THE NEW REPUBLIC

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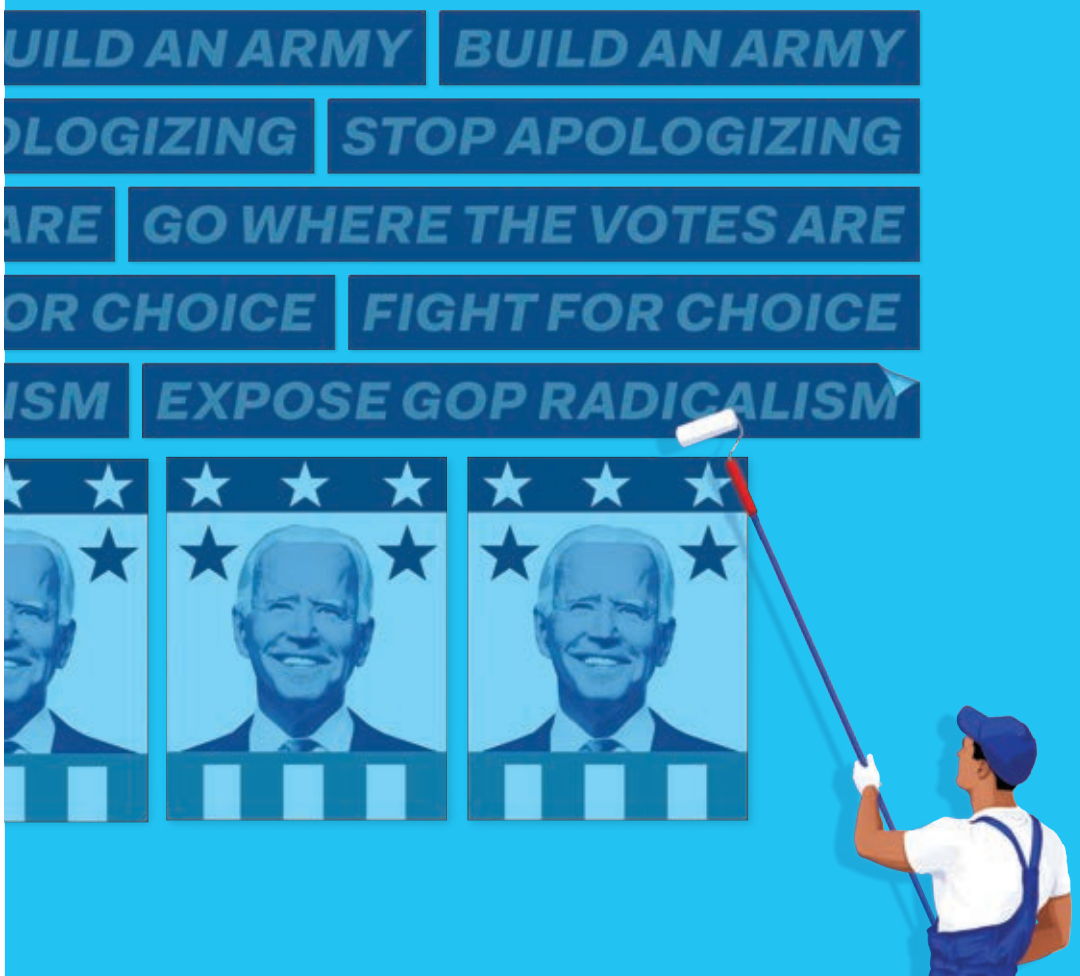
How the Democrats Need to Run

A Playbook for 2024

WITH SIMON ROSENBERG • STUART STEVENS • ILYSE HOGUE • CORNELL BELCHER • NANCY MACLEAN



PLUS:

THE U.S. SHOULD STOP GROWING TOBACCO
DUNCAN MURRELL

THE BURGEONING MARKET FOR LUXURY AIR
SHAYLA LOVE

A NEW RED SCARE?
EMILY TAMKIN

THE FUTURE OF THE WOMB
ANNA LOUIE SUSSMAN

EVERY CHOICE OF BAGEL AVAILABLE ON 8TH AVENUE, NEW YORK

PLAIN WITH HONEY PECAN CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH CINNAMON CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH PUMPKIN CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH BLUEBERRY CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH ESPRESSO CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH GARLIC AND HERBS CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH TOFU SCALLION CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH SRIRACHA BACON SCALLION CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH CUCUMBER DILL CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH VEGGIE CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH BACON CHEDDAR CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH JALAPENO CHEDDAR CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH CHIPOTLE CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH SUNDRIED TOMATO AND ROASTED GARLIC CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH STRAWBERRY CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH OLIVE CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH DIABLO CHIPOTLE CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH JALAPENO CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH LOX CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH HONEY BACON SRIRACHA CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH LOW FAT CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH APPLE CINNAMON CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH TOFU CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH TOFU ARTICHOKE SPINACH CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH TOFU OLIVE CREAM CHEESE, PLAIN WITH COOKIE MONSTER (IT'S BLUE) CREAM 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TNR

Activists from the group Jewish Voice for Peace, which has been calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, occupied the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in November.

STEPHANIE KEITH/GETTY

A New Red Scare?

The suppression of pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist voices in the wake of Hamas's Oct. 7 attacks raises uncomfortable historical parallels.

By Emily Tamkin

AT THE HEIGHT of McCarthyism in the early 1950s, Jewish community councils across the country threw out a group: the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, a subsidiary of the International Workers Order. A workers' group with Communist leanings, it was too far left and too political to exist within the fold anymore.

The Jewish establishment did not only send this organization into exile. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as senators investigated Hollywood's role in promoting Soviet propaganda and the House Un-American Activities Committee worked to investigate Soviet influence more broadly, some argued that "Soviet" or "Communist" was code for "Jew." The Red Scare was at least in part an antisemitic project, and mainstream American Jewish groups made a choice. The Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee purged Communists and Communist sympathizers and went so far as to turn files over to HUAC.

This is often presented and understood as an action taken out of fear. As Geoffrey Levin, assistant professor of Middle Eastern studies and Jewish studies at Emory, writes in his new book, *Our Palestine Question,* "In a period

marked by McCarthyism, the Rosenberg trials, and the House Un-American Activities Committee investigations, the question of whether accusations of divided Jewish loyalties threatened to roll back the gains made in the fight against anti-Jewish feelings was hardly theoretical." It is not difficult to understand why, in the wake of the Red Scare of the early-1900s and in the shadow of World War II, American Jews would be afraid and act defensively.

There was another dimension, too, argued Hasia Diner, professor emerita of New York University's history and Judaic studies departments. The Jewish establishment, she said, was "articulating a position that reflected both the fear and the desire to not have those views represented." If their stability was threatened by Jewish Communists, so, too, she argued, were their sensibilities.

"Fear and abhorrence are almost two sides of the same coin," she said.

Seven decades later, Jewish communities find themselves in a similar position in the wake of Hamas's Oct. 7 attack. As millions—including many progressive Jews—called for a cease-fire as Israel retaliated against Hamas by relentlessly bombing densely packed parts of Gaza, the ADL Washington, D.C., called anti-Zionist groups antisemitic. The ADL also deemed Jewish-led rallies for cease-fires as antisemitic attacks, in addition to including pro-Palestine rallies in its report on antisemitic incidents.

In November, Jewish Voice for Peace, an anti-Zionist Jewish group, and IfNotNow, a self-described "movement of American Jews organizing our community to end U.S. support for Israel's apartheid system and demand equality, justice, and a thriving future for all Palestinians and Israelis," gathered outside the Democratic Party headquarters in Washington, D.C. Protesters said they were peaceful, and that police attacked them. David Weigel, a Semafor reporter who was at the scene, confirmed that protesters tried to block entrances, but did not break in, and described the event as "illegal civil disobedience." T'ruah, a rabbinic human rights group, criticized the police. Others took a different approach.

"This Wed, some congressional offices were put on lockdown & 6 officers were injured during a JVP & If Not Now protest outside DNC headquarters," tweeted ADL Washington, adding, "We continue to be concerned by these radical anti-Israel groups & the way their actions impact our communities."

One could be forgiven for reading both fear and abhorrence in the post.

THE MOOD IN the wake of Oct. 7 has been described in some corners as a kind of new Red Scare or new McCarthyism, this time intended to ferret out not Soviet or Communist sympathy, but pro-Palestinian speech.

There are, of course, real differences between our moment and the Red Scare, in which the state itself put the onus on thousands to prove their innocence and loyalty to this country. Still, civil rights and free speech advocates are not exactly short on moments to cite when expressing their concerns: The presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania stepped down from their positions after failing to offer full-throated condemnation of student protests after Oct. 7 at a congressional hearing. Palestine Legal, a nonprofit that offers "legal support to the Palestine solidarity movement," described an "exponential surge" in their caseload. Palestinian cultural events have been canceled across the country. "Doxing trucks" pulled up to university campuses to list the names and show the faces of students who have called for divestment from Israel, among other things. Pro-Palestinian speech has long been targeted by critics. But those alleging a new McCarthyism argue that the effort to silence pro-Palestinian voices is now being done with a new fervor and intensity.

Today, mainstream Jewish institutions and establishments, driven in part by fear, are once again more solidly defining the borders of acceptable American Jewish political belief, this time casting Jewish groups and individuals questioning Zionism as being on the outside. And in looking specifically at the behaviors of Jewish institutions toward dissenting Jews then and now, one small slice of a larger story, we can perhaps see similar impulses at work and gain insight into the ways not only in which these moments vary, but in which they are alike, and see the threats posed by those similarities for Jewish—and American—communities.

Some reject the idea that the Red Scare is a useful frame for understanding the moment we are in now. "To my mind, it's really not an apt comparison," Ken Jacobson, deputy national director of the ADL, wrote in an email. There is room for criticism of Israel, he argued, but there should be consequences when it crosses the line into antisemitism. "Unlike McCarthyism," he wrote, "this is not about politics, essentially, but about the long history of Jew hatred and how the events in Israel and Gaza are bringing those themes out once again."

Even for those who see a parallel, and who do clearly see the moment as being

NEVER FORGET

A brief look back at the chaos of Donald Trump's White House at this time five years ago.

TRAGEDY

In March, national security adviser John Bolton reportedly went to the White House with disturbing new intelligence: The Russian government was secretly offering bounties to Taliban-linked militants for killing Americans. "It's hard to overstate what a major escalation this is from Russia," tweeted *New York Times* investigative reporter Michael Schwirtz, when the bounties became public a year later. In response to the escalation, Trump and his administration did nothing.

FARCE

On March 18, Donald Trump fired off nearly 30 tweets in a kind of greatest hits of his obsessions. He complained about *Saturday Night Live*'s portrayal of him (suggesting that the Federal Communications Commission investigate whether the show was in "collusion" with Democrats). He demanded that Fox News stand by Tucker Carlson, after advertisers fled Carlson's program following the publication of misogynistic sexual comments that the anchor had made years earlier. And he retweeted Pizzagate conspiracy theorist Jack Posobiec. So, a normal day online for Trump—only crazier.

FASCIST

A day after his Twitter tirade, Trump welcomed Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro to the White House. A visit meant to strengthen diplomatic ties became a lovefest celebrating the reach of the global far right. Bolsonaro presented Trump with a custom soccer jersey featuring the number 10—once worn by greats Pelé, Rivaldo, and Ronaldinho—and Trump's own name.

"Brazil and the United States are tied by the guarantee of liberty, respect for the traditional family, the fear of God our creator, against gender identity, political correctness, and fake news," Bolsonaro said. Trump loved it. "I'm very proud to hear the president use the term fake news," he beamed. TNR

CHRIS KLEPONIS/POOL/GETTY

A truck bearing signage advocating for the protection of Jews on the Harvard campus drove through the campus of nearby MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in December.

about politics, the comparison is not one to one. The scale and scope are different: As Benjamin Balthaser, associate professor of English at Indiana University South Bend, put it, the Red Scare "completely rewrote America." Hundreds were imprisoned, and thousands lost their jobs. And though the experience of being called antisemitic or not Jewish by another Jew can be painful, it is not the same as Jews pushing for or defending Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's executions at the hands of the state in 1953.

During the Red Scare, moreover, Christian support for Israel had not yet solidified; "Zionist," "Jew," and "Communist" were sometimes used as interchangeable insults; and the AJC even formed a subcommittee to look at "the impact of Israel on American Jews." One could argue that this is in fact as much a continuity as it is a change. Zionism, Balthaser argued, has since become "part of the civic apparatus." Since the late-1960s, to be a good American and to be a good Zionist are the same. From this view, then as now, mainstream Jewish groups are on the side of the state (and, indeed, to protest Israel's war is also to protest U.S. foreign policy).

More than a half-century ago, power, Diner said, "was so much more diffuse." Now, she said, it's "just been so thoroughly, thickly concentrated.... Money is so much more important now in terms of the funding of institutions, the funding of programs." On the other hand, the internet didn't exist 70 years ago. Protest videos couldn't go viral; Reform Jews and descendants of Reform rabbis and leaders could sign letters breaking from leadership, but they couldn't circulate them online. If power is stronger, one could argue that challenges to it are, too.

BUT IF THERE are obvious differences, there are also similar dynamics at play.

For one thing, as Clay Risen, author of the forthcoming *Red Scare: Blacklists, McCarthyism and the Making of Modern America,* due out in 2025, said, a rich part of the 1940s and 1950s was "this tension between different factions of Jews in America." There were Jews standing with McCarthy (including Roy Cohn, his chief counsel and a prosecutor in the Rosenberg case). There were Jews in the ADL and AJC casting out Communist and socialist sympathizers. And there were the Jews being purged. Each of these groups saw an existential threat: a fight in which they and those who agreed with them were on the right side of history. The same could be said today of, for example, Sasha Senderovich, author of *How the Soviet Jew Was Made,* and COJECO, a New York-based group for Russian-speaking Jews, which, according to Senderovich, canceled his book talk over his social media posts criticizing Israel's war on Gaza.

For another, "I think there's an enormous amount of opportunism going on," said Jonathan Jacoby, director of the Nexus Task Force, which emerged to create an alternative definition of antisemitism to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or IHRA, definition, which progressives argue could be used to equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, thus chilling pro-Palestinian speech. He points to Israel's special envoy for combating antisemitism, Michal Cotler-Wunsh, who said in November of last year that the only way to fight antisemitism is to define it, and that the IHRA definition should be used. Jacoby also mentioned a U.S. congressional investigation into antisemitism that will use subpoena power. This is in addition to a December House resolution that said anti-Zionism was antisemitism, which passed with 311 votes.

That some may be seizing the moment doesn't mean that the fear felt isn't real, that horror and uncertainty aren't motivating factors now, just as they were then. "I think the fear and the 'we don't like these people anyhow' are so connected," said Diner, adding, "The people will call me an

MEL MUSTO/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

antisemite, or possibly you—I think they're genuinely afraid."

However, that doesn't mean the fear isn't also being used to clear out political disagreement. "This behavior of Jewish communal institutions in the '50s to drive out the Communists, to go along with loyalty oaths and purging their own ranks … it is so like what's going on now," she added. Diner, who renounced Zionism in a 2016 *Haaretz* essay, said, "I'm constantly asked, 'We'd love to have you speak here, but you're a known antisemite.'… It's the same thing as, 'Have you ever been a Communist?'

"The rhetoric is so similar. The notion that Jewish life is so insecure that it cannot have within its ranks people who say, 'Actually, the Soviet experiment is a really good one,' or, 'There shouldn't be a constituted Jewish state, but a state of all of its people'—it's the same thing."

Balthaser offered that behind this exclusionary impulse is the idea that "the normative Jewish subject is a liberal patriot." Anything outside of that is a threat to the sense of a cohesive American Jewish self-understanding. Here, too, he sees a paradox: "Zionism is no longer a part of American liberalism." This only feeds the sense of crisis, which only exacerbates the desire to hold onto the paradigm.

Stefanie Fox, executive director of JVP, believes it's in response to "sheer reality that anti-Zionist Jewish organizing is a fact, is growing by the day. More and more Jews of all ages are saying they've had it, they see clearly what is happening, they want to be on the side of justice and freedom."

She also raised the question of whom, exactly, efforts to codify the IHRA definition or to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism are meant to help. "Who is it protecting? The state of Israel is not a person, it is not a Jew … but that's the only entity being protected by the IHRA definition," she said. That's true of Israelis and Palestinians, she argued, but also of individuals in the United States, whose civil liberties can be attacked once a precedent has been established over pro-Palestinian speech and assembly. "It's not a slippery slope," she said. "It's like an iced-over mountain."

Others worry that, in focusing on pro-Palestinian activists, including Jews, mainstream Jewish groups are missing the work of the moment.

The moment does need to be exactly like the Red Scare to concern those who will feel cast out or be cast out in the process.

"This really intense policing of what people say, what people do, what people think … the thing that feels really scary as an American Jew in this country is that there is real antisemitism that I'm really scared about, I'm worried about," said Matan Arad-Neeman, IfNotNow's communications director. Belief in civil rights and democratic protections "only matter in the moments where there's crisis, where there's conflict, where there's disagreement. It can't just be when we all get along."

"ADL's mission 'to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment to all' hasn't changed since Oct. 7," wrote Jacobson. "We continue to speak up strongly against antisemitism and all forms of hate, wherever and whenever they arise. That said, in light of our unique expertise when it comes to fighting antisemitism, and particularly in this moment of crisis, our work to counter anti-Jewish hate remains a top priority." And the ADL, he added, will not hesitate to continue to speak out when criticism of Israel negates Zionism.

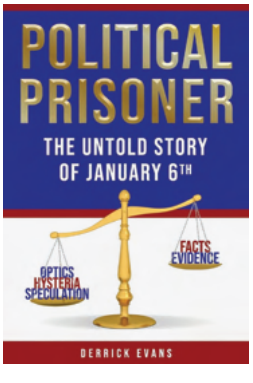
Jacoby, a self-identified Zionist—"a strong enough Zionist that I'm not threatened by anti-Zionism"—sees an additional downside: "I worry the direction that's being taken by the legacy groups is going to exclude so many Jews, especially younger Jews, that it weakens the community," he said. "It's not about Zionist/anti-Zionist. That's, like, a Jewish Beltway thing." The actual divide, he said, is about people who still care about Israel and people who have given up on it.

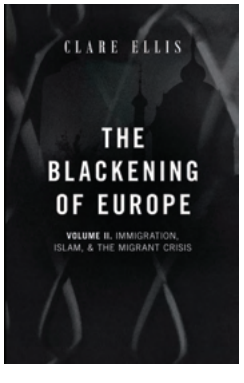
And the moment does need to be exactly like the Red Scare to concern those who will feel cast out or be cast out in the process. And so why this insistence that a Jew cannot really speak as a Jew and disagree? Why take this moment to try to codify definitions, or harden boundaries? To navigate identity, politics, civil rights, human rights, and what it means to be in community—all of this is hard. Why compound that?

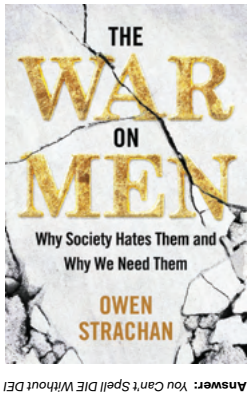
"I don't know," said Jacoby. "The only thing that I would say: Sometimes the people who are the most threatened are the ones who are closest to us." TNR

Emily Tamkin *is a global affairs journalist and author of* The Influence of Soros *and* Bad Jews.

SPOT THE FAKE RIGHT-WING BOOK TITLE







Answer: *You Can't Spell DIE Without DEI*

The State Department's Stalled Diversity Push

Despite promises to make America's diplomatic corps more representative under Secretary of State Antony Blinken, little progress has been made.

By Jonathan Guyer

Illustration by Hanna Barczyk

THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S diplomats represent America. But do they really represent America?

Their reputation is Yale, pale, and male. During the Trump years, the State Department became even whiter, as diplomats from diverse backgrounds resigned in protest or were forced to leave. At Secretary of State Antony Blinken's confirmation hearing, he promised to make the State Department look "like the country it represents." Blinken created the position of chief diversity and inclusion officer and appointed Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, a career foreign service officer, who is Black.

And yet, three years after Blinken made his promise, anger is growing about the lack of progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion in this historically white, male institution. Current and former State Department employees with firsthand knowledge of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion say that the State Department is struggling to retain employees and expand diversity. Several Black diplomats have left the department for the private sector, including Abercrombie-Winstanley, who left last summer. Those who remain say that the office has had scant success. And congressional leaders, meanwhile, are concerned enough that three prominent Black members sent a previously unreported letter to Blinken, calling on him to do more.

"Our offices continue to hear concerns related to discrimination, harassment, and other abuses faced by some employees, including political appointees of color whose reporting lines or available recourse mechanisms may lie outside the scope of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion," wrote the senior Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Gregory Meeks; Representative Barbara Lee; and Congressional Black Caucus Chair Steven Horsford. "We are deeply concerned by these reports."

"The State Department has, under this administration, done more than it's ever done. But that's clearly not enough," Lee told me. "If you don't have a government that's going to require and be intentional about inclusion, you're going to have a system that maintains, in many respects, white privilege and white supremacy."

A current diplomat described an "internal system of patronage and kingmaking." Former diplomat Akunna Cook said on a podcast that the Africa Bureau was more diverse two decades ago, in the George W. Bush administration. Today, the current diplomat said, the Biden administration is putting "a Band-Aid over something that needed plastic surgery."

At State, "you still have a whole bunch of white men who don't respect Black intellect until another white person confirms it."

Joe Biden's big talk has crashed into long-running systemic issues in the mostly white foreign policy world. Abercrombie-Winstanley also lacked the high-level administration support needed to steward the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in a way that could bring about changes, according to four internal sources.

"The State Department is the ultimate country club," Terrell Jermaine Starr, host of the *Black Diplomats* podcast, told me. "You still have a whole bunch of white men who don't respect Black intellect and Black expertise until another white person confirms it."

THE BLACK LIVES MATTER protests of 2020 highlighted the deep legacy of racism in America and, in turn, shaped Biden's team's thinking on how to remedy systemic racism in hiring and retention.

Experts say that diversity makes for better diplomacy, and ultimately better policy; some lawmakers agree. "Creating a diplomatic corps that reflects the diversity of America is both the right thing to do and necessary for our national security," Representative Ilhan Omar said in a statement to *The New Republic*.

Abercrombie-Winstanley served as ambassador to Malta from 2012 to 2016. After leaving her role as ambassador, she returned to the State Department when Blinken tasked her with the onerous job of fixing its diversity problem. "Support was strong from the secretary," she told me. "We got done an extraordinary amount as compared to what had been done before." According to Abercrombie-Winstanley, her signature accomplishment was a shift in workplace climate. "There is conversation about what can be done at all levels," she said.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion made a handful of reforms and released a strategic plan in September 2022. For the first time, deputy assistant secretary jobs were listed internally to widen the applicant pool, an improvement from a previous system that sources said verged on cronyism. The office also led a survey in 2022 to get data on the extent to which employees had experienced

harassment, discrimination, and abuse. It worked to change the State Department's typeface to one that's more accessible for those who are visually impaired or who have learning disabilities.

Though in theory Abercrombie-Winstanley reported directly to Blinken, she had no authority over the department's human resources team. Three sources familiar with her office say that the office was underresourced and short-staffed, and that Abercrombie-Winstanley lacked sustained, direct access to Blinken.

Perhaps it wasn't the right role for a former ambassador. Several former State Department employees say it would have been better to bring in an expert in HR and government bureaucracy. "Being Black does not make you a diversity expert," a former State Department employee told me. What's worse, they added, "I never got the impression that Secretary Blinken or [chief of staff] Suzy George, who in my view were the most powerful people in the building, that they were ever invested in this issue."

"They were invested in making sure that they presented well and that it looked good. But they were not invested in actually making sure that the systemic changes that needed to happen happen," the former State Department employee added, explaining that cronyism is a well-known concern. "There was no real outside entity that was engaged to look at the systematic issues with retention, and promotion.... The problem is that the people who are in charge now are beneficiaries of the same system. They're not going to disrupt it."

Abercrombie-Winstanley admits that her time as the State Department's first DEI officer was a struggle. "I will absolutely acknowledge we did not, before I departed, find perfect solutions to every tension in that space," Abercrombie-Winstanley told me. "So I had my own disappointments, and things took longer than they should have."

Key lawmakers share those disappointments and have been pushing Biden's team to do more. In their January 2023 letter to Blinken, the three members of Congress noted that the 2021 State Department authorization bill had mandated "anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training" and in particular "required training for personnel in senior and supervisory positions, as well as for personnel with responsibilities related to the recruitment, promotion, or retention of employees." They inquired about the status of the training and received no reply.

Just before Juneteenth, Blinken met for a one-hour breakfast that turned into a two-hour conversation with members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The secretary and the caucus discussed the Biden administration's diversity priorities, as well as geopolitics and diplomacy more broadly.

"My only hope is that we could be faster in the action and the accountability for following through on those commitments," Horsford, the caucus chair, told me. "As the secretary noted in the meeting, it starts with him and blows through the senior management and the diplomatic corps to ensure that it reaches all aspects of the State Department."

"When we raise things, we don't just raise them just to raise them. We raise them to promote action," he added.

Two days earlier, Abercrombie-Winstanley testified to the House about the State Department's diversity and inclusion policies.

Nathaniel Moran, a Republican representative from Texas, grilled the ambassador about accountability measures. He asked if there were any complaints against her, and she declined to comment. In an interview, she also declined to discuss specific cases. Two sources said that the State Department's inspector general is pursuing an inquiry into Abercrombie-Winstanley's tenure.

At the same hearing, she came under fire from Republicans, who dismissed the serious challenges the State Department faces. Brian Mast, a Republican from Florida, called the office's diversity efforts "un-American."

Many high-level Black State Department employees have departed during the Biden administration. Among them was Jalina Porter, the first African American spokesperson for the State Department, who has since spoken out about these systemic issues.

"Window dressing touted as diversity does not yield a more inclusive foreign policy," Porter wrote in *Foreign Policy*. "Currently, Black people who work in foreign policy face some of the same obstacles … [of] more than 50 years ago."

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S efforts to increase diversity have led to strange moments: Senior leaders speak the language of DEI without dealing with the core concerns of career diplomats. In October, State Department rank and file were mad about the president's staunch support for Israel's destructive ground campaign in Gaza, and Blinken's inner circle held listening sessions. "Several participants made the point that we've received from the field, namely that 'our credibility is shot' within the region," adviser Ned Price acknowledged in an internal State Department email viewed by *The New Republic*. "Were we to do this all over again, there are things that the Administration could/should have done differently at the outset."

A top appointee provided a video message to Palestinians. "We see you, we grieve with you, and we mourn every loss of innocent life," said Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, with her hand on her heart.

Zeya had led a Council on Foreign Relations study in 2020 with Jon Finer, before both went into the administration, part of a flurry of reports put out to address systemic racism in the State Department.

One of the biggest issues, according to the Government Accountability Office, is that "State does not have performance measures and has not taken sufficient actions to enhance accountability for its workplace [DEI] goals." As the GAO's 2022 report says, "Without ways to measure progress and enhance accountability, State may not achieve its goal of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace." Employees express "concerns that managers and supervisors do not face consequences when they fail to uphold [DEI] values and violate equal employment opportunity principles."

Congressional leaders have witnessed that disconnect. Lee says that when she travels abroad, she doesn't see enough minority personnel at embassies. "We need faster action, and we need accountability," she told me. "I don't think there's been enough oversight in terms of asking the hard questions."

One reason for the sluggish pace of reform is that diplomacy is a nonconfrontational business, and the way to get ahead in the State Department is by keeping one's head down.

As Abercrombie-Winstanley departed last summer, the office posted its first demographic survey. The collection of this data wasn't new, but its publication was. The department's lawyers and human resource officers at the Global Talent Management bureau had stonewalled the release of such data, according to a current senior State Department employee. The data set was published as a series of Excel spreadsheets. It was difficult to analyze for a lay reader and got scant media attention.

By some metrics, the State Department is doing well. The department as a whole has 16 percent Black or African American staff, as compared to 13 percent of the U.S. labor force broadly. But once the data is broken down by specific bureaus or roles, the picture is less rosy; foreign service generalists and specialists fall below the nationwide baseline by several points. The Bureau of Legislative Affairs is among the most diverse, with 32 percent Black employees, while the Bureau of Intelligence and Research is 80 percent white, and the Office of the Legal Adviser is 79 percent white. The State Department overall workforce is 7 percent Black women, 3 percent Hispanic women, and 4 percent Asian women. For the senior levels of the executive service and foreign service, the numbers are considerably lower.

"Secretary Blinken's commitment to diversity is unprecedented," a State Department

WHO SAID IT?

Rudy Giuliani or Barry Zuckerkorn

Rudy Giuliani is a fascist, a creep, and a pathetic, craven, evil little man. He's also a truly terrible and incompetent lawyer. He shares the last quality (and a proclivity toward perversion) with Barry Zuckerkorn, the Bluth family's defense attorney on *Arrested Development*. See if you can tell which moronic lawyer said what.

1. **"You can't try a husband and wife for the same crime, right?"**
2. **"If they're investigating me, they're assholes."**
3. **"I had another hearing. Here's the good news: I think I'm going to get off. I have a good lawyer."**
4. **"Truth isn't truth."**
5. **"My attitude about my legacy is *Fuck it*."**
6. **"Men are, you know, disposable."**
7. **"The will is not here. The will is at my office, next to the hot plate with the frayed wires."**
8. **"Collusion is not a crime."**

Answers: 1. Zuckerkorn 2. Giuliani 3. Zuckerkorn 4. Giuliani 5. Giuliani 6. Giuliani 7. Zuckerkorn 8. Giuliani

FROM LEFT: BROOKS KRAFT/GETTY; FOX/PHOTOFEST

spokesman told TNR in a statement citing numerous advances and programs. "The State Department's approach to [DEI] has been cited by the Chief Diversity Officers Executive Council as a model for other federal agencies.... The Secretary's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (S/ODI) has, and continues to receive, strong support from the Secretary, his Chief of Staff Suzy George, and senior leaders from across the Department."

Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done. Harassment, in particular, is a concern. Two sources familiar with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion explained that there is a gap between the number of people reporting harassment, assault, and bullying and the number of people experiencing it. That's in part because people don't trust the processes that exist for reporting harassment. The fear of retaliation is a major concern. "People are afraid to talk," Starr, the podcaster, told me.

One foreign service officer, Vera Partem, is suing Blinken in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia for alleged improper tenure review and denial of due process. Partem believes that she was dismissed in retaliation for speaking out.

Senior leaders speak the language of DEI without dealing with the core concerns of career diplomats.

Another foreign service officer, Amy Dahm, has for a decade tried to work within the State Department system to deal with a harassment case, to no avail. Now, she is publicly speaking out and named her alleged sexual harasser in a blog post. Dahm is outraged that President Biden named him to an ambassadorial post.

Black diplomats say that the biggest enduring concerns that deter them from rising and succeeding within the State Department are discrimination, harassment, and abuse, sometimes in the form of bullying and sometimes by way of cliquishness that ends up being exclusionary. "The top issue for the workforce is addressing and rooting out this behavior. But it is not one that department leadership has been willing to take ownership and leadership of," said a State Department employee familiar with the office's dynamics. "It's not, you know, the sexy or the easy part of improving diversity and inclusion, but it is what the workforce most wants to see, and what the leadership is least willing to act on. And that's a huge problem."

This summer, Blinken attended Abercrombie-Winstanley's retirement party at the State Department. After her last day, she posted on LinkedIn, "The roadmap is there. Accountability will bring success." A successor has not yet been named. TNR

Jonathan Guyer *is a foreign policy reporter and editor based in New York.*

How the Democrats Need to Run

A Playbook for 2024

FOR MONTHS, Donald Trump has been crystal clear about the campaign he will wage—one of retribution against the "Godless Marxists" and others who have tried to defend democracy and bring Trump to the bar of justice.

Joe Biden and the Democrats, meanwhile, have barely started campaigning. A pair of speeches in early January—he spoke about democracy near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and about extremism and white supremacy in Charleston, South Carolina—set a tone. But the shape of their campaign remains amorphous. And Democrats' internal feuds, as ever, are on greater public display, especially over Israel.

So: How should the Democrats run? *The New Republic* asked five experts to weigh in. Four have long experience in politics. The fifth is a leading scholar and observer of the right. They wrote on different topics, but they all landed in the same psychic and emotional place: Fight. Play offense. Talk—a lot!—about the real-world damages caused by Republican policy. Be aggressive when discussing the issues that matter to everyday Americans. The years of equivocating on core principles and being afraid of attacking the other side's so-called principles are over. Stand *for* things. And just as important, stand *against* things. Just … stand.—*Michael Tomasky*

Illustrations by Taylor Callery

Biden Must Reinvent What a Presidential Campaign Is

by Simon Rosenberg

I START OFF 2024 VERY OPTIMISTIC about Joe Biden's reelection and excited for what a second Biden term may bring. My working take on 2024 is that Joe Biden is a very good president, the country is better off today than when he came to office, and he will have a persuasive case for reelection. The Democratic Party has been winning elections all across the country, particularly since the *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision in 2022. The Republicans, on the other hand, are making a huge mistake in renominating Donald Trump, who is far more degraded, extreme, and dangerous than he was in 2016 or 2020. Current commentary is wildly discounting his negatives, but it will be hard for him to overcome them once the Biden campaign reminds voters of what Trump has done and plans to do. For all these reasons, it is far more likely that Joe Biden wins than loses this year.

But the aspiration of Democrats and our pro-democracy allies must be not just to win the election, but to win big, making 2024 a clear and unequivocal rejection of MAGA. For only once Republicans view MAGA as a political loser will they begin to walk away from their recent reckless embrace of extremism.

So, in that spirit of going big, here are four things Biden world should consider (and in some cases may already be working on). The first two are campaign-related. The second two for when the president begins to roll out his agenda for a second term:

Reimagine and Reinvent the War Room.

WHEN WE THINK OF the campaign war room, we think of 20 sweaty kids drinking Red Bulls and cranking out TikTok videos. But this year, I hope the Biden campaign can reimagine the war room as two, three, four million patriots networked together, amplifying the good works and the second-term agenda of the president through their networks. Republicans have what I call a "loudness advantage" over Democrats, and for Democrats to have the election they want this year, they need to be creative in finding ways to close that gap. The Biden team should ask supporters not just to help on campaigns in all the traditional ways, but also to become "information warriors" this year and help their side get very, very loud. We left the broadcast era of politics long ago, and it is time to start building campaigns not around top-down advertising but around bottom-up and shareable organic content appropriate for the networked information age we are now in.

Build the Largest Youth Engagement Program in History.

DEMOCRATS SHOULD no longer accept that the voters who give them the biggest margins in our elections vote the least. Democrats simply must change that in 2024. In an analysis I released last year, I showed that if you hold all the 2020 results in place and change only one thing—get 18- to 44-year-old voters voting at the same rate as their distribution in the population—Biden wins by 10 points in 2024. There is perhaps no more important way for Democrats to turn 2024 into a big and historic election than by pushing the youth vote to the upper end of what's possible.

As young people live in a vastly different information and cultural universe than older Americans, this youth effort should be a "campaign inside a campaign" and be allowed to experiment and invent new ways of engaging, registering, persuading, and turning out young Americans.

Anchor the Second Term Around Countering Climate Change and the Fight for Democracy.

IF THE PRIMARY JOB of the first term was about successfully getting America to the other side of Covid, the second term should be about mobilizing unprecedented resources around tackling the next two existential challenges of our time–countering climate change and accelerating the energy transition from fossil fuels, and ensuring that freedom and democracy prevail here in the United States and everywhere.

The president should talk directly and forcefully to the American people about the existential nature of these dual challenges, particularly the rise of what is perhaps the most serious threat we've ever seen to the American-led, rules-based order; and he should prepare Americans for what could be years or even decades of hot and cold conflict with authoritarians at home and abroad. The president began that process this year with his compelling speech near Valley Forge in early January.

As part that mobilization, we will need to keep our economy strong and prosperous, persistently proving that democratic capitalism remains the best system for human advancement; develop a long overdue national strategy to restore integrity to our daily discourse, making it far harder for authoritarian forces to manipulate and control speech in open societies; build greater governmentwide institutional capacity to advance pro-democracy initiatives here and across the world; and be direct in asking the American people, as President Kennedy once did, to become active partners in ensuring we prevail in these deeply consequential struggles in the coming decades.

Offer a Big Reform/Clean Up Washington Agenda, and a Strategy to Raise Life Expectancy.

THE PRESIDENT SHOULD commit to making progress in at least two other areas during his second term—cleaning up a city and a democracy that have been weakened by corruption and illiberalism of all kinds, and raising American life expectancy so it is again at the level of peer nations'.

PHOTO REFERENCE: DREW ANGERER/GETTY

I think Joe Biden should promise to clean up the city he has so long been a part of. Among the things we can tackle are the influence of foreign money, the need to raise ethical standards at the Supreme Court, eliminating the debt ceiling and the ability to shut down the government, and the wild abuse of Senate holds on nominations. Perhaps Biden could set up a commission to make broader recommendations on how to modernize and reform a city desperately in need of it.

The president faces a similar opportunity to address an unacceptable decline in American life expectancy in recent years. Life expectancy continues to decline, and we've fallen behind peer nations. We should use this as a sign that a new emphasis on the health and well-being of Americans is needed, and the president should commit to reversing this decline in his second term. All ideas need to be on the table—better mental health and addiction recovery programs, more aggressive steps to stop the flow of foreign drugs into the country, better gun laws, the restoration of women's reproductive freedom and addressing unacceptable levels of maternal mortality, fighting to restore trust in vaccines and the broader concept of public health.

Joe Biden has largely risen to the challenges presented to him and followed through on the promises he made in 2020. Now he has two more important challenges he must meet—build a campaign that can go big, unleash the patriotism and love of country that is driving Democratic politics today and make 2024 a clear repudiation of MAGA; and give us a second term that ensures that the opportunities we've all had are there for our kids and grandkids. As successful as he has been, it is possible that Joe Biden's most important work still lies ahead of him. TNR

Simon Rosenberg *is a longtime Democratic strategist, veteran of two presidential campaigns, and author of Hopium Chronicles on the Substack platform.*

Just Say It, Democrats: Biden Has Been a Great President

by Stuart Stevens

A PLEA TO MY DEMOCRATIC FRIENDS: It's time to start calling Joe Biden a great president. Not a good one. Not a better choice than Donald Trump. Joe Biden is a historically great president. Say it with passion backed by the conviction that it's true.

Because it is.

Yes, the desire to see the 2024 election as a choice between a normal, stable president versus an erratic thug under indictment in multiple states is seductive. But don't base a campaign on that contrast. Don't go into 2024 with the game plan to win because Donald Trump is an existential threat to democracy. That's true, he is, but that's only making the case that Donald Trump shouldn't be president. It's not the reason Joe Biden should be reelected.

Joe Biden should remain president because of his historic level of achievement here at home while standing on the side of freedom versus tyranny in the largest land war in Europe since World War II, a role no American president has played since the Roosevelt-Truman era. Be bold. Walk into this campaign with swagger and confidence and pride.

It's become a 2024 trope that Donald Trump is the only Republican whom President Biden could beat, and that Biden is the only Democrat whom Trump could defeat. Like a lot of things in politics, it's true if you accept it. But that acceptance is voluntary. Reject that framing for the industrial political complex bullshit that it is, brought to you by the same class of experts who knew without question that Bill Clinton was dead in June 1992, when he was running third to Ross Perot and George Bush, with 24 percent of the vote.

Stop the nonsense that only a weak opponent gives Joe Biden a chance to win. It's more than wrong—it's dangerous, completely misjudging Donald Trump's strength. Trump is dominating a contest for a presidential nomination like no candidate in modern history because he's the weakest candidate?

No. Donald Trump is going to win the Republican nomination easily, be endorsed by all his opponents not named Christie or Hutchinson, and emerge from the primaries better positioned to face an incumbent president than any candidate since Ronald Reagan in 1980. If you don't want to wake up with Trump as your president a year from now, stop fantasying that Trump might not be the Republican nominee. End the whining about a Trump-Biden choice that only helps Trump and get about the business of uniting behind a great president.

There's not much I admire about the modern Republican Party, but I find myself wishing Democrats could learn from their eagerness to unite behind a candidate and echo a consistent message. If a Republican president had a record remotely equaling the Biden record, the only debate among Republicans would be if he should be called one of the greatest presidents or simply the greatest. Now considering they are doing that for Donald Trump, it is a low bar, but can we acknowledge that complaining about Joe Biden as if he were some fantasy football pick that was hurting the odds of winning the office pool is increasing the likelihood that the worst and most dangerous president in U.S. history will win again in November?

As someone who worked in Republican campaigns for almost 30 years, I say without hesitation that the Democratic Party is the only pro-democracy party in America. But guys, why do so many of you have this need to act like ungrateful children of wealthy parents—impossible to please and always demanding more?

Name a president who accomplished as much in his first term.

The stock market is hitting record highs. Unemployment is at a record low, with 14 million new jobs. Talk to small-business owners, and the biggest problem they are facing is finding workers. A child born in the first Republican "infrastructure week" would have been entering grade school by the time President Biden passed the largest public spending initiative in American history. As a Republican media consultant, I made hundreds of ads about the high cost of prescription drugs. But it took President Biden to give Medicare the power to directly negotiate with Big Pharma to lower prices and cap the cost of insulin for Medicare beneficiaries at $35. For all the bitching about gas prices, the United States is now producing more oil than any country in history. Yes, more than Russia or Saudi Arabia, and that's one of the reasons gas prices are now lower in inflation-adjusted prices than in 1974. Yeah, I know, fossil fuels suck, and the world should run on solar power. But the Biden administration also launched a $7 billion solar power investment project.

What is most amazing is that Biden got this done in a world in which the majority of Republicans believe he is not a legal president. Ponder that for a minute. You are a White House staffer working to help pass Biden initiatives, and you are dealing with members of Congress and senators who don't just disagree with your boss—they think he's an illegitimate president.

Wake up and show some gratitude. You wanted student loan forgiveness. You got it, for three million borrowers. You wanted a president who would finally pass gun safety legislation. You got the most comprehensive bill in nearly 30 years, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which passed with the support of 15 Republican senators and 14 Republican House members, opening the door to some hope that laws on gun violence might finally start to reflect the wishes of the majority of the country. Maybe you're a Democrat who actually cares about the federal deficit, unlike the Republicans who fake concern. Since Biden took office, the deficit has decreased by $1.7 trillion.

I could go on citing the achievements of a president who actually cares about governing. All of these actions and numbers are important, but none matter as much as what Joe Biden has done to restore stability and decency to the presidency. One of the greatest gifts of a democratic civil society is the freedom not to think about government, to wake up and not worry about the mood of a leader. Joe Biden has made governing boring and predictable, both fundamental rights of the people in a healthy democracy.

All years are not created equal. There is every reason to believe that 2024 will be a year like 1944, a hinge in history. A dark shadow has fallen over America and Europe. President Joe Biden is fulfilling the role of the greatest American presidents, rallying support in America and abroad for the fundamental values that make America more than a place on the map with a flag. Without President Biden, a monstrous evil would be violently spreading in Europe. At a time when one of the two major parties in the world's only superpower has embraced autocracy, Joe Biden has stood firm, unflinchingly calling out those who may be Americans by accident of birth but not belief.

President Biden understands that an optimistic embrace of the future has defined America. That hope and confidence in a better tomorrow is the promise that embodies the best of America. This is greatness. This is a president keeping true to the legacy of the Greatest Generation who rose to defend the gift of democracy that Republicans now squander.

Yes, Joe Biden is a great American president. Be proud of this president, Democrats. Be proud that you live at a time when America needs you to rise to her defense. None of us can choose history, but history chooses us.

When America once again needed a quiet American hero, Joe Biden has met the moment. Now it is up to the rest of us not to falter. Certainty and conviction will bring victory, while doubt and hesitation invite defeat. TNR

Stuart Stevens *is a former Republican political consultant now working with the Lincoln Project.*

Don't Just Defend Choice. Play Offense Over It.

by Ilyse Hogue

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN IS staking his reelection and the future of this country on an American love for democracy. Marking the third anniversary of the January 6 insurrection near the Revolutionary War encampment at Valley Forge, he cautioned his audience, "We're living in an era where a determined minority is doing everything in its power to try to destroy our democracy for their own agenda."

When we think of democracy, what most often pops to mind are structural elements like voting rights, equal representation, and effective checks and balances. And certainly, Democrats should pound away on those crucial elements of a functional system. But it's also the case that they have no better proof point for the president's claim than the Republican obsession with eliminating legal abortion in twenty-first-century America.

Yes, abortion rights are about democracy. The vast majority of voters revile abortion bans. Most don't want women punished for seeking one, and even fewer want those who help them to face penalties. Yet that's exactly the point of laws passed by the GOP from South Carolina to Texas. Hypothetical horrors are transforming into grim realities as doctors are threatened with prosecution for providing care, and life-altering medical decisions are punted from operating rooms to the desks of hospital lawyers. These terrifying maladies have been brought to voters by the anti-democratic Republican drive to control women and girls. Democrats should broadcast that.

Consider the 10-year-old raped by a man almost three times her age and then denied an abortion in her home state of Ohio. She had to be transported across state lines to Indiana to receive care, where, afterward, her doctor faced charges for violating patient privacy laws by commenting on the already well-publicized case. The charge seemed designed more to demonstrate that doctors would be targeted for providing care than to actually protect any privacy. This doctor showed fortitude in the face of harassment and intimidation, but not everyone can be expected to jeopardize everything to treat patients. Voters have to be reminded of this.

Then there's Texan Kate Cox, who made news lambasting her state government for refusing to allow her to terminate a doomed pregnancy that, left untreated, risked her future fertility. She wants another child; elected politicians just may deny her one. And then there's Yeniifer (Yeni) Alvarez-Estrada Glick, whose pregnancy became a perfect storm of complications that ultimately ended her life. Yeni's family struggled in a part of Texas where the basics were hard to get: health care, nutrition, education. As is the case with many in that situation, her maternal status was high-risk from the start. No physician felt safe even telling her that terminating the pregnancy would likely save her life. At a conference before Yeni died, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist in her hospital network laid bare the impossible choices doctors face in the grim reality of the abortion ban in place: "Some women just cannot take the stress of pregnancy, so they may basically die or develop a life-threatening condition. In those cases, I have to recommend an abortion in order to prevent a maternal death. And that is getting much harder."

Voter frustration with abortion bans has run hot in state and local elections and has propelled backlash at the ballot box. Abortion rights ballot measures have enjoyed a clean sweep of victories across seven states. Blowouts in blue states have been reinforced by double-digit wins in reliably red states from Kansas to Ohio. In a closely watched Wisconsin Supreme Court race, a liberal judge beat a staunchly anti-choice opponent, flipping the body's ideological majority. The race heavily featured debate over the future of legal abortion in that state. Pro-choice Governor Andy Beshear handily won his reelection in Kentucky after his state soundly rejected a ballot measure that stated there is no right to abortion under the state constitution and made future challenges to the state's current abortion ban more difficult. And Governor Glenn Youngkin lost his quest for Republican control of both houses of Virginia's legislature, after he supported a planned 15-week abortion ban in the state. Exceptions in the measure were meant to mollify moderate voters, and still it failed. Democrats held the state Senate and flipped the House of Delegates. Youngkin's bill was dead on arrival.

If history serves as any guide, the only thing standing in Democrats' path to using this issue as a cudgel in 2024 is themselves. Democrats must ignore the pundits who will inevitably claim—as they did in 2022—that the issue is played out. Instead, double down. If candidates up and down the ballot drive home to voters what their opponents want this country to look like for women and for families, they will win. Here's a quick playbook on how to leverage this massive and historic advantage.

Come out swinging. Republicans know better than anyone that they have overplayed their hand on abortion, so they cross their fingers and hope for their opponents' silence. Or they try

to mimic Donald Trump, who adheres to a strict formulaic and noncommittal answer to neutralize the issue. First, he takes credit for installing the justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, while still suggesting skepticism about a federal ban before pivoting to slime Democrats with the false claim that they support abortion "even after birth." Republicans' ability to mollify the base/comfort the middle/deflect the extremism is effective only if they set the table for the audience. Democrats should throw the first punch, make their opponents own the abortion bans, and lay the destruction at their feet. If Republicans claim victory on abortion, they undercut their support with the majority of voters. If they try to distance themselves from what they have done, they alienate their base. Either plays badly; don't let them off the hook until they answer.

Make Republicans' position on abortion a referendum on their character. Arizona Senator Mark Kelly did this beautifully in his 2022 debate against Blake Masters when he said, "I think we all know guys like this.... You know, guys that think they know better than everyone about everything. You think you know better than women and doctors about abortion." Voters don't want arrogant politicians making decisions for themselves and their families. Remind the voters that it's no coincidence that states that have the strictest abortion laws are the states where maternal mortality is highest, women are least likely to be insured, and people's economic conditions are most perilous.

And perhaps most of all: Connect the dots for voters between Republicans' drive to end legal abortion and their willingness to throw aside American democracy. Turns out it's a straight line. After all, when you are losing the majority of voters, you resort to oppressing their will to hold power. Restrictive abortion laws have long gone hand in hand with voter suppression laws. Ranking Senate Republican Mitch McConnell achieved a historic coup in 2016 when he stonewalled the nomination of Merrick Garland in President Barack Obama's last year in office. It was a high-risk strategy that reaped great reward when Donald Trump was able to install three justices to fulfill his promise to get the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe*. And those justices are just getting started: In 2023, they undermined affirmative action in college admissions and reversed President Biden's student loan forgiveness program.

That same court may very well decide Donald Trump's fate in the upcoming election. His lawyer Alina Habba recently suggested that the court's decision is a "slam dunk," citing Trump's support for Justice Brett Kavanaugh's controversial nomination and suggesting Kavanaugh owes the former president. If the courts don't work their magic, an extreme base stands at the ready. The foot soldiers of the war on abortion converged neatly with insurrectionists as January 6 saw well-known clinic protesters join the throngs attempting to take the Capitol and prevent the peaceful transition of power. There's a crucially important story to tell here, and Democrats need to tell it.

After all, they have one thing the other side doesn't have: the majority of the American public that does actually support their positions on both abortion and maintaining this fragile democratic system. The alternative is the tyranny of the minority that President Biden warned us about near Valley Forge, and, as always, women will be on the front lines. TNR

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★★★★★★★

Needed: An Unprecedented Pitch To Voters of Color

by Cornell Belcher

AT THE START OF 2023, a *New York Times* headline proclaimed "BIDEN AIMS TO WIN BACK WHITE WORKING-CLASS VOTERS THROUGH THEIR WALLETS." For the past year (or decade, or arguably four decades), a great deal of media pundit time and attention has been spent waxing on about winning the working-class white vote. Competing for noncollege white voters has been and continues to be the center of political attention on both sides of the political aisle. It is likely that the lion's share of communication dollars spent in the 2024 campaign will be directed at this important demographic group. But for the Biden campaign and national progressive organizations—should it be?

I am not saying Democrats shouldn't compete strongly for this or any cohort of voters. Even improving their margin among white working-class voters by a few percentage points can make an important difference in a close election (and these days, they're all close). But what I am arguing for is time and resource decisions based on reality, not romanticism. Let's look at the data.

In 2016, according to exit polling, Democrats lost noncollege white voters by a staggering 37 points. But surely with a working-class white candidate whose roots go back to Scranton, Pennsylvania, at the top of the ticket, they made significant inroads with this important cohort in order to win, right? Wrong. On his way to winning a 51 percent majority of the vote, Joe Biden lost working-class white voters by 35 points in 2020, according to the exit polls. And in the 2022 midterms, when Democrats were able to defy history and turn back the much-predicted red wave, House Democratic candidates still lost white working-class voters by 34 points.

You don't have to be a statistician to see the trend here. We must be clear-eyed about reality, especially in the face of Donald Trump's success at manipulating the politics of racial grievance. It's time to lean heavily into the changing face of the American electorate that has propelled the party's

successes and historical breakthroughs since 2008.

Democrats have been losing the white vote, and losing it badly, for decades. Jimmy Carter came close in 1976, garnering 48 percent of that vote. But ever since, Democrats have typically scored in the low 40s. That hasn't changed. What has changed, of course, is that the electorate has become far more diverse. The real difference between Barack Obama's majority win and John Kerry's narrow loss in 2004, for example, wasn't in Obama's ability to win a significant greater percentage of white voters than Kerry. It was the well over six million more voters of color. Just looking at African American votes alone, John Kerry garnered roughly 11.8 million Black votes in 2004, while Barack Obama amassed about 16.2 million in 2008. And in 2020, Biden won roughly 17.9 million Black votes—surpassing Obama's roughly 15.6 million in 2012. And more so than any demographic group, Hispanic voters are rapidly growing as a share of the electorate, which has been helping Democrats win. According to exit polls, in 2004 Hispanic voters made up roughly 8 percent of the electorate when Kerry narrowly lost to Bush; but in 2020, Hispanic voters made up 13 percent of the electorate, and Biden's ability to win them by 33 points was crucial. Biden's 2024 majority coalition will need to be built largely on the turnout and support of America's ascending, diverse new electorate.

America's electorate should continue to grow 3 to 4 points less white with each presidential election moving forward. According to 2008 exit polls, white voters made up roughly 74 percent of the electorate that year. If Democrats are able to generate turnout among voters of color, the electorate should be around 65 percent white in 2024.

Realistically, the Biden campaign must lean into persuading, mobilizing, and maximizing the votes of America's growing diverse electorate if it is to again garner a majority. Trump will win a solid majority of white voters regardless of how many indictments—and convictions—he has.

And when we look at the current Biden versus Trump polling that has much of the progressive community hand-wringing in anguish and fear, it's among the ascending diverse electorate, not among white voters, where Biden is most lagging behind his 2020 performance, and where he must make up the most ground. In a January 2023 *USA Today*/Suffolk University poll, Biden is a whopping 24 points off his 2020 winning performance among African American voters, and a staggering 31 points off his performance among Hispanic voters. If the Biden campaign can't close these sizable gaps in performance among voters of color, he will lose the election.

Therefore, the Biden campaign and the progressive community's messaging should lean into the issues of democracy and freedom. Since Trump's election in 2016, minorities in America have seen and felt the horrifying rise of hate crimes against their communities and the threats to hard-won rights, from voting rights to the right to teach the truth about our history. And the right for a woman, not the government, to make decisions about her body absolutely has antebellum echoes for Black women. So, while gas prices will always poll high as an issue, the Biden campaign must raise the stakes of the 2024 election by making it about bigger things. The campaign needs to explain in simple terms the existential threat that a Trump win would mean—a dictatorship by a man standing with white nationalists is not going to turn out well for you voters of color. And a vote for a third-party candidate who has zero chance of winning is in reality a vote for Trump.

Tactically, the campaign will need to spend the lion's share of its resources differently than campaigns of the past. You are not reaching younger voters of color on broadcast; the campaign will need to take the fight against Trump to the digital and social media space like never before. It will need to flood the zone day and night across all social media platforms. Our polling data shows the least motivated Black voters are hearing more negative than positive information about Biden on social media. That must change.

The campaign should engage surrogates who are influencers with cultural competence in the Hispanic and Asian American communities. They should immediately tap Representative Jasmine Crockett of Texas, who has a knack for going viral and putting loud and often factually wrong Republican colleagues in check. She's a young and dynamic African American leader who can meet younger voters of color where they are culturally and socially. And while historically the vice president has played a background role in campaigns, Kamala Harris is a unique historical political figure, and the campaign should give her a uniquely larger role than is typical. More so than any Democrats on the national stage right now, she reflects and is a symbol of the changing face of the American electorate, and team Biden should let her have a uniquely larger role engaging an electorate that might see more of themselves in her than in the president. TNR

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Warn Voters About the Radicalism Beyond Trump

by Nancy MacLean

WHAT SHOULD THE DEMOCRATS RUN ON? Alerting every voter to what is in store for them if the radical right succeeds in its endgame to enchain American democracy.

Lurking behind the full-frontal assault by Donald Trump and his enablers lies a more far-reaching threat. If the Republicans gain control of both Houses of Congress, expect a state-authorized Constitutional Convention to eviscerate core rights and protections most Americans hold dear.

Imagine living in a country without Social Security, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, the right to organize a union, civil rights enforcement, and clean air and water protections, let alone action to stop climate collapse. The Constitutional Convention, in the plain language of the leading organizer for it, aims "to reverse 115 years of progressivism."

That's big talk, 115 years. Think it can't be done? Although the convention push has been all but ignored by the commentariat and national Democratic leaders, it has powerhouse backing. The Koch network and other dark-money donors are generously funding it. The corporation-underwritten American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has supplied "model legislation" and training to Republican state legislators. Endorsers include Mark Meadows, Ron DeSantis, Greg Abbott, Sean Hannity, and many more. Convention of States Action (COS), the 501c(4) organization leading the campaign, whose head was a co-founder of Tea Party Patriots, has recruited and deployed volunteers to lobby their legislatures. (It also offers training in "biblical citizenship.") COS has held three practice conventions with legislators from nearly every state. The Heritage Foundation—the 800-pound gorilla on the right—recently signed on in "a game-changing report" that such a convention would be "a potent check on federal power" and is "a worthy cause." That endorsement is likely to drive even more cash to add to the over $70 million in IRS-traceable contributions that groups solely focused on convening such a gathering have garnered from 2012 to 2022, in findings of the Center for Media

and Democracy. That figure does not include contributions to ALEC, which has promoted the convention since 2013; its revenue hovers around $10 million annually.

Promoters have been methodically lining up authorizations from the states since the 2012 election showed them that most Americans reject the kind of society they seek, even Mitt Romney's mild version. So strategists concluded that the only way to permanently entrench minority rule by plutocrats and theocrats is to encase it in a dramatically altered Constitution.

They count on most of us remaining in the dark until it is too late to stop their scheme.

So far, that's proved a good gamble. How many of us know that there are two routes to amending the Constitution—the usual one, and the nuclear option never yet tried?

Under Article V of the Constitution, Congress "shall call a convention for proposing amendments" when it receives applications from two-thirds of the states. In reality, this is hard, because one party would need to control both houses of 34 state legislatures (or 33 plus unicameral Nebraska). But ALEC has fabricated a claim built around the idea that enough states have made past calls for a convention, some going back decades, for the idea to proceed. It plans to use these outdated state resolutions to argue to the courts that they should force Congress to convene one.

But it gets worse. If Republicans control Congress, they won't have to bother with litigation, because it would be up to the majority in control to determine the validity of the applications—and Article V lacks the guardrails to prevent this manipulation.

Seriously? Yes, alas. House Speaker Mike Johnson, who would be in a position to call it, is a longtime ally of COS.

SO HOW EXACTLY WOULD a convention nullify the Democratic agenda, past and current? The six amendments adopted by the Simulated Convention held in Williamsburg, Virginia, on August 4, 2023, would dismantle reforms We the People have won over generations. The centerpiece amendment, entitled "Fiscal Restraints," is a one-two punch to knock out popular programs such as Social Security, unemployment insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid. By mandating that two-thirds of both houses of Congress would have to agree to any tax increase, it would force annually balanced budgets, while making it all but impossible to raise revenue from the wealth-hoarding ultrarich who back this radical agenda.

Another amendment takes dead aim at all federal regulation since 1937 and civil rights and environmental policies since then. It would obliterate the "administrative state," the bugbear of the hard-right coalition. The measure would in short order end fair labor standards, antitrust enforcement, environmental protections, safeguards for workers who choose to unionize, civil rights on the job and in public accommodations, and the Affordable Care Act, among other hard-won reforms that ease hardship and protect us from corporate domination.

Still another amendment would allow a simple majority of state legislatures "to abrogate any action of Congress, President, or administrative agencies." That could stop federal intervention to ensure the equal citizenship rights established in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments.

The simulated convention's last adopted amendment would be a gargantuan gift to fossil fuel corporations. It would require Congress to turn over to state control virtually all federal lands and mineral rights, including any national park, monument, or wilderness area designated since 1975.

But this is madness, you will say. These reactionaries could never get away with rewriting the Constitution!

Except they could. First, because the instigators have already adopted a representation scheme for the convention based on one-vote-per-state, chosen by the legislatures; it gives near-empty states like Alaska and Wyoming the same power as California and New York. Second, because by crooked counting ("aggregating") of ancient authorizations with those recently obtained, planners claim that the threshold needed to call a convention under Article V has already been met: two-thirds of the states. Third, because most of us aren't even aware that this is happening.

For the American people to realize how much is at stake will require vast and to-the-point popular education. While the right has been tutoring its base in its version of the Constitution for years, the left has dropped this ball badly, particularly on such vital but wonky matters as how interpretation of the Commerce Clause after 1937 enabled all the federal regulations demanded by voters that had been overturned until then by reactionary justices.

But here's the silver lining as we approach November. Democrats could jiujitsu this. Why not use the right's menace to the Constitution to energize turnout to reclaim for Democrats state legislatures lost since 2010? The consummation of the right-wing plan depends on convention backers being able to control most statehouses. If Democratic get-out-the-vote workers train voters to fill out the entire ballot, including state legislative and judicial races, progressives could reclaim vast power to enact the popular agenda that Republican elected officials have blocked.

This urgent emphasis on winning at the state level could pay off handsomely. It might even help top-of-the-ticket candidates. Few know it, but the 2016 election was likely the first time a president was swept into office on the "reverse coattails" of Senate candidates (thanks to a flood of last-minute money from corporate donors afraid of losing the upper chamber in the predicted Hillary Clinton sweep). Wouldn't it be a delicious inversion if President Biden won reelection and Republicans suffered a shellacking in House and Senate races because informed voters turned out in epic numbers to keep the right from rigging the Constitution? TNR

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FRESH AIR FOR SALE

The rich have different houses, different cars, different lifestyles from the rest of us. These days, they also want to breathe different air.

By Shayla Love

Illustration by Anuj Shrestha

WHEN I STEPPED INTO JOHN ROE'S apartment early last December, slipping off my boots at the elevator that opens into the home, it wasn't immediately clear that people inhabited the space, let alone a child. The four-bedroom, four-and-a-half bath Manhattan residence looked like a showroom. In the living room, a white minimalist couch with no arms confronted two white bouclé chairs. White couch, white lamps, white walls. Even Roe's wife, Cherry, wore white. Charlotte of the Upper West Side has no dust, she told me—unlike the couple's previous home, on the sixty-second floor of the Four Seasons Private Residences. Above my head, gentle classical music issued from invisible speakers.

Roe, a ruddy Asian man who wore a pink polo shirt tucked into khaki pants, is the developer of this nine-story brick and terra-cotta building, named after his daughter. His goal, Roe said, was to create the most immaculate and sustainable indoor environment possible. He obtained a Passive House Institute certification, which recognizes when buildings minimize the energy used for heating and cooling with airtight seals and insulation. (Such measures can decrease energy consumption by up to 90 percent.) To reduce residents' inhalation of volatile organic compounds, Roe employed nontoxic building materials. Indeed, the star of Charlotte is its air. Each unit sports its own Swiss-engineered ventilation system, called Zehnder. On an iPad, Roe showed me the app that gives residents control over what they breathe.

The building's approach to filtration is undeniably sophisticated. The air in each unit isn't shared with any other. Outside air is brought in, filtered, treated with an ultraviolet-C light that kills 99.9 percent of pathogens, and completely changed out once per hour. Circulation can be boosted or slowed. Most apartments with similar

systems recycle the air every four to five hours a day. "We were thinking, if we're already going to build a Ferrari, then why would we only give it a 200-horsepower engine?" Roe said. "Let's put a 1,000-horsepower engine into it." The quadruple-layer, triple-paned windows feature museum-quality glass and are generally opened only for cleaning. Otherwise, you'd let in air far dirtier than what's circulating inside.

At night, when Roe's family is sleeping, it "smells like you're camping, because the fresh air is getting pumped in at such a rapid rate," he said. You know the air is good, he told me, because the hydrangeas last. Typically, when cut at the stem and arranged in a vase, the delicate flowers wither and droop in a few days. In his apartment, the blooms will stay perky for nearly two weeks.

Walking down the long hallways, I took deep, greedy breaths. There was a complete absence of odor, yet somehow the air felt bright, abundant—the opposite of stuffy, the inverse of stale.

On June 7, 2023, New York City briefly had the worst air quality in the world. The sky turned auburn as smoke from wildfires in Canada spread throughout the boroughs. The horizon vanished into an orange haze. It was not hard to feel that we were living in an era Stephen Pyne, an emeritus professor at Arizona State University, has called the Pyrocene. Last year, at one point or another, New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Detroit, and Portland, Oregon, all had air in the "hazardous" or "unhealthy" range, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. A September 2023 study found that wildfires have erased 25 percent of air-quality improvements made since 2000. By mid-2023, the average American's smoke exposure was worse than their total cumulative exposure every year since 2006.

Unlike other effects of climate change, the environmental reporter Oliver Milman has argued, smoke will be more egalitarian, affecting "the wealthy and white as well as poor people of color." After all, smoke doesn't care about neighborhoods or country borders. Primarily made up of fine particulate matter less than 2.5 microns long, it is mobile, and small enough to intrude nearly anywhere.

In New York over the summer, outdoor after-school activities were canceled. New Yorkers were told to stay inside and shut the windows. Experts advised using air conditioners to recirculate indoor air, and supplement with additional purifiers, if available. (These sold out quickly at local stores.) At Charlotte and a growing number of high-end apartments and condos, advanced filtration systems kicked into gear. Elsewhere, people were not so lucky. Around three-quarters of the buildings in New York were constructed before 1960, and thus before central air conditioning was commonly installed. In my apartment in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, it smelled like a group of smokers had lit up and had a party. The hydrangeas I buy at the farmer's market die tragically quickly on my kitchen table.

Once enclosed inside, the air we breathe is not the same. The notion that smoke could be a democratizing force, afflicting everyone equally and perhaps motivating them to take action to mitigate worsening climate conditions, is already colliding with the reality of an emerging luxury air market, yet another example of how, as the environment becomes less habitable, the wealthy will continue to insulate themselves from its worst aspects—even as their lifestyles disproportionately fuel emissions. As the fervor for ventilation that began during the pandemic meets the need to blockade against smoke, some wealthy people will do anything, and pay any amount, to guarantee they will always have a breath of fresh air.

TAKE A CASUAL scroll through luxury real estate listings today, and you'll find that Charlotte of the Upper West Side is not alone: Many buildings are enticing buyers with the promise of an exceptional breathing experience. A $1.5 million apartment in Battery Park City boasts "twice-filtered outdoor air," while a Gramercy condo for $3.1 million notes that it has "filters in the common and amenity areas for premium and fresh air ventilation." At Rose Hill in NoMad, where apartments range from $2 million to $6 million, air filters occupy every corner of the building, including common areas, and there are additional "perimeter walls and floor slabs to thwart transmission of air, odors and contaminants." A 2023 roundup from City Realty listed more than a dozen current properties in New York City that brag about just how clean their air is. "Air is being marketed as a luxury product feature," said Richard Peltier, a professor of environmental health sciences at University of Massachusetts Amherst, who began studying air quality in graduate school, when he collected and examined air filters from buildings in the Bronx. "You know, it comes with a gym, and a concierge, and a HEPA filter."

In California, which has a longer history of smoke events, the high-end air market has already taken off. In 2020, the *Los Angeles Times* covered how Gregory Malin, a developer based in San Francisco, began marketing the air inside a property as an amenity just like a gym or a three-car garage. Carl Gambino, a real estate agent with Compass in Los Angeles, told the newspaper that his most recent multimillion-dollar sales could be directly linked to their state-of-the-art filtration technology. And the trend is spreading: In Chicago, the building Elevate claims to be the first in the city to install hospital-grade UV-C/HEPA air filters in the lobby, elevators, and amenity floor. Mobile UV-C sanitizing equipment sterilizes the air in each apartment before a resident moves in.

Luxury markets have developed in other parts of the world with poor air quality, too. For *Wired,* Akanksha Singh described the "pay-to-breathe" economy in India, where air-filtered spaces are accessible only to affluent people. In China, the sociocultural anthropologist Victoria Nguyen reported, underground bomb shelters have been converted into communal breathing areas, while wealthier Chinese can afford to go on "lung wash" vacations. For many others, on bad-air days, activities that used to take place in parks—playing cards, exercising, reading the paper—now take place below ground.

In New York, the fixation on air began during the pandemic. During Covid, ventilation was king. Outside air, and lots of it, could prevent the spread of airborne viruses. During a wildfire, the opposite is true: Outside air is noxious, and ventilation is less important than maintaining a seal and cleaning the air you've got inside.

This is what makes the technology in these high-end buildings, objectively speaking, so impressive: the ability to bring in, filter, and clean outside air, while also sealing off the outside world when needed. The seal is tough for leaky, drafty older buildings, especially those that date from the turn of the century: better for pandemics, but bad for smoke and pollution. During the 1970s, a global energy crisis prompted architects and engineers to create more airtight construction out of plastic, pressed wood, and vinyl rather than wood or stone. The new designs decreased ventilation, so unless such buildings can

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filter the air that's brought in, the air quality suffers. This makes truly clean indoor air a complicated, and expensive, dance: You need the ability to toggle between outside and inside air, seal off individual apartments, and still provide high levels of filtration and—if desired—disinfectant technologies, such as UV light. Usually, building a 50-story condo would cost $800 to $900 a square foot, Roe said. The Charlotte cost around $1,200 a square foot.

The costs have not dissuaded the wealthy, who appear to be more concerned about smoke, according to a 2022 study in Nature Human Behaviour; those who live in affluent locations perform more online searches for information about air quality and health protection during smoke events. They are also more likely to stay at home and report negative moods about what they see outside their windows. In her book *The Shock Doctrine,* Naomi Klein argued that corporations would respond to crises by taking advantage of the distress they cause to sell new products. "This is another example of it," said Christine Eriksen, who leads a research group called Geographies of Disasters at the University of Bern. "Real estate agents or developers are seeing a business opportunity in other people's misfortune."

FEAR ABOUT SMOKE is well-founded. For the past two decades, ever since collecting filters in the Bronx, Richard Peltier has been studying human exposure to air pollution. He's been asking what people breathe as they work, as they go about their day, and as they sleep at night in their homes—and how it affects their bodies.

According to Peltier, eight million people around the world die early per year from air pollution exposure. Air pollution is associated with cancer, heart disease, and reproductive, neurological, and immune system disorders. Even in the short term, exposure to wildfire smoke specifically can damage the lungs and heart, cause strokes, and exacerbate asthma and other respiratory issues. Smoke harms many bodily systems, not just the respiratory or cardiovascular, agreed Colleen Reid, an associate professor of geography at the University of Colorado Boulder. The particles of black carbon, the sooty chemical that wildfires make, are small enough to enter the bloodstream, which can bring them anywhere in the body. From 2010 to 2020, worsening air in the Western United States caused an increase of 670 premature deaths per year in those areas. "Particulate matter is associated with virtually every adverse health outcome that we know about," said Joan Casey, an environmental epidemiologist at the University of Washington.

As Casey pointed out, smoke will act as a "multiplier" of existing disparities. Dozens of studies have found that lower-income people are exposed to more smoke and experience more negative health effects from it. According to the EPA, people of color and impoverished children and adults are more likely to have asthma and other respiratory diseases.

This is in part because people with lower socioeconomic status have less access to tools to improve the air they breathe at home; even those low-income households that have air conditioning in their homes may not run it because of electricity costs, and air conditioners are more effective when they have high-quality filters that are changed frequently. We learned during Covid that the indoor environment is more important than scientists had previously assumed. Based on data from the American Time Use Survey, the average American spends more than 70 percent of their total time indoors at home. Before, scientists often tried to estimate exposure based on outside air pollution. But because people experience wildly different indoor environments, and spend so much time there, their health heavily depends on the quality of the air they breathe inside.

Real estate statistics bear out the inequities: A 2021 study that collected data from 1,400 indoor air sensors installed by users of the crowdsourced PurpleAir network in San Francisco and Los Angeles showed large differences in indoor air according to house value. Using Zillow data, the researchers found that, during smoke events, newer homes and those with central air conditioning had better air quality. The average price of the homes that have these filters is 20 percent higher than the median property values.

A HOME ACTS, at the most basic level, as a form of shelter. As the outdoor climate becomes more erratic, everyone will need, even more than we already do, places to cool down, warm up, stay dry, and breathe freely. But how far should architecture or technology go to protect from all the dangers of the outside world?

In 1969, the architectural critic Reyner Banham argued that the way modern buildings look should be guided more by the development of technology that controls our environments, like air conditioning, than by aesthetic concerns. Banham believed these advancements in our ability to create man-made climates should compete with other architectural desires.

He even suggested that, given all of the gadgets that modern residences have now, we might as well remove the house part. In his essay "A Home Is Not a House," he speculated about the end result of this shift in priorities, presenting a structure he called the Environment-Bubble, a "transparent plastic bubble dome inflated by air-conditioning output."

Push the idea of the hypercontrolled environment to the extreme, and it quickly enters the dystopian, as a host of artists and cultural critics have observed. In 1970, the underground architecture collective Antfarm staged "Breathing—That's Your Bag," a performance that brought people

into a sealed pneumatic bubble called the "Clean Air Pod" so that they could breathe pure air, free of pollution. If people chose not to enter the pod, they were asked to sign a death consent form. During the 1970s, a British anarchist architectural group called Street Farm published an underground paper where they predicted that fresh air would be valuable real estate for purchase in the future. In 2006, the activist group the Yes Men made the Survivaball, a large inflatable suit that they called "a gated community for one," to protect corporate managers from the effects of climate change. "We have a plan to save you from the wide range of catastrophes that are likely to come from our increasingly unstable climate," their spoof product's website claimed. "While others look to Senate bills or UN accords for a climate solution, we look to our best engineers."

Such visions don't seem too far off the mark at Sven, a luxury high-rise with a curved facade in Long Island City, where a team of engineers, whose duties include supervising air-quality monitors, can tweak the building's system at any time. Sven is the second-tallest building in Queens and holds more than 950 apartments; at the street level, if you crane your neck, you can barely see the top of it.

On an unseasonably warm day in early December, I stood in a two-bedroom corner unit that boasts floor-to-ceiling windows with a sweeping view of Manhattan's skyline. What was more impressive, though, was what I saw elsewhere, in the guts of the building: a multistep filtration system that is constantly bringing in about 60 cubic feet per minute, or CFM, of air. (One CFM is around a basketball of air; the recommended amount for an adult to breathe at any given time is around 15 CFM.)

At Sven, all of the outside air is filtered twice: once through a MERV-8 and once through a MERV-15 filter, said Philip Skalaski, the senior vice president of engineering and energy services at Durst, the building's developer. (MERV stands for minimum efficiency reporting value and describes how capably a filter can capture particles. The higher the number, the better the filter; the highest is MERV-16.)

The fan coil units in each apartment have additional MERV-13 filters, which take care of any contaminants generated by the residents themselves. "We have a full operating engineering staff here that is constantly watching," Skalaski said. "If something were to happen … they could shut things down."

During the summer's smoke event, the engineers immediately responded, lowering the amount of outside air coming in. "We did direct comparisons of particulate matter," Skalaski said, "and it was extremely low on the inside." A resident of the building told me that, when she stepped outside, the smoke was so bad she could taste it on her lips. Once indoors, the smell and taste vanished.

For our last stop, Skalaski walked me down to Sven's amenities levels, where there is a "library"—a large, cavernous room that looked like a study hall on a university campus. Even more fresh air gets pumped into the library, since the space is bigger, though not many people were there to breathe it. One resident sat at the end of a long, otherwise empty table. At Charlotte, Roe had shown me how even the residents' storage units and pet-washing room have filtered and cleaned air. "It does cost more in energy, but it's better for the health and wellness of the building," Skalaski said. "We felt like this was a valuable trade-off."

Not everyone's home can take on all of these protective qualities; it's practically impossible to engineer a design like Sven's into most of the housing stock. "Speaking totally unemotionally, that approach is as good as it gets," Peltier said. "But … very few people get that." In poorer countries, HEPA filters are even more of a rarity.

I asked Skalaski whether people have come to demand this standard of air, alongside other amenities. He said he thinks that they have, that air quality of this level will be expected in a building of this stature. "You go to the places with cheaper rents, you know, you might not get this level of quality."

The apartments in these buildings are typically millions of dollars to purchase, thousands to rent, but as more people see the perks of what they offer, Roe thinks they will want the same amenities. Eventually, he imagines, these technologies will "trickle down" to the $1 million buyer.

"After that, it basically becomes like a seat belt," he said. "How long will that trickle take to get to the bottom? I don't know. It depends on other people."

OUTDOOR AIR IS regulated through the Clean Air Act of 1970, a federal law that gave the EPA the power to monitor and set limits on hazardous pollutants in outdoor air; the named pollutants now number 187. In response, factories installed scrubbers onto smokestacks, and car manufacturers introduced catalytic converters to cars. But because wildfire smoke isn't the result of the behavior of particular factories or even particular industries, it simply can't be regulated the way that air has been in the past. And the Clean Air Act made no provisions for the atmosphere indoors. "We do nothing to regulate indoor air quality," said Marshall Burke, an associate professor at the Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability. "It's just treated totally differently, and we don't measure it comprehensively. It's sort of an unknown." The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers has standards that outline minimum ventilation rates, but there's no mention of who ought to be checking, how often, or when.

Consuming 40 percent of energy in the United States, and around 70 percent in New York City and other high-density cities, buildings at once protect us from and perpetuate climate-driven problems. When buildings bring outdoor air inside, the exchange increases energy expenditure. That said, most buildings with high-end filtration systems adopt sustainability measures, and the extra energy expenditure can be ameliorated through heat and energy recovery ventilation, which takes energy from hot air before it's exhausted from a building. Nevertheless, Peltier thinks that it is a stretch to call the air-quality improvements in these buildings "sustainable." Bringing in outside air, cleaning air, heating up or cooling down air—all these activities require energy. "You're not reducing your consumption of a limited product, like water, for example," Peltier said. "You're taking a product … that's polluted and making it better for the people who live there. That's about it." For contrast, when people put solar panels on their apartments or homes, they make more energy accessible to others—the benefit to the broader public is clear.

Rather than leaving the problem to individual developers to devise solutions for particular buildings, Stanford's Burke argued, governments should consider air quality a novel infrastructure issue. Encouragingly, New York City lawmakers introduced two bills in 2023 regarding air quality, proposing ways that indoor air in schools and municipal buildings might be measured and standards enforced in the

future, and giving officials 18 months to determine the benchmarks. Two additional bills proposed five-year pilot programs to analyze air quality in residential and commercial buildings, programs that would be voluntary unless a building receives financial assistance from the city.

Meanwhile, there are public health solutions that can be pursued right away, like creating clean air centers, retrofitting buildings, and distributing mobile, more affordable filtration devices. Portable filtration is relatively cheap, Burke said. "That is going to be accessible to a lot more people than who can afford to buy your fancy New York penthouse suite."

Without any substantive attempt to address the needs of the broader public, however, smoke and indoor air stand to become another driver of "climate gentrification," when some property becomes more valuable because of its ability to withstand the effects of climate change. In 2018, Harvard University researchers published a paper on one such instance after noticing that elevation was affecting property values in Miami-Dade County. If a house was at a higher elevation, its value was more likely to increase between 1971 and 2017, whereas the value of homes at lower elevations was more likely to decrease.

Follow-up work on climate gentrification has found that when "green" or resiliency improvements are made to a neighborhood—installing rain gardens or green roofs, for instance, or building LEED-certified high schools—the changes do little for those most exposed to environmental risks. A 2020 study in Philadelphia found that green resilience infrastructure didn't end up helping socioecologically vulnerable people. Instead, the improvements simply attracted the higher-income people who could better afford them.

In other words, unless there's some effort to bring these technologies to the wider public, all they do is enable a few to live with pristine air. We certainly shouldn't assume that the innovations will automatically trickle down to everyone, Eriksen said. There needs to be some investment, she argued, in "social betterment."

During New York City's smoky summer, the writer Adam Gopnik described how people were turning to the novel *Bleak House,* in which Charles Dickens evokes the suffocating, engulfing quality of London's air pollution in the mid-1800s: "Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun." The novel aptly characterized the environmental crisis of the period, Gopnik wrote. In Dickens's time, too, the hardship did not befall everyone equally; smog, fog, and smoke were characteristic of low-income neighborhoods. The poor were the ones with dirty faces and clothes covered in soot.

For Peter Adey, a professor of human geography and the author of *Air: Nature and Culture,* the air in cities "reveals who belongs and who does not, who is deserving and who is not." Adey describes construction projects as seeking to "secure the air from everyone else." He called these "secessionary atmospheres": every man's air for himself. Your air is only as clean as the air you personally can buy. But individual interventions of the kind that the "wellness" sphere usually dictates are among the worst responses we can have to the climate crisis, Eleanor Cummins wrote in this magazine in 2020. "Personal solutions for public crises," as Cummins put it, are predicated on "magical thinking at best, and myopic selfishness at worst."

AT THE SOLAIRE, a high-rise with 279 residences that overlooks the Hudson River, Miroslav Salon brought me up to the roof to see where the air pulled out from the bathrooms and kitchens was being exhausted. As with the other buildings I toured, fresh air is pumped into the apartments 24 hours a day. The outside air is cooled or heated, and moisture added or removed depending on the season. Here, too, the air inside is much better than out. "There's no need for the windows," said Salon, the resident manager. "But I found from experience that it's more psychological."

Laurence, a woman who owns an apartment at the Solaire and works in interior design, said that her profession makes her very aware of the health implications of indoor air quality. During the wildfires, Laurence said, she was grateful to be unaffected. All of her homes have had high-quality filtration systems. "I can tell the difference when visiting homes with lower levels of air filtration," she said. "There is often a smell or an unpleasant odor in the space. It doesn't feel comfortable or safe visiting or living in those types of interiors."

As I left the Solaire, I looked out onto the Hudson River. There's been talk of building some form of seawall here to protect against flooding from the Hudson River during storm surges and rising water levels. Looking back up at the building, I imagined it surrounded by walls, windows sealed shut from the outside world. The life that these kinds of buildings offer is like one from a science-fiction novel, epidemiologist Casey said. "This is going to be the future: You're under a glass dome."

Many city planners, science-fiction writers, and engineers—even the creators of *The Simpsons Movie*—have considered the prospect of people living enclosed below glass domes. The best-known proposal is probably from the American architect Buckminster Fuller, who wanted to cover Midtown Manhattan with a mile-tall shield to reduce air pollution and defend against inclement weather. The "in-dome" apartments, Fuller acknowledged, would probably have higher rents.

The glass dome might be a trope of science fiction, but some version has already arrived. It's just more subtle than Fuller's giant contact lens, suspended over the city: The domes today are the buildings themselves. In a handful of decades, worsening air quality may divide everyone into those who can thrive "in-dome" anywhere, no matter how bad the air outside is, and those who can afford no such protections, and must endure the harrowing consequences: more frequent illness, earlier death.

During the smoke in New York, Roe said, his family couldn't tell at all from inside their apartment. In the kitchen when I visited, I stood underneath a vent as Roe turned on the hood over the gas stove. Charlotte's system detects how much air is being taken up through exhaust vents and immediately begins to replace it with clean outdoor air. Within 30 seconds, the vent over my head started releasing a breeze that blew my hair around pleasantly. "We can cook shrimp, lobster," Roe said, and if somebody visits 30 minutes later, there is no trace of a seafood smell.

Last Thanksgiving, Roe had friends and family over to Charlotte for all the usual fixings—turkey, stuffing, potatoes, cranberry sauce. The people sitting at the table were perhaps a dozen or so feet from the stove and oven. "They could barely smell the food," Roe said. "It's very, very effective." TNR

Shayla Love, *a science journalist based in Brooklyn, is a staff reporter for* The Guardian *and* Psyche.

The Last Days of The Local Paper

Auburn Journal

LOCATION: **AUBURN, CALIFORNIA**
FOUNDED: **1872**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **4,000**

In July 2023, broken and retired newspaper bins lined a parking lot in Auburn, California, northeast of Sacramento.

The decline of printed newspapers has resulted in news deserts, “ghost” publications, and increased public mistrust of the media. Undeterred, local journalists soldier on.

Photographs by Ann Hermes

LAST AUGUST, police in Kansas executed questionable search warrants on the offices of the *Marion County Record*, a weekly newspaper that has been publishing since 1869, along with the homes of the publisher and a local city councilwoman. At issue was how the paper obtained a local businesswoman's driving record, which revealed the woman had had her license revoked for a DUI offense; she had been seeking a liquor license for her Marion restaurant. After a public outcry, the police chief was suspended, then resigned. The co-owner of the *Record,* 98-year-old Joan Meyer, suffered a fatal heart attack the day after the raid.

While shocking, the Marion County incident underscored the genuine power that local media still retains over our community conversations. But that power is rapidly crumbling, with worrying ramifications for American democracy. An average of 2.5 newspapers shut down across the United States each week, according to "The State of Local News 2023" (a report by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism), and nearly 2,900 newspapers have ceased publication since 2005. Today, 204 counties in the United States are without any local news hub—and more than 1,500 have only one—leading to "news deserts" in which misinformation, bot-generated "articles," and social media rumors go unchecked, public meetings and officials escape scrutiny, and community issues are overlooked.

The precarity of local media was on the mind of photographer Ann Hermes during a 2015 visit to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newsroom. The paper had just won a Pulitzer for its photographic coverage of the 2014 Ferguson uprising but had also been hit by layoffs. At the *Post-Dispatch* offices, Hermes said, she noticed marks in the carpet where employee desks had been removed. The moment stuck with Hermes, later inspiring her to create a visual portfolio of local newsrooms nationwide. "I figured that if I could show the coffee stains, the bottles of Tums, and the rinky-dink spaces crammed with hardworking journalists, people would see that these are not elitist institutions but people working as hard as they can, under duress, to serve their communities," said Hermes, who herself spent years as a photographer for outlets like *The Christian Science Monitor*.

She has spent much of the past half-decade visiting papers in 10 states and talking to journalists about the challenge of producing vital, responsive coverage of the issues that matter most to their neighbors. "People who work in local newsrooms are thinking deeply about journalism," Hermes observed. And they're doing so while trying to adapt to largely hit-or-miss business models, along with dramatically reduced staff.

Not all the news about news is bad: The Medill report cites "bright spots"—areas where local news growth has occurred, staff numbers have expanded, and models for news delivery seem promising. Polarization may have helped corrode our national conversation, but those bright spots could prove a signal moment for journalism and democracy. TNR

The Emporia Gazette

LOCATION: **EMPORIA, KANSAS**
FOUNDED: **1890**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **2,245**

(At left) Ryann Brooks, the news and online editor of *The Emporia Gazette,* conducts interviews by phone in front of a photographic mural depicting the newsroom's early days.

"If I'm out somewhere covering an event and I tell people I'm with the *Gazette*, they say they're happy that we're here, they love that we still have a local paper."

—Ryann Brooks, news and online editor of *The Emporia Gazette*

The Conway Daily Sun ▸

LOCATION: **NORTH CONWAY, NEW HAMPSHIRE**
FOUNDED: **1989**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **13,000**

(Following page) During the New Hampshire primaries, *The Conway Daily Sun*'s editors ask visiting presidential candidates to autograph the newsroom refrigerator. Barack Obama was one of the first to sign.

of you, who are also founders)

So good to be here + visit with a great newspaper that understands that local news matters. Keep up the good work!

Amy Klobuchar

Here's to the power of journalism to build the future we need.

Thanks for the great work + local journalism.

Best,

With gratitude and high hopes!

Here's to the dedicated journalists who make an informed electorate -- and thus democracy -- possible.

Tom Steyer

Thank you for your work - and for having me over!

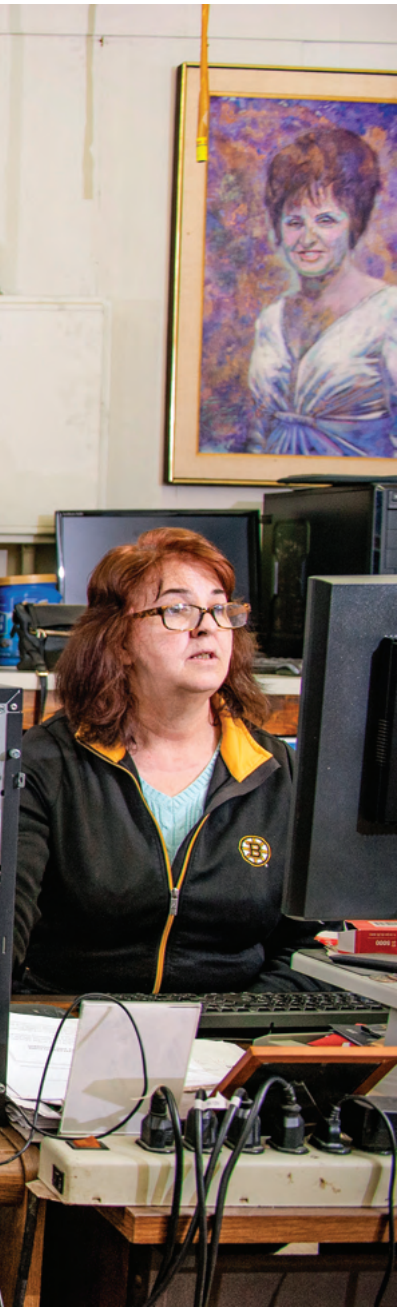
"People will come in here and tell me things. They trust the *Post-Gazette* because they know we're not going to do sensationalism. We're not going to do fake news."

—Pamela Donnaruma, owner and editor of Boston's *Post-Gazette*

Post-Gazette

LOCATION: **BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**
FOUNDED: **1896**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **12,000 (ESTIMATED)**

Pamela Donnaruma (left), the publisher and editor of the *Post-Gazette*, and Joan Smith, who puts together the paper's layout, work at their desks. Founded as *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* by Donnaruma's Italian grandfather, the *Post-Gazette* is one of the country's oldest ethnic newspapers still in existence.



Belleville News-Democrat

LOCATION: **BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS**
FOUNDED: **1858**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **6,077**

An archive of photographic negatives is stored in the office of the *Belleville News-Democrat*, a daily newspaper that serves southwestern Illinois, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis.

Post Bulletin

LOCATION: **ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA**
FOUNDED: **1925**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **11,651**

Jeff Pieters (right), editor of the *Post Bulletin*, during a newsroom meeting in January 2020

The Sacramento Valley Mirror

LOCATION: **WILLOWS, CALIFORNIA**
FOUNDED: **1991**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **2,500**

Stacks of print editions sit in the newspaper morgue at *The Sacramento Valley Mirror*. The paper is almost exclusively print; it maintains only a small social media presence. Its longtime editor and owner, Tim Crews, was once jailed for protecting his sources. Crews passed away in 2020. His wife, Donna Settle, continues to run the paper.

The Daily Star ▸

LOCATION: **HAMMOND, LOUISIANA**
FOUNDED: **1959**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **4,000**

(Following page) A member of *The Daily Star*'s delivery crew loads a truck with newspapers. Once the paper had almost 100 employees. Now it has a staff of six.

Marion County Record

LOCATION: **MARION, KANSAS**
FOUNDED: **1869**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **5,897**

(Above) In the newsroom, owner and editor Eric Meyer looks over proofs of the *Marion County Record* with writer Phyllis Zorn. In August 2023, local police raided the newspaper's offices, seizing computers, cell phones, and hard drives. In the aftermath of the raid, the newspaper experienced a dramatic increase in subscriptions.

The Keene Sentinel

LOCATION: **KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**
FOUNDED: **1799**
PRINT CIRCULATION: **5,000**

(At right) A printing press operator starts the morning pressrun of *The Keene Sentinel*, an independently owned newspaper that publishes six days a week.

"It's worrisome, what is going to happen when you lose the accountability… that rules are followed and democracies upheld and all of the things that this country was founded on."

—Cecily Weisburgh, co-executive editor of *The Keene Sentinel*


LABEL OTHER END
LABEL OTHER END
LABEL OTHER END
THE DAILY STAR
Trailer influx worries city officials
Sports
in Hammond murder

Resolved: The U.S. Should Stop Growing Tobacco

It kills millions, it has no productive use, and even its farmers see the end coming.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

By Duncan Murrell

Illustration by Richard A. Chance

LINWOOD SCOTT III CLIMBS two-story tobacco cropping machines with real agility and apparently no thought to falling. The sixth-generation tobacco farmer is proud of his machinery, upgraded 20 years ago and therefore relatively new. He delights in every tool and accoutrement of the cropping, curing, and baling process: every trailer, every sawed-off school bus that pulls those trailers, every conveyor belt, every one of his 200 small curing barns.

Scott, in his early fifties, is from Lucama, North Carolina. He's never smoked. His father told him tobacco was for cropping, not smoking, and he abides by that dictum. When I visited in December, he led me on a tour of his operation. "Tobacco has been growing on this farm way back before me," he told me. "I walk the same fields that my great-granddad and my granddad and my dad walked." He spoke as if he could see the families stretching out behind him and over the distant horizon of his very flat fields on the coastal plain of North Carolina.

But he's stressed, he explained, worried about tobacco's "razor-thin" margin in a way that few before him had to be. A bad or failed crop could end the operation. When there's a hurricane near the coast, he stays up all night, as if obsessing about the weather could change it. He recounted the innumerable ways his 1,500 acres of tobacco, spread over several counties around Wilson, the historic center of the flue-cured tobacco industry in North Carolina, might lose money if he's not careful. (Flue-cured tobacco is exposed in an enclosed barn to a week or more of forced, heated air, which preserves the leaves and gives them that familiar golden color.) Scott has contracts with several tobacco companies, each of which wants its tobacco grown and prepared just so: light or dark, thick or thin, whatever its part of the market wants. Tobacco companies set the prices, and if you don't have what they want, Scott said, they "don't want it at any price." Fertilizer, fuel, and labor costs increase every year, while prices hardly change.

If tobacco built the farm over generations, it's no longer a dependable source of the kind of income his grandfather earned decades ago, much less its best cash crop. Scott plants most of his acreage in sweet potatoes now. And he has begun to entertain the notion that his farm, one of the biggest tobacco growers in the biggest tobacco state, may soon get out of tobacco altogether.

Scott's son-in-law is the "numbers guy," he explained. "I've told him that before I'm dead and gone he's probably going to have to tell me to stop." Scott is not exactly distraught about this, he said, because in one sense, it's just business: "It would be hard.... But I'm not so emotionally attached to it that I'm not going to make a good business decision."

Scott's feelings aside, there's no getting around the fact that in the United States, tobacco as we know it—which was here at the beginning of European colonization, which subsidized those Colonies, which built much of North Carolina, which transformed the fields of advertising and marketing, which once provided good incomes for many thousands of farmers, which killed at least 100 million people who smoked it in the twentieth century—will likely die long before Scott does, without any help from him or his son-in-law.

But is that fast enough?

IN 1980, North Carolina's Democratic Governor Jim Hunt famously declared, "In this state, tobacco is still king. And we intend to keep it king." This is how we talk about tobacco here in North Carolina: with metaphors and symbols that describe something unconquerable, essential, even gifted by God; grown by modest, hardworking people whose toils funded the Colonies, saved the American Revolution, and built states, North Carolina included. We talk about the colleges it bankrolled, such as Duke University; how it paid for the educations of farmers' children; how it fueled so many towns around rural North Carolina; and how the money tobacco generates is still key to the survival of our economy. Tobacco built kingdoms and titans of industry, the story goes; tobacco is freedom, and in case you didn't realize that, here in Durham sits a 250-pound replica of the Liberty Bell constructed of pressed tobacco leaves, a twin of the bell given by the R.J. Reynolds Company to the Smithsonian in 1976 on the occasion of our nation's two-hundredth birthday. The founder of the American Tobacco Company, James "Buck" Duke,

The Duke Homestead State Historic Site and Tobacco Museum in Durham, North Carolina, houses a replica of the Liberty Bell made of pressed tobacco leaves.

BRIAN CAHN/ZUMA/ALAMY

who at the turn of the century created a union-busting, price-fixing monopoly that spread cigarettes over the entire globe—that man is interred in the chapel at Duke University, in a marble sarcophagus crafted in his image, draped in emperor's robes.

Nowhere in that chapel does it mention that Duke's company purposely spread an addiction that captured billions of people.

Some parts of the tobacco prosperity story, it should be said, are basically true. Tobacco farmers *are* highly skilled and hard-working, their work *has* supported generations of their families, and their children *have* gone to college on the money they pulled off tobacco plants. Real towns and communities sprang up around farming and selling leaf. Small-scale, part-time tobacco farming that filled savings accounts or paid debts—that was real, but is no longer.

The more baroque fantasy, the tale of the miracle crop that founded a nation and ensured our freedom and financed our entry into the modern world? *That* mix of truth, myth, and exaggeration has been used by tobacco companies in their opposition to everything from cigarette taxes to medical research to smoking regulations. *It'll hurt farmers and small businesses* is a familiar refrain, and it's been one of the tobacco industry's great weapons over the years, even as the interests of tobacco companies and tobacco growers have diverged.

But the myth has never been aimed at farmers, who aren't particularly susceptible to it anyway: It doesn't help them pay for seed and fertilizer, it doesn't help them pay workers, it doesn't help them heat curing barns, it doesn't help them get a good price from the companies that have locked them into contracts. The prosperity story has always been a device for propping up the cigarette industry. For them, farmers were propaganda tools as much as suppliers. Conflating these two—tobacco farming and cigarettes—was one of the cigarette industry's most impressive sleights of hand, a trick it has employed worldwide, with remarkable consistency.

This past fall, to take one example, two North Carolina congressmen joined with tobacco industry lobbyists to pressure the Biden administration into delaying implementation of the Food and Drug Administration's ban on menthol cigarettes. "Our focus is on the impact the ban will have on working families and farmers in North Carolina," wrote Democratic Senator Don Davis and Republican Representative David Rouzer, who threatened that homeownership and college educations would be imperiled if the ban were allowed to take effect. "The tobacco industry brought generations of North Carolinians out of poverty," the pair piously declared, and "built cities and towns across the state." As of this writing, the Biden administration had still not implemented the ban.

Another example: The International Tobacco Growers Association, set up and run by cigarette manufacturers, lobbied in Indonesia in 2010 against a ban on additives in tobacco manufacturing, claiming that it would harm the livelihood of farmers. Tobacco use is fast on the increase in Indonesia and much of the Pacific Rim, unlike the rest of the world. Later, the Tobacco Growers' Association of Brazil, another industry group, presented 250,000 signatures on a petition from tobacco farmers, workers, and community members, opposing a similar ban on additives.

This shackling of farmers to cigarette companies by way of the tobacco prosperity story would be merely interesting if it weren't so effective, disingenuous, and deadly.

It's startling to realize how unpopular cigarettes were at the turn of the twentieth century, and to what lengths the American Tobacco Company went not only to advertise the product, but to convince people that smoking cigarettes was something they wanted to do, something good Americans did.

From the late nineteenth century through most of the twentieth, U.S. tobacco companies worked very hard to create new smokers and develop a robust market here and abroad. Marketing and addiction are powerful partners: Even after a 27.2 percent global decline among men and a nearly 38 percent decline among women since 1990, around 1.3 billion smokers remain worldwide. Much of this is due to the success of J.B. Hutson, who formed the industry group Tobacco Associates in 1947, the organization most responsible for expanding markets for U.S. tobacco overseas and for battling cigarette taxes. Through a remarkable variety of benign-sounding institutes and committees funded by Big Tobacco, Hutson promoted false research into the health effects of tobacco and ushered the industry into the production of propaganda films.

Here in the United States, in 1943, Lucky Strike put a very young Frank Sinatra on a stage with North Carolina's own big band leader, Kay Kyser, for a television performance in a very weird infomercial that simulated a tobacco auction and repeatedly touted the "romance" of tobacco farming. (Fifty-five years later, Sinatra was buried with a Zippo lighter and a pack of his favorite Camels, a rival brand.) It's perhaps a testament to the power of tobacco advertising that even an unflattering portrayal of its sliminess, the TV show *Mad Men,* coincided with a 43 percent increase in sales of Lucky Strike cigarettes. In the first episode, the head of Lucky Strike puts the romance succinctly: "We're selling

The tobacco prosperity story, which insists that tobacco farming is essential to the tobacco states, and any insult to cigarette manufacturing and sales would do untold damage, is alive and well, even if the facts point to another conclusion.

America here. The Indians gave it to us, for shit's sake." To which Don Draper, the show's hero, responds with a nonsense slogan, "It's Toasted!"—one of many nonsense slogans in the history of tobacco. In 1974, the Tobacco Institute put out a documentary, *Leaf,* which peddled the idea that tobacco was a "gift of the gods," that growing it was an emotional, personal matter of heritage, and that it had inspired a "whole new art form," namely the carving of pipes and wooden tobacco-store Indians.

It's been a long time since tobacco was the economic king here. It's true that if North Carolina seceded tomorrow, it would instantly become the eighth-largest tobacco-producing country in the world. But in 2021 tobacco growing accounted for just 3 percent of all farming income in North Carolina, a sector that was itself just 2.6 percent of the state's gross income from all industries. Tobacco manufacturing jobs—de-stemming leaves, making cigarettes—accounted for only 1.6 percent of all manufacturing jobs in the state.

This state has moved on from tobacco, as the rest of the nation has. We just have a hard time admitting it. People still write poems about tobacco. ("Every night I pray in my own humble way/For those who farm the golden weed," goes one such verse, recited on YouTube by its author, Parker Phillips.) The tobacco prosperity story, which insists that tobacco farming is essential in North Carolina, and any wound or insult to the broader industry of cigarette manufacturing and sales would do untold damage to the tobacco states, is alive and well, even if the facts point to another conclusion. Tobacco is not even close to being king here, and yet that fact doesn't stop tobacco companies from using the myth to their advantage.

IN MARCH 2003, a North Carolina tobacco farmer named Dwight Watson drove his tractor all the way north to Washington, D.C., parked it in the middle of the pond in an area called Constitution Gardens, and began a two-day standoff, during which he threatened to blow himself up and made references to another standoff at Ruby Ridge. The American flag above his cab flew upside down. He was in distress.

He told reporters that he'd been moved to embark on his protest by the impending failure of his tobacco farm in the town of Whitakers—the result of unfairly low prices and the imminent end of the federal price support system. "If this is the way America will be run, to hell with it," he told *The Washington Post*. "They can blow my ass out of the water. I'm ready to go to heaven."

Fifteen years later, the six biggest tobacco companies in the world reported profits of $55 billion. One of those companies, Imperial Brands, disclosed a profit margin in 2018 of 46 percent on global revenue. Tobacco companies in 2019 spent more than eight times as much on U.S. marketing and advertising ($8.02 billion) as they did on buying U.S.-grown tobacco ($940 million). Eighty percent of that marketing and advertising budget went to price discounts to retailers and in-store marketing and advertising campaigns. In this sense, Big Tobacco is less in the tobacco-buying business than the recruit-more-smokers business. Keeping tobacco as cheap as possible is imperative. This is why tobacco farming is dying here.

Tobacco farmers today deal with one brutal and primary fact: The real price of tobacco has not grown meaningfully in decades. In 1974, the average price for a pound of U.S. tobacco was roughly $1.09. In 2022 dollars, that would be $6.94. But in 2022, the price for that pound of tobacco was around $2.28, or less than 35 percent of its 1974 value. There is no doubt that tobacco money once built much of North Carolina and its institutions. But that was when tobacco was worth nearly three and four times what it is today.

Most federal benefits—in the form of price supports and crop quotas—went away in 2004, when, under the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act, the government bought out farmers who agreed to give up their tobacco quotas and quit farming tobacco. Quotas were part of the system established during the Depression to ensure that tobacco farmers wouldn't be ruined by the untenable prices tobacco companies were offering. After the 2004 buyout, the number of tobacco farms in North Carolina fell from 7,850 in 2002 to fewer than 1,300 in 2022. Tobacco farming in the United States represents 0.004 percent of GDP. There were 6,150 tobacco farmers in the country in 2020, and the share of tobacco farmers and workers among all U.S. agricultural workers is now 0.037 percent. In 2014, the amount of land devoted to tobacco cultivation, as a portion of all U.S. agricultural land, was 0.04 percent and dropping.

Will Strader, a county extension director in Rockingham County, North Carolina, who grew up on a tobacco farm, described the situation in 2004 with his father's words. "He told me multiple times that our family farm, when he was growing up, supported six families. And he said, 'Now it's getting to the point where I can't support a family of three with this farm.' So, you know, it got to a point where we had to go out. We had to go after the buyout."

Produced in Durham, North Carolina, a late-1940s-era magazine ad for Chesterfield cigarettes features famous baseball players.

Today, farming tobacco means owning equipment worth many hundreds of thousands of dollars that no one—or very few—will ever want to buy from you. It means knowing when to spray and fertilize, when to crop, how to put up leaves in the barns, and how to control those barns so you don't ruin everything the week the leaves are curing—knowledge that would be useless on another crop. It means dealing with several companies at once, all of which want a different style of tobacco from you but won't tell you how much they're going to pay until you're done and the leaves are harvested. It's loading your trucks and taking your leaf to weigh, hearing the company buyer grade your tobacco lower than is fair or right, and walking away with a price that might put you in debt.

The stakes are higher now. "The yield required to make it work is becoming, you know, nearly a record crop every year," said Brandon Batten, a farmer in Four Oaks, North Carolina. "And that's very hard to achieve."

Batten is, like Linwood Scott, a sixth-generation tobacco farmer, on what is now the family's Triple-B Farm. He didn't think he would ever get a chance to grow tobacco or anything else on his family farm. There was no room for him there when he graduated high school, so he went off to North Carolina State University and ended up with a master's degree in agricultural engineering. But when the buyout came along, Batten's family decided to forego the money and continue growing tobacco. And because there was no longer a quota system to limit how many acres they could put in tobacco, the farm expanded and Batten was able to return. Now 38, he's nearly a generation younger than Scott, and he has no illusions about what he's gotten himself into.

The tobacco side of the farm has grown from 50 acres to 150, and the farm also produces soybeans and grain crops on another 850 acres. The family tried to get into sweet potatoes, but, unlike Scott's farm, Batten's operation wasn't big enough. Still, Batten—now the farm manager—has not been shy about trying new things and new crops, whatever might work, including floral hemp for CBD, which here in North Carolina didn't go so well. Too many farmers got too excited about it and raised too much of it for an industry in its infancy. "Show a farmer a profit, and he'll show you an oversupply very quickly," Batten told me. "We can work ourselves out of a profit."

Where Linwood Scott and Scott Farms have gone as big as possible with tobacco in order to make the thin margins work, Batten has chosen to stay steady at 150 acres and focus on quality to get the best prices. The farm prioritizes efficiency, and Batten manages to make his crop with just six workers he hires each year through the federal H-2A visa system. He gets more pounds out of his acres than most farmers by controlling the smaller operation personally. If the operation got any bigger, he told me, he thinks his quality would suffer. If he makes a few hundred dollars to $1,000 an acre, he can stay in business.

Batten is a clean-shaven, kind-faced man. If he talks like a scholar of soil, he's also social media savvy. He isn't a smoker either, but, he said, he's addicted to growing tobacco. It's a beautiful plant, and you can practically see it growing—from four inches tall in April to five feet tall and three feet wide in June. He told me this with a note of wonder in his voice, like it still amazes him, and described the insurance salesman who envied him for having something to show for his labor at the end of the day. He wants his children to have the experience of looking out the window and seeing some of their beef cattle walking by, or riding with him in the combine when they're picking corn. He wants them to see the beauty in all that. But he's also wary of their falling too in love with it.

"Surviving is a good starting point," he said. "That's not ultimately the end goal, right? You want to thrive, make money, build something for the future. But when I came home from school, I was pretty sure I could make a living growing tobacco, and I was also fairly sure that if my children wanted to farm, they would probably have to farm something else. I'm 38 now, and I'm not sure that I will be able to spend my entire working career growing tobacco."

Batten and his farm lost a 30-acre parcel just this year to the dynamics of development in rural areas, another phenomenon pushing tobacco farmers to the edge. The acres, which he had leased, are to become a housing development. "The generation that owns it dies, passes away, the kids inherit it," he explained. "They're scattered, living wherever they live in their own lives. They don't need a farm in Johnston County." He learned about the loss of the land when the county came out to the property to test it for suitability as a septic field. Afterward, Batten made a video and posted it on social media.

"I can weather a lot," he said, getting into his tractor, visibly frustrated. "I can manage my way out of high input costs and tough markets, but I don't know how to farm without land. If y'all can figure it out, let me know."

ONE OBVIOUS ANSWER to Batten's rhetorical question, of course, would be to stop farming. And if farmers don't stop of their own accord, perhaps they should be more strongly encouraged. Even Batten said he thought the end of tobacco would be "legislative."

But for all its symbolic importance to the tobacco industry, to say nothing of its provision of cigarettes' key ingredient, tobacco farming is mostly ignored by the worldwide anti-tobacco movement, which focuses its attention on battling smoking. "Squeezing on leaf growing may raise the price of leaf slightly, at least temporarily, but that would have a very small impact on the price of cigarettes," said Chris Bostic, policy director of the tobacco watchdog group Action on Smoking and Health. According to Bostic, the public health community's position is that reducing or ending tobacco farming in the United States—or any individual nation—would not meaningfully alter the business, because tobacco is grown in so many countries and so often exported and imported.

The World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which went into effect in 2005, was the first international treaty devoted solely to health, and provides a blueprint for fighting the spread of tobacco and smoking worldwide. Most of it concerns regulating the markets for tobacco products, and a smaller portion touches on protecting the environment, not least by addressing the environmental costs of farming tobacco. In practice, this has meant almost exclusively working in low- and middle-income countries to enforce and promote labor standards and to undermine the international version of the tobacco prosperity myth, namely that tobacco is a path out of poverty and a boon to national economies.

The United States is one of only a handful of countries that have not ratified the treaty.

In the United States, attention to tobacco farming has of late been centered on fair and just labor practices, to include the protection of child tobacco workers. It is legal in the United States to employ agricultural workers as young as 12, with parental permission, as long as that work is not considered hazardous. In 2014, Human Rights Watch released a study in which it documented children as young as seven working tobacco fields in North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. In the study's sample of 141 children, the organization found that nearly three-quarters "reported the sudden onset of serious symptoms—including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, difficulty breathing, and irritation to their eyes and mouths—while working in fields of tobacco plants and in barns with dried tobacco leaves and tobacco dust." These are symptoms of "green tobacco sickness," or acute nicotine poisoning, but the U.S. Department of Labor does not recognize that kind of exposure as hazardous. Many tobacco companies operating in the United States have established their own, more stringent rules against child labor in the contracts they make with farmers, but it's unclear how those are policed or enforced.

Conditions for adult tobacco workers in the United States can vary widely. In the best scenario, they are hired through the federal H-2A visa program, which mandates and enforces fair pay, adequate and free housing, and other protections. In North Carolina, H-2A workers are protected under a contract negotiated by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and the North Carolina Growers Association. But H-2A compliance is expensive compared to the cost of hiring labor through labor brokers, who are notorious for underpaying, silencing, and otherwise abusing workers. On occasion, a grower will be reported, but in one infamous case a farmer who happened to be a North Carolina state senator, accused of withholding pay and penalizing union members, received a notable donation of cash to his campaign fund from Reynolds American.

Recently, there have been efforts to eliminate all federal benefits to tobacco farmers. Many farmers left the business entirely after the 2004 buyout, together taking nearly $10 billion over 10 years as compensation for giving up their tobacco growing quotas. But the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation continues to support tobacco farmers with tens of millions of dollars a year. An amendment to the farm bill to cease that protection died several times in Congress between 2015 and 2018, and hasn't been taken up again since.

The states where the most tobacco gets grown—North Carolina and Kentucky—both rank among the top 10 states for lowest taxes on cigarettes, and also among the top 10 for highest number of smoking-related cancer deaths. Maintaining low tax rates on cigarettes in tobacco states has long been a priority for Big Tobacco, going back to 1970, just after North Carolina raised a tax on cigarettes. The industry was afraid of the "domino effect." As the Tobacco Tax Council put it back then: "Many states felt that if North Carolina would impose a tax on [cigarettes], its number one commodity, then why should we worry. The floodgates were opened in a number of states, and 15, to be exact, increased their [cigarette] tax rates in exorbitant degrees."

This may have been sound strategy for Big Tobacco, but its special pressure on tobacco states left more North Carolinians dead.

Opposition and organization against child labor, unfair and unhealthy labor practices, ongoing tobacco insurance subsidies, and increased morbidity have not transformed into a general movement to end tobacco growing. And yet tobacco growing in the United States does indeed appear to be on its way out.

SHOULD TOBACCO BE allowed to die a natural death here in the United States? Since the 1950s, the amount of tobacco in a manufactured cigarette has shrunk by 37 percent, and since 1950 the amount of foreign tobacco in those cigarettes has increased by nearly five times, to an estimated 50 percent and probably more. Cigarette companies are not nearly as dependent on U.S. leaf as they might have been once. Tobacco farming has been declining in the United States since the mid-1950s. The number of farms growing tobacco here fell from 512,000 in 1954 to 6,237 in 2017, according to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture. The amount of acreage in tobacco fell, too: In 1954, the United States farmed 1.5 million acres in tobacco; in 2017, it was just 331,552 acres. These trends have been well-established for generations.

The United States is no longer the world's biggest producer of tobacco. That would be China, where farmers grow 10 times as much as farmers here. Next are India, Brazil, and Indonesia. In many of these countries, Big Tobacco's efforts to squeeze farmers have been memorialized in print, in contracts that essentially guarantee indentured servitude via debt to the companies themselves. In Malawi, currently the eighth-largest tobacco producer in the world, farmers call themselves "tobacco slaves."

According to a WHO report, "More than 90 percent of the world's tobacco is grown in low- and middle-income countries, mostly by smallholder farmers who need to use unpaid family labor to make

Perhaps the best reason to purposely end tobacco cultivation might be to explode the prosperity myth being peddled around the world to lure in new growers in new countries.

ends meet, leading to child labor." As the market penetration of cigarettes continues to shrink among adults worldwide, the big tobacco companies have pushed tobacco growing from the United States and Europe to countries where labor is cheap, and where they can have influence on policy. In Kenya, it takes 1,000 hours of unpaid labor to raise one acre of tobacco.

Some countries even offer subsidies to the companies, as well as tax holidays, low wages, and lax environmental standards. In Lebanon, small-scale production is so unprofitable that it could not exist without government subsidies. "Governments in African countries are often desperate for foreign direct investment," said Roy Maconachie, professor of social and policy sciences at the University of Bath, during a public discussion of his film, *Tobacco Slave*. "These are poor countries, they're often dependent on a single commodity. The companies often wield more power than the country itself."

Despite the decline, we're still the fifth-largest tobacco producer in the world, producing more than 200,000 metric tons last year. If we stopped growing tobacco tomorrow, those pounds would end up being grown somewhere else, becoming someone else's problem. But there are still good reasons to end it now, and opportunities to be lost if we don't.

Tobacco is a crop with few redeeming qualities. You can't eat it, you can't build houses with it, you can't feed hogs with it, and the billion-plus people who smoke it get a little high, become addicted, and end up dying by the millions each year. Around 1.3 million nonsmokers die per year from exposure to secondhand smoke. If trends continue, nearly one billion people worldwide will die this century due to smoking. Tobacco production uses and pollutes 22 billion tons of water, or 0.2 percent of the Amazon River's annual discharge. According to the World Health Organization, "for every kilogram of tobacco that is not produced, consumed, and disposed of," one person's yearly need for drinking water can be met. Up to 25 percent of tobacco farmers worldwide suffer from green tobacco sickness, or nicotine poisoning, through repeated contact with the leaves. There are 1.3 million children involved in tobacco growing worldwide. Five percent of the world's annual deforestation is attributable to clearing forests for tobacco fields. Production and consumption of tobacco annually releases 80 million tons of carbon dioxide into Earth's atmosphere.

People in tobacco states die from smoking-related cancers at a higher rate than most of the rest of the country. Tobacco-producing states are reliable sources of politicians to lobby and legislate on behalf of Big Tobacco in Washington. Some U.S. tobacco growers are abusive union-busters who house their workers in filthy hovels; others withhold pay and employ 12-year-olds who get sick from nicotine exposure. Growing tobacco normalizes the use of tobacco and makes it seem a normal crop, when in truth it is a crop that was transformed from a relatively benign plant used by native people in ritual and medicine into a pox on the earth and its people.

Perhaps the best reason to purposely end tobacco cultivation might be to explode the prosperity myth being peddled around the world to lure in new growers in new countries. Just as the Tobacco Tax Council once warned of the domino effect that might come from a tobacco state raising a cigarette tax, what if the country at the epicenter of the worldwide smoking plague—the country that invented the tobacco prosperity story—said "No more"? What if we demonstrated that tobacco is not a miracle crop, that if it was once an economic boon to communities and states, this hasn't been true for decades? And if it's not true here, where the tobacco industry was born, how likely is it to be true abroad? Perhaps there might be some real power in ridding tobacco's birthplace of tobacco.

EITHER BECAUSE IT becomes untenable for farmers to keep growing the crop on a large scale or because we take the radical step of purposely extinguishing it, tobacco will end its run here, on the coastal plain of North Carolina, a reasonable distance on either side of I-95. Outlawing tobacco, of course, would require another buyout to cover the cost of farmers' switching crops or getting out of farming altogether. The price tag of the 2004 buyout was $10 billion to detach the federal government from tobacco subsidies; a second buyout would have to detach farmers from the crop itself, and the total price of that would be at least twice as expensive—possibly as much as two to three times as expensive—as the first buyout if structured similarly.

There is practical and symbolic value in ending the normalization of growing a crop that is so deadly and addictive. But there is cost, too.

Linwood Scott thinks he wouldn't be himself without tobacco. His childhood would have been different, how he lived his days would have been different, how the world smelled during curing time would have been different. Perhaps it's not worth thinking about what he might have been without it, because tobacco is what he did, who he was, and who he is.

In his fifties, he is a man as much grown by tobacco as he is its grower. Stopping tobacco would be a loss for him, even a loss of himself. But someone has to be the last one holding the seeds. TNR

Duncan Murrell, *a contributing editor of* Harper's Magazine, *lives in North Carolina.*

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ILLUSTRATION BY DEENA SO'OTEH

Origin Stories

The womb has been serially misunderstood and understudied.

By Anna Louie Sussman

OVER SEVEN MONTHS in the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2013, nine women who had been born without wombs received uterine transplants from living donors; mostly, their mothers. The transplants took place in Gothenburg's Sahlgrenska University Hospital on weekends, when the surgical unit is normally closed. Experts flew to Sweden from the United States, Spain, and Australia. Ten gynecologists and surgeons, as well as support staff, worked on their off-hours, hoping to be part of medical history. A private research foundation covered their costs. Two months after the transplants, the women began menstruating. Five years after the first transplant, eight children had been born to that initial cohort.

In the years since, the pioneering surgeons have refined the technique: It is now possible to remove a uterus from a deceased donor, revivifying it as soon as it is sutured to the recipient's blood vessels. The surgeons perform the removal with a robotic arm, operated with joysticks observed through a large screen, a video game of epic and minute proportions. One bioethicist has said that, as the science advances, "it may be legally and ethically impermissible" not to consider offering this procedure to trans women, ostensibly a step toward reproductive equality for all.

Yet anyone paying attention to the news has probably grasped that societies all over the world are drifting further away from a vision of reproductive equality. In China, Hungary, North and South Korea, Poland, and the United States, among other places, politicians lament the decline in the number of children being born and implore—or coerce, subtly or overtly—people to have more. They hold out carrots (monthly stipends, housing loans, baby bonuses) in an effort to rev wombs up. They craft legislation giving them ostensible dominion over wombs, attempting to dictate what can and cannot happen within them. But as enthusiastic as they are about controlling wombs, they, and quite frankly the rest of us, know shockingly little about these organs from whence we all sprung.

A new crop of books unpacks the history of uterine misunderstanding, medical mysteries, and misogyny to teach us more about this extraordinary organ. These books trace the womb's evolutionary origins, enlighten us about its myriad functions and dysfunctions, and envision a potentially transcendent future, in the midst of an all-too-dystopian present.

ANYONE WHO HAS had a difficult pregnancy or witnessed one up close may wonder why we can't simply lay eggs, like our distant avian relatives. Indeed, as Cat Bohannon observes in *Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution*, the "majority of multicellular animals lay a clutch of eggs." The placenta had evolved sometime before the apocalyptic event known as Chicxulub, when an asteroid or comet hit the earth some 66 million years ago. But it was around the time of the impact that incubating eggs inside the body really took off. This party trick came with evolutionary advantages: Gestating creatures could search further afield for food without worrying about an untended nest, while providing a more stable and controlled bacterial environment and temperature. Of course, there were downsides, too. Internal gestation didn't just reshape our reproductive organs, but pulled in the immune system and the metabolic system, too. As we became placental mammals, Bohannon writes, "the entire female body became a gestation engine."

Of course, humans still do produce eggs, through the process known as folliculogenesis. After leaving the ovaries, in humans, they travel to the fallopian tubes. If they are fertilized, they then attach to the endometrium, or the uterine lining, and the two entities—uterus and embryo—work together to grow the placenta. A squirrel-like creature, *Protungulatum donnae,* whom Bohannon calls "Donna," may be the first creature to have a modern placenta as well as a single fused womb (smaller mammals such as mice still have two uteri and two cervixes and produce litters). This ancient uterus evolved from "a muscular, oozy organ that secreted all the stuff necessary to produce an eggshell," Bohannon writes; it marked the moment evolution turned "the mother's body into a combination of eggshell and nest."

Besides her primitive uterus, Donna, who lived 67 million to 63 million years ago, had another useful evolutionary alteration—her legs didn't splay out to the side, but ran more perpendicular to the ground, hinting at what would eventually become the upright, bowl-shaped pelvis that supports an occupied and growing uterus. Birthing live young also led to another extraordinary evolutionary step. Instead of a cloaca, the single cavity through which egg-laying mammals such as the platypus also excrete urine and feces, our ancestors went on to develop a three-holed female pelvic plan, with a vagina, urethra, and rectum. Clearly, the babies that emerged into the world sans a coating of fecal matter and its dangerous intestinal bacteria had an evolutionary advantage. (Human embryos still develop a cloaca at five weeks, which then divides into the urogenital and rectal passages by the sixth and seventh weeks; the full suite of orifices is complete by about week 20.) But even with this clever bit of engineering, as placental mammals evolved to become larger, and to gestate longer, birth became

riskier. By the time Homo sapiens evolved, our highly invasive placentas put us at risk for internal bleeding. And the large size of human skulls relative to the size of the pelvic opening (a mismatch that gave rise to the memorable image of "shitting a pumpkin") means that some sort of miracle had to occur for humans to reproduce so successfully. That miracle, Bohannon says, was midwifery.

SCIENTISTS HAVE OBSERVED small groups of female bonobos, a female-dominated primate society, guarding a birthing mother. In several cases, they "even cupped their paws under the newborn as it came out of the mother," instances of "bonobo midwifery." But bonobos, chimps, and other primates have relatively straightforward births. Human birth is far more complicated: Our labors are long and involved, sometimes beginning dangerously early, sometimes well overdue. So humans, with their innate sociality and emergent tool use, invented what Bohannon calls "gynecology," defined by her as the "continually evolving body of medical knowledge and practices" to prevent, manage, or otherwise intervene in female reproduction. This includes using herbs as abortifacients, creating gynecological tools to prevent infections or stanch uterine bleeding, or eating certain plants to enhance fertility (something that primates have also been observed doing) or guide labor. Every known human society has records of gynecology. Without this innovation, without learning to care for the wombs among us, our species, with its terribly designed reproductive system, might have died out long ago.

Gynecology also couldn't have developed without a cooperative female society, Bohannon observes—a culture that encouraged women to support one another in their most vulnerable moments ("Trust Women," as the slogan goes). Yet for much of its recent history, this field that is centered around the bodies and lives of women and their babies has been dominated by men who frequently held women in varying degrees of contempt. A surprising share of the extant gynecological record is a history of misogyny and misunderstanding on the part of male physicians. While some of this misunderstanding is only fair, given the scientific tools available, some of it is deeply intertwined with sexism. Aristotle's influential theory of reproduction posited that semen provides "the form and the efficient cause" of a new being, while the female provides "the material" (menstrual blood, he hypothesized) that gets added as the embryo grows, supplying the reproductive foundation for the long-standing binary of superior male activity versus inferior female passivity—the egg waiting to be fertilized; the vacant, inert womb waiting for something to do. His theory dominated until the seventeenth century; it wasn't until the discovery of the human ovum in 1827 that our understanding of reproduction gained a firmer grasp on the female role.

Despite this limited understanding, innovations in gynecology continued in fits and starts, with most occurring in the last 200 years. In *Womb: The Inside Story of Where We All Began*, the writer and midwife Leah Hazard relates the first account of an unsuccessful hysterectomy in 120 CE, when Soranus of Ephesus removed a gangrenous prolapsed uterus via the vagina, but lost the patient. An early account of a successful (self-administered!) hysterectomy came in England in 1670, when "an attempt to carry 'a heavy coale'" left a local woman with a prolapsed uterus (when the uterus drops into the vagina), which she addressed by cutting it out herself, severing her bladder and part of her vagina as well. A male midwife arrived and stitched her up, although the stitches didn't hold, and she suffered lifelong incontinence. In the mid–nineteenth century, the notorious "father of modern gynecology" J. Marion Sims, working in Alabama, developed techniques such as fistula repair and tools such as the speculum, by experimenting on enslaved women and their babies with little regard for their suffering or humanity. Hazard quotes his own admission: "If there was anything I hated, it was investigating the organs of the female pelvis." Despite his "undisguised distaste for women's bodies," he seemed to enjoy the renown they brought him, often performing his surgeries "in front of a small crowd of other admiring physicians."

The mid-1800s, a period Hazard calls the "infancy" of obstetrics, was also a moment in which traditional midwives fell out of fashion. "Having a man at the foot of one's bed—potentially with a shiny new invention like forceps in his hand—became a sign of status and sophistication available only to the very wealthiest society doyennes," Hazard writes. As generations of female knowledge fell into the shadows, prominent men came to dominate the field. In a typical example, John Braxton Hicks, a London physician working in the second half of the century, identified the uterine contractions that can occur at any point during pregnancy and don't signal the onset of labor. Naturally, he gave them his name, even though, Hazard writes, "one suspects that this characteristic of the womb had already been experienced and acknowledged by generations of women since time immemorial."

To be fair, there could be advantages to having one of these men with shiny instruments attending your birth, since it was largely men who were able to study the latest surgical techniques and important developments, such as the use of antiseptics to prevent dangerous bacteria from developing in wounds. Murdoch Cameron, a chief obstetrician at Glasgow Maternity Hospital, was one of these men. He is considered to have performed the first modern antiseptic cesarean sections (C-sections) in 1888. Since antiquity, people had extracted

Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution
by Cat Bohannon
Knopf,
624 pp., $35.00

Eve: The Disobedient Future of Birth
by Claire Horn
House of Anansi,
224 pp., $22.99

Womb: The Inside Story of Where We All Began
by Leah Hazard
Ecco,
336 pp., $29.99

babies by slicing open the abdomen (the name, Hazard suggests, more likely refers to Julius Caesar's decree to use this method of extraction if the mother's life was threatened, rather than to his own abdominal delivery), but until Cameron's intervention, "infection and blood loss made the procedure so dangerous that it was used only as a last resort." Cameron had studied at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary under the pioneering surgeon Joseph Lister, and he was confident that "Lister's tried-and-tested carbolic acid solution" had its place in obstetrics, not just general surgery. In contrast to many other instances of obstetric breakthroughs, we know the name of the woman on whose body science took its strides. Patient A was Catherine Colquhoun, a woman barely four feet tall, whose pelvis was "severely narrowed by the rickets that plagued so many of the city's slum-dwellers." In fact, her pelvis was just an inch and a half in diameter, making vaginal delivery assuredly fatal to mother and child alike. Catherine had a safe abdominal delivery and recovered under the care of many nurses, leaving the hospital just over a month after she'd been admitted, with her son, Caesar Cameron Colquhoun, in her arms.

Throughout this period, the nonpregnant womb was imagined as a sterile, empty space, "a kind of crystal ball—unblemished and pristine," Hazard writes. This image was reinforced by the invention of early human incubators, an idea borrowed from the chick hatcheries of the Paris Zoo by the French physician Stéphane Tarnier. He asked the zookeeper, Odile Martin, to construct a "couveuse sufficiently ventilated and large enough to hold one or two infants," which looked something like a large, glass-topped toaster oven, according to an 1897 account with illustrations in *The Lancet*. These were a notable improvement on the swaddling and warming that human cultures had always done for their young; with constant attendance, they could be kept at a stable temperature, and allowed the infant to breathe. In *Eve: The Disobedient Future of Birth*, author Claire Horn notes that while "Tarnier's incubators would likely have held infants not less than thirty-eight weeks old," the physician nevertheless boasted "that he was on the cusp of enabling almost the entire latter half of gestation to occur through his technology." He had an eager audience for his claims: Infant mortality was high, and premature births were (and remain) common. But the audience was wider than those in the medical profession.

Anyone who has had a difficult pregnancy or witnessed one up close may wonder why we can't simply lay eggs, like our distant avian relatives.

A pair of doctors (one a pediatrician, one, it transpired, a self-proclaimed doctor) took incubators to exhibition halls, beginning with the *Kinderbrutenstalt* (child hatchery) at the 1896 Great Industrial Exposition in Berlin. The self-proclaimed physician, Martin Couney, later set up "a permanent 'incubator baby show' at Coney Island's Luna amusement park in 1903." Although Couney was uncredentialed and operated without oversight, Horn writes, "his patients received a level of care that would have been unavailable anywhere else at the time." They were fed by wet nurses and monitored around the clock "by healthcare professionals who practised meticulous hygiene." Tarnier may have profoundly overestimated his own ingenuity, but his devices and their descendants have helped save countless premature infants' lives.

MORE THAN A century later, we are on the cusp of accomplishing Tarnier's dream of realizing the back half of a 40-week pregnancy outside of the human body. But just as we plan for life on other planets while proving ourselves embarrassingly incapable of caring for our own, the advances in artificial womb technology belie a discomfiting degree of ignorance about the wombs inside of us. It was only in 1979 that an Israeli scientist, Vaclav Insler, examined the uteri of 25 women who'd agreed to be inseminated with a stranger's sperm just before scheduled hysterectomies, discovering the cervix's active role in filtering and housing sperm in "over 20,000 tiny 'crypts.'" The cervix gatekeeps access to the womb, such that "the percentage of colonized crypts and sperm density were severely reduced in patients inseminated with abnormal sperm," Insler wrote, although Hazard notes that it's unclear whether sperm fitness or cervical selectivity is behind this. Far from being a passive crystal ball, the unpregnant uterus is hard at work.

Doing what else, exactly? Part of the reason we know so little is that, like almost everything else with respect to women's health, research in this area has been underfunded for most of medical history. For example, Hazard searches the medical literature and finds 15,000+ search results for sperm or semen, compared with 400 for menstrual effluent (the mixture of blood, "endometrial cells, mucus, native bacteria … and vaginal secretions" that we think of as our periods). But the tides are finally shifting, and scientists and doctors around the world are engaged in fascinating new explorations of the womb and its functions and dysfunctions. Dr. Christine Metz, head of the Laboratory of Medicinal Biochemistry at the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research, and an ob-gyn researcher at North Shore University Hospital, had to overcome the "yuck factor" to get other physicians to help her recruit patients whose menstrual effluent she could study. She hopes to analyze this matter to identify cells that would indicate the presence of endometriosis, which would provide a noninvasive way to screen for a painful disease that can take seven to 10 years to be diagnosed and involves uncomfortable biopsies in which tissue is scraped from the lining of the womb. Still, in a telling sign of who controls the purse strings and how widely they are missing the point, one of the comments she received in applying for a National Institutes of Health grant was, "That's ridiculous, why collect menstrual effluent when you could just collect biopsies on these women?"

Remarkable discoveries await those who care enough to look closely at the womb,

and Hazard's book takes us on a tour of this knowledge frontier. For example, in the past two decades or so, study of the uterine microbiome has overturned the "sterile womb" paradigm that reigned for over a century. As scientific advances made it possible to identify microorganisms and bacteria through the detection of genetic debris, scientists analyzing meconium, the fecal matter produced by newly born infants, showed it to be full of bacteria, and not just in babies born to women known to have infections, suggesting that the fetus's first home is a lively, teeming bacterial ecosystem. Dr. Frances Byrne, a researcher at the University of New South Wales, is investigating what the uterus can tell us about the relationship between endometrial cancer and obesity. Obese women, she has found, have microbiome signatures that are similar to women, obese or not, who have endometrial cancer. And women with cancer had lower levels of the "good" probiotic bacterium lactobacillus, relative to the controls. Dr. Margherita Turco is generating a placental "organoid," a reconstituted model of the placental tissue made from endometrial and early placental cells, that allows her to study how the placenta grows and what it secretes—things that, in Turco's words, "we still don't know anything about." These little endometrial organoids have the potential to lead not just to a better understanding of the dialogue between the endometrium and the placenta it helps grow, but to the creation of bespoke IVF regimes tailored to each patient's window of implantation and hormonal response.

With existing technologies, such as medication abortion, we are also gaining more control over our wombs. In the United States today, self-managed abortion, usually done with pills, now accounts for the majority of abortions. Knowledge is more accessible, thanks to the internet. People with underdiagnosed conditions such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome, or PCOS, find community and resources online. Young people openly discuss their periods on social media, and menstruation has become a larger part of the global health and gender equality conversation. Even the academy is taking menstruation seriously: In 2020, an academic publisher released *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*.

In spite of these advances, so much uterine knowledge remains buried. Among the frustratingly basic questions we still do not have answers to: Why do contractions start when they do, and why do women go into preterm labor? Why does the composition of menstrual effluent vary so widely among women, from 1 to 2 percent blood to 82 percent blood in others? Why are so many uterine events that could potentially be catastrophic for our species—miscarriage, an embryo's failure to implant, stillbirth, preeclampsia—still so poorly understood? What is a "hostile uterus" and an "incompetent cervix," and why can't we have more precise and less insulting names for those nebulous conditions? What is the actual connection between the womb and mental health, not just the one that Bohannon notes was believed by "otherwise intelligent Europeans" until a little over a century ago, that "the uterus drove women to huge, disruptive emotional outbursts"?

Why are so many uterine events that could be catastrophic for our species—miscarriage, stillbirth, preeclampsia—still so poorly understood?

AS SOME RESEARCHERS begin to answer those elemental questions, others are engaged in a multisited arms race to develop an artificial womb (also sometimes called partial ectogestation, or artificial amnion and placenta technology). In 2017, researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia published a breakthrough paper, "An extra-uterine system to physiologically support the extreme premature lamb," which detailed how their "Biobag" kept lambs at the human gestational equivalent of 23 to 24 weeks alive in a womblike, sealed environment filled with lab-made amniotic fluid; the fluid-filled design, critically, allows the lamb's lungs to follow a more normal path of development, as they would in utero, compared with current practice of being in an incubator and receiving oxygen via a ventilator. In September 2023, the FDA met to discuss how potential human trials of this technology might be carried out.

Similar projects are underway in Australia, Japan, and the Netherlands. All have as their stated aim to help premature infants born before 28 weeks, some, perhaps, as early as 22 to 24 weeks. Indeed, the impetus for the device came from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia research fellow Emily Partridge, M.D., Ph.D., who, according to a university press release, "experienced the challenges of caring for critically premature infants." This is undoubtedly noble and necessary work. Preterm birth is the number one cause of infant mortality worldwide; about 15 million babies are born preterm each year. But that is not necessarily how the devices will be used. One only has to look as far as the reproductive priorities of one of the richest men in the world to see how this might go awry. In January 2022, when Elon Musk tweeted about population collapse, several tech bros jumped in to propose synthetic wombs as a solution. "We should be investing in technology that makes having kids much faster/easier/cheaper/more accessible ... Synthetic wombs, etc," replied one investor and entrepreneur. Another, inadvertently channeling Shulamith Firestone, proposed, "Synthetic wombs would remove the high burden of pregnancy, significantly reducing the inequality" between women and men in their careers.

Those wombs are almost here. So what should we be thinking about as they creep toward reality? Horn, an academic who works at the intersection of law, policy, and reproduction, asks first-order questions about access to such a technology. Would this brand-new, cutting-edge, and presumably expensive solution be available in the nations where the greatest number of preterm births occur, such as India, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia, and where electricity is not always reliable?

Or among the communities within rich countries whose maternal and fetal health is most at risk?

Horn also dwells on the idea, floated by bioethicists for decades now, that artificial wombs will provide "the abortion solution," a way to end a pregnancy while maintaining the life of the fetus. But such a glib, "win-win" take on ectogenesis ignores many obvious questions that arise if one pauses for even a moment to think about the reality of this possibility. If the pregnant person doesn't want to be a parent—presumably why they are seeking to end the pregnancy in the first place—who will care for the surviving fetus? Is it truly permissible to require someone to submit to what will presumably be an invasive medical procedure to extract a fetus rather than take a few pills that can end the pregnancy? Does proposing artificial wombs as an abortion solution require, fundamentally, viewing women and people with wombs as incubators that can easily be swapped for a mechanical version? When I think about what could go potentially awry, one possible nightmare is someone like Elon Musk buying as many artificial wombs as he can afford (thank goodness he lost so many billions buying Twitter) and manufacturing a little army of children with his sperm in an effort to counter what he perceives as population decline, an idea not too far afield from what Jeffrey Epstein was planning, only Epstein proposed using actual women to gestate his babies at a Santa Fe, New Mexico, ranch. If there's one thread that runs through these worst-case scenarios, it is a lack of respect for wombs and the people who live with them—usually, but not always, women. Horn's conclusion, that artificial womb technology arriving in a racist, misogynistic, classist, and eugenicist world stands a high likelihood of being used toward racist, misogynistic, classist, and eugenicist ends, is hard to dispute.

And yet the prospect of uterine transplants for trans women, alongside other horizon technologies such as in vitro gametogenesis, or growing eggs and sperm from stem cells, may offer interesting liberatory possibilities. Not just in chipping away at one of the most obvious markers of biological sex difference—after all, it still takes male and female gametes to reproduce—but in the very quest to understand what makes a uterus work, and how it might function in someone assigned male at birth. The nuance and depth of understanding of the human reproductive and endocrine systems required to pull off such a feat would have benefits for everyone, womb or not.

But Horn maintains, and I agree, that asking the womb to be the site of reproductive liberation perhaps asks of it too much. After all, we can achieve much of what the artificial womb purports to solve with simpler, low-cost interventions: Better nutrition and access to quality prenatal care, for example, would go a long way toward improving outcomes in places like India, where short maternal stature and congenital and neonatal infections have been linked to or identified as causes of preterm birth. Cleaner air could help prevent nearly a million stillbirths per year. Social, economic, and environmental conditions, not a lack of artificial wombs, are behind the reluctance of many people to have children—as feminist author Lyz Lenz tweeted back to the tech bros, "Men would rather develop robot wombs than advocate for paid leave."

In other words, we could get a lot closer to reproductive equality with some very basic measures—addressing medical racism, having adequate nutrition and healthy air and water for everyone, and even just learning more about the basics of the human body, especially the long understudied female body (womb included), which could enlighten us about the health of all bodies. Horn proposes a vision of reproductive equality that emphasizes a broader equality, less narrowly focused on reproduction: "a future in which the weight of carrying a pregnancy is shared, not through automating gestation, but through the provision of resources, support and care." A future, in other words, that recalls our distant past, when our ancestors understood that knowledge, care, and respect for the womb—and its bearers—held the key to our species' implausible success. TNR

Anna Louie Sussman *is a journalist working on a book about reproduction.*

Play, 1966

by Victoria Chang

In 27 days, my depression has reorganized into grids. I now know that my heart is made of 1,376 grids. Trying to pull the rectangles together is no longer the objective. I used to make parts into wholes, force snowfall into lines. Is it possible to write down how we feel without betraying our feelings? Once I write the word *depression*, it is no longer my feeling. It is now on view for others to walk toward, lean in, and peer at. I have stared at this painting all morning and wondered whether it's gray or white, both, or neither. Whether the lines are really there or if they are the beginning of my leaving. Pessoa once wrote, *a real and true unity/Is a disease of our ideas.* Maybe we are small pieces without a whole, and there is no one self, just the old selves alongside the newer selves, and looking for a whole is depression. Which is why my depression on view isn't actually on a canvas at all but it is in the air and illegible.

Victoria Chang's *forthcoming book of poems is* With My Back to the World. *She is the Bourne Chair in Poetry at Georgia Tech and serves as the director of Poetry@Tech.*

Self Evidence

Lucy Sante pieces together a lifetime of writings, photos, and memories in the story of her transition.

By Lidija Haas

NO GENRE TESTS the delicate trust between author and reader like memoir. It is unavoidably provocative, a case study of the fragile magic act that all creative writing entails: claiming authority to tell the truth and make the past hold still, continually raising the question of how its author-subject should have found time to undergo experiences worth reading about and then to juice and distill and rearrange them for us. What could sound more boring, after all, than the true history of a serious writer of prose—especially nonfiction of the burnished, richly detailed, heavily researched kind—given all the color and incident and conflict presumably foregone during hours and years squirreling at a desk, not to mention the long stretches of youthful bookish loneliness that must form such writers in the first place? No wonder memoir still so often follows the line indicated by Augustine's *Confessions,* privileging the inner life, and hinging on an epiphanic moment through which its course is altered and reread.

Twenty-six years ago, in her first memoir, *The Factory of Facts,* Lucy Sante pointedly disdained this approach. Investigating how a self is forged from the surrounding culture and history, that book opens with a delightful set of variations on the same life story: Each successive paragraph begins from the same point—the author's birth in 1954 as the only child of working-class parents in Verviers, Belgium—but each version takes a fanciful hairpin turn. The author moves to a luxurious villa in the Belgian Congo right before independence; is starved, beaten, and relegated to a series of foster homes after dad is removed by the FBI; becomes a competitive cyclist; a boarding school arsonist; an international beach-bum hedonist; a secretary to the papal nuncio in El Salvador. The rest of the book treats Sante's actual background with the playfulness, imaginative force, and ferocious close reading that have characterized her work from *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (1991) to *Nineteen Reservoirs: On Their Creation and the Promise of Water for New York City* (2022). The effect is an elegant tracing around the author's interior, without delving too far in.

It would seem that Sante has since tired of such formalized reticence. Her new book, *I Heard Her Call My Name: A Memoir of Transition,* entwines a sped-up, more or less chronological version of her life story with a markedly direct account of her coming to consciousness as a transgender woman at the age of 66. She undergoes the epiphany while using FaceApp: Applying a gender-swap filter to a selfie, she recognizes the woman in the new picture—a self undeniably hers. She starts to allow in thoughts and longings she had energetically repressed for some 60 years, confronting vaulted memories from childhood onward as she runs photographs from each era through the filter, feeling in every case the same jolt of recognition. There she is, only "how much more relaxed she looked": "I was having a much better time as a girl in that parallel life."

The transfigured snapshots "managed to force open a door" in her subconscious, "one festooned with padlocks and wax seals and warning signs in nineteen languages." The evasiveness of *The Factory of Facts* now appears glaring to her, the attempt "to absent myself from the story" a defensive move: She had told herself that rendering her own emotions would "reduce and standardize the narrative." She had "thought this demurral was a measure of my seriousness."

This brief self-reassessment exemplifies the subtle tragicomedy Sante draws from one of the new book's central questions: how she can have dedicated the better part of a lifetime to analyzing the culture around her—its prehistories, its unarchived detritus, its collective mythologies—rescuing so much of what she loved from oblivion or nostalgic distortion, without ever uncovering this fundamental truth about herself. It's not just the sheer irony of a writer having congratulated herself on the feat of repression that produced an entire memoir without revealing anything personal. Sante is also offering a casually self-lacerating sketch of that familiar persona, the cooler-than-thou male aesthete-intellectual who cares for large social forces, smaller cultural ephemera, and not much between. Alongside Sante's experiences navigating the new social and emotional territory that comes with acknowledging her gender, *I Heard Her Call My Name* explores other kinds of transition, and transitional objects—it's about taste, in art and music and crushes and books and clothes, and the ways it can build and sustain or obscure a self.

TASTE, AS A mode of self-definition, rebellion, belonging, provides the thread for Sante's biography as she recounts it here, from a sheltered but unsettled childhood between Belgium and New Jersey, to the New York of the '70s and '80s—working at the Strand and *The New York Review of Books,* drunkenly dancing to Billie Holiday records at Elizabeth Hardwick's apartment, reveling downtown at the Mudd Club and losing half the day to heroin or pills (though by the mid-'80s everyone was in recovery, serving seltzer-and-cranberry Transfusions at their gatherings), hanging out with Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, with Nan Goldin and Jim Jarmusch and Jean-Michel Basquiat—to making her name as a writer and retreating somewhat into family life upstate.

Though she seems to have felt alien everywhere she went, Sante established herself as an insider, always in the know. That male connoisseur character was a role she took such pains to develop and inhabit over the decades that now and then

she overdid it—hence, she notes, being surprised and ashamed when a reviewer pointed out that *Kill All Your Darlings,* which collected 15 years' worth of pieces on writers, artists, and musicians, omitted any serious treatment of a woman. While many women artists had been "of critical importance to me," she writes, she'd avoided considering them in print because she "had unconsciously subscribed to the dick-matching ethos" in which "men's work was serious, a life-or-death struggle to reach the top," while women's was "asterisked, italicized, special-categoried, exceptions made for, not entered in the main competition."

You can even detect a hint of the same pose in a 2003 afterword to *Low Life,* in which, recalling her neighborhood of the late '70s on Broadway and 101st, she tempered outsider kinship and solidarity with careful if self-deprecating detachment:

> a rather eerie daily entertainment
> in the warmer months was
> provided by a group of middle-aged
> transvestites who would lean against
> parked cars in their minidresses
> and bouffants and issue forth perfect,
> obviously church-trained four-part
> doo-wop harmonies.... For them,
> as for the majority of the people on
> the street—including, so we liked
> to think, us—New York City was
> the only imaginable home, the
> only place that posted no outer limit
> on appearance and behavior.

It's striking now how much inner confinement (that parenthetical "including, so we liked to think, us") accompanied Sante's seekings of those freer edges of culture.

Sante takes pains to expose the parts of this persona that survived her transition, owning up to bouts of snobbery toward trans women who wear polyester or write their online confessions in "some script font with no paragraph breaks and maybe no capital letters" or choose cliché background music for their transformation videos. She seems to have had these feelings almost from the start of her awareness that she was a girl, around the age of nine. She remembers associating the desire to change gender with a perversion, embarrassing on an aesthetic level above all—men in ladies' underwear, French maid or nurses' uniforms, "pinafores and pigtails": "There was nothing wrong with any of that of course, nobody got hurt, but it was all just so limited, so superficial, so cheap, so squalid. What made me different—because I always had to be different—was that I actually wanted to *be* a girl, not just look or act like one." She writes near the end of *I Heard Her Call My Name* that, in matters of gender presentation, "I'm not really very concerned with what you might call authenticity, at least these days. I'm more preoccupied with taste, because taste has always been the way I demonstrate that I'm as valid as anyone else."

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLA CHAPDELAINE

Lucy Sante at her home in Kingston, New York

Therein lies a clue to the mystery of how Sante's vocation as a writer did so little to help her answer that other call invoked in the book's title. Writing was no more a free space for play and self-expression than gender is. She represents her life as a fraught, embattled adventure of self-fashioning, played out on the page as much as anywhere else. To write was to invite severe scrutiny, as she learned during the era when her fervently Catholic mother searched her "room on any pretext and read every bit of writing she found there," and when, aged 14, she began unsuccessfully submitting to magazines, signing herself *Mr. Luc Sante* "so they'd know I was both male and adult." She recalls how much of her adulthood was spent shoring up a pose, "trying at all times to mount a production titled *Luc*": "I curated my surroundings as a kind of rebus of cultural signs, displaying faceup those items that would send a message about my judgment and my possession of secret knowledge," she writes. "Barring grocery lists, I never wrote anything down that I would have been unwilling to have published."

In a certain sense, Sante was stuck living the wrong life—the one she felt capable of making at the time out of what she was given. Maintaining the "production titled *Luc*" evidently required a lot of energy, yet that process formed her, and she has few real illusions about what might have been possible without it. She notes, "I naturally regret my lost girlhood, yearn hopelessly for it, although I'm drawn up short when I actually imagine what being my parents' daughter would have been like." Among other things, it would have precluded the scholarship to a New York City Jesuit high school that provided an initial escape from home. "Would I have had to get married to get away from them?"

Sante catalogs in detail the anxious work undertaken by a perennial outsider, figuring out how to be an American, a man, a sophisticate, a woman, a trans person—all the minute codes of dress, imagery, language, mood, tone. The insights this book yields into gender dysphoria and transition are also always applied to other kinds of discomfort, yearning, exploration. There is an almost old-fashioned quality to

Sante's predicament—the book offers some of the strange virtues of a previous generation of trans memoir, such as Jan Morris's 1974 *Conundrum,* which situates its author as perforce the lone questing heroine of an epic, surveying a starkly binary landscape that has altered considerably in the years since. Of course, Sante is in a position to describe witnessing and belatedly participating in that transformation, discovering a new world of trans literature and collective life that she'd somehow contrived to know little about until her "egg cracked."

BY SANTE'S USUAL standards, this book feels disarmingly frank. She writes about the truth, and announces, "I am the person I feared most of my life." She reproduces, apparently verbatim, the coming-out email she sent to friends and acquaintances in February 2021 and later adapted for a viral essay in *Vanity Fair.* She also includes the elaborate retraction she composed two weeks later in a panic but didn't send, and the more honest compromise email she settled on in mid-March. I say verbatim because she goes so far as to share specific edits she incorporated to the original text, such as the suggestion of a trans woman she barely knew that she amend "I trembled from my shoulders to my crotch," substituting for *crotch* "that Victorian euphemism, 'belly.'"

The use of these emails might at first give an impression of unfiltered intimacy, not so much because they began as nominally private communications, but because they allow us to witness Sante's epiphany in close to real time, amid the "pink cloud" of early transition. The urgent clarion style of the first email, in particular, conveys the force of her relief and euphoria. But there is nothing artless here. Even the book's seemingly simple structure, interspersing sections on Sante's childhood, coming of age as a writer, midlife, with those on each phase of her transition so far, creates eerily repetitive overlaps and echoes and contradictions—double takes that put the reader through some approximation of the hesitancy and impatience and grandiosity and self-loathing, the halting, confused, frustrating, humbling experience of Sante's change.

She wrestles with a sense of not deserving to be among the women she admires, understanding gender as a spectrum yet also wanting "the emotional range of a woman," and the reflexively self-punishing reluctance to come out to her online chat group because of how unconditionally supportive they were likely to be—"like jumping out of the window into a tub of marshmallows." (And she notes the far more troubled reactions she received from supposedly cis men, including a significant number who told her they had the same feelings but planned never to act on them.) She depicts the struggle of a habitually binary-thinking person who doesn't fit into her own schema. Like Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick,* this is in part an epistolary memoir that captures a fervid love affair with oneself, but like that book it also treats its material with the retrospective zeal and precision of a detective.

The self-portrait Sante draws is in fact much more elliptical than it first appears—and not only because, one senses, of the desire to shield some of the people who have shared her life. The book is illustrated with a series of images of Sante as a girl and woman, from childhood to the present, many created by feeding old photos into the app. They are a painfully moving testament to the life she didn't get to have, and their immediacy draws attention to the relative restraint of the text around them. Her approach here is at times reminiscent of the Didion of *The Year of Magical Thinking,* examining from the outside the workings of her own mind in extremis. Ruefully recalling the remark of someone who hoped transition might inaugurate a new openness in her writing, Sante declares herself an incurable emotional "minimalist."

WHAT FEELS MOST poignant is the clear continuity with Sante's earlier work. Just as in *Low Life* and *The Other Paris* she used partial maps and letters and pamphlets found in flea markets to conjure the "fugitive lyricism" once found in the impoverished underbellies of cities, in *I Heard Her Call My Name* she draws on a seductively incomplete archive, the material evidence of her own life. As well as those emails and photographs, there are notebook entries; the death certificate of a would-have-been older sister, Marie-Luce, whose stillbirth haunted Sante's fraught relationship with her mother; the newspaper caption announcing her the winner of a local school prize that, thanks to a misprint, marked the public appearance of "Lucy Sante" several decades avant la lettre; and of course her published works.

She marvels at the imagery that slipped by her "internal censor" in a prose poem she wrote in 1978. Subjected to a close reading, it's a vision of the "alchemical transformation from male to female.... And is that a clitoris in the last sentence?" But the key, and characteristic, challenge she sets herself is to dig up and parse the evidence that never made it into any concrete form, the stuff of fantasy and rumination that might by now feel untraceable, a "flood of matter—knowledge, speculation, dreams—that had been confined so long it had fermented and become hallucinogenic." She tracks down the esoteric reading she did in secret, getting rid of the books and clearing her browser history afterward. Memory, too, she treats like a physical archive to be explored and interpreted:

> Every time I'd go to confession
> I'd confess the same two sins:
> disobedience and lying. That
> dates my trouble with my parents
> back to an early age, because I
> don't remember ever confessing
> to anything else, and just the
> appearance of the word *disobedience*
> sets off an audio clip in my head of
> shouting and screaming.

All those habits of mind, the way Sante fashions her sentences and the parallel accretive and analytic methods she has developed over the decades to approach her subject matter, searching out a path through influences and desires and revulsions, are, it turns out, the closest thing to a self that can be examined and shared—in silhouette. Literary style, like gender expression, is always part posturing or "playacting," part aspiration, and by the same token discloses something more elusive and resonant, being that place where the conscious and unconscious meet. TNR

I Heard Her Call My Name: A Memoir of Transition
by Lucy Sante
Penguin Press, 240 pp., $27.00

Lidija Haas *is an editor at* The Paris Review.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOAN YANG

PUBLIC DOMAIN (X2); GETTY (2X)

Secret History

Ed Park's ingenious, conspiracy-laced Korean American epic

By Alexander Chee

KOREAN HISTORY IS not usually taught in schools here in the United States. We learn it in other ways: through our family and friends; through Korean school programs, often run through evangelical and Roman Catholic churches and their summer programs; through undergraduate classes in East Asian studies and Asian American studies; and through the Korean and Korean American fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and memoirs where we learn everything our families and teachers won't or can't tell us. In my own reading life, I can trace a line from an aunt who gave me an anthology of contemporary Korean women's fiction in translation, *Words of Farewell,* at the end of a 1989 visit to Korea, to today and the act of writing this review.

We become amateur historians of a kind, each with our own private and continually revised sense of the country, the culture, and our relationship to it. We do so in the aftermath of the violent restructuring of the country and its culture through the Korean War, which divided Korea into its current incarnations, North and South, and before that, the 35-year colonization of Korea by the Japanese, during which time they sought to erase Korean culture and language.

And if it is difficult to discover Korean history in America, it is as hard or harder to locate Korean American history. And so any Korean American writer writes across some enormous gulfs when describing Korean American experiences like transracial adoption, immigration, and assimilation, reverse migration, and which forms of political and social repression inside postwar Korea our families sought to escape, producing very different reasons to emigrate—and thus, very different treatments in literature.

Few Korean American fiction writers if any have described the struggle of the Korean Provisional Government, a Korean resistance effort against the Japanese occupation that set itself up in 1919, eventually becoming a government in exile in Shanghai and producing South Korea's controversial first president, Syngman Rhee. And none that I can think of has threaded together all of this history into the world-building of their novel—the country before its division into the North and the South and after, the diaspora in the United States and also China—until now.

Ed Park's brilliant new novel, *Same Bed Different Dreams,* takes its title from the English translation of a popular saying in Korea, which invokes the way two people in a marriage or a family might share a life but have very different aims for that life—a perfect metaphor, it turns out, for the differences and similarities in Korean diasporic identities. The novel's first three chapters introduce three very different narratives that gradually reveal themselves to be the different parts to a single narrative as it approaches the end. The central premise is bold: What if the Korean Provisional Government in exile still existed, now a secretive and mysterious organization continuing past its apparent usefulness, a shadow government that was, like the anonymous company in Park's first novel, *Personal Days,* both succeeding and falling apart at the same time? What if the real mission of that government was still a unified Korea?

Park is not writing a historical novel, hoping to dramatize some episode or series of episodes in the past. He is building an alternate history of Korea and its relationship to the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, telling a story by mining and transforming the historical record. And it begins with a question that returns again and again, until it is almost like a chant in a protest: *What is history?*

AS A NOVELIST, Ed Park did not seem so concerned with history, at first. His debut, *Personal Days* (2008), was a wry and piercing office novel that captured the ambient paranoia in the lives of co-workers at an anonymous American company, hanging on to their positions as employees are fired and laid off, in a world bounded by the Good Starbucks and the Bad Starbucks, and shaped by phrases like *Help me help you* and *The evaluations would remain anonymous*. The first section of the novel uses a first-person plural narrator to unforgettable effect, and a 48-page, single-sentence final chapter is written as an email and hints at the ambition and scale of the art to come.

Same Bed Different Dreams begins inside another unnamed, unnerving company. The first chapter's enigmatic title, "2333: The Scholars (2016)," is slippery—are we in a far-flung future or the near past? The first sentence, "What is history?" is the topic of an all-hands meeting where three scholars have been invited as guest speakers, to debate the question in front of the closed corporate audience, TED talk–style. The first speaker insists that, in an era of advertiser-driven surveillance meant to build your sales algorithm, we must return to "Day Zero," and only "by going off the grid can one enter true history." The second speaker, that first speaker's former adviser, is an academic who offers this anecdote as his answer: He had taken a note for his monograph on the true nature of history, sure he'd arrived at a "shattering insight" as a conclusion; but the note, when he found it again, had been destroyed, "a summer storm had reduced it to a blank white scrap." The third and last speaker seizes on this as a metaphor. "What is history, you ask? A message from a genius, ruined by the rain."

"They speak to be quoted," Park tells us—we could be anywhere in the world along the billionaire ideas festival circuit. Footage of a sleeping colleague is posted to a nameless social media forum where it goes viral, becomes a meme, an internet folk legend. "This fading, drooling figure in the crowd is part of history, too, even if the official transcript omits the incident."

On first reading, I thought of this section as a prologue, but as the novel progresses, we find a series of chapters whose titles are all marked "2333" up front, and which, we learn, describe the life and works of a Black writer and Korean War veteran named Parker Jotter, who barely survived crashing his F-86 Sabre jet in North Korea in 1952.

Same Bed Different Dreams
by Ed Park
Random House,
544 pp., $30.00

Jotter's memory of the day of his capture begins with him on a dawn patrol near the border of China, where he sees "a strange aircraft, a huge disk peaking at the center like a coolie hat … rewriting the air as it moved." He wakes up in a North Korean prison cell with a soldier named Ko Pangu. KPG, as his initials read on the lighter he leaves behind for Parker. And which he brings home from Korea.

After the encounter with the UFO, Jotter is possessed by a feeling he calls "the Freak," during which he types up the novels in the 2333 series. The Freak is a "message, not in words but pulses, pauses, intimations…." Jotter will include the UFO encounter in each of his novels with the repetitive intensity of a vigil, waiting for the next signal. His story is soon a rich series of love letters to pulp science-fiction novels from the twentieth century; to Buffalo, New York; and to those conspiracy theorists ground down by America and America's wars and yet somehow still full of hope that somewhere, someone cares enough to read what they're hiding in code and figure it out.

THE SECOND CHAPTER leaves behind the high-concept science fiction of the first, and we enter an entirely different story stylistically, set in another world and time and with another set of fonts. The man who will turn out to be the novel's main character, Soon Sheen, is Park's most likely alter ego in the sort of autofiction he is satirizing in these sections. Like Park, he is a Korean American who grew up in Buffalo (as did Parker Jotter), and we could say he is what Ed Park might have become if he had never become Ed Park: Sheen is a former short story writer living out his literary afterlife in a town named Dogskill in upstate New York and working at an amorphous tech company called GLOAT, where none of the employees really knows what the name means or stands for. His daughter is named Story, suggesting that he is at least the parent of a Story if not a writer of stories, and his dog is named Sprout—a nod, I think, to the villainous boss of the same name in *Personal Days*. Sheen's entire world is something of a loving joke about the life and work of Ed Park, even as it is also a poignant reflection on those who give up on the writing life.

Sheen arrives at a Koreatown restaurant in New York called The Admiral Yi for a night of drinking that will change his life. A night in a Koreatown restaurant, a tilt-a-whirl of Asian American literary fame, ambition, and cultural anxiety with Korean barbecue smoke on the inside and cigarettes on the sidewalk. All around him is a mix of the new and old guards of this scene, with everyone jostling uncertainly and alternating between feeling like you belong in the good way and feeling like you belong in the bad way.

His college friend, Tanner Slow, now the publisher of the indie Slow Press, is throwing this party in honor of his new author, a bad-boy, avant-garde Korean writer named Cho Eujin, and he has invited exactly the New York City Asian American literati Sheen fears will show up. Soon he is hugging his old friend Monk Zingapan, a Filipino writer he knows from their time together at a culture magazine named *N.Y. Whip;* Yuka Tsujimoto, an ex-girlfriend from college, now an award-winning playwright; Padraig Kong, the rakish director of the Asian American Watchdog and Creative Writers' Association, "commonly pronounced 'Awkward'"; Loa Ding, a Hawaiian Asian American tastemaker who once interviewed him as a teen for her Asian diasporic culture zine and calls Sheen "Footnote," her way to remind him that that is his fate if he never publishes again; and Daisy Oh, Cho Eujin's translator, a superfan of Sheen's as he discovers, to his dismay, when she slaps his back after being introduced and says, "Dude, I've read your book five times."

Sheen learns Cho Eujin has been rebranded by his publishing house on the advice of Loa as Echo, preparing him for American and international audiences with his newly translated book, *The Sins*, a novel in three novels. Daisy tells him about another novel Echo is working on, one he might never finish, she says, about the secret history of Korea. The excerpt published in a Korean journal drove readers to fear for their sanity. That novel? That one is called *Same*

Bed, Different Dreams. Almost the same title, yes, as this one, except for the comma.

Soon everyone is playing a game called Juryungu, a drinking game with dice, at the insistence of the South Korean consul general who has sponsored Echo's trip. The die has 14 sides, not all of them even, each marked with a different Chinese character, as it dates to before the invention of hangul, the Korean alphabet, as Echo confidently declares. There are six squares, eight triangles, and after rounds that involve *Dance without a tune* and *Drink three glasses of wine,* Sheen ends up with *Reveal secret things*. We don't see his answer. Instead, it becomes what Sheen does for the rest of the novel.

On the train home afterward, Sheen pulls the shreds of his self-respect and purpose around him. He finds what he believes is the copy of *The Sins* someone gave him at the party. But it is *Same Bed, Different Dreams,* mysteriously finished and translated. Five communal dreams described in a cool and omniscient point of view, as if written by a committee. Sheen begins reading; soon, he finds, "the book drew me in, made me question which things were real and which invented.... I kept going, eyes gasping, as line by line Echo's world replaced my own."

Thus do we turn the page, and the next chapter begins, with another new font,

> SAME BED, DIFFERENT DREAMS
> BEING A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE
> KOREAN PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
>
> DREAM ONE
> 1905–1937

WE ENTER DREAM ONE with a doubled consciousness, reading as ourselves but also as Sheen reading the novel. The first dream is divided into numbered sections, 1 through 33. It describes the stories of the Korean Provisional Government's founding. The characters here are well-known to Koreans—such as Syngman Rhee and the independence activist Thomas Ahn, Emperor Kojong and the poet Yi Sang—but this is a kind of dreamscape version of this group and this history, openly acknowledged as such.

In these sections, the tone is remote, omniscient, like reading intelligence reports on some of the gravest betrayals in Korean history. Here we have the vicious murder of Queen Min, beheaded by assassins sent by the Japanese government, her corpse burned after her death, and the Taft-Katsura agreement that Theodore Roosevelt made in 1905, giving Korea to Japan in order to "modernize" it (yes, this meant "colonize it")—an effort to appease an increasingly powerful Japan, to forestall and maybe even prevent the eventual threat Japan would pose to the United States. Korea was known for many years as the Hermit Kingdom, and Koreans set fire to American trading ships that reached its shores, as Park notes. And by the end of this third chapter, we see this may have been the correct response.

The following chapters cycle between these three stories, and the echoes across chapters illuminate obscure characters whose names change or mutate, characters at times revealed to have other older or newer identities. Eventually, we get Parker Jotter's origin story, and we learn that the novel's opening was most likely a scene from one of Jotter's novels, 70 pages before we meet him. This cat's cradle structure is hard to describe without spoiling the book, but one of the pleasures here is the way Park will include material like this that becomes significant later, leaving a seemingly invisible trail that later lights up like a string leading back across the dark. This is a novel with the thorough weave of a video game where all of the NPCs become important somehow. A game no one might ever design except maybe, just maybe, Parker Jotter.

It's not just that you're being told secret knowledge, but you're being admitted to a secret circle. The true and the fictional blend, as the different parallel fictions do, until the novel has the feeling of a production by one of those traveling Shakespeare companies with just a few actors who take on all of the many different roles—but on a vast world-altering scale.

WHAT IS HISTORY? The question vanishes for a while before returning, a leitmotif at first and then a central obsession. You may notice pieces are missing from the real history of this struggle that you may almost want to insert here. But the novel isn't meant to be taken as a history; it is meant to challenge American and Korean and Korean American readers with what they think they know about their country, whatever they think that is. When Park asks as his novel begins, "What is history?" he could as easily ask, *What is history to you?*

This elusive and labyrinthine vision feels right even as it feels like a trespass, but a trespass on what, I would be hard-pressed to say. It is not quite accurate to describe *Same Bed Different Dreams* as a novel about Korean history, since so much of it is set in America and is about America. Some of its most tantalizing moments are drawn from little-known episodes in this joint history, stories like Marilyn Monroe's visit to Korea to perform for the USO during the war, or Ronald Reagan's starring role in the 1954 film *Prisoner of War* as an agent undercover at a North Korean reeducation camp, "pretending to renounce America and embrace communism." Much of what feels the strangest in the novel turns out to be true, if you look it up.

Parker Jotter becomes the author of the series of unsuccessful science-fiction novels that eventually achieve cult success thanks to the efforts of Daisy Oh and Loa Ding, well before their meetings with Cho Eujin. We're in both Jotter's future and Sheen's past now. Jotter's novels make their way into the Korean Provisional Government's dream chapters as well. By the time we reach the discovery of Jotter's archives, including a guide to writing called *Wildwording,* you may or may not remember this is the same name as the institution that granted tenure to Soon Sheen's friend Monk Zingapan, mentioned back in the second chapter. GLOAT might even be the company having the all-hands meeting in Chapter 1, or is it an entity named Harmony Holdings? Are they the same? The cat's cradle becomes a corset. What does it all mean?

Is it possible that Park's novel is a device meant to aid in the reunification of Korea by recruiting every reader into his dream state version of the Korean Provisional Government? Maybe. Or does it just describe that reunification as it is already happening? Are we all living in a simulation controlled by Koreans and Korean Americans, intent on rescuing their country? It may be that I can't tell you, and even if I did, you wouldn't believe me. And what country would that be, anyway? Only time will tell. You'll just have to read the novel to figure it out. It's an attempt to inscribe a future wholeness, a single unified Korea, even if the path to that goal there doesn't seem clear or even possible.

Park's novel appeared in the fall amid an unprecedented wave of Korean American fiction in 2023, at least 35 titles. If that isn't the work of the Korean Provisional Government, I don't know what is. TNR

Alexander Chee's *latest novel is* The Queen of the Night. *He is a contributing editor to* The New Republic.

Mean Streets

How the suburbs created the war on drugs

By Claire Potter

IN 1956, Jane Tompkins of Maplewood, New Jersey, waged her own war on drugs. Tompkins, who was then the state director of the New Jersey Commission on Narcotic Control, had a difficult job. As she raised the alarm about drugs, she had to persuade the white voters who had moved to the safety of the suburbs that their children were in danger. Although Maplewood was a "first class suburban area," she acknowledged, she warned that drug users and dealers—members of "economically and socially deprived minority groups," nurtured in deteriorating cities—could travel to upscale communities to commit crimes.

The answer? A law like one that had just been adopted in Ohio, where civic groups had banded together to protect the suburbs and suburban children from urban drug pushers. New Jersey's Democratic Governor Robert Meyner saw the flaw in these tough laws—that white youth, temporarily corrupted by outsiders, could easily end up in the prison system—and Jane Tompkins's campaign failed. But it highlights an important, and often overlooked, aspect of America's decades-long war on drugs. Although many works on the subject focus, rightly, on its devastating effects on cities and particularly on communities of color, these harsh policies were a phenomenon of suburbanization.

Matthew Lassiter's *The Suburban Crisis* is a history of the war on drugs that plays out in ranch houses, high school parking lots, and courtrooms from Shaker Heights, to Westchester, to Orange County. Lassiter's last book examined the silent majority in the Sun Belt, and he is one of several authors who have in recent years paid close attention to the outsize political power of the suburbs, from Lily Geismer's 2014 study of Boston suburbs, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party,* to Willow Lung-Amam's *Trespassers?: Asian Americans and the Battle for Suburbia*. The panic over drug use after World War II was crafted, Lassiter argues, to recruit and serve middle-class Americans who had fled the cities for the good schools and safe streets of the suburbs. Most importantly, he places at the center of this story the policing of marijuana—the drug to which suburban teens had the easiest access.

Rather than aiming to limit the harmful effects of the most addictive and potential deadly substances, Lassiter proposes, the war on drugs focused relentlessly on protecting white youth from the fictional perils of cannabis. That many of these drug warriors were sincere in their beliefs hardly matters, for these campaigns didn't curtail drug use. Instead, they functioned first and foremost to give white suburban voters a sense of security, and to lay blame for a range of social dysfunction on outsiders and urban communities of color. And so, in order to understand the twisted logic and resultant failures of these policies, he argues, we have to look at the aspirations and anxieties of America's white suburbs.

ALTHOUGH THE TERM "war on drugs" dates to the Nixon era, America's drug war has a long prehistory. An important precedent was the criminalization of alcohol from 1920 to 1933. Like the war on drugs, Prohibition began with local and state legislation and reformers who saw alcohol abuse as a working-class moral failing. As in later political campaigns to pass harsh drug laws, Prohibition was linked to middle-class women establishing their own political authority, both in the pre- and post-suffrage eras. And as in later policing, enforcement was uneven and corrupt. Poorly trained agents of the newly created Bureau of Prohibition established an important pattern, turning a blind eye toward middle-class and wealthy consumers, who drank in their homes and in private clubs, while conducting often lethal raids against rural moonshiners and storefront dealers.

Even as Prohibition failed, President Herbert Hoover stubbornly applied the same approach to the trade in narcotics, which soon became a robust source of income for organized crime, as bootlegging had been. In June 1930, Hoover appointed former railroad detective and Prohibition agent Harry Anslinger commissioner of a new Federal Bureau of Narcotics. This as yet feeble government agency became the foundation for what we know today as the Drug Enforcement Administration, and operated on the same principle as Prohibition. It controlled and criminalized narcotics and marijuana by requiring federal tax stamps on imports and sales. In other words, drugs themselves were not illegal or even more than loosely controlled in the United States, until much later.

The move toward tougher, more punitive policy would be powered by grassroots activists, who had state and local laws in their sights. Anxieties about drug-addled juvenile delinquents and the porous Mexican border made drugs a major preoccupation of suburban Californians by the mid-1950s. In April 1950, Los Angeles newspapers began to report on "wolf gangs" and "rat packs" of Mexican American youths, smuggling drugs and spreading lawlessness. A prominent narcotics prevention group warned of dealing at "bowling alleys, drive-in restaurants, malt shops, and pool halls," Lassiter writes. Threats to suburban conformity lurked all around. Articles in popular magazines and much-discussed movies

ILLUSTRATION BY KATIE MARTIN

like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) warned that thrill-seeking behaviors—petting, drinking, and sneaking off to jazz and rock and roll clubs—could escalate into life-threatening criminal acts. The children suburban parents had rescued from deindustrializing cities, moviemakers warned, were inexplicably alienated, bored, and angry. And increasingly, smoking pot seemed to accompany these teenage antics.

In California, a range of actors, from Republican Governors Earl Warren and Goodwin Knight to the California Federation of Women's Clubs and the California Congress of Parents and Teachers, mobilized to implement tougher state penalties for the possession and sale of cannabis and institute a school-based drug awareness curriculum in 1951. In 1958, California Attorney General Pat Brown (who, not coincidentally, would go on to become the governor of California the following year) launched a narcotics awareness campaign, directly appealing to white middle-class parents. A year earlier, the California Citizens' Advisory Committee on Crime Prevention had presented him with a report that recommended distinguishing between "hard core incorrigibles" and "those who would reasonably profit from rehabilitative treatment." In Washington, in the 1955 to 1956 term, the Senate established a committee to study the drug problem. A change in the law also doubled penalties on the sale and possession of heroin and marijuana, implicitly categorizing the two substances as equally dangerous and addictive.

The Suburban Crisis: White America and the War on Drugs
by Matthew D. Lassiter
Princeton University Press, 680 pp., $39.95

A sensationalist press added to parents' fears. In 1965, *Life* magazine profiled a young, white couple who had fallen from their racial and class privilege through drug use. Controlled by her addiction to hard drugs and living in "teeming slums" (code for poor, Black neighborhoods), Karen had once been part of a Midwestern family. Now, she "worked as a prostitute to pay for their dope, and expected to die on the streets." Karen's boyfriend, John, as Lassiter writes, "started smoking marijuana at age thirteen, supported his smack habit with petty theft, and occasionally operated as a 'junkie pusher'" (a term that described an addict who sold, not to exploit others, but to support his own habit). In this framing, drugs represented an explicitly *racial* danger, a stubborn, residual connection to the ethnic neighborhoods and poverty that white suburbanites believed they had left behind and that now, they believed, were coming for them.

Amid this mix of anxiety and animosity, the stage was set for ever-harsher policies

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that would deepen racial inequality and offer little help to those affected by actual problems with drug use.

A STARK DIVIDE between the treatment of white middle-class kids and working-class people of color charged with drug offenses had already begun to emerge in the Anslinger era, which ended in 1962. Local and state laws gave judges broad sentencing discretion, and white offenders, seen as victims who required treatment and care, rarely received the harshest punishments. In overwhelmingly white Nassau County, New York, between 1967 and 1971, 66 percent of those arrested had their cases dismissed outright, 17 percent were sentenced to probation, and only 6 percent to confinement. Low-level marijuana arrests were often reduced to a public intoxication charge, "a simple violation that did not leave a criminal record."

Across the country, courts "almost always released college-bound youth to the custody of their parents," Lassiter writes, preferring to recommend "internal family discipline and often private psychiatric counseling." Suburban judges downgraded white teens' violation of felony drug laws to misdemeanors, agreed to dismiss charges in exchange for therapy, and could even erase the record of an arrest that might hinder admission to college. Authorities were open about why: White, suburban teens were not criminal by nature; they were good kids, from good families, who had only gotten caught up in illegal activity by accident.

Young people of color, meanwhile, did not benefit from the same lenience. As Lassiter shows in two graphs compiling "racial characteristics and total number of boys referred to the probation department for delinquent acts" in California and Los Angeles County, youth contacts with the police and the justice system skyrocketed under enhanced enforcement between 1954 and 1964, with young men of color disproportionately affected. During this period, the share of Black teens under confinement or court supervision in Los Angeles County rose by 9 percent, while the share of white teens dropped by 6 percent. Lassiter points to egregious sentences, such as the 40-year prison term handed to Samuel Williams, an African American man who had sold a single joint to a 16-year-old white teen who had solicited him in a Seattle restaurant in 1967.

PERHAPS IT IS no accident, given California's early and aggressive posture on drugs, that it was a career politician from the state who discerned that he could ride to the White House on suburban fear. Making his second run at the presidency in 1968, Richard Nixon promised a crackdown on drugs but also signaled that his policies would not be aimed at the children of white suburbanites. At a campaign rally in conservative Anaheim, outside of Los Angeles, the candidate "pledged to stop marijuana and heroin importers at the border, arrest the drug traffickers, and rehabilitate their youthful victims."

Nixon's promise resonated with white suburban parents nationwide; Democrats across the nation crossed party lines to vote for him, particularly in the South where white suburbanites were removing their children from public school rather than have them mingle with Black students. As president, Nixon delivered on his pledge by building up a more robust and extensive machinery for cracking down on drugs. The 1970 Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act created the schedule system, placing marijuana in the same category as LSD and heroin.

Liberal Democrats in Congress knew what their suburban constituents wanted. They flocked to empower a war on drugs that has never ended—and never succeeded. Borrowing a phrase from FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, Nixon labeled narcotics "public enemy number one" and appointed psychiatrist Jerome Jaffe the first "drug czar." On the campaign trail in 1972, Nixon contrasted his own "tough on crime" stance to that of his Democratic opponent, South Dakota Senator George McGovern, a darling of a New Left who had vowed to decriminalize but not legalize marijuana. Once reelected, Nixon moved federal anti-drug operations into a new, stand-alone federal agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration.

By the time he resigned under threat of impeachment in 1974, Nixon had succeeded in establishing a potent political strategy: Tough drug policies could mobilize suburban parents and serve as a route to the presidency for Republicans. While Nixon fought Congress's Watergate investigation, laws at the state level intensified as other candidates looked ahead to 1976.

One of these aspirants was New York's Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal who saw a path to win over voters to his right by promoting a package of anti-drug laws that were even harsher than Nixon's. A chart issued by New York state in 1973, headlined "See how this new law affects you," describes four classes of felony

The Bronze Arms

by Richie Hofmann

Love is a memory now, you said.
Most of the bronzes have been melted down
and made into other bronzes,
coins, weapons—

Love is a memory now,
you said to me.
If antiquity can survive, love can too.

But it must be forceful.

Richie Hofmann *is the author, most recently, of* A Hundred Lovers.

charges for narcotics sale and possession that could result in life imprisonment; possessing an ounce of marijuana could cost the unlucky offender 15 years. Under these new sentencing guidelines, New York sent thousands of Black men to prison. The Rockefeller laws, and other state laws patterned on a "zero tolerance" approach, contributed to an extraordinary rise in the national prison population, from 330,000 to 2.3 million over the next several decades. Yet the 1973 chart also points to a loophole for some: at the very bottom, the possibility to treat the possession of "any amount" of "any controlled substance" as a class A misdemeanor, which carried only a one-year maximum, with the possibility of probation.

Although Rockefeller never won the Republican nomination, he created a map for a man who did. President Ronald Reagan renewed the call for a national war on drugs and in his second term created the Office of National Drug Control Policy to coordinate anti-drug initiatives that reached across multiple branches of government. His efforts were bolstered by the first lady. In 1981, Nancy Reagan rolled out an anti-drug campaign, officially adopting the slogan "Just Say No" in 1985. In September 1986, she addressed parents directly with an established, racially coded message that reassured white suburbanites that the government was on their side. Families needed to be on guard, she warned sweetly, against "ingenious" drug dealers determined to "steal our children's lives."

Predictably, Reagan's war on drugs only accelerated the flow of youth of color into the nation's prisons. By the time he left office, drug arrests and incarcerations had more than doubled from their level 11 years before. The share of Black people among those arrested increased from 22 to 42 percent. Meanwhile the share of white people apprehended fell from 77 percent to 58 percent.

The disparity wasn't because white kids learned to say no and Black kids didn't. Rather, the war on drugs was shifting away from pot, and toward the heroin and cocaine that were more widely available in urban neighborhoods. Lassiter reports that "between 1978 and 1989, the proportion of marijuana to all drug arrests declined from 70 to 29 percent." In any case, by the 1970s, some white parents had ceased to believe that pot was dangerous, or that it led their children to harder drugs, or that—consumed in moderation—it interrupted a teenager's trajectory toward success. In the 1973 documentary *An American Family,* suburban matriarch Pat Loud's children were routinely stoned on camera, and it was clear that she knew they were high. While some parents in the PBS audience may have been shocked by this breach of maternal responsibility, many others weren't. A few years after this series aired, Republican first lady Betty Ford, and then her successor, Democrat Rosalynn Carter, acknowledged publicly that their children had smoked pot. Two of these children—Jack Ford and Chip Carter—went to work to decriminalize pot with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

The children suburban parents had rescued from deindustrializing cities were alienated, bored, and angry. And smoking pot seemed to accompany their teenage antics.

BECAUSE *THE SUBURBAN CRISIS* ends with Reagan, Lassiter does not devote full chapters to George H.W. Bush's militarization of drug policing, say, or the rocketing incarceration rated that accompanied the Clinton crime bill. A book that stretched closer to the present might even have concluded with an upbeat chapter, documenting the first steps toward the legalization of marijuana. For, while still illegal under federal law, marijuana is now fully legal in 22 states, and only fully illegal in seven. In the 2021 fiscal year, Massachusetts collected more tax revenue from pot than alcohol; in 2022, only 261 people were arrested for possessing and selling it illegally.

Yet as the drug war eases off on marijuana, it has shifted to fentanyl, and relies on all the same tropes: the idea that this intoxicant is a blight on the suburbs, and that foreign enemies—Mexican cartels, Chinese manufacturers—prey on ordinary well-meaning Americans. Politicians push this narrative, even though it was the Food and Drug Administration's approval of Purdue Pharma's highly addictive OxyContin in 1996 that laid the foundation for a national opioid addiction crisis and a booming market for the deadly synthetic opioid, fentanyl. The penalties for fentanyl-related crimes are steep: Currently, a dealer can receive a sentence of up to 40 years in prison and a fine of up to $5 million, and Republican Representative Paul Gosar has introduced legislation that would make fentanyl trafficking subject to the death penalty. Meanwhile, the owners of Purdue Pharma have faced no criminal charges for their actions and, pending a decision from the Supreme Court later this year, may even secure personal immunity from further civil suits.

A true effort to help Americans out of addiction and substance-related issues would mean accepting the fact that people, often very high-functioning ones who live in the suburbs, take drugs whether we want them to or not. Today's fentanyl deaths and sprawling networks of prisons demonstrate that the United States is no closer to implementing proven solutions that improve public health—decriminalization, education, treatment, and monitored use.

This necessary shift might also require something else: a national reckoning with the damage U.S. drug policies have done to the poor, the working class, and communities of color who have not, like white suburbanites, had the resources, social prestige, or political clout to defend themselves from the government's war on them. TNR

Claire Potter *is the author of* Political Junkies: From Talk Radio to Twitter, How Alternative Media Hooked Us on Politics and Broke Our Democracy.

DAVID HUME KENNERLY/GETTY

Phantom Menace

How much has "woke politics" actually hurt Democrats?

By Ed Burmila

IN 2002, John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira made a prediction. In their book *The Emerging Democratic Majority,* they famously argued that demographic changes in the American electorate would, over time, naturally deliver consistent majorities to a Democratic Party that dominated growing voting blocs like urban dwellers, people of color, and the educated professional class. The key caveat to their 2002 prediction was that Democrats would also need to retain a little under half, give or take, of the working-class vote—notably the white working class.

This run of expected victories did not materialize, and their new work, *Where Have All the Democrats Gone?*, is a book-length dive into why the previous predictions fell short. As Democrats have struggled mightily to retain the kind of voter who was the cornerstone of the base during the New Deal era, the party has lost considerable power at the state level, and its decades-long congressional majorities are now a distant memory. White working-class voters seemed open to putting their faith in Barack Obama in 2008—he won

Indiana that year—but have since become increasingly hostile to a party that once took their support as a given. At the same time, the demographic changes that formed the premise of *The Emerging Democratic Majority* have come to pass but have been offset, Teixeira and Judis assert here, by defections of working-class people repelled by liberal social-issue politicking.

This dire state of affairs has arisen, the authors propose, because the Democratic Party has been hijacked by a cadre of activists who have foisted unpopular positions on candidates and jettisoned their electability. The authors' previous book was in fact correct, until its core predictions were waylaid by The Wokes. Yes, Democrats lost working-class voters when they embraced neoliberal economics and free trade, policies that decimated many communities that were once working-class party strongholds. But Democrats also alienate the working class, Judis and Teixeira argue, by opposing "measures that might reduce illegal immigration," opposing "any restrictions" on abortion rights, supporting "strict gun control," "insistence on eliminating fossil fuels," and using "the courts and regulations to enforce their moral and cultural agenda," among other radical moves.

It's a puzzling thesis, not least because—from the vantage of 2024—the Democratic Party does not appear to be in crisis, at least not by these measures. As the recent midterm and off-year elections reinforced, in reality it is the *Republican* Party that is energetically shooting itself in the electoral foot with its extremist views and embrace of culture wars politics that appeal to only a loud minority. "Where did all the Democrats go?" is a transparently strange question to ask when the Democratic Party's performance in recent elections has been stronger, notably in 2022, than many prognosticators predicted or, arguably, than Democrats' tepid governing performance would merit. And yet a not insignificant portion of the commentariat, including the authors, appears to believe the opposite. This may be the most telling aspect of the book: It shows how a certain species of political observer has invented a version of the Democratic Party that does not exist, an inverted world in which people with no power call all the shots and people with real power are helpless bystanders.

The question is less *where have all the Democrats gone?* than *where have these two Democrats gone?* How did they come to believe this?

THE STORY STARTS promisingly enough, with an argument reminiscent of Judis's recent work on populism: Neoliberal economic policy has been a disaster for working-class America, and the weakening of institutions like organized labor that once tied working-class people closely to the Democrats has left the party scrambling to find ways to appeal to voters, when its more liberal views on cultural, social, gender, and racial politics have always been at odds with the worldview of a stereotypical Union Man in a hard hat. This analysis does not really square with the fact that a core tenet of the New Democrat movement (which gave us Bill Clinton, among much else) was that Democratic failures of the 1970s and 1980s were explicitly the result of the party's close ties to unions, and only by aggressively slashing ties with organized labor could the party return to prominence. But the makings of a compelling argument are here: Whether the working class departed the Democratic coalition of its own accord or at the behest of free-market-oriented neoliberals, the loss has been a painful one for the party's electoral fortunes.

This auspicious premise, however, is quickly dropped in favor of a kind of culture war on the authors' part. The main antagonist of the book is what the authors call the Democrats' "shadow party," the origin and content of which they describe as follows: "Controversial views on social issues had begun to surface during Obama's second term—not so much in Washington, but on college campuses and social media and in the foundations, publications, and groups that were aligned with the Democratic Party."

Instead of focusing on the choices made by people with actual power, we meet a cast of backbenchers, bit-player Beltway interest groups, and woke college kids who bear the responsibility, in this telling, for sending Bob Bricklayer, age 64, of Rust Bucket, Ohio, running toward the incipient fascism of the Donald Trump GOP. The chapter titles for the second half of the book tell you well in advance what you're in for: "Race and Radicalism." "Sexual Creationism." "The War of Words." If you are predisposed to believe that use of terms like "Latinx" or "communities of color" explains why the Democratic Party has fallen from its perch, this book could appeal to you (although you've already heard everything you'll learn here, and repeatedly). If, instead, your understanding of politics focuses on the actual people and institutions who hold, wield, and contend for power, you'll turn each page waiting for the real story to begin and ultimately end up disappointed. For example, when tweets supersede Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi in the pecking order of things that drive the fortunes of the Democratic Party, the plot has been lost.

It's a critique of power that would have you believe marginalized environmental activists and blue-haired nonbinary college sophomores run the Democratic Party, and the people actually in charge of the party barely rate a mention. Black Lives Matter appears 32 times in the text; "Bernie" 12 times. Chuck Schumer is mentioned only twice—to criticize him for saying climate change is a priority and for failing to properly consider an anti-immigration bill (such a reasonable one, we're assured!) sponsored by the authoritarian-curious Tom Cotton. Nancy Pelosi's main role here is to oppose climate activists and to warn Joe Biden to tone down his wokeness. Harry Reid never appears. The Sunrise Movement—the *Sunrise Movement!*—appears 10 times. "Defund the police," 15 times.

Radical concerns, the authors argue, are responsible for a set of losses, from the recall of San Francisco D.A. Chesa Boudin to Eric Adams's triumph over Maya Wiley in the Democratic primary for a New York City mayoral candidate to Glenn Youngkin's victory in the Virginia governor's race. The authors offer little to establish that social justice issues were the main factors in these losses, and have even less to say about the campaigns themselves. The authors report, for instance, that "Youngkin was able to take advantage of the racial controversies over Thomas Jefferson High School and Loudoun County's Equity Collaborative to tie his Democratic opponent to critical race theory," but they do not note that pandemic-era school closures were a major issue in the race, and that Youngkin consistently did better in counties where schools took longer to reopen.

The Democrats' disastrous, decades-long fumbling of the federal courts; the unwillingness or inability to match Republicans' aggressive redistricting, which badly disadvantages Democrats who do just fine on a more level electoral playing field; or the endless rounds of "reaching across the aisle" by Democratic leaders that have

accomplished nothing but to abet GOP obstructionism are insignificant storylines in this telling. Meanwhile, the authors trumpet the success of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who "strenuously opposed" "Democrats' policies on sex and gender," without acknowledging how poorly he has performed on a national level, amid a miserable run at the Republican nomination. Nor do they think it necessary to note that Florida Democrats effectively punted on opposing him in his reelection campaign, nominating ex-Republican Charlie Crist—precisely the kind of moderate the book's thesis suggests should appeal to voters. It's anyone's guess why trying to appease working-class voters' concerns that Democrats are too woke and liberal by literally nominating a Republican didn't work.

Most puzzlingly, the authors punt on trying to explain how and why voters believe the "shadow party" represents the true Democratic Party instead of, more logically, the words, actions, and beliefs of the actual Democratic Party and its most powerful figures—Biden, Obama, the Clintons, congressional leaders, DNC chairs, and so on.

IF THIS VERSION of what the Democratic Party stands for sounds familiar, it's because it is the preferred narrative of reactionary conservatives. Turn on Fox News, and this is the Democratic Party that exists in its universe, where Hillary Clinton is a radical Marxist, Obama was essentially Chairman Mao, and even Joe Biden is cackling madly as he mashes the accelerator and yanks the national steering wheel toward a giant hammer and sickle. This book's assertions about what the Democratic Party stands for, what it represents, and what it attempts to do with power are ripped straight from your most embarrassing uncle's Facebook posts. The Green New Deal is both an existential threat to our nation and the Democratic Party's top priority. Redefining gender is a linchpin of the Democratic agenda, as are other forms of "sexual creationism." Meanwhile, the Republican Party's mainstream embrace of what was 30 years ago its extremist fringes apparently does not factor into the political calculus of voters chased away by Democratic liberalism. The extremism of liberal interest groups repels them, but Trump lackeys openly planning to do away with constitutional government doesn't?

If we instead look at the Democratic Party that actually exists, the picture falls apart rather quickly. In reality, Democrats support the most basic, unradical, commonsense gun control measures—things that even Republican survey respondents overwhelmingly support, like criminal background checks. These measures are by any meaningful definition timid and insufficient to solve the nation's gun violence problem. Yet in this book they become "Democrats' support for strict gun control," full stop. Five decades of tacking the Hyde Amendment onto spending bills and bending over backward to flatter and accommodate anti-abortion Democrats in Congress are here "opposition to any restrictions" on abortion rights—a sentence the authors may well have been working on while the entire leadership structure of the national Democratic Party was being airlifted into rural Texas to save anti-choice Representative Henry Cuellar. We're also apparently ignoring the reality that the Democratic Party's broadly, if incompletely, supportive views on abortion are arguably its strongest electoral asset right now.

The basic premise of the book's title is wrong. Democrats haven't all gone anywhere; the party has done better than expected in three straight congressional elections.

Where Have All the Democrats Gone?: The Soul of the Party in the Age of Extremes
by Ruy Teixeira and John B. Judis
Henry Holt and Co., 336 pp., $28.99

Decades of Democrats, including Obama and Biden, aping right-wing "tough on immigration" policies in a vain effort to appease right-wing voters are here transmogrified into Democrats' "opposition to measures that might reduce illegal immigration." Which ones? How many of Trump's immigration policies has Biden's White House failed to adopt or even expand? To top it off, we are reminded of "Democrats' insistence on eliminating fossil fuels." Here in the real world, Biden seems motivated to overtake Obama in a race over which administration can approve more oil drilling. Finally, we're told that voters are repelled by the Democrats' "use of the courts to enforce their moral and cultural agenda," which is literally the last several decades of conservative political strategy in the United States. If that were a deal-breaker for any voter, working-class or otherwise, Republican vote shares would be in the single digits.

The authors quickly allow that "Not all Democrats are in line with these actions or beliefs," a statement that rather undersells the reality that almost every single Democrat in a real position of power—not slogan-chanting Oberlin sophomores, not powerless environmental activists the party pays lip service to when it wants their help or money—is not in line with said actions and beliefs. To hand-wave even this caveat away, though, the next sentence assures us that "overall,

they came to characterize the party, as Robert Price would tell you." Robert Price is a fiftysomething ex-autoworker we met on the first page, whose status as an ex-Democrat turned Trump supporter makes him an authority for the purposes of this book.

The basic premise of the book's title is wrong. Democrats haven't all gone anywhere; the party has done better than expected in three straight congressional elections, including making a one-termer of an incumbent Republican president and achieving the historical rarity of bucking the Midterm Loss phenomenon in 2022. The party has also rebounded in states such as Michigan and Minnesota where it has been moribund for some time.

THIS BOOK IS part of a thriving genre of "what's wrong with the Democrats" books. If the market can bear several such volumes annually for decades, that strongly suggests a party experiencing a long-term identity crisis. Books of the genre generally fall into one of three categories. There are critics from the left who lambaste the Democrats' relentless drift toward the center or even the right. There are mainstream Democrats who blame most of the party's struggles on feckless voters who let it down and focus their critiques more on how extreme and unreasonable the Republicans have become. Finally, there are conservatives who write red meat screeds about a straw man of the Democratic Party that exists only in their own fervid prose.

Here, Judis and Teixeira have written something that doesn't fit neatly into any of those categories. While that could be a strength—a new, fresh paradigm for understanding Democratic politics—it is instead a puzzling "view from nowhere." Dual authorship is a clear problem here, especially for a pair of authors on very different trajectories since their influential 2002 book. Judis has since written, generally cogently, about populism and the Democratic Party. Teixeira, conversely, has tacked so conservative that he is now employed by the American Enterprise Institute on what might best be described as the full-time Whining About Wokeness beat. In 2002, when perhaps the authors were more in ideological sync, their shared work was coherent and—to many readers—persuasive. Here the voice is muddled, half Obama-era liberal blogger and half enraged reactionary. These disparate voices mix approximately as well as gummy bears and foie gras. The resulting text is less an analysis of the Democratic Party as it is or was, and more a book-length version of the thrice-weekly opinion pieces we see in established media outlets positing that the biggest crisis facing the country at present is "campus free speech" or some similarly moral-panicky canard.

What could have been an exercise in evaluating a previous, influential prediction with the benefit of hindsight—a truly interesting premise—instead chooses a villain and proceeds to lash out at it in language you've already read many times, and at interminable length. It probably felt wonderfully cathartic to write, but therein lies a problem with so much nonfiction writing on politics these days: The authors benefit far more from writing it than any reader could from reading it. TNR

Ed Burmila *holds a Ph.D. in political science and is the author of* Chaotic Neutral: How the Democrats Lost Their Soul in the Center.

Resolutions

by Henri Cole

Stop playing catch-up

with the new generation.

Spend less money. Say*: I love you, too.*

Transcribe events without distortion.

Tell the lifeguard to teach me the flip-turn.

Question not, *Where, when, how?* Bake bread,

put on an album, turn off the cable news.

Cherish those who choose honesty over flattery.

Ignore plate-lickers, sycophants, and opportunists—

nobody there. Eat salmon, mushrooms, greens.

Do not surf the net. Do not be a herd of one,

like the cardinal slain in the false

azure of the window pane.

BMB—"be more better."

Henri Cole *is most recently the author of* Gravity and Center, Selected Sonnets, 1994–2022.

Cosmic Horror

True Detective: Night Country and the pleasures of paranoid TV

By Phillip Maciak

TIME, YOU MAY have heard, is a flat circle. It's hard, now, to go back to the moment of the first *True Detective* in 2014 and remember the hold it had on us. We recall, of course, the way it opened the floodgates for the prestige limited series. It was a proof-of-concept that one-season commitments and easy Emmy odds could lure A-listers like Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey. Those two actors walked through the vines into Carcosa, then Reese Witherspoon and Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep and everyone else walked in after them, and a thousand big little lies and white lotuses and little fires bloomed everywhere.

The memory that's harder to conjure is the precise texture of viewers' absorption in the world of the show, week to week. The show's production values and star power certainly put everything in an appealing package, but *True Detective*'s real allure, as it aired, was the gripping strangeness of its mystery, the seeming cosmic horror of its whodunit. The Yellow King, the Green-Eared Spaghetti Monster, the Big Hug Mug—show creator Nic Pizzolatto, for all his eventual missteps, was able to produce a series that electrified viewers' conspiratorial imaginations and paranoid inclinations. *True Detective*, in this sense, was less an heir to HBO hits like *The Sopranos* or *The Wire* than it was to *Lost*. A generation of serial TV viewers had been trained to turn their acts of spectatorship into acts of detection themselves, hunting for Easter eggs and subtextual clues. This was the time when *Mad Men*'s fandom became obsessed with the idea that Megan Draper was going to be murdered by the Manson family, when Vince Gilligan was nesting coded spoilers in every episode of *Breaking Bad*. Even the artsiest epics were dropping chum for Reddit gumshoes.

True Detective was a show built for that style of viewership, self-consciously so. In the first episode, Harrelson's by-the-book cop Marty Hart warns McConaughey's mystic savant, Rust Cohle: "You attach an assumption to a piece of evidence, you start to bend the narrative to support it, prejudice yourself." He was warning us, too. All of that season's lore and mythology and cryptic foreboding would ultimately come to nothing. What seemed extraordinary ended up being pretty ordinary after all. There were no supernatural forces at play, no complex coherent systems of occult power; it was just a bunch of pedophiles from central casting cloaking their crimes in evangelical prophecy, Satanic ritual, and even the secular grandeur of the state. And, beyond that, a show that seemed to have been building up to a sweeping critique of misogyny—in the Senate, the church, the police, in marriage—ended up being more of a shrug. Rust and Marty get to experience transcendence, and all those women who aren't betrayed by them or objectified by them stay dead or keep dying.

Ten years later, along comes HBO's excellent new *True Detective: Night Country*, a show that's as much a tribute to that original series as it is a point-by-point response. Written, directed, and produced by acclaimed Mexican filmmaker Issa López, *Night Country* is the first of the four *True Detective* seasons made without Pizzolatto as showrunner, and the difference is striking. Rather than a sequel or a reboot or even a new installment, *Night Country* should be considered a revision, eager to preserve the anthology's signature funk while feeling free to let go of Pizzolatto's gallery of men in crisis. It's also a response to the television landscape that the original *True Detective* helped shape, formally and thematically. As a result, it doubles as something like a referendum on 10 years of TV, 10 years of paranoid viewership, 10 years of the decline and dissolution of the prestige antihero. You can practically smell the psychosphere.

WHEREAS THE ORIGINAL series played out on the receding shorelines and amid the murky bayous of Louisiana, *Night Country* is set at the other extreme of the American landscape: the northernmost coastline of Alaska. Oil rich, deeply provincial outposts on the bleeding edge of a rapidly changing climate—*True Detective* knows how to pick 'em. Taking place almost entirely during the extended period of sunless days in the northern Alaskan winter, *Night Country* follows Elizabeth Danvers (Jodie Foster), the chief of police of the small town of Ennis, as she works with and against young trooper Evangeline Navarro (Kali Reis) to solve two seemingly disparate mysteries. The first is the inexplicable sudden death of the staff scientists at a remote Arctic research facility called TSALAL. Six men, in the nude, frozen together like a giant novelty ice cube for a Hieronymus Bosch–themed cocktail, faces arrested in various states of terror amid the frozen plain. The second mystery is the unsolved murder of an Indigenous activist named Annie K., which took place some years before the events of our show and was deemed at that time a simple act of violent retribution for her vocal opposition to the local mine. Both Danvers and Navarro remain unsatisfied by that explanation. The case haunts both women, who, you might imagine, are also haunted by other figures of their pasts—Danvers's lost son, Navarro's lost mother—figuratively and literally.

All this transpires against the backdrop of Ennis itself, a community of intimate familial bonds and suffocating closeness. There's the malevolent mining company that both poisons the town's water supply and employs half of its residents; there's the local Inupiat community, all seeking to triangulate their identities in a town largely ruled by whites; there's the robust Alaska Native protest movement against the mine, which used to be led by Annie K. and now has attracted Danvers's Inupiat stepdaughter; there's Navarro's beloved sister, fighting against hospitalization for mental illness; there are a variety of romantic entanglements that complicate nearly every interaction; there are corrupt cops and scuzzy politicians and militant nomads and village madwomen and secrets upon secrets buried beneath the ice.

But beyond all that, there *are* ghosts. From the very beginning, we hear from characters

MICHELE K. SHORT/HBO

of all stripes that life at the edge of the world is frequently populated by the dead. Sometimes the specters are merely chatty, other times they are potentially murderous. Danvers remains a skeptic, but she's pretty much alone in that. In fact, it is *Night Country*'s most pivotal intervention as part of the *True Detective* universe that its supernatural subplots are pointedly not red herrings. Part of what sustained so much fan obsession in the original series was the notion that, beneath these visible crimes, there was some invisible force at work. Maybe God, maybe the devil, maybe an earthly manifestation of one or the other—we, along with Rust and Marty, got distracted by all this mythology that would eventually slough away in the end.

Night Country is considerably more committed to its cosmic overtones, and in the process reveals something about the original show. It portrays a community that believes in spirits: In a pragmatic sense, then, there are ghosts in Ennis, Alaska. In this setting, they are simply a part of the ensemble. "Rejoice," an old woman tells Rust in the first season. "Death is not the end." *True Detective* was about crafting a world in which such a revelation might alternately bring mortal terror and relief. I'm not sure I fully realized the truth of that until I saw López's take on the franchise here. She watched the same show we did, and she found something we missed.

THIS SHOW'S GOT the same weird spiral pictogram from 2014. Its setting in Alaska is also where Rust Cohle notoriously hung out between the two timelines of the original show. There's a company named Tuttle United, after the powerful political family from Louisiana. And Cohle's iconic line from the first episode—"then start asking the right fucking questions"—is essentially Danvers's mantra. Some viewers might be annoyed by these references or find them too cute, but I loved them. Some might find this easy, but I don't think the references come easily. López isn't doing fan service; she's citing the text. *Night Country* is a work of criticism about *True Detective*.

It's maybe a bit reductive but also pretty undeniably accurate to say that *Night Country* is specifically a piece of feminist criticism of *True Detective*. Prior seasons carried with them the aura of feminist critique. They depicted the bad acts of bad men with such sumptuous and leering detail that viewers had to imagine that some critique was implicit. But the show never went out of its way to do much more than that, trusting the audience to morally grade these fragile, brutal men as we followed them on their arcs toward redemption. The thing *Night Country* valiantly tries to do is to understand that there, in fact, *was already* a meaningful insight to be had about gender and violence in the *True Detective* series, but that the show's unwillingness to put women at its center placed an artificial ceiling on what it might be able to say.

Most of these gut renovations end up working out, but what the show has gained in conceptual complexity, it's also gained in degree of difficulty. Early episodes, saddled with the task of explaining and teasing so many interlocking traumas and regional contexts, are filled with awkwardly confusing exposition scenes that slow down the show's otherwise visually stunning, otherworldly set pieces. And, for that reason, it takes a while to discern which subplots are a bit hard to follow because they are complicated and still partially obscured, and which subplots are actually just not that well fleshed out. Another feature that made the original *True Detective* such a hit was its incredible narrative efficiency; every morsel of a clue or plot twist was delivered to us in a neat package. *Night Country* clocks in at six episodes, a constraint that results in some things serving stock purposes in the story rather than lending greater specificity to the tale (the ambivalent presence of the mine in the local community, in particular). In other words, I think a lot of the valid criticisms that could be leveled at *Night Country* come down to the fact that there really ought to have been a little more of it.

In the 10 years since *True Detective* premiered, its production model and its reception style have continued apace. Though I am hard-pressed to think of all that many series so thoroughly dissected by fans. *Succession* was elaborately memed; *Hannibal* became a niche fanfic obsession; *Game of Thrones*, of course, was battled over; and viewers worked hard to unravel the whodunits of *Big Little Lies* and *The White Lotus*. But *True Detective* was perhaps the last true effusion of a certain type of (pleasurably!) deranged fan engagement. Perhaps our trip to Carcosa ruined us for that style of spectatorship, made us feel foolish for all that naïve belief, for putting our trust in the hands of a creator-auteur-god like Pizzolatto. The most common argument I heard online in the lead-up to the finale of *Succession* is that it didn't matter who took over the company. Nobody online was saying the identity of the Yellow King didn't matter in 2014, right up until abruptly it didn't. *Night Country* is likely not going to resurrect that style of viewing, but it might well resurrect *True Detective*. TNR

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Res Publica
by Win McCormack

Mr. Attorney General, Tear Up That Memo

How a temporary legal expedient came to defy the rule of law

On March 22, 2019, special counsel Robert Mueller submitted his report on possible collusion between the Russian government and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign to then–Attorney General William Barr. Almost a month later, Barr issued a redacted version of the report, with a statement asserting that Mueller had found no persuasive evidence of conspiracy or collusion between members of the Trump campaign and Russian agents. The attorney general further noted the Justice Department's firmly held position that a sitting president cannot be indicted, and Mueller supported him on that point, asserting that indicting a president would be "unconstitutional."

Attorney General Merrick Garland

Most Americans, hearing of this official departmental policy, would likely assume it was based on some provision in the U.S. Constitution. However, while the Constitution provides for a process of impeachment and conviction by the House and Senate of federal officials for "high Crimes and Misdemeanors" committed in the political realm, it is silent on the question of their exposure to the regular criminal justice system. Whence came this mysterious Justice Department policy?

The U.S. government has been operating since 1789, but this policy has been in effect only since 1973, meaning that we survived 184 years without this policy. In an article appearing in *The New York Times'* opinion section prior to the release of the Mueller report, attorney J.T. Smith II, who was an executive assistant to Nixon Attorney General Elliot Richardson during the Watergate scandal, explained the origins of the policy. "The principal purpose of the 1973 Watergate-era legal opinion," he wrote, "which concluded that a sitting president cannot be indicted—was to aid in removal from office of a criminally tainted vice president, who, the memo concluded, could be indicted."

New Republic staff writer Matt Ford followed up on J.T. Smith's *Times* piece, conducting an interview with Smith for TNR a few months later. In the summer of 1973, Smith explained, Vice President Spiro Agnew was under investigation by the U.S. attorney in Baltimore for accepting bribes when he was a county executive and then governor of Maryland, and even after he became vice president of the United States. Agnew was arguing, through his attorneys, that he was not subject to criminal prosecution but only to impeachment. Agnew went so far as to file a motion in court making this contention.

Attorney General Richardson enlisted Solicitor General Robert Bork to do an analysis of the Agnew matter, and he turned to Assistant Attorney General Robert Dixon and the Office of Legal Counsel regarding whether the VP and president could be criminally prosecuted. Dixon found the matter vexing and ended up telephoning Smith and probing for "kind of offline advice as to how the attorney general hoped the opinion would turn out." Smith said to Ford: "I remember telling him that he certainly hopes it would find the vice president to be subject to criminal process. I don't recall saying, 'and he wanted it to say that a president wasn't.' But anybody of more than average intelligence at the time kind of knew that that was the best way for it to turn out." Smith elaborated: "There were three ways for the memo to turn out: neither subject to criminal process; both subject to criminal process; or vice president subject to criminal process, president not. And that was the only outcome that was, for lack of a better word, sustainable *in the context how it had arisen*" (emphasis mine). He also added: "It's a matter of historical fact that the original Office of Legal Counsel memo saying that a sitting president isn't subject to criminal process wasn't prepared with that being its primary purpose. Its purpose was to say that a sitting vice president *was* subject to criminal process, and then the analysis was prepared by way of a distinction between the two offices."

Rachel Maddow, in an interview with NPR's Terry Gross concerning Maddow's 2020 book, *Bag Man*, which recounted Agnew financial misdoings while in office, offered a view of how the effort to distinguish President Nixon's liability to impeachment from Vice President Agnew's might have turned out differently. Prosecutors, she recounted, went through an elaborate choreography to make sure that by the time Agnew got into the courtroom where he was to be sentenced, he had resigned from the vice presidency. Why did they take such pains to achieve that particular sequence? "Had he resigned as vice president moments after he pled or after he was indicted," Maddow asserted, "we would have an entirely separate legal precedent on this case—that a president or vice president could be indicted. In this case, they sidestepped that issue by allowing him to resign."

Mr. Attorney General, I don't see how you can permit the Office of Legal Counsel to continue promulgating an opinion that originated as the product of temporary expediency, which many notable scholars believe has no basis in U.S. constitutional law. Yes, the opinion was reconfirmed by the Office of Legal Counsel in 2000, apparently in order to shield President Bill Clinton after he faced impeachment, making the whole matter even more confusing than it already was. And you owe it to your country to abolish this policy, because if you had launched an immediate investigation of the insurrection Donald Trump provoked on January 6, 2021, we would not now be facing the possibility of time running out for the various legal actions Trump is finally confronting before the election. Trump might become president again, free under current Justice Department rules to break any law he wants to during his second tenure in office. I don't think you want that to be your major legacy, Mr. Attorney General. TNR

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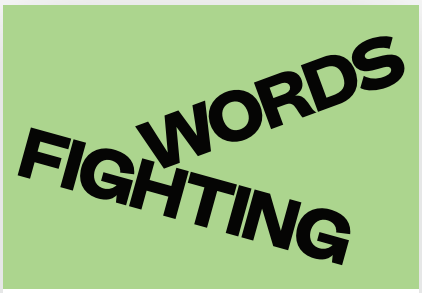

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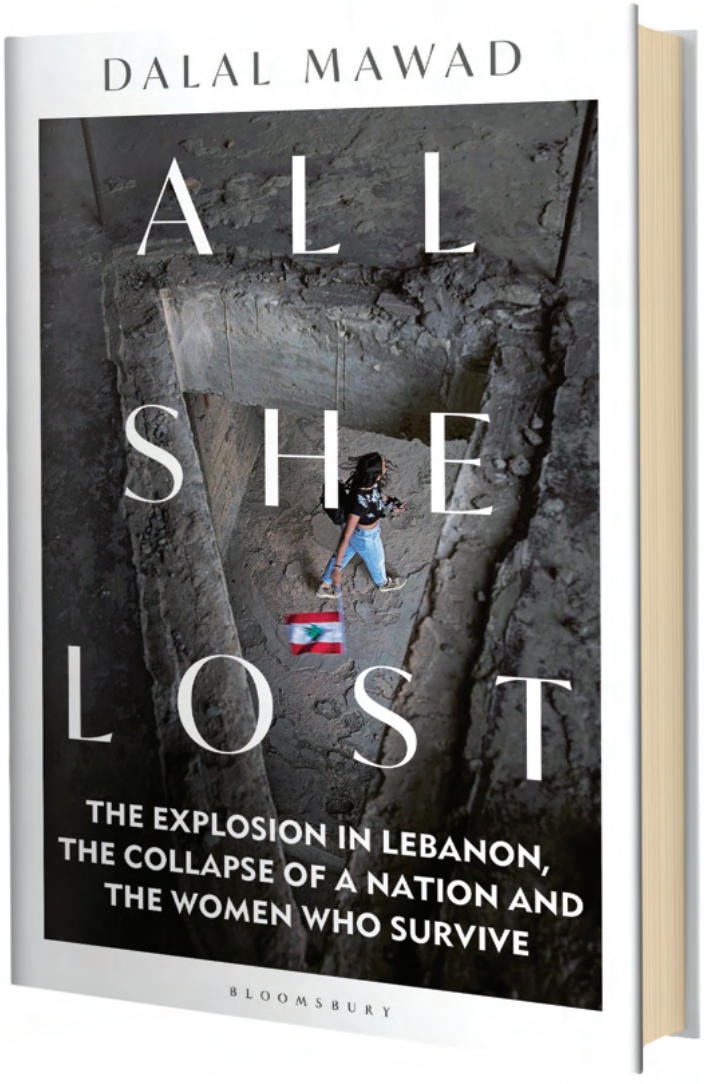

The port explosion in Beirut on August 4th, 2020, forever changed the Middle East. From award-winning journalist Dalal Mawad comes an extraordinary story of survival, corruption, and impunity—and its effect on the women and girls left behind.

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