-market, unregulated claptrap pushed by capitalist thugs. It's a language that has been swallowed whole by the corporate media and now bleeds out into our national conversations about the social safety net, social justice, and even the power of the government to combat the greatest threat of our age, climate change.

I cannot say that the Airline Deregulation Act caused many of the bad laws we still live with today. I can say that if you understand how Democrats passed the Airline Deregulation Act, you will understand nearly every fucking mistake the Democratic Party has made over the last 50 years.

Obviously, to get to the point where the airlines could be deregulated, they needed to have been regulated in the first place. Prior to 1978, the airline industry was one of the most heavily regulated sectors of American life. That makes sense when you remember that rocketing human beings tens of thousands of feet into the atmosphere and expecting them to come down again at a gentle, survivable rate of speed is an insane thing to do. The world's first libertarians, Daedalus and Icarus, learned too late that having minimum regulatory standards for human flight is a good and necessary thing.

Spacious, comfortable seats. Five-star meals. American Airlines had a piano bar… in economy class.

It should also go almost without saying that the air is shared space and thus must fall under some basic level of public regulation. I know that concept bothers a certain kind of billionaire who assumes that he has a right to buy everything he can see, but you can't own the sky, Elon Musk. Regulations are needed to govern what goes up, if for no other reason than to prevent everything that's up there from crashing into each other and coming back down on all of our heads.

But air travel wasn't regulated just because of safety concerns. Crisscrossing the country with reliable commercial air traffic requires massive public infrastructure spending. Airports, it turns out, are not the kinds of things the free market will easily provide. The sheer amount of physical space airports require, combined with the need to have the area surrounding the airport clear of obstructions like trees and buildings and little kids flying military-grade helicopter drones, means that the government has to become involved. Moreover, the market is bad at providing comprehensive air

Friendlier skies: A demonstration of the Boeing 747, which was then under development, in 1968.

ALAN BAND / FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

Modern purgatory: Passengers line up for TSA security screenings at Denver International Airport.

ROBERT ALEXANDER / GETTY IMAGES

traffic routes. The market tends toward overserving big population centers, while leaving smaller cities and rural areas without air service.

Vanderbilt law professor Ganesh Sitaraman's book *Why Flying Is Miserable: And How to Fix It* brilliantly details the pre-1978 regulatory environment. Many early airline "regulations" were carried out on behalf of the US Postal Service through its Bureau of Air Mail, which was organized in 1917, because delivering the mail was an essential government function, and the airlines were better suited to doing it than literal horses. The key concept here, according to Sitaraman, is that airlines had to get permission from the government to fly between certain cities. Because the sky is shared space, the airlines had to be granted access to use that space by the government, and the government's interest was establishing reliable mail service to every part of the country, even to places where the airlines had no financial interest in flying.

The system worked well enough to deliver the mail, but when it came to commercial passenger travel, for the most part, the early airline environment was a disaster. Smaller carriers were gobbled up by larger ones, tickets were ridiculously expensive, few cities had access to passenger air travel, and airlines were financially unstable. When the Great Depression hit, a bunch of them went under. In 1938, the Roosevelt administration, which had come to view commercial air travel as critical to national security in the prewar years, erected a brand-new agency to oversee the industry: the Civil Aeronautics Board. The CAB needed to solve the most vexing problem for national air travel: How do you make low-demand routes affordable for consumers yet lucrative enough to get airlines to fly there? Everybody wants to fly from New York to Chicago. Fewer people want to fly from New York to, say, Akron. Because of the low demand, it's actually more expensive for carriers to fly the NYC-to-Akron route even though NYC to Chicago is farther away.

If you understand how Democrats passed the Airline Deregulation Act, you will understand nearly every mistake they have made since.

One solution is, you know, fuck Akron. People who need to go to Akron could just fly to Chicago and rent a canoe or whatever and paddle their asses through the lakes on their way home. Alternatively, they could pay a private pilot exorbitant rates to fly to Akron at a price that makes it worth their while. That's what "the market" would say.

But if you think about air travel as a public service, then Americans have just as much of a right to fly to Akron at a reasonable time for a reasonable charge as they have to fly anywhere else. If you think about this country as something other than a contest of capitalists trying to extract as much wealth as possible before they choke on their billfolds, then it stands to reason that the government should, in some way, be involved in making sure flights to Akron happen.

This is where the Postal Service roots of the airline industry become important, because the post office had already confronted and solved this problem. Preflight mail carriers (the guys on horses) also realized it was prohibitively expensive to take mail to low-population centers, resulting in very high rates or no mail carriage at all to sparsely populated areas. And yet, they were still supposed to deliver the mail to low-population areas, because mail delivery is a public service. The financial innovation that solved

this postal problem was… the stamp. Stamps are a fixed-rate fee based on the weight of the letter and not the distance it travels, so it costs the same price to send the same letter from anywhere to anywhere in the country. Stamps, therefore, are a form of public subsidy: People sending their letters along cheap, high-trafficked routes are subsidizing people who send their letters to remote locations along low-trafficked routes. We all pay the same rates even though some of our letters cost more to deliver than others. It's almost like we live in a society.

The CAB adopted this postal solution and brought a similar kind of price-fixing approach to passenger travel in the airline industry. I know, I know, "price-fixing" is a dirty phrase that makes people think of communist politburos that crush entrepreneurs and economic innovation. But in the context of what the CAB was trying to solve, fixed-rate fares made a lot of sense. The CAB would give popular, well-traveled routes to airlines if the airlines agreed to serve less popular routes as well, for a fixed fee. It was a way to make air travel from New York to Akron affordable, because that route was subsidized by the fares for New York to Chicago.

Price-fixing solved one economic problem but introduced others. The biggest problem, somewhat obviously, was that airlines couldn't really compete on price to attract new customers. That meant that the only way for airlines to grow was to offer better, more alluring customer services.

For consumers, this was great. Spacious, comfortable seats. Five-star meals. Airplanes even had bars and smoking lounges. American Airlines (famously) had a piano bar… in economy class.

This was the golden age of airline travel that my father and yours fondly remember. For the airlines, however, it was kind of disastrous. Putting aside the sheer gravitational inefficiency of carrying a freaking piano on a thing that needs to float in the air, you have to remember that the airlines couldn't really charge people more for these luxuries. Yes, enhanced ticket prices for "first class" was always a thing, but the basic fare was controlled by the government, piano included or not.

BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES

In any event, it was all fun and games until the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries got its shit together and realized that the West was (and is) entirely addicted to and dependent on oil sourced from countries it used to colonize. The price of fuel went up so hard and so fast that it sent whole economies into recession. If the airline industry had spent its salad days investing its profits in developing fuel-efficient planes, maybe it would have handled the oil shocks of the 1970s better. But no, it spent the money building gas guzzlers big enough to carry an entire Vegas lounge act into low earth orbit. When gas prices went up, the entire airline industry almost went under.

IT TAKES A GIANT LEAP TO go from "Fuel prices are too high" to "We should deregulate the entire airline industry and give it away to private capitalists." But some people thought they could use the fuel crisis to pull it off. The cast of characters who pulled off the great corporate heist of our public air space could be plopped into an *Ocean's Eleven* movie without the script missing a beat. They include the following characters:

It takes a giant leap to go from "Fuel prices are too high" to "We should deregulate the entire airline industry."

The Orchestrator: Yale law professor Robert Bork. Bork, who is the founder of the conservative judicial philosophy known as originalism, basically invented the case for airline deregulation.

The Safecracker: Future Supreme Court justice Stephen Breyer. Breyer cowrote the Airline Deregulation Act and recharacterized the Republican calls for deregulation into something establishment Democrats could support.

The Expert: Future airline executive Phil Bakes. Bakes was a congressional staffer and the other author of the bill, who falsely sold deregulation as populism.

The Face Man: Consumer advocate Ralph Nader. Nader drummed up popular support for deregulation, arguing (rightly) that corporate capture of the CAB had led to industry-regulator collusion while making the case (wrongly) that it would somehow be better for consumers to have industry in charge of commercial air travel.

Bumpy landing: Dan McKinnon, the chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, testifies on airline deregulation in 1982.

The mark for this con job, the dupe all these people had to gaslight into handing them the keys to the kingdom and ushering in the era of neoliberalism, was one of the most solidly liberal Democrats we've ever had in the US Senate: Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Democrats probably never would have turned their backs on a literal New Deal agency like the CAB without a Roosevelt Democrat (who was also functional political royalty) like Kennedy leading the way.

In 1976, with the Republican Party still reeling from the associated scandals of Watergate and President Gerald Ford's pardoning of Nixon, Kennedy was eager to continue the family business of running for president. But Kennedy couldn't run against Ford in 1976. Well, I mean, he could have, but in 1969 he had kinda, sorta, actually killed a woman, Mary Jo Kopechne, when he drove his car off a bridge in Chappaquiddick with her in it after a booze-filled party, escaped the submerged vehicle, and left her there without reporting the accident for hours. (He ultimately pleaded guilty to leaving the scene of an accident.) Kennedy was still too toxic to run in '76, clearing the way for Jimmy Carter to become president, but he was absolutely planning to challenge Carter in a primary in 1980. He was looking for a signature issue that he could push the Carter administration on and distinguish

Who Gave Away the Skies to the Airlines?

himself from the administration's "malaise." He realized, as everybody with half a brain realized, that the fuel crisis was Carter's biggest weakness.

Meanwhile, airlines were ailing, so the CAB raised airfare prices. That was almost certainly the right regulatory call, but raising prices on an essential service like air travel during a period of economic recession and stagflation caused a lot of pain for consumers and, most importantly, voters.

DELAY

All these men sold airline deregulation to Kennedy, who made it one of his signature issues in opposing the Carter administration.

And there was a deeper problem with the CAB: It had ceased operating like a regulatory agency that oversees the airline industry and started operating like a cartel that protects the airline business elite. It's a problem that infects almost all "big government" regulatory agencies if they last long enough: corporate capture. Eventually, the wealthy people the agency is supposed to regulate buy the regulators.

If you tell a rich fuck that there is an agency head who is responsible for making up the rules that govern the rich fuck's business, the first thing that rich fuck is gonna do is try to buy, bribe, or influence that agency head. Should the agency head prove incorruptible, the next thing Mr. Moneybags will do is use his political influence and connections to get the agency head fired. With enough time, pressure, and money, Richie McCashman will eventually get his way and will install his own agency head, who is loyal not to the people or the government but to the rich fuck who got him the job.

That is essentially what happened to the CAB. The major airlines bought it, used it to murder small carriers and new competition, and turned the entire regulatory scheme into a closed market that guaranteed profits to a few wealthy players. When the CAB started raising prices to contend with the fuel crisis, nobody paying attention could trust that it was raising prices out of economic necessity or sound financial planning. It looked, for all the world, like the CAB was just protecting the profit margins of greedy airline moguls.

The orchestrator: Robert Bork, the intellectual godfather of airline deregulation, at a press conference in 1973.

The high airfare prices and the low trust in the regulators are what, I believe, gave the neoliberals the opening to get to Kennedy. I could spend an entire book detailing the evils of Robert Bork, in the same way the historian Robert Caro set the record straight on Robert Moses. Bork was Nixon's legal hatchet man. He invented originalism and was a virulent racist. He's easily one of the 10 most impactfully evil people in American history about whom most people don't know. But—critical to this story—he was also a key advocate for the conservative false gospel of deregulation.

Bork's signature view was that courts and government agencies should be solely guided by what he dubbed "economic efficiency" and "consumer welfare." But he defined those terms poorly: Efficiency essentially translated into "increased profits," and welfare meant only "lower prices." His theory was that consumers really care only about price. He intuited that consumers will functionally eat shit in order to pay a little bit less, and so the government should be concerned only with lowering the price as much as possible, as long as the business owner or capitalist can turn a healthy profit on the back end.

Bork's theory is that the entire point of laws is to bring about these market efficiencies and lower prices. Not to build a better, more fair society or, you know, stop evildoers, but to increase profits while lowering costs. Bork belonged to a school of thought called law and economics (sometimes scholars will shorthand this to the Chicago School, because a lot of these people were incubated at the University of Chicago School of Law), which holds that just about every law can and should be understood through an economic cost-benefit analysis, and the government should pick the most profitable one. It's incredibly popular in legal circles, and if you spend any time studying law, you will quickly come across people, both liberal and conservative, who will blithely reduce every legal question—from abortion rights to First Amendment issues to healthcare—to a back-of-the-envelope math equation.

Bork's solution to the airline crisis was to get rid of the CAB. Not reform it or replace it with new, better rules to govern airline behavior but to repeal it outright and deregulate the entire industry. Bork likely had too much racist, literally segregationist baggage to convince Kennedy of anything on his own. (Kennedy would go on to be the critical voice preventing Bork from becoming a Supreme Court justice, after Bork was nominated for the position by Reagan in 1987.) But like I said, Bork's theory of deregulation had been adopted by a whole crew. Ralph Nader was working from the outside, at the grassroots level, convincing voters that the CAB was the cause of all their consumer pain. Phil Bakes, a Kennedy staffer, was working on the inside, telling Kennedy that opposing the CAB could set him apart from Carter and bring unions (which also didn't trust the bloated, captured agency) to his side. And Stephen Breyer, then a lawyer for the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, was working the legal angles, essentially translating Bork's kooky and untested ideas into a legal framework that promised a pragmatic and (pseudo-)scientific approach to answering big legal questions without wading into culture war issues.

All these men sold airline deregulation to Kennedy, who made it one of his signature issues in opposing the Carter administration. Breyer spearheaded Senate hearings exposing the CAB as a "regulatory cartel," and they both sold the plan to other Democrats as a "moderate" proposition that would show the country that Democrats were not the big-government stooges Republicans made them out to be. Breyer and Bakes wrote the bill.

DAVID HUME KENNERLY / GETTY IMAGES

Introduced in the Senate as the Air Transportation Reform Act and in the House as the Air Service Improvement Act, the bill did exactly what Bork and the neoliberals wanted: It got rid of the CAB and its price regulations. The act eliminated restrictions on route competition, made it easier to start new airlines, and eliminated the subsidies given to airlines that delivered the mail. The CAB itself was to be phased out over a number of years (it effectively died almost immediately after the bill's passage), and the authority to administer what regulations remained in place passed to the Federal Aviation Administration (because the bewitched Democrats at least remained concerned about planes falling out of the sky) and the Department of Transportation.

The final bill passed 356–6 in the House and 82–4 in the Senate and was signed into law by Carter. You can credit Carter for being politically savvy enough essentially to steal one of his rival's signature political issues and make it his own. But realistically, when a bill has that much support in the House and Senate, any president is going to sign it.

The first casualty of the Airline Deregulation Act was the ongoing victim of the Democrats' embrace of neoliberalism: organized labor. Introduced to real price competition for the first time in their history, the first thing airlines did was try to cut labor costs. Yes, frills like piano bars were gone, but the airlines also cut wages, overtime pay, and sick days.

Unionized pilots, flight attendants, and baggage handlers saw their wages and benefits cut when the newly deregulated airlines raced to the bottom. Prior to the deregulation act, the CAB enforced collective bargaining agreements and fair labor standards across the entire industry. Without the CAB, every airline was free to make its own deal with its labor unions: If workers objected, they were fired and replaced by scabs. And workers were in many cases compelled to take bad deals, because often the alternative was the entire airline going under and everybody losing their jobs. The new rules, or lack thereof, put many airlines out of business. Fans of deregulation will say that's a good thing because giants like Eastern, Pan Am, and TWA were ossified and inefficient and were being propped up only by the anticompetitive policies of the CAB. There is truth in that, of course, but what the market Darwinists always fail to mention is that each of these airline failures was a body blow to thousands and thousands of workers who lost their jobs. And under Reagan-era policies, workers sacrificed to deregulation were no longer caught by a social safety net.

The other downside of airline failures is that they largely eliminated one supposed benefit of deregulation: increased competition. For a time after deregulation, more airlines formed, competing on more routes and driving prices down. But ultimately, the bigger carriers that survived gobbled up the smaller carriers. Today, four air carriers—American, Southwest, Delta, and United—account for 75 percent of air travel in the United States.

But what about the prices? Remember, according to many deregulation acolytes, the price is the only thing that matters. Nearly 50 years later, whether the price of tickets actually went down after deregulation, when you take all factors into account, is heatedly debated. I'm not an economist, but the consensus opinion seems to be that prices went down on high-trafficked routes and went up on low-trafficked ones. But people like Columbia law professor Tim Wu argue that these cost savings hide the fact that the consolidation of the air travel market to just a few companies leads to collusion and price-fixing on the most popular routes. Even if you are paying less, you're not paying as little as the deregulators promised.

Cheek by jowl: Passengers are crammed seven to a row on a transatlantic flight.

I'm glossing over the economics here, and not just because I'm the kind of guy who needs to use the Internet to check my 11-year-old's math homework. I'm willing to give the baby his bottle and stipulate that ticket prices more or less went down for most consumers, thanks to deregulation. My issue is that unlike Bork or Breyer, I don't think prices are the only thing the government should be concerned about when making policy. Service is objectively shittier, thanks to deregulation. Labor was screwed, thanks to deregulation.

The first casualty of the Airline Deregulation Act was the ongoing victim of the Democrats' embrace of neoliberalism: organized labor.

Delays and overcrowding also increased, thanks to deregulation, because while the airlines were allowed to compete in all of these popular markets, nobody told the airports. If it seems as if our major international airports, like JFK, LAX, and O'Hare, are perpetually "under construction," it's because they were built for a regulated air traffic market and have

JON HICKS / GETTY IMAGES

Who Gave Away the Skies to the Airlines?

never caught up to the sheer volume of deregulated air traffic trying to come to port in their crowded markets. As always, the deregulators never want to talk about the infrastructure that can be built only by the government, which the private companies need in order to reap maximum profits.

Tracking how Democrats belatedly came to grips with what they had wrought is a morbidly fun exercise. In 1986, Democratic Senator Robert Byrd remarked:

> This is one Senator who regrets that he voted for airline deregulation. It has penalized States like West Virginia, where many of the airlines pulled out quickly following deregulation and the prices zoomed into the stratosphere—doubled, tripled and, in some instances, quadrupled. So we have poorer air service and much more costly air service than we in West Virginia had prior to deregulation. I admit my error; I confess my unwisdom, and I am truly sorry for having voted for deregulation.

One of the more insidious aspects of deregulation is that, once done, the policy cannot easily or reasonably be undone.

Byrd was a former Klansman—literally an "Exalted Cyclops" in the KKK—who opposed the Civil Rights Act, so I can't really say that the Airline Deregulation Act was even in the top 10 of Byrd's "mistakes." But it ranks pretty high up there in political mistakes by Ted Kennedy: He lost his 1980 primary challenge to Carter, so it can truly be said that Kennedy spearheaded the most important deregulation bill in the nation's history for, politically speaking, nothing.

Eventually, even Kennedy realized what a terrible mistake it had been to support deregulation. In 1988, at a Washington, DC, social event, he ran into his old staffer Phil Bakes. Bakes was by then the president of Eastern Airlines (having previously been president of Continental Airlines). That's right: One of the guys who used his federal perch to destroy the "regulatory cartel" of the CAB just happened to become a wealthy airline executive. Funny how things work out, isn't it?

At the event, Kennedy tore into him, reportedly saying, "This goddamn [deregulation]…you know, Phil, you double-crossed me. You lied to me. You said the unions were going to support deregulation."

Unfortunately, not every Democrat got the memo. Neoliberalism eventually took over the Democratic Party, capped off by Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign. Bill and Hillary Clinton both studied under Bork at Yale Law School, which is a fact I often think about when contemplating why the Democratic Party sometimes looks like an uncanny valley version of the Republican Party. Clinton would go on to appoint Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court in 1994, giving neoliberals key footholds in all three branches of government. In 1996, Clinton declared in a State of the Union address, "The era of big government is over," to the thunderous applause of both houses of Congress.

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And that pretty much brings us to the present day. Many other industries have been deregulated or privatized since the airlines, including the telecommunications industry, large swaths of the financial sector and banking, and even the prison industry. Wherever neoliberals go, the story always stays the same: Labor gets hollowed out, monopolies emerge, service gets worse, and consumer protections disappear. But prices stay low and the stock market goes up, so everybody acts like we're winning. It's all been incredibly profitable for a few individuals. In 1978, the top 0.1 percent owned about 7 percent of the nation's wealth; by 2018, those same people owned 18 percent of the nation's wealth.

And these incredibly profitable deregulated industries still have access to billions of public dollars whenever anything goes wrong: 9/11, Covid-19, a bunch of rich fucking bankers gambling on the housing market like it was a craps table, it doesn't matter—the deregulated industries get bailed out by taxpayer money. It's a great economic model for the industry titans: They reap all the profits, while taxpayers assume all the risk. Capitalists will demand that the government get out of their way while they fly themselves to the freaking moon… right up until one of them gets stuck up there. Then they will demand that the government launch a taxpayer-funded search-and-rescue mission to bring them home.

Planes do not fly backward. There is no going back to the pre-1978 regulatory environment, or the CAB, or the literal price-fixing of airfares. One of the more insidious aspects of deregulation is that, once done, the policy cannot easily or reasonably be undone. Reregulating a market requires intense and sustained political will, and no small amount of pain, as the businesses adjust to being stopped from reaping maximum profits for minimal services. It's theoretically possible to reregulate a market, of course, but I don't have any practical examples of that actually happening. No industries in America have been deregulated and then successfully reregulated.

I do think Ted Kennedy was right about one thing in this entire deregulation saga: A presidential candidate who could actually fix the airlines and make air travel something other than the overcrowded, poorly serviced, nickel-and-dime nightmare that it has become would be extremely popular.

Democrats can rediscover the power of how to fix things. But, in the words of Yoda, they "must unlearn what [they] have learned" from neoliberals. A true Democrat uses the power of the government as an ally, and a powerful ally it is. **N**

(Whalen, continued from page 41)

Reeves does not believe that masculinity is toxic. But he does believe it's fragile. Drawing on anthropology, Reeves argues in *Of Boys and Men* that manhood is harder-won and more easily lost than womanhood "because of women's specific role in reproduction." He criticizes the right for greatly overstating the significance of biology and the left for being unwilling to acknowledge the role of biology, for fear that it will be used to justify discrimination. (Reeves has also written that transgender and nonbinary identities are just as sincerely felt as cisgender identities.) While biological differences, he says, "are not determinative of human behavior," they do matter, and "little good will come from denying [them]."

This leads to Reeves's most controversial policy recommendation. Because boys' brains, on average, are slower to develop during adolescence, Reeves wants to "redshirt the boys," or hold them all back for a year before they start kindergarten. This question of how to weigh biology—especially in education—is one that has long polarized the field, said the psychologist Michael Reichert, the director of the Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives at the University of Pennsylvania and a coauthor of Equimundo's "State of American Men" report. "To the extent that Richard has caused controversy, it's really along those very familiar fault lines," he said. "We have been producing poor outcomes for boys for generations and rationalizing it based on the assumption that boys are essentially feral beasts that need to be tamed."

Niobe Way believes that Reeves is "fanning the flames" of a gender divide that is "more ferocious than it's been for a long time." By bifurcating gender, as Reeves does, Way says that you will inevitably end up privileging one side over the other. "Richard gets the point that boys and men feel put on the bottom of the hierarchy of humanity. But the solution is not to flip the hierarchy and then to only focus on boys and men. You can't say that the problems that boys and men are facing are somehow fundamentally different from the problems of girls and women. And that is a Richard Reeves assumption," she said.

As Reeves was speaking at the Global Women's Summit, I heard someone behind me quietly saying "yes" after each beat. I caught up with her outside in the reception hall. Her name was Priestley Johnson, and she directs the USA division of Girl Up, an initiative of the United Nations Foundation. "I was in that room like, 'Oh my God, what side am I on right now?'" she said with a nervous laugh.

Johnson said she thinks many women are still "licking their wounds" after an election in which so many voters showed that they did not prioritize reproductive rights. But, she continued, "I think we are at a critical place to ask why. I don't think it's based on the issues; I think it's around the sentiment of men not being included in the conversation." She felt like the panel we'd just attended demonstrated this. "The 'mommune'—like, where are men going? Oh, they're dying? We should be talking about their healthcare then, right?"

I met up with Reeves in the greenroom afterward, and we headed out to another café. As he walked through the reception hall, he was greeted like one of the celebrities on the bill. "I'm constantly waving your book in front of people's faces," said a woman named Sarah Hall, who told Reeves that she works with college football players. "I wish more people knew about what you were doing."

"I'm trying," Reeves said, adding that he hopes to launch a "Coach for America" program with help from the former Ohio representative Tim Ryan.

Quari Alleyne, a senior video producer at *The Washington Post*, was practically glowing as he approached Reeves. "I have come to sing your praises, Mr. Reeves," he said. "I have to tell you how much I appreciate what you're doing."

"Coming over and saying that means a lot," Reeves replied. "It can be a lonely space."

A woman named Kevonne, who asked me not to share her last name and to describe her as a Black mother, had a cathartic reaction to hearing Reeves speak. She said her son had been unfairly disciplined in school and had "tons of different diagnoses put on him." Reeves told her that he has a Black godson and that there's a chapter in his book about the specific barriers faced by Black men and boys, including grossly disproportionate rates of school discipline.

REEVES DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT MASCULINITY IS TOXIC. BUT HE DOES BELIEVE IT'S FRAGILE.

"I'm going to buy your book," Kevonne said. "Are they selling it here?" She motioned toward the makeshift gift shop next to us. "That's a very interesting question," Reeves said, cracking a mischievous grin. As it turned out, *Of Boys and Men* was not being sold at the *Washington Post* Global Women's Summit. But given how the book's message had gone over, perhaps it should have been. In real time, one could see there was a demand for the kind of "permission space" that Reeves had made it his life's work to create.

"Your son is lucky to have you," Reeves told Kevonne, and headed off to the elevator with a smile. N

LIFE UNDER SA

Lights out: People gather against a backdrop of unlit buildings in Havana, as Cuba's national power grid has effectively collapsed.

NICK KAISER / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / DPA / AP IMAGES

Cubans are trapped in a vicious circle of government mismanagement exacerbated by the US embargo.

DAVID MONTGOMERY

GERMINARES CARDERO CÉSPEDES lives in hilly Segundo Frente, a coffee-growing community at the eastern end of Cuba where Fidel Castro's rebels established a second front in their 1959 revolution. At 89, Cardero seems full of vigor, but his heart is failing, just when his country is suffering its worst economic crisis since the revolution. He grew up working the land outside Santiago, Cuba's second-largest city. He raised five children, who gave him 15 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. He retired from an agricultural cooperative with a pension of 1,550 pesos a month. That used to provide a meager living but now won't even buy two bottles of cooking oil.

Two years ago, this man who'd hardly been sick a day in his life began having fainting spells, says his grandson Lisneydi Cardero Diéguez, 40, a physical education teacher. Doctors said he urgently needed a pacemaker—but there was a national shortage. The only option was to harvest a device from the chest of a patient who had died of other causes, sterilize it, and implant it in Cardero Céspedes. Afterward, the retired campesino felt as good as new. The catch was that the recycled pacemaker had just two years of battery life left.

The scarcity of such basic life-saving devices is one potentially lethal consequence of the United States' hardening policies toward Cuba in the past several years. Because of sanctions, including President Donald Trump's decision in 2021 to place Cuba on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, American manufacturers won't sell pacemakers bound for Cuba, says Bob Schwartz, the executive director of Global Health Partners, a New York–based nonprofit that raises money to buy medical supplies and medicine for Cuba. At the same time, Cuba's own crashing economy has prevented it from buying enough pacemakers from other countries. Now people like Cardero

The scarcity of lifesaving medical devices is a lethal consequence of the hardening of US policy toward Cuba.

Céspedes are suffering. The waiting list for pacemakers in the Santiago region grew to 112 people, including 25 who had to be tethered to external pacemakers in the hospital, says José Carlos López Martín, the director of the Center for Cardiology and Cardiovascular Surgery in Santiago.

Cardero Céspedes recently felt sick again, almost exactly when his two-year lease on life was set to expire. But he was in luck: Global Health Partners and a European NGO had launched a campaign to buy thousands of pacemakers outside the US. One would be for the retired campesino.

The new device was implanted on a morning in mid-December. Cardero emerged from the operating room in a green wheelchair, sitting ramrod straight in white pajamas. "I never thought I'd live to see this moment," he said in a loud, clear voice. By coincidence, the date was December 17, the 10th anniversary of the deal announced by US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro to begin to normalize relations, a memory that never seemed more remote.

Blighted bedsides: Health workers in Cuba increasingly find patient care compromised.

Cuba has contended with the US embargo on trade and travel since President Dwight Eisenhower imposed initial sanctions in 1960 and President John F. Kennedy broadened them in 1962, imposing a travel ban a year later. Cuba found ways to soften the economic blow, first with patronage from the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991, and then later with oil subsidies from Venezuela and the authorization of limited private enterprise within Cuba's socialist system.

Those remedies aren't sufficient anymore. Trump's decision at the beginning of his first term to cancel Obama's engagement policy and get even tougher on Cuba—and, later, to place Cuba on the terrorism list—coincided with the implosion of Venezuela's economy and problems in Cuba's own economic management to create mass hardship in the country. "We will not be silent in the face of communist oppression any longer," Trump said in announcing his first round of renewed sanctions in Miami's Little Havana in 2017. "We do not want US dollars to prop up a military monopoly that exploits and abuses the citizens of Cuba." Obama had based his policy of easing restrictions on the opposite logic: Decades of Cold War antagonism had impeded political reform on the island; repairing the relationship was a better way of promoting American values.

Joe Biden, as president, largely failed to keep his campaign promise to "promptly reverse the failed Trump policies that have inflicted harm on the Cuban people," as he told *Americas Quarterly* in March 2020. He did take marginal steps in 2022, such as loosening Trump's clampdown on family remittances and easing restrictions on some types of group travel to Cuba. But he waited until six days before leaving office to remove Cuba from the US terrorism list—a gesture that Trump quickly canceled hours after taking the oath of office again. Biden's lack of action earlier in his term likely was a result of political pressure not to be seen as rewarding Cuba after its crackdown on widespread street protests in July 2021, and he had to retain the support of former senator Robert Menendez, the Cuba hard-liner and powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Of all the blockade reinforcements imposed by Trump and largely maintained by Biden, Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism (along with North Korea, Iran, and Syria) is perhaps the most consequential. The Trump administration gave two reasons for putting Cuba on the list: its refusal to extradite Colombian guerrillas and its harboring of American fugitives involved in political violence in the early 1970s. But the guerrillas had been participating in internationally recognized peace talks, and Colombian President Gustavo Petro called Cuba's inclusion on the list "an injustice." The American fugitives were never connected with international terrorism, a defining feature of the list. Biden subsequently certified that Cuba has not recently supported terrorism and has been cooperating in the fight against it.

The terrorism designation has caused dozens of foreign banks and multinational corporations to stop participating in transactions involving Cuba, according to Cuba's annual report on the blockade to the United Nations. While Cuba had been on the list before Obama removed it, its reinstatement is more devastating because a heightened fear of US sanctions has caused widespread "overcompliance" by foreign institutions, which now refuse to have anything to do with Cuba, even legal transactions, says Robert Muse, a Washington lawyer who represents clients seeking to do business or philanthropy with Cuba. Also, during the Biden administration, the United States for the first time began enforcing another consequence of being on the terrorism list: Tourists from more than three dozen countries, particularly Europeans, lost their privilege to visit the US without a visa if they visited Cuba. A visa costs $185 and requires an interview with an American consular official, which can take months to schedule. Vacationers who want to preserve their access to the United States must ask themselves if Cuba is worth the hassle. The number of travelers to Cuba from the seven top European Union countries dropped from 730,000 in 2019 to 324,000 in 2023, according to Cuban government figures.

Other measures imposed by Trump in his first term and maintained by Biden similarly cut Cuba off from foreign—not just American—cash, goods, and investment. The US sanctions ships carrying Venezuelan oil to Cuba, bars manufacturers from sending goods containing more than 10 percent of American content, and per-

YAMIL LAGE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

mits lawsuits in American courts against foreign investors in properties confiscated during the revolution. (One of Biden's last-minute changes was to suspend this Trump-era lawsuit policy; the new Trump administration has reinstated it.)

The hit to Cuba's resources has left it unable to import enough food or sufficient animal feed and fertilizer to support domestic agriculture; fuel to run its aging power plants, leading to frequent widespread blackouts; and medicine, medical supplies, and ingredients to support domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing, according to the Cuban government and independent analysts. "There's a kind of a vicious-circle quality to this," says William LeoGrande, a Cuba specialist at American University and a coauthor of *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana*. "Because they don't have any foreign exchange earnings, they can't buy seed, they can't buy fertilizer, they can't buy equipment. And so, lo and behold, domestic production then falls, and that makes the shortage even greater, the need for imports even greater, but the ability to import even less."

Independent experts also say the hardened blockade amplifies and exploits Cuba's own failures to make its economy more efficient. "They put all their eggs in the tourism basket, rather than really diversifying their economy more," LeoGrande says. "They could have invested more in modernizing agriculture and been better about giving farmers more incentive to produce."

Juan Triana, an economist at the University of Havana who has criticized some elements of Cuban economic policy, adds, "Trump's measures attacked Cuba's sources of income, attacked where they could damage the lives of the Cuban people in a surgical manner."

A talking point on the right is that US culpability for hardship on the island is overblown. How can the US be responsible for the food crisis, for example, when, according to the US Department of Agriculture, US farmers are permitted to export more than $400 million in food (mostly chickens) to Cuba? But US farmers send more than $1.8 billion in food to the nearby Dominican Republic, with a similar population size. Without sanctions, US farmers' exports to Cuba could quadruple, says Paul Johnson, the founder of the US Agriculture Coalition for Cuba.

Scarcity in Cuba is evident everywhere. Produce markets have empty stalls. There's a lack of eggs, milk, and meat. When the shrunken monthly food-ration basket comes—if it comes—it's often missing something: the rice, perhaps, or the cooking oil. The lights go out every couple of days, especially far from Havana. Drivers often wait more than 12 hours at gas pumps and are limited to about 10 gallons. The nation is short about 14,000 working public buses, according to the government's blockade report, leaving the public transportation system all but collapsed. There are frequent sidewalk footraces as people sprint for a place on the already packed boxy American mini-trucks from the 1950s that serve as collective taxis.

Empty shelves: Havana's largest supermarket is sparsely stocked.

The lack of healthcare supplies extends beyond pacemakers. The scarcity of medicine and equipment means surgeries must be postponed. "The limitations are tremendous," says López Martín, the cardiologist, adding that there's a waiting list of about 300 people in Santiago for cardiovascular surgery. Nationwide last year, there was a waiting list of more than 86,000 people for surgeries of all types, including 9,000 children, according to the government. Schwartz, of Global Health Partners, says he has a $1.9 million cargo of medicine that he has been unable to send for two months because shippers are leery of transactions involving Cuba.

Scarcity is evident everywhere. Produce markets have empty stalls. Drivers wait 12 hours at gas pumps.

"The objective of the Trump-Biden governments was regime change…and it was a failure in terms of the objective," says Johana Tablada, the deputy director general for

YAMIL LAGE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

US relations in the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "But it was successful in harming the Cuban people at a level that has no precedent."

The privation is too much for many people. Over 1 million Cubans—almost 10 percent of the population—have left the country in recent years. That's by far the largest migration since the revolution, Tablada says. About 670,000 of those migrants tried to cross the US border, according to US Customs and Border Protection figures, showing how one American policy priority sabotages another. An additional 110,000 Cubans arrived via the Biden administration's humanitarian parole program, according to Refugees International.

Tropical tableau: Brightly colored vintage American cars have long been a tourist draw in downtown Havana, though riders are now scarce.

With so many politicians claiming to act in the best interests of the Cuban people, it's worth taking a bus ride across the island to see how those actions affect the lives of people like Cardero Céspedes—and how the people's own resilience may be Cuba's most precious resource.

NOLBERTO MORENO BORJAS, 60, WEARS A FLOPPY BROAD-brimmed hat against the midday Havana sun. He worked for 30 years as a metallurgic engineer in a nickel factory, but today he's posted a few blocks from the domed Cuban Capitol, beside a two-tone white and black-cherry 1956 Ford Victoria convertible, offering tourists excursions around the city. He charges $20 a ride, sharing the revenue with the car's owner, a young entrepreneur. Candy-colored vintage American cars conveying giddy visitors along the seaside Malecón were an emblem of the Obama opening, when a spigot of investment briefly poured a semblance of prosperity over the island. But now platoons of drivers sweat idly beside their nostalgic machines. Moreno will not get a single fare all day.

"It seems to me like a war the United States is making against Cuba. It causes a lot of damage to the poorest Cubans."

—Nolberto Moreno Borjas, a Cuban driver

"It seems to me like a war the United States is making against Cuba," Moreno says. "It causes a lot of damage, not to the leaders of the country, nor to the upper class, but to the poorest Cubans."

The number of international travelers to Cuba dropped by more than half, from a record 4.7 million in 2018 to 2.2 million last year, according to reports citing official figures. The number of American visitors fell from a peak of 638,000 in 2018 to 163,000 in 2023, according to the Cuban government, with just 129,000 Americans visiting in 2024 through November. Tourism was one of Cuba's top three sources of revenue pre-Covid, along with family remittances and income from sending thousands of Cuban doctors to serve in other countries. Anything that hurts tourism not only impoverishes legions of hospitality workers; it also cripples the national fund reserve needed to purchase vital goods from abroad, such as food, fuel, and medicine. Moreno digs into his pocket to show a handful of blister packs containing pills: hypertension medicine and Vitamin C for him, and stomach medicine for his father, who just had an operation. Moreno could not find these items in the state pharmacy, but he was able to buy them on the street, at a much higher price.

Moreno says his own government shares responsibility for the problems. Cuban officials equivocate in their attitude toward private businesses, loosening restrictions and then tightening them, causing *bandazos* (the lurching of a ship), he says. "The Cuban system isn't working well. But the government of another country has no right to attack the country that has this system.… In the end, the ones who suffer are us."

KOBBY DAGAN / VWPICS VIA AP

In a Havana neighborhood outside the city center, Oscar Fernández, 46, a cofounder of Deshidratados Habana, which dries up to 660 pounds of fruits and vegetables a day, stands behind the counter of his open-air storefront. The wall has racks of dehydrated mangoes, oranges, bananas, and more, selling for less than $1 per packet, which he dreams of one day exporting to the US.

American pro-embargo rhetoric is confused about Cuban entrepreneurs like Fernández. US policy is supposedly designed to support individual Cuban initiative, yet the private sector in Cuba is also said to be a myth, a front to raise money for the government.

"That's crazy," says Fernández, an economist who was a professor at the University of Havana before starting Deshidratados Habana during the pandemic. His business provides 22 jobs, creates a market for 20 to 30 suppliers, and enlivens the menus of about 100 bars, restaurants, stores, and small hotels. According to his fellow economist Juan Triana, the private sector generates 15 percent of Cuba's gross domestic product and employs 35 percent of Cuban workers.

"The US blockade is the main obstacle for Cuban economic development," Fernández says, particularly the measures taken after the Obama administration.

Fernández keeps samples of dried fruit packets from Whole Foods and Trader Joe's in his desk. He's sure he could compete with those outfits or become their suppliers if the embargo would allow it. He plans to build a small factory near the Havana airport and increase production capacity to five tons a day. With the help of an American partner, he has a request pending for a US license to export to the insatiable yet inaccessible market just 90 miles away.

For now, though, Fernández has had to halt production for two months because of the unreliability of the electrical power his drying machines depend on and the scarcity of the fuel he needs to transport fruit from the countryside.

"You cannot separate the government from the Cuban people," Fernández says of US policies ostensibly aimed at punishing the government and helping the people. "You cannot say you want to help the Cuban people if you are putting pressure on the government." Political and military leaders are personally insulated from the effect of sanctions, he adds, while "these restrictions are going to be impacting real people."

Some entrepreneurs are losing hope, closing up shop, and leaving the country, a step that Fernández says he would never take: "This is my country." While he thinks the government could have made better choices over the years—"Even with the embargo as it is, we could be in a very different situation if the Cuban government made proper decisions in spite of [it]," he says—he sympathizes with the economic ministers consumed with putting out daily fires.

"I don't want state companies to be privatized," Fernández continues. "I don't want the healthcare system to be private, schools to be private. I want inefficient public companies to be closed, and I want private companies to emerge and to solve problems, to pay taxes, to sustain social goals. How do you want to call this model? Socialism? Capitalism? I don't care about the labels, because we've [spent] too much time discussing empty labels. What I need is the Cuban people to be better off this year than last year."

US policy is supposedly designed to support individual initiative in Cuba, yet the Cuban private sector is also said to be a myth.

The 540-mile bus ride from Havana in the west to Santiago in the east takes 16 hours. The driver deftly skirts potholes and crumbling pavement. There's a shortage of asphalt and trucks to make repairs. The government reports that 38 percent of the nation's roads are in "fair or poor condition," but that seems an underestimate.

Waiting in Santiago on the tree-canopied patio of his seven-room guest hostel is Reinaldo Suárez Suárez. Hostal la Hiedra sits a few blocks from San Juan Hill, where Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders joined Cuban independence fighters to defeat the Spanish Army in 1898. While digging a cistern, Suárez, who is also a historian and law professor, found evidence of an American military trench and numerous shell casings. He leads the way to the top of the storied hill and sweeps his arm across the panorama of highlands and valleys where a succession of historical actors aspired to shape Cuba's destiny—colonizers and slave traders, Spanish and American imperialists, Castro's revolutionaries. In the current crisis on this land, he says, the rebel spirit of Santiago must respond with self-reliance and ingenuity.

To that end, Suárez grows nearly all the vegetables and fruit he needs for his guests and recently proposed to his neighbors a joint agroecological project to cultivate "alimentary autonomy" on their properties as well as an "anti-blockade culture." Cubans must learn to grow alternative foods and eat the parts of plants they once discarded, Suárez says. He holds up a humble fruit known as the mouse pineapple. The size of a kumquat, it grows on wild shrubs. Suárez and the hotel's chef, Elieser Jardinez, transformed the mouse pineapple into a sweet and tart breakfast fruit and a gourmet dinner dessert. While a traditional pineapple costs 250 pesos and serves eight people, a large bunch of mouse pineapples costs 100 pesos and serves 33 people. "It's a total success and resolves an enormous problem for me," Suárez says.

But there's no escaping the blockade. Thanks in part to the US terrorism listing, occupancy has dropped from about 85 percent to 50 percent. Europeans are his main customers, but a German airline just announced that it will halt flights to Cuba. "For me, that's a big

House-made: The kitchen in a *casa particular*, a Cuban institution that allows residents to host foreigners.

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"Suddenly there are no eggs, then there's a blackout, then it's the water. Every day is a struggle to keep alive."
—Reinaldo Suárez Suárez, a Cuban hotel owner

blow," Suárez says. He's bracing for even fewer guests in 2025.

La Hiedra's manager, Suárez's 20-year-old nephew José Leandro Suárez Suárez, solemnly announces there is not an egg to be found in all of Santiago. For a hotelier, the inability to offer eggs is a professional disgrace. At a tourist hotel in Havana a few days earlier, the server had reported the absence of eggs with a sadness bordering on shame. Reinaldo Suárez Suárez contacts some incoming guests who are still in Havana to ask if they can buy eggs there before they travel to Santiago, to supply La Hiedra. Two dozen eggs in Havana can cost roughly half the average monthly salary paid by the state.

"What happens is every day you're having to do the engineering of survival," Suárez says. "Suddenly there are no eggs, then there's a blackout, then it's the water, then there's no toilet paper. Every day is a struggle to keep alive what you care for, the project you have." He pauses and adds, "But also, in the end, there's something very beautiful: You carry on inventing yourself. Reinventing yourself. Reinventing reality—overcoming reality."

Entrepreneurs against the odds: Private ventures like Deshidratados Habana are forced to swim upstream due to the US blockade.

Several miles away, on the rural outskirts of Santiago, Leandro NaunHung, 45, the pastor of the Catholic parish San José Obrero, seeks to lead his flock through a similar reinvention. Having no church sanctuary, the priest brings religious services, protein-rich foods, and community-building exercises to people living in remote communities over hundreds of square miles.

Faced with the lack of so much, "we have to transform ourselves, develop resilience to confront it, and not let it flatten us," NaunHung says as he sets out on his pastoral rounds in a battered Toyota pick-up truck. He worries that people are so busy trying to survive that they're losing the ability to imagine a future.

Wherever he goes, NaunHung carries a jar of what he calls *mata hambre*—"hunger killer"—and a pocketful of plastic spoons. It's a thick paste of ground and toasted seeds and grains mixed with honey, a kind of homemade energy bar. A couple of spoonfuls can stand in for a meal, he says, something "you can store and serve when you don't have electricity, in difficult times." He dispenses spoonfuls to people hiking along the road, to anyone with an empty belly.

As the scarcities worsened last year, he began sharing other recipes that could be made from wild plants and the ingredients at hand. He gave lessons in how to make food blackout-proof by preserving it through canning or salting. He and parish supporter Leocadia Rivera Rivera, 75, a retired nurse who served on medical missions to Libya, Angola, and Haiti, turned the patio of their old mission house into a sustainable garden. Humberto David Téllez Zamora, a 20-year-old biology student, helped launch a large-scale bread-baking operation, repurposing discarded iron machine parts from a junkyard as wood-burning ovens and distributing loaves of what they call *pan de la solidaridad*—"solidarity bread."

NaunHung switches from the Toyota to a large yellow truck with metal benches loaned by a parish member and heads into the hills. Every several miles, the truck picks up more people until there are 60 packed standing-room-only as they arrive at a disintegrating children's park near the coast.

"Today we are going to kill hunger!" says parish volunteer Dasmary Marrero del Toro, 68, inviting everyone for breakfast spoonfuls of *mata hambre*.

The purpose of the gathering is to celebrate Mass and plan for the future. NaunHung has also brought a friend, a hospital psychologist, to give a workshop on personal resilience, which takes place in a crumbling amphitheater. They brainstorm ways to improve their communities, then act out a short Christmas skit. Lunch is *pan de la solidaridad* and cheese pizza.

Every day NaunHung encounters quiet individual struggles. Marrero del Toro tells him her November food basket never arrived. She had to wait in line much of the day for her December basket of rice, sugar, and cooking oil. After working 35 years as an economics technician for a cement plant, she receives a pension of 1,500 pesos a month. That's worth less than $5 on the informal exchange market that Cubans use to change money. Inflation jumped 25 percent in 2023, according to government figures. Cooking oil costs 800 pesos, a bag of spaghetti 330 pesos, a can of beans 460 pesos, a pound of rice 180 pesos.

Margot Montoya Lahera, 64, says she sometimes has trouble collecting her pension of 1,600 pesos because the bank machine doesn't work during blackouts. This year she was responsible for Christmas decorations in the open-air shelter behind her house at the top of a steep, eroded road. A few dozen gather there for Mass when NaunHung visits. Montoya made a Christmas tree out of a branch from a cherry tree and adorned it with deodorant balls wrapped in silver paper. "It's not very beautiful, but I think God likes it," she says.

During Mass, the power goes out.

To raise money, the parish collects beer and soda cans that NaunHung hauls weekly to a sheet metal shack in Santiago, where he gets 40 pesos per kilogram. Today's 77 kilos yield 3,080 pesos.

The parish also relies on donations from Cubans living abroad. A couple years ago, NaunHung started making videos of parish life so the donors could stay informed. Video production turned into an effective way to engage the parish's teenagers. More than 600 clips have been posted to NaunHung's YouTube channel. These poignant and droll digital vignettes offer glimpses into forgotten lives on the receiving end of blunt policies devised in faraway capitals.

JORGE LUIS BAÑOS

Making it work: Even under dire conditions, communities and organizations find ways to help poor Cubans meet their needs.

The young videographers are excited about their work, but their generation is abandoning the country. "Here, there aren't many possibilities to do anything," says Alberto Enrique Wilson Vidal, 18. "So the idea is to try to leave one day, the earliest possible." Yunior Borrero García, 16, adds, "They don't create the conditions for us to exploit our talents."

As Trump retakes control of the United States' Cuba policy, with arch Cuba critic Marco Rubio as his secretary of state and hard-liner Mauricio Claver-Carone named special envoy for Latin America, he may be tempted to see how much tighter he can turn the screws. For now, though, after reversing Biden's last-minute changes, the administration has no further Cuba measures to announce, a State Department spokesperson told *The Nation* in late January, while false rumors of coming new, draconian restrictions course through social media.

"I'm very concerned because…things are going to get much tougher for Cuba," says Ricardo Torres, a Cuban-born economist at American University who is a critic of Cuba's economic model. "Trump and Marco Rubio?... It's the worst nightmare."

Rubio introduced a bill in 2023 to keep Cuba on the terrorism list until "a transition government in Cuba is in power." During his confirmation hearing in January for secretary of state, he elaborated his conviction that US policy should not ease until Cuba allows for democratically elected leaders. "The moment of truth is arriving," Rubio said. Cuban leaders are "going to have a choice to make.… Do they allow the individual Cuban to have control over their economic and political destiny, even though it threatens the security and stability of the regime? Or do they triple down and just say, 'We'd rather be the owners and controllers of a fourth-world country that's falling apart and has lost 10 percent of its population'?"

Trump will have to consider how much dissonance he can tolerate between the goal of eliminating illegal immigration and the aim of forcing regime change in Cuba. Recognizing a mutual interest in stemming the flow of Cubans to the US could be a starting point for engagement, suggests Johnson of the US-Cuba agriculture coalition. "I hope that this next administration works on three things," he says. "They recognize there's a food crisis, they recognize that there's mass migration, and they recognize that there is a private sector within Cuba that we can work with Cuba to improve, in order to resolve migration and the food crisis. That's the solution that we need to take."

As Trump retakes control of Cuba policy, he may be tempted to see how much tighter he can turn the screws.

Cubans are bracing to draw on deeper wells of resilience. "We must demonstrate every day that the blockade is inhumane," says Juan Triana, the economist. "But at the same time, we must demonstrate that even with the blockade, we can improve and continue living." That will mean understanding that the private sector is not an enemy of the revolution but a compañero, he says, and realizing that "this society…must be managed not with the tools and instruments that we used 40 years ago but with the instruments of now."

Johana Tablada, in the foreign ministry, recalls the economic crisis of the early 1990s, after the Soviet Union collapsed. "We were able to emerge with creativity, and I think we are about to do the same again," she says. "The country keeps evolving. What hasn't evolved is US policy." N

David Montgomery, a former longtime staff writer for The Washington Post, *is a freelance journalist in Washington.*

LEANDRO NAUNHUNG / YOUTUBE

The Loyalist

The cruel world according to Stephen Miller

BY DAVID KLION

IF THE ONLY THING ONE KNEW ABOUT Stephen Miller was that he was a white man, it might be sufficient to explain his alignment with Donald Trump—after all, 60 percent of that demographic supported Trump against Kamala Harris last fall. But identity is complicated, and every other aspect of Miller's points to the opposite conclusion. At 39, Miller is a millennial (51 percent of voters age 30 to 44 voted for Harris); he was raised Jewish in a Reform congregation (84 percent of Reform Jews voted for Harris) and grew up in Santa Monica, California (Santa Monica's precincts ranged from 71 to 86 percent for Harris); he has parents with advanced degrees and

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE CIARDIELLO

himself graduated from top-ranked Duke University (56 percent of college graduates and a likely 75 percent of students at Duke voted for Harris); and he has lived his entire postcollegiate life in the District of Columbia (92 percent of DC voters went for Harris).

Miller has the profile not of a typical Trump supporter but of a garden-variety liberal Democrat. Nevertheless, he is arguably one of the president's most influential and ideologically fervent loyalists. Having previously served as chief speechwriter and a senior adviser for policy in Trump's first term, this year he returned to the West Wing as deputy chief of staff for policy and Homeland Security adviser in Trump's second—roles that mark him as one of the most powerful people in the Trump White House and, by extension, the world. As a January *New York Times* profile put it, "Mr. Miller was influential in Mr. Trump's first term but stands to be exponentially more so this time."

One of the architects of the attempted "Muslim ban" as well as the infamous child-separation policy during Trump's first term, Miller has now pledged to oversee "the largest deportation operation in American history," indiscriminately targeting the roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants believed to be living in the United States, with the full coercive power of the executive branch. To whatever extent he is successful, he will transform America demographically, culturally, and economically in ways he has fantasized about since his early teens; in many respects, he already has.

How to make sense of Miller and his trajectory? While he has made his share of public appearances to push his ultranativist views, he rarely speaks about his own political evolution. To date, the only authoritative biography of Miller is *Hatemonger: Stephen Miller, Donald Trump, and the White Nationalist Agenda*, by the reporter Jean Guerrero. Published in 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and during a presidential election that saw voters reject Trump, the book was well received by reviewers but arrived at a moment when Miller seemed, mercifully, to be fading in relevance. But the story Guerrero recounts is an urgent one, packed with insights into the kind of personality that self-radicalizes toward the far right in the unlikeliest of circumstances. As we now know, Miller was only just getting started during Trump's first term. The particular brand of virulent xenophobia he represents is now politically ascendant, and his biography is inescapably central to the history of the present.

Hatemonger
Stephen Miller, Donald Trump, and the White Nationalist Agenda
By Jean Guerrero
William Morrow
Paperbacks.
336 pp. $18.99

Stephen Miller was born in 1985 and raised in the coastal paradise of Santa Monica—a semi-urban enclave of wealthy and mostly white liberals, undergirded by the omnipresent labor of immigrants who are neither white nor wealthy. "Laborers maintain this world," Guerrero notes, most often laborers from Mexico and Central America. The rest of California in the 1980s and '90s, however, was neither placid nor uniformly liberal. During Miller's childhood and adolescence, the state was a hotbed of anti-immigrant sentiment and racial backlash.

Miller was 6 years old when the Los Angeles Police Department's savage beating of Rodney King set off a wave of protests and riots across the city. California's Republican governor, Pete Wilson, won reelection on an anti-immigrant platform when Miller was 9, campaigning on Proposition 187 to deny nonemergency services to undocumented immigrants. Right-wing talk radio, spearheaded by but not limited to Rush Limbaugh, took off nationwide during the 1990s and stoked racist and xenophobic sentiment for anyone inclined to listen to it. Santa Monica may have been a haven for well-to-do veterans of the New Left (Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda lived there for decades), but they were thriving amid the cognitive dissonance produced by a functional racial caste system upon which many of them relied and a state that was a harbinger of our ugly political moment.

Miller is a product of some of the same cognitive dissonance. The story of how he came to be born in Santa Monica, as Guerrero reminds us, begins with his ancestors' immigration to escape antisemitism. Both sides of his family, the Millers and the Glossers, arrived in the United States from Russia's impoverished Pale of Settlement in the early 20th century. From then on, they both had typically American Jewish social ascents. On the Miller side, one generation's success selling groceries and rolling cigars in Pittsburgh led to the next generation's success in law and real estate in Los Angeles; on the Glosser side, a family-owned department store served as a community pillar in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, until it was acquired and liquidated in a leveraged buyout in the 1980s.

Stephen's father, Michael Miller, a Stanford-educated lawyer, cofounded a firm focused on corporate and real estate law; he also became deeply involved in his father's real estate business and helped to reconstruct the world-famous Santa Monica Pier. Stephen's mother, Miriam Glosser, graduated from the Columbia University School of Social Work and worked with troubled teens before eventually pivoting to the family real estate business as well. As a child, Stephen grew up in a $1 million, five-bedroom home in the North of Montana section of Santa Monica, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Greater Los Angeles. He had Latin American–born housekeepers who cooked family meals and cleaned up after him and his siblings.

This comfortable lifestyle was disrupted in 1994, when the Millers had a run of terrible luck: A major earthquake inflicted $20 billion in property damage in Southern California, including on a number of properties managed by the family firm. This came at a particularly inopportune moment, as Michael Miller was in the midst of an acrimonious legal battle with his former partners in the law firm he'd started, the upshot of which was that he found himself hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt.

In 1998, when Stephen was 13, the family sold its imposing home and moved to a smaller house by a freeway underpass near the working-class Hispanic neighborhood of Pico, though still in a majority-white middle school district. The area was beginning to gentrify, and the Millers would refinance the house three times over the next four years as their fortunes gradually recovered.

David Klion last wrote for Books & the Arts on the film The Apprentice. *He is working on a book about the legacy of neoconservatism.*

If there is a sociological explanation for Miller's politics, Guerrero implies, perhaps it lies in this period. In the aftermath of the 2008 housing crisis, many of Miller's peers found themselves downwardly mobile, locked out of the housing market and denied opportunities that prior generations had taken for granted—experiences that have inclined many millennials toward a more socialistic politics than previous cohorts. But Miller's brush with downward mobility came much earlier, with his affluent boomer parents experiencing the shock of material insecurity during the 1990s, a decade that is more typically remembered as a period of unprecedented economic prosperity. Though Miller was never anywhere close to working-class, and his family's finances rebounded in time for him to enjoy the benefits of an elite university education and a parentally subsidized down payment on a DC condo (though recently his parents had another bit of bad luck, as their home was destroyed in the Los Angeles wildfires in January), he did pass through a period of acute economic and status anxiety during a very impressionable age.

But sociology can only explain so much; it is hard to escape the sense that there was something fundamentally malevolent about Miller from the start. Another person in his shoes might have grasped that this anxiety was the product of his parents' business difficulties and sheer geological misfortune, but the adolescent Miller sought out other culprits. With his economic privilege in seeming jeopardy, he leaned much harder into his privilege as a white, native-born American.

Guerrero spoke with Jason Islas, a working-class Mexican American who was Miller's friend in middle school and attended his lavish bar mitzvah. Though the two initially bonded over *Star Trek*, Miller abruptly ditched Islas as a friend the summer after middle school, citing his Latino heritage as a justification. "The conversation was remarkably calm," Islas told Guerrero. "He expressed hatred for me in a calm, cool, matter-of-fact way."

In middle school, Miller was already drawn to right-wing subcultures that distinguished him from his peers, purchasing a subscription to *Guns & Ammo* magazine and finding himself inspired by the writings of Charlton Heston and Wayne LaPierre on the Second Amendment. His father was also moving right, alienated by bad relationships and burned bridges with his liberal Santa Monica cohort, and Stephen seems to have inherited his father's contrarian streak. By the time he enrolled in the public Santa Monica High School, which Guerrero portrays as neatly internally segregated between professional-class, college-bound whites and working-class Hispanics, he was a full-fledged conservative provocateur.

For Miller, a key entry point to the right was *The Larry Elder Show*, whose Black host had built a following among right-wing Angelenos for his verbal assaults on political correctness and liberal shibboleths. Miller called in to the show and invited Elder to speak at his high school, and he subsequently became a frequent guest, a precocious teen reactionary holding forth on his high school's alleged anti-Americanness in the wake of the 9/11 attacks before an audience that spanned Southern California.

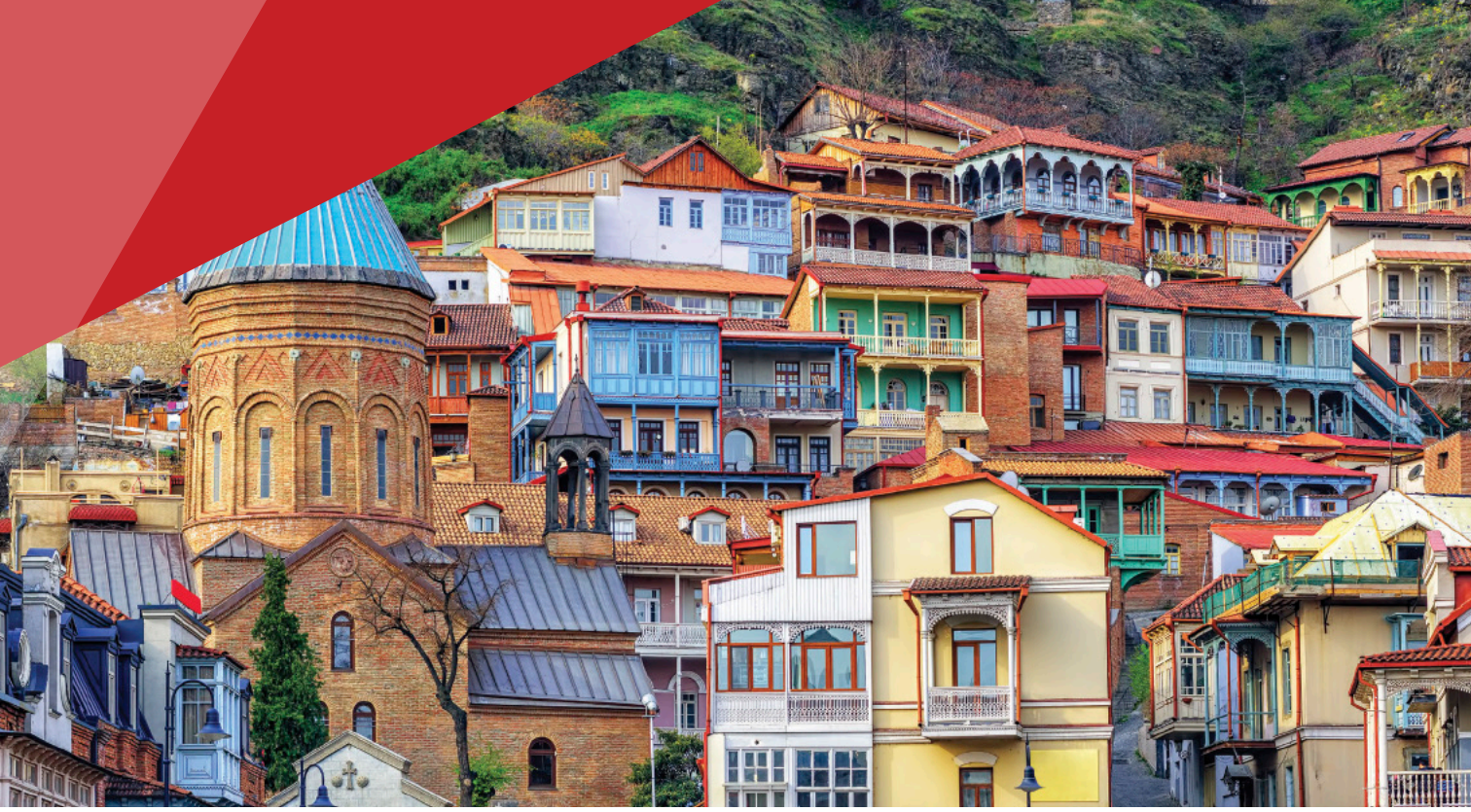
Miller's provocations became more outlandish as he advanced through his teens. He cultivated a mid-century gangster affect: He listened to Frank Sinatra, enjoyed gambling, and styled himself after Ace Rothstein, the Robert De Niro character in *Casino*. He was known for arguing with teachers, hijacking school events, and winning attention with his outrageous antics. In both high school and college, he would be repeatedly observed throwing trash on the floor and then insisting that the custodial staff pick it up. ("Am I the only one here who is sick and tired of being told to pick up my trash when we have plenty of janitors who are paid to do it for us?" he is quoted as saying at one point.) A number of students and faculty found this behavior appalling, but Miller's shameless transgressiveness at least got him a lot of attention.

Miller's provocations became more outlandish as he entered his teens.

His willingness to upset liberals and thrive on their outrage put Miller on the radar of David Horowitz, the nationally notorious firebrand whose red diaper upbringing and early career involvement with the Black Panthers were followed by an abrupt rightward turn beginning in the 1970s. By the early 2000s, Horowitz had become a leading conservative ideologue who specialized in identifying and recruiting young talent. After discovering Miller on *The Larry Elder Show*, Horowitz went on to serve as something of a career guru to him. He helped Miller craft an image as an outspoken champion of free speech at a hostile liberal high school, which Miller exploited to secure a photo spread in the *Los Angeles Times*. This publicity, Guerrero speculates, might also have helped Miller gain admission to Duke University despite an antagonistic relationship with his high school administration.

In 2003, Miller entered Duke, where he continued the shtick he'd developed at Santa Monica High: the performative littering, the trolling classroom monologues, the *Larry Elder Show* appearances lambasting the university administration for its supposed leftism, and the fruitful relationship with Horowitz. He quickly established a Duke chapter of Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom, which he used to assail the Palestine Solidarity Movement, to attack feminism and multiculturalism, and to champion the white members of the Duke lacrosse team who were accused (falsely, it turned out) of raping a Black stripper in 2006. This last incident, which drew sustained national attention, gave Miller the opportunity to appear on *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Nancy Grace* while he was still an undergrad.

Miller's TV appearances proved to be the perfect launchpad for a career in Republican politics after graduation. Horowitz helped, too, introducing Miller to Representative Michelle Bachmann, from whose office Miller quickly rose to serve as press secretary for Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions. It was in this job that Miller met Steve Bannon, then affiliated with the emerging right-wing tabloid site *Breitbart*; Bannon, a longtime Los Angeles resident, recognized Miller from his *Larry Elder* spots. *Breitbart* and an increasingly extensive network of alternative right-wing media outlets enabled Miller, working with Sessions,



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to play a central role in the successful effort to kill the Obama administration's effort at bipartisan immigration reform in 2014.

By this point, Miller had become much more deeply immersed in the literature and online forums of the extreme right and was taking direct inspiration from Jean Raspail's novel *The Camp of the Saints*, with its dystopian vision of a horde of nonwhite migrants invading the West. Soon he also began to develop ties with leading right-wing media figures like Ann Coulter, Laura Ingraham, Tucker Carlson, and the anti-immigration think tanker Mark Krikorian.

Perhaps the most vocal advocate against immigration in that media space was one Donald Trump, who had leveraged his celebrity to become the leading exponent of the "birther" conspiracy theory during the Obama years, impressing Miller greatly in the process. "Our whole country is rotting, like a third world country," Trump told *Breitbart* in the wake of the Obama immigration bill's defeat, prompting Miller to e-mail his friends that "Trump gets it.... I wish he'd run for president." When Trump began his long-shot campaign the following year, Miller, barely 30, joined up, and the two quickly hit it off. Where more traditional young Republicans might have spent their early careers preparing to work for a more conventional Republican candidate like Jeb Bush or Chris Christie, Miller had presciently spent his preparing for a candidate like Trump. And with Trump's victory came opportunities to do the kinds of things that his more seasoned peers might never have proposed.

The world according to Stephen Miller is a cruel and callous one.

Literally from Day 1, Miller set the tone for Trump's first presidency: "This American carnage stops right here and stops right now," the most memorable line in Trump's 2017 inaugural address, came from Miller's pen. A wave of executive orders empowering Immigration and Customs Enforcement, targeting sanctuary cities, ordering the construction of a border wall, and suspending immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries soon followed, all of them pushed and heavily shaped by Miller. It was Miller who made the once-obscure Salvadoran gang MS-13 an obsession of the Trump administration, and Miller who emerged as one of the top internal advocates for the family separation policy that became a national scandal in 2018.

In addition to the president himself, Miller built a close relationship with Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, ensuring a level of family trust that protected him from the turnover for which the Trump administration became infamous. If xenophobia was the policy through line for most of Miller's efforts, competent bureaucratic maneuvering and absolute loyalty to Trump were what empowered him to execute his agenda. Miller's fingerprints are likewise all over the early initiatives of Trump's second term, including turning legal refugees away from the United States, suspending foreign aid, launching ICE raids on major cities, and leaning on the major tech companies to ban diversity initiatives.

The world according to Stephen Miller is a cruel and callous one, in which America is strictly for unhyphenated Americans and those here "illegally" must be forcibly returned to the "failed states" where they were born. To Miller, the crumbling American heartland is being preyed on not by rapacious capital but by an invading army of gangsters, thugs, and terrorists waved in by coastal liberal elites—in other words, by exactly the kind of people he has always lived among.

Part of why Guerrero was able to speak with so many of Miller's acquaintances—including his estranged uncle David Glosser, who has compared his nephew to the Nazis—is that Miller is so unrepresentative of the world he grew up in. Interviewees throughout *Hatemonger* regularly express shame and horror rather than pride at Miller's steady climb to the heights of political power; one gets the sense that speaking to the media is a form of penance for some of them.

At the same time, Miller's rise wasn't exactly a fluke. It was facilitated not only by his family's baseline wealth and privilege and the social capital they afforded, but by Miller's demonstrated talent for hacking the weaknesses of liberal elite culture itself. Miller is an extreme case, yet anyone who grew up in similar communities or attended similar schools can recognize him as a very particular type of guy. His hateful tirades weren't popular at Santa Monica High or at Duke, but they consistently drew attention; students and faculty often pushed back hard against his constant trolling, but in doing so they played right into his hands. Teachers who wanted to encourage open debate and free speech gave him a platform regardless of whether he was arguing in good faith; mainstream and liberal media outlets continued to promote him in the name of provocation and ideological diversity. Like Trump himself, Miller intuitively grasped that being hated in elite liberal environments was better than being ignored, and that embracing the language and tactics of conservative media offered a means for a strange and argumentative kid to stand out from a crowd of generic achievers and to fast-track his way to influence.

This isn't to say that Miller's act is entirely cynical. It's clear that beneath all the performative cruelty and amoral careerism, there's an authentic core of seething, visceral, unquenchable hatred that defies any easy explanation. It's true, as Guerrero documents, that such bigotry circulated widely in Southern California and elsewhere in the 1990s, and it's true that far-right voices on talk radio and later on the Internet continually grew in influence as Miller came of age, but none of that by itself explains why Miller is the way he is.

Despite his obvious intelligence and his elite pedigree, Miller didn't arrive at his views via serious reading—his is not the classical conservatism of Edmund Burke, the libertarianism of Friedrich Hayek, the neoconservatism of Irving Kristol, or the paleoconservatism of Samuel Francis—and he's never presented himself as an intellectual in his own right in the manner of, say, his White House colleague Michael Anton. His ideas are not just monstrous and reactionary but banal and simplistic; he lacks the imagination that is a prerequisite for empathy. But in a way, this makes him the ideal conservative for the Trump era: His ideology is not refined, abstracted, or euphemized away from its real object. He's told us exactly what he intends to do. N

Across a Continent

Andrée Blouin's revolutionary lives

BY BILL FLETCHER JR.

THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF READING *MY COUNTRY, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria*, I found myself stopping every so often to look at the picture on the cover. It's the picture of a striking woman who is looking toward the camera with an expression that seems to indicate she's been caught in the middle of a sentence. That woman also happens to be the book's author, Andrée Blouin, and I found myself returning to the picture and wondering what that sentence might have been. What was Blouin in the midst of saying?

Born in a region of what was then the French Congo and is today part of the Central African Republic, Blouin emerged from a childhood of abuse to become a young, nomadic romantic and ultimately a well-respected Pan-African nationalist revolutionary. *My Country, Africa* is her extraordinary memoir. It is both a dramatic look at the realities behind European colonial rule in Africa, including its impact on the consciousness of the oppressed themselves, and an account of the factors that led to Blouin's transformation and that of the world she entered. Originally published in 1983, it has now been reissued by Verso, with a foreword by Adom Getachew and Thomas Meaney, in an effort to advance our understanding of the 20th-century anti-colonial movement. In both form and content, it's a book about far more than a single life—even one as extraordinary as Blouin's. It's a book about a liberation struggle that spanned an entire continent, as well as the limitations of that struggle. It is a story, as Blouin puts it, that is "inextricably entwined with Africa's fate as a land of black people colonized by whites. The contradictions within my life are those from which Africa has suffered."

My Country, Africa reads at first like two different books. The first is a powerful look into the author's formative years. Blouin was born to a European man in his early 40s and a 14-year-old African girl, and the

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA VENTURA

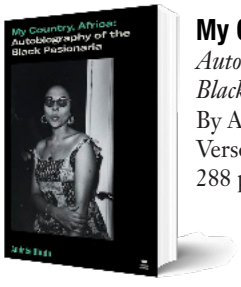
saga of her early years is compelling and painful, drawing the reader into what at first seems a "no exit" from hell and then later becomes an unusual journey. This second "book" tells a very different story: the remarkable transformation of a young, unfocused woman into a revolutionary Pan-Africanist deeply committed to ending colonialism (and later, neocolonialism) but ultimately frustrated by the limitations of actual African independence. Yet to separate these "books" would be a mistake, since together they form part of a much larger story: the story of European empire and colonization and of African resistance and revolution—and the eventual liberation of a continent that saw its people kidnapped by slavers and then was drawn and quartered by the various European powers in the 19th century.

The intertwined nature of Blouin's story is revealed almost immediately. Reading the description of how her father, a French businessman working in what was then a French colony, ended up having a child with a 14-year-old girl—whom Blouin describes as having been very pretty and captivating—leaves one screaming with rage, and not just at the criminality of the "marriage" of the 14-year-old to a much older European man but also at the system of colonial oppression and male supremacy that enabled it.

Blouin describes the evolution of this relationship between her parents in such a way that it almost appears as sarcasm. How, one asks, can Blouin profess any degree of love for a father such as hers—or, for that matter, for a mother who, during most of her life, identified beauty, stature, and success with whiteness?

To the extent to which there is an answer, it can be found only through reading the entirety of the book. It's a story about the confusion of a child born from such a relationship, of the denial, the revelation, and the defiance—a pattern that, as Blouin points out, might offer us an account of Africa in general, a continent raped by the barbarities of European colonialism. From the start, it is both eye-opening and jaw-dropping. As the child of this "union" between a European and an African, Blouin is designated by the French term *metisse*, meaning "mixed race." Living in a colonial society of white supremacy and male supremacy, she finds that her future rests in the hands of men in general, and white men in particular.

Although Blouin's father married her mother, this marriage had no validity for Europeans. Thus her father could, at his own discretion, also establish a so-called legitimate marriage with a European woman. Although polygamy was accepted by Blouin's tribal or ethnic group, it was not accepted, either legally or socially, by Europeans, and when her father chose to leave the area where Blouin was born with his European wife, he ordered Blouin



My Country, Africa
Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria
By Andrée Blouin
Verso.
288 pp. $26.95

sent to an orphanage in Brazzaville, in another area of what was then known as the French Congo. It was there, in the orphanage, that she remained a de facto prisoner for 14 years under unbelievably inhumane conditions.

Had *My Country, Africa* ended here, it would still have been a powerful examination of white supremacy, patriarchy, and child abuse, and how this was embedded in the very culture and social organization of European colonialism in Africa. But it would also have joined the long list of books about individuals who have managed to survive such disasters more or less intact. Blouin's story, however, is about what happens when those individuals come together, when they begin to do something about the unfair facts of their lives.

Blouin eventually became very active in anti-colonial politics throughout West Africa.

The beginning of her transformation comes in early adulthood. After two relationships with European men, Blouin is traumatized by the death of her son. The death of a child is always an indescribable agony for a parent, one from which many never recover. But when that death is easily preventable, it casts even stronger and longer-lasting reverberations. In the case of Blouin's son, his death could have been prevented had he received malaria medication. But he was denied the medicine, and no amount of pleading by his anguished mother would convince the French authorities to release it: As far as they were concerned, this medicine was reserved for Europeans. This incident, above all else, set in motion the events that, combined with a second, near-mystical occurrence, would transform Blouin into an activist for African liberation.

Blouin's second moment of radicalization came a little later: In a store, she saw a picture of Sékou Touré, then the leader of the independence struggle for Guinea-Conakry (and later the president of an independent Guinea). The picture, she recalled, almost spoke to her—in fact, she thought she heard the words of Touré, calling on her to fully embrace the African freedom struggle and to reject much of her former life.

And that is exactly what she did. Blouin joined and became very active in the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain, which was initially a regional anti-colonial formation in so-called French West Africa, and she also became a fierce proponent of Africa's freedom from European colonialism, traveling throughout West Africa promoting the cause of independence from France. In addition, Blouin was a key intermediary in efforts to resolve disputes among the advocates of independence, and her work would evolve in fascinating directions. In 1960, she was asked to organize the Feminine Movement for African Solidarity in what was then the Belgian Congo. With the recommendation of Guinea-Conakry's Sékou Touré, Blouin undertook this major task. The organization's platform included the following goals:

> To make all women, no matter what age, literate.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a longtime socialist, trade unionist, international activist, and writer of fiction and nonfiction.

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The Feminine Movement for African Solidarity, which is rarely mentioned in discussions of African anti-colonialism, organized thousands of women. As indicated by its platform, it was a formation that addressed not just colonialism but also patriarchy; in that sense, it was fighting on two fronts. This dual struggle became critically important for Blouin, who saw in the male supremacy practiced in Africa not only a force for the continued suppression of women but also one that countered the potential contained in African liberation.

Blouin's work in building this women's formation also positioned her at the heart of the struggle for the independence of the Belgian Congo, and it was there that she met and became a close confidant of Patrice Lumumba, the iconic freedom fighter who would go on to become the first prime minister of an independent Congo, only to be murdered by traitorous elements actively encouraged and supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency.

It is this section of *My Country, Africa*, detailing a moment of triumph that would soon be undone and lead to decades of tragedy, that is perhaps the most engrossing and heartbreaking part of the book. Blouin was there at the very center of this struggle, someone who became a thorn in the side of the Belgians and their Congolese neocolonial servants—for example, the notorious Joseph Mobutu, who would eventually become the president of Congo after Lumumba's assassination (and change the name of the country to the Republic of Zaire).

For Blouin, and for countless other revolutionary women, there was no going back, regardless of defeats or tragedies.

In these years, Blouin's activities ranged from what was then the French Congo to French Guinea and the Belgian Congo. Few causes were unworthy of her attention, and some of the greatest names in the African freedom struggles—Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Congo's Patrice Lumumba—became comrades. The organizing of women, and the specific request for her assistance in Congo, were particularly noteworthy. Both Nkrumah and Touré were major proponents of Blouin's work. And once in Congo, she became an important adviser to Lumumba—so important that the Belgians and their African allies wanted her out of the country.

I found Blouin's story astounding, and it was all the more remarkable to me because although she was seemingly everywhere, I had never heard of her before. While I'm not claiming to be an Africa specialist, I am quite familiar with many of the major—as well as minor—names in the African freedom struggles of the 20th century. As I moved toward the end of Blouin's book, I kept asking myself: How could I have not known about her? Was it simply that I had somehow overlooked the material on her life and work?

The simple—yet still incomplete—answer would certainly be that history is frequently, if not generally, written by and about men. This includes even the progressive histories, which often focus on the work of great men and their particular contributions. But there are other reasons, too, one suspects. Blouin's story—compelling, painful, and heroic—is also a story about a person caught between many different worlds, and it's one that can't be easily summarized or categorized. Her early life as the child of a mixed-race relationship between a man who was over 40 and a girl who was just 14; her miseducation and brutalization as a child; her romantic relationships with European men and, separately, her intense political relationships with African revolutionaries—all point to the complicated and entangled histories of European colonialism, African anti-colonialism, and patriarchy.

In this way, *My Country, Africa* is not just an account of one individual. Blouin's life is one that overlaps and is intertwined with the larger story of empire, oppression, resistance, and transformation in Africa. Indeed, the book can be read as a near allegory for the conditions that the continent faced while colonized by Europe and its struggle for liberation, a struggle that necessitated—and still necessitates—awareness, repudiation, progressive action, and the recognition of the constant possibility of failure.

Told through the eyes of a Black woman, the story reveals the overdetermined nature of colonialism and the manner through which male supremacy operated as a partner to European domination (including among the oppressed). And this story, despite not having a so-called happy ending, is one that will resonate with all those who engage in emancipatory struggles.

For Blouin and for countless other revolutionary women, there was no going back, regardless of defeats or tragedies. The course had been chosen; the word had been given. Perhaps in that picture on the cover, Blouin was not caught in mid-sentence. Perhaps she had just finished one. N

Wisner's Ghosts

The making of a Cold War spy

BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD

Sometimes it can be mostly harmless when the powerful lose their minds. For no discernible purpose, the Roman emperor Caligula ordered a floating bridge of ships stretched across the Bay of Naples and reportedly planned to appoint his horse as consul. King George III of England issued orders to people who were dead, shook hands with an oak tree, and believed he could see Germany through a telescope. He planted beef in his garden, it was said, in hopes of growing a herd of cattle. He had to be tied to his bed at night and put in a straitjacket by day.

In the nuclear age, however, madness can be dangerous. One man who had influence over such weapons was President Harry Truman's secretary of defense, James Forrestal. Convinced that he was being pursued by a mix of White House officials, Zionists, and communists, he told friends, "They're after me." When a fire engine's siren sounded, Forrestal rushed out of his house screaming, "The Russians are attacking!" He was eased out of his job in 1949 and, several months later, jumped out of a hospital window to his death.

Frank Wisner, a longtime CIA official, suffered in his later years from what we now call bipolar disorder and, like Forrestal, would take his own life. But it is remarkable how much he did to destabilize the world before showing any symptoms at all. As the CIA's chief of clandestine operations, Wisner helped orchestrate the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1953, leaving power in the hands of the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The shah's increasingly harsh authoritarian rule eventually provoked a massive popular uprising against his regime and its American backers in 1979, whose reverberations we are still living with.

In Guatemala in 1954, Wisner staged a coup to oust another elected official who was too progressive for Washington's taste, President Jacobo Árbenz. The excuse was that his land and tax reforms showed him to be communist. If Árbenz "is not a communist," Wisner's man in Guatemala cynically cabled him, "he will certainly do until one comes along." The coup triggered a brutal, decades-long civil war between rebels and a string of US-backed military dictators that left more than 200,000 Guatemalans dead and provoked still more to emigrate to safety abroad, mostly in the United States.

Wisner also arranged to parachute or infiltrate hundreds of operatives into Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe as well as overseeing the MK-Ultra program, which experimented with giving mind-altering drugs to unwitting subjects. He had a major hand in secretly subsidizing, on a huge scale, dozens of supposedly private independent groups like the US National Student Association, the Free Trade Union Committee, the American Society of African Culture, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom. When investigative journalists at *Ramparts* magazine and elsewhere revealed all this in the late 1960s, it was a major boon for Soviet propaganda, tarnished the various groups involved, and, among their employees and grantees, shattered hundreds of relationships between those in the know and those who had now discovered that a key secret had been kept from them.

Douglas Waller's new biography, *The Determined Spy*, is not the first study of Wisner—he is one of the central figures, for instance, in Scott Anderson's trenchant *The Quiet*

ILLUSTRATION BY GABBY BARUCCI

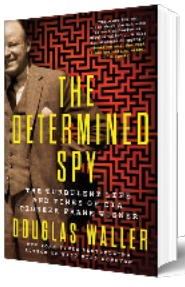
Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War—but it is certainly the most thorough. And through Wisner, Waller offers us a picture of a postwar America that felt it had the power, and the right, to craft the rest of the world to its liking. That power also included the ability to influence what people in the United States knew about the rest of the world. More on that in a moment.

From an early age, Frank Wisner fit the mold of many of the CIA's top officials: He came from a wealthy family; he was a member of the elite Council on Foreign Relations; he spent a few years at a Wall Street law firm and, during World War II, in the cloak-and-dagger Office of Strategic Services run by "Wild Bill" Donovan. (Donovan's peacetime law firm was even in the same building as Wisner's.) The intense, high-living Wisner took happily to wartime spy work, enjoying an extramarital affair with a young Romanian princess while managing various OSS operations from a luxurious mansion in Bucharest. As the war ended, Wisner managed to arrive in a newly conquered Berlin soon enough to grab some medals and a sketchbook as souvenirs from Hitler's bunker.

The Allied victory in World War II gave OSS veterans like Wisner a boundless confidence that they could accomplish almost anything. This arrogance lasted for some two decades. The hard-driving Wisner was the principal drafter of a 1951 document known as the Magnitude Paper. It proposed to greatly increase the CIA's budget in order to roll back communist advances in Eastern Europe—and China. Wisner predicted a Soviet invasion of Western Europe; the agency's operations, he contended, must expand exponentially to meet the threat.

That invasion, of course, never came, and the hundreds of agents the CIA slipped into the Soviet satellite states were almost all killed, captured, or took the money and ran. Even when opposition to the USSR emerged, it rarely came from them. The Soviets were convinced that the CIA had instigated the 1956 Hungarian revolt against their rule, but ironically that uprising took Wisner and his colleagues totally by surprise.

Wisner's comrades may have been full of bravado and ineffectual scheming where Europe was concerned, but it proved easier for them to influence events in the Global South. There, in the eyes of Eisenhower-era Washington, any country that claimed to be neutral in the Cold War was an enemy—as was any that might threaten Western economic interests. Hence the CIA's interventions in Iran (protecting a huge British oil company) and Guatemala (protecting United Fruit—a client of CIA chief Allen Dulles's former law firm).



The Determined Spy
The Turbulent Life and Times of CIA Pioneer Frank Wisner
By Douglas Waller
Dutton.
656 pp. $36

The CIA's next major operation of that kind was the sordid 1960–61 ousting and assassination of Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who was seen as a threat to Belgian and American investments. This was one of the rare bits of the era's skulduggery in which Wisner was not involved. The reason is that his behavior had begun to worry those around him. He screamed at his subordinates and tried to micromanage them; he went on manic shopping sprees. Shortly after the Soviets suppressed the Hungarian uprising, at a restaurant in a Vienna suburb, Waller writes, "Wisner stood up and announced in a loud voice to the other diners that Russian tanks had assembled at the border and would storm into Austria at any time." It was an eerie echo of Forrestal's paranoia.

Some months later, Wisner spent nearly half a year receiving psychotherapy and electroshock treatments in a private mental institution in Maryland, the Sheppard Pratt Hospital. It was a remarkably luxurious place with a greenhouse, a large library, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a small golf course. After this, Wisner returned to duty. He was no longer masterminding coups but was appointed as the CIA's station chief in London.

Two years later, however, the paranoia and mania returned. Wisner underwent more electroshock treatments in London, then was recalled and given a make-work job in Washington. After being awarded the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Medal and a consulting contract, he finally resigned in 1962, at the age of 53. As the Vietnam War heated up, he became a virulent hawk and developed a number of obsessions, including the belief that Hitler's deputy Martin Bormann was hiding in South America. Old friends cut him off. Another round of shock treatments did not help. In 1965, Wisner put a shotgun to his head and pulled the trigger.

Any of us can fall prey to mental illness, and there were certainly fewer effective treatments and drugs for it 65 years ago than today. Luckily, Wisner's family and colleagues got him into the sanitarium before he could act on his belief that Soviet tanks were about to pour across the Austrian border. But his life raises a larger question: When it comes to the belligerence of the United States during the Cold War, where do we draw the line between sanity and madness? Is it more irrational to imagine those invading tanks than to believe that you can replace the democratically elected government of Iran with an absolute monarch and not suffer consequences for decades to come? Or to believe that you can covertly fund scores of supposedly independent private organizations for years without undermining the faith in everything they stood for once that secret leaks out?

We can ask the same question about the man who now ultimately controls the CIA and so much else. Which is the more demented—to suggest injecting disinfectant as a cure for Covid or to claim that we can pour unlimited amounts of carbon into the atmosphere without catastrophically overheating the earth? That is a belief worthy of Caligula or George III.

Adam Hochschild's most recent book is American Midnight: The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy's Forgotten Crisis. *He is working on a book on American social movements of the 1930s.*

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The B-Sides of the *Golden Record*, Track Eleven: "How Will You Begin?"

When morning comes, whenever I can, I lie for a great while in dread.
I don't know how much more of it I can take, yet I confess I lure dread

with baits of what-if: if I make a decision that kills a man; if I become allergic
to skin; if I lose the use, but not the memory, of my tongue. To endure dread,

create bait, then bait, then abate. But what if there is no there there?
What if you, my extraterrestrial darling, don't exist? I need you to cure dread.

It's not fair, I know, but the truth is, like many of us, I live partially in my fantasy
of it: how, after decades, I find a trace of you in a bend of light; how your dread

never rises; how, instead, you turn to me with whatever part of you can see.
How my landing gear groans as I lower myself to you, cocksure. Dread—

in reality, you would feel it. It would not just be me coming, and your terror
would be justified. But this poem is about my fantasy, in which we abjure dread

at last together. I find you windswept on the equinoctial colure, nestled
on the first point of the constellation of the ram. I vulture dread.

I say, I am Sumita. Lure, a lure, allure. I have wanted you for so long.
My fears fall like dust. So do yours, like stardust. Transfigured, dread.

SUMITA CHAKRABORTY

Finally, Waller's biography makes one other haunting aspect of Wisner's life visible: An astonishing number of people in his immediate circle were journalists. Eric Sevareid of CBS was a bird-hunting comrade. The columnists Stewart and Joseph Alsop were constant companions, and Wisner persuaded the latter several times to produce columns backing the CIA's preferred autocrats in Southeast Asia. "By the mid-1950s," Waller writes, "Joe Alsop considered Wisner his closest friend in Washington." Wisner and his wife, Polly, were also extremely close to Philip Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*, and his wife, Katharine. They attended each other's parties, and Polly and Katharine had a daily morning phone call to keep each other apprised of Washington gossip.

In the case of the Iran coup, Waller says, "the Alsop brothers and a handful of other reporters in Washington had known about the CIA plot ahead of time but printed nothing on it." This raises the question: How many other coups or supposedly independent front organizations that Wisner was managing did journalists in the know keep silent about? Even the pathbreaking Church Committee probe of the CIA in 1975–76 was largely stonewalled from investigating how the agency used a compliant press.

There was certainly much to uncover. When a CIA U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, the reporter Erwin Knoll told Carol Felsenthal, the author of *Power, Privilege and the Post*, that he'd once found himself in an elevator with a *Post* editor who told him, "We've known about those flights for several years, but we were asked not to say anything." Key people at *The New York Times* also knew and kept quiet, David P. Hadley reported in *The Rising Clamor: The American Press, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Cold War*.

Carl Bernstein revealed in *Rolling Stone* that Katharine Graham, who had succeeded her late husband as the *Post*'s publisher, once asked CIA chief William Colby if anyone on her staff was working for him. "Colby assured her that no staff members were employed by the Agency but refused to discuss the question of stringers," Bernstein writes, adding that "more than 400 American journalists… have secretly carried out assignments" for the CIA.

We will never know how many of those assignments were hatched in the corners of the lavish parties at the Wisners' Georgetown home. Waller does not speculate about this, but he does mention that Wisner kept a wire-service teletype next to his office so he could monitor the news all day. If it was not to his liking, he acted. When British correspondents wrote critically of what the United States was doing in Guatemala, he had the State Department put pressure on Winston Churchill. When the *Times* reporter Sidney Gruson did the same, Wisner had the CIA gather information on him, and Allen Dulles got the *Times* to remove Gruson from the Guatemala beat.

The CIA was watching us so closely that they did something even we never had the time to do: compile an index, by subject and author, of the articles we'd published.

The CIA's hostility to all-too-rare critical journalism continued after Wisner's departure from the agency. I worked at *Ramparts* at the time the magazine started to unravel the CIA's widespread secret funding of private organizations. When, years later, I received my heavily redacted copies of CIA files under the Freedom of Information Act, there were dozens of pages on me, even though I was an extremely junior and unimportant staff member. The agency had a "*Ramparts* Task Force" of 12 agents that, among other work, prepared a briefing on the magazine for the director. They were watching us so closely that they did something that even we never had the time to do: compile an index, by subject and author, of the articles we'd published.

Journalism like this was rare; the Alsops were more typical. I doubt if it was the author's main intention in writing *The Determined Spy*, but the book is a reminder of how easily the American media can be cajoled into serving as another branch of government. On that score, the next four years will be a severe test. N

Sunbelt Ringstrasse

Atlanta's Beltline and the effort to re-create pedestrian cities

BY KARRIE JACOBS

TO ME, ATLANTA HAS LONG BEEN THE INVISIBLE CITY. Like anyone who flies with regularity (as I used to do pre-Covid), I've changed planes too many times at Hartsfield-Jackson airport. My joke about it is that no one has ever seen the outside of its seemingly infinite terminals—that, like certain freaks of topology (Google "Klein bottle"), it has no exterior.

In truth, though, I have occasionally escaped the confines of the endless terminals and ventured into the city itself. I once spoke at a conference at the AmericasMart (né the Merchandise Mart) in downtown Atlanta, but I can't recall a single thing about what the place looked like, inside or out. Prior to a weekend in Atlanta this past October, my previous visit to the actual city was in 2003, and I can only reconstruct the details of that trip by reading what I wrote about it at the time.

I live and breathe cities. My memory is a vast trove of urban places, famous and obscure, large and small; I can go on at length about the graffiti-filled tunnel through which Little White Oak Bayou in Houston sneaks under a massive highway interchange, or the water tower that's also the world's tallest free-standing Corinthian column, found smack in the middle of a St. Louis intersection. So it is a little weird that, until I visited Atlanta again this past fall, my visual recall of the city was almost nonexistent. This is especially peculiar not just because I've found reasons to respect and admire even the most chronically unloved American cities, but because the first work of architecture that truly moved me was by a man who was, for a considerable time, Atlanta's one noteworthy homegrown architect and developer: John Portman.

In the mid-1960s, Portman began the project of rebuilding a 2.5-million-square-foot chunk of downtown Atlanta (which eventually mushroomed to almost 19 million square feet) in what became his signature style: masonry towers that are inert on the outside and, seemingly, like the airport, all interior and no exterior. Portman's theory, circa 1967, was that

A RESTAURANT ON ATLANTA'S BELTLINE TRAIL (JOHN GREIM / GETTY IMAGES)

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urban life as it once existed—the hustle and bustle of pedestrians visiting local shops and socializing on the pavement—was over. Streets were inherently dangerous and ugly, and what was needed instead were "total environments" in which "all of a person's needs are met," preferably without ever leaving the building.

As an 18-year-old college student on a summertime jaunt to San Francisco in the 1970s, I wandered into Portman's brand-new Embarcadero Hyatt, with its dramatically raked 17-story atrium. To me, it looked like an M.C. Escher drawing come to life, and more than the other architecturally noteworthy buildings I'd previously visited—mostly museums like the Guggenheim or the monuments in Washington, DC—it instilled in me a sense of extraordinary possibility.

Of course, Atlanta isn't John Portman's city anymore—at least not entirely. One long, circular stretch of it is has been radically transformed by a very au courant piece of urban design: A linear park known as the Beltline, built incrementally since 2008, now encircles much of the city and has spawned new clusters of residential development along its path. The concept would be familiar to Portman, who believed he was building pedestrian-oriented villages—except his pedestrians were supposed to do their walking indoors, in corridors and across sky bridges, while the Beltline is outdoors, a long, narrow environment tracing the path of an old freight rail line. When it is completed, the main loop will be 22 miles long. And though it hasn't yet inspired Atlanta to make its ordinary streetscapes more hospitable to pedestrians, the Beltline has become a magnet for walkers and bicyclists (who often drive to get there). Like New York City's High Line, Detroit's Joe Louis Greenway, or Dallas's Katy Trail, the Beltline doesn't just provide a recreational conduit; it changes the way people live in the city around it.

My interest in the Beltline was sparked in 2017 when I interviewed Ryan Gravel, whose graduate thesis at Georgia Tech proposed repurposing the disused freight line that encircled downtown as the site of a linear park and light rail line. After his graduation in 1999, he began the work of making the concept a reality. With the initial support of a single Atlanta councilwoman, Gravel and a growing number of planners and community activists gradually built momentum and found financial support for the project in the form of a Tax Allocation District, meaning that the project is now supported by the development along its path. The TAD also funds affordable housing along the Beltline.

Invited to speak at a conference at Georgia Tech this past fall, I finally got a chance to see it. After getting my bearings, I arranged to meet Gravel at a spot along the Beltline so we could explore it together. I also invited a fellow conference participant, Maurice Cox, whom I had last spoken to when he was head of Detroit's Department of City Planning, a role he would subsequently play in Chicago. Among other things, Cox is remembered in Detroit for meeting with a group of activists in 2016, soon after his arrival the year before, and declaring that he wanted to make the Motor City "America's best city for bicycling."

We rendezvoused outside a food hall called Krog Street Market, after which Gravel walked us south, through the graffiti-filled Krog Street Tunnel and alongside the Hulsey railyard, a disused 70-acre CSX facility that may someday be redeveloped as a walkable neighborhood and a major stop on the Beltline's light rail loop. Gravel no longer has any official ties to the project, but he's still concerned with its future, particularly whether the light rail line he envisioned will ever happen. He also pointed out that there are very few spots along the Beltline's path that have blossomed into full-fledged public places, with the landscaping and infrastructure you'd expect from a real park.

The section of the Beltline we walked appeared to be an overwhelming success.

Nonetheless, the section of the Beltline we walked, on Atlanta's affluent Eastside, appeared to be an overwhelming success. Everywhere there is new housing, both market-rate and affordable. We were also impressed by the intensity of the activity all around us: the sheer number of people taking pleasure in walking, biking, riding scooters (Cox tells me that his Atlanta relatives habitually head to the Beltline to get some exercise after big holiday meals), or dining in, say, an open-air taco shed. And unlike New York's High Line—which, because it's elevated and painstakingly crafted, feels like someplace very precious—the Beltline is at street level and looks, in most respects, very ordinary. This elemental piece of infrastructure, with some stretches paved and others not, mostly feels organic. If I didn't know better, I would think it had always been there.

Not all of Atlanta is like this. On my first morning in the city, I'd set out on a pilgrimage: I began walking down Peachtree Street from the vicinity of Georgia Tech to Portman's Peachtree Center. But I was spooked by the almost total absence, on a lovely Friday morning, of other human beings. So I decided to ride MARTA, Atlanta's version of a subway, which wasn't much more populated than the sidewalks.

When I emerged from the train station, I felt like I was in a badly designed video game surrounded by unmarked buildings. This was the mid-20th-century American city as envisioned by Portman. I was in a sea of taupe concrete; Google Maps was stumped, as was I. I finally asked a man on the street where the Marriott Marquis was, and he told me that it was right in front of me—that if I took a few more steps, I'd bump into it.

What impressed me most on this quick Portman field trip wasn't the vertigo-inducing spectacle of the Marriott atrium (once I'd found it), but the remarkable deadness of the streets outside. While New York City's own Portman-developed hotel, the Times Square Marriott, has been retrofitted in recent years with enough signage and lights to make it look like a good Times Square neighbor, this complex was still deeply mired in the 1960s or '70s. Though Portman died in 2017, his disdain for street life lives on around Peachtree Center and on the pedestrian-free thoroughfares all over town.

Meanwhile, the Beltline is signaling that a very different city is possible. After Cox and I said goodbye to Gravel, we

Karrie Jacobs writes frequently on architecture and urban planning for Books & the Arts. Her last article was on the "greening" of Broadway.

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stopped by a Kroger supermarket. This might not sound like an architectural or urbanist landmark, but the Kroger had a shaded front patio where you could buy a beer from a takeout window and drink it at an outdoor table. It was a genuine pleasure to linger outside; it was as if we were dallying in Paris's Tuileries Garden or Madrid's Parque del Retiro. OK, it's not quite so lovely or so formal, but the supermarket's front porch is a spot where people take obvious pleasure in just being in public. To me, it's the clear antithesis of Peachtree Center and Portman's Atlanta: It's the Atlanta that Gravel and the Beltline's creators saw as the city's future. It is precisely what 21st-century urbanism is all about.

As it happens, the supermarket also offers a splendid view of the new Fourth Ward project, an urban place that owes its existence the Beltline. It was developed by a man named Jim Irwin, who is as much a product of this moment as Portman was of his and is now president of his own company, New City Properties. Initially, Irwin, an Atlanta native, working for a developer called Jamestown, headed up the conversion of a disused Sears warehouse into a bustling destination called Ponce City Market, a massive flea-market-cum-food-hall. Irwin subsequently acquired a nearby site of about 17 acres along the Beltline from Georgia Power and, working with the planner Cassie Branum of Perkins & Will (who was also involved with the overall design of the Beltline), corralled an idiosyncratic, international group of architects to landscape the site and design its buildings. Neither starchitects nor the kind of safe choices to which many developers default, the firms Irwin selected have brought a finely honed eccentricity to the project, one that was inspired by, and contributes to, the vitality of the Beltline.

The most eye-catching new building is the Forth Hotel, which opened in June of last year. It's a 16-story glass tower girdled with a dramatic concrete exoskeleton known as a diagrid. Designed by the New York–based architect Morris Adjmi, the startling structure brings to mind a Buckminster Fuller dome or the concrete frames designed by the Italian architect Pier Luigi Nervi. (The exterior of Nervi's 1963 George Washington Bridge bus terminal in New York City is an unexpectedly great example.)

The other major new building is an office complex by Olson Kundig, a Seattle firm best known for its idiosyncratic minimalist houses. The 1.1-million-square-foot office complex—clad in black glass and covered with louvers—consists of two mid-rise buildings linked by a sky bridge (à la Portman) but also connected at ground level by lush landscape (courtesy of Brooklyn's Future Green) and a public stairway that joins the Beltline to the nearby park. Like many staircases these days, this one also doubles as a sort of lounge: It is to the Beltline as the Red Steps are to Times Square.

During a panel discussion at the end of the conference I was attending, Irwin said this about his development: "I almost want to re-create the feeling of looking at your phone in real life." Which struck me as brilliant, perverse, and very revealing about the present moment. I appreciate that the developer sees the place that he's willed into being as a remedy for a society "fixated on this little eight-inch piece of glass." It's definitely a place worth looking at (and, inevitably, it's become a popular backdrop for TikTok videos).

Like Portman, Irwin is using architectural razzle-dazzle to address what he perceives as the social malaise of the moment. As Portman wrote in his 1976 book *The Architect as Developer*: "I decided that if I learned to weave elements of sensory appeal into the design, I would be reaching those innate responses that govern how a human being reacts to the environment." Similarly, Irwin is trying to awaken a generation of sleepwalkers.

Portman's Atlanta was built on the assumption that street life was a blight, that it undermined the value of the real estate itself. But the version of Atlanta that emerges from Irwin's work and the Beltline is pure alchemy, transforming street life into social and economic gold. After a couple of days spent exploring and discussing the Beltline effect, I left convinced that even a city as wedded to the automobile as Atlanta could evolve and become walkable and (somewhat) car-free. I plunged back into Hartsfield-Jackson carrying indelible images of the city outside. N

A SCENE FROM *SEVERANCE* (COURTESY OF APPLE TV+)

Office Politics

The workplace nightmares of Severance

BY JORGE COTTE

DO INNIES HAVE RIGHTS? BY "INNIES," OF COURSE, I MEAN the severed employees of Lumon Industries, relegated to the severed floor of the company's offices, who work on a project whose true nature is hidden even from them. The medical procedure of severance permanently splits a person into two beings: one who exists outside of Lumon and another whose consciousness exists entirely on that office floor from 9 to 5. Essentially, the "outies" rent out their bodies, but the process of severance creates a whole other person with their own memories and feelings and opinions, whose entire existence belongs to Lumon.

This is the premise of *Severance*, an Apple TV+ show whose acclaimed first season premiered three years ago, and which has now returned to continue the story of Mark S., the innie fomenting rebellion within Lumon's walls, and his outie, Mark Scout, who exists outside the company and is consumed by the death of his wife (who, it turns out, might not be dead after all). The appeal of severance for Mark is that it offers eight hours of unconsciousness each day, a release from the grip that grief has on him since his wife's fatal car accident. The appeal of *Severance* is that, toggling between these two worlds, it dangles the promise of a mystery that will eventually explain everything.

Despite the show's stark sci-fi aesthetic, however, the notion that some people seek gain by dehumanizing others from whose labor they benefit is not exactly science fiction. When the show prompts us to ask why Lumon is doing this, it asks us to speculate on the company's specific aims and not on the conditions of the world that led to this. It's a show that is often more interested in the *what* than the *why*. But if the first season was about workers getting radicalized, the second is much more personal. By dramatizing our alienation from labor, and therefore from life itself, *Severance* creates the conditions that pit Mark against Mark.

From its premiere, *Severance* has been one of the most boldly stylized shows on television. We first meet the innies in the only world they know—an office that looks like the hotel lobby from *2001: A Space Odyssey* crossed with the dentist's office from your worst nightmares. Ben Stiller, who established the show's visual language and directed many of its episodes, formalized the innies' oppressive conditions in images that feel as overdetermined and airless as their lives. The influence of Stanley Kubrick is clear too in how the visual framing conveys a hypnotic horror: One-point perspective and meticulous symmetrical framing create a deeply ordered world. The negative space and blank uniformity are as withholding as the company that runs the building.

The innies are born as blank slates, so the meaning they derive from their existence is based solely on what they are offered by the company. What do the innies actually do all day? They stare at computer screens showing a matrix of numbers and pore over the digits, looking for a combination that evokes a certain feeling, and then sort them into the bins that correspond to those feelings. Despite the office's retro aesthetics, they are contemporary workers and their attention belongs to Lumon, like everything else.

Just as the showrunners curate every aspect of the series in order to control information, Lumon carefully fills the innies' need for meaning. The company provides a god (Lumon's founder, Kier Eagan) and a sacred text (Kier's aphorisms). It even has a division that produces paintings depicting its version of the stations of the cross (the Kier Cycle)—Lumon ultimately resembles a religious cult more than a corporation. This tendency mirrors how viewers have engaged the show, treating every absurd background detail as a clue that could lead to some meaningful revelation. But the series is interested in explaining all the wrong things.

Severance is eerie, serious, and deadpan. Like *Twin Peaks*, it embraces both the humor and the horror in its absurdity. Yet unlike David Lynch's classic, in which the unexplainable is at the core of what is truly unsettling, *Severance* holds to its promise that everything you see will fit as part of the puzzle. Something introduced in one season, such as a department that raises baby goats, will be explored in the next. Although the show embraces the appearance of strangeness, its overriding impulse is to be as ordered as Lumon's offices.

The first season began with the introduction of a new innie, Helly R. (Britt Lower), and her resistance to the lot she'd been given. Her refusal to accept innie life was the engine that started Mark S. (Adam Scott), Dylan G. (Zach Cherry), and Irving B. (John Turturro) down the path to questioning everything they'd been told. This eventually led to all four innies encountering the outie world. The finale was explosive, and it shifted things both inside and outside Lumon.

Season two begins with everyone recoiling from that fissure. The innies try to regroup, their bosses try to do damage control, and the outies are forced to face what they do and do not know about what's

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Jorge Cotte writes frequently for Books & the Arts on film and TV. His last piece was on The Pitt *and the gritty return of the medical drama.*

Kakakin

A bee caught in the rain
tries to sting its way through the glass window.

On the other side of the road,
a man erases murals from the brick wall.

Outside a king's palace, women in matching buba
gathered around bottle gourds, placed inside buckets

of water. I watched the women recite names
written on the throne, I didn't hear my name.

When my body has the right amount of sugar,
my heart pulsates only to love songs.

I have ruled over cities that are not on maps,
I have ruled over a kingdom of crickets

and woke up to the ticking songs of kettles,
and sometimes to the mimicry of fledglings.

How noble that I can still spin yards of threads
into a gift basket. I fixed my gaze on the giant glass wall

until the barrier thinned out. I sanitized my palms
and raised them in praise of the black stone in Makkah.

In this small town, seventeen death certificates are signed
every day, someone waits for an organ transplant,

it'll be too late by sunset. I offer a song in exchange for this grief,
I know that with a song, I'll set my brain fog ablaze.

The wind clocks our aspirations inside its cold hands,
until we are numb like a frozen ball of blood, on the tip of a knife.

HUSSAIN AHMED

going on at Lumon. Dylan G. makes a connection to his outie's life that changes his priorities. Helly R., having discovered that her outie has close ties to Lumon, keeps her identity a secret. But in a way that is very television, season two first has to gather back and redirect the energy expelled in that earlier finale before finally following up on the questions raised by season one: What are the innies working on, and where is Mark's wife?

A lot of that energy goes toward expanding the series' world. Mark S.'s coworkers have their own relationships to their outies, and comparatively more of the story takes place outside the office, though most of the world-building is still limited to the minutiae of Lumon. We follow the former supervisor of the severed floor as she sets off on her own journey; her deputy, Seth Milchick (Tramell Tillman), is now in charge. Milchick's bosses are constantly pressuring him about the work his floor is doing—Mark S.'s sorting seems to be the company's top priority (although, of course, no one ever mentions what the numbers actually mean). Meanwhile, both Marks are distracted: Outie Mark, hoping to find his wife, is trying to infiltrate the offices he goes to every day, while innie Mark, realizing what it means for the innies' dignity and self-determination, is desperately trying to solve the disappearance of outie Mark's wife, who is somewhere inside Lumon.

In expanding the locations and characters for their second season, the showrunners loosen the reins on *Severance*'s claustrophobic insularity, but its visual language becomes less distinctive. When you're out in the world dealing with real-life locations, it's a lot harder to have perfectly rigid and manicured frames. As the show's core fractures, and as the characters spin off into their own storylines, *Severance* feels more open and less controlled. But this also means that more time is spent with large swaths of the show only tangentially related to one another, and it can all feel like delays and detours from where we know this must end up.

In its second season, *Severance* breaks out of its claustrophobic insularity.

What is the point of all this sinister activity for Lumon? What is the company making, and how is it profiting from what it makes? *Severance* is about a plan for the total control of labor—a complete alienation of workers from their lives in order to strip them of human feeling. Rather than losing their jobs to automation, the workers of Lumon are themselves made into automatons. And so, whatever else it is, *Severance* is the story of a worker revolt.

Because the show, like its world, is so withholding and meticulous, everything it brings into the frame is deliberate. Despite the centrality of labor to *Severance*, it's a vision of labor that is deracinated and degendered. But in the second season, with the promotion of Milchick, who is Black, the show brings race explicitly into the picture. The superficially gregarious supervisor has a tough time, facing racist slights and micromanaging from his superiors. But *Severance* struggles to integrate any meaningful insights into the show itself. Despite his verbosity and seeming learnedness, Milchick outwits no one. And in the show's high-stakes moments, he is little more than a brute easily caged.

But there's one point in the third episode where Milchick and Natalie—another Black employee of Lumon—share an inarticulate camaraderie. Even though they're not severed, the fake emotions plastered on their faces show how the emotional labor they perform requires a kind of self-imposed severance. This is not quite the racial ventriloquism of *Get Out*, but it is about two people trapped inside their laboring bodies. And though they don't act on it, Milchick and Natalie still feel, just as Mark does, a sense of being trapped. That feeling, the seed of resistance, is what Lumon wants to eradicate.

This is what's at risk for the company's severed employees, and possibly for Mark's wife, Gemma (Dichen Lachman). Finding her means finding out what Lumon is really up to, and maybe what *Severance* has to say about work. Gemma is the closest to becoming a body without a self, an unfeeling, pliant worker. Does the show know that she's Asian? Gemma embodies the company's ultimate intentions, and the efforts to save her connect the innie and outie worlds—but she also connects the series' world to ours, throwing into stark relief the impossibility of a deracinated, degendered idea of labor. She's the locus of everything, but the show stops there.

After expanding and sprawling, *Severance* narrows its focus to this damsel in distress and her rescue. In the end, the series abandons its precise and manicured style for the handheld viscerality of an action sequence. There's blood and fighting and a love triangle. It's probably smart storytelling to get so personal, to marry the mystery with everything that matters to the main character. Still, I can't help but feel a little dissatisfied: If the series' cold, antiseptic style can be so easily superseded by the personal, then it was nothing more than a visual tactic, not an indictment of a system. And, after all, don't wait for them to kidnap your wife to revolt. N

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