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BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

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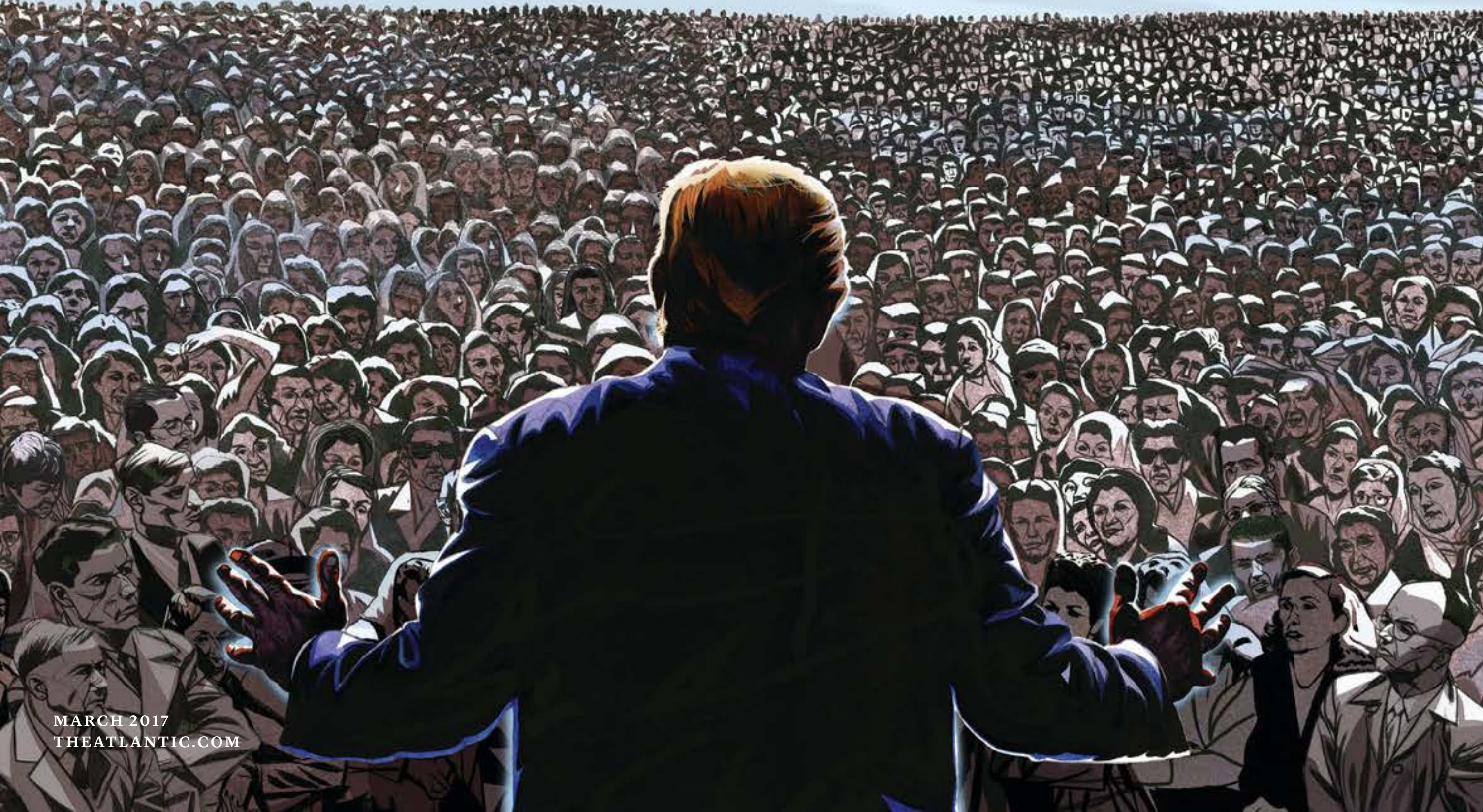

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JOSH HANER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

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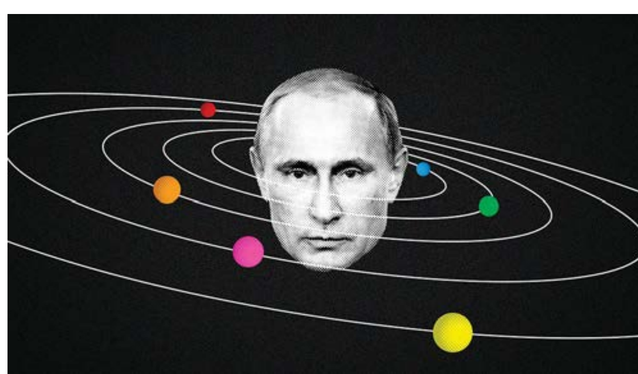

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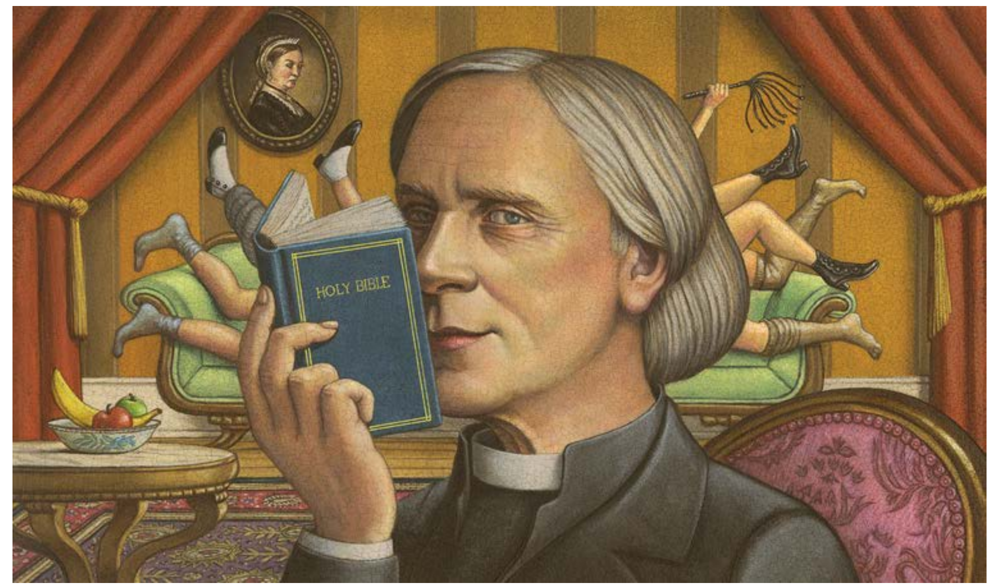

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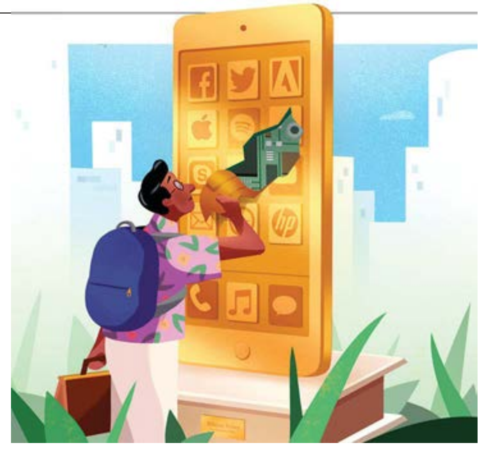

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Can Megyn Kelly Escape Her Past?

Charting a route into the mainstream media, Fox News's former star has downplayed her role in an ugly election.

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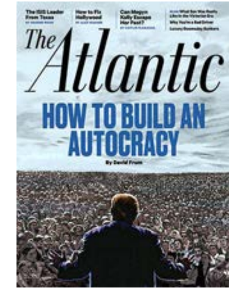

On the Cover

Illustration by Jeffrey Smith

THE FARTHEST UNKNOWN NOW KNOWN

Texas A&M has a long and storied history, and often even makes history,

such as the discovery of the most distant galaxy known to humans. Formally titled z8GND-5296, this galaxy was formed within 700 million years of the Big Bang, meaning Texas A&M scientists saw 13 billion years into the past — and closer than ever into the mysteries of the universe.

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THE CONVERSATION

RESPONSES & REVERBERATIONS

My President Was Black

For the January/February cover story, Ta-Nehisi Coates interviewed Barack Obama and analyzed his legacy as America's first black president. "This is the best postmortem on the Obama presidency I've yet seen," Cory Doctorow wrote at Boing Boing, "the cornerstone of the literature that will be written about the previous eight years."

Ta-Nehisi Coates compellingly details the inexcusable, racially charged rhetoric with which many Americans have described our first black president. It pains me to consider the racial tension that festers within our country.

At what point, though, do reports like this widen the racial rifts by describing Americans' views with too broad a brush? After all, Coates fails to mention that the white-supremacist-tinged language and extreme anti-Obama vitriol documented in his article come from the fringes of our society and do not represent the views of most Americans. Surely the number of people who would gleefully chuckle at things like "Obama Bucks" and "Obama Waffles" is terribly small (not to mention the fact that some individuals cited in the article have apologized for their own remarks).

We should not dismiss the uncomfortable picture Coates paints; yes, our country's racial divides run deep, and the hurtful reactions to Obama's presidency underscore that. But we should remember—and take solace in the fact—that the many inflammatory words and racist acts Coates describes certainly do not represent the majority of white people, the majority of conservatives, or the majority of Americans.

Garrett Haley
LUBBOCK, TEXAS

I know the battle surrounding race in this country does not belong to me the way it belongs to Ta-Nehisi Coates. I am a middle-aged white guy. Still, I have reread "My President Was Black" twice now. I love reading what Coates writes, but am also deeply troubled by much of what the piece has to say. I know the racism this country faces is not my fight the way it is his. I know it is not my fight the way it is the fight of the black students who sit in disproportionate numbers in the lower-level academic classes that I teach. I know the advantages I have had because I am white, just like I know the advantages I have had in being male.

I know this is not my fight, but I also know that my president, too, was black. And that made me proud. It gave me hope.

Coates emphasizes that whiteness in America is a "badge of advantage"—a concept that no intelligent person could refute. But he also writes that in response to a black president, "the badge-holders fumed. They wanted their country back. And … they would have it." His use of *they* troubles me, because it blurs the lines between me as a white male and the insidious, hateful people coming out of the woodwork in the wake of Donald Trump's election. I don't have my country back; I have had it hijacked by a man who rode to the presidency on the backs of the worst monsters that humans could conjure up. While I am white, I don't think my race makes me any less distraught at who will run this country, how he got elected, or what that says about this nation.

Coates tells the reader, "For most African Americans, white people exist either as a direct or an indirect force for bad in their lives." I find that troubling as well. Certainly there are white people who are both direct and indirect forces for bad in the lives of African Americans. But they are that way because of their character, not their skin color. We need to change this narrative to focus on behavior and beliefs rather than pigmentation. If we fail to do that, we risk sliding further and further away from our goal of making progress. We risk sliding backwards to a time when everything was judged in terms of color.

Coates talks about trust a lot in the piece. He writes about Obama's ability to trust white people because his childhood experience taught him that white people were to be trusted. Later he writes, "What Obama was able to offer white America is something very few African Americans could—trust. The vast majority of us are, necessarily,

too crippled by our defenses to ever consider such a proposition." That does not leave us much room to move forward. If in fact the transgressions of whites that came before me make it so that a great voice of contemporary black America can't even consider the proposition of trusting me, then we are doomed. If little kids are raised to mistrust my two young boys just because of their color, their generation is doomed as well.

I hope Obama's sense of hope does not die in the face of one catastrophic failure. I hope Coates can see in me an ally, a man who wants for his child the same thing I want for my own children. I hope we can all see one another for who we are, and not revert to superficial and detrimental definitions of race.

Jeremy Knoll
MEDFORD, N.J.

The theory that Obama could be elected president because his white family had imbued him with an authentic love for and faith in white people that the typical black American does not have is intuitive but wrong. I suspect, given Obama's own words over hours of conversations with Coates, that he believes he really does have some special insight into white people's better angels. Nothing is more emblematic of the problem with this theory than Obama's assessment of Donald Trump's election chances to Coates: "He couldn't win"… Obama's faith, like the theory that it made Obama's presidency possible, misunderstands race as something black folks can choose without white folks' assent. White voters allowed Barack Obama because they allowed him to exist as a projection of themselves. It is seductive to believe Obama could shape that in some way, much less control and direct it. But, as Coates details in painful case after case of political obstructionism among Democrats and Republicans during the first black president's terms, Obama never had the ability to shape white people's attitudes. White people's attitudes, the contradictions of their racial identities and class consciousness, made Obama. Obama did not make them.

It didn't matter that Obama had faith in white people; they needed only to have faith in him: in his willingness to reflect their ideal selves back at them, to change the world without changing them, to change blackness for them without being black to them … Obama could look at years of pictures of his wife and children drawn as apes and decades of white backlash to perceived black socioeconomic gains as racial, albeit not *racist*: "I'm careful not to attribute any particular resistance or slight or opposition to race." That is catnip to millions of white voters.

Tressie McMillan Cottom
EXCERPT FROM A THEATLANTIC.COM ARTICLE

In his conversation with Coates, the president appears to acknowledge that there is a sound moral and philosophical case for reparations, particularly if—as Coates presses him to concede—incremental changes in existing social programs will not close the gaps, especially the racial wealth gap. The president ultimately takes the position that it is politically untenable to enact a reparations program. If so—and if nothing comparable can be realized—then I contend that it is impossible to close the racial wealth gap …

There is no doubt that the political obstacles to congressional approval of black reparations are significant. But in 1820 in the United States one might not have been able to conceive that American slavery would ever come to an end, yet there were some who advocated abolition. In 1950 in South Africa one might not have been able to imagine that apartheid would ever come to an end, but there were activists who already had begun to oppose the system. If black reparations is the right thing to do—and I know in the depth of my soul that it is—then we should work to make it happen, no matter how long the odds. We should not bow at the altar of presumed political expediency.

William A. Darity Jr.
EXCERPT FROM A THEATLANTIC.COM ARTICLE

THE BIG QUESTION

On TheAtlantic.com, readers answered January/February's Big Question and voted on one another's responses. Here are the top vote-getters.

Q: Who is the worst leader of all time?

5. Neville Chamberlain: "Peace for our time" led to World War II and millions of civilian and military casualties.
— *Gerald Bazer*

4. Nicholas II, the last emperor of Russia, took a reasonably functioning country and left it vulnerable to radical revolutionaries. He lost the war with Japan and was losing his side of World War I. His misjudgment allowed Rasputin to become influential. That was a huge mistake.
— *Ahmad Alsaleh*

3. Few can compare to the enigmatic **Napoléon Bonaparte,** whose grandiose, ambitious foreign policies and epic military blunders ultimately led to the collapse of the first French empire.
— *Dan Fredricks*

2. Adolf Hitler was evil; **George W. Bush's** policies produced evil results.
— *Bill Turney*

1. Adolf Hitler was the worst leader in history. He provoked World War II, which was the greatest and most destructive event in history. He caused the most deaths by war ever, and unprecedented suffering. His political philosophy was the most bigoted and violent over the widest expanse of space and people.
— *Robert L. Flax*

Despair and Hope in the Age of Trump

In the January/February issue, James Fallows, grappling with the results of the 2016 presidential election, observed that Americans are optimistic about the communities they live in, but not their nation.

I am a great fan of James Fallows, but I believe that he may have missed the mark here. Some 63 million people chose to vote for the coarsest, stupidest, most ill-informed, megalomaniacal, dishonest,

and just generally vile candidate in memory and probably in history. Why? Anger. Anger at our politicians for failing to govern. Anger at our political system and the economic system it has spawned that unrelentingly concentrates obscene levels of wealth in ever fewer hands—hands attached to all too many people who increasingly alienate themselves from the broader community and care nothing for its welfare. Anger at a president many of us expected to be Teddy Roosevelt but turned out to be Jimmy Carter, and who, alas, was really not qualified for the job. Anger that so many people who have lost their jobs, their communities, their health, and their homes have been largely ignored while efforts seem to be made to keep the Wall Street bonus system intact. Anger that so many of the people getting the new jobs we hear touted can't make a living wage, even in manufacturing.

I am a retired scientist with a Ph.D. My friends are scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, academics, and corporate people. We are by many definitions part of the professional elite. And we are angry too. We see the growing inequities in our society, the threats to our own well-being, the disintegration of America's social fabric. Some of us even voted for Trump, simply because he offered the promise of something different.

I think Fallows gets excessively teary-eyed when talking about "real Americans" in the heartland, and has missed the unifying mood of the country.

Arthur Moss
WILMINGTON, DEL.

As an admirer of James Fallows, I think everything he says in "Despair and Hope in the Age of Trump" rings true, but in my view the things he left out are more significant. To James Comey, the Russians, and the relentless poll-watching that declared Hillary Clinton a done deal, add the national press coverage of Clinton's non-scandals versus Trump's real ones. What this election shows us is not just the breakdown of norms in flyover country, but in the institutions we depend on to perpetuate the norms in the upper echelons of Washington and New York.

Margot Ammidown
ASHEVILLE, N.C.

BAROMETER

The most-read magazine stories from 2016 on TheAtlantic.com

The Obama Doctrine
Jeffrey Goldberg (April)

The Mind of Donald Trump
Dan P. McAdams (June)

My Secret Shame
Neal Gabler (May)

The Case for Hillary Clinton—And Against Donald Trump
The Editors (November)

What's Ailing American Politics?
Jonathan Rauch (July/August)

Fear of a Female President

In October, Peter Beinart examined the "gender backlash" against Hillary Clinton, arguing, from a sociological and psychological standpoint, that "the Americans who dislike her most are those who most fear emasculation."

Peter Beinart did not identify correctly the root cause of the attacks on Hillary Clinton. She was attacked because she is a Democrat, pure and simple. In 2008, if Condoleezza Rice had run for president, she

might very well have won the Republican primary race. In a contest with Barack Obama, she might have won the presidency. As a nominee and as a president, Rice would have had the full support of Fox News and its thuggish commentators; they would not have generated sexist, or racist, attacks against the Republican torchbearer.

I live in a very right-wing, rural community. In August 2008, one of our right-wingers put up an eight-by-four plywood sign on a highway on which he painted PALIN FOR VICE PRESIDENT. In November 2008, he crossed out the word *vice*.

I contend that if a right-wing nutcase was all in favor of a female president in 2008, then we may safely assume that the glass ceiling had been broken well and good by that time, and that we are now free to focus on policy and principles, rather than on identity politics.

Sallie Skakel
GOLDENDALE, WASH.

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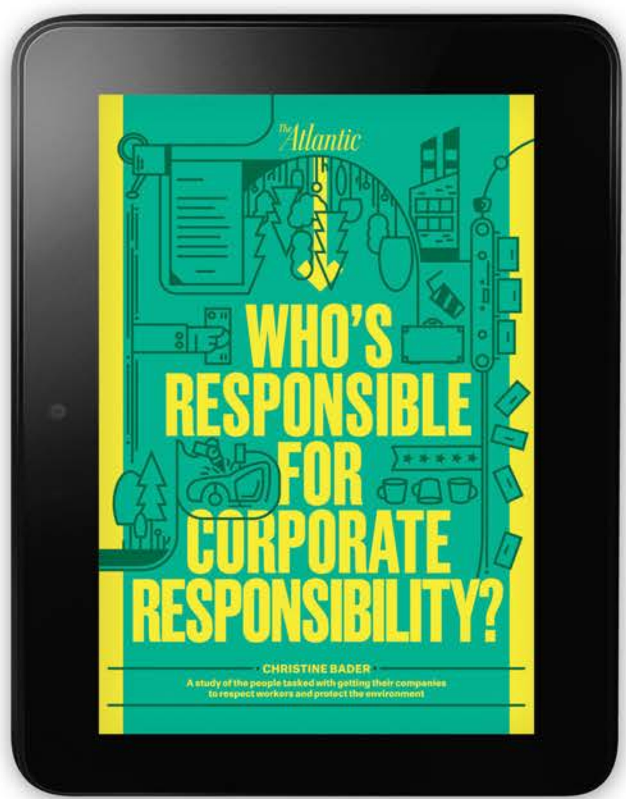


Who's Responsible for Corporate Responsibility?

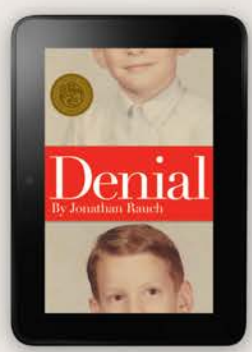
CHRISTINE BADER

Who has the power to ensure a company is a force for good in the world? Christine Bader, a leading expert on corporate responsibility, takes readers on a tour of the key roles aimed at advancing corporate change on social and environmental issues. She interviewed leaders from Google, Microsoft, Gap, MasterCard, Levi Strauss, Motorola, AT&T, and many other companies to explore the opportunities (and limitations) for employees at all levels to show what good business can do for the world.

The Zen Predator of the Upper East Side

MARK OPPENHEIMER

A story of secrets and sexual exploitation



Denial

JONATHAN RAUCH

"A memoir that will move everyone who has yearned for a love they do not understand."
—David Frum, *Newsweek/Daily Beast*

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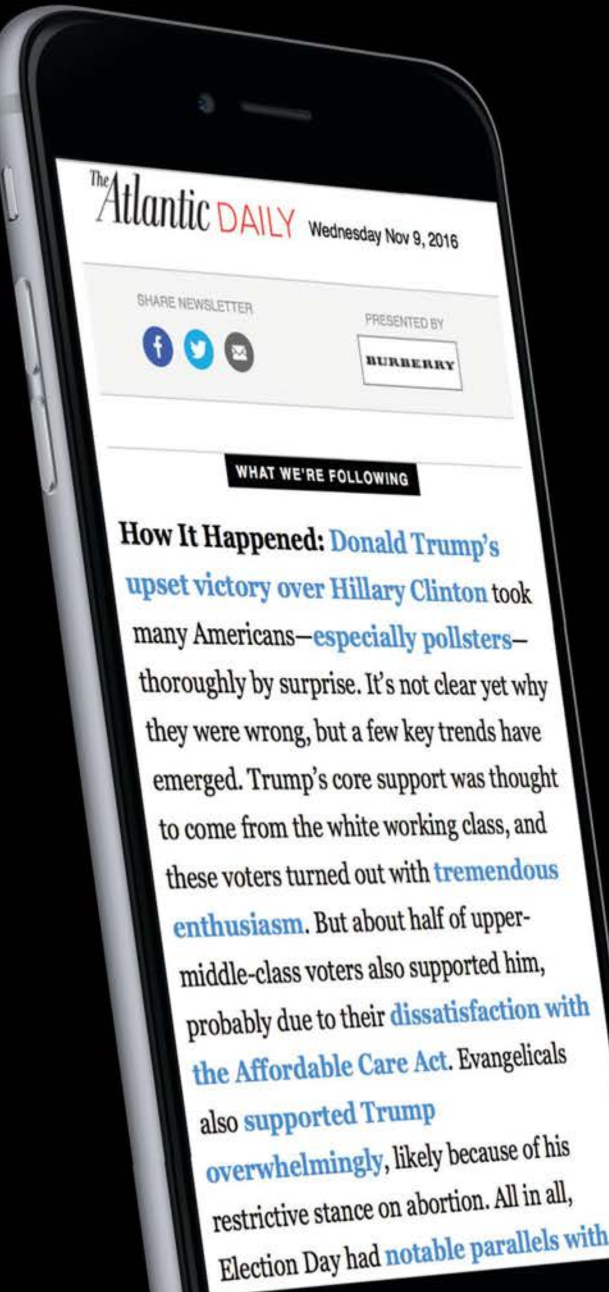

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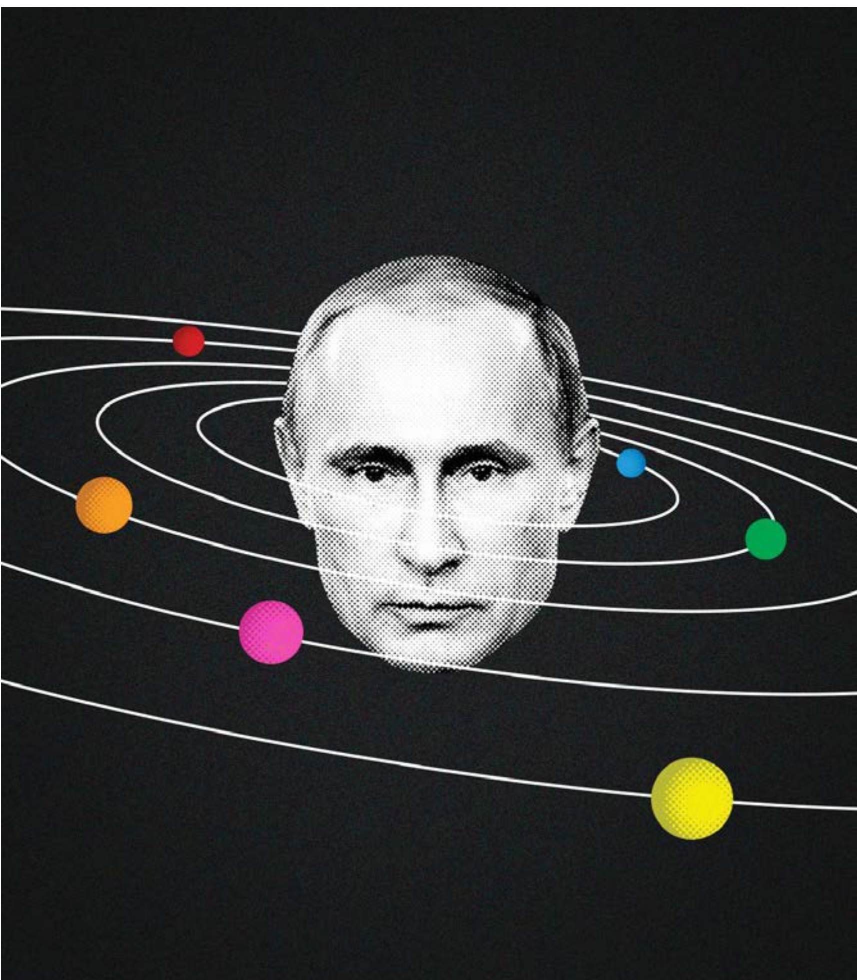
"Rising S Bunkers, one of several companies that specialize in high-end shelters … says sales of its $500,000-plus units increased 700 percent last year."
— Ben Rowen, p. 30



ALEXEI NIKOLSKY/AFP/GETTY

• GEOPOLITICS

It's Putin's World

How the Russian president became the ideological hero of nationalists everywhere

BY FRANKLIN FOER

IN 2012, VLADIMIR PUTIN returned to the presidency after a four-year, constitutionally imposed hiatus. It wasn't the smoothest of transitions. To his surprise, in the run-up to his inauguration, protesters filled the streets of Moscow and other major cities to denounce his comeback. Such opposition required dousing. But an opportunity abroad also beckoned—and the solution to Putin's domestic crisis and the fulfillment of his international ambitions would roll into one.

After the global financial crisis of 2008, populist uprisings had sprouted across Europe. Putin and his strategists sensed the beginnings of a larger uprising that could upend the Continent and make life uncomfortable for his geostrategic competitors. A 2013 paper from the Center for Strategic Communications, a pro-Kremlin think tank, observed that large patches of the West despised feminism and the gay-rights movement and, more generally, the progressive direction in which elites had pushed their societies. With the traditionalist masses ripe for revolt, the Russian president had an opportunity. He could become, as the paper's title blared, "The New World Leader of Conservatism."

Putin had never spoken glowingly of the West, but grim pronouncements about its fate grew central to his rhetoric. He hurled splenetic attacks against the culturally decadent, spiritually desiccated "Euro-Atlantic." He warned against the fetishization of tolerance and diversity. He described the West as "infertile and genderless," while Russian propaganda derided Europe as "Gayropa." At the heart of Putin's case was an accusation of moral relativism. "We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization," he said at a conference in 2013. "They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious, and even sexual … They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in

Illustration by EDMON DE HARO

Satan." By succumbing to secularism, he noted on another occasion, the West was trending toward "chaotic darkness" and a "return to a primitive state."

Few analysts grasped the potency such rhetoric would have beyond Russia. But right-wing leaders around the world—from Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines to Nigel Farage in Britain to Donald Trump in the U.S.—now speak of Putin in heroic terms. Their fawning is often discounted, ascribed to under-the-table payments or other stealthy Russian efforts. These explanations don't wholly account for Putin's outsize stature, however. He has achieved this prominence because he anticipated the global populist revolt and helped give it ideological shape. With his apocalyptic critique of the West—which also plays on anxieties about Christendom's supposedly limp response to Islamist terrorism—Putin has become a mascot of traditionalist resistance.

François Fillon with Vladimir Putin in 2011. Fillon, who is now running for the French presidency, cultivated a tight relationship with the man he has called "my dear Vladimir."

NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP/GETTY

AT FIRST, most Western observers assumed that Putin wouldn't win fans outside the furthest fringes of the right. In France, Russia's hopes initially focused on Marine Le Pen, the fierce critic of immigration and globalization, whose National Front party has harbored Holocaust deniers and Vichy nostalgists. In 2014, a Russian bank loaned Le Pen's cash-strapped party 9 million euros. Le Pen, in turn, has amplified Putin's talking points, declaring Russia "a natural ally of Europe."

If Europe's far-right parties were Putin's landing beach, he has made inroads, and hovers over the current French presidential election. During last year's campaign for the nomination of France's Republican Party—the newly rechristened home of the center-right—candidates tripped over themselves to pay obeisance. Former President Nicolas Sarkozy, vying to resurrect his career, sprinted away from his own history of slagging the Russian strongman. On a trip to St. Petersburg in June, he made a point of stopping for a photo op with Putin, pumping his hand and smiling broadly. Sarkozy's pre-campaign book swooned, "I am not one of his intimates but I confess to appreciating his frankness, his calm, his authority. And then he is so Russian!" These were gaudy gestures, but hardly idiosyncratic. Sarkozy's rival François Fillon behaved just as effusively, though his affection seemed less contrived—during his years as prime minister, from 2008 to 2012, he cultivated a tight relationship with the man he has called "my dear Vladimir." In November, Alain Juppé, the Republican contender initially favored by oddsmakers, moaned, "This must be the first presidential election in which the Russian president chooses his candidate." But deriding his opponents for "acute Russophilia" hardly helped him: Fillon is now the party's nominee, having drubbed Juppé by more than 30 points.

The French embrace of Putin has roots in the country's long history of Russophilia and anti-Americanism. But Putin's vogue also stems from the substance of his jeremiads, which match the mood of France's conservative base. As French book sales reveal, the public has an apparently bottomless appetite for polemics that depict the country plummeting to its doom. Much anxiety focuses on the notion of *le grand remplacement*, the fear that France will turn into a Muslim country, aided by native-born couples' failure to reproduce. The gloom is xenophobic, but also self-loathing. Right-wing polemicists bellow that France will squander its revolutionary tradition and cultural heritage without lifting a finger to save itself. The defining screed is Éric Zemmour's *The French Suicide*, an unabridged catalog of the forces sucking the vitality from his country—post-structuralist academics, unpatriotic businessmen, technocrats in the European Union.

Contrary to prevailing wisdom, the new populism cannot be wholly attributed to economic displacement. In a short period of time, the West has undergone a major cultural revolution—an influx of immigrants and a movement toward a new egalitarianism. Only a decade ago, an issue like gay marriage was so contentious that politicians like Barack Obama didn't dare support the cause. The movement's success seemed like one of the marvels of the age—an object lesson of what can happen when the internet helps tie people together and the entertainment industry preaches tolerance. It seemed that the culture wars had been extinguished, that the forces of progress had won an unmitigated victory.

Except they hadn't. In search of a global explanation for the ongoing revolt, Pippa Norris of Harvard's Kennedy

School and Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan have sifted through polling data and social science. They've found that right-wing populists have largely fed off the alienation of older white voters, who are angry about the erosion of traditional values. These voters feel stigmatized as intolerant and bigoted for even entertaining such anger—and their rage grows. "These are the groups most likely to feel that they have become strangers from the predominant values in their own country, left behind by progressive tides of cultural change," Norris and Inglehart write. Their alienation and fear of civilizational collapse have eroded their faith in democracy, and created a yearning for a strongman who can stave off catastrophe.

Gay marriage is a divisive issue in France, where Fillon has vowed to block adoption by same-sex couples. The battle against Islamism also remains a rallying cry; Fillon's campaign manifesto is called *Conquering Islamic Totalitarianism*. When he genuflects before the Russian president, he knows that his base yearns for everything Putin embodies—manliness, thumbing one's nose at political correctness, war with the godless cosmopolitans in Brussels, refusal to tolerate the real and growing threat of terrorism. As the Hudson Institute's Benjamin Haddad told me, "Fillon may justify his embrace of Putin with international relations, but he is increasingly a symbol for domestic purposes."

PUTIN HAS INVERTED the Cold War narrative. Back in Soviet times, the West was the enemy of godlessness. Today, it's the Russian leader who seeks to snuff out that supposed threat. American conservatives are struggling with the irony. They seem to know that they should resist the pull of Putinism—many initially responded to his entreaties with a ritualistic wringing of hands—but they can't help themselves.

In 2013, the columnist Pat Buchanan championed Putin as an enemy of secularism: "He is seeking to redefine the 'Us vs. Them' world conflict of the future as one in which conservatives, traditionalists, and nationalists of all continents and countries stand up against the cultural and ideological imperialism of what he sees as a decadent west." This type of homage became a trope among conservative thinkers—including Rod Dreher and Matt Drudge—and in turn influenced their followers. In mid-2014, 51 percent of American Republicans viewed Putin very unfavorably. Two years later, 14 percent did. By January, 75 percent of Republicans said Trump had the "right approach" toward Russia. (When asked about this change, Putin replied, "It's because people share our traditional sensibilities.")

Donald Trump, who hardly seems distraught over the coarsening of American life, is in some ways a strange inductee into the cult of Putin. Indeed, of the raft of theories posited to explain Trump's worshipful attitude toward the Russian leader, many focus less on ideology than on conspiracy. And yet, Trump's analysis of the world does converge with Putin's. Trump's chief ideologist, Steve Bannon, clearly views Western civilization as feckless and inert. In 2014, Bannon spoke via Skype at a conference hosted by the Human Dignity Institute, a conservative Catholic think tank. Shortly after the election, *BuzzFeed* published a transcript of his talk, which was erudite, nuanced, and terrifying.

Kulturkampf is not merely a diagnosis of the world; it is a political strategy.

Bannon was clear-eyed about Putin's kleptocratic tendencies and imperial ambitions. That skepticism, however, didn't undermine his sympathy for Putin's project. "We, the Judeo-Christian West, really have to look at what [Putin's] talking about as far as traditionalism goes," Bannon said. He shared Putin's vision of a world disastrously skidding off the tracks—"a crisis both of our Church, a crisis of our faith, a crisis of the West, a crisis of capitalism." The word *crisis* is used so promiscuously that it can lose meaning, but not in this case. "We're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict," Bannon said, exhorting his audience to "fight for our beliefs against this new barbarity that's starting, that will completely eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years."

Of course, Kulturkampf is not merely a diagnosis of the world; it is a political strategy. Putin has demonstrated its efficacy. When protesters looked like a challenge to his rule, he turned the nation's attention to gays and lesbians, whom he depicted as an existential threat to the Russian way of life. The journalist Masha Gessen described this fomented wave of homophobia as "a sweet potion for a country that had always drawn strength and unity from fearmongering." The secularist scourge would later be used to smear those who opposed the invasion of Ukraine: Pro-European demonstrators in Kiev were portrayed as wanting same-sex marriage. Traditionalism has allowed Putin to consolidate power while sucking the life from civil society.

The specter of decline has haunted the West ever since its rise. But the recent spate of jeremiads is different. They have an unusually large constituency, and revisit some of the most dangerous strains of apocalyptic thinking from the last century—the fear of cultural degeneration, the anxiety that civilization has grown unmanly, the sense that liberal democracy has failed to safeguard civilization from its enemies. Trump doesn't think as rigorously or as broadly as Putin, but his campaign was shot through with similar elements. If he carries this sort of talk into office, he will be joining a chorus of like-minded allies across the world.

There is little empirical basis for the charge of civilizational rot. It speaks to an emotional state, one we should do our best to understand and even empathize with. But we know from history that premonitions of imminent barbarism serve to justify extreme countermeasures. These are the anxieties from which dictators rise. Admiring strongmen from a distance is the window-shopping that can end in the purchase of authoritarianism. A

• SKETCH

Instamom

The enviable, highly profitable life of Amber Fillerup Clark, perfect mother and social-media influencer

BY BIANCA BOSKER

One morning in early November, Amber Fillerup Clark sat at her dining-room table, which serves as her desk most days, peering at her laptop. She had professional photo-editing software open, and was using it to tweak pictures that her husband, David Clark, had snapped of their toddlers dressed up as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. The children had rotated through several costumes before Halloween—11-month-old Rosie wore a lamb outfit; 2-year-old Atticus dressed as a dragon; the whole family donned matching superhero getups—and Clark had photographed each one for Barefoot Blonde, Fillerup Clark's blog about motherhood and fashion. As we talked, she adjusted the colors in the pictures, giving them the warm pastel hues characteristic of wedding portraits. She assured me that she stops short of Photoshopping appearances, then reconsidered: "Sometimes I'll whiten teeth."

Fillerup Clark has shared enough holidays and milestones that she and her husband can predict what types of images will charm her followers. "Before we post a picture, we can usually tell how good the engagement will be based off the content," Clark said.

"If it has the whole family in a pretty place, traveling, that's going to do the best," Fillerup Clark said. On another occasion she'd told me, "We always have to think of our life as 'Where can you take the prettiest pictures?' "

Not so long ago, Fillerup Clark was a broke student in Provo, Utah. Today, at age 26, she is the equivalent of internet royalty: a "relatable influencer," someone whom hundreds of thousands of women trust as a friend and whom companies pay handsomely to name-drop their products. Stepping for the first time into her living room in Manhattan, I found it intimately familiar, thanks to the up-close-and-personal Instagram photos, YouTube vlogs, Snapchat videos, and blog posts Fillerup Clark shares with her 1.3 million Instagram followers, 227,000 YouTube fans, and 250,000 monthly blog readers. I knew from the redecoration "reveal" she'd posted a few months back that the velvet side chair had been provided by West Elm, and I recognized the tangle of curls on a shelf as clip-in hair extensions from Barefoot Blonde Hair, Fillerup Clark's own line of products, which sold out within 72 hours of its debut in October. I could even name the stuffed dog on the couch: That was Chauncey, it belonged to Atticus, and it had been named after the family's real golden retriever.

Since launching Barefoot Blonde in 2010, Fillerup Clark has adhered to a deceptively simple formula: beautiful pictures of herself—she has the golden locks, lithe frame, and wholesome femininity associated with prom queens who date quarterbacks—paired with breezy diary entries that read like texts from a best friend. "Me and my friends were talking about how long the perfect massage would be and I think we settled on 5 hours lol," she wrote in a blog post featuring 19 photos of her family's lazy day at home. Nothing is too momentous or mundane to share: Watch a video of Fillerup Clark in a hospital gown, shortly before giving birth to Rosie, then scroll through pictures of her walking Chauncey, her outfit annotated with links (when a reader purchases an item, Fillerup Clark usually

Illustration by JOHN CUNEO

earns a commission). She has chronicled her engagement to David, their wedding, both their children's infancies, and their 2014 move from Alabama to New York City. Soon the blog will detail construction of their dream house, near Fillerup Clark's hometown of Mesa, Arizona, where the family will move early next year.

FILLERUP CLARK'S PORTRAIT of domestic bliss has earned her a top spot among the second generation of so-called mommy bloggers. She joins a clique of stylish women, among them Naomi Davis of Love Taza and Rachel Parcell of Pink Peonies, who have acquired loyal followings (and incomes rumored to be in the seven figures) by showing themselves excelling as ordinary wives and mothers. If the feats these blogs capture are familiar—dressing well, attending to children—this is a key part of the appeal; the women epitomize a new breed of celebrity, as public fascination expands beyond the rich and famous to the well-off and above-average. "We're seeing people following almost idealized versions of themselves," said Rob Fishman, a co-founder of Niche, an ad network for online influencers that is now owned by Twitter. "It's this attainable perfection."

Bloggers at Fillerup Clark's level can earn between $1 million and $6 million a year.

Mommy blogs first emerged as a mainstream obsession in the mid-2000s, led by dooce, which featured Heather Armstrong, an irreverent ex-Mormon, dishing on the agony and ecstasy of raising two daughters. Armstrong, who cut back on blogging in 2015, has trouble recognizing the genre in its current form. As she sees it, written storytelling has given way to pretty pictures. Where advertising was once confined to banner ads, "native advertising" now packages sponsors' messages in a blogger's voice. (Many Barefoot Blonde photos include product placements: A post sponsored by Seventh Generation, for example, features the Clarks picking berries with their kids outfitted in the company's diapers.) And where Armstrong's cohort divulged the frustrations of parenting—"Feeling guilty for blaming my farts on the baby," reads a typical dooce post—current bloggers, in her view, present an airbrushed, Pinterest-ready vision of parenthood, one that can leave readers feeling jealous, inadequate, or ashamed when they almost inevitably fall short. "Because the way to make money now is through sponsorships, we've lost the grit, truth, and messiness," said Armstrong, citing pressure from sponsors to tone down her voice and rope her daughters into promotions. "It's all staged. It's all fake. It's like, 'How many photos did you have to take to get that one photo?' "

Fillerup Clark rejects the idea that she whitewashes motherhood. "We take pictures as it happens. Whatever we get, we get," she said, as she winnowed about 30 photos of her kids in their Trump and Clinton costumes down to six blog-worthy shots. She noted that she regularly shares aches and pains in the text accompanying her photos. And when it comes to her own appearance, she is candid about the ways she gives Mother Nature a helping hand, openly discussing her fondness for sunless tanning, false eyelashes, veneers, and hair extensions.

As Fillerup Clark clicked through photos, I asked how she chose which ones to post. Given that millions of Instagrammers perseverate over vacation snapshots and food pictures in the hopes of attaining even a fraction of Fillerup Clark's success, I steeled myself for a spiel on the hallmarks of the Barefoot Blonde brand. Fillerup Clark looked at me like I'd asked why she was right-handed. "I don't know," she said. "Whichever ones I like best." What fueled her success on Instagram? "It just kind of happened." Why do people find her interesting? "Good question. I don't know." This might have sounded coy. But Fillerup Clark seems to just instinctually understand what the internet wants, and to take pleasure in offering it. Though she has two assistants, she handles most fan-facing details herself: She vets comments, replies personally to followers, brainstorms photo shoots, plans outfits, writes her blog entries, and curates the pictures. (She and Clark do have a part-time nanny, who has traveled with them.) Fillerup Clark speculates that logging her life might come naturally because—like a disproportionate number of top mommy bloggers—she and her husband belong to the Mormon Church, which encourages keeping a journal.

Fillerup Clark did not originally intend to make Barefoot Blonde a career. She created the site while volunteering at an orphanage in Fiji when she was 20, so she could update her family back home; after returning to Utah, she transitioned to posting style inspirations and musings on college life. The blog's early popularity earned her a gig with an alarm-system company that paid her to wear a T-shirt with its logo around campus. But school failed to keep her interest, and after a year she transferred to a yearlong hairstyling program; she went back to college for a second year before dropping out. During their first year of marriage, she and Clark made ends meet by donating plasma at a blood bank and living in his parents' basement. Then, in 2014, the blog got its first big break: a sponsored campaign with the hair-care brand Tresemmé. Before the year was up, Barefoot Blonde was profitable enough that Clark quit law school to become a "blog husband." Today he serves as the go-to photographer and manages logistics for the hair-extension line. The Clarks declined to tell me their income, but Karen Robinovitz, a co-founder of Digital Brand Architects, the agency that represents Fillerup Clark, said bloggers at her level can earn between $1 million and $6 million a year.

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON, I joined all four Clarks for a photo shoot in Central Park. Fillerup Clark, Rosie, and Atticus wore matching jean jackets—freebies from a boutique—and Fillerup Clark tossed leaves above the kids' beaming faces while the photographer, a friend hired for the day, snapped

away. Like other successful parent bloggers, the Clarks have been accused of exploiting their children for financial gain. They counter that Rosie and Atticus are never forced to do anything, and that Barefoot Blonde allows the family more time together than would any traditional job. As the shoot continued, the toddlers appeared largely oblivious to the camera and delighted to be feeding ducks with their parents.

Fillerup Clark says she juggles about five photo shoots a week, not including impromptu picture-taking when the family happens to be doing something photogenic. It was the Clarks' second visit to Central Park that day; the earlier trip, which they'd deemed a casual family outing, not an official shoot, had generated content for an Instagram photo, a Snapchat video, and a blog post.

The seemingly effortless grace with which the Clarks are living the American dream appeals to their fans, who are overwhelmingly female, largely in their mid-20s to early 30s, and concentrated in New York and California, according to Clark. Twenty-nine-year-old Gena Baillis, who lives with her husband and their infant son in Charleston, South Carolina, has followed Fillerup Clark for three years and looks to her "to help me become a better version of myself." On Fillerup Clark's recommendation, Baillis has bought nail polish, camera gear, sports drinks, healthy snacks, and workout equipment. (For her birthday, Baillis said, her husband "bought me a spinning bike because Amber takes spinning and I swore that's what would work.") "My husband's like, 'You aspire to be like her, so this is what you need to do,'" said Baillis. "They kinda seem to live a fantasy life, but they seem pretty down-to-earth. It doesn't seem fake at all."

The shoot in Central Park wrapped up within half an hour, and as we walked back to the Clarks' apartment, the Manhattan skyline glowing gold in the late-afternoon sun, Fillerup Clark and her husband reflected on how Arizona's landscape would be less photogenic than New York's. They were already planning ahead to ensure their new home would offer attractive backdrops.

"So we're thinking of having an indoor gym in our home because if we could even say yes to one or two fitness campaigns, then that would pay for the gym itself," Fillerup Clark explained. They'd sprung for an outdoor shower for similar reasons. "Sometimes we'll have a campaign where we're doing shaving cream, and it's a little awkward to be indoors in your shower, so it makes more sense to have a beautiful outdoor shower and do it out there." They were incorporating picturesque window seats, and had come up with a special design for what they called "Amber's hallway": It would be extra wide and lined with windows and, according to Clark, was partly "based off of 'I want to take pictures there.'"

"The more our house becomes Pinnable, the more it leads back to the website," said Clark. "We want it to traffic well. We want it to go viral." *A*

Bianca Bosker is the author of Cork Dork, *which comes out this month.*

• VERY SHORT BOOK EXCERPT

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM!

IN HIS BOOK *10 Rules of Writing*, Elmore Leonard offered a rule about exclamation points. He stated, "You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose." Leonard was prolific. He wrote more than 40 novels in his career, totaling 3.4 million words. If he had followed his own advice, he would have used only 102 exclamation points in his entire career. In practice, he used 1,651. That's 16 times as many as he recommended! But before you start thinking that Leonard was a secret exclamation-point fanatic, consider the chart below.

Author		Number of ! per 100,000 Words
ELMORE LEONARD	45 novels	49
ERNEST HEMINGWAY	10 novels	59
TONI MORRISON	10 novels	111
SALMAN RUSHDIE	9 novels	204
VIRGINIA WOOLF	9 novels	258
E. L. JAMES	3 novels	278
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD	4 novels	356
JANE AUSTEN	6 novels	449
TOM WOLFE	4 novels	929
JAMES JOYCE	3 novels	1,105

—Adapted from *Nabokov's Favorite Word Is Mauve: What the Numbers Reveal About the Classics, Bestsellers, and Our Own Writing*, by Ben Blatt, published in March by Simon & Schuster

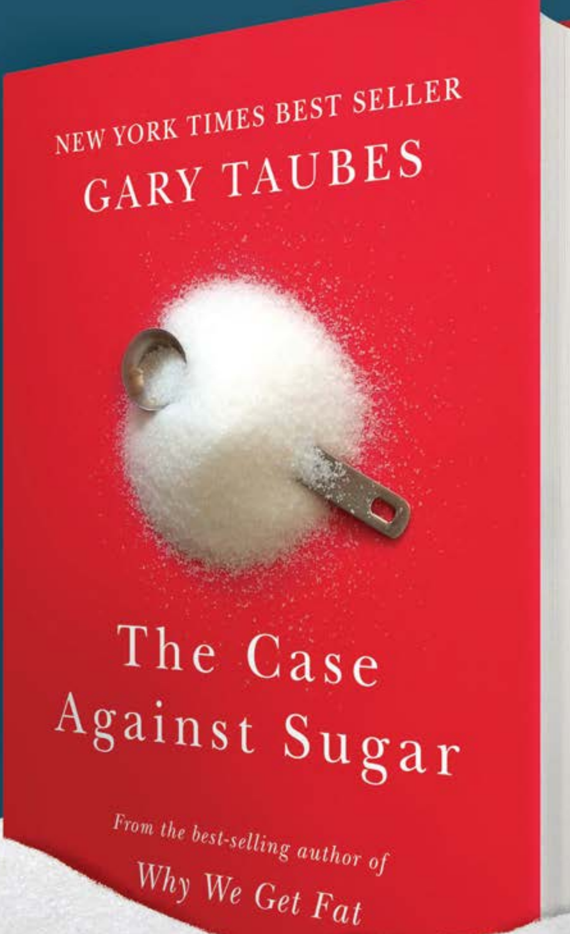
Illustration by JOE McKENDRY

"Here is a book about sugar that sugarcoats nothing.
THE STUFF KILLS."
—DAN BARBER on the front cover of *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW*

From the best-selling author of WHY WE GET FAT,
a groundbreaking, eye-opening exposé that makes the convincing case that sugar is the new tobacco: backed by powerful lobbies, entrenched in our lives, and making us very sick.

"THIS IS REQUIRED READING for not only every parent, but every American."
–KATIE COURIC

"POWERFUL… A matter of life and death."
–*THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



"RIVETING… UTTERLY PERSUASIVE… [It] explains why sugar–not sloth, not fat–accounts for our unprecedented levels of obesity, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease."
–GRETCHEN RUBIN

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• BUSINESS

Wall Street Diversifies Itself

Exchange-traded funds are challenging the status quo in investment management—including who's in charge.

BY BETHANY McLEAN

WALL STREET IS an unlikely vanguard against corporate America's diversity problem. The white shoes of investment management are still worn almost exclusively by white men. So it's notable that the surging business of exchange-traded funds, or ETFs—investment funds that generally track an index like the S&P 500 and are traded on exchanges like stocks—looks a little different.

The demographics of this slice of the financial-services industry haven't yet been studied. But I recently spoke with roughly a dozen women and people of color working in ETFs who say that they see more diversity in their business than elsewhere in finance—and the anecdotal evidence is convincing. While McKinsey reports that women represent only about 20 percent of senior vice presidents and vice presidents in asset management and institutional investment, Laura Morrison, the head of exchange-traded products at Bats Global Markets, says that women make up half of the team that works to get funds listed on Bats's exchanges around the world. At iShares, the largest provider of ETFs in the world, which was acquired by the financial giant BlackRock in 2009, seven out of the 14 members of the global executive committee are women. A group called Women in ETFs, started three years ago by five prominent female executives, now counts more than 2,000 members.

Reggie Browne, the head of ETF trading at Cantor Fitzgerald—whom *Forbes* in 2012 dubbed the "Godfather of ETFs," and who is himself African American—says that at least one woman or person of color holds a senior position at every ETF company or unit he knows of. Ben Johnson, who analyzes ETFs for Morningstar, says that compared with the rest of the investment-management field, the workforce "is somewhat more diverse."

"Somewhat," of course, isn't a ringing endorsement. But consider the world we live in. Female representation in finance *dropped* slightly from 2000 to 2015, and a 2013 Government Accountability Office report found that in the U.S., black people held just 2.7 percent of senior positions in financial-services companies. *Business Insider*, after reviewing self-reported diversity metrics from six of the biggest Wall Street banks, reported in 2015 that more than 80 percent of executives were white and more than two-thirds of them were men.

Against this backdrop, ETFs stand out. And unlike many other parts of the finance industry since the crisis of 2008, they've also been wildly successful: Altogether, they now control more money than hedge funds do. It's worth considering what might make the ETF business distinct—in hiring as well as performance—and whether the rest of the industry could catch on.

THE ETF BOOM is part of a revolution in the way money is invested. The funds, most of which simply follow the performance of an index, represent a trend toward so-called passive management—a strategy that has begun

Illustration by DOUG CHAYKA

to pose an existential threat to stock pickers. A study by S&P Dow Jones Indices found that from 2006 to mid-2016, 87 percent of all actively managed U.S. equity funds underperformed the market. ETFs also have the advantage of low fees, which average less than a third of those of actively managed mutual funds. In just over two decades, assets in ETFs have expanded to more than $2.5 trillion in the United States alone, making them one of the fastest-growing investment products in history.

What's generally considered to be the first ETF in the U.S. was launched in 1993, when the American Stock Exchange and State Street created something called S&P Depositary Receipts, or SPDRs (pronounced "spiders"). Each share holds a stake in the 500 stocks represented by the S&P 500. Kathleen Moriarty, who worked at the law firm Orrick in the early 1990s, recalls a male partner's assigning her to help with the legal work on SPDRs when he happened to stand next to her in the elevator. "Everyone thought [SPDRs were] a one-off," she says. And because the field was new, "you didn't have to work through several rounds of the organizational chart. People who gravitated to it were accepted."

Today, Moriarty is a go-to lawyer for new ETFs. Her nickname in the industry is "Spider-Woman." But back then, ETFs were considered marginal products. They were governed by arcane laws and didn't carry the same star power as ventures like investment banking and trading. Deborah Fuhr, a prominent figure in the global ETF community who now runs a consulting firm called ETFGI, says the environment made space for women: "Men weren't clamoring for those jobs, so women were able to take more senior roles." Amy Schioldager, who was an early employee of iShares—the first business to market ETFs to retail investors—and now manages BlackRock's worldwide ETF investments, says, "Honestly, it was just 'We need someone to make this happen.'"

Many prominent women in the industry have gotten their start at iShares. The business was originally developed by Morgan Stanley and Barclays Global Investors in the mid-'90s under the leadership of Patricia Dunn. "It was a deeply entrepreneurial organization," recalls Sue Thompson, a founder of Women in ETFs who worked at iShares until last spring, when she left to start her own consulting firm.

Dunn was a strong supporter of women, and Thompson recalls times when the entire slate of interviewers for a prospective hire would be made up of women. "My boss was a woman, and my boss's boss was a woman, and her boss's boss's boss was a woman!" says Marie Dzanis, another early employee. (Dunn, whose legacy was tarnished by her involvement in a spying campaign at Hewlett-Packard when she was chairman of that company's board, died of ovarian cancer in 2011. The Wikipedia description of iShares does not mention her, instead giving full credit to two men who helped develop the business.)

> **"My boss was a woman, and my boss's boss was a woman, and her boss's boss's boss was a woman!"**

One thing that distinguished Dunn's leadership was that she didn't merely mentor other women; she sponsored them. Mentorship generally entails offering advice without much at stake for the advice giver. Sponsorship, says Lori Heinel, the deputy global chief investment officer at State Street, is "a willingness to risk your own political capital to push someone along or pull someone up." Many big promotions require sponsorship, and typically, men sponsor other men. As a report by the consulting firm Oliver Wyman puts it, "It is more difficult for women to find a sponsor in their organization, with few having senior colleagues pushing them up to the next career level."

Sponsorship is a large part of the thinking behind Women in ETFs—which is also open to men, who account for about 10 percent of its members. (Reggie Browne is a member.) Roughly a quarter of the members rank as senior vice presidents or higher, and local chapters are designed to let rising women take on leadership roles and meet possible sponsors outside their own companies.

It's not an accident that these practices took hold in an area where white men hadn't already staked their claim, where the rules of the game weren't already defined, and where the career path wasn't seen as prestigious. Browne—who recently helped Cantor Fitzgerald start an internship program for graduates of historically black colleges and universities—points out that in the nascent ETF business, there was "no old boys' network that holds people down." ETFs "don't have this 100-year history of what the people in charge look like," says Sue Thompson. "There is more opportunity for the smartest, the brightest, those with the most interesting vision."

Many of these factors—the entrepreneurialism, the newness, the growth—would also seem to apply to Silicon Valley, where the lack of both gender and racial diversity has been well chronicled. But as Lori Heinel points out, in Silicon Valley, where there's a higher concentration of STEM careers, "there's a heavy reliance on an educational background skill set that is classically more male." For ETFs, on the other hand, much of the infrastructure is in marketing, sales, and relationship management, roles that leave openings for those who are ambitious, talented, and hardworking—even if they don't have a specific set of technical skills.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN as ETFs go mainstream? Big firms including Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, and New York Life have started to acquire ETF units or launch their own, and the upstart business is meeting the traditional culture of Wall Street.

Shundrawn Thomas, who helped launch ETFs at Northern Trust and is now part of the firm's asset-management leadership team, says that he is often the only African American participating on industry panels with

others at the executive level. As he has moved up the ranks, he says, "I'm not sitting around the table with a whole lot of diversity." And while it might seem that absorbing a diverse ETF team would eventually affect the makeup of a firm's management structure, change doesn't necessarily trickle up. As Amy Schioldager, who is retiring from BlackRock this year, puts it, "We all know senior women beget senior women." Seniority is a relative concept, and when big firms acquire smaller ones, the culture of the big firm is likely to prevail. More than seven years after acquiring iShares, BlackRock still has few women in line for top corporate jobs.

Yet women and people of color have some forces on their side—notably customers. Pension plans are a big source of capital for the asset-management industry, and Reggie Browne points out that several state-employee retirement systems now monitor gender and racial diversity among their investment managers. If you can't meet their requirements, he says, "you are done." Last winter, State Street launched an ETF called SHE, to track the performance of big companies that have high levels of gender diversity on their boards and among their senior leadership. The California State Teachers' Retirement System made an initial investment of $250 million in SHE on the basis of research showing that increasing a company's diversity leads to higher returns.

The growing recognition that more-diverse teams perform better—possibly even better than teams with high IQs, research has suggested—is giving big firms a financial incentive, not just a moral imperative, to move the needle. As a McKinsey study reported last year, "Companies' commitment to gender diversity is at an all-time high, but they are struggling to put their commitment into practice." The GAO noted a similar problem with racial diversity. That it isn't easy is all the more reason to look to the ETF business as an example. *A*

Bethany McLean is a financial journalist and the author of several books.

• STUDY OF STUDIES

Unsafe at Any Speed

The case against human drivers

BY JAKE PELINI

UNDER OHIO LAW, a driver can accrue 12 points' worth of violations within two years before his license is automatically suspended. That is, he could be caught going 30 miles over the limit three times (four points each) or cause multiple accidents resulting in misdemeanor reckless-driving charges (two to four points each) before losing the right to drive. Should he commit vehicular manslaughter (six points), his license would be suspended, but he could get it back in as little as six months. Other states have similarly forgiving laws. Considering that 94 percent of crashes involve some form of driver error or impairment immediately before impact, **[1]** you have to wonder: Are we too tolerant of bad driving—or is the problem more basic? Are we, as humans, simply not suited to the task?

According to one analysis, 4 million of the nearly 11 million crashes that occur annually could potentially be avoided if distractions were eliminated. **[2]** But instead, we actively seek out distractions, like texting. A meta-analysis of 28 studies confirms that typing or reading on our phones while driving adversely affects stimulus detection, reaction time, lane positioning, vehicle control, and, yes, collision rate. **[3]** Some researchers have concluded that texting while driving may pose more of an accident risk than driving either under the influence of marijuana or at the legal alcohol limit. **[4]** And, contrary to stereotype, teenagers aren't the primary offenders: A survey of more than 2,000 adults suggests that they are just as likely as teens to have texted behind the wheel, and substantially more likely to have talked on their cellphone. **[5]**

Which isn't to say we're all equally bad in the driver's seat. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people who report becoming angry while driving are more likely than others to behave recklessly on the road. **[6]** So are people who drive fancy cars. In one pair of studies, researchers observed that drivers of expensive cars (think shiny new BMWs) were less likely than those with older, less expensive, or beat-up vehicles to yield to other drivers and pedestrians. **[7]** And according to a four-year study, adults who played risk-glorifying video games like Grand Theft Auto as adolescents were more likely to have risky driving habits—and to get into accidents—later on. **[8]**

Compounding the problem, few of us accept that we are bad drivers. Many people overestimate their driving capabilities thanks to a cognitive bias known as the illusion of control, which is predictive of dangerous driving behavior. **[9]** We may be especially prone to overconfidence when we think no one is watching. One study found that we're more likely to engage in aggressive behavior such as cutting across a lane when we don't have a passenger. **[10]**

Driverless cars are looking better and better: They won't text with each other, or get angry. They won't play Grand Theft Auto in their off-hours. And they won't cut you off just for the hell of it. Even if they're BMWs. *A*

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•POLITICS

Red State, Blue City

The United States is coming to resemble two countries, one rural and one urban. What happens when they go to war?

BY DAVID A. GRAHAM

The United States now has its most metropolitan president in recent memory: a Queens-bred, skyscraper-building, apartment-dwelling Manhattanite. Yet it was rural America that carried Donald Trump to victory; the president got trounced in cities. Republican reliance on suburbs and the countryside isn't new, of course, but in the presidential election, the gulf between urban and nonurban voters was wider than it had been in nearly a century. Hillary Clinton won 88 of the country's 100 biggest counties, but still went down to defeat.

American cities seem to be cleaving from the rest of the country, and the temptation for liberals is to try to embrace that trend. With Republicans controlling the presidency, both houses of Congress, and most statehouses, Democrats are turning to local ordinances as their best hope on issues ranging from gun control to the minimum wage to transgender rights. Even before Inauguration Day, big-city mayors laid plans to nudge the new administration leftward, especially on immigration—and, should that fail, to join together in resisting its policies.

But if liberal advocates are clinging to the hope that federalism will allow them to create progressive havens, they're overlooking a big problem: Power may be decentralized in the American system, but it devolves to the state, not the city. Recent events in red states where cities are pockets of liberalism are instructive, and cautionary. Over the past few years, city governments and state legislatures have fought each other in a series of battles involving preemption, the principle that state law trumps local regulation, just as federal law supersedes state law. It hasn't gone well for the city dwellers.

Close observers of these clashes expect them to proliferate in the years to come, with similar results. "We are about to see a shit storm of state and federal preemption orders, of a magnitude greater than anything in history," says Mark Pertschuk of Grassroots Change, which tracks such laws through an initiative called Preemption Watch. By the group's count, at least 36 states introduced laws preempting cities in 2016.

State legislatures have put their oar in on issues ranging from the expansive to the eccentric. Common examples involve blocking local minimum-wage and sick-leave ordinances, which are opposed by business groups, and bans on plastic grocery bags, which arouse retailers' ire. Some states have prohibited cities from enacting firearm regulations, frustrating leaders who say cities have different gun problems than do rural areas. Alabama and Arizona both passed bills targeting "sanctuary cities"—those that do not cooperate with the enforcement of federal immigration laws. Even though courts threw out much of that legislation, other states have considered their own versions.

Arizona also made sure cities couldn't ban the gifts in Happy Meals (cities elsewhere had talked about outlawing them, on the theory that they lure kids to McDonald's), and when some of its cities cracked down on puppy mills, it barred local regulation of pet breeders, too. Cities in Oklahoma can't regulate e-cigarettes. Mississippi decreed that towns can't ban sugary drinks, and the beverage industry is expected to press other states to follow suit.

Most of these laws enforce conservative policy preferences. That's partly because Republicans enjoy unprecedented control in state capitals—they hold 33 governorships and majorities in 32 state legislatures. The trend also reflects a broader shift: Americans are in the midst of what's been called "the Big Sort," as they flock together with people who share similar socioeconomic profiles and politics. In general, that means rural areas are

Illustration by STEPHAN SCHMITZ

becoming more conservative, and cities more liberal. Even the reddest states contain liberal cities: Half of the U.S. metro areas with the biggest recent population gains are in the South, and they are Democratic. Texas alone is home to four such cities; Clinton carried each of them. Increasingly, the most important political and cultural divisions are not between red and blue states but between red states and the blue cities within.

Nowhere has this tension been more dramatic than in North Carolina. The state made headlines last March when its GOP-dominated general assembly abruptly overturned a Charlotte ordinance banning discrimination against LGBT people (and stating, among other things, that transgender people could use the bathroom of their choice). Legislators didn't just reverse Charlotte's ordinance, though; the state law, HB2, also barred every city in the state from passing nondiscrimination regulations, and banned local minimum-wage laws, too.

North Carolina's legislature wasn't new to preemption—previously, it had banned sanctuary cities, prohibited towns from destroying guns confiscated by the police, and blocked local fracking regulations. It had restructured the Greensboro city council so as to dilute Democratic clout. In Wake County, home to Raleigh, it had redrawn the districts for both the school board and county commission, shifting power from urban to suburban voters. The state had seized Asheville's airport and tried to seize its water system too. Lawmakers had also passed a bill wresting control of Charlotte's airport from the city and handing it to a new commission.

Rural voters harbor growing resentment toward cities from Austin to Atlanta.

HB2 was different, though—it set off a fierce nationwide backlash, including a U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit and boycotts by businesses, sports leagues, and musicians. Since corporate expansions, conventions, and concerts tend to take place in cities, North Carolina's cities have suffered the most. Within two months of HB2's passage, Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce estimated that the city had lost nearly $285 million and 1,300 jobs—and that was before the NBA yanked its 2017 All-Star Game from the city. Asheville, a bohemian tourist magnet in the Blue Ridge Mountains, lost millions from canceled conferences alone.

For Asheville residents, the series of preemption bills felt like bullying. "People are furious. They're confused," Esther Manheimer, Asheville's mayor, told me as her city battled to retain control of its water system. "We're a very desirable city to live in. We're on all the top-10 lists. How would anyone have an issue with the way Asheville is running its city, or the things that the people of Asheville value?"

NATIONAL MYTHOLOGY cherishes the New England town-hall meeting as the foundation of American democracy, and once upon a time, it was. But the Constitution doesn't mention cities at all, and since the late 19th century, courts have accepted that cities are creatures of the state.

Some states delegate certain powers to cities, but states remain the higher authority, even if city dwellers don't realize it. "Most people think, *We have an election here, we elect a mayor and our city council, we organize our democracy—we should have a right to control our own city in our own way*," says Gerald Frug, a Harvard Law professor and an expert on local government. "You go to any place in America and ask, 'Do you think this city can control its own destiny?' 'Of course it can!' The popular conception of what cities do runs in direct conflict with the legal reality."

The path to the doctrine of state supremacy was rocky. In 1857, when New York State snatched some of New York City's powers—including its police force—riots followed. But after the Civil War, the tide of public and legal opinion turned against local government. Following rapid urban growth, fueled in part by immigration, cities came to be seen as dens of licentiousness and subversive politics. Moreover, many municipalities brought trouble on themselves, spending profligately to lure railroads through town. Unable to make good on their debts, some towns and cities dissolved, leaving states holding the bag and inspiring laws that barred cities from independently issuing bonds. In an 1868 decision, the jurist John Forrest Dillon declared that cities were entirely beholden to their state legislature: "It breathes into them the breath of life, without which they cannot exist. As it creates, so may it destroy. If it may destroy, it may abridge and control."

Today's clampdowns on cities echo 19th-century anxieties about urban progressivism, demographics, and insolvency. Many of the southern cities that have been targeted for preemption are seen as magnets for out-of-state interlopers. Republican officeholders have blasted nondiscrimination ordinances like Charlotte's as contravening nature and Christian morality. They've argued that a patchwork of wage and sick-leave laws will drive away businesses, and that fracking bans will stifle the economy.

Yet the economic reality that underpinned rural-urban distrust in the 19th century is now inverted: In most states, agriculture is no longer king. Rural areas are struggling, while densely packed areas with highly educated workforces and socially liberal lifestyles flourish. In turn, rural voters harbor growing resentment toward those in cities, from Austin to Atlanta, from Birmingham to Chicago.

In this context of increasing rural-urban division, people on both sides of the political aisle have warmed to positions typically associated with their adversaries. The GOP has long viewed itself as the party of decentralization, criticizing Democrats for trying to dictate to local communities from Capitol Hill, but now Republicans are the ones preempting local government. Meanwhile, after years of seeing Democratic reforms overturned by preemption, the party of big government finds itself championing decentralized power.

Both sides may find their new positions unexpectedly difficult. As

North Carolina's experience shows, preemption-happy state governments have a tendency to overreach: The state supreme court ruled the attempted takeover of Asheville's water system unconstitutional. Federal courts struck down the redistricting efforts in Greensboro and Wake County. The takeover of Charlotte's airport foundered when the FAA pointed out that the state didn't have the authority to transfer the airport's certification. In November, voters ousted Governor Pat McCrory, in part because of HB2's deep unpopularity.

In a particularly odd twist, last summer Republicans in the North Carolina statehouse joined Democrats in rejecting a bill, offered by a powerful outgoing Republican senator, to redistrict Asheville's city council. In a heated debate, Representative Michael Speciale, a Republican, mocked his colleagues for suddenly acting as if they knew better than the people of Asheville. "We may not agree ideologically with the citizens of Asheville or the city council of Asheville," he said. "I'm sorry, but we don't need to agree with them, because we don't live there."

By and large, though, cities hold the weaker hand. It makes sense that these areas, finding themselves economically vital, increasingly progressive, and politically disempowered, would want to use local ordinances as a bulwark against conservative state and federal policies. But this gambit is likely to backfire. Insofar as states have sometimes granted cities leeway to enact policy in the past, that forbearance has been the result of political norms, not legal structures. Once those norms crumble, and state legislatures decide to assert their authority, cities will have very little recourse.

An important lesson of last year's presidential election is that American political norms are much weaker than they had appeared, allowing a scandal-plagued, unpopular candidate to triumph—in part because voters outside of cities objected to the pace of cultural change. Another lesson is that the United States is coming to resemble two separate countries, one rural and one urban.

Only one of them, at present, appears entitled to self-determination. A

BIG IN BOLIVIA

ZEBRAS IN THE STREETS

ZEBRAS ARE running rampant through the streets of La Paz, Bolivia, where they can be seen hanging out in groups, interacting with drivers, and even directing traffic. The *cebritas*, as they are known, aren't of the equid variety—rather, they're local volunteers dressed in full-body zebra costumes.

La Paz's *cebritas* program is a spiritual successor to a 1990s-era Colombian initiative launched by Bogotá's then-mayor, Antanas Mockus, who dispatched mimes to tease and shame the city's drivers for breaking traffic rules. Mockus, a philosopher and mathematician, believed that Colombians were more afraid of ridicule than of punishment. He appears to have been onto something: The mimes contributed to a 50 percent decrease in traffic fatalities in Bogotá during his tenure.

After a meeting with Mockus, Pablo Groux, who worked for La Paz's government, was inspired to make his city's "zebra crossings" (striped crosswalks) come alive. La Paz's *cebritas* employ similar tactics to Bogotá's mimes—they dance, gesture comically at drivers, and help pedestrians safely cross the street. When the program launched in 2001, it included just 24 zebras; today, La Paz has 265, and the cities of El Alto, Tarija, and Sucre have dozens more.

According to Patricia Grossman, who headed the program from 2005 to 2011, the *cebritas* at one time used whistles and flags. But organizers realized that this defeated the purpose—Grossman told me the zebras were acting like "civilian police." Today, they focus more on nudging people toward good behavior. "On a lot of busy corners you will have police directing traffic, but their method of doing it is whistling at you, yelling at you, pulling you over, giving you a ticket," says Derren Patterson, an American who owns a walking-tour agency in La Paz. "Whereas the way the zebras do it, if a car stops in the crosswalk, they will lay across his hood."

In addition to their traffic duties, the *cebritas* visit schools and hospitals, and appear in parades and on television. Most are students from disadvantaged or troubled backgrounds; in exchange for working part-time as *cebritas*, they receive a small stipend. A project called Zebra for a Day lets tourists and locals alike dress up as zebras and get a taste of the experience.

By all accounts, local drivers have grown more cautious and mannerly since the *cebritas* arrived, and the mood on the streets has improved. "They may be dressed up as zebras," says Kathia Salazar Peredo, one of the program's early organizers, "but they defend what is human about the city." In December, the *cebritas* won the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation, which recognizes cities and regions with innovative approaches to improving public life. The award's organizers commended La Paz for its response to a "very serious challenge" confronting cities worldwide—the subordination of pedestrians to cars—with "great humor and understanding," and said they hoped the project might inspire "more civilized streets" around the world.

— Isabel Henderson

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• TECHNOLOGY

Our Bots, Ourselves

How the descendants of Siri and Alexa could change our daily lives, our thoughts, and our relationships

BY MATTHEW HUTSON

In the coming decades, artificial intelligence will replace a lot of human jobs, from driving trucks to analyzing X-rays. But it will also work *with* us, taking over mundane personal tasks and enhancing our cognitive capabilities. As AI continues to improve, digital assistants—often in the form of disembodied voices—will become our helpers and collaborators, managing our schedules, guiding us through decisions, and making us better at our jobs. We'll have something akin to Samantha from the movie *Her* or Jarvis from *Iron Man*: AI "agents" that know our likes and dislikes, and that free us up to focus on what humans do best, or what we most enjoy. Here's what to expect.

1 A Voice in Your Head

Anyone who's used Siri (on Apple products) or Alexa (on Amazon Echo) has already spoken with a digital assistant. In the future, such "conversational platforms" will be our primary means of interacting with AI, according to Kun Jing, who oversees a digital assistant called Duer for the Chinese search engine Baidu. The big tech companies are racing to create the one agent to rule them all: In addition to Siri, Alexa, and Duer, there's Microsoft's Cortana, Facebook's M, and Google Assistant. Even Mattel is getting in on the action: It recently announced Aristotle, a voice-controlled AI device that can soothe babies, read bedtime stories, and tutor older kids.

These voice systems might eventually go from something you talk to on a device to something that's in your head. Numerous companies—including Sony and Apple—have developed wireless earbuds with microphones, so your virtual helper might be able to coach you on dates and interviews or discreetly remind you to take your meds.

You might even be able to communicate back without making a sound. NASA has developed a system that uses sensors on the skin of the throat and neck to interpret nerve activity. When users silently move their tongues as if speaking, the system can tell what words they're forming—even if they don't produce any noise and barely move their lips.

2 Talking Cereal Boxes

Your main AI agent won't be the only new voice in your life. You'll likely confront a cacophony of appliances and services chiming in, since companies want you to use their proprietary systems. Ryan Gavin, who oversees Microsoft's Cortana, says that in 10 years you might select furniture at the mall and say, "Hey, Cortana, can you work with the Pottery Barn bot to arrange payment and delivery?" Consider this a digitally democratized version of the old power move: "Have your bot call my bot."

Nova Spivack, a futurist and entrepreneur who works with AI, says a wearable device like Google Glass might, for example, recognize a book and then connect you to an online voice representing that book so you can ask it questions. Everything in the world could be up for a chat. ("Hello, box of Corn Flakes. Am I allergic to you?") Your agent might also augment reality with visual overlays—showing you a grocery list as you shop or displaying facts about strangers as you meet them. All

DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/GETTY; © THOMAS JEFFERSON FOUNDATION AT MONTICELLO/ON LOAN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

A BRIEF CHRONICLE OF ROBOTIC HELPERS

HISTORY

1206: Al-Jazari, an Arab scholar and mechanical genius, lays out plans for programmable automatons that could serve drinks and play music.

1804: Thomas Jefferson acquires a device with two connected pens that can create a copy of any document written with one of them.

1952: Bell Laboratories introduces Audrey, the first speech-recognition system.

1200 · 1800 · 1950

Illustration by ALVARO DOMINGUEZ

of which sounds rather intrusive. Not to worry, says Subbarao Kambhampati, the president of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence: Future agents, like trusted friends, will be able to read you and know when to interrupt—and when to leave you alone.

3 Smarter Together

In 1997, a reigning world chess champion, Garry Kasparov, lost a match to the supercomputer Deep Blue. He later found that even an amateur player armed with a mediocre computer could outmatch the smartest player or the most powerful computer working alone. Since then, others have pursued human-computer collaborations in the arts and sciences.

A subfield of AI called computational creativity forges algorithms that can write music, paint portraits, and tell jokes. So far the results haven't threatened to put artists out of work, but these systems can augment human imagination. David Cope, a composer at UC Santa Cruz, created a program he named Emily Howell, with which he chats and shares musical ideas. "It is a conversationalist composer friend," he says. "It is a true assistant." She scores some music, he tells her what he likes and doesn't like, and together they compose symphonies.

IBM's Watson, the AI system best known for winning *Jeopardy*, has engaged in creative collaborations, too. It suggested clips from the horror movie *Morgan* to use for a trailer, for instance, allowing the editor to produce a finished product in a day rather than in weeks.

Eventually, digital assistants may co-author anything from the perfect corporate memo to the next great American novel. Jamie Brew, a comedy writer for the website ClickHole, developed a predictive text interface that takes examples of a literary form and assists in producing new pieces, by giving the user a series of choices for what word to write next. Together he and the interface have churned out a new *X-Files* script and mock Craigslist ads and IMDb content warnings.

4 Mutual Understanding

Most machine-learning systems are unable to explain in human terms why they made a decision or what they intend to do next. But researchers are working to fix that. The military's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency recently announced a plan to invest significantly in explainable AI, or XAI, to make machine-learning systems more correctable, predictable, and trustworthy. Armed with XAI, your digital assistant might be able to tell you it picked a certain driving route because it knows you like back roads, or that it suggested a word change so that the tone of your email would be friendlier. In addition, with more awareness, "the robot would know when to ask for help," says Manuela Veloso, the head of Carnegie Mellon's machine-learning department, who calls this skill "symbiotic autonomy."

Researchers are developing artificial emotional intelligence, or emotion AI, so that our agents can better understand us, too. Companies such as Affectiva and Emotient (which was bought by Apple) have created systems that read emotions in users' faces. IBM's Watson can analyze text not just for emotion but for tone and, over time, for personality, according to Rob High, Watson's chief technology officer. Eventually, AI systems will analyze a person's voice, face, posture, words, context, and user history for a better understanding of what the user is feeling and how to respond. The next step, according to Rana el Kaliouby, Affectiva's co-founder and CEO, will be an emotion chip in our phones and TVs that can react in real time. "I think in the future we'll assume that every device just knows how to read your emotions," she says.

5 Getting Attached

We already know that people can form emotional bonds with Roomba vacuum cleaners and other relatively rudimentary robots. How will we relate to AI agents that speak to us in human voices and seem to understand us on a deep level?

Spivack, the futurist, pictures people partnering with lifelong virtual companions. You'll give an infant an intelligent toy that learns about her and tutors her and grows along with her. "It starts out as a little cute stuffed animal," he says, "but it evolves into something that lives in the cloud and they access on their phone. And then by 2050 or whatever, maybe it's a brain implant." Among the many questions raised by such a scenario, Spivack asks: "Who owns our agents? Are they a property of Google?" Could our oldest friends be revoked or reprogrammed at will? And without our trusted assistants, will we be helpless?

El Kaliouby, of Affectiva, sees a lot of questions around autonomy: What can an assistant do on our behalf? Should it be able to make purchases for us? What if we ask it to do something illegal—could it override our commands? She also worries about privacy. If an AI agent determines that a teenager is depressed, can it inform his parents? Spivack says we'll need to decide whether agents have something like doctor-patient or attorney-client privilege. Can they report us to law enforcement? Can they be subpoenaed? And what if there's a security breach? Some people worry that advanced AI will take over the world, but Kambhampati, of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, thinks malicious hacking is the far greater risk. Given the intimacy that we may develop with our ever-present assistants, if the wrong person were able to break in, what was once our greatest auxiliary could become our greatest liability.

Matthew Hutson is the author of The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking.

1966: An MIT professor named Joseph Weizenbaum invents Eliza, the first chatbot, and is surprised by the depth of emotional understanding that users attribute to it.

1997: The butler Jeeves invites users to pose questions in natural language (as opposed to keywords) on Ask.com.

2011: Apple introduces Siri, which grew out of a DARPA program to develop an AI assistant for the military.

2017

2050: People begin interacting with AI via brain implants.

1975 · 2000 · PREDICTIONS · 2050

STR/CALVIN CAMPBELL/AP; BEN MARGOT/AP

• WORKS IN PROGRESS

A Resort for the Apocalypse

Texas's Trident Lakes is the latest entry in a booming market for luxury bunkers.

BY BEN ROWEN

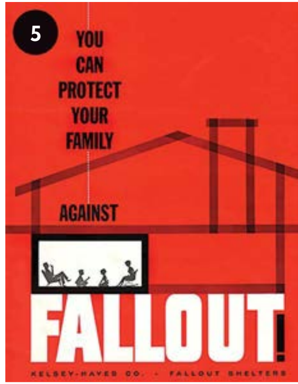
ON JULY 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy spoke to the American people of a need "new to our shores" for emergency preparedness, including fallout shelters. The bunkers of that era—Brutalist, cement, with foldout beds and stockpiled food—were designed to protect families in the event that the Cold War turned hot ❶.

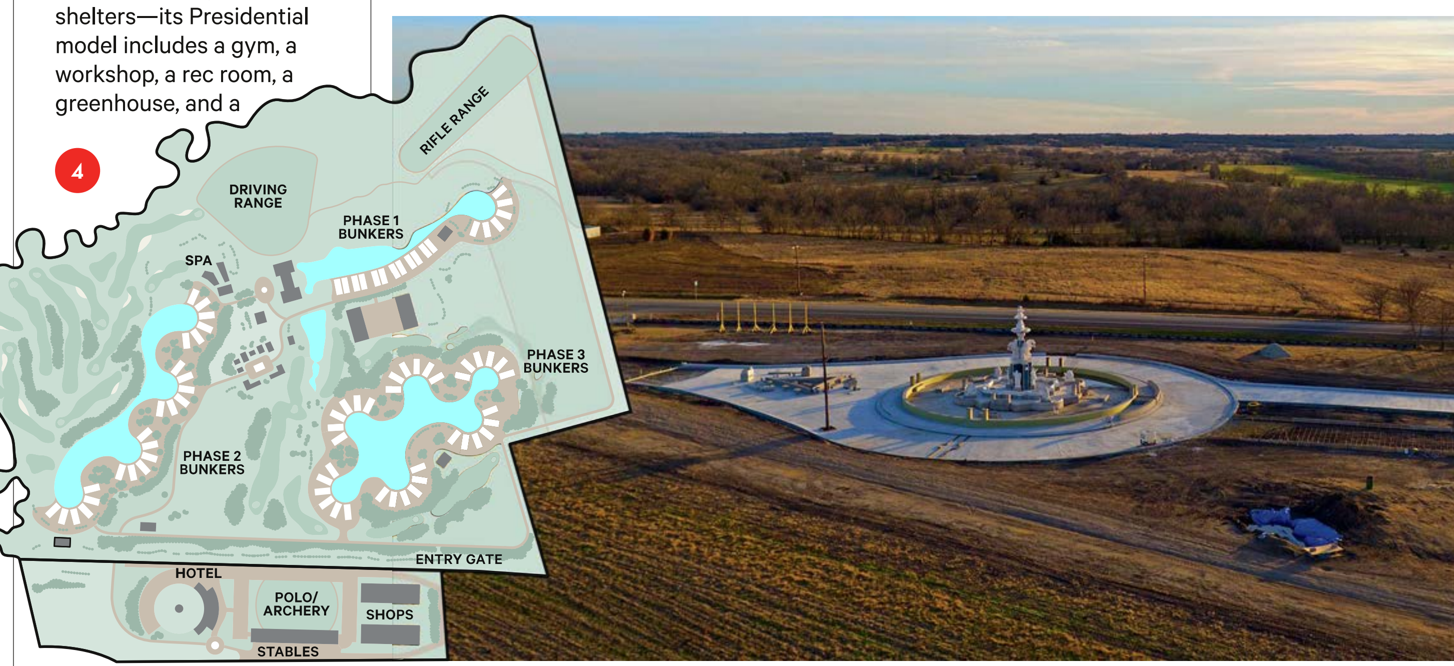
It never did, but fears of cataclysm—nuclear and otherwise—are back. So are shelters, with a twist. Growing numbers of "preppers" hope to ride out various doomsday scenarios in luxury.

Rising S Bunkers, one of several companies that specialize in high-end shelters—its Presidential model includes a gym, a workshop, a rec room, a greenhouse, and a car depot ❷—says sales of its $500,000-plus units increased 700 percent last year. (This compares with a more modest 150 percent increase across other Rising S units.) Bunker companies won't disclose customers' names, but Gary Lynch, Rising S's CEO, told me his clients include Hollywood actors and "highly recognizable sports stars." Other luxury shelters are marketed to businesspeople, from bankers to Bill Gates, who is rumored to have bunkers beneath his houses in Washington State and California.

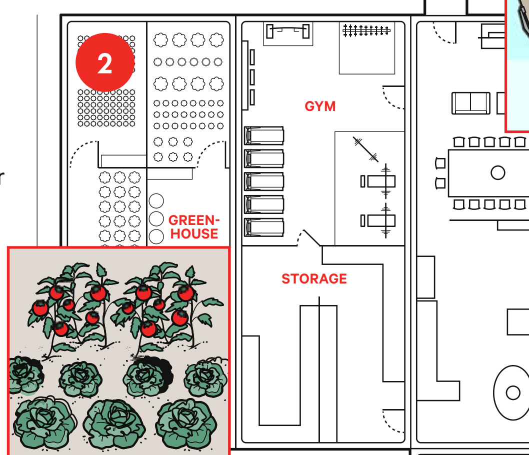
Whereas Cold War shelters, by design, were near the home and easy to get to, a handful of bunker companies are building entire survival communities in remote locations. Some of them share literal foundations with Cold War buildings: One project, Vivos XPoint, involves refurbishing 575 munitions-storage bunkers in South Dakota; Vivos Europa One, in Germany, is a Soviet armory turned luxury community with a subterranean swimming pool ❸.

By contrast, Trident Lakes ❹, a 700-acre, $330 million development in Ector, Texas, an hour and a half north of Dallas, is being built from scratch. Marketed as a "5-star playground, equipped with DEFCON 1 preparedness," it is the project of a group of investors who incorporated as Vintuary Holdings. According to James O'Connor, the CEO, Trident Lakes "is designed for enjoyment like any other





1: BETTMANN/GETTY; 2, 4, 6: CHRIS PHILPOT; 3: TERRAVIVOS

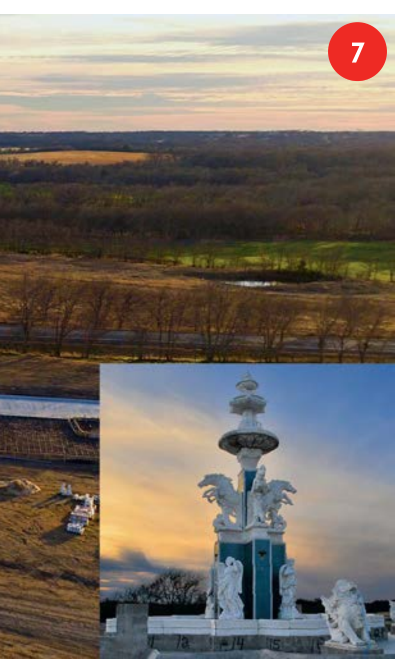


resort." (This pitch is rather different from its Cold War–era counterparts: A 1963 bunker advertisement from the Kelsey-Hayes company shows a family tucked under its home, with just rocking chairs for comfort ❺.)

In some regards, the plans for Trident Lakes do resemble those for a resort. Amenities will include a hotel, an athletic center, a golf course, and polo fields. The community is slated to have 600 condominiums, ranging in price from $500,000 to $1.5 million, each with a waterfront view ❻ (to which end, three lakes and 10 beaches will be carved out of farmland). Other features are more unusual: 90 percent of each unit will be underground, armed security personnel will guard a wall surrounding the community, and there will be helipads for coming and going.

As of January, only one part of the project was under way: a 60-foot statue that will feature Poseidon, amid what is supposed to be a 55,000-square-foot fountain ❼. By June, Vintuary plans to unveil the development's entrance and the shells of six bunkers. If all goes according to schedule, the first units will be finished next year.

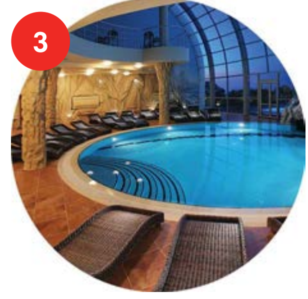
5: KELSEY-HAYES; 7: PAYNE WINGATE



Jeff Schlegelmilch, the deputy director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University, told me that the luxury-bunker trend is "not just a couple of fringe groups; there is real money behind it—hundreds of millions of dollars." But why are wealthy people buying?

Some customers appear to be motivated by old anxieties, recently revived—the threat of nuclear war, or a national-debt default that leads to unrest. Others have newer fears: climate change, pandemics, terrorism, far-left and far-right extremism. The presidential election has brought new faces into the fold, namely liberals (who also contributed to a record number of background checks—an indicator of gun purchases—on Black Friday). "Typically our sales are going to conservatives, but now liberals are purchasing," says Lynch, the Rising S CEO.

Rob Kaneiss, Trident Lakes's chief security officer and a former Navy SEAL, told me that violence "seems to be the unfortunate trend in the U.S." He believes the community's location will prove to be ideal under the circumstances. "Ector offers … a very rural area," he said, "so the likelihood of having risks like that, in the absence of specific targeting, is extremely low."



In case things do go south, Trident Lakes will offer "Navy SEAL Experience" self-defense training, and a vault for family DNA. The hope is that, down the line, scientists could use genetic material to replicate residents who were lost to catastrophe, thereby ensuring "family sustainability." Where these scientists might come from isn't clear, but for a group selling cataclysm, the gesture seems an oddly hopeful bet on the future.

The CULTURE FILE

THE OMNIVORE

A Saint for Difficult People

From bohemian to radical to Catholic activist, Dorothy Day devoted her life to the poor, however unlovable.

BY JAMES PARKER

ONE WAY TO UNDERSTAND the saints—the radiant, aberrant beings next to whom the rest of us look so shifty and shoddy—is to imagine them as cutting-edge physicists. Their research, if you like, has led them unblinkingly to conclude that reality is not at all what, or where, or *who* we think it is. They have penetrated the everyday atomic buzz and seen into the essential structures. They have seen, among other things, that the world is hollowed-out and illumined by beams of divine love, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and that sanctity—should you desire it—is merely to live in accordance with these elementary facts.

Whether or not the Catholic Church makes it official—and the cause for her canonization rumbles on—Dorothy Day was most definitely a saint. *Is* a saint, because her holiness has suffered no decrease in vitality since her death, at age 83, in 1980, and her example, her American example, is more challenging and provocative today than it ever was. Day was about people, especially poor people, especially those whom she called with some wryness "the undeserving poor," and the paramount importance of serving them. For her, what the Church defines as Works of Mercy—feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, sheltering the homeless, and so on—were not pious injunctions or formulas for altruism but physical principles, as inevitable as the first law of thermodynamics. Pare her right down to her pith, strip away all her history and biography, and what do you get? A fierce set of cheekbones and a command to love. That's the legacy of Dorothy Day, and it is endless.

Her history and biography, nevertheless, are intensely interesting, particularly as revisited by her granddaughter Kate Hennessy in *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty*. What a story. Although the chronology, and even the spiritual progress (so far as we presume to discern it) are straightforward—from bohemianism to radicalism to motherhood to Catholicism to a life, a mission, of purely focused sacrifice and activism—the images are kaleidoscopic. There's Greenwich Village Dorothy, cub reporter, in the teens of the 20th century: "cool-mannered, tweed-wearing, drinking rye whiskey straight with no discernible effect." She's with her buddy Eugene O'Neill—*the* Eugene O'Neill—in a bar called the Hell Hole. O'Neill, with "bitter mouth" and "monotonous grating voice," is reciting one of his favorite poems, Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven": *I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; / I fled Him, down*

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THE LINCOLN
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How worldly you are has nothing to do with a passport.
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the arches of the years. By way of response, Dorothy sings "Frankie and Johnny."

There's young Dorothy lying in darkness on a work-farm bunk in Virginia, on a hunger strike, having been arrested, beaten, and terrorized for joining a picket line of suffragists. ("I lost all consciousness of any cause," she would write of this episode in her memoir *The Long Loneliness.* "I had no sense of being a radical, making protest ... The futility of life came over me so that I could not weep but only lie there in blank misery.")

There she is in 1922 in Chicago, following an abortion, a failed marriage, and two suicide attempts, "fling[ing] herself about" and in love with the pugilistic, alpha-male newspaperman Lionel Moise.

And there she is in December 1932, on East 15th Street, with Peter Maurin knocking at her door: Maurin, the street philosopher who, Hennessy writes, "didn't say hello or goodbye, and every time he arrived ... began talking where he had left off." He told Dorothy that he had been looking for her.

Maurin is the pivot character in this story. More even than the birth of Tamar, Day's daughter (and Hennessy's mother), whose out-of-wedlock arrival in 1926 jump-started her conversion to Catholicism, Maurin's entrance marks the great shift in the narrative of Dorothy Day. A self-described peasant, 20 years older than she was and originally from France, he was a liminal figure, a kind of intellectual jongleur, who gave his ideas—a very personal hybrid of radical politics and Catholic social teaching—to the air in extraordinary, rippling singsong. (He claimed that the word *communism* had been "stolen from the Church.") A crank, perhaps. Some people, notes Hennessy, found him ridiculous.

But not Day. In his inspired eccentricity, Maurin gave her a hinge between the natural and the supernatural, and in his exhausting monologues she heard a program for action. With him she almost instantaneously founded the Catholic Worker movement, the entity (Hennessy calls it "the great American novel") to which she would henceforth give herself in serial gestures of the heart and commitments of the body. The movement was first a newspaper—*The Catholic Worker*, which Day edited for 40-odd years—and then in short order a number of "houses of hospitality," some urban, some agrarian, all autonomous, dedicated to the provision of welcome (and food, and shelter) for the chronically unwelcome. The newspaper continues to be published, and more than 200 Catholic Worker houses and communities are currently active in the United States.

A lot of gas has been spewed recently—green, heavy, showbiz-wizard gas—about the overlooked person, the forgotten man. Dorothy Day lived with the forgotten man, and he was a huge pain in the ass. His name was Mr. Breen, and during his residency at the Catholic Worker house on Mott Street he was a vituperative racist and a fire hazard. His name was also Mr. O'Connell, who stayed for 11 ill-natured years at Maryfarm, the Catholic Worker farming commune in Easton, Pennsylvania, slandering the other workers without mercy, hoarding the tools, and generally making of himself "a terror" (in Day's words) and "hateful, venomous, suspicious" (in Hennessy's).

One gets the sense from Hennessy's book, and from Day's own writing, that she reserved a special respect for these very difficult people, because it was with them—so thornily particular—that she was obliged to put flesh on all those airy abstractions about justice and generosity. This was, so to speak, where the rubber met the road. Loving Mr. Breen, loving Mr. O'Connell—that involved great vaulting maneuvers of self-negation. Dealing with them day to day was a high moral science. How tolerant could or should one be? At what point was one simply indulging one's own goody-goodiness? "This turning the other cheek," she wrote in her memoir *Loaves and Fishes*, "this inviting someone else to be a potential thief or murderer, in order that we may grow in grace—how obnoxious. In that case, I believe I'd rather be the striker than the meek one struck."

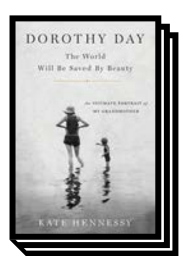
Meekness was not in her nature. Her obedience, her submission—to the Church and to the poor—was as headlong and headstrong in its way as her benders with Eugene O'Neill had been. But it made her whole. Or rather it joined her to the whole. In *The Reckless Way of Love*, a new miscellany of her spiritual writings, Day quotes one of the mottoes of the Industrial Workers of the World, otherwise known as the Wobblies. "The old IWW slogan 'An injury to one is an injury to all,'" she writes, "is another way of saying what Saint Paul said almost two thousand years ago. 'We are all members of one another, and when the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered.'" Which happens to be a perfect synthesis, Peter Maurin–style, of fist-in-the-air communitarianism and Christian dogma. But it also directs us to the mystical body of Dorothy Day—the Catholic Worker movement, in all its aspects and expressions—and to her own nonmystical body, so present in Hennessy's book: her body in pleasure, in pain, under political punishment, in motherhood, and finally surrendered in the luminous drudgery of service. A

James Parker is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

The Culture File

THE OMNIVORE

Dorothy Day lived with the forgotten man, and he was a huge pain in the ass.



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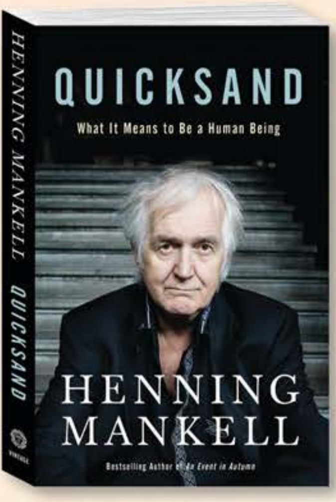

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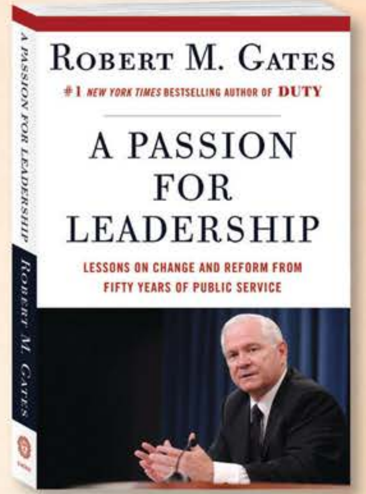

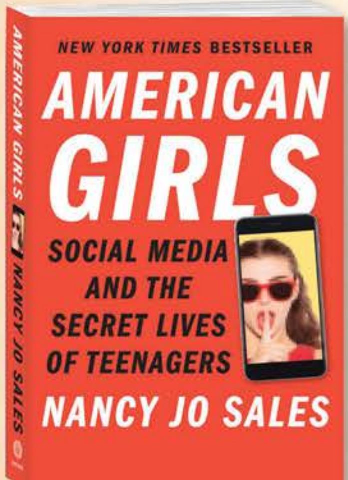

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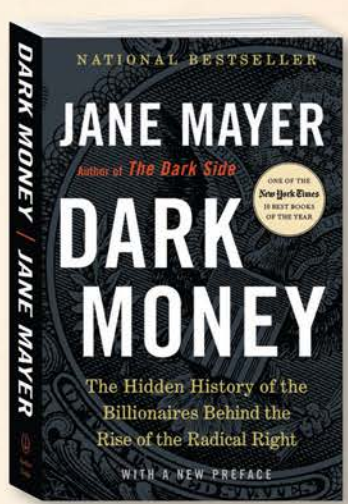

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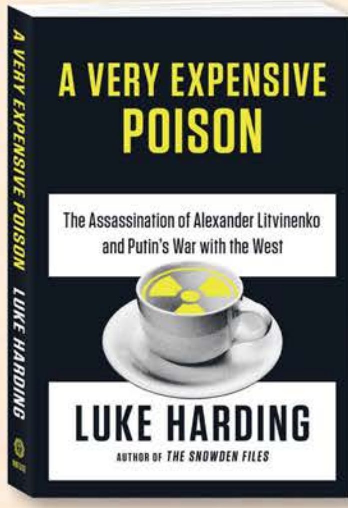

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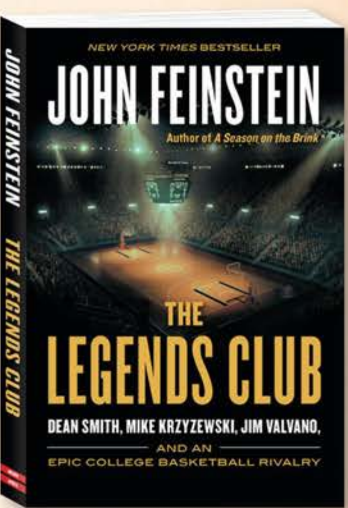


BOOKS

The Sentimental Sadist

Ghosts and schmaltz haunt George Saunders's first novel.

BY CALEB CRAIN

George Saunders's new novel—his first, after four collections of short stories and a novella—takes place in the afterlife. Or rather, it takes place in the "bardo," a term that Saunders has borrowed from Buddhism for what might be called the "justafterlife"—the interval between a ghost's separation from its body and its departure for whatever comes next. As in *The Sixth Sense* and other movies and television shows, the ghosts imagined by Saunders linger in our world because they either don't know they're dead or aren't yet resigned to leaving. "You are a wave that has crashed upon the shore," they are told by browbeating angels who visit intermittently, but they refuse to listen.

In form, the novel is a combination of film script and Lincoln-focused scrapbook, alternating dialogue among the ghosts with excerpts from historical accounts of the Civil War era, some genuine and some invented. At the center is the ghost of Willie Lincoln, a young son of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, and the action takes place shortly after Willie dies of typhoid fever on February 20, 1862, at age 11. The dead boy's spirit wants to stay for the sake of his father's visits to the "hospital-yard," as the ghosts refer to their cemetery. But staying endangers him, because of an ugly twist that Saunders has added to the usual principles of ghostology: Psychic deterioration overtakes some ghosts who loiter too long after death. Saunders has played with this idea before. "Why do some people get everything and I got nothing?" the corpse of a deceased aunt ranted in *Pastoralia* (2000), despite having been a meek Pollyanna in life. Similarly, at the end of *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), one ghost warned another that those who tarry can become "trapped here forever, reenacting their deaths night after night, more agitated every year, finally to the point of insanity."

Even the sane ghosts in the new novel are disfigured by desires they failed to act upon while alive, and the disfigurements have a Dantean specificity. One of the more talkative ghosts, for example, is of a printer named Hans Vollman, who appears naked and with a distended member because he died before he was able to consummate his marriage to a teenager. His friend, a ghost named Roger Bevins III, manifests with

Illustration by RENAUD VIGOURT

multiple sets of eyes and hands, which seem to represent the sensuous appetites that, as a closeted gay youth, he failed to fully explore before he committed suicide. No literalized neurosis marks Willie Lincoln's form when he emerges from his coffin—or rather, "sick-box"—but because Willie is a child, he is vulnerable to a distortion even more extreme. If he's not vigilant, he will be pinned down by creeping tendrils consisting of damned souls, which will join up to encase him in a carapace that will degrade his consciousness and transform him into a series of violent and repulsive figures.

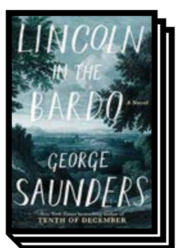
This is a fairly awful peril—in fact, so cartoonishly awful that as a reader I rebelled. Whatever Willie's sins may have been, surely death in childhood was punishment enough? Moreover, as perils go, it's a bit contrived. *Hurry, President Lincoln!* the book in effect exclaims. *Someone has tied Willie to the floor of the mausoleum, and a monster is coming!* A crude plot can be effective, and I turned the pages briskly. In the real world, though, tendrils don't envelop undead children in carapaces, as far as I know, and it's impossible to ignore that the tying-up in this case has been done by the somewhat heavy-handed author.

It's awkward, too, that the outcome of the novel hinges on whether Willie can acknowledge in time that he's dead. A character's struggle to accept the death of a loved one would be affecting, as would a character's struggle to face up to his own imminent death. But mercifully, no human being on Earth will ever need to accept that he is dead. And if, on some future cosmic plane, any of us ever do need to make such an acknowledgment, then by virtue of our being able to think about it, death will have lost much of its sting. The book's crux, in other words, is either impossible or trivial. As if to compensate, the ghosts rush about a great deal, detonating "matterlightblooming" explosions whenever one of them accepts death and shoots off to the great beyond. The pell-mell comes to resemble the final half hour of a superhero movie.

In calm moments between the explosions, a number of ghosts tell their life stories, and the tales of disappointment, infidelity, and loss bring to mind *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), Edgar Lee Masters's collection of poems in the voices of a small Illinois town's dead. Masters wrote in a plain but self-consciously classic style, which Saunders updates to antic pastiche. A soldier addresses his wife through a veil of simulated Civil War–era misspellings ("It was a terrible fite as I believe I rote you"). An alcoholic couple regret in em-dash-obscured cusswords the comedown that forced them to move to a "s—hole by the river." A plantation owner boasts of "pounding my SHARDS," using idiolect to refer to his rape of female slaves.

The Culture File

Thanks to his willingness to be cruel, Saunders has been able to probe painful questions about class.



LINCOLN IN THE BARDO
GEORGE SAUNDERS
Random House

The vignettes are miniatures of the cruel, satirical stories that have won Saunders fans, and several are poignant, but they don't have much connection to Willie's story. The characters in question are dead, after all; their stories are over, and not amenable to further development. Saunders bends the rules a little, giving ghosts who sit inside a living person the power to sense the person's thoughts and transmit ideas to him. But this is anti-novelistic, too. The fun of novels is that people *can't* get in one another's heads except by talking; the impediment multiplies the opportunities to mislead and misunderstand. Saunders does what he can to amp up the naughtiness—three separate ghosts take poops, for example. But a novel is bound to stagnate if characters are incapable of taking decisive action, and it quickly turns maudlin or pious if they have no chance to deceive one another.

THE GONZO HUMOR of Saunders's early stories was more lively and unpredictable, though his cast of characters was limited to brutes and sad sacks, and the openness of the sadism could be a little hard to take. In his debut collection, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996), for example, the longest tale features a mutant, with claws instead of toes, who leaves a steady job in a historical-reenactment theme park in order to rescue a sister who has been sold into what he fears is sex slavery. I lost patience when the narrator of the story wrote, of a neighbor who killed and ate the family dog, "Who could forget him, satiated and contrite, offering Mom a shank?" The curlicue of the word *shank* seems to invite the reader to admire not only the cleverness but also the heartlessness of the diction. The character seems to be boasting of having mocked his own emotional attachments before anyone else could.

I sympathized with the rage that I suspected was driving the sadism, however. Several decades ago, corporate America began to demand that employees take part in goal setting, trust games, and other manipulative protocols that would commit their voices, if not their hearts and minds, to the corporation. Saunders has written about how alienated he felt in the job he held as a white-collar technical writer when his fiction career was getting off the ground. By setting many of his early stories in demented theme parks, where the disparity between corporate culture's false cheeriness and the underlying conditions of labor is grotesque, he was able to satirize the psychic encroachment rather brutally. In the title story of *Pastoralia,* the

hero's job is to impersonate a prehistoric caveman. He's expected to utter nothing but grunts all day, but the joke is that he hasn't yet sunk as low as he can go: The human-resources department is about to pressure him to rat out his cave mate. The joke, in other words, ends up being as much on him as on his behalf. The note of complicity in the degradation left me a little uncomfortable, but comfortable probably isn't how rage is supposed to make a reader feel.

Thanks to his willingness to be cruel, Saunders has been able to probe painful questions about socioeconomic class. "Do you think you have to be rich to be nice?" a father in "Pastoralia" asks his son. The character intends the question to be rhetorical, but the son answers, "I guess so," and in Saunders's universe, the son is right: Some people's lives are so financially precarious that humanity, as traditionally understood, feels like a luxury they can't afford. Tolerance, for example, often seems out of their price range. Saunders's early stories contain ethnic slurs and off-color jokes about male prostitution and gay sex, as if to signal that Saunders considered himself to be writing about the disaffected working-class whites that one now thinks of as Donald Trump's constituents. Indeed, a nonfiction account by Saunders of Trump's rallygoers, published in *The New Yorker* last summer, was exceptionally insightful and clear-eyed. Saunders the reporter had to respect the law that his new novel breaks: He revealed his subjects' motives through observation and talk.

Over the past decade, Saunders has progressed from theme parks to other varieties of capitalist falseness, including sitcoms, advertising, product-testing focus groups, and the exploitation of immigrant labor. He has also extended his range of characters to include more-fortunate types who, as we now conceive our divided country, might be supporters of Obama and Clinton. The two classes meet and misunderstand each other in "Puppy," a story in *Tenth of December* (2013), in which an upper-middle-class mother, who has steeled herself to "adopt a white-trash dog," catches sight of a developmentally disabled boy harnessed and leashed to a tree in the dog owner's backyard, and recoils. Saunders has no patience for the woman's condescension and squeamishness, and it's the mother of the "white trash" family who gets to deliver the story's moral, which Saunders has her repeat, in italics: "*Love was liking someone how he was and doing things to help him get even better.*" This is a bit treacly, unfortunately. The cost, for Saunders, of moving beyond the stylized violence of his early stories seems to be the transmutation of a portion of his violence into schmaltz. Only a portion, though: He remains unflinching enough to let the reader know that the puppy will now be left to starve in a cornfield.

The Culture File

BOOKS

He remains unflinching enough to let the reader know that the puppy will be left to starve in a cornfield.

THERE'S QUITE A BIT of schmaltz in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. In some of the historical eyewitness testimony that Saunders has fabricated, he rivals the Victorians at death kitsch—no mean achievement. Next to genuine eulogies about Willie Lincoln's innocence and gentleness, for example, he sets invented ones that praise the boy as "a sweet little muffin of a fellow." In a concocted "Essay Upon the Loss of a Child," he rhapsodizes over "the feel of the tiny hand in yours—and then the little one is gone!" As with "Puppy," however, sadism does persist. The decisive epiphany for Willie the ghost—that he is dead—comes through sharing, in ghoulish detail, his father's memory of the boy's death and his corpse's embalmment.

Sadism and sentimentality preside over the novel hand in hand. Saunders's Lincoln comes to realize that "we must try to see one another … as suffering, limited beings," with the corollary that as president he must strive, in waging the Civil War, to "kill more efficiently." When ghosts of blacks appear, one, who prides himself on his self-education, is caught in an endless loop of brawling with the ghost of the bigoted white plantation owner. Another melds his mind with Lincoln's and decides to try to induce the president "to *do* something for us," as if the secret cause of emancipation was a personal emotion of Lincoln's.

In one of Saunders's early stories, "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline," the narrator, who works in a run-down historical theme park as a yes-man and fixer, says of the authentic 19th-century ghosts who happen to haunt the park, "They don't realize we're chronologically slumming." The park's visitors pay for the privilege of not having to realize it, either. The reader, however, knows the score. The story's ironic edge depends on Saunders's awareness, which he invites the reader to share, that a touristic longing for the pathos of another era is readily subject to manipulation and exploitation. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is CivilWarLand under new management, sleek and professional. The sets are brightly painted; the period detail is well curated; the reenactors have had top-notch dialect coaches. The ghosts, formerly dupes, are now heroes, and if you like a salty-sweet mix of cruelty and sappiness, you'll enjoy your visit. But you can't see backstage anymore. The new administration has much tighter message discipline.

Caleb Crain is the author of Necessary Errors.

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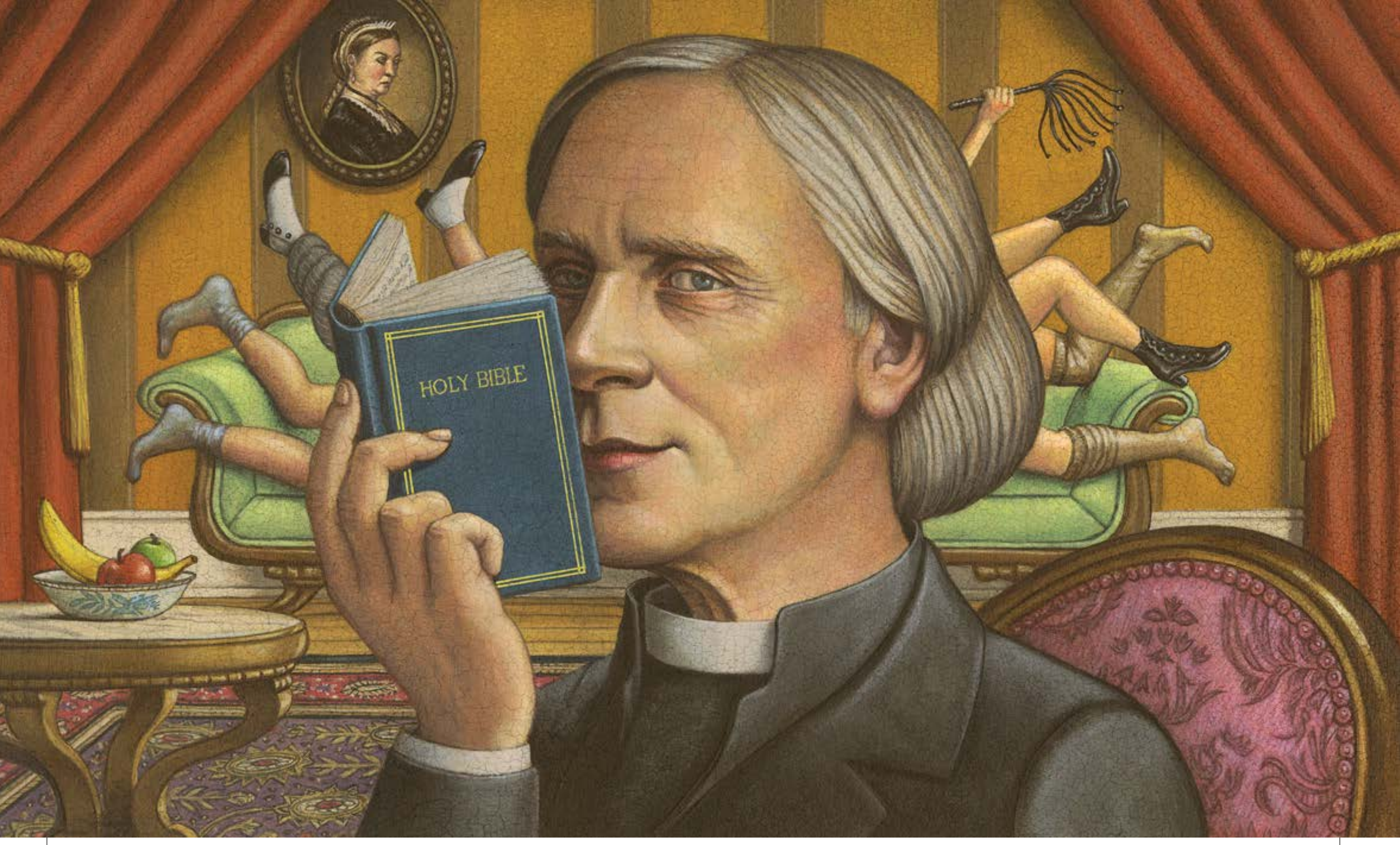


BOOKS

Before Straight and Gay

The discreet, disorienting passions of the Victorian era

BY DEBORAH COHEN

Even by the formidable standards of eminent Victorian families, the Bensons were an intimidating lot. Edward Benson, the family's patriarch, had vaulted up the clerical hierarchy, awing superiors with his ferocious work habits and cowing subordinates with his reforming zeal. Queen Victoria appointed him the archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Anglican Church, in 1883. Edward's wife, Minnie, was to all appearances a perfect match. Tender where he was severe, she was a warmhearted hostess renowned for her conversation. Most important, she was Edward's equal in religious devotion. As a friend daringly pronounced, Minnie was "as good as God and as clever as the Devil."

All five of Edward and Minnie Benson's adult offspring distinguished themselves in public life. Arthur Benson served as the master of Magdalene College at Cambridge University, wrote the lyrics to Edward Elgar's hymn "Land of Hope and Glory," and was entrusted with the delicate task of co-editing Queen Victoria's letters for publication. His brother Fred was a best-selling writer, well known today for the series of satirical Lucia novels (televised for the second time in 2014, on the BBC), which poked good-natured fun at the pomposities of English provincial life. Their sister Margaret became a pioneering Egyptologist, the first woman to lead an archaeological dig in the country and to publish her findings. Even the family's apostate, the youngest brother, Hugh, a convert to Roman Catholicism, was considered a magnetic preacher and, like his brothers, was an irrepressible author of briskly selling books. All told, the family published more than 200 volumes.

An exemplary Victorian family, or so it seems. But let us borrow one of Charles Dickens's favorite literary devices and pull the roof off the Benson home to take a peek inside. It is 1853. Edward is 23 years old, handsome, determined, and already embarked on a promising career. Perched on his knee is his cousin Minnie, a pleasingly childish 12-year-old. Edward has just kissed Minnie to seal their engagement. Wait 40-odd years, lift the roof again, and we find grown-up Minnie tucked in her marital bed with Lucy Tait, the daughter of the previous archbishop, who has been living with the Bensons at Edward's invitation. At the Sussex home where Minnie and Lucy moved three years after Edward's death, they were joined by Minnie's daughter Margaret, the Egyptologist, cohabiting with her intimate lady friend. As for the Benson boys, well, none of the three married, and contemporaries in the know had a pretty good understanding of their romantic feelings for men, in all likelihood never acted upon. The Bensons were, as Simon Goldhill writes in his subtle, smart book, a very queer family indeed.

Wresting the Victorians from the prison of dour, prudish stereotypes to which their children and grandchildren consigned them is a project that has occupied scholars for more than a few

Illustration by MARC BURCKHARDT

decades now. Goldhill, a professor at Cambridge, has produced an insightful contribution to that effort. But even more resonant for our own times of sexual and gender heterodoxy—when ambiguity is the new frontier—is what the Bensons can tell us about the prehistory. As a great deal of queer history has by now demonstrated, the strictly defined categories of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" are relatively new: bright lines drawn across the late-20th-century sexual landscape that made "coming out" a dichotomous choice.

For the Victorians, the situation was much more fluid. A woman's romantic interest in another woman could be seen as excellent preparation for marriage. Though sex between men was a criminal offense (in Britain, lesbianism was invisible before the law), there was, as yet, hardly a homosexual identity defined by same-sex desire. Until the early 1950s, a man could have sex with another man without thinking himself in any respect "abnormal"—as long as he steered clear of the feminine dress or behavior that marked a so-called pouf or queen. To pry off the Benson roof is to ask the question: What was it like to live before and during the invention of modern sexuality?

The Culture File

What was it like to live before and during the invention of modern sexuality?

OF ALL THE DOINGS in the Benson household, the most discomfiting to our own sensibilities is Edward's romance with Minnie. She was just 11 when Edward decided to make her his wife, though at her mother's insistence, he agreed to delay the wedding until Minnie turned 18. In opting for a child bride, Edward was calculating as well as passionate: It would be a few years before he had enough money to marry, and here was an opportunity to mold his future wife to suit his own pious requirements. For her part, Minnie was girlishly eager to please.

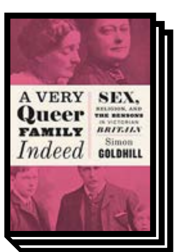
Domineering, moody, given to fits of displeasure, a fiend for detail, Edward was a cartoonish Victorian patriarch. His children were frightened of him. "He brought too heavy guns to bear on positions so lightly fortified as children's hearts," his son Fred wrote. Minnie put up with Edward's bullying, accommodated his ambitions, soothed him when he was depressed, entertained the hordes of guests that high clerical office entailed, and only occasionally lapsed into bouts of ill health.

But there was much more going on in the archbishop's marriage than a simple story of feminine acquiescence. Minnie's intimate friendships with other ladies frequently tipped into romances, one of which—with a Miss Hall—caused her to prolong a trip to Germany, away from her husband and six children (ages seven months to 11 years) for half a year. Even allowing for the extravagant language in which Victorian women conducted their female friendships, Minnie's letters to her favorites were unremittingly romantic: "Did you *possess* me, or I you, my Heart's Beloved, as we sat there together on Thursday and Friday—as we held each other close, as we kissed." Another letter to the same woman closed with equal rapture: "My true lover, my true love, see, I am your true lover, your true love."

Edward Benson clearly understood, and to a certain degree accepted, his wife's longings for other women. The subject was discussed by the couple, not hidden. Edward took Minnie on his knee to pray together about these stirrings. "Ah, my husband's pain, what he bore, & how lovingly, how gently," she wrote years later in a journal. And it was of course Edward who invited Lucy Tait, 15 years younger than his wife, to live with the Benson family. Paying homage to Edward's generosity and to the "fullness and strength of married love," Minnie worked to reconcile her sexual and spiritual longings. If "Love is God," as she came to believe, then passion could exist without physical expression—though, as she acknowledged, with Miss Tait lying beside her, the bed continued to be their "own region of mistake."

IF ALL OF THIS sounds bewildering, that, for Goldhill, is precisely the point. Absolute as Victorian moral certainties appeared to be, they nonetheless permitted a great deal of ambiguity in matters romantic and sexual, even in the most respectable of families. The marriage of Minnie and Edward—"intricate, sensitive, caring, and deeply committed," as Goldhill describes it—ran alongside her love for women. True, the complications of the Benson marriage caused some anguish on both sides and undeniably left their children confused as to the state of their parents' feelings for each other. But to his credit, Goldhill doesn't attempt to tidy up the Bensons' complexities.

Like the best writers working in a biographical vein recently (many of whom eschew the conventions and certainties of biography), he uses the inner conflicts of his subjects to immerse his readers in an unfamiliar and disorienting world. He doesn't diagnose the Bensons retrospectively and anachronistically as a family of repressed homosexuals. Instead, he dwells on the equivocations and the accommodations that could be made "within the tramlines and travails of a very conventional life." Not least, Goldhill appreciates the Bensons' own feat of simultaneously probing and withholding as they churned out



A VERY QUEER FAMILY INDEED: SEX, RELIGION, AND THE BENSONS IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN
SIMON GOLDHILL
University of Chicago Press

all those books, many of them devoted to their family relations.

The Bensons' memoiristic zeal was phenomenal—from Arthur's two-volume, 1,000-page biography of his forbidding father, to Fred's three volumes of memoirs and book about his mother's life after his father's death, to Hugh's autobiographical musings. And that is merely a sampling of the family's output (Arthur's diaries ran to 180 volumes), and leaves out the novels in which they most freely worked over the incidents of family life. Yet the Bensons' loquacity was remarkable chiefly, as Goldhill notes, for its reserve.

Arthur's biographical avalanche gave away almost nothing about how he felt about his august parent: "His heart and mind remained, and still remain, a good deal of mystery to me." In one of Arthur's novels, by contrast, a small boy named Arthur writes "I hate papa" on a scrap of paper, which he buries in the garden. About the vexed marriage of the elder Bensons, Arthur and Fred were equally inscrutable. Fred managed the feat of making Minnie and Edward sound almost ordinary, describing his father's courtship of the 11-year-old girl as a "little authentic Victorian love story." Arthur, while acknowledging marital tensions, took refuge in constrained understatement. After Minnie got married, he wrote, she "began to experience a certain fear as to whether she could give my father exactly the quality of affection which he claimed."

Above all else, Arthur and Fred, the two main memoirists of the family, were cagey about sex. Today, we name sexual orientations and gender identities in order to live freely; confession is the mode of liberation. By contrast, the Bensons cultivated what Goldhill terms a "highly articulate indirectness." One way of understanding their reticence is as a queerness that was writing itself, falteringly, into being. In Arthur's case, that seems an apt description of discretion exercised, paradoxically enough, at great length and over many volumes.

"Anyone might think they could get a good picture of my life from these pages, but it is not so," Arthur mused in his diaries, noting (without naming) the subjects he kept in his "carefully locked and guarded strong room." Although he dilated on the pleasures of sentimental friendships with the boys in his care, he studiously policed their platonic boundaries, rejoicing in the bronzed bodies at the swimming bath but skirting anything that smacked of lust. Was it possible, Arthur wondered, that he had "the soul of a woman in the body of a man"? Even though the term *homosexual* was coming into currency, he did not use it until 1924, the year before he died. And when he did use it, after a theoretical conversation on the subject with Fred, he wrote the word out—"the homo sexual question"—in a way that suggested unfamiliarity.

There's another way of understanding reticence, though, which Fred, Arthur's sunnier brother, supplies. Although Fred lived to see the new mores of the post–World War I world (he was the last of the family to go, in 1940), in a curious fashion he clung to his Victorian inheritance. He saw the virtue—and, perhaps more important, the utility—of reserve. It laid the groundwork for a person's privacy. What wasn't said and couldn't be named allowed a latitude for action.

Fred's enigmatic judgment about his mother's marriage was characteristic: "If her marriage was a mistake, what marriage since the world began was a success?" Writing in 1930, Fred thought the much-deplored "Victorian reticences and secrecies" needed defending in an increasingly confessional era. They were "profitable as well as prudish." The same year, Virginia Woolf (who had both a husband and a female lover) lamented the erosion of sexual ambiguity. Unlike Fred Benson, she was unsentimental about her Victorian upbringing, yet as the dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual solidified, she could see what had been lost: "Where people mistake, as I think, is in perpetually narrowing and naming these immensely composite and wide flung passions—driving stakes through them, herding them between screens."

As ambiguity and in-betweenness have rolled around again, they inevitably look different than they did to the Victorians. The Bensons expended millions of words questing after the building blocks of identity. Today, Edward, Minnie, and the kids would log on to Facebook, make their choice from an extensive ready-made menu—everything from pangender to the plain-vanilla cis man—and share the result with an army of "friends." The irony of all this is something that no gay liberationist would have thought possible when the campaign for homosexual rights was regarded as a grave threat to the social order. Sandwiched between the fluidity of the Victorian years and the proliferating sexual and gender identities of the new millennium, the late 20th century's straight-gay paradigm looks decidedly old-fashioned—maybe even a little stodgy.

Virginia Woolf lamented the erosion of sexual ambiguity.

The Culture File

BOOKS

Deborah Cohen is the Peter B. Ritzma Professor of the Humanities and a professor of history at Northwestern. Her most recent book is Family Secrets: Shame and Privacy in Modern Britain.

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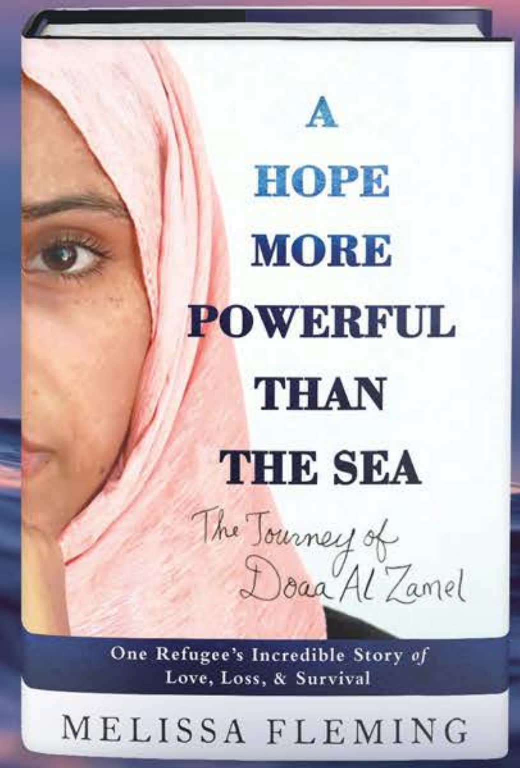
—KHALED HOSSEINI, author of *The Kite Runner*



WHEN DOAA AND HER FIANCÉ LEAVE SYRIA IN SEARCH OF A BETTER LIFE,
they join hundreds of refugees on an overcrowded ship. After four days at sea, their boat is sunk—and Doaa is adrift with two little girls clinging to her neck. Doaa must stay alive for them. She must not lose hope.

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BOOKS

The Shine Comes Off Silicon Valley

Awestruck visions of the tech industry have become less convincing than ever.

BY ANNA WIENER

IN LATE 2010, during a fireside chat at the tech-industry conference TechCrunch Disrupt, the venture capitalist and entrepreneur Peter Thiel disclosed that he would award 20 enterprising teenagers $100,000 apiece over two years to bypass college in favor of entrepreneurship. "Stopping out," Thiel called it. Having decried student debt (not to mention universities' inculcation of political correctness), he endeavored to make the case that college was a limiting and outdated model. The Thiel Fellowship, as it came to be known, was representative of a particular strain of anti-establishmentarianism in tech-industry culture. Who needs higher education?

In *Valley of the Gods: A Silicon Valley Story*, Alexandra Wolfe, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, zooms in on a handful of Thiel fellows from the 2011 inaugural class. Among them are John Burnham, an antsy teen who has his sights set on asteroid-mining robots; Laura Deming, a prodigy working on life extension; and James Proud, who founded GigLocator, an app for locating tickets to live concerts, and sold the company in 2012. As the fellows adjust to their new environs in the Bay Area, Wolfe follows them into a constellation of mentors and affiliates, subcultures and institutions—"Silicon Valley's elite and underbelly." Her goal is a portrait of the tech industry as "a new social order, one with an anti-'society' aesthetic that has taken on a singular style."

Wolfe is an entertaining writer, if not an outstanding prose stylist, and she largely lets her subjects speak for themselves, skimping on broader context. Her subjects, mostly entrepreneurs, founders, and figureheads, are indisputably more elite than underbelly, but no matter. From the futurist and author Ray Kurzweil to Todd Huffman—a biologist, an early participant in the now-defunct San Francisco "intentional community" Langton Labs, and an aspiring cryogenically preserved corpse—Wolfe lands on characters who are vibrant and open-minded, each deserving of more inquiry than a 250-page book allows.

Through visits to start-up incubators, communal-living groups in mansions, and polyamorous households on Paleo diets, Wolfe constructs an argument that in Silicon Valley, "institutions and routines such as raises, rents, mortgages—marriage—were as inconsequential, breakable, and flexible as the industries technology disrupted." She deploys her anecdotes to serve her vision of the culture as a reaction to "the East Coast's hierarchy," as well as its foil. She pokes fun at the tech industry's own self-aggrandizing fetishes while also affirming them. Incubators are "a sort of West Coast Ivy League," a fast track to access and social capital. Millennials prefer the "freedom" of Silicon Valley to the "old world" of the East Coast. Gone is Wall Street's uniform of Thomas Pink and Tiffany; in its stead, "the only outward signs of tech success are laptops and ideas." Pitting East against West even gets ontological. Using New York City hedge-fund managers as an example, Wolfe writes that the

Illustration by JACK HUDSON

"retrowealth" of the East Coast is "a harkening back to what it was to be human *last* century." Silicon Valley, by contrast, has trained its sights on how to "disrupt, transgress, and reengineer ... humanity as a whole."

WOLFE'S BOOK SPANS five years, but the bulk of her reporting appears to be from 2011 and 2012. And a lot happened in the years between the cocky-nerd drama of 2010's *The Social Network* and the first quarter of 2016, which brought zero initial public offerings from tech companies. In 2012, new start-ups were flush with money and the tech sphere was overwhelmed by ardent media coverage; the verb *disrupt* was elbowing its way into vernacular prominence and had not yet become a cliché. Facebook's IPO was not only record-setting but a flag in the ground, and the West Coast seemed a hopeful counternarrative in an otherwise flailing economy. Stories about Silicon Valley were imbued with a certain awe that, today, is starting to fade.

Since the genre's takeoff in the late 1990s, during the first dot-com boom, writing about the tech industry has traditionally fallen into a few limited camps: buzzy and breathless blog posts pegged to product announcements, suspiciously redolent of press releases; technophobic and scolding accounts heralding the downfall of society via smartphone; dry business reporting; and lifestyle coverage zeroing in on the trappings, trends, and celebrities of the tech scene. In different ways, each neglects to examine the industry's cultural clout and political economy. This tendency is shifting, as the line between "tech company" and "regular company" continues to blur (even Walmart has an innovation lab in the Bay Area). Founders and their publicists would have you believe that this is a world of pioneers and utopians, cowboy coders and hero programmers. But as tech becomes more pervasive, coverage that unquestioningly echoes the mythologizing impulse is falling out of fashion.

The backlash is unsurprising. Accelerated, venture-capital-fueled success is bound to inspire more than just wonder. In the past year alone, three Silicon Valley darlings—Hampton Creek, Theranos, and Zenefits—have been subject to painful debunking by the media. Thiel's own reputation, always controversial, has come into question since his financing of a lawsuit that shuttered Gawker and his emergence as an avid Donald Trump supporter. *Valley of the Gods*, which opens with a tribute to Thiel and the "counter-intuitive idealism" he aimed to encourage, feels like a time capsule from a previous iteration of tech media, a reminder of the sort of narratives that have contributed to growing impatience with the mythos.

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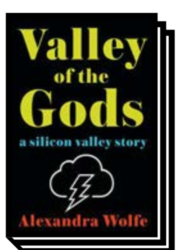
Portraying Silicon Valley's powerful as "uber-nerds" is reductive and unhelpful.



VALLEY OF THE GODS: A SILICON VALLEY STORY
ALEXANDRA WOLFE
Simon & Schuster

VALLEY OF THE GODS is fine as an artifact hurtled from a more innocent time, as far as scene-driven reportage is concerned. But what feels like a throwback perspective takes a toll on the larger argument of Wolfe's book. She relies at every turn on stereotypes such as "Asperger's Chic" and "engineering geeks [who] barely knew how to make friends or navigate a cocktail party, let alone be politically manipulative." Statements like "Only the young and ambitious who grew up with the computer saw it for what it might become" aren't just vaguely ageist, but also ahistorical. (What the computer has thus far "become" is only one version of many potential outcomes and visions.) Peter Thiel's friends, in her summation, are part of "a whole new world of often-wacky people and ideas that didn't seem to subscribe to any set principles or social awareness." Leaning on Silicon Valley tropes, Wolfe fails to take her subjects—and their economic and political influence, which has only increased over the past five years—seriously.

She also undercuts her own point about the disruptive ethos of the place. "Today's uber-nerds are like the robber barons of the industrial revolution whose steel and automobile manufacturing capabilities changed entire industries," she writes. "But instead of massive factories and mills, they're doing it with little buttons." Portraying Silicon Valley's powerful as "uber-nerds" who struck it rich is as reductive and unhelpful as referring to technology that integrates personal payment information and location tracking as "little buttons." The effect is not only to protect them behind the shield of presumed harmlessness, but also to exempt them from the scrutiny that their economic and political power should invite.

The sort of mythology that celebrates a small handful of visionaries and co-founders blurs important social realities. Technology has always been a collective project. The industry is also cyclical. Many failed ideas have been resuscitated and rebranded as successful products and services, owned and managed by people other than their originators. Behind almost every popular app or website today lie numerous shadow versions that have been sloughed away by time. Yet recognition of the group nature of the enterprise would undermine a myth that legitimizes the consolidation of profit, for the most part, among a small group of people.

If technology belongs to the people only insofar as the people are consumers, we beneficiaries had

better believe that luminaries and pioneers did something so outrageously, so individually innovative that the concentration of capital at the top is deserved. When founders pitch their companies, or inscribe their origin stories into the annals of TechCrunch, they neglect to mention some of the most important variables of success: luck, timing, connections, and those who set the foundation for them. The industry isn't terribly in touch with its own history. It clings tight to a faith in meritocracy: This is a spaceship, and we built it by ourselves.

After four years of working in tech, almost all of which were spent at start-ups in San Francisco, I'll happily acknowledge that the industry contains multitudes: biohackers and anti-aging advocates, high-flying techno-utopians and high-strung co-founders, polyamorous couples and M.B.A.s. But they're just people, and their lifestyle choices are usually in the minority. They're not a new social order. Even if they were, plenty of people just like them live in New York City, too.

Valley of the Gods is journalism, not ethnography. As with any caricature, the world depicted in its pages is largely an exaggeration—even, in some cases, a fantasy—but certain dimensions ring true, and loudly. It's important to note what Wolfe gets right. This is a culture that champions acceleration, optimization, and efficiency. From communication to attire, some things are more casual than they are on the East Coast, and people seem to be happier for it. Irreverence is often rewarded. This is far from punk rock (the irreverence is often in the name of building financially successful corporations), but experimentation is encouraged. Silicon Valley is

The Culture File

BOOKS

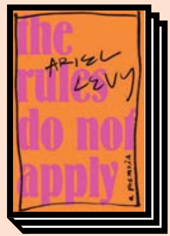
The line between "tech company" and "regular company" continues to blur.

hardly a meritocracy—diversity metrics make that clear, and old-school credentials and pedigree still have clout out west—but it's more meritocratic than other, older industries like consulting or finance. Few women figure in Wolfe's book, which also feels accurate, especially at the higher levels.

The trouble with telling "a Silicon Valley story" is that the real stories are not just more nuanced and moderate but also relatively boring. Many people working in technology are legitimately inspiring, but they don't necessarily gravitate toward flashy projects, and won't be found strolling across a TED stage. If they fail, they may not fail up, and they certainly won't write a Medium post afterward in an attempt to micromanage their personal brand or reconfigure the narrative.

The other, less flattering truth is that the difference between the East and West Coasts is not fundamentally all that great. The tech industry owes a huge debt to the financial sector. Wolfe is eager to depict Silicon Valley as the new New York, but much of the money that funds venture-capital firms comes from investors who made their fortunes on Wall Street. (The tech industry also owes a great debt to "Main Street": Private-equity funds regularly include allocations from public pension plans and universities.) Cultural differences abound, but they're not a function of the tech industry. They're a function of history, of the deeply entrenched cultural and social circumstances that slowly come to define a place. As the mythology gets worn away, the contours of the Valley become easier to see. The view, though less glamorous, still offers plenty to behold.

Anna Wiener is a writer living in San Francisco.



COVER TO COVER

The Rules Do Not Apply: A Memoir

ARIEL LEVY
RANDOM HOUSE

DON'T BE FOOLED by this book's neon cover, or by what could be taken as the Trumpian tone of its title. Ariel Levy's subject is sudden, all-encompassing loss—of a son, a spouse, a house, and, along with them, "my ideas about the kind of life I'd imagined I was due." When her world was upended, she had not yet turned 40.

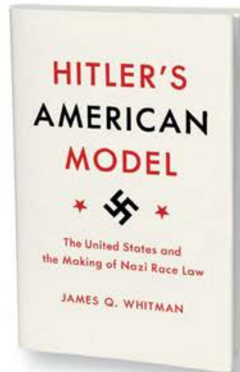
Levy, who began her career at *New York* magazine before joining *The New Yorker* as a staff writer in 2008, knew early on "the kind of woman I wanted to become: one who is free to do whatever she chooses." A bold and bookish girl growing up in Westchester, New York, in a pre-9/11 world, she thrived throughout her 20s and into her 30s on "a compulsion to thrust myself toward adventure." She had male and female lovers. She traveled to far-flung places. Her journalistic specialty was "stories about women who are *too much.*"

Levy counted herself among that undaunted company. She still qualifies, even after being buffeted by deep grief in marriage and pregnancy, and chastened to learn how much in life eludes control. Levy has the rare gift of seeing herself with fierce, unforgiving clarity. And she deploys prose to match, raw and agile. She plumbs the commotion deep within and takes the measure of her have-it-all generation.

Without giving away her story, I don't think you can beat this as a trailer for the turmoil unleashed in her one-of-a-kind memoir: "And the truth is, the ten or twenty minutes I was somebody's mother were black magic. There is nothing I would trade them for. There is no place I would rather have seen."

— *Ann Hulbert*

Changing the Conversations that Change the World



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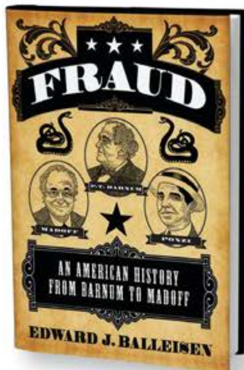

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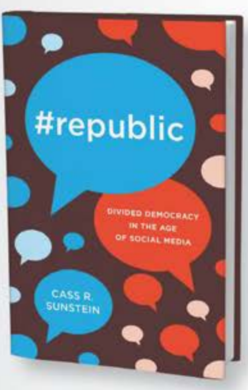

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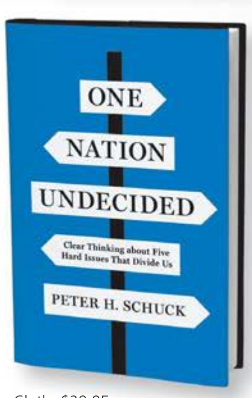

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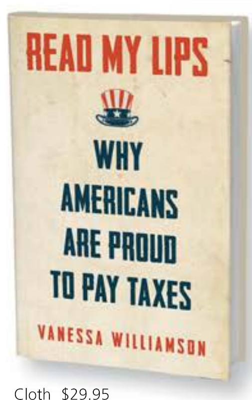

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AUTOCRACY

Here's the playbook he'd employ.

BY DAVID FRUM | ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY SMITH

It's 2021, and President Donald Trump will shortly be sworn in for his second term. The 45th president has visibly aged over the past four years. He rests heavily on his daughter Ivanka's arm during his infrequent public appearances.

Fortunately for him, he did not need to campaign hard for reelection. His has been a popular presidency: Big tax cuts, big spending, and big deficits have worked their familiar expansive magic. Wages have grown strongly in the Trump years, especially for men without a college degree, even if rising inflation is beginning to bite into the gains. The president's supporters credit his restrictive immigration policies and his TrumpWorks infrastructure program.

The president's critics, meanwhile, have found little hearing for their protests and complaints. A Senate investigation of Russian hacking during the 2016 presidential campaign sputtered into inconclusive partisan wrangling. Concerns about Trump's purported conflicts of interest excited debate in Washington but never drew much attention from the wider American public.

Allegations of fraud and self-dealing in the TrumpWorks program, and elsewhere, have likewise been shrugged off. The president regularly tweets out news of factory openings and big hiring announcements: "I'm bringing back your jobs," he has said over and over. Voters seem to have believed him—and are grateful.

Most Americans intuit that their president and his relatives have become vastly wealthier over the past four years. But rumors of graft are easy to dismiss. Because Trump has never released his tax returns, no one really knows.

Anyway, doesn't everybody do it? On the eve of the 2018 congressional elections, WikiLeaks released years of investment statements by prominent congressional Democrats indicating that they had long earned above-market returns. As the air filled with allegations of insider trading and crony capitalism, the public subsided into weary cynicism. The Republicans held both houses of Congress that November, and Trump loyalists shouldered aside the pre-Trump leadership.

The business community learned its lesson early. "You work for me, you don't criticize me," the president was reported to have told one major federal contractor, after knocking billions off his company's stock-market valuation with an angry tweet. Wise business leaders take care to credit Trump's personal leadership for any good news, and to avoid saying anything that might displease the president or his family.

The media have grown noticeably more friendly to Trump as well. The proposed merger of AT&T and Time Warner was delayed for more than a year, during which Time Warner's CNN unit worked ever harder to meet Trump's definition of fairness. Under the agreement that settled the Department of Justice's antitrust complaint against Amazon, the company's founder, Jeff Bezos, has divested himself of *The Washington Post*. The paper's new owner—an investor group based in Slovakia—has closed the printed edition and refocused the paper on municipal politics and lifestyle coverage.

Meanwhile, social media circulate ever-wilder rumors. Some people believe them; others don't. It's hard work to ascertain what is true.

Nobody's repealed the First Amendment, of course, and Americans remain as free to speak their minds as ever—provided they can stomach seeing their timelines fill up with obscene abuse and angry threats from the pro-Trump troll armies that police Facebook and Twitter. Rather than deal with digital thugs, young people increasingly drift to less political media like Snapchat and Instagram.

Trump-critical media do continue to find elite audiences. Their investigations still win Pulitzer Prizes; their reporters accept invitations to anxious conferences about corruption, digital-journalism standards, the end of NATO, and the rise of populist authoritarianism. Yet somehow all of this earnest effort feels less and less relevant to American politics. President Trump communicates with the people directly via his Twitter account, ushering his supporters toward favorable information at Fox News or Breitbart.

Despite the hand-wringing, the country has in many ways changed much less than some feared or hoped four years ago. Ambitious Republican plans notwithstanding, the American social-welfare system, as most people encounter it, has remained largely intact during Trump's first term. The predicted wave of mass deportations of illegal immigrants never materialized. A large illegal workforce remains in the country, with the tacit understanding that so long as these immigrants avoid politics, keeping their heads down and their mouths shut, nobody will look very hard for them.

African Americans, young people, and the recently naturalized encounter increasing difficulties casting a vote in most states. But for all the talk of the rollback of rights, corporate America still seeks diversity in employment. Same-sex marriage remains the law of the land. Americans are no more and no less likely to say "Merry Christmas" than they were before Trump took office.

People crack jokes about Trump's National Security Agency listening in on them. They cannot deeply mean it; after all,

there's no less sexting in America today than four years ago. Still, with all the hacks and leaks happening these days—particularly to the politically outspoken—it's just common sense to be careful what you say in an email or on the phone. When has politics not been a dirty business? When have the rich and powerful not mostly gotten their way? The smart thing to do is tune out the political yammer, mind your own business, enjoy a relatively prosperous time, and leave the questions to the troublemakers.

IN AN 1888 LECTURE, James Russell Lowell, a founder of this magazine, challenged the happy assumption that the Constitution was a "machine that would go of itself." Lowell was right. *Checks and balances* is a metaphor, not a mechanism.

"The benefit of controlling a modern state is less the power to persecute the innocent, more the power to protect the guilty."

Everything imagined above—and everything described below—is possible only if many people other than Donald Trump agree to permit it. It can all be stopped, if individual citizens and public officials make the right choices. The story told here, like that told by Charles Dickens's Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, is a story not of things that will be, but of things that may be. Other paths remain open. It is up to Americans to decide which one the country will follow.

No society, not even one as rich and fortunate as the United States has been, is guaranteed a successful future. When early Americans wrote things like "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," they did not do so to provide bromides for future bumper stickers. They lived in a world in which authoritarian rule was the norm, in which rulers habitually claimed the powers and assets of the state as their own personal property.

The exercise of political power is different today than it was then—but perhaps not so different as we might imagine. Larry Diamond, a sociologist at Stanford, has described the past decade as a period of "democratic recession." Worldwide, the number of democratic states has diminished. Within many of the remaining democracies, the quality of governance has deteriorated.

What has happened in Hungary since 2010 offers an example—and a blueprint for would-be strongmen. Hungary is a member state of the European Union and a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights. It has elections and uncensored internet. Yet Hungary is ceasing to be a free country.

The transition has been nonviolent, often not even very dramatic. Opponents of the regime are not murdered or imprisoned, although many are harassed with building inspections and tax audits. If they work for the government, or for a company susceptible to government pressure, they risk their jobs by speaking out. Nonetheless, they are free to emigrate anytime they like. Those with money can even take it with them. Day in and day out, the regime works more through inducements than through intimidation. The courts are packed, and forgiving of the regime's allies. Friends of the government win state contracts at high prices and borrow on easy terms from the central bank. Those on the inside grow rich by favoritism; those on the outside suffer from the general deterioration of the economy. As one shrewd observer told me on a recent visit, "The benefit of controlling a modern state is less the power to persecute the innocent, more the power to protect the guilty."

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's rule over Hungary does depend on elections. These remain open and more or less free—at least in the sense that ballots are counted accurately. Yet they are not quite fair. Electoral rules favor incumbent power-holders in ways both obvious and subtle. Independent media lose advertising under government pressure; government allies own more and more media outlets each year. The government sustains support even in the face of bad news by artfully generating an endless sequence of controversies that leave culturally conservative Hungarians feeling misunderstood and victimized by liberals, foreigners, and Jews.

You could tell a similar story of the slide away from democracy in South Africa under Nelson Mandela's successors, in Venezuela under the thug-thief Hugo Chávez, or in the Philippines under the murderous Rodrigo Duterte. A comparable transformation has recently begun in Poland, and could come to France should Marine Le Pen, the National Front's candidate, win the presidency.

Outside the Islamic world, the 21st century is not an era of ideology. The grand utopian visions of the 19th century have passed out of fashion. The nightmare totalitarian projects of the 20th have been overthrown or have disintegrated, leaving behind only outdated remnants: North Korea, Cuba. What is spreading today is repressive kleptocracy, led by rulers motivated by greed rather than by the deranged idealism of Hitler or Stalin or Mao. Such rulers rely less on terror and more on rule-twisting, the manipulation of information, and the co-optation of elites.

The United States is of course a very robust democracy. Yet no human contrivance is tamper-proof, a constitutional democracy least of all. Some features of the American system hugely inhibit the abuse of office: the separation of powers within the federal government; the division of responsibilities between the federal government and the states. Federal agencies pride themselves on their independence; the court system is huge, complex, and resistant to improper influence.

Yet the American system is also perforated by vulnerabilities no less dangerous for being so familiar. Supreme among those vulnerabilities is reliance on the personal qualities of the man or woman who wields the awesome powers of the presidency. A British prime minister can lose power in minutes if he or she forfeits the confidence of the majority in Parliament. The president of the United States, on the other hand, is restrained first and foremost by his own ethics and public spirit. What happens if somebody comes to the high office lacking those qualities?

Over the past generation, we have seen ominous indicators of a breakdown of the American political system: the willingness of congressional Republicans to push the United States to the brink of a default on its national obligations in 2013 in order to score a point in budget negotiations; Barack Obama's assertion of a unilateral executive power to confer legal status upon millions of people illegally present in the United States—despite his own prior acknowledgment that no such power existed.

Donald Trump, however, represents something much more radical. A president who plausibly owes his office at least in part to a clandestine intervention by a hostile foreign intelligence service? Who uses the bully pulpit to target individual critics? Who creates blind trusts that are not blind, invites his children to commingle private and public business, and somehow gets the unhappy members of his own political party either to endorse his choices or shrug them off? If this were happening in Honduras, we'd know what to call it. It's happening here instead, and so we are baffled.

If this were happening in Honduras, we'd know what to call it. It's happening here instead, and so we are baffled.

"AMBITION MUST BE MADE to counteract ambition." With those words, written more than 200 years ago, the authors of the Federalist Papers explained the most important safeguard of the American constitutional system. They then added this promise: "In republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates." Congress enacts laws, appropriates funds, confirms the president's appointees. Congress can subpoena records, question officials, and even impeach them. Congress can protect the American system from an overbearing president.

But will it?

As politics has become polarized, Congress has increasingly become a check only on presidents of the opposite party. Recent presidents enjoying a same-party majority in Congress—Barack Obama in 2009 and 2010, George W. Bush from 2003 through 2006—usually got their way. And congressional oversight might well be performed even less diligently during the Trump administration.

The first reason to fear weak diligence is the oddly inverse relationship between President Trump and the congressional Republicans. In the ordinary course of events, it's the incoming president who burns with eager policy ideas. Consequently, it's the president who must adapt to—and often overlook—the petty human weaknesses and vices of members of Congress in order to advance his agenda. This time, it will be Paul Ryan, the speaker of the House, doing the advancing—and consequently the overlooking.

Trump has scant interest in congressional Republicans' ideas, does not share their ideology, and cares little for their fate. He can—and would—break faith with them in an instant to further his own interests. Yet here they are, on the verge of achieving everything they have hoped to achieve for years, if not decades. They owe this chance solely to Trump's ability to deliver a crucial margin of votes in a handful of states—Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—which has provided a party that cannot win the national popular vote a fleeting opportunity to act as a decisive national majority. The greatest risk to all their projects and plans is the very same X factor that gave them their opportunity: Donald Trump, and his famously erratic personality. What excites Trump is his approval rating, his wealth, his power. The day could come

Viktor Orbán of Hungary, the late Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, and Jacob Zuma of South Africa all turned their countries away from liberal democracy and toward kleptocracy. Worldwide, democracy is in recession.

when those ends would be better served by jettisoning the institutional Republican Party in favor of an ad hoc populist coalition, joining nationalism to generous social spending—a mix that's worked well for authoritarians in places like Poland. Who doubts Trump would do it? Not Paul Ryan. Not Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader. For the first time since the administration of John Tyler in the 1840s, a majority in Congress must worry about their president defecting from *them* rather than the other way around.

A scandal involving the president could likewise wreck everything that Republican congressional leaders have waited years to accomplish. However deftly they manage everything else, they cannot prevent such a scandal. But there is one thing they can do: their utmost not to find out about it.

"Do you have any concerns about Steve Bannon being in the White House?," CNN's Jake Tapper asked Ryan in November. "I don't know Steve Bannon, so I have no concerns," answered the speaker. "I trust Donald's judgment."

Asked on *60 Minutes* whether he believed Donald Trump's claim that "millions" of illegal votes had been cast, Ryan answered: "I don't know. I'm not really focused on these things."

What about Trump's conflicts of interest? "This is not what I'm concerned about in Congress," Ryan said on CNBC. Trump should handle his conflicts "however he wants to."

Ryan has learned his prudence the hard way. Following the airing of Trump's past comments, caught on tape, about his forceful sexual advances on women, Ryan said he'd no longer campaign for Trump. Ryan's net favorability rating among Republicans dropped by 28 points in less than 10 days. Once unassailable in the party, he suddenly found himself disliked by 45 percent of Republicans.

As Ryan's cherished plans move closer and closer to presidential signature, Congress's subservience to the president will likely intensify. Whether it's allegations of Russian hacks of Democratic Party internal communications, or allegations of self-enrichment by the Trump family, or favorable treatment of Trump business associates, the Republican caucus in Congress will likely find itself conscripted into serving as Donald Trump's ethical bodyguard.

The Senate historically has offered more scope to dissenters than the House. Yet even that institution will find itself under pressure. Two of the Senate's most important Republican Trump skeptics will be up for reelection in 2018: Arizona's Jeff Flake and Texas's Ted Cruz. They will not want to provoke a same-party president—especially not in a year when the president's party can afford to lose a seat or two in order to discipline dissenters. Mitch McConnell is an even more results-oriented politician than Paul Ryan—and his wife, Elaine Chao, has been offered a Cabinet position, which might tilt him further in Trump's favor.

Ambition will counteract ambition only until ambition discovers that conformity serves its goals better. At that time, Congress, the body expected to check presidential power, may become the president's most potent enabler.

Discipline within the congressional ranks will be strictly enforced not only by the party leadership and party donors, but also by the overwhelming influence of Fox News. Trump versus Clinton was not 2016's only contest between an overbearing man and a restrained woman. Just such a contest was waged at Fox, between Sean Hannity and Megyn Kelly. In both cases, the early indicators seemed to favor the women. Yet in the end it was the men who won, Hannity even more decisively than Trump. Hannity's show, which became an unapologetic infomercial for Trump, pulled into first place on the network in mid-October. Kelly's show tumbled to fifth place, behind even *The Five*, a roundtable program that airs at 5 p.m. Kelly landed on her feet, of course, but Fox learned its lesson: Trump sells; critical coverage does not. Since the election, the network has awarded Kelly's former 9 p.m. time slot to Tucker Carlson, who is positioning himself as a Trump enthusiast in the Hannity mold.

From the point of view of the typical Republican member of Congress, Fox remains all-powerful: the single most important source of visibility and affirmation with the voters whom a Republican politician cares about. In 2009, in the run-up to the Tea Party insurgency, South Carolina's Bob Inglis crossed Fox, criticizing Glenn Beck and telling people at a town-hall meeting that they should turn his show off. He was drowned out by booing, and the following year, he lost his primary with only 29 percent of the vote, a crushing repudiation for an incumbent untouched by any scandal.

Fox is reinforced by a carrier fleet of supplementary institutions: super PACs, think tanks, and conservative web and social-media presences, which now include such former pariahs as Breitbart and Alex Jones. So long as the carrier fleet coheres—and unless public opinion turns sharply against the president—oversight of Trump by the Republican congressional majority will very likely be cautious, conditional, and limited.

DONALD TRUMP WILL NOT set out to build an authoritarian state. His immediate priority seems likely to be to use the presidency to enrich himself. But as he does so, he will need to protect himself from legal risk. Being Trump, he will also inevitably wish to inflict payback on his critics. Construction of an apparatus of impunity and revenge will begin haphazardly and opportunistically. But it will accelerate. It will have to.

If Congress is quiescent, what can Trump do? A better question, perhaps, is what can't he do?

Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the House, who often articulates Trumpist ideas more candidly than Trump himself

SEAN GALLUP; AVERY CUNLIFFE/PHOTOSHOT; CHESNOT; GETTY

might think prudent, offered a sharp lesson in how difficult it will be to enforce laws against an uncooperative president. During a radio roundtable in December, on the topic of whether it would violate anti-nepotism laws to bring Trump's daughter and son-in-law onto the White House staff, Gingrich said: The president "has, frankly, the power of the pardon. It is a totally open power, and he could simply say, 'Look, I want them to be my advisers. I pardon them if anybody finds them to have behaved against the rules. Period.' And technically, under the Constitution, he has that level of authority."

That statement is true, and it points to a deeper truth: The United States may be a nation of laws, but the proper functioning of the law depends upon the competence and integrity of those charged with executing it. A president determined to thwart the law in order to protect himself and those in his circle has many means to do so.

The power of the pardon, deployed to defend not only family but also those who would protect the president's interests, dealings, and indiscretions, is one such means. The powers of appointment and removal are another. The president appoints and can remove the commissioner of the IRS. He appoints and can remove the inspectors general who oversee the internal workings of the Cabinet departments and major agencies. He appoints and can remove the 93 U.S. attorneys, who have the power to initiate and to end federal prosecutions. He appoints and can remove the attorney general, the deputy attorney general, and the head of the criminal division at the Department of Justice.

There are hedges on these powers, both customary and constitutional, including the Senate's power to confirm (or not) presidential appointees. Yet the hedges may not hold in the future as robustly as they have in the past.

Senators of the president's party traditionally have expected to be consulted on the U.S.-attorney picks in their states, a highly coveted patronage plum. But the U.S. attorneys of most interest to Trump—above all the ones in New York and New Jersey, the locus of many of his businesses and bank dealings—come from states where there are no Republican senators to take into account. And while the U.S. attorneys in Florida, home to Mar-a-Lago and other Trump properties, surely concern him nearly as much, if there's one Republican senator whom Trump would cheerfully disregard, it's Marco Rubio.

The traditions of independence and professionalism that prevail within the federal law-enforcement apparatus, and within the civil service more generally, will tend to restrain a president's power. Yet in the years ahead, these restraints may also prove less robust than they look. Republicans in Congress have long advocated reforms to expedite the firing of underperforming civil servants. In the abstract, there's much to recommend this idea. If reform is dramatic and happens in the next two years, however, the balance of power between the political and the professional elements of the federal government will shift, decisively, at precisely the moment when the political elements are most aggressive. The intelligence agencies in particular would likely find themselves exposed to retribution from a president enraged at them for reporting on Russia's aid to his election campaign. "As you know from his other career, Donald likes to fire people." So New Jersey Governor Chris Christie joked to a roomful of Republican donors at the party's national convention in July. It would be a mighty power—and highly useful.

The courts, though they might slowly be packed with judges inclined to hear the president's arguments sympathetically, are also a check, of course. But it's already difficult to hold a president to account for financial improprieties. As Donald Trump correctly told reporters and editors from *The New York Times* on November 22, presidents are not bound by the conflict-of-interest rules that govern everyone else in the executive branch.

Presidents from Jimmy Carter onward have balanced this unique exemption with a unique act of disclosure: the voluntary publication of their income-tax returns. At a press conference on January 11, Trump made clear that he will not follow that tradition. His attorney instead insisted that everything the public needs to know is captured by his annual financial-disclosure report, which is required by law for executive-branch employees and from which presidents are not exempt. But a glance at the reporting forms (you can read them yourself at www.oge.gov/web/278eguide.nsf) will show their inadequacy to Trump's situation. They are written with stocks and bonds in mind, to capture mortgage liabilities and deferred executive compensation—not the labyrinthine deals of the Trump Organization and its ramifying networks of partners and brand-licensing affiliates. The truth is in the tax returns, and they will not be forthcoming.

Even outright bribe-taking by an elected official is surprisingly difficult to prosecute, and was made harder still by the Supreme Court in 2016, when it overturned, by an 8–0 vote, the conviction of former Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell. McDonnell and his wife had taken valuable gifts

TASOS KATOPODIS/AFP/GETTY

Members of the Trump family—Melania, Ivanka, Eric, and Donald Jr.—listen to the second presidential debate at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, in October.

of cash and luxury goods from a favor seeker. McDonnell then set up meetings between the favor seeker and state officials who were in a position to help him. A jury had even accepted that the "quid" was indeed "pro" the "quo"—an evidentiary burden that has often protected accused bribe-takers in the past. The McDonnells had been convicted on a combined 20 counts.

The Supreme Court objected, however, that the lower courts had interpreted federal anticorruption law too broadly. The relevant statute applied only to "official acts." The Court defined such acts very strictly, and held that "setting up a meeting, talking to another official, or organizing an event—without more—does not fit that definition of an 'official act.'"

Trump is poised to mingle business and government with an audacity and on a scale more reminiscent of a leader in a post-Soviet republic than anything ever before seen in the United States. Glimpses of his family's wealth-seeking activities will likely emerge during his presidency, as they did during the transition. Trump's Indian business partners dropped by Trump Tower and posted pictures with the then-president-elect on Facebook, alerting folks back home that they were now powers to be reckoned with. The Argentine media reported that Trump had discussed the progress of a Trump-branded building in Buenos Aires during a congratulatory phone call from the country's president. (A spokesman for the Argentine president denied that the two men had discussed the building on their call.) Trump's daughter Ivanka sat in on a meeting with the Japanese prime minister—a useful meeting for her, since a government-owned bank has a large ownership stake in the Japanese company with which she was negotiating a licensing deal.

A president determined to thwart the law to protect himself and those in his circle has many means to do so.

Suggestive. Disturbing. But illegal, post-*McDonnell*? How many presidentially removable officials would dare even initiate an inquiry?

You may hear much mention of the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution during Trump's presidency: "No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State."

But as written, this seems to present a number of loopholes. First, the clause applies only to the president himself, not to his family members. Second, it seems to govern benefits only from foreign governments and state-owned enterprises, not from private business entities. Third, Trump's lawyers have argued that the clause applies only to gifts and titles, not to business transactions. Fourth, what does "the Consent of Congress" mean? If Congress is apprised of an apparent emolument, and declines to do anything about it, does that qualify as consent? Finally, how is this clause enforced? Could someone take President Trump to court and demand some kind of injunction? Who? How? Will the courts grant standing? The clause seems to presume an active Congress and a vigilant public. What if those are lacking?

It is essential to recognize that Trump will use his position not only to enrich himself; he will enrich plenty of other people too, both the powerful and—sometimes, for public consumption—the relatively powerless. Venezuela, a stable democracy from the late 1950s through the 1990s, was corrupted by a politics of personal favoritism, as Hugo Chávez used state resources to bestow gifts on supporters. Venezuelan state TV even aired a regular program to showcase weeping recipients of new houses and free appliances. Americans recently got a preview of their own version of that show as grateful Carrier employees thanked then-President-Elect Trump for keeping their jobs in Indiana.

"I just couldn't believe that this guy ... he's not even president yet and he worked on this deal with the company," T. J. Bray, a 32-year-old Carrier employee, told *Fortune*. "I'm just in shock. A lot of the workers are in shock. We can't believe something good finally happened to us. It felt like a victory for the little people."

Trump will try hard during his presidency to create an atmosphere of personal munificence, in which graft does not matter, because rules and institutions do not matter. He will want to associate economic benefit with personal favor. He will create personal constituencies, and implicate other people in his corruption. That, over time, is what truly subverts the institutions of democracy and the rule of law. If the public cannot be induced to care, the power of the investigators serving at Trump's pleasure will be diminished all the more.

"T**HE FIRST TASK** for our new administration will be to liberate our citizens from the crime and terrorism and lawlessness that threatens our communities." Those were Donald Trump's words at the Republican National Convention. The newly nominated presidential candidate then listed a series of outrages and attacks, especially against police officers.

> America was shocked to its core when our police officers in Dallas were so brutally executed. Immediately after Dallas, we've seen continued threats and violence against our law-enforcement officials. Law officers have been shot or killed in recent days in Georgia, Missouri, Wisconsin, Kansas, Michigan, and Tennessee.
>
> On Sunday, more police were gunned down in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Three were killed, and three were very, very badly injured. An attack on law enforcement is an attack on all Americans. I have a message to every last person threatening the peace on our streets and the safety of our police: When I take the oath of office next year, I will restore law and order to our country.

You would never know from Trump's words that the average number of felonious killings of police during the Obama administration's tenure was almost one-third lower than it was in the early 1990s, a decline that tracked with the general fall in violent crime that has so blessed American society. There had been a rise in killings of police in 2014 and 2015 from the all-time low in 2013—but only back to the 2012 level. Not every year will be the best on record.

A mistaken belief that crime is spiraling out of control—that terrorists roam at large in America and that police are regularly gunned down—represents a considerable political asset for Donald Trump. Seventy-eight percent of Trump voters believed that crime had worsened during the Obama years.

In true police states, surveillance and repression sustain the power of the authorities. But that's not how power is gained and sustained in backsliding democracies. Polarization, not persecution, enables the modern illiberal regime.

By guile or by instinct, Trump understands this.

Whenever Trump stumbles into some kind of trouble, he reacts by picking a divisive fight. The morning after *The Wall Street Journal* published a story about the extraordinary conflicts of interest surrounding Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, Trump tweeted that flag burners should be imprisoned or stripped of their citizenship. That evening, as if on cue, a little posse of oddballs obligingly burned flags for the cameras in front of the Trump International Hotel in New York. Guess which story dominated that day's news cycle?

Civil unrest will not be a problem for the Trump presidency. It will be a resource. Trump will likely want not to repress it, but to publicize it—and the conservative entertainment-outrage complex will eagerly assist him. Immigration protesters marching with Mexican flags; Black Lives Matter demonstrators bearing antipolice slogans—these are the images of the opposition that Trump will wish his supporters to see. The more offensively the protesters behave, the more pleased Trump will be.

Calculated outrage is an old political trick, but nobody in the history of American politics has deployed it as aggressively, as repeatedly, or with such success as Donald Trump. If there is harsh law enforcement by the Trump administration, it will benefit the president not to the extent that it quashes unrest, but to the extent that it enflames more of it, ratifying the apocalyptic vision that haunted his speech at the convention.

Civil unrest will not be a problem for the Trump presidency. It will be a resource. Trump will likely want to enflame more of it.

A**T A RALLY** in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in December, Trump got to talking about Vladimir Putin. "And then they said, 'You know he's killed reporters,'" Trump told the audience. "And I don't like that. I'm totally against that. By the way, I hate some of these people, but I'd never kill them. I hate them. No, I think, no—these people, honestly—I'll be honest. I'll be honest. I would never kill them. I would never do that. Ah, let's see—nah, no, I wouldn't. I would never kill them. But I do hate them."

In the early days of the Trump transition, Nic Dawes, a journalist who has worked in South Africa, delivered an ominous warning to the American media about what to expect. "Get used to being stigmatized as 'opposition,'" he wrote. "The basic idea is simple: to delegitimize accountability journalism by framing it as partisan."

Trump supporters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at a stop on Trump's postelection thank-you tour

DON EMMERT/AFP/GETTY

The rulers of backsliding democracies resent an independent press, but cannot extinguish it. They may curb the media's appetite for critical coverage by intimidating unfriendly journalists, as President Jacob Zuma and members of his party have done in South Africa. Mostly, however, modern strongmen seek merely to discredit journalism as an institution, by denying that such a thing as independent judgment can exist. All reporting serves an agenda. There is no truth, only competing attempts to grab power.

By filling the media space with bizarre inventions and brazen denials, purveyors of fake news hope to mobilize potential supporters with righteous wrath—and to demoralize potential opponents by nurturing the idea that everybody lies and nothing matters. A would-be kleptocrat is actually better served by spreading cynicism than by deceiving followers with false beliefs: Believers can be disillusioned; people who expect to hear only lies can hardly complain when a lie is exposed. The inculcation of cynicism breaks down the distinction between those forms of media that try their imperfect best to report the truth, and those that purvey falsehoods for reasons of profit or ideology. *The New York Times* becomes the equivalent of Russia's RT; *The Washington Post* of Breitbart; NPR of Infowars.

One story, still supremely disturbing, exemplifies the falsifying method. During November and December, the slow-moving California vote count gradually pushed Hillary Clinton's lead over Donald Trump in the national popular vote further and further: past 1 million, past 1.5 million, past 2 million, past 2.5 million. Trump's share of the vote would ultimately clock in below Richard Nixon's in 1960, Al Gore's in 2000, John Kerry's in 2004, Gerald Ford's in 1976, and Mitt Romney's in 2012—and barely ahead of Michael Dukakis's in 1988.

This outcome evidently gnawed at the president-elect. On November 27, Trump tweeted that he had in fact "won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally." He followed up that astonishing, and unsubstantiated, statement with an escalating series of tweets and retweets.

It's hard to do justice to the breathtaking audacity of such a claim. If true, it would be so serious as to demand a criminal investigation at a minimum, presumably spanning many states. But of course the claim was not true. Trump had not a smidgen of evidence beyond his own bruised feelings and internet flotsam from flagrantly unreliable sources. Yet once the president-elect lent his prestige to the crazy claim, it became fact for many people. A survey by YouGov found that by December 1, 43 percent of Republicans accepted the claim that millions of people had voted illegally in 2016.

A clear untruth had suddenly become a contested possibility. When CNN's Jeff Zeleny correctly reported on November 28 that Trump's tweet was baseless, Fox's Sean Hannity accused Zeleny of media bias—and then proceeded to urge the incoming Trump administration to take a new tack with the White House press corps, and to punish reporters like Zeleny. "I think it's time to reevaluate the press and maybe change the traditional relationship with the press and the White House," Hannity said. "My message tonight to the press is simple: You guys are done. You've been exposed as fake, as having an agenda, as colluding. You're a fake news organization."

This was no idiosyncratic brain wave of Hannity's. The previous morning, Ari Fleischer, the former press secretary in George W. Bush's administration, had advanced a similar idea in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, suggesting that the White House could withhold credentials for its press conferences from media outlets that are "too liberal or unfair." Newt Gingrich recommended that Trump stop giving press conferences altogether.

Twitter, unmediated by the press, has proved an extremely effective communication tool for Trump. And the whipping-up of potentially violent Twitter mobs against media critics is already a standard method of Trump's governance. Megyn Kelly

blamed Trump and his campaign's social-media director for inciting Trump's fans against her to such a degree that she felt compelled to hire armed guards to protect her family. I've talked with well-funded Trump supporters who speak of recruiting a troll army explicitly modeled on those used by Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russia's Putin to take control of the social-media space, intimidating some critics and overwhelming others through a blizzard of doubt-casting and misinformation. The WikiLeaks Task Force recently tweeted—then hastily deleted—a suggestion that it would build a database to track personal and financial information on all verified Twitter accounts, the kind of accounts typically used by journalists at major media organizations. It's not hard to imagine how such compilations could be used to harass or intimidate.

Even so, it seems unlikely that President Trump will outright send the cameras away. He craves media attention too much. But he and his team are serving notice that a new era in government-media relations is coming, an era in which all criticism is by definition oppositional—and all critics are to be treated as enemies.

In an online article for *The New York Review of Books*, the Russian-born journalist Masha Gessen brilliantly noted a commonality between Donald Trump and the man Trump admires so much, Vladimir Putin. "*Lying is the message*," she wrote. "It's not just that both Putin and Trump lie, it is that they lie in the same way and for the same purpose: blatantly, to assert power over truth itself."

THE LURID MASS MOVEMENTS of the 20th century—communist, fascist, and other—have bequeathed to our imaginations an outdated image of what 21st-century authoritarianism might look like.

Whatever else happens, Americans are not going to assemble in parade-ground formations, any more than they will crank a gramophone or dance the turkey trot. In a society where few people walk to work, why mobilize young men in matching shirts to command the streets? If you're seeking to domineer and bully, you want your storm troopers to go online, where the more important traffic is. Demagogues need no longer stand erect for hours orating into a radio microphone. Tweet lies from a smartphone instead.

"Populist-fueled democratic backsliding is difficult to counter," wrote the political scientists Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz late last year. "Because it is subtle and incremental, there is no single moment that triggers widespread resistance or creates a focal point around which an opposition can coalesce … Piecemeal democratic erosion, therefore, typically provokes only fragmented resistance." Their observation was rooted in the experiences of countries ranging from the Philippines to Hungary. It could apply here too.

If people retreat into private life, if critics grow quieter, if cynicism becomes endemic, the corruption will slowly become more brazen, the intimidation of opponents stronger. Laws intended to ensure accountability or prevent graft or protect civil liberties will be weakened.

If the president uses his office to grab billions for himself and his family, his supporters will feel empowered to take millions. If he successfully exerts power to punish enemies, his successors will emulate his methods.

If citizens learn that success in business or in public service depends on the favor of the president and his ruling clique, then it's not only American politics that will change. The economy will be corrupted too, and with it the larger culture. A culture that has accepted that graft is the norm, that rules don't matter as much as relationships with those in power, and that people can be punished for speech and acts that remain theoretically legal—such a culture is not easily reoriented back to constitutionalism, freedom, and public integrity.

The oft-debated question "Is Donald Trump a fascist?" is not easy to answer. There are certainly fascistic elements to him: the subdivision of society into categories of friend and foe; the boastful virility and the delight in violence; the vision of life as a struggle for dominance that only some can win, and that others must lose.

Yet there's also something incongruous and even absurd about applying the sinister label of fascist to Donald Trump. He is so pathetically needy, so shamelessly self-interested, so fitful and distracted. Fascism fetishizes hardihood, sacrifice, and struggle—concepts not often associated with Trump.

Perhaps this is the wrong question. Perhaps the better question about Trump is not "What is he?" but "What will he do to us?"

By all early indications, the Trump presidency will corrode public integrity and the rule of law—and also do untold damage to American global leadership, the Western alliance, and democratic norms around the world. The damage has already begun, and it will not be soon or easily undone. Yet exactly how much damage is allowed to be done is an open question—the most important near-term question in American politics. It is also an intensely personal one, for its answer will be determined by the answer to another question: What will you do? And you? And you?

Of course we want to believe that everything will turn out all right. In this instance, however, that lovely and customary American assumption itself qualifies as one of the most serious

Twitter has proved an extremely effective communication tool for Trump, shown here in his office at Trump Tower. "Troll armies," mobilized in his support, may be a fixture during his administration.

impediments to everything turning out all right. If the story ends without too much harm to the republic, it won't be because the dangers were imagined, but because citizens resisted.

The duty to resist should weigh most heavily upon those of us who—because of ideology or partisan affiliation or some other reason—are most predisposed to favor President Trump and his agenda. The years ahead will be years of temptation as well as danger: temptation to seize a rare political opportunity to cram through an agenda that the American majority would normally reject. Who knows when that chance will recur?

A constitutional regime is founded upon the shared belief that the most fundamental commitment of the political system is to the rules. The rules matter more than the outcomes. It's because the rules matter most that Hillary Clinton conceded the presidency to Trump despite winning millions more votes. It's because the rules matter most that the giant state of California will accept the supremacy of a federal government that its people rejected by an almost two-to-one margin.

A would-be kleptocrat is better served by spreading cynicism than by deceiving followers.

Perhaps the words of a founding father of modern conservatism, Barry Goldwater, offer guidance. "If I should later be attacked for neglecting my constituents' 'interests,'" Goldwater wrote in *The Conscience of a Conservative*, "I shall reply that I was informed their main interest is liberty and that in that cause I am doing the very best I can." These words should be kept in mind by those conservatives who think a tax cut or health-care reform a sufficient reward for enabling the slow rot of constitutional government.

Many of the worst and most subversive things Trump will do will be highly popular. Voters liked the threats and incentives that kept Carrier manufacturing jobs in Indiana. Since 1789, the wisest American leaders have invested great ingenuity in creating institutions to protect the electorate from its momentary impulses toward arbitrary action: the courts, the professional officer corps of the armed forces, the civil service, the Federal Reserve—and undergirding it all, the guarantees of the Constitution and especially the Bill of Rights. More than any president in U.S. history since at least the time of Andrew Jackson, Donald Trump seeks to subvert those institutions.

Trump and his team count on one thing above all others: public indifference. "I think people don't care," he said in September when asked whether voters wanted him to release his tax returns. "Nobody cares," he reiterated to *60 Minutes* in November. Conflicts of interest with foreign investments? Trump tweeted on November 21 that he didn't believe voters cared about that either: "Prior to the election it was well known that I have interests in properties all over the world. Only the crooked media makes this a big deal!"

What happens in the next four years will depend heavily on whether Trump is right or wrong about how little Americans care about their democracy and the habits and conventions that sustain it. If they surprise him, they can restrain him.

Public opinion, public scrutiny, and public pressure still matter greatly in the U.S. political system. In January, an unexpected surge of voter outrage thwarted plans to neutralize the independent House ethics office. That kind of defense will need to be replicated many times. Elsewhere in this issue, Jonathan Rauch describes some of the networks of defense that Americans are creating (see page 60).

Get into the habit of telephoning your senators and House member at their local offices, especially if you live in a red state. Press your senators to ensure that prosecutors and judges are chosen for their independence—and that their independence is protected. Support laws to require the Treasury to release presidential tax returns if the president fails to do so voluntarily. Urge new laws to clarify that the Emoluments Clause applies to the president's immediate family, and that it refers not merely to direct gifts from governments but to payments from government-affiliated enterprises as well. Demand an independent investigation by qualified professionals of the role of foreign intelligence services in the 2016 election—and the contacts, if any, between those services and American citizens. Express your support and sympathy for journalists attacked by social-media trolls, especially women in journalism, so often the preferred targets. Honor civil servants who are fired or forced to resign because they defied improper orders. Keep close watch for signs of the rise of a culture of official impunity, in which friends and supporters of power-holders are allowed to flout rules that bind everyone else.

Those citizens who fantasize about defying tyranny from within fortified compounds have never understood how liberty is actually threatened in a modern bureaucratic state: not by diktat and violence, but by the slow, demoralizing process of corruption and deceit. And the way that liberty must be defended is not with amateur firearms, but with an unwearying insistence upon the honesty, integrity, and professionalism of American institutions and those who lead them. We are living through the most dangerous challenge to the free government of the United States that anyone alive has encountered. What happens next is up to you and me. Don't be afraid. This moment of danger can also be your finest hour as a citizen and an American. A

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JOSH HANER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Our new president may well try to govern as an authoritarian. Whether he succeeds depends less on what he does than on how civil society responds.

CONTAINING TRUMP

BY JONATHAN RAUCH | ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY SMITH

Whatever his intellectual and political gifts, Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, was a cunning and dangerous criminal. For him, issuing illegal orders was literally just another day at the office.

One such day, in July of 1971 (nearly a year before the Watergate break-in), found him ordering his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, to execute a burglary. The president was exercised about politically damaging documents that he imagined were possessed by scholars at the Brookings Institution, a respected Washington think tank, where I now work. "We're up against an enemy, a conspiracy," Nixon railed, banging on the desk for emphasis. "They're using any means. We are going to use any means. Is that clear? Did they get the Brookings Institute raided last night?"

Haldeman: "No, sir, they didn't."

Nixon: "No. Get it done. I want it done! I want the Brookings Institute safe cleaned out!"

Anyone who wants to hear the president of the United States sounding like a B-movie mobster will find dozens of examples on the Nixon presidential library's website. Nixon compiled lists of enemies, tried to suborn the IRS and the CIA, demanded that Jews be investigated and fired ("You can't trust the bastards"), created a personal black-ops team (the Plumbers), raised hush money and established slush funds, suggested engaging thugs to beat up protesters, proposed selling ambassadorships, spied on political activists, and orchestrated cover-ups. He remained in office for nearly six years, ultimately being forced out only because he made the astonishing mistake of recording himself breaking the law. Until the Supreme Court ordered the tapes turned over to a special prosecutor in July of 1974, Nixon still had enough support to survive a removal vote in the Senate.

The 45th president, Donald Trump, might pose the gravest threat to the constitutional order since the 37th. Of course, he might not. Perhaps we'll get Grown-up Trump, an unorthodox and controversial president who, whatever one may think of his policies and personality, proves to be responsible and effective as a chief executive. But we might get Infantile Trump, an undisciplined narcissist who throws tantrums and governs haphazardly. Or perhaps, worse yet, we'll get Strongman Trump, who turns out to have been telegraphing his real intentions when, during the campaign, he spread innuendo and misinformation, winked at political violence, and proposed multiple violations of the Constitution and basic decency. Quite probably we'll get some combination of all three (and possibly others).

If we get Strongman Trump or Infantile Trump, how would we protect our democratic institutions and norms? "Don't be complacent," warns Timothy Naftali, a New York University historian who was the founding director of the Nixon presidential library. "Don't assume the system is so strong that a bad president will be sent packing. We have someone now saying things that imply unconstitutional impulses. If he acts on those impulses, we're going to be in the political struggle of our lifetimes." Meeting that challenge, I think, hinges on whether civil society can mobilize to contain and channel Trump. Fortunately, that's happening already.

IT'S TEMPTING to think of Trump as a fluke, and to believe that at the end of his administration everything will return to normal. Many people hold a darker view, though—among them Yascha Mounk, the co-founder of a new watchdog group called After Trump. A lecturer on government at Harvard and a fellow at the New America Foundation, Mounk thinks the stakes are high. "Most people," he told me, "are thinking about Trump as a policy problem: how he will lead to the deportation of undocumented immigrants or lead the U.S. to pull out of the Paris climate agreement. But I think Trump is also potentially an authoritarian threat to the survival of liberal democracy."

Mounk is a 35-year-old German who studied in the United Kingdom before coming to the United States. He's Jewish, and in Germany his Judaism made him an object of curiosity. "They thought of me as an outsider," he told me. When we first spoke, he was waiting for his final immigration interview before taking the oath of U.S. citizenship. In America, he says, "It doesn't matter what ethnicity you are, what religion you are. That's where I want to live." He sees America as the world's preeminent example of multiethnic liberalism, a model he believes is under attack.

Mounk's work first came to my attention this past summer, when he and Roberto Stefan Foa, of the University of Melbourne, published an article in the *Journal of Democracy* showing a decline in support for democracy in the West. The decline is alarming. In the U.S., the proportion of people saying it would be good or very good for the "Army to rule" rose from one in 16 in 1995 to one in six in 2014. Ominously, the trend was strongest among the young. When asked to rate on a scale of one to 10 how essential it was for them to live in a democracy, 75 percent of Americans born in the 1930s chose 10, but the proportion dropped with each succeeding decade, falling to only about 30 percent for people born in the 1980s.

The trends were similar in Europe. "I started looking at developments in Europe and also in the United States," Mounk told me, "and started thinking that democracy was much less stable

than people assumed." In Hungary, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, Venezuela, and other new and emerging democracies, authoritarian-minded populists had adopted versions of what Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, has called illiberal democracy, which Mounk defines as democracy without rights. In Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and other mature democracies, authoritarian populists were gaining in popularity and clout.

Yascha Mounk, the co-founder of a new watchdog group called After Trump, believes that Donald Trump represents an authoritarian threat to the survival of liberal democracy.

STEFFEN JÄNICKE

At first, scholars and editors pooh-poohed Mounk's alarmism. Recent events, though, have made a global retreat from democracy look disturbingly plausible. Mounk calls the trend "democratic deconsolidation." When I asked why, he explained that many students of political development have supposed that in prosperous and democratic parts of the world, liberal democracy has consolidated its standing. Unfortunately, that reassuring theory now appears to be wobbly. Democracy can start to unwind if popular support for it declines, if the public becomes open to undemocratic alternatives, and if undemocratic politicians emerge who can exploit that opening. All of those factors are visible in a multitude of places. "Democracy is no longer the only game in town," Mounk says.

Why? Mounk suspects the mutually reinforcing effects of three different but related social vectors. The first is economic anxiety. "In a lot of countries," he says, "you've always had a very rapid increase in living standards from one generation to the next. That's no longer the case in many countries in Europe and in North America." Some of what always looked like unconditional support for democracy may actually have been conditioned on rising prosperity. The second vector is ethnic and racial anxiety: historically dominant groups' perception (frequently accurate) that they are losing majority standing and the cultural status that goes with it. The third vector, Mounk believes, is growing economic inequality between urban centers and rural hinterlands. The United States in 2016 offered a particularly vivid example: Hillary Clinton carried only 472 counties, out of more than 3,000, but those 472 were predominantly urban and accounted for nearly two-thirds of the country's total economic output. "No election in decades has revealed as sharp a political divide between the densest economic centers and the rest of the country," write Brookings's Mark Muro and Sifan Liu, who reported the data.

Globalization exacerbates all three of those vectors. And the vectors (especially the first two) reinforce one another. Together they seem to create political opportunities for illiberal democracy and tough-guy populists. So Trump might be a black swan. But he also might be a transformative figure in a global antidemocratic backlash.

I'M A CAUTIOUS OPTIMIST. After all, this isn't the first time the U.S. has seen panic about an antidemocratic presidency. In 1828, many serious people believed that Andrew Jackson was an authoritarian who would impose military rule, and Jackson's record provided real grounds for concern. "The phrase was that he was going to be an American Bonaparte," says the Jackson biographer Jon Meacham. "He would become a dictator." But the Constitution survived, and Jackson's presidency, although controversial to this day, proved effective.

We have reason to hope that Trump will figure out how to be a modern-day Jackson. Anyone who over a five-decade career succeeds as a real-estate developer, an author, a television star, and now an insurgent politician clearly possesses adaptability and talent. But we also have reason to fear that he might use the powers of his office to violate court orders, encourage supporters to harass his political opponents, suborn the Justice Department or the IRS or other powerful agencies, circumvent Congress, or aggrandize and enrich himself. In an accompanying article in this issue ("How to Build an Autocracy," page 48), David Frum imagines how a corrupt and corrupting Trump presidency might look. Just as important, however, is how it might not look: obvious.

For this article, I set out to develop a list of telltales that the president is endangering the Constitution and threatening democracy. I failed. In fact, I concluded that there can be no such list, because many of the worrisome things that an antidemocratic president might do look just like things that other presidents have done. Use presidential power to bully corporations? Truman and Kennedy did that. Distort or exag-

gerate facts to initiate or escalate a war? Johnson and George W. Bush did that. Lie point-blank to the public? Eisenhower did that. Defy orders from the Supreme Court? Lincoln did that. Suspend habeas corpus? Lincoln did that, too. Spy on American activists? Kennedy and Johnson did that. Start wars at will, without congressional approval? Truman did that. Censor "disloyal" speech and fire "disloyal" civil servants? Wilson did that. Incarcerate U.S. citizens of foreign extraction? Franklin D. Roosevelt did that. Use shady schemes to circumvent congressional strictures? Reagan did that. Preempt Justice Department prosecutors? Obama did that. Assert sweeping powers to lock people up without trial or judicial review? George W. Bush did that. Declare an open-ended national emergency? Bush did that, and Obama continued it. Use regulatory authority aggressively and, according to the courts, sometimes illegally? Obama did that. Kill a U.S. citizen abroad? Obama did that, too. Grant favors to political friends, and make mischief for political enemies? All presidents do that.

Context is everything. Many of the behaviors that Trump displayed during the transition—leaning on corporations to retain American jobs, questioning Department of Energy bureaucrats about their climate-change activities, criticizing by name a union official who challenged his veracity—could be interpreted as dangerously illiberal, but they could also be interpreted as ordinary presidential assertiveness. Authoritarianism lies not in any individual presidential action but in the patterns of action that emerge over the course of a presidency. Lincoln and Eisenhower and all the others I've just named were committed small-*d* democrats. Their excesses were exceptional or occasional. Unlike Nixon, they did not engage in concerted efforts to undermine the integrity of the Constitution or the government. Moreover, and more important, when excesses did happen, the rest of the system usually pushed back, usually successfully. Whether any particular presidential action, or pattern of action, is authoritarian thus depends not just on the action itself but on how everyone else responds to it.

For a good example, one need look back no further than the presidency of George W. Bush. After the 9/11 attacks, Bush claimed alarmingly broad presidential powers. He said he could define the entire world as a battlefield in the War on Terror, designate noncitizens and citizens alike as enemy combatants, and then seize and detain them indefinitely, without judicial interference or congressional approval or the oversight called for by the Geneva Conventions.

What happened next, says Jack Goldsmith, a veteran of the Bush Justice Department, was unprecedented pushback from "giant distributed networks of lawyers, investigators, and auditors, both inside and outside the executive branch." Goldsmith, now a professor at Harvard Law School, discusses the phenomenon in his 2012 book, *Power and Constraint*:

> These forces swarmed the government with hundreds of critical reports and lawsuits that challenged every aspect of the President's war powers. They also brought thousands of critical minds to bear on the government's activities, resulting in bestselling books, reports, blog posts, and press tips that shaped the public's view of presidential action and informed congressional responses, lawsuits, and mainstream media reporting.

In response, the Supreme Court and Congress weighed in to regulate and constrain Bush's powers, and the result is a detention process that has its controversial aspects but fits comfortably within our constitutional norms.

"Civil society had a huge and unprecedented impact during the Bush administration," Goldsmith told me. The networks that constrained Bush are still there, and Trump has put them on red alert. "Every single thing he does will be scrutinized with an uncharitable eye," Goldsmith said. "That's true of most presidents, but it's true to an even greater degree with Trump."

Trump might be a black swan. But he also might be a transformative figure in a global antidemocratic backlash.

The forces are already mobilizing. In the first five days after the election, the American Civil Liberties Union saw what it called the greatest outpouring of support in its history: more than $7 million from 120,000 contributors, a 25 percent increase in Facebook followers (to nearly 1 million), and 150,000 additions to its email list. By early January, the ACLU had raised an impressive $35 million online, from almost 400,000 contributors. Meanwhile, according to *Politico*, progressive donors were discussing "forming a liberal equivalent to the right's Judicial Watch, which spent much of the past eight years as a thorn in the Obama administration's side, filing legal petitions under the Freedom of Information Act."

I have seen evidence of mobilization firsthand. Just days after the election, a friend told me that he and others were organizing a network of law firms willing to provide pro bono legal services to people fending off harassment or bullying by the new administration or its allies. Before November was out, the Niskanen Center, a center-right think tank in Washington, announced a project to bring together intellectuals and activists and politicians (especially Republicans) to make the case for lib-

eral democracy, hold the line against incursions, and try to prevent Trump's excesses from being normalized. "It's important for people coming from the center and center-right to resist the forces and ideas coming out of the Donald Trump campaign," Jerry Taylor, the center's director, told me. "We'll be keeping a very close eye on administration undertakings and events on Capitol Hill, and when things cross the line we will be energetically pushing back."

Yascha Mounk, too, will be pushing back. When I first met him, the Friday after the election, he and Justin E. H. Smith, an American academic based in Paris, had grabbed the domain name AfterTrump.org and were setting up their new watchdog organization. Two weeks later, Mounk told me that they had enlisted about 20 core supporters—academics, journalists, activists—plus 50 to 100 friends and helpers. In December, they developed plans for a blog, an online dashboard on the state of liberal democracy, podcasts, and a new magazine. Their most important idea, though, is to use crowdsourcing to monitor potential illiberal maneuvers by the Trump administration, thereby building up a database that, over time, could reveal subtle patterns of worrisome or abusive behavior that sporadic media attention might miss.

If you think it's ridiculous to imagine that one nascent group, or even a handful of heavy hitters like the ACLU, could shift the orbit of Planet Trump, you're right. The point is that a civil-society mobilization involves multitudes of groups and people forming a whole greater than the sum of its parts—the phenomenon that Goldsmith describes in *Power and Constraint*. Goldsmith calls the vast array of watchers focused on the president the "synopticon." Today the synopticon is far bigger and more developed than it was in Nixon's day. The White House and executive agencies are scrutinized by watchdog groups, mainstream media, bloggers, leakers, inspectors general, lawyers, and all sorts of others—sometimes to the point of impeding legitimate executive action, but also making abuses harder to hide or finesse than Nixon ever imagined.

Nixon's gift to American democracy was to inadvertently establish the infrastructure that will contain Trump. The harder he pushes to stretch or violate the law, the more he'll be swarmed. As a result, where Nixon-style illegality or naked power grabs are concerned, I'm optimistic that the constitutional framework will hold.

BUT THERE'S A tougher problem we'll have to confront: behavior by either the administration or its allies that is, in Goldsmith's phrase, "lawful but awful." As Benjamin Wittes, a Brookings Institution expert on legal affairs, told me, "The first thing you're going to blow through is not the laws, it's the norms." By "norms," he means such political and social customs as respecting the law, accepting the legitimacy of your political opponents, tolerating speech you disagree with, performing civic duties like voting and staying informed, treating public office with dignity, and not lying. Fervently and frequently, the Founders warned that the Constitution would stand or fall on the public's commitment to high standards of behavior—what they called republican virtue. James Madison said "parchment barriers" could not withstand the corruption of democratic norms. George Washington, in his farewell address, said, "It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government." John Adams warned that "avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our constitution as a whale goes through a net." When Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the Constitution established, he replied: "A republic—if you can keep it."

Prior to entering office, Trump mounted an unprecedented assault on republican virtue. During the campaign, and continuing into the transition, he showed that he could define political deviancy downward at the speed of sound. When, just a month after declaring his candidacy, he attacked Senator John McCain for having been a prisoner of war, decent people assumed he had gone too far. Speaking for many, Senator Lindsey Graham said Trump had "crossed a line." Actually, Trump had erased the line, and then erased many others. A president has much greater power than a candidate to erase accepted standards of conduct, because millions of partisan supporters will rally to him. Trump and people around him seem aware of this power and willing to use it. In December, when CNN's Jake Tapper asked Kellyanne Conway, one of Trump's top advisers, whether it was appropriate for a soon-to-be president to make bogus statements on Twitter about massive electoral fraud, she replied, "Well, he's the president-elect, so that's presidential behavior."

If Trump or his supporters (with his explicit or tacit approval) were to continue in the same vein as before he took office—by spreading disinformation, trolling or harassing opponents, mocking the intelligence agencies, and the like—outside groups couldn't do much to stop them. Here is where a second aspect of Mounk's effort, and that of Jerry Taylor and others, becomes relevant. Mounk's most ambitious goal is to develop an appealing case for democratic institutions and open societies. "We need a positive vision of what politics can be after Trump," Mounk says. "We need to build a new vision of how liberalism can improve people's lives while pulling them together."

Mounk acknowledges that he doesn't yet know how to effect this mission. It's likely to require revising the liberal-democratic social contract to meet the challenges of societies struggling with growing inequality, disappointing economic mobility, weakened institutions, and an angry, jaded public. It's going to require a collective effort of activists and citizens and elites on several continents. Years will pass before we know whether liberal democracy can muster a new case for itself.

That said, Mounk's core insight—that the work needs to get done—is sound. To help the body politic resist de-norming, you need to make an argument for the kind of government and society that the norms support. You have to explain why lying, bullying, and coarsening are the enemies of the kinds of lives people aspire to. Instead of pointing to Trump with shock and disgust—tactics that seem to help more than hurt him—you need to offer something better. In other words, you need to emulate what the Founders did so many years ago, when they offered, and then built, a more perfect union.

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HIS ANONYMOUS SURVEY HAS LAUNCHED CAREERS, RECOGNIZED FOUR OF THE PAST EIGHT BEST PICTURE WINNERS, AND PUSHED MOVIE STUDIOS TO THINK BEYOND SEQUELS AND ACTION FLICKS.

HOW FRANKLIN LEONARD CREATED THE HOLLYWOOD LIST EVERYONE WANTS TO BE ON

BY
ALEX WAGNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JOE PUGLIESE

IN THE AGE OF THE GARGANTUAN BLOCKBUSTER,

it wasn't immediately clear that the story of a suicidal mathematician in wartime England would make for a successful movie. In fact, it wasn't clear that it would make for a movie at all.

In 2010, Graham Moore was a precocious 28-year-old author who had just written a novel about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. At a cocktail party in Los Angeles, a producer named Nora Grossman mentioned to him that she and her producing partner were interested in making a film based on a biography of Alan Turing—the English scientist who is credited with developing the first computer but was punished for his homosexuality. Moore was immediately intrigued; he'd been interested in Turing's story since he was a teenager. "I have to be the one to write this!" he told Grossman.

She and her partner, Ido Ostrowsky, agreed, and Moore set to work. After he finished the screenplay, he called his agent. " 'Hey, I have this script about a gay English mathematician who killed himself,' " Moore deadpanned to me, recalling that—because of the subject matter—he didn't expect it to be an instant success. But his agent loved the script, recognizing that Moore had managed to turn what could have been a morbid biopic into a riveting thriller. A few months later, Warner Brothers bought a one-year option to make the film.

But selling a screenplay is not the same as making a movie, as Moore would soon learn. Warner Brothers, like many of the major studios today, is largely in the business of making big movies, and the script, despite being very good, did not fit the mold of the tentpole franchises that might do well in, say, China. Moore wondered whether it would ever get made. "It would have been their lowest-budget movie in 30 years," he told me recently.

Nine months into Warner Brothers' year-long option, Moore got a call from Greg Silverman, then an executive vice president at the company, who gave him his script back on good terms and told him to "go make this as the small indie film that you always should have." Technically, Warner Brothers could have sat on the script for another three months, so getting it back when Moore did was a boon. Yet he knew the project faced an uncertain future. Many scripts bounce from studio to studio, cast and crew come and go according to availability, and even a great story can languish for years—or never get told.

But Moore had an important advantage. In 2011, shortly after Warner Brothers optioned his screenplay, it landed in the No. 1 spot on something called the Black List: an anonymous survey in which industry professionals name the scripts they liked the most that year. The Black List was started in 2005 by a 27-year-old film executive from west Georgia named Franklin Leonard, and has become an influential index of the most original and well-written—if not the most bankable—screenplays in Hollywood. Its power to launch careers and expedite projects is astounding.

Moore saw this power firsthand when he tried again to sell his script. "Because of the Black List, everybody had already read it," he said—including the Norwegian director Morten Tyldum, who would end up making the movie, and the English actor Benedict Cumberbatch, who would star in it.

At an event in 2014, Cumberbatch recalled first hearing about the script. "What could have been a sort of English-scented rose garden of a script kind of landed with huge heat on it, because it was top of the Black List," he said. "I was intrigued by people of taste who said 'You've got to read it'—including everyone who votes on the Black List."

Having gotten the attention of Tyldum, Cumberbatch, and other key players, the project sailed along. "We skipped six steps," Moore told me. "We were shooting less than 12 months later."

The movie, like the script, was called *The Imitation Game*. It went on to garner eight Academy Award nominations—and to win the 2015 Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay.

THE MOVIES THAT have come out of Black List scripts comprise a Murderers' Row of critics' picks: *Spotlight*, *The Revenant*, *Whiplash*, *Argo*, *The King's Speech*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Wrestler*, *Juno*, *There Will Be Blood*. Four of the past eight Best Picture winners at the Oscars and nine of the past 18 winners for Best Screenplay or Best Adapted Screenplay appeared on the Black List.

Franklin Leonard was a junior executive at Leonardo DiCaprio's Appian Way Productions when he started the Black List. "Throughout the year in Hollywood," he told me, "there are all these conversations happening at all levels about 'What have you read that's good lately?' " In 2005, he decided to anonymously survey his Rolodex, soliciting from his contacts their picks for the top 10 scripts of the year that were not yet being made into movies. Ninety-three executives and studio assistants responded. Leonard compiled the results, ranked them by the number of mentions each got, and sent his contacts a PDF of the list from an anonymous email address. A couple of years later, the *Los Angeles Times* outed him as the Black List's creator, and eventually he started announcing the list more publicly—on Twitter and YouTube, and on a website he created.

Though Leonard created the survey essentially because he was looking for some good reading material, he quickly realized that it had a certain subversive potential. Leonard is outspoken about the lack of diversity in Hollywood—not just when it comes to who appears onscreen, but also in terms of what kinds of stories get told. The number of films produced by the major studios has fallen in recent years, and the industry has become highly dependent on foreign sales. As a result, studios have begun to stick to a narrower range of films that they think will be profitable—and they appear ever less likely to take a chance on unusual but compelling screenplays. Leonard sees the Black List as a tool that can highlight promising scripts outside that range, helping to promote exceptional storytelling at a time when market forces are pushing Hollywood toward cookie-cutter action extravaganzas.

Leonard isn't surprised that the selections on the list tend to depart from standard blockbuster fare. "The

Black List is asking a different question than the market does," he told me. "We're asking what scripts people love. The market requires that they answer 'Which scripts do you think will result in a profitable movie?'" The list offers proof that the industry still recognizes great stories, even if it doesn't always make them into movies with great haste—or at all. Leonard named it the Black List in part as a tribute to the screenwriters and other professionals whose careers were ruined by the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1940s and '50s, and in part as "a conscious inversion of the assumption that *black* somehow signifies something negative."

The survey has since grown to include up to 300 executives in any given year, and the Black List now recognizes about 75 scripts. In 12 years, about a third of the scripts named to the list have been made into films—by Hollywood standards, an impressive record. To be sure, some of these movies would have been made without the help of the Black List. Many scripts have already caught the interest of studios or producers and are spoken for by the time they make the list. But that doesn't necessarily ensure a film will be made quickly. It's not uncommon for scripts that have been optioned or purchased to fall into a state of limbo, whether because of a lack of funding, a lack of a big-name director and actors committed to the project, or a lack of enthusiasm among studio executives.

As *The Imitation Game* demonstrates, the Black List can act as an accelerant—focusing Hollywood's attention on a project and giving it crucial momentum. "The survey forces Hollywood to look in the mirror and say, *Here's what you said you liked!*," Leonard told me. "Because there's been so much success with the list, not only are studio execs and producers saying that, but now you have actors—when the list comes out—going through it, calling their agents, and saying, 'Hey, you gotta get me that script.'"

Rowena Arguelles, an agent who represents screenwriters and directors such as Chris Terrio (*Argo*) and Ava DuVernay (*Selma*), agrees. The Black List is "part of our industry lexicon," she told me. "The phrase means something to the town."

Consider the example of the 2015 Best Picture nominee *Whiplash*, an unlikely psychodrama about a jazz orchestra at a top New York conservatory. "We knew it would be a difficult sell, so we thought we'd take a scene and make it a short," Helen Estabrook, the producer, told me. "We shot it in three days, and we took it around town as a proof of concept."

During this time, the script landed on the 2012 Black List. "I was basically walking around town with the DVD" of the short, Estabrook said, "and it certainly helped to have it on the list."

I asked Estabrook why, and she explained that the spot on the Black List offered "a level of validation that proved, 'Hey, I'm not a crazy person—many other people agree with me.'"

HAT'S PERHAPS MOST SURPRISING about the Black List is that nobody had ever thought of it before, given its obvious utility. "Historically, what movies got made and what movies were good were the decisions" of a small number of individual executives at the studios, Leonard said. And even the most esteemed studio heads have blind spots.

Because of the financial pressures associated with making a movie, they tend to err on the side of safety, preferring films that are somehow similar to ones that have done well in the past. (Thus, the seven *Fast and the Furious* sequels.) But convention can be the death of creativity—and it's no guarantee of box-office success, either. The Black List offers a different way of looking at scripts. By using the wisdom of the crowd to assess the best stories, it reassures financiers, executives, and producers that they're not going too far out on a limb.

But while the list inevitably helps those in the middle and at the top of the Hollywood food chain—agents, producers, executives, actors—the subset most clearly assisted is the group traditionally at the low end: writers. Even if not all the scripts on the list get made, the careers of the writers on it certainly can be.

"I've read plenty of great scripts on the Black List that wouldn't necessarily make great movies," Ruben Fleischer, who directed *Zombieland*, *30 Minutes or Less*, and *Gangster Squad* (all of which appeared on the Black List), told me. "It can be a really entertaining script and an incredible screenplay, but it might be a hard movie to realize." For writers, though, getting onto the Black List "can be great exposure and great access."

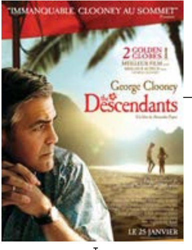
Take Joshua Zetumer, who was working as an assistant "not really in Hollywood," though he (sort of) knew two people who were. "One was a friend of an ex, the other was my roommate's brother," he told me. In 2006 Zetumer wrote a dark thriller about two brothers, called *Villain*, and passed it along to his friends of friends, who got it to an agent. That year, *Villain* was the No. 4 script on the Black List.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY

Graham Moore has credited the Black List with helping to get *The Imitation Game* made into a film. It won the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2015.

Juno
Black List 2005
Won Best Original Screenplay in 2008

Little Miss Sunshine
Black List 2005
Won Best Original Screenplay in 2007



The Descendants
Black List 2008
Won Best Adapted Screenplay in 2012

2005

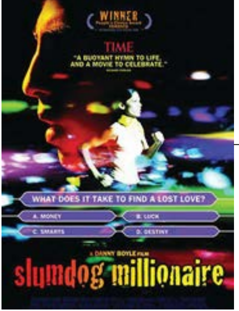
2008

OSCAR BAIT

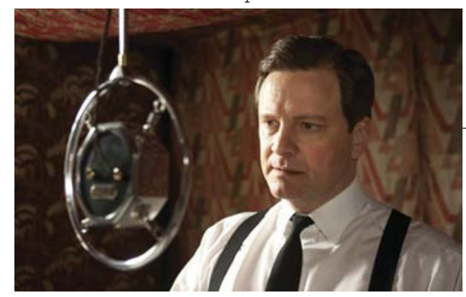
SCRIPTS FROM THE BLACK LIST HAVE A RECORD OF WINNING CRITICAL ACCLAIM—AND LOTS OF ACADEMY AWARDS.

2007

2009



Slumdog Millionaire
Black List 2007
Won Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay in 2009



The King's Speech
Black List 2009
Won Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay in 2011

"It was the first big thing that happened," Zetumer told me. The script never ended up getting made into a movie—it was "a violent, character-driven thriller," Zetumer said—but he quickly started booking serious writing gigs. He wrote two more scripts—one for Leonardo DiCaprio and another that had Hugh Jackman attached to it—that made the Black List, but neither of those has been made into a movie yet either.

"It's frustrating," he said, "but off of those scripts, I've been able to get a wonderful career." Zetumer has worked on big-budget projects like the James Bond movie *Quantum of Solace* and the *RoboCop* reboot, as well as the recent film *Patriots Day*. "I can't say what my life would have been like" without the Black List, he told me.

JOSHUA ZETUMER WAS WORKING AS AN ASSISTANT WHEN HIS SCRIPT APPEARED ON THE BLACK LIST. "I CAN'T SAY WHAT MY LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE" WITHOUT IT.

FOR AS MANY nobody-to-somebody stories as the Black List has created, its power to open up Hollywood to new voices is limited, as Leonard himself readily admits. Scripts have to find their way into the industry pipeline before they can make the list: An agent or a manager has to have the script in order to get it into the hands of other agents and executives so that they may, in turn, like it and vote for it. And it is a select group of men and women who can move to Los Angeles and forge the connections necessary to get a script into the pipeline in the first place.

"The industry is a closed circle," Leonard told me, criticizing the arrogance behind the assumption that "everyone who wants to work in Hollywood will move to L.A. and network themselves into a position." That expectation, he noted, is fine for kids who went to Ivy League schools (Leonard himself went to Harvard) or have parents willing to float them cash while they work in agency mail rooms. "But if you're a suburban mom in Chicago," he said, "you can't do that. And that has nothing to do with whether you're a good writer or not."

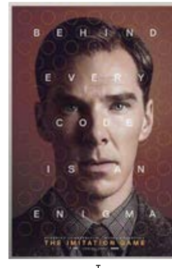
Earlier in his career, Leonard urged would-be writers outside Hollywood to apply for the Nicholl Fellowship, a $35,000 grant for amateur screenwriters offered by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. But the Nicholl is highly competitive—offering no more than five grants a year to an average of 7,000 applicants—and eventually he decided that it was "an insufficient answer."

"There was no efficient mechanism by which people with talent could even make the industry aware of their talent," he said. So he decided to try to create one. In September 2012 he left his job at Overbrook Entertainment, Will Smith's production company. The next month,

ENTERTAINMENT PICTURES; EVERETT COLLECTION; UNITED ARCHIVES; PHOTO12; ALAMY

Argo
Black List 2010
Won Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay in 2013

Django Unchained
Black List 2011
Won Best Original Screenplay in 2013



The Imitation Game
Black List 2011
Won Best Adapted Screenplay in 2015

2010

2011

2013

The Social Network
Black List 2009
Won Best Adapted Screenplay in 2011

Spotlight
Black List 2013
Won Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay in 2016

he added the Black List screenwriting service to his website. One aim of the service is to give would-be writers, for a fee, a chance to get critical feedback on their scripts—a coveted asset in a town where honest and thoughtful critiques are hard to come by.

Once a script is uploaded to the site, a Black List reviewer reads it. These anonymous men and women have worked for at least a year as an assistant in the industry. If a script performs well in its initial evaluation, the writer is given the option of a second, free evaluation. As long as the feedback remains good, the script is entitled to further free reviews. In this way, Leonard attempts to ensure that the best scripts stay in circulation, and that good work is rewarded. The site also gives moviemaking professionals a portal through which they can search out new—and well-reviewed—scripts, based on any number of criteria, including budget, genre, and a variety of tags (*exploding buildings*, *sharks*, *yakuza*).

Ruckus and Lane Skye, a husband-and-wife filmmaking duo based in Atlanta, first heard of the Black List through its year-end survey. They were interested in directing and writing, but had never seriously considered moving to Los Angeles. "We write a lot of southern stories," Ruckus told me. Still, they would visit the city a few times a year, to "try and make inroads."

Lane described the futility of doing this without an agent or a manager. "We would go out there and accomplish literally nothing," she said. "We were meeting with someone's friend who was in the mail room." The two had just finished writing the script for a low-budget jailhouse thriller, *Rattle the Cage*, when they saw the announcement for the Black List screenwriting service in late 2012. They decided to try it, "just to see what would happen."

The reviewers on the site offered encouraging feedback. "I remember one of the first ones was 'This is a no-brainer. This film should be made,'" Ruckus said. "Up until then, just our friends had read it." Within six weeks, they got a call from a manager in Los Angeles who was interested in representing them. Soon they were having meetings on studio lots. A year later, a director named Majid Al Ansari, who is based in Abu Dhabi, read the script on the Black List website—he had joined the site to look for new material.

Rattle the Cage takes place in Georgia. The Skyes wanted to direct the film themselves, and figured it was a story that would shoot well—which is to say, for little money—in their backwoods. The script was filled with southern colloquialisms, but this was apparently of no concern to Al Ansari. He liked the script and wanted to make the film. And he wanted to set it in the Middle East.

The Skyes refused—they were determined to direct the film themselves. Al Ansari was undeterred. His employer, Image Nation Abu Dhabi, offered to buy only the Arabic-language rights; the Skyes could keep the English rights for themselves and direct the American version when the time (read: money) was right. "We tried hard to think of a reason not to do it—and we couldn't," said Ruckus. The couple agreed. *Rattle the Cage* became *Zinzana*, the first thriller shot in the United Arab Emirates. Last March, Netflix acquired the rights to stream the film globally.

AF ARCHIVE; PHOTO12; PICTORIAL PRESS; ALAMY

How did a movie set in a southern jail cell become an Arabic thriller? Instead of the backwoods of Georgia, the jailhouse was set in the desert, sometime in the 1980s. The most significant character change was to turn an unmarried pregnant woman into a chubby woman with asthma—presumably to conform to the UAE's strict religious views. Overall, the Skyes said, it was "about 80 percent" the same film.

The southern version of the film is now fully funded, with the Skyes attached to direct it. They no longer have day jobs, Ruckus told me, because "this is what we're doing." They had found a new way into an existing power structure.

SUCCESS STORIES like the Skyes' show how the Black List screenwriting service might begin to widen the funnel through which talent reaches Hollywood. Still, in one respect Leonard has been disappointed: He'd hoped that the site would help more women and minority screenwriters get discovered. Instead, the overwhelming majority of submissions have come from white men, a pattern that mirrors the industry as a whole.

The lack of diversity in Hollywood has come under increasing public scrutiny, especially since last year's Academy Awards. The all-white nominees for the top four acting categories, plus the overwhelmingly white casts of all the Best Picture contenders, sparked a national outcry. Movies are still one of America's most powerful and popular forms of cultural expression, advocates argue, and they should reflect the realities of their American audience.

A recent study by the Motion Picture Association of America found that people of color purchased 45 percent of movie tickets in 2015. But a report from the Annenberg Foundation and the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California revealed that in the 100 highest-grossing films of 2015, only 26 percent of the characters with speaking parts were nonwhite. Statistics like these have stoked a debate over whether the market for films starring white actors is simply larger, or whether the industry is guilty of bias in producing an overwhelming number of films with white stars.

"MANY OF THE BELIEFS ABOUT WHAT'S PROFITABLE ARE FUNDAMENTALLY RACIST AND MISOGYNIST," LEONARD SAYS.

Danny Strong, a writer, actor, and director, told me a story that revealed how bias—whether conscious or not—can seep into assessments of a film's financial prospects. Strong wrote the script for the HBO film *Recount*, about the 2000 election, which nabbed the top spot on the Black List in 2007. The film came out in 2008 and won three Emmys and a Golden Globe. He was then hired to write a script about Eugene Allen, a butler in the White House who had served eight presidents. The script, called *The Butler*, appeared on the Black List in 2010. Steven Spielberg "planted his flag in it" just three days after Strong finished writing the first draft, he told me. Yet despite the writer's good reputation, his clearly well-liked script, and the interest of an industry titan, getting *The Butler* made into a movie took years. I asked Strong why, and he laid out the challenges.

He began by detailing the financial realities of Hollywood. "Because of the advertising costs," he said, "it's $20 million to $40 million to promote a film. And DVD sales used to bring that in, if not more." But streaming has largely supplanted DVD sales—which fell by almost 70 percent from 2005 to 2015—and isn't nearly as profitable for studios. "When that went away," Strong said, "it caused irreparable harm to the film business, as far as getting movies green-lit." Faced with a dismal sales forecast, big studios have chosen to focus on films they expect to do well overseas. In 2015, international sales accounted for more than two-thirds of the industry's revenue, with the majority coming from Asia, especially China.

According to Strong, *The Butler* had to overcome two of Hollywood's widely held assumptions: Films starring African Americans don't do well abroad, and neither do films about American history. "It had two *X* marks against it for international sales," he said. But Strong didn't agree that *The Butler* had limited appeal. "To me," he said, "the beats of that movie were very mainstream. It was not this indie, art-house film. It was a sweeping, mainstream, emotional epic."

Spielberg ultimately passed on directing it, but Lee Daniels, fresh off an Oscar nomination for the film *Precious*, signed on. Daniels put together a cast that included prominent black stars such as Oprah Winfrey and Forest Whitaker, as well as major white stars such as Robin Williams and Jane Fonda to play the presidents and first ladies. Daniels then went to "every Hollywood financier and studio—and every single one of them said no. Not one wanted to make it," Strong recalled.

In the end, *The Butler* found a champion in a producer named Laura Ziskin, who had considerable clout in Hollywood: She had produced *Pretty Woman* and the *Spiderman* trilogy. (She died in 2011 of breast cancer.) Strong told me that Ziskin went on a "crusade" to raise the money independently. She targeted wealthy African Americans, urging them to fund the project because it was a chronicle of the civil-rights movement.

Sheila Johnson, a co-founder of BET (Black Entertainment Television), was one of the first to sign on. Dozens of others followed. "It took 41 producers to get the film made!," Strong told me, still somewhat in disbelief. "The producers were anyone who gave us money or got people to give us money—they got an onscreen credit. That was the journey."

The journey was indeed an extraordinary one. I was astounded that even with the critically lauded team of Strong and Daniels, a script that was acknowledged to be one of the year's best, and the involvement of Oprah—a kingmaker in her own right—*The Butler* had faced such an uphill battle. Did it really come down to financiers and studio executives thinking that a black, American-history movie couldn't do well overseas? If that was the case, had they been right?

Leonard sees the Black List as a tool to help ensure Hollywood doesn't give up on making great films.

I asked Strong how *The Butler* had done in the foreign market.

"Gangbusters," he said. The international-distribution rights sold for double the expected amount. The Weinstein Company ultimately picked up the movie for distribution—and gave it the wide release that Strong had always believed it deserved. *The Butler* was the No. 1 movie in America for three weeks. It brought in more than $116 million.

Strong then recounted the story behind *Slumdog Millionaire*, whose script—an Indian love story set against the backdrop of a high-stakes game show—appeared on the 2007 Black List. Warner Independent Pictures, a division of Warner Brothers, picked up the film but was soon shuttered. The executives at Warner Brothers decided to release *Slumdog Millionaire* as direct-to-DVD. That was the plan, until Fox Searchlight picked up the marketing and distribution rights for a limited release and the film became a word-of-mouth and critical sensation. It was only *after* it won Best Picture at the 2009 Academy Awards that ticket sales really took off, raking in $141 million in North America and $365 million internationally. All for a film that very nearly wasn't released in theaters.

How could so many people in Hollywood have been so embarrassingly, overwhelmingly wrong? Strong was sanguine. "Everything always goes back to that William Goldman quote," he said: " 'Nobody knows anything.' "

Leonard has a more pointed explanation. "The industry is making a subset of all scripts that exist, based on a set of beliefs about what's profitable," he told me. "Many of the beliefs about what's profitable are fundamentally racist and misogynist." Take the example of *The Hunger Games*, the first installment of one of the most successful movie franchises in recent history.

The script, which was based on a young-adult book, featured a strong, independent teenage girl as its heroine, an unusual protagonist for an action film. Most of the major studios passed on it, leaving it to Lionsgate, a studio that had little experience making this type of movie—up until that point, the studio was mostly known for the *Saw* horror-movie franchise.

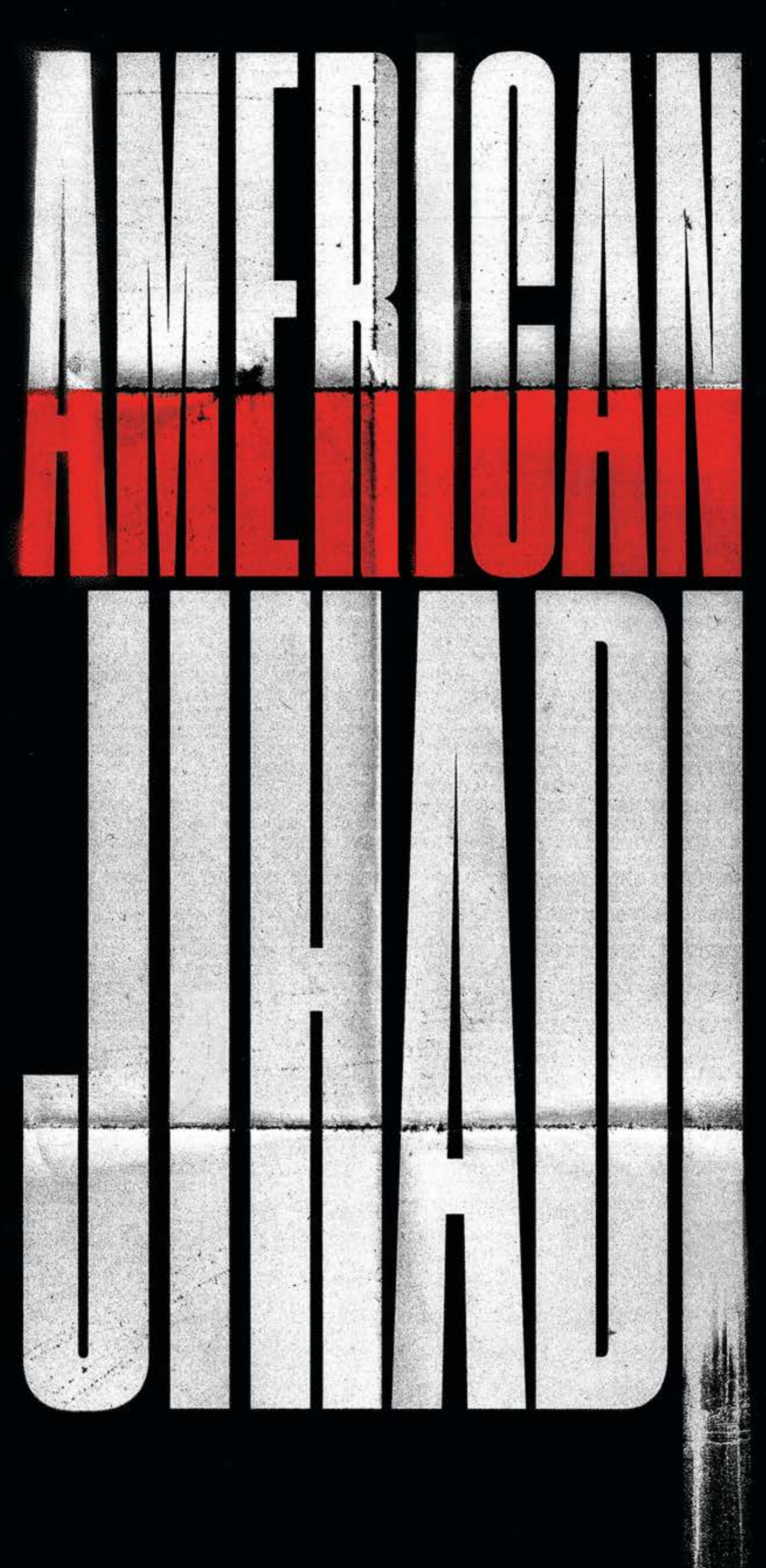
Lionsgate bought the script in 2009, just before the book was published. The next year, the script appeared on the Black List and the book sold 4.3 million copies. Lionsgate was rewarded for its foresight: *The Hunger Games* brought in $408 million at the U.S. box office, and another $286 million overseas. In 2012, it was the third-highest-grossing film in the U.S., and the ninth-highest-grossing film worldwide.

When the Academy holds its 89th Oscars on February 26, it will likely recognize a considerably more diverse pool of talent than it did in 2016. Films like *Moonlight*, *Fences*, *Lion*, and *Loving*, all of which star lead actors of color, demonstrate that while Hollywood is of course the home of the *Fast and the Furious* franchise, it is also a place of true artistry from diverse voices.

Yet such films are by no means the future of the industry. They are rare and extraordinary exceptions—the backstories of which almost inevitably include a great deal of perseverance and serendipity. The very thing that Hollywood prides itself on—making films with compelling plots and rich, interesting characters—is the thing that it is doing less and less of.

This isn't a problem just for film buffs. Storytelling lies at the root of filmmaking—a truth that can get lost in the analysis of foreign-box-office sales and profit margins. "We are, as a culture, defined by the myths that allow us to dream about what's possible, and think about how we interact and value each other as human beings," Leonard said. Without stories that reflect both the great and the tragic, the mainstream and the marginalized, the country risks losing a vital artery for empathy, concern, and curiosity. Movies, after all, are one of the ways America tells itself who it is.

Alex Wagner is a contributing editor at The Atlantic *and an anchor and correspondent for CBS News.*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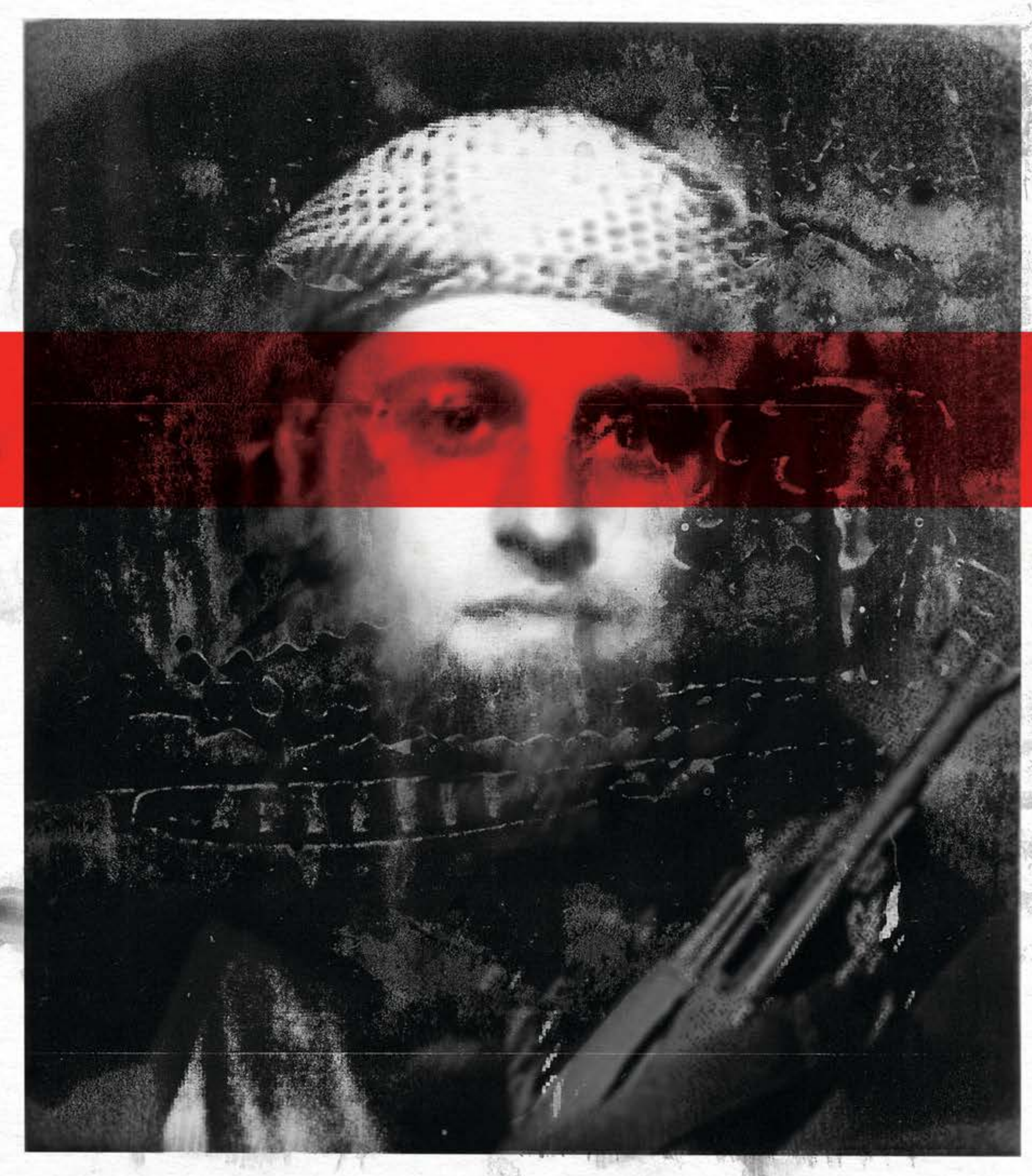


John Georgelas was a military brat, a drug enthusiast, a precocious underachiever born in Texas. Now he is a leader within the Islamic State. Here's the never-before-reported story of his long and troubling journey.

By Graeme Wood | Illustrations by Ian Wright

warm September morning in 2013, a minivan pulled up to a shattered villa in the town of Azaz, Syria. A long-bearded 29-year-old white man emerged from the building, along with his pregnant British wife and their three children, ages 8, 4, and almost 2. They had been in Syria for only about a month this time. The kids were sick and malnourished. The border they'd crossed from Turkey into Syria was minutes away, but the passage back was no longer safe. They clambered into the minivan, sitting on sheepskins draped on the floor—there were no seats—and the driver took them two hours east through a ravaged landscape, eventually stopping at a place where the family might slip into Turkey undetected.

They disembarked amid a grove of thorny trees. Signs warned of land mines. The border itself was more than an hour's walk away, through the desert. They'd forgotten to bring water. Tania dragged the puking kids along; Yahya carried a suitcase and a stroller. Midway, Tania had contractions, although she was still several months from her due date. They continued on. At the border itself, while the family squeezed through the barbed wire, a sniper's bullets kicked up dirt nearby.

Yahya had arranged for a human trafficker to meet them, and when the trafficker's truck arrived, Yahya pressed a few hundred dollars into the man's hand. Yahya and Tania had been married for 10 years, but they did not say goodbye. Satisfied that his family would not die, Yahya turned and ran across the border, back into Syria—again under gunfire—without even a wave.

The trafficker drove Tania and the kids a short distance into Turkey, then dropped them by the roadside without food or water and sped off. Tania carried the children and luggage toward the nearest town. The day ended with the intercession of a stranger on a motorcycle, who helped carry their things to a bus station. Tania started to leak amniotic fluid due to the journey, and she spent the next weeks recovering in Istanbul, and then with family in London. Six months pregnant, she weighed 96 pounds.

As his family traveled to London, relieved to have escaped the worst place on Earth, Yahya felt relief of his own—he could now pursue his dreams unencumbered by a wife and children. He felt liberated. He carried visions of the caliphate yet to be declared, and ideas for how to shape it. These thoughts were not idle. Yahya, by then, had a small but influential following, and his calm erudition had won him the respect that his teachers and parents had withheld during his youth. His own destiny seemed to be converging with that of the world's. It was the best day of his life.

▶ **The war-ravaged town of Azaz, Syria, where Yahya Abu Hassan, his wife, Tania, and their three sons lived in 2013 before Tania and the children fled to Turkey**

ANDREE KAISER/MCT/GETTY

I FIRST HEARD the name Yahya Abu Hassan in 2014, while reporting on an article for this magazine about the rise of the Islamic State. I was in a suburb of Melbourne, talking with Musa Cerantonio, an Australian convert to Islam who has served as an unofficial spiritual guide to many English-speaking followers of the group, about its history and theology. (He is now in jail, charged with attempting to travel to Islamic State territory.)

In our earliest conversations, Cerantonio mentioned a fellow convert—a "teacher" or "leader," he called him—who had done much to prepare Muslims for the religious obligations

that would kick in once a caliphate had been established. Cerantonio spoke of his teacher with awe. Yahya was deeply devoted to the idea of the caliphate, he said, and showed a staggering mastery of Islamic law and classical Arabic language and literature. Jihadists in Syria knew him by reputation, and they honored him when they met him.

▶ **Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State's spokesman and second-most-powerful figure before his death in August 2016, was reportedly close to Yahya.**

Cerantonio said that in early 2014, Yahya had pressed the leaders of what was then the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) to declare a caliphate. He began preaching that the conditions for the declaration of a valid caliphate had been met—the group held and governed territory, and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was a physically and mentally fit male of Qurayshi descent, capable of ruling according to Sharia. Delaying further would mean disregarding a fundamental obligation of Islam.

Yahya had developed a relationship with Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the group's spokesman, chief strategist, and director of foreign terror operations. "Yahya was like *this* with Adnani," Cerantonio told me, pressing his fingers together. Yahya met with Adnani near Aleppo and warned him that Baghdadi would be in a state of sin if he did not promote himself to caliph immediately. Yahya and his allies had prepared but not yet sent a letter to the emirs of the ISIS provinces, airing their displeasure at his failure to do so. They were ready to make war on Baghdadi if he delayed further. Adnani replied with good news—that a caliphate had already been declared secretly, months before, and that it would soon be publicly announced.

Yahya shared the update with Cerantonio, who leaked word of the caliphate declaration on Facebook. Within weeks the official public declaration took place in Mosul, Iraq, and Yahya immediately pledged himself to Baghdadi, urging others to do likewise.

The figure of Yahya—an English-speaking convert within ISIS with powerful connections and the cojones to challenge Baghdadi to a death match—intrigued me. But Cerantonio didn't elaborate on his identity and referred to him only by an alias, in the traditional Arabic style, with his first name and the name of his firstborn: Yahya, father of Hassan. He said Yahya was a fellow Dhahiri—a member of an obscure, ultra-literalist legal school that had enjoyed a sort of revival within the Islamic State. He didn't, or wouldn't, say more. I wrote down the name and committed to investigating Yahya later.

Soon enough, I began collecting clues to his identity. In early 2015, a pro–Islamic State Twitter user (his handle identified him as a "swordsman") wrote to me and advised me to contact "Abu Yahya" to learn more about the group. The name resembled Yahya Abu Hassan's closely enough to lead me to believe he was the same person Cerantonio had mentioned. The Twitter user claimed Yahya was Greek. "He is on the field"—in the war zone—"and part of the IS," the swordsman wrote. "A great mind and a trustworthy student."

He then shared a link to a website that featured a collection of Dhahiri writings by Cerantonio and a few others—including a "Yahya al-Bahrumi." In fluent Arabic and English, Yahya wrote prolifically about many jihadist subjects. He projected calm even in his most grotesque opinions, and wore the label *irhabi* ("terrorist") with pride:

> This word ("terrorist") has also been cast as an insult and has been received as such. But irhab ["terror"] itself is something notable scholars have declared obligatory and supported *verbatim* by the Qur'an itself.

He called for emigration to lands where Sharia would be fully enforced, and wrote that choosing not to emigrate was a form of apostasy:

> Call me extreme, but I would imagine that all of those who willingly choose to live among those with whom Muslims are at war are themselves at war with Muslims—and as such, are not actually Muslims.
>
> Get out if you can—not only in support of your brothers and sisters whom your taxes have been killing, but also to protect yourselves from the punishment Allah has ordained for those who betray the nation.

He called for Muslims to hate, fight, and kill infidels—among whom, he said, were many so-called Muslims who nullified their faith by neglecting prayer, deviating from the narrow literalism of his interpretation of scripture, or, in the case of rulers, not instituting the brutal system of justice for which the Islamic State was then becoming famous.

In dozens of articles posted over several years, Yahya demonstrated knowledge of classical Arabic—the notoriously difficult language of educated religious speech—and familiarity with Islamic sources and history. His Arabic was stunning even to Cerantonio, an extremely self-confident religious autodidact. Cerantonio told me that another Muslim in their internet discussion group had once challenged a theological point Yahya had made. "Then Yahya did something that shocked us all," Cerantonio said. "He responded to the guy in traditional Arabic poetry that he devised off the top of his head, using the guy's name in the poetry, explaining the situation, and answering his objections."

WHEN JOHN UTTERED THE MUSLIM DECLARATION OF FAITH, THE ASHES OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER WERE BARELY COOL.

For any claim, it seemed, Yahya could instantly spout textual support, and confronted with any counterclaim, he could undercut the argument with a sweep of the leg.

The website the swordsman had pointed me to included a narrative biography and a small photo of Yahya, its founder. The picture showed a bearded, bespectacled young man with a Kalashnikov over his shoulder. He was

dressed for cold weather, as if in preparation for a night raid or patrol. When I saw him, I wondered when I had last seen someone looking so content.

As for the biography itself, nearly every word showed signs of careful selection, including his name, Bahrumi, a portmanteau of the Arabic words *bahr* ("sea") and *rumi* ("Roman"). Many jihadists construct a nom de guerre from their first name and their national origin. He called himself Yahya of the Roman Sea, or Yahya the Mediterranean.

The biography continued:

> His roots are from the island of Crete in the Roman sea (Bahr al-Rūm). Born in 1404 [A.D. 1983–84] and raised as a Nazarene [Christian], Yahya then entered Islam in 1422 [A.D. 2001–02]. He traveled seeking knowledge and work in the path of Allah until Allah granted him hijrah [migration] to Sham. He now resides in the countryside of Aleppo.

▶ Yahya first traveled to Syria in December 2001. He devoted himself completely to the study of Arabic and gradually adopted a violent jihadist interpretation of Islam.

Now I thought I had enough data to narrow down his identity: a philologically inclined Cretan jihadist convert not just to Islam but to Dhahirism, a minuscule legal school. The list of candidates could not be long.

Many converts choose Arabic names that are the equivalent of their birth names. Yahya is Arabic for John, in English, or Ioannis in Greek, so I began searching online for Dhahiris with these names. In a German-language jihadist chat room, I found a reference to "Ioannis Georgilakis," and here the trail began to sizzle under my feet. Georgilakis's Facebook page showed photos of the same hirsute young man with glasses, dressed in Muslim garments and playing with his kids.

As I looked at his Facebook page, I began to wonder whether the Greek was an affectation. Many of his Facebook friends were English speakers, and few were Greek. Georgilakis isn't an especially common surname, and given Yahya's apparent creativity in self-naming, I tried a few permutations, including the English John and the vanilla, non-Cretan Greek version of Georgilakis, which would be Georgelas.

One of the first hits on Google for *John Georgelas* was an August 15, 2006, press release from the Department of Justice. "Supporter of Pro-Jihad Website Sentenced to 34 Months," it crowed. At the time of his conviction, he lived in North Texas, near Plano, 20 minutes' drive from the house where I grew up.

AMERICAN MUSLIMS ARE RARE in the Islamic State: Only 53 are publicly known to have traveled to Syria as jihadists, according to Seamus Hughes, the deputy director of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. (The United States has stopped more than 100 others in the process of preparing to travel, or to act on behalf of the Islamic State in America.)

Hughes, a former Senate staffer, has meticulously cataloged the Americans who have made it to Syria, and places nearly all of them in the category of "knuckleheads"—brawny idiots with little hope of understanding a discussion of Islamic theology. Many have by now fulfilled their dream of battlefield death; all that remains of them is a martyrdom notice, posted like a headstone, on their Facebook page.

However canny the Islamic State's internet-based recruiting, a personal touch remains crucial to fully radicalizing most targets and signing up new terrorists. In the United Kingdom, more than 100 fighters have waged jihad after contact with a group called Al Muhajiroun; in Belgium, Sharia4Belgium has recruited numerous Islamic State fighters. But in the United States, groups like these exist only in the fever dreams of Islamophobes.

Fewer than 20 percent of the Americans in the Islamic State are known to be converts to Islam, and many have long-standing family connections with other countries—long periods of residence in Kuwait, say, or ties to the Somali tribes of their parents. They do not, as a rule, ascend to high positions in the Islamic State's organization. One Bosnian American, Abdullah Pazara, parlayed Serbian military training into command of an ISIS tank battalion. But even Pazara (who died in 2014) was relatively obscure and uncelebrated. In the United States, his most glorious achievement was owning a barely profitable trucking company.

Not all recruits are stupid. At least three have a college education and, according to friends and family, good academic records and habits. The smart ones, though, have in effect renounced their learning in favor of the greater glory of jihad. Having made it onto the dean's list for a degree in computer science counts neither for nor against you if your goal is to explode in a crowd of apostates.

Yahya, it seemed to me, was unique. He in some ways resembled his fellow Americans in Syria: He went to fight, and he would have welcomed a battlefield death if God had willed it. But he was no mere foot soldier; his religious scholarship, connections, and standing distinguished him—even if I didn't then understand their full extent. I wanted to know more.

PLANO IS A SHORT DRIVE from downtown Dallas, toward the Oklahoma border, a flatland sprouting subdivisions watered by money from the region's burgeoning tech sector. Shortly after his probation expired, John Georgelas had posted a résumé online listing as his address an elegant brick house with white Doric columns, a small portico, and a circular driveway. In August 2015, when I first drove up, I could hear the happiness of children. I saw a boy, who looked about 10, bouncing a basketball in the driveway and two others playing nearby; they were about the same ages as the kids in the Facebook

photos. As I approached the front door, I spied a yellow-ribbon decal ("We support our troops") in the window, and behind it a foyer, tidy and richly decorated, and a piano festooned with family photos.

The man who answered the door was Timothy Georgelas, John's father and the owner (with his wife, John's mother, Martha) of the house. Both parents are Americans of Greek ancestry.

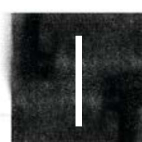
Tim is a West Point graduate and a physician. He has a full head of gray hair and soft features that betray no sign of the stress of having raised an Islamic State terrorist. He has, however, no illusions about the life his son has chosen. "He and John are enemies," I was told by someone who knows them both—"until the Day of Judgment."

Tim wore shorts and a T-shirt, and a crisp draft of air conditioning escaped as he said good morning. When I told him I had come to ask about John, he stepped outside and shut the door as if to seal off the house from his son's name. He slumped in a white wicker chair by the front door, and with a reluctant gesture, he invited me to sit across from him.

He stared at the magnolia tree in the front yard and said nothing. I told him what I knew—that his son, John, was Yahya. Tim sat, lips pursed, and with a shake of his head began to speak. "Every step of his life he's made the wrong decisions, from high school onward," Tim told me. "It is beyond me to understand why he threw what he had away." Two of Yahya's sisters have earned advanced degrees, he added, as if to demonstrate that it wasn't failed parenting that led his only son to drop out of school, wage holy war, and plot mass murder.

"He was always the youngest kid in the class, and always a follower," Tim said. "I have bailed him out so many times—financially, in circumstances with his wife and kids, you name it. I always pick up the wreckage."

The Yahya Tim described to me was a sad figure, a sheep who had strayed into a wicked flock. Above all, he was easily manipulated. This, for me, was another puzzle. The Yahya I had encountered online, and the one Musa Cerantonio described, was nothing like a sheep, and no pathetic follower. He was not the boy his father described. At some point, Yahya had shape-shifted into a wolf, into a leader of men.



IN DECEMBER 1983, John Thomas Georgelas was born into a wealthy family with a long military tradition. His grandfather Colonel John Georgelas was wounded twice in the Second World War and worked for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Tim Georgelas spent three years in the U.S. Army, then accepted an Air Force commission to attend medical school. He retired as a colonel in 2001, and now practices radiology in a north-Dallas breast-imaging clinic. He is politically conservative, as is Martha, his short, dark-haired wife, whose Facebook cover photo shows her standing proudly in front of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, near downtown Dallas.

The Georgelases moved frequently during John's youth, as Tim's military assignments required. John entered school at the age of 4, while the family was living in England, and he was young and small for his class. He was sickly—he grew benign tumors and had brittle bones—and his infirmities may have pushed him toward religion. When he was 11, his leg shattered, and he spent a long period out of school, recuperating. Lonely and depressed, his mind turned to God in idle moments, and he became attached to the Greek Orthodox Church. Wheelchair-bound, he hounded his family into attending services more regularly. Among his spiritual mentors was a clergyman who encouraged John to hate and distrust Muslims, with an intensity that would later change its polarity. (A family member calls John's attitude one of "righteous fury, jacked up with certainty"—a bright-burning sanctimony that has been consistent across his religious transformations.)

As the family's male heir, John enjoyed a special status in the Georgelas patriarchy. With that status came expectations, and therefore disappointment when it became clear he was unsuited for a soldier's life. His body refused to grow into robust, battle-ready form. Tim is tall, a former high-school quarterback, but John was shorter, his torso tending to pudge. His temperament wasn't suited to military discipline. When he returned to school after his leg injury, he had little interest in academic achievement or rule-following. His father tried repeatedly to correct his behavior and failed. (This account is drawn from sources close to John, including family members, co-workers, friends, and correctional officers.)

Nor did he fit in well with his peers. He gravitated toward the skateboard set, and he didn't date much, if at all. (One acquaintance told me, "If you put a million bucks on the table and told him to use it to go get laid, he couldn't do it to save his life.") Like many a military brat before him, John experimented with the counterculture. He smoked pot, dropped acid, and ate magic mushrooms. He hated his father for punishing his drug use and hated the U.S. government for criminalizing it. By the time he graduated from high school, his primary interests were computer hacking, skateboarding, and the voracious consumption of psychedelics. His grades were miserable, Tim says, but his standardized-test scores were better than those of his high-achieving sisters. John ended up studying philosophy at the College Station branch of Blinn College, an open-admission junior college in central Texas. He passed only a few classes.

In a class on world religions at Blinn, the instructor's cursory lecture on Islam annoyed him, so John sought more information from local Muslims. Curiosity turned to something more, as he discovered that Muslims were not the demons he had been led to expect them to be. A few days before Thanksgiving 2001, on the first day of Ramadan, John converted at a mosque in College Station frequented by foreign students from Texas A&M.

AMERICANS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE TRAVELED TO SYRIA AS JIHADISTS. MOST ARE KNUCKLEHEADS. YAHYA, IT SEEMED, WAS UNIQUE.

Whether the conversion was meant to spite his parents or whether spite was just an ancillary benefit of his spiritual salvation, it is not possible to say. But the timing is suggestive. When John uttered the Muslim declaration of faith, the ashes of the World Trade Center were barely cool. Anti-Muslim sentiment in America was reaching

new highs, and in central Texas, conversion to Islam would have been a singular act of rebellion.

John's parents found his conversion to be a sign of mental weakness. "Every university town in this country has a mosque for one reason," Tim told me. "Kids are away from home for the first time, vulnerable and subject to influence. They hear the message and they're hooked, and that's what happened to John." John took the name Yahya, and sold his pickup truck to buy a plane ticket. In December 2001, the family received an email from Yahya announcing that he was in Damascus learning Arabic.

ESTERN JIHADISTS find their way to violence many different ways, but they often match a profile. And that profile fit John like a wet suit. He came from an upper-middle-class family. He squandered opportunities commensurate with his innate talent; he recognized that he would not excel in the fields chosen or glorified by his parents and authority figures. Often, a personal crisis—a death in the family, a near-death experience of one's own—triggers existential contemplation, leading to religious exploration; in John's case, his childhood frailty might have filled that role.

Jihadists are also overwhelmingly left-brained, quantitative-analytic types. Diego Gambetta of the European University Institute and Steffen Hertog of the London School of Economics have noted a preponderance of former engineering students among jihadists; they suggest that the mental style of that discipline disposes certain people toward jihadism. As a teen, John had taught himself to program. His computers ran the Linux operating system, not the Windows or Mac software favored by the masses. Years later, after he had become a full-blown jihadist, he would share a line of C++ code on his website, a geeky statement of his own hard-line stance:

```
if (1+1+1 != 1 && 1 == 1) return true; else die();
```

Translation: If you believe the Christian Trinity ("1+1+1") is not really monotheistic ("!= 1"), and if you believe in the unity of God ("1 == 1"), then great. Otherwise: Die.

Despite these binary inclinations, upon his arrival in Damascus Yahya envisioned himself as a Sufi, a Muslim mystic who sought oneness with God through poetry, perhaps, or dance or song, and who could countenance a shaded, or nuanced, version of Islam. That posture may have been a holdover from his counterculture teens. Gradually, though, under the influence of British Muslims who were more rigid in their approach to the faith, he became jihad-curious. They persuaded him to follow a bin-Ladenist approach, hostile to Sufism, instead.

Yahya soon surpassed them in intolerance. To his jihadism he added general displeasure with the hierarchy of scholarly authority in mainstream religion. He objected to mainstream imams' telling him to trust the words of scholars and not to attempt his own interpretation of scripture and law. Muslim laymen are generally advised not to derive legal rulings on their own, and to follow more-experienced scholars. But Yahya maintained a typically American can-do attitude toward his religion, similar to the one many Texans adopt toward their trucks: If he couldn't understand or fix it himself, it didn't feel like his.

He acquired *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, a cuboid volume that is the standard Arabic-English reference work. It is not meant to be read through. The typical student of Arabic keeps the *Hans Wehr* on a corner of his desk and consults it as needed for the rest of his natural life. Yahya memorized it in six months. Then, as a chaser, he memorized *Kitab al-Ayn,* the eighth-century Arabic dictionary by al-Khalil al-Farahidi. He wandered through Damascus, chatting up everyone and learning classical Arabic to a level of proficiency rarely achieved even by educated native Arabic speakers.

He drifted further from his parents and sisters. Later, when counseling other Muslims about how much effort to put into proselytization at home versus heading directly to the Islamic State, Yahya wrote:

> What about those [Muslims] who are trying to work on their families, but their families insist on kufr [disbelief in Islam]? Should they wait their whole lives in patience, trying to guide someone whom Allah has not chosen for guidance, or should they move on and help their true family: the Muslims?

AHYA MET HIS WIFE in 2003 on a Muslim matrimonial site. Tania was born in London in 1983 to Bengali British parents. It was almost as if they had shared the same life, before even being introduced. Like Yahya, Tania grew up riddled with benign tumors and incorrigibly rebellious. She tormented her parents by practicing, with alarming vigor, the religion they had neglected in the pursuit of an assimilated English middle-class existence.

She was a pretty girl, a petite firecracker. But her mischief was not of the usual variety, like dating boys her parents didn't approve of. When her parents suggested that she try to meet boys, Tania hissed "Muslims don't date." She had a type: Her heartthrob was John Walker Lindh, the American who fought for the Taliban in 2001. She swore that until marriage no strange man would know anything more of her physical appearance than its cloaked outline, and by her late teens she was draping herself in a full-body covering, or *jilbab*. She fantasized about packing a bomb under it. At 19, she married Yahya.

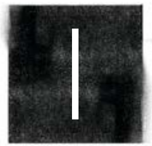
YAHYA AND TANIA LIED TO ANYONE WHO INQUIRED ABOUT THEIR ACTIVITIES. WHEN SYRIAN GOVERNMENT SPIES STARTED ASKING NEIGHBORS ABOUT THEM, THEY MOVED ON.

After meeting online, Yahya and Tania fell in love fast, and just as couples bond over Netflix or jogging or cooking, they bonded over jihad and a shared capacity for bad decisions. After a month of digital flirtation, Yahya flew to London, and they met in person on March 15, 2003. Within three days they married secretly, then left for Texas. They settled in College Station and partook of the pleasures of freedom, young love, and independence from family. They

▶ Yahya and Tania bonded over their childhood similarities, their commitment to jihad, and their passion for getting high.

lived cheaply and happily, embracing as their community the foreign students at the mosque where Yahya had converted. The mosque threw them a wedding party, and rich Gulf Arabs who lived near the university kicked in money to support Yahya's continued study of Islam.

The couple indulged, too, in their other shared passion: getting high. Islamic orthodoxy considers cannabis an intoxicant, and therefore forbidden. But Yahya's practice of Islam was unconventional even then. In a historical essay titled "Cannabis," heavily footnoted with classical Arabic sources, he made the Islamic case for pot. There was evidence, he wrote, that early Islamic leaders had taxed hemp seeds. Since Muslims generally cannot tax forbidden substances, such as pork or alcohol, Yahya reasoned, they must have considered pot permissible. As for psilocybin: Yahya cited an obscure hadith (a report of the sayings and actions of Muhammad) that he said described Muhammad's having descended from a mountain after meditation and extolling the medicinal properties of mushrooms—particularly as a cure for diseases of the eye. Yahya and Tania took this to mean that God had sanctioned the ingestion of psychedelic mushrooms. So the young lovers blissed out under the Texas sky, shrooming after the example of the prophet himself.

**N LATE 2003,** Yahya and Tania traveled to Damascus for an extended honeymoon, living there furtively and quietly associating with other jihadists. Their existence mirrored that of many young radical tumbleweeds of yesteryear: Black Panthers, Baader-Meinhof gangsters, fin de siècle anarchists. They dodged the authorities and lied to anyone who inquired about their activities. When Syrian government spies started asking neighbors about them, they moved on, settling briefly in a town selected because it was prophesied to be the headquarters of the prophet Jesus upon his return.

They often quarreled. Still strong-willed, Tania wanted to obey only God. But God's words were unequivocal: "Men are in charge over women," says a Koranic verse. So for most of the 10 years before the founding of the Islamic State, Yahya maintained a Rasputinlike control over her. He hadn't had much success finding social esteem in his prior life, but in Tania he found his first student. He mesmerized her with his confidence, and she repressed her own misgivings whenever she found herself questioning him. Tania has mild dyslexia; Yahya's reading of Islamic texts convinced her, with his fluency and recall and breadth, that he could produce an unanswerable argument about any point on which she disagreed. She determined that Yahya was a genius with gifts God had denied her, and she accepted her place in the world of jihad: Service to Yahya was her ticket to heaven. She endorsed slavery, apocalypse, polygamy, and killing. She aspired to raise seven boys as holy warriors—one to conquer each continent.

From Syria they returned to London, where Yahya chose to follow a Jordanian known as Abu Issa. He had allegedly fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and on April 3, 1993, his followers there swore loyalty to him and created what the French scholar Kévin Jackson calls "the forgotten caliphate," an unsuccessful precursor of the Islamic State.

Abu Issa declared himself caliph and ruled a small portion of Afghanistan's Kunar province in the mid-to-late 1990s. There he implemented many practices that the Islamic State would later realize on a larger scale. The total area governed did not extend beyond a few small towns, and the local

Afghans despised Abu Issa and his supporters. When Osama bin Laden came to Afghanistan in 1996, Abu Issa sent a message demanding his obedience. (There is no record of a reply.)

In the late 1990s, when the Taliban took over Kunar province, Abu Issa and his followers relocated to London, and it was in that diminished state that Yahya and Tania first encountered them. For a while, Yahya had the jihadist-dork dream job of tutoring the caliph's son in the subjects of computer hacking and martial arts. Ultimately Yahya and Abu Issa fell out over a dispute regarding interpretation of Islamic law. But during that period, Yahya nurtured an interest in the obligation to declare a caliphate and in Islamic literalism, both of which would drive him, in the end, back to Syria.

▶ An artist's rendering of Yahya and two of his sons (whose faces have been blurred) on the Nile around 2011. In Egypt, he translated fatwas and began to develop a religious following.

At a bookshop in London, he found a copy of the works of Ibn Hazm (994–1064), by far the greatest Dhahiri scholar. Dhahirism is the most binary and monochrome of Islamic legal schools. In some ways, it resembles the constitutional originalism of Clarence Thomas or Antonin Scalia: It drastically and pitilessly winnows down the sources of legal authority to the Koran, the sayings and actions of Muhammad, and the ironclad consensus of the prophet's followers within his own lifetime. It refuses to accept new laws based on analogy to old ones, and it urges jurists and theologians to resist allegorical or figurative readings, and instead stick to rulings with plain textual support.

The rejection of figurative readings, legal analogy, and other types of extended interpretation strikes most mainstream Muslim scholars as preposterous. But through Dhahiri eyes, scripture should simply be read like a manual—or like software. It is a legal and theological methodology that aligned well with Yahya's left-brained, autodidactic disposition.

In September 2004, Yahya and Tania returned to the United States, relying financially on Yahya's parents. They settled briefly in Torrance, California, with Yahya hoping to find work as an imam. His jihadism disqualified him for mosque jobs, however, and increasingly the two sought only each other's spiritual camaraderie. They stopped frequenting mosques altogether, on the grounds that they were dens of spies.

In 2004, their first son was born in California. Yahya and Tania moved back to greater Dallas, and a year later, Yahya took a job as a data technician at Rackspace, a server company in Texas. At night, he cruised jihadist forums and offered tech support to Jihad Unspun, a Canada-based Islamist news site widely thought to be a recruiting ground for would-be terrorists. He also looked for ways to use his position at Rackspace to wage jihad. On April 8, 2006, he accessed the passwords of a client, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, with the intention of hijacking its website.

As hacking jobs go, it was amateurish. Rackspace found out, and the FBI, aware of Yahya's terror links, moved fast. When a SWAT team came to his house in Grapevine, Texas, early in the morning, he and Tania were already awake for dawn prayers. He surrendered peacefully and warned that a child was sleeping inside and that his wife needed to get dressed. The Department of Justice prosecuted him for hacking into a protected computer—this was the source of the press release I had found earlier—and a judge sentenced him to 34 months' imprisonment. Prior to his arrest, he had planned to travel to Iraq to fight against the Americans, so prison may have saved his life.

Yahya's arrest caused marital friction of a new sort. With her husband in prison and studying Islamic texts full-time, Tania began asserting her independence. After receiving scowls from neighbors due to her Muslim dress, she told Yahya she planned to wear just a veil, and not a full-body cloak. Yahya, furious, demanded that she cover herself fully when she visited him in prison, to be sure no one would titter at the immodesty of the sheikh's wife. (He had Muslim acquaintances in prison and was the most scholarly among them.) He told her to leave infidel America to join the group known as the Nigerian Taliban, a predecessor to Boko Haram. She refused and threatened divorce.

But she didn't leave him—even after he got out of prison and took a second wife, a Jamaican British friend of Tania's. Tania did not approve, but she didn't forbid the union. The bride still lived in London, and the groom could not travel without violating parole. Yahya investigated the Islamic legality of a marriage conducted across physical distance. He found precedent: Muhammad had married the widow of

his brother-in-law when she was in Ethiopia and he was in Medina. Having ascertained the validity of marriage-by-telecom, Yahya and his second wife married over the phone, with Tania present and quietly fuming. (Yahya later divorced his second wife.)

About his crimes, he remained unrepentant. “He can justify anything he does, and he didn’t think he did anything wrong,” Tim says. “He is just full of himself.” During his parole, Yahya lived in Dallas and worked as an IT specialist for a shoe wholesaler. In August 2009, 10 months after he’d left prison, a second child arrived, another boy. The extended Georgelas family took a trip to Hawaii, and the couple came along. Tania stayed secluded, says one acquaintance, and Yahya harangued everyone about the virtues of Sharia law. But he mostly stayed quiet during that period. The family wondered whether he had mellowed, though Yahya’s colleagues at the shoe company report that he and Tania occasionally posted politically worrisome items on Facebook.

Among their enthusiasms, at this point, was the libertarian Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul, whose anti-government obsessions and isolationist foreign policy Yahya and Tania both found congenial. The prophet had endorsed the gold standard, and so did Paul. Yahya and Tania liked pot, and the Libertarians were the closest thing to an anti-prohibitionist party in the United States. And—finally—Paul’s foreign policy suggested a possible disengagement with Israel. “You guys (meaning Americans) need to stop supporting democracy, and just make Ron Paul your king,” Tania later wrote on Facebook, only half joking. Yahya wanted revolution. “Tyranny is here,” he replied, “and the Tree of Liberty is thirsty.”

ON OCTOBER 1, 2011, Yahya’s parole expired, and he drove to the Dallas–Fort Worth airport with his wife and two children, a free man. He was leaving America—probably for good. “Muslims in America,” he wrote around that time, “remember: Hijrah is always an option and sometimes an obligation.”

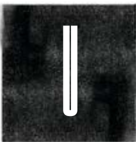
The family flew to London, then Cairo. Yahya and Tania lived in Egypt for the next two years, at first happily: The boys were clever and precocious—YouTube videos show the younger one reading words in English, French, and Arabic before the age of 3—and they were joined on Christmas Day 2011 by another boy. The family sailed feluccas on the Nile and savored life beyond the reach of the U.S. government.

Yahya earned money by translating fatwas from the salaried religious scholars of the government of Qatar. Ever allergic to human authority, he seethed at the banality of the fatwas and the government clerics’ abject servitude to tyrants. None of the fatwas ever mentioned what he considered the core imperatives of Islam, stressed by Ibn Hazm a thousand years before, such as the establishment of a caliphate and emigration from lands of disbelief. The scholars relentlessly glorified the Qatari royal family. The fatwas, Yahya claimed, were based not on evidence but on mere opinion.

In Cairo, Yahya met other jihadists and became respected for his scholarly rigor. One person who knew him then describes him as one of the strongest pre-ISIS pro-caliphate voices, and says the online seminars he conducted in Arabic and English did much to “prepare” Westerners for the declaration of the caliphate that would come a few years later. Musa Cerantonio, who would become his leading Australian disciple, met him digitally. European jihadists began traveling to Egypt to learn from him. He impressed one sheikh so much that the man declared that it would be sinful for Yahya to expose himself to danger on the battlefield in a conflict like Afghanistan’s or Syria’s. “Your blood is haram,” he said—forbidden to spill.

In his sermons and public statements, Yahya anticipated many of the themes of Islamic State propaganda, including distrust of Islamist movements that compromised their religion by partaking in secular politics. On social media, Tania supported his views, but with each child she bore, her eagerness to join the jihad by then under way in Syria waned. Yahya reminded her that the Koran judges harshly those who give up on *hijrah:* Angels will rip their souls from their mortal bodies and prepare them for judgment by God. “The angels will say, ‘Was not God’s earth spacious [enough] for you to emigrate in it?’ For those, their refuge is Hell.”

In July 2013, a secular military coup toppled the Muslim Brotherhood–led government in Egypt, and the Islamist moment there passed as quickly as it had arrived. Yahya and Tania fretted about the possible consequences for them as jihadists, and sought escape. Cerantonio encouraged them to consider the southern Philippines, where he was living at the time. It turned out to be too rustic. “Look, I’m happy to be in, like, a mud hut,” Yahya said to him. “But my wife is very specific and is asking you to take photos of houses.” The houses were inadequate, so they scrapped that plan.



ULTIMATELY, the Syrian civil war presented opportunities that Yahya couldn’t decline. His poetry frequently had a martial tone:

Rise, cut ties: spies disguised in white,
by the sword, for the Lord of Might
Defeat the cheat, trite fleet of fright,
by rod—by God!—by baud, by byte.

For years before the Islamic State’s rise, Yahya had said his weapon of choice was the keyboard (“by baud, by byte”). But now that Syria was becoming the battlefield he had dreamed of, he was ready to take up other arms.

WHEN A SWAT TEAM CAME TO THEIR HOUSE IN GRAPEVINE, TEXAS, EARLY IN THE MORNING, YAHYA AND TANIA WERE ALREADY AWAKE FOR DAWN PRAYERS.

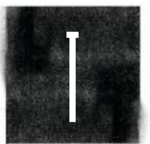
When they left Cairo, Yahya insisted on going to Turkey. Once there, in August 2013, he took his family onto a bus and told them they were going on a trip. He did not reveal their destination until Tania (now almost five months pregnant with their fourth child) saw the Syrian border. By then, the Assad government had lost

control of large parts of northern Syria, and around Aleppo, factions were working with and against one another. The region had become an anarchic wasteland haunted by death.

They squatted in a villa, the abandoned residence of a Syrian general, in the town of Azaz, a few miles inside the border. The windows had been smashed and the plumbing shut off, but the chandeliers were still hanging. Mujahideen groups controlled the territory, and Yahya's connections assured his family a meager supply of food. He spent days with jihadist friends. He had known some of them only in an online fantasy life; now they were comrades in arms.

Tania and the children got sick and developed mysterious infections. She prepared herself for the possibility that government forces or other rebels would overrun their position. But she also still loved the rush, and was curious about the fighting nearby. She wanted to see the action, but because she was a woman, when she poked her head out the window, she was told to be sensible and get back inside. When she complained to Yahya about being brought into a war zone without consultation—"How could you do this to us?"—he cited a hadith: "War," he said, "is deception."

She finally decided: Ten years of this was enough. She demanded to take the kids back to Turkey. Yahya could not or would not join them. He had come to fight for ISIS, and he knew the penalty in the afterlife for retreating from the battlefield. But his kids were not mujahideen, so he let them go—across a minefield, through sniper fire, back into Turkey—with the assumption that the family would reunite, in this world or the next.



ANIA MADE REVERSE *HIJRAH* to Plano, moved into Tim and Martha's house, and gave birth to a boy, her fourth, in January 2014. In December 2014, she petitioned for divorce. Her own transformation has been bittersweet. These days she describes herself as "agnostic," and has said, in her discussions with friends online, that she is "a lost cause to Muslims now." In her social-media postings, she looks like any other painted-lady infidel of north Dallas. She dresses stylishly, baring a shoulder now and then, and has highlights in her dark hair. Still in her early 30s, she looks free, even reborn. "Some people would make takfir of me"—excommunicate her—"for this," she writes. "But I have hope in God that he understands my weaknesses."

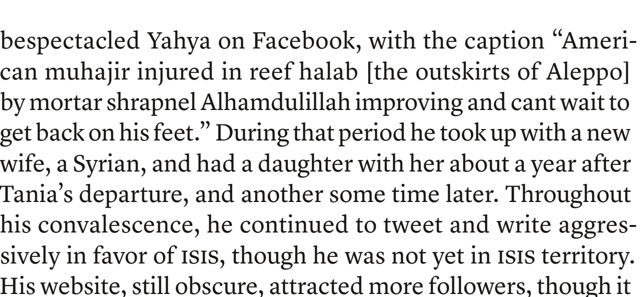
Many would call Yahya's treatment of Tania unforgivable and urge her to forget him. But the two have shared most of their adult lives, in difficult and thrilling circumstances. She has left jihadism, but she cannot completely leave Yahya. On social media, she wrote to a relative of her husband's:

> Where do I begin discussing the 'Ioannis complex'? … He's a man torn between two worlds, well actually four or more in his case (East vs. West, religious principles vs. family and happiness) … We made some really poor choices that backfired on us …
>
> Ioannis is fixated on changing the hearts and minds of people and the course of history. I'm somewhat jealous of the love and devotion he has for Islam over me.

HAT DEVOTION has not wavered. After he turned away from his wife and children that day in 2013, Yahya added a new and unlikely chapter to the Georgelas military tradition. For several months, he trained as a soldier as part of an Islamic State–aligned group near Aleppo. He saw battle there, and during combat in April 2014, a mortar blast sent shrapnel into his back, nearly severing his spine.

"I was in immense pain," he wrote on his website, "but I at least knew that my reward is with Allah and that comforted me greatly." He spent time in a hospital in Turkey. Then, fearing detection as an American (he could pass as Syrian, but not indefinitely), he went back to Syria and received treatment from Adam Brookman, an Australian alleged jihadist who has since returned to Australia and is under arrest (Brookman, a nurse, maintains that he went to Syria solely for humanitarian reasons). Yahya posted images on Facebook of his suppurating wounds and of himself on bed rest, smiling. The scars are, for him as for other jihadists, a VIP pass in the afterlife, a badge of honor that shows his commitment to God during his time on Earth.

His injuries left him temporarily unable to walk—disabled again, 20 years after his first leg injury. But he was content and proud. A fellow jihadist posted a photograph of a grinning,



▶ In April 2014, during combat near Aleppo, a mortar blast sent shrapnel into Yahya's back. He remained content throughout his convalescence, and continued to tweet and write in support of jihad.

bespectacled Yahya on Facebook, with the caption "American muhajir injured in reef halab [the outskirts of Aleppo] by mortar shrapnel Alhamdulillah improving and cant wait to get back on his feet." During that period he took up with a new wife, a Syrian, and had a daughter with her about a year after Tania's departure, and another some time later. Throughout his convalescence, he continued to tweet and write aggressively in favor of ISIS, though he was not yet in ISIS territory. His website, still obscure, attracted more followers, though it remained a highbrow product, too scholarly for the masses.

It was around this time that he began pestering ISIS's leaders—particularly Adnani—to declare a caliphate. When the declaration happened, in June 2014, Yahya was living near Aleppo, about 100 miles from Raqqah, the Islamic State's capital. "This is the moment I have been waiting [for] for years," he wrote. He immediately committed to moving to Raqqah.

▶ Tania petitioned for divorce from Yahya in 2014. She now describes herself as agnostic.

His plans were thwarted for a time after the Free Syrian Army captured him. He was eventually released, and silently vowed to return to behead his captors. For a brief while he feigned cooperation with the group. But in mid-2015, he made his way to the caliphate's capital. His shattered back would have earned him exemption from front-line military duty—but ISIS's leadership by then recognized that his talents were best put to use not as a grunt but as a scholar and spokesman.

On December 8, 2015, Yahya's voice came through clearly on Al Bayan radio—the voice of the Islamic State. He is now the Islamic State's leading producer of high-end English-language propaganda as a prolific writer for its flagship magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. For a while, he tweeted under pseudonyms, but in keeping with a general Islamic State move toward other, better-encrypted media, he stopped and now appears to be limited to official channels. The profile photo for one of his last personal Twitter accounts is a well-worn laptop with a Browning 9 mm semiautomatic handgun resting across the keyboard.

The first article in *Dabiq* that I have been able to confirm was written by Yahya was published in April 2016, and took as its subject Western Muslims who, despite calling themselves Muslims, are infidels. The headline, "Kill the Imams of Kufr [Disbelief] in the West," was only marginally less grotesque than the accompanying design: crosshairs over images of prominent mainstream Western Muslims; an image of a crouching, blindfolded "apostate" at the moment an executioner's blade enters his neck. In the article, Yahya recounted many stories of Muhammad and his companions' harsh treatment of Muslims who had lapsed. Hands and feet are severed, eyes gouged out with nails, bodies stomped to death.

The issue that followed bore Yahya's fingerprints everywhere. A polemical article about Christianity notes, with a familiar pedantry and some of Yahya's favorite Bible verses, inconsistencies between Christian doctrine and the historical record. Some articles are clearly his, and others, whether his or not, use the voice he has perfected. Unsigned, but likely written by Yahya, is the pellucid "Why We Hate You & Why We Fight You," which avows the religious nature of the war. "We hate you, first and foremost, because you are disbelievers," it begins. The article reads like a distillation of every conversation I have ever had with a jihadist:

> The fact is, even if you were to stop bombing us, imprisoning us, torturing us, vilifying us, and usurping our lands, we would continue to hate you because our primary reason for hating you will not cease to exist until you embrace Islam ...
>
> What's equally if not more important to understand is that we fight you, not simply to punish and deter you, but to bring you true freedom in this life and salvation in the Hereafter, freedom from being enslaved to your whims and desires as well as those of your clergy and legislatures, and salvation by worshipping your Creator alone and following His messenger.

The Islamic State has staked its survival on creating a revolutionary Muslim mass movement—one that can compensate for its loss of territory in Iraq and Syria by rising up elsewhere. With Yahya it lends an American accent to its universal jihadist message, and a speaker whose strengths, weaknesses, personality, and insecurities are deeply American as well. He knows how to speak to Americans, how to scare them, how to recruit them—how to make the Islamic State's war theirs.

It is unknown how far Yahya's role extends beyond keyboard jihad. But clues have very recently emerged that point toward an extraordinary possibility. In August, a drone killed Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State's most powerful leader save for Baghdadi himself, and—according to Musa Cerantonio—Yahya's friend and patron. Adnani is widely suspected of having directed foreign terrorist attacks on behalf of the Islamic State, including the mass murder of restaurant- and concertgoers in Paris in November 2015. The suspected operational mastermind of that attack, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was emir of the foreign fighters in Azaz around the time of Yahya's residence there. Adnani himself was from the town of Binnish, also in northwestern Syria.

Adnani's death left a job opening, and on December 5, 2016, the Islamic State announced the name of his successor: Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir. That name is nearly identical to an active alias of John Georgelas, Abu Hassān al-Muhajir. (A *muhajir* is someone who has immigrated to the Islamic State, a foreign fighter rather than a Syrian or an Iraqi.) The title inherited by "Abu al-Hassan" is *mutahaddith*, or "spokesman." The job may or may not include Adnani's responsibility for directing overseas attacks. It certainly means that the Islamic State—in all its official pronouncements, its incitements to terror, its encouragements of its supporters—will speak in Abu al-Hassan's words.

YAHYA IS THE ISLAMIC STATE'S LEADING PRODUCER OF HIGH-END ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PROPAGANDA. RECENTLY, CLUES HAVE EMERGED THAT HE MAY BE MUCH MORE.

The voice that delivered the December 5 speech was not Yahya's. But the Islamic State has altered voices in the past, to protect the identities of key figures—and however fluent Yahya's Arabic is, it might have preferred a native speaker to deliver a prepared text under his name.

"Al-Muhajir" is an epithet shared by a significant percentage of foreign fighters (though most go by a more specific origin-name, such as "the Belgian" or "the Tunisian"), and many jihadists would have a firstborn son named Hassan; it is a relatively common name. The Islamic State likely includes more than one person with the name Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, although I can find no record of anyone in the Islamic State using that name or Yahya's variant before December 5, other than Yahya himself.

For Yahya to occupy such a celebrated position would mean an improbable ascent through an organization dominated by Syrians and Iraqis. To succeed Adnani directly would mean leapfrogging numerous other candidates with greater seniority and previous authority in the group. No analyst with whom I have spoken thinks it likely that an American could rise so high in the group. But no other American is quite like Yahya, and until now, few people outside jihadist circles and the American intelligence community have even known of his existence.

E'VE BECOME NUMB to what he's doing," Tim told me when I first met him. He says they haven't heard anything from Yahya since 2014, and they hadn't heard confirmation that he was with the Islamic State until I appeared on their doorstep. "He's no one I recognize anymore. I'm not looking out for what he's doing, or how he's doing, because I'm not sure it makes any difference." Martha, he said, has taken longer to come to terms with the loss of their son. They don't think he will return to America—not as long as he has a following in Raqqah, and the certainty of incarceration in the United States.

Tania and the kids lived with them for a long period after her return, but she now resides separately. The kids stay with their grandparents during the week and their mother on weekends. Having spent most of the past decade as an itinerant jihadist, Tania lacks the job skills and degrees to match her intellect, so she does not have the resources or career prospects to raise four young children on her own. The kids will grow up in Plano, their safety and education financed by their father's abandoned inheritance.

The Islamic State's enemies are drawing closer to Yahya, from all sides and from above. Drones assassinate his brethren every few days, and there is reason to believe they will kill him too if they get the chance. The U.S. government's "kill list," which once included the Yemeni American jihadist Anwar al-Aulaqi, likely now includes John Thomas Georgelas, if his name hasn't been crossed off already by the time this article reaches readers.

Whatever parenting flaws Tim may have had could not possibly merit the anguish he and his wife have suffered. He still seems to think of his son as "John," a wayward kid, easily influenced by his more assertive elders. "This is the first time in his life where he's in a position where he might be emulated," Tim told me.

I wanted to tell Tim and Martha that Yahya had been emulated for years, and their inability to see jihadism as a valid subject of intellectual expertise had kept them from realizing it. They didn't know how evil their son had become, or how coolly competent. Like other parents of jihadists, they saw him as they wished to see him—as the youngster who bumbled through classes, sneaked spliffs, and struggled to hold down jobs. There was comfort in imagining that he remained hapless, and perhaps that his Islam was just another phase. They would be more troubled by the truth—which was that their son, a failure in so many prior pursuits, had found his calling.

Graeme Wood is a national correspondent for The Atlantic. *This article is adapted from his new book,* The Way of the Strangers: Encounters With the Islamic State.

PENCIL

Once, you loved permanence,
Indelible. You'd sink
Your thoughts in a black well,
And called the error ink.

And then you crossed it out;
You canceled as you went.
But you craved permanence,
And honored the intent.

Perfection was a blot
That could not be undone.
You honored what was not,
And it was legion.

And you were sure, so sure,
But now you cannot stay sure.
You turn the point around
And honor the erasure.

Rubber stubs the page,
The heart, a stiletto of lead,
And all that was black and white
Is in-between instead.

All scratch, all sketch, all note,
All tentative, all tensile
Line that is not broken,
But pauses with the pencil,

And all choice, multiple,
The quiz that gives no quarter,
And Time the other implement
That sharpens and grows shorter.

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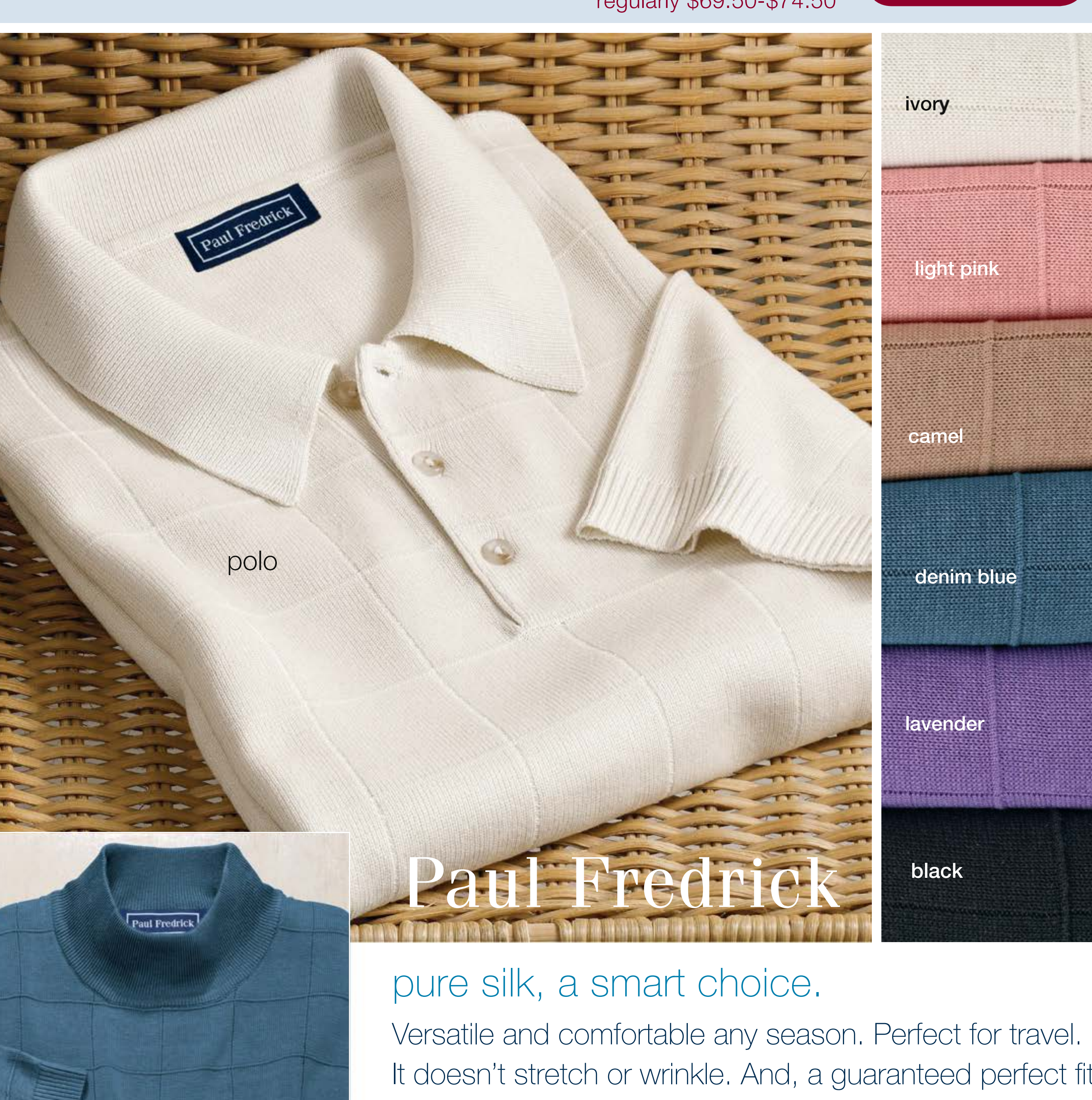

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Can MEGYN KELLY ESCAPE *Her Past?*

Charting a route into the mainstream media, Fox News's former star has downplayed her full role in an ugly election.

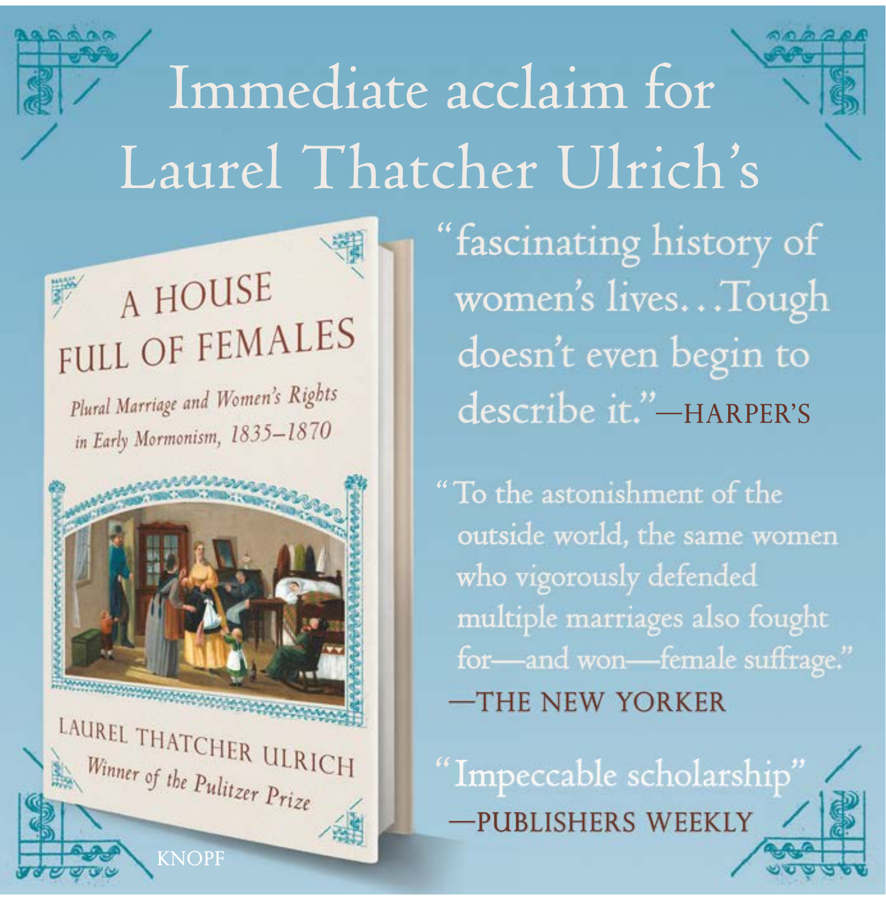
By CAITLIN FLANAGAN

Illustration by Michael Marsicano

Fox News was founded in 1996, when the entertainment impresario and conservative political consultant Roger Ailes acted on a pair of insights: that most people found television news boring and that a significant number of conservatives didn't trust it to represent their interests and values fairly. The TV producer in Ailes saw a marketing niche, and the political operative in him saw a direct way of courting voters. Rupert Murdoch owned the network, but Ailes was its intellectual author. In the two decades since, the network has thrived without legitimate competition of any kind. It has proved to be a big tent, sheltering beneath it some excellent reporters but also a collection of blowhards, performance artists, cornballs, and Republican operatives in rehab from political failures and personal embarrassments. With the help of this antic cast, the Fox audience has come to understand something important that it did not know before: The people who make "mainstream" news and entertainment don't just look down on conservatives and their values—they despise them.

By 2010, the network had become so popular that—according to Gabriel Sherman's biography, *The Loudest Voice in the Room*—Ailes added a new goal to the mission: the election

FOX NEWS



of the next president. The team did its best for Mitt Romney, but he lacked both the ability to excite crowds and the blood instinct necessary to "rip Obama's face off" in the debates, which Ailes believed was essential for victory. Almost as soon as the election ended, Fox News went back to work on the mission, emphasizing a variety of themes, each intended to demonize the left. At the top of the list was the regular suggestion that Barack Obama was an America-hating radical, an elaboration of Glenn Beck's observation (on Fox) that the president had "a deep-seated hatred for white people." Other themes included the idea that straight white men were under ever-present threat from progressive policies and attitudes; that Planned Parenthood was a kind of front operation for baby murder; that political correctness had made the utterance of even the most obvious factual statements dangerous;

There can't have been anyone more telegenic in the history of the business than Kelly.

and that the concerns of black America—including, especially, those of the Black Lives Matter movement—were so illogical, and so emotionally expressed, that they revealed millions of Americans to be beyond the reach of reason.

There is zero evidence that Fox was motivated to help Donald Trump over the other Republican candidates, although in retrospect he seems almost the dream candidate of the new agenda, embodying all the signature Ailes moves, right down to ripping off his opponents' faces and threatening reporters. ("How would you like it," Ailes once asked the journalist Kurt Andersen, if "a camera crew followed your children home from school?") We will never know to what extent Fox created or merely reported on the factor that turned out to be so decisive in the election: that to be white and conscious in America was to be in a constant state of rage.

In the middle of all this, feeding clips of ammo into the hot Fox News machine, was Megyn Kelly. To watch her, during one of her interviews on the subject of race and policing, interrupt a black guest

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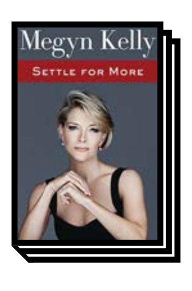
to ask her whether she'd ever called white people "crackers" was to see Kelly in action, fired up and ready to go. In some respects, she was an independent actor at Fox, with her own show and ultimate control of its editorial content. But she was also a cog in something turning, and what the great machine ultimately produced was President Donald Trump.

But a funny thing happened as the election season unfolded. Kelly—the darling daughter of the conservative network—began to change before our eyes. She took on some of the most powerful Republican men in the country, including Newt Gingrich ("You know what, Mr. Speaker? I'm not fascinated by sex. But I am fascinated by the protection of women"); Roger Ailes ("I picked up the phone and called Lachlan Murdoch: 'You need to get your general counsel on the phone' "); and Donald Trump himself ("You've called women you don't like fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals"). Over the summer she joined a group of vocal Hillary Clinton supporters—Lena Dunham, Emma Watson, Kerry Washington, Eva Longoria, and others—to take part in a Sheryl Sandberg initiative called Lean In Together (its name suggestive of Clinton's own "Stronger Together" motto) that was dedicated to some vague vision of a female utopia.



SETTLE FOR MORE
MEGYN KELLY
Harper

And she published a best-selling memoir, *Settle for More*, that buffs away her long history of strongly argued and often principled conservative opinions and emphasizes her handful of progressive ones, packaging herself as an independent. The book never once mentions that the network she worked for is a platform for conservative ideas. Writing a book about a career at Fox without mentioning its conservative agenda is like writing a book about a career at the Vatican without mentioning its Catholic agenda. Kelly, it seemed, was cleaning up her record. Why? The answer came in January, when she announced her big new job at NBC.

That Kelly should have ended her tenure at Fox not just bullied by Trump but threatened by some of his deranged followers (she had to bring an armed guard with her when she took her children to Disney World last spring) falls somewhere between a dark irony and a sick statement of where we are in the year of our Lord 2017. That she should chart a path forward while downplaying her full role in an ugly election that helped fuel her rise hardly marks her as unusual—many on the right are eager to blur the norm-breaking excesses of the recent past. To judge by Kelly's cover-her-traces strategy, her trajectory also conveys another message: Making the crossover to a major network requires a conservative to change her stripes, which is one reason why so many Americans have lost faith in the mainstream media.

MEGYN KELLY ARRIVED at Fox at age 33, in 2004, with almost no experience in the field. As a teenager, she had not heeded her mother's warning that "they don't give scholarships for cheerleading." She was popular, boy-crazy, obsessed with her weight, and the shining star of her high-school sorority. She had hoped to attend the fabled Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, but she whiffed the SAT and got rejected. She didn't turn her back on the "planned pursuits" she had enumerated in her high-school yearbook: "College, government, and wealth." She enrolled at Syracuse, majored in political science, and fell in love with a lax bro who knew how to encourage this fatherless daughter to be a winner. "You got this, little girl," he would tell her when she set out to claim another prize.

Kelly decided to go to law school so that she could become a prosecutor "and be respected." But once again she came up short, rejected this time by Notre Dame, so she packed up her aerobics leggings and Tri-Delt T-shirts and headed back to her girlhood bedroom and the Albany Law School, where a frenemy told her people were calling her Barbie ("Shove it up your ass," Kelly said when she'd had enough: problem solved). She loved moot court, where she discovered she liked "being 'on' in a room"; she also spent too much money

and ruined her credit. Public service was not going to put her right with the collection agencies, so she set her heart on Bickel & Brewer, the firm that pioneered "Rambo litigation":

> At twenty-three years old, I loved it. Kill or be killed! We're not here to make friends, we're here to win! You sue my client? F— you and your request for an extension! You want a settlement conference? Pound sand! Our offer is screw you!

After a decade in the trenches in New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., making bank and cruising toward partner, Kelly had a little talk with herself: "*I am more exciting than this!*" she wrote in her journal. "*I am more interesting than this! I am more interested than this! I need more out of life!*" What she needed, it turned out, was to leave the law and become a TV news reporter. She bought a killer Dolce & Gabbana

As a litigator in high-stakes lawsuits, Kelly learned a skill of the trade: taunting her adversaries until they snapped.

dress and made a demo tape. ("Only you would spend a thousand dollars to interview for a job that pays seventeen thousand a year!" her first husband said playfully, unaware that he was soon to be moved into the *I am more interesting than this!* category.) Sure enough, the dress, the tape, and the moxie got her a job moonlighting with Washington's local ABC affiliate, and soon she was making a run at Fox News, the only major news network that actually prefers to hire reporters with little or no journalistic experience. In short order, she was in Roger Ailes's office, making a case for herself.

As she tells it, one of the first questions Ailes asked her was "how the daughter of a nurse and a college professor understood anything other than left wing dogma." She replied that although she'd been raised in a Democratic household, she had always been apolitical. She got the job. "He wasn't looking for a Republican reporter," she writes. "He just wanted someone who

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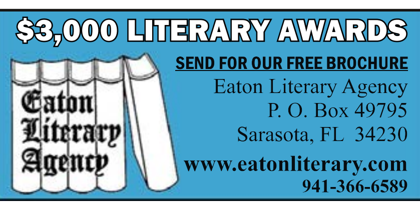

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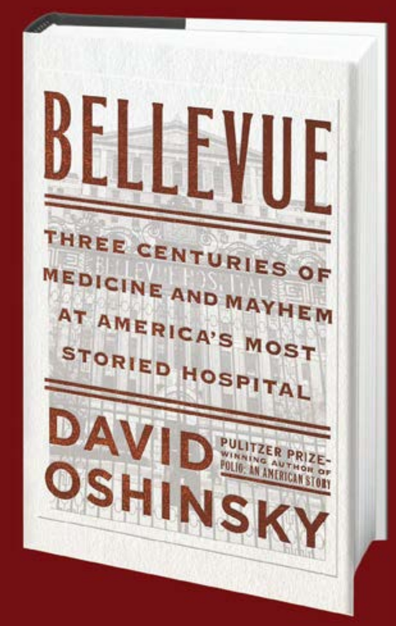

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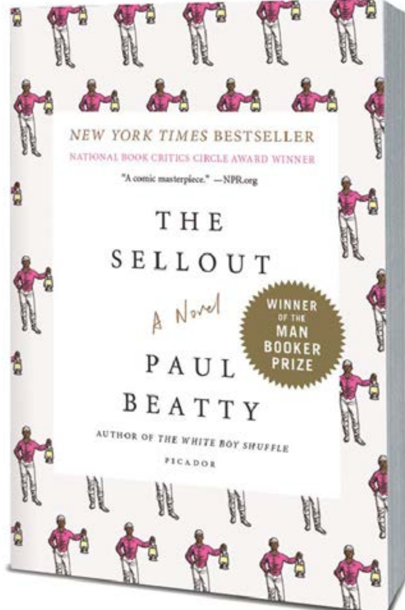

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PICADOR

was open-minded." More accurately, he wanted people who hadn't been tainted by the left-wing media machine, so they could be trained in the attitudes and opinions the network had been founded to advance.

Ailes taught Kelly how to adjust her on-air personality for maximum effectiveness, an area of expertise in which he is without rival. (He is the person who suggested that Richard Nixon warm up his image by touching Pat more often when they were on camera together, a small price to pay for bombing Cambodia to his heart's content.) His signal advice to her was "to not try so hard to be perfect" all the time on air, and to allow herself to show "who I really am"—perhaps not exactly the counsel he had offered Bill O'Reilly or Sean Hannity or Bret Baier, but *la difference* is big at Fox, and she followed along. Kelly learned to be more playful on camera, to crack herself up and not take herself so seriously when she flubbed a line. She developed a bantering rapport with regular guests, even those she evidently disdained, like Al Sharpton. She leavened her big-city style by developing a series of folksy nicknames for regulars. She called Sharpton "Rev" and Mike Huckabee "Gov," and (surreally) she called Cornell West "Doc," as though he'd just ambled over to the front porch on *Hee Haw* with his medical bag.

Ailes was her boss—the unchallenged "king" of Fox News, she has called him—but Brit Hume, who had come to Fox from ABC during the new network's first year, was her ideological father. Kelly writes that when she first entered the ambit of Hume and his wife, Kim (then Fox's Washington-bureau chief), she felt "like little Orphan Annie seeing the mansion for the first time." She was determined to work with them, and the pair became "actively involved in my development." Kelly learned to seek Hume's approval above all others'. Brit Hume is a deeply accomplished, very smart, heart-on-his-sleeve conservative. He is also a Christian who has said he has committed his life to Christ "in a way that was very meaningful." This one fact alone might be enough to freak out many more-conventional journalists. (After the election, Dean Baquet, the executive editor of *The New York Times*, made an astonishing confession about his newspaper: "We don't get the role of religion in people's lives," by which he meant that the paper doesn't get the role of Christianity in people's lives—something Fox understands deeply.) Kelly's own father, who died suddenly when she was 15, was a devout Catholic who had "considered becoming a Christian Brother" before marrying, and often encouraged his children to think of what Jesus was like "as a man." Hume—authoritative, partisan, religious, and besotted with Kelly in a deeply affectionate, paternal way—taught her the ropes, and maintains that her rapid rise at Fox was because "she believes in our mission."

Kelly is an unbelievably talented broadcaster—smart, funny, quick-witted, and able to handle a bit of fluff with as much zeal as she tackles a serious story. There can't have been anyone more telegenic in the history of the business. Her understanding of the legal aspects of news stories and her tendency to conduct interviews as hostile cross-examinations ("Stay in bounds!" "I've already ceded the point!" "Don't deflect!") made her a riveting journalist-entertainer, the Fox ideal. She moved

To see her reporting on Black Lives Matter was to see how Fox often stirred up racial anger among its viewers.

up quickly through the Fox ranks. Starting as a general assignment reporter, within two years she was co-hosting a show with Bill Hemmer, "America's Newsroom," on which she evinced her signature political stance: free-market enthusiasm combined with Nixonian law-and-order conservatism. "Enjoy prison!" she would call out after showing a video of an especially inept criminal enterprise.

She popped off the screen—fun, sexy, tough—and became popular not just with conservatives but also (in the mode of a guilty pleasure) with many progressives, including her sometime nemesis Jon Stewart, who once said she was his favorite Fox personality. She boldly waded into waters that the mainstream news outlets wouldn't go near. Some of her set pieces—unpacking the liberal cant about the Supreme Court's

decision in the *Hobby Lobby* case, for example—were sensational bits of theater. One night she went into a rant about the new federal guidelines on college sexual-assault adjudication: "Once you are accused, you're *done*," she shouted, speaking up for male students. "You can't have a lawyer in there representing you, and the rules say, 'Don't allow the accused to cross-examine the accuser, because it could be intimidating and threatening for her.' Well—she might be *a liar*! She might *deserve* a little intimidation!" It was harsh, it was politically incorrect as hell, it was antifeminist (women who report rape might need to be intimidated?)—and within it was a desperately needed kernel of pure truth, some "cool water over a hot brain," as she has described her style of truth-telling.

But Kelly's rise to national attention, in 2014, featured a different sort of spectacle. She conducted her career-making interview with Bill Ayers, a cofounder of the Weather Underground, whom Fox never expected to land as a guest and whom Kelly calls "the gift that kept on giving." In *Settle for More*, she describes the background to that exceptional event this way: "During the 2008 election, it was reported that Barack Obama launched his career in Bill Ayers's living room. That was a little inflated. They were both in Chicago and in the same social justice circles, and Ayers had a cocktail party for the then aspiring politician."

That's a fair enough assessment of the situation, even sounding vaguely like something you'd hear on MSNBC—"social justice circles"! But for a stark contrast to this measured opinion, go look up the original interview. "Professor Bill Ayers admits to terrorizing this country, bombing buildings, and committing other crimes during the 1970s," Kelly says by way of introduction, "and he got away—*scot-free*. Because this is *America*, he wound up as a *college professor* who even helped a *president* launch his *political career*." Then—without any explanation or context—an old John McCain ad plays. To the accompaniment of *Exorcist*-style music, images appear on a devilish red-and-black background, and a creepy female voice says, "Barack Obama and domestic terrorist Bill Ayers … Friends. They've worked together for years … But Obama tries to hide it … Why?" In between segments of the interview, Kelly reminds us of the "launching" of Obama's campaign in Ayers's living room, and says she will ask Ayers an important question: "Will he bomb America again?"

Not likely, given that he was a 69-year-old grandfather at the time, the classic tenured radical working on his TIAA-CREF retirement account more than on his violent manifestos; Kelly looked liked she could have reached across her glass desk and bench-pressed him if she'd wanted to. But the premise for hauling this old lefty out of mothballs, shaking him awake, and interrogating him was to remind viewers how dangerous he—and by implication Obama—was to the country, so the question had to be raised.

The spectacle strengthened the Fox objective of undermining the Obama presidency by suggesting that he was someone akin to Ayers, whom Kelly described as sounding "like Osama bin Laden" at one point and as "like Hitler" at another. But there's nothing about

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that in her book, nor is there any mention of her emotionally laden reporting on abortion, which often features luminous sonogram images of "babies" in utero. After the Center for Medical Progress released its sting videos of Planned Parenthood meetings on the handling of fetal organs, she interviewed her mentor Hume about what to make of them. He explained to her that "when you wrest from the woman's womb this little human creature and *kill it*, that's not a tidy little minor 'procedure,' really. That's the taking of a human life." Kelly has often said that her feelings on abortion are private and unknown to the public. But you can clearly see from her show that, at the very least, abortion after the 12th week horrifies her. In this, as in so many other regards, she is a conservative. Why, to ask a classic Megyn Kelly question, does the topic go all but unmentioned in her book?

More important, why has she left her vigorous—and much discussed—interviews about the Black Lives Matter movement out of *Settle for More*? In her memoir, she observes that Fox News anchors are frequent targets of unfair accusations of racism. That bothers Kelly, who regularly and appreciatively hosts black conservatives on her show. But to see her segments on Black Lives Matter—which first aired as the primaries were getting under way and continued until the general election itself—was to see how Fox often stirred up racial anger among its viewers, a kind of anger that was crucial fuel for the Republican outcome Roger Ailes so desired.

When Kelly was a litigator in high-stakes lawsuits, she learned a skill of the trade: taunting her adversaries until they snapped. "I might say something passive-aggressive just to get opposing counsel mad," she writes. "And then when he got worked up about it, I would say calmly, 'You seem upset. Do you need a break? We can take a moment if you'd like to step outside and get yourself together.'" She became "an expert in making them lose their cool."

She brought this technique to her most contentious interviews on Fox, often generating more heat than light, while also getting a fair share of electric moments. But in her regular application of it to black activists, she contributed to an ugly mood that was the hallmark of Fox all last year: one of white aggrievement at a country gone mad, led by a radical black president supported by irrational black protesters who were gaining power. In regard to Black Lives Matter specifically, Fox anchors wanted to know why so many in the movement continued to invoke the names of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray when police officers in those cases had been exonerated. This was a fair question, and one politically volatile enough that the mainstream media largely steered clear of it. (CNN famously promoted the "Hands up, don't shoot" narrative before there was any evidence for it.) But the way Kelly went about seeking answers—often by applying her "make them lose their cool" approach—was disturbing.

She invited the comedian and radio host D. L. Hughley to her studio to discuss the shooting death of Philando Castile in Minnesota in July 2016. After he was seated at the glass desk, she turned first to do a surprise interview with one of her favorite Fox News contributors on race and policing issues: Mark Fuhrman, the former Los Angeles Police Department detective—and enthusiastic collector of Nazi memorabilia—whose racially charged past proved so central in the O. J. Simpson trial. That he should be one of Fox's paid consultants on these topics is a telling comment about the network. He told Kelly that Castile's girlfriend, who had described the shooting in a live Facebook video, was a liar. When it was Hughley's turn to talk with Kelly, he was understandably a bit stunned by what had just transpired. "I think it was interesting to hear Mark Fuhrman, who was actually—got in trouble for perjuring himself, calling somebody a liar," Hughley said. "It's ridiculous to me."

Kelly is off to the big time, which will crush her.

"Mmmhmm," Kelly said, ignoring the point. They talked a bit about the case, and whether or not the girlfriend was credible. Kelly compared the incident to the Michael Brown case, and began almost shouting at Hughley: "'Hands up, don't shoot' was a *lie*, and Michael Brown was *the aggressor*."

Hughley looked down at the desk, obviously restraining himself from saying something he'd regret. "Wow," he said mildly, countering her furious tone with a controlled one. "Don't '*Wow*' me," Kelly said angrily. Why was she so angry at him? It was never clear; she just seemed to be trying to get him to bite back, and she continued pushing him on Brown, raising her voice in the manner of an outraged teacher letting a class clown have it. Hughley said that Fox didn't acknowledge racism. "That's insulting," she told him sharply, and gestured toward the camera. "You've just insulted millions of people watching this channel."

"And you know what? I'm insulted by the things I hear on this network, so we're even," he said. "I could care less about insulting people who insult me on a daily basis." At the end of the segment, Kelly thanked Hughley crisply and then rolled her eyes at the audience: *This is what we're dealing with.*

According to *Settle for More*, Kelly's great moment of racial awakening took place when she watched the black receptionist at her law firm cheer the O. J. Simpson verdict. She writes that the moment "opened my eyes to the reality that two people can see the exact same facts and come to vastly different conclusions." She says this insight made her "check" her own "bias" in her reporting.

During the Republican National Convention in August, sitting in a skybox awaiting a speech by the black conservative sheriff David Clarke, she introduced her TV audience to Malik Shabazz, the president of Black Lawyers for Justice and a former president of the New Black Panthers Party. Shabazz is a radical—an anti-Zionist who believes that Jews dominated the Atlantic slave trade and were involved in the 9/11 attacks, he is in a sense far more radical than Bill Ayers—but Kelly did not tell the audience that. Nor did she tell them that she had had Shabazz on her show in the past. The two proved useful to each other; he got to go deep behind enemy lines to spread his theories, while she got to show her audience members a black man who really does hate them. But to the casual viewer, he seemed like merely another Black Lives Matter supporter, no more or less extreme in his views than D. L. Hughley.

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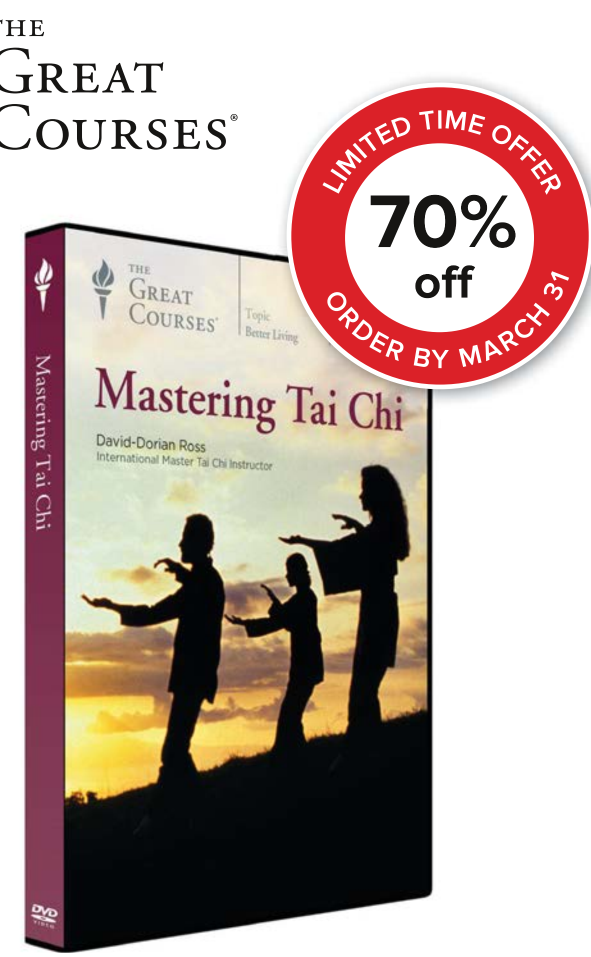

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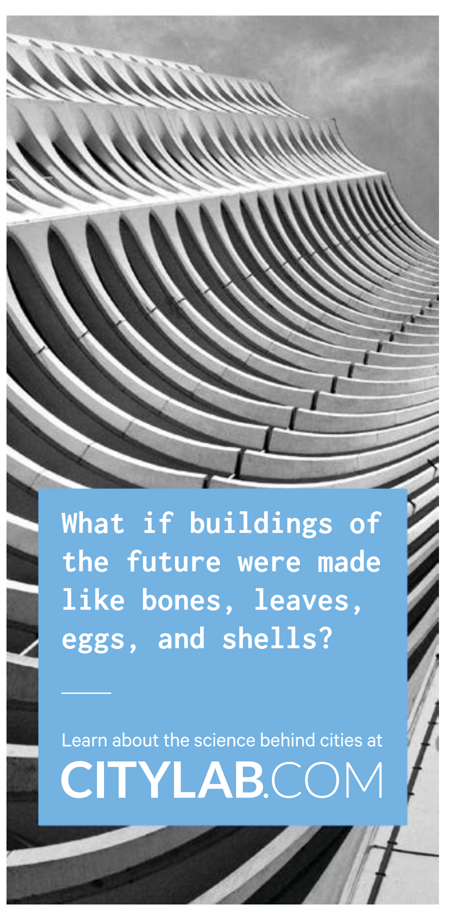

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Within two minutes, Kelly was speaking to him in her raised, angry voice—and she got him. "Your *attitude* is part of the problem," Shabazz told her. "You believe that your lives are better than ours." She told him it was hard to take him seriously; he told her—in a low, careful voice—"Oh, take me very seriously." "So there's no reasoning with you," she said.

He made some points that might have enlarged the discussion, had Kelly been interested in hearing them. "This type of campaign which promotes racism and division," he said, "it's going to create more police who desire to kill us." Kelly wasn't going there. "Do you believe that white people are inherently evil?" she suddenly asked, reading from notes. "Do you use the term *cracker* to refer to white people? … Did you say we should kill every G-damn Zionist in Israel? That their G-damn little babies, that old ladies should be blown up?" No one familiar with Malik Shabazz would be surprised by these statements, but Kelly knew she had fodder for an audience that had come to revile the Black Lives Matter cause. She scolded Shabazz for taking "antagonistic positions when it comes to white people as a group," and sent him on his way, another dangerous black man among millions.

This was Fox News last spring and summer and into the fall: a place where black guests were always a few prodding questions away from telling the audience what they *really* felt about whites, and a place where white hosts were quick to defend other members of their race from unfair accusations of bias. These tactics were integral to the network's mission: to get conservative ideas out there, to help elect a Republican president, and to make exciting television while doing it. Kelly proved adept on all fronts.

FOX NEWS CAN turn a nobody into a star—but only of a certain size. You can't become a Katie Couric or a Diane Sawyer or a Barbara Walters at Fox, so Megyn Kelly is off to the big time, which will crush her. NBC is not going to let her roll her eyes at black activists, or tell her audience that Santa is white, or hector a Planned Parenthood supporter with a horrified "Where's your humanity?" Her recent adoption of Sheryl Sandberg–style "you go, girl" feminism isn't going to help her either. There are only so many uplifting reports on workplace mentoring you can file before sleepy viewers start clicking around. The reason Kelly was so great at Fox is that, unlike just about every other woman to be called this, she actually is a badass. *Settle for More* aside, she's spent her career really not caring if you think she's a racist or a pro-lifer or a bully. She's a strong, strong woman—but she won't be one at NBC. She'll be like everyone else.

No matter, it's still the honeymoon. Kelly has been approved for general consumption by *The New York Times* ("unlikely feminist heroine") and *Vanity Fair* ("feminist icon of sorts"). She gave an interview to Terry Gross in which she sounded not like Fox's avenging angel but like a good liberal, saying that she was concerned about the "relative lack of power of certain minority groups and the fear they're feeling in the wake of Donald Trump's election." She had a brief badass moment soon after that, at *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Women in Entertainment breakfast, where she told the audience she had "high hopes" for Donald Trump, and that there was "much to admire about the man." But the Women of Hollywood booed her, and Kathy Griffin flipped her the bird. They'll get her in line. And who knows? Maybe all this time she was just a gun for hire. If so, she took some very cheap shots over the past few years. And she hit the target. A

Caitlin Flanagan is the author of Girl Land *and* To Hell With All That.

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THE BIG QUESTION

Q: What was the most influential film in history?

Allison Schroeder, screenwriter, *Hidden Figures*
Star Wars gave us Leia: a "princess" who defied the stereotype as a kick-ass rebel fighter. She changed the definition of a heroine. And as the revolutionary special effects transformed our imaginations, the story set in a galaxy far, far away reminded us of our own world's battle between good and evil—one that never ends but must always be fought.

Anna Biller, filmmaker
Mae West's witty dialogue, revealing gowns, purring voice, and sexual innuendos in ***She Done Him Wrong* (1933)** made her an icon of a type of frank female sexuality that would define the early 1930s and the pre-censorship era, and would inspire concepts of high camp and female sexual independence in cinema for decades to come.

Howard A. Rodman, president, Writers Guild of America, West
It's hard to name a film of more expansive reach than **Lang and von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1927).** A work of magisterial surrealism that both predicted and incarnated the rest of the 20th century, the film cast its long chiaroscuro shadow over everything from the Third Reich to cyberpunk.

Miriam Segal, managing director and producer, Good Films
Singin' in the Rain perfectly illustrates how an impeccable script, brilliant performances, and timeless characters combine to entertain all ages worldwide.

Ty Burr, film critic, *The Boston Globe*
In American history, it has to be **D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)**—the first cinematic blockbuster and a revisionist racist artifact that helped resurrect the Ku Klux Klan, led to a fresh wave of violence, bolstered myths about the antebellum South, and cemented the false image of the black male "savage" in the white cultural mainstream. One hundred years on, the movie still has far too much to answer for.

Tom McCarthy, director, *Spotlight*
***The Great Train Robbery* (1903),** directed by Edwin S. Porter, was one of the first films to combine multiple story lines into a narrative structure. The film also used innovative camera and editing techniques that are still very much a part of our cinematic vocabulary today. All of that in 12 minutes—and it was commercially successful to boot!

Laura Mulvey, film and media-studies professor, Birkbeck, University of London
An Italian neorealist film from the 1940s: **Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945)** or **Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948).** The films were played across the world, demonstrating the power and immediacy of location shooting; they influenced the French New Wave, Brazilian Cinema Novo, and other new-film movements.

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Nancy Wolske Lee, Marietta, Ohio
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Tim Cox, Chicago, Ill.
Jaws—the first summer blockbuster—changed the business of filmmaking, gave us an iconic score, and continues to make us fearful of ocean swimming even though we know better.

David Baker, DeLand, Fla.
The Godfather. Francis Ford Coppola's Corleone family represents the American dream, with all of its pros and cons.

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