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The Atlantic

WAS SHAKESPEARE
A WOMAN?

TRUMP'S BIGOTRY:
AN ORAL HISTORY



ABOLISH THE PRIESTHOOD

BY JAMES CARROLL

TO SAVE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,
RETURN IT TO THE PEOPLE



BROOKS KOEPKA



TIGER WOODS



BRYSON DECHAMBEAU



THE BIG THREE 1962



JON RAHM



JASON DAY

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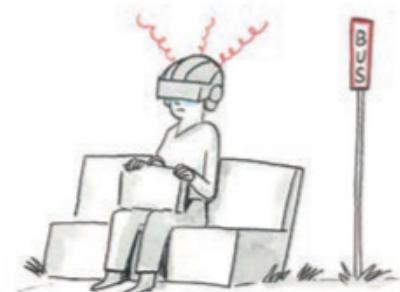
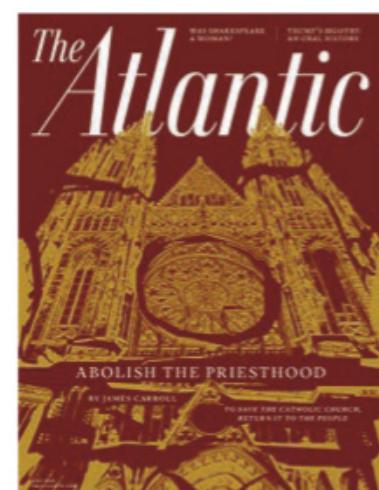
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Mendelsund/Munday

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A NEW TELEVISION SERIES
IN PURSUIT OF THE TRUTH

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The authorship controversy has yet to surface a compelling alternative to the man buried in Stratford. Perhaps that’s because, until recently, no one was looking in the right place. The case for Emilia Bassano.





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• THE CONVERSATION

How Much Immigration Is Too Much?

We need to make hard decisions now about what will truly benefit current and future Americans, David Frum argued in April.

David Frum's statistically dense exploration of America's immigration conundrum is an important and welcome antidote to the simplistic and xenophobic rhetoric of the president, which dominates the public discourse. Mr. Frum's analysis, however, suffers from a fundamental omission. It ignores the elephant in the debate on immigration—xenophobia and racism.

Throughout our history, antagonism toward racial, religious, and ethnic minorities has dominated American immigration policy. Mr. Frum writes nostalgically of the period of slow immigration from 1915 to 1975. His analysis ignores the fact that racist immigration policies helped create this age of "cohesion." It also ignores the fact that the United States economy during

this period benefited greatly from the federal government's enormous investment, and from the economic devastation of Europe and Asia and the resulting paucity of international competition. In any event, I doubt that African Americans of the Jim Crow South, or minorities in other parts of the U.S., considered this period to be particularly "cohesive."

Mr. Trump's xenophobic immigration policies and rhetoric are simply the latest manifestation of America's original sin of racism. Until we acknowledge this reality, we can never have an honest debate about the role of immigration in the success of the American experiment, or about how to determine "how much immigration is too much."

Robert Thornton
IRVINE, CALIF.

[Frum's] central premise—that if liberals don't enforce immigration laws, the nation will turn to fascists—is bedeviled by reality. President Trump, Fox News and the Republican Party tried with all their might to demagogue immigration before the midterm elections. The GOP got clobbered. Democrats did especially well in elections in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and California, the states that border Mexico. In fact, all nine members of Congress who represent the districts along the Mexico border oppose funding for Trump's border wall.

According to Gallup, 67 percent of Americans think immigration levels should either stay the same or increase, and 75 percent think immigration is a "good thing," an all-time high ...

Frum's essay also includes some bizarre, anti-historical observations. This one might be the strangest: "America was built on the revolutionary idea, never fully realized, that those who labor might also govern—that every worker should be a voter." The United States was, of course, *actually* founded on the still-revolutionary—but not nearly *as* revolutionary—idea that every *white, male landowner* should be a voter. We weren't even ready to admit that the people doing the most work at the time were full human beings.

Radley Balko

EXCERPT FROM A WASHINGTON POST COLUMN

A country as large and rich as America can afford to temper self-interest with generosity. "Give me your tired, your poor ..." should not be the only consideration driving America's immigration policy, but neither should it be neglected entirely.

Felicia Nimue Ackerman
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

[Frum] says:

Under present immigration policies, the U.S. population will exceed 400 million by 2050. Nobody is seriously planning for such population growth ...

An American population of 400 million and beyond is not only imaginable, not only being planned for: it's the world most Americans should want ... A growing America, a mighty America, an America with a wind at its back as successive large generations of young people propel it to success and innovation and strength, sends a signal to the rest of the world that the experiment is working. Liberty and self-government, aside from being morally good, are simply more effective than the alternatives.

This sets the stage for more peaceful and confident relations between the United States and other countries.

So unlike Frum and other declinists, I'm excited for 400 million Americans. I'd like even more than that.

Lyman Stone
EXCERPT FROM A FEDERALIST ARTICLE

David Frum offers a brilliant exposition of the nature of the immigration crisis, and he points toward a comprehensive immigration strategy. But why does he preach to liberals that solving the problem is up to them? Conservatives still dominate American politics with money, powerful lobbies, political-action committees, and more. Mr. Frum, a conservative, enjoins liberals to stop fascism because, apparently, conservatives are unavailable. Conservatives should step up and put their own house in order.

Christopher Sweet
CHICAGO, ILL.

Today's discourse is so polarizing and devoid of nuance that it often feels like you're crazy if you fall somewhere in between Trump-loving nativists and their counterparts on the far left requesting an end to immigration enforcement. We need more articles like Frum's that center the debate on realistic outcomes.

Geoffrey Dodson
SACRAMENTO, CALIF.

David Frum replies:

Thanks to all who joined the discussion on my article. You can read fuller answers to more specific criticism and queries in my follow-up, "Faith,

Reason, and Immigration," on TheAtlantic.com. Here, I'll reply only to Radley Balko's objection that the United States was not founded as a democracy. He's right! Which is why I didn't say otherwise. Here's what I did say:

America was built on the revolutionary idea, never fully realized, that those who labor might also govern—that every worker should be a voter. The struggle toward this ideal has been slow, arduous, and sometimes violent. The immigration surge has had the effect of setting this ideal back. Half a century after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the United States has again habituated itself to employing workers who cannot vote and therefore cannot protect their interests or even their lives.

A building rests upon a foundation—but rises above it. Since the founding of the republic, Americans have, century upon century, built a country of wider possibilities for ordinary people. One reason to fear that this achievement might be lost is precisely that it did not always exist. If my words failed to convey that strong message, I correct them here.

Psychiatry's Incurable Hubris

The quest to understand the biology of mental illness has so far failed, Gary Greenberg wrote in April. But you wouldn't know it from practitioners' claims.

I read "Psychiatry's Incurable Hubris" with a mixture of curiosity, disappointment, bafflement, and anger. As a psychiatrist charged with not

only seeing patients but also teaching psychiatry trainees, I am well aware of how little we know about disorders of the brain and the mind. Psychiatrists frequently share with one another our frustration with the complexity of the psyche. We may not know how or why something has gone wrong in the brain, but we certainly know when it has. And so we rally all the resources we have in order to offer relief to those in pain—theories, hypotheses, experiments, data, observations, neuroscience, medications with terrible side effects, logic, kindness, a listening ear—and we do our best. Is this "hubris," as the article says? Try desperation. Try humanity.

Alison May, M.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY, UCSF WEILL INSTITUTE FOR NEUROSCIENCES SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

Greenberg's article, which at first offended me with its seeming dismissal of medication-based treatment, pushed me to look closely at modern scientific studies of the chemical-imbalance theory I have accepted since I was diagnosed with depression at 15. I wholeheartedly agree that mental-health professionals would benefit from adopting a praxis that incorporates just as much social science as chemical.

However, as someone who has taken antidepressants since that diagnosis and suffered badly during periods when I went off them, I want to make sure *The Atlantic*'s readers know that medication does help an enormous number of people. Even if we don't understand exactly how these medications help, they do. Millions of us with mental illnesses

have to muddle through life while doctors muddle through theories. Surely it's worthwhile to continue using what we've got until we're offered something better.

Sarah Walsh
CINCINNATI, OHIO

At any given moment, a substantial proportion of the population is experiencing diminished quality of life due to emotional distress or cognitive impairment. Psychiatry is the branch of medicine that works to mitigate these difficulties. As Greenberg indicates, psychiatry has many flaws. But the distress that psychiatry addresses begs relief. If we dismiss psychiatry, what is the alternative?

E. Michael Kahn
ABINGDON, VA.

Gary Greenberg replies:

Alison May is correct to say that psychiatrists, like all of us, are outmatched by the complexities of the psyche and the brain from which it arises. She is also right to point out that hubris does not always lie behind the act of offering relief when something has gone wrong. However, hubris does manifest itself when psychiatrists tell people experiencing depression that they have a chemical imbalance, without knowing which chemicals are out of balance or what the proper balance should be. The gap between knowledge and practice should not stop people from using drugs that help them, but it should make us wary of shaping our identities around specious theories of mind.

To contribute to The Conversation, please email letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.



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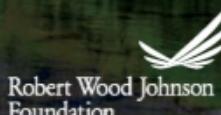
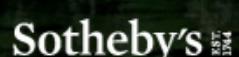
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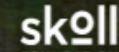
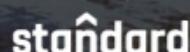
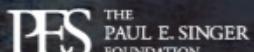
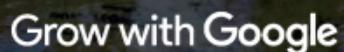
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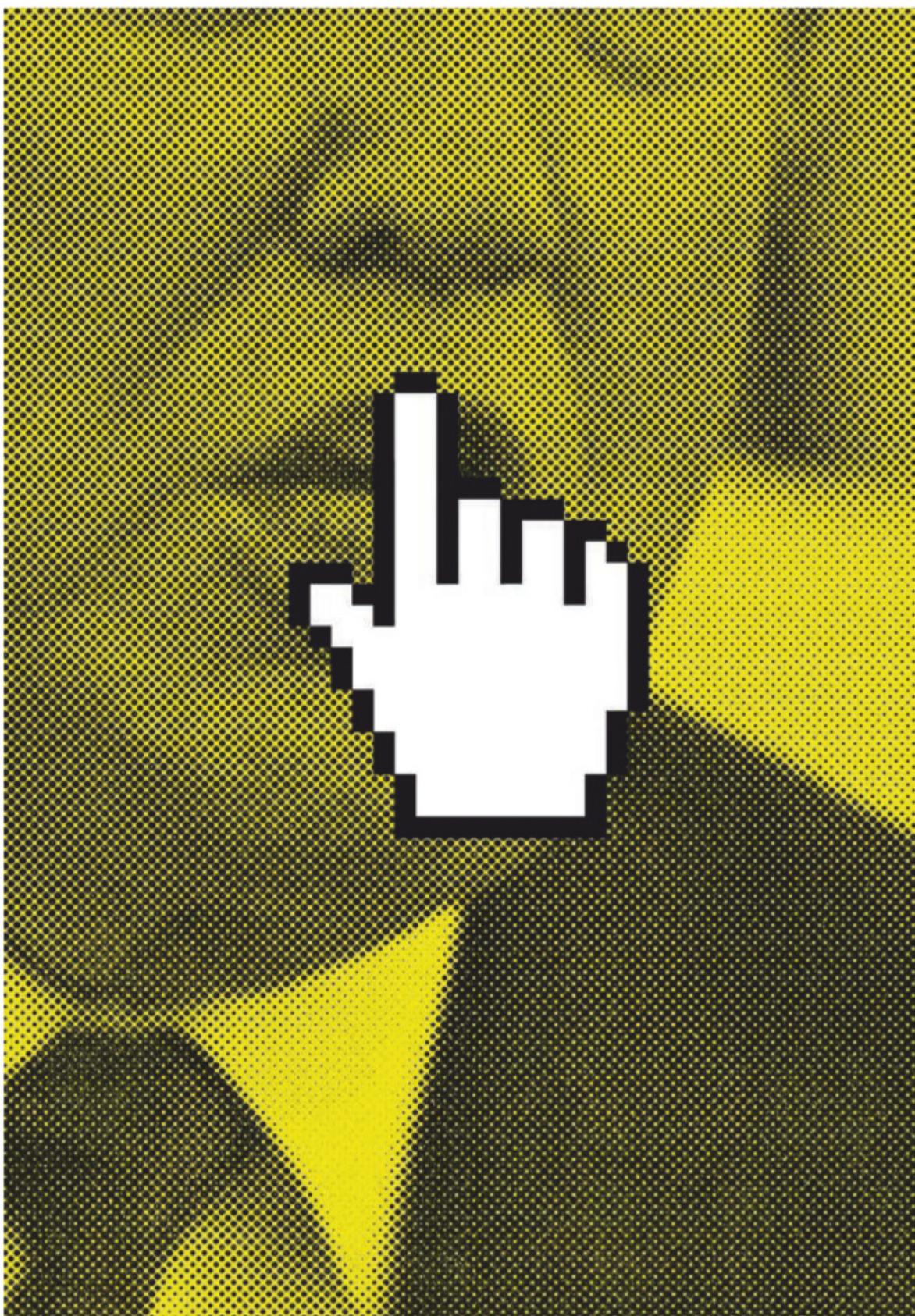
A German study found that vacation was more likely to provoke envy than any other attribute examined, including “relationship and family,” “appearance,” and “money and material possessions.” — Ben Healy, p. 19



D I S P A T C H E S

IDEAS & PROVOCATIONS

JUNE 2019



• POLITICS

AUTOCORRECT

How advances in real-time fact-checking might improve our politics

BY JONATHAN RAUCH

IT'S FEBRUARY 2019, and I'm waiting to see whether a robot will call the president of the United States a liar.

I have tuned in to the State of the Union address, a speech that I haven't missed more than a couple of times in my four decades of adulthood. Some addresses were soaring, some were slogans, and one, a magisterial performance by Ronald Reagan, was thrilling, because I watched it in the House chamber, from a press-gallery perch right behind the president. But I have never had the sense of suspense I feel now, as I sit staring not at a TV, but at a password-protected website called

FactStream. I log in and find myself facing a plain screen with a video player. It looks rudimentary, but it might be revolutionary.

At the appointed time, President Donald Trump comes into view. Actually, not at *precisely* the appointed time; my feed is delayed by about 30 seconds. In that interval, a complicated transaction takes place. First, a piece of software—a bot, in effect—translates the president's spoken words into text. A second bot then searches the text for factual claims, and sends each to a third bot, which looks at an online database to determine whether the claim (or a related one) has previously been verified or debunked by an independent fact-checking organization. If it has, the software generates a chyron (a caption) displaying the previously fact-checked statement and a verdict: true, false, not the whole story, or whatever else the fact-checkers concluded. If Squash, as the system is code-named, works, I will see the president's truthfulness assessed as he speaks—no waiting for post-speech reportage, no mental note to Google it later. All in seconds, without human intervention. If it works.

Also watching the experiment, from Duke University, is a journalism professor named Bill Adair, along with researchers at the university's Reporters' Lab. A doyen of fact-checking since 2007, when he established PolitiFact.org, Adair has for years dreamt of fact-checking politicians in real time. Squash is his first attempt to teach computers to do just that. In the run-up to the State of the Union, he and a team of journalists, computer scientists, web developers, and students scrambled to prepare what tonight is still jerry-rigged software. "Guys," he told the group ahead of time, defensively talking down expectations, "I'll be happy if we just have stuff popping up on the screen." (Fact-check: *Stuff* was not the word he used.) But if the system works, for an hour or two we might glimpse a new digital future, one that guides us toward truth instead of away from it.

THE WEB AND its digital infrastructure are sometimes referred to as information technology, but a better

term might be *misinformation technology*. Though many websites favor information that is true over information that is false, the web itself—a series of paths and pipes for raw data—was designed to be indifferent to veracity. In the early days, that seemed fine. Everyone assumed that users could and would gravitate toward true content, which after all seems a lot more useful than bogus content.

Instead, perverse incentives took hold. Because most online business models

reach more people, penetrate deeper into the social network, and spread much faster than accurate stories."

The resulting situation is odd. Normally, if an information-technology system delivered false results at least as often as true results, we would say it was broken. But when the internet delivers a wrong answer, we say the *user* is to blame. That cannot be right. Our information systems need to help us avoid error, not promulgate it. As philosophers and politicians

have known since at least the time of Plato, human cognition is inherently untrustworthy.

The word *inherently*, though, implies a question. Must things be this way? What if the information superhighway could be regraded to tilt more toward veracity? What if social media's implicit preference for clickbait and trolling could be mitigated, or even reversed? No one, mind you, is talking about censorship, which is repugnant and ineffective—just about providing signage and guardrails that alert consumers to epistemic hazards and point them toward reality.

Google, Facebook, and various digital-media organizations are working on such safeguards, with mixed but promising results. Facebook, for example, uses algorithms and user flags to identify questionable news items, which it then routes to outside fact-checking organizations; if an item is found to be false, Facebook's

algorithms demote it in your News Feed and display links to corrective information. Also, if you try to post or share an item that has been identified as bogus, Facebook displays a pop-up advising you that the item is dicey, asking whether you want to share it anyway, and offering links to fact-checks and real news. According to Facebook, demoting and contextualizing misinformation slows its spread on the platform by 80 percent. Google, too, has launched a suite of measures that it says make its service more truth-friendly. For example, it has created what it calls a "knowledge panel," which displays information about publishers alongside search results, in order to help users weigh sources. (Google *The Atlantic*, and you can see one of these



depend on advertising, and because most advertising depends on clicks, profits flow from content that users notice and, ideally, share—and we users, being cognitively flawed human beings, prefer content that stimulates our emotions and confirms our biases. Dutifully chasing ever more eyeballs, algorithms and aggregators propagate and serve ever more clickbait. In 2016, an analysis by *BuzzFeed News* found that fake election news outperformed real election news on Facebook. Donald Trump, a self-proclaimed troll, quickly caught on. So did propagandists in Russia, and conspiracy websites, and troll farms, and ... well, you already know the rest. By now, multiple studies have confirmed that, as Robinson Meyer reported last year for *The Atlantic*, "fake news and false rumors

publisher-information boxes on the right side of the page.) Google News also labels and promotes articles written by fact-checking organizations, making them easier to spot and boosting their traffic.

Meanwhile, smaller players are building other epistemic road signs. An example is NewsGuard, launched last year by the entrepreneurs and journalists Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz. NewsGuard is a browser extension that displays credibility ratings—along with detailed explanatory pop-ups (“nutrition labels”)—when a listed website’s links appear in search results or in social-media feeds. Having tried it for a while, I find that it works smoothly, and that the ratings are sensible and well explained. The Heritage Foundation’s *Daily Signal*, for example, gets a green check mark (“This website adheres to all nine of NewsGuard’s standards of credibility and transparency,” says the pop-up). Meanwhile, *Breitbart News* is rated “Proceed with caution” and gets a red exclamation point (“This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency,” which are enumerated).

All of these approaches are embryonic, many have kinks to be worked out, and some have been controversial. For example, critics charge that Facebook’s effort needs more funding and transparency, and some conservatives have complained about bias in Google’s implementation of fact-checking. Still, such measures may collectively be having some effect; a recent study by five political scientists found that from 2016 to 2018, web users’ exposure to fake news leveled off and may have even declined.

Nevertheless, a vexing asymmetry remains. Inventing and disseminating falsehoods is quick and cheap and fun, whereas identifying and debunking falsehoods is slow and expensive and boring. There is no way to fact-check all the bogus claims that circulate online.

It turns out, though, that not all misinformation is created equal. Although alarm about Russian disinformation and trollbots and the like is justified, politicians are by far the biggest shapers of opinion and spreaders of bullshit. “The most worrisome misinformation in U.S. politics remains the old-fashioned kind: false and misleading statements made by elected officials,” Brendan Nyhan, a University of Michigan political scientist who

studies political disinformation, wrote recently for *Medium*. And politicians, unlike random trolls, can be monitored, pressured, and hopefully influenced. Research by Nyhan and others finds that politicians who are reminded that they might be fact-checked stick significantly closer to the truth.

Where, then, might you start if you wanted to nip a lot of disinformation in the bud? Perhaps with a prominent politician who makes false or misleading claims at a rate of 17 or so a day. Perhaps with a politician who repeats those falsehoods over and over (for instance, saying 134 times, as of early April, that his tax cut was the biggest ever, according to a count by *The Washington Post*). Perhaps with Donald J. Trump.

WHEN I FIRST MET Bill Adair, he was a freshman at Camelback High School, in Phoenix, and I was a junior. We didn’t socialize much, because I was a debate nerd and he was a journalism nerd, but I knew him to be easy-going and friendly. Even then, though, he was fiercely ambitious to make a mark in journalism. As a boy, he had a newspaper route; by high school, he was writing for both the school paper and *The Phoenix Gazette*. At Arizona State University, his senior thesis on political ads concluded that journalists needed to do more fact-checking, instead of simply transmitting what politicians say.

In his 20s, he went to work for the *St. Petersburg Times*, but as he rose through the reportorial ranks, a dissatisfaction with he-said, she-said journalism nagged at him. *We need to tell people what’s true and what’s not*, he thought. In 2003, FactCheck.org launched, debuting the concept of a journalistic organization that specializes in reporting on the veracity of what politicians say. One fact-check organization could not begin to cover the territory, Adair believed, and so in 2007 he persuaded the paper to join the fray with PolitiFact, which he led until 2013. “What I loved about [FactCheck.org] was that it reached a conclusion,” Adair told me. “That was my pitch for PolitiFact—that we need to call the balls and strikes.” Today PolitiFact is operated by the Poynter Institute,

and it has lots of company. Organizations devoted to fact-checking have sprung up around the world; as of 2018, more than 150 were operating, in more than 50 countries. Most are staffed by journalists who follow protocols developed by the International Fact-Checking Network (which Adair co-founded). Unsurprisingly, activists, especially on the right, complain that the fact-checkers are biased. But reputable organizations show their work, cite their sources, pledge nonpartisanship, and disclose their funding, ensuring a degree of transparency that distinguishes them from propagandists and fakers.

By 2013, when Adair accepted his journalism professorship at Duke, fact-checking had come into its own, but a frustrating bottleneck remained. The problem, as Adair saw it, is that people have to go looking for fact-checks, typically after a false claim has already entered general circulation. Also, although a lot of people read articles from fact-checking websites (about one in four Americans during the run-up to the 2016 election, according to research by Nyhan, Andrew Guess, and Jason Reifler), they tend not to be the same people who visit sketchy web-

Politicians are by far the biggest shapers of opinion and spreaders of bullshit.

sites and repeat misinformation. “What we need to do is close the gap in time and space so people get the fact-check at the moment they get the political claim,” Adair said. That should be possible, because politicians repeat their lines. “So the fact-check published a month ago is just as valuable today. The key is finding the match.”

As recently as 2015, Adair and six colleagues published a paper describing real-time, automated fact-checking as a “holy grail” that “may remain far beyond our reach for many, many years to come.” Since then, however, software’s ability to translate speech to text has improved, as has its ability to parse written text and to tell when different words refer to the same idea. Ditto scouring content

for checkable claims. Exploiting those developments, the Duke Reporters' Lab—which Adair leads—created, among other automated gizmos, a bot that monitors politicians' statements on Twitter and CNN and in the *Congressional Record*; when it finds new claims, it emails them to fact-checkers.

The hardest step, though, has been to develop an algorithm that can match a claim, new or old, with an existing fact-check. But when Adair put some Duke undergraduates to work on the task last summer, they made quick progress. Which is how they came to think that they might have a shot at robotically checking the biggest presidential speech of all, in real time.

ON FEBRUARY 5, when Adair and his team gathered in his office for the State of the Union address, they had little more idea of what to expect than I did. Their software was crude and barely tested, the last pieces of it having been slapped together with only hours to spare. Monitoring from my kitchen table in Washington, D.C., I grew uneasy as the first minutes of Trump's speech ticked by and no fact-checks appeared on the screen. Finally, about five minutes in, the first one popped up. It was laughably off-target, bearing no relationship to what the president was saying. Several more misses followed. But then came several that were in the ballpark. And then, after about half an hour: bull's-eye.

The president said, "In the last two years, our brave ICE officers made 266,000 arrests of criminal aliens, including those charged or convicted of nearly 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 killings or murders." It was a claim he had made before, in similar words, and the software recognized it. As Trump spoke, a chyron appeared quoting a prior version of the claim. Alongside, this verdict: "Inflates the numbers."

A few minutes later, a second bull's-eye. Trump: "The border city of El Paso, Texas, used to have extremely high rates of violent crime, one of the highest in the entire country, and [was] considered one of our nation's most dangerous cities. Now, immediately upon its building, with a powerful barrier in place, El Paso is one of the safest cities in our country." Beneath his image appeared, again, a prior version of the claim, plus: "Conclusion: false."

Squash's performance exceeded Adair's expectations and impressed me, but it is still nowhere near ready for prime time. Before the public sees robo-checking, the software needs to become more sophisticated, the database of fact-checks needs to grow larger, and information providers need to adopt and refine the concept. Still, live, automated fact-checking is now demonstrably possible. In principle, it could be applied by web browsers, YouTube, cable TV, and even old-fashioned broadcast TV. Checker bots could also prowl the places where trollbots go and stay just a few seconds behind them. Imagine setting your browser to enable pop-ups that provide evaluations, context, additional information—all at the moment when your brain first encounters a new factual or pseudo-factual morsel.

Of course, outrage addicts and trolls and hyper-partisans will continue to seek out fake news and conspiracy theories, and some of them will dismiss the whole idea of fact-checking as spurious. The disinformation industry will try to trick and evade the checkers. Charlatans will continue to say whatever they please, foreign meddlers will continue trying to flood the information space with junk, and hackers of our brains will continue to innovate. The age-old race between disinformation and truth will continue. But disinfotech will never again have the field to itself. Little by little, yet faster than you might expect, digital technology is learning to tell the truth. **A**

Jonathan Rauch is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

• VERY SHORT BOOK EXCERPT

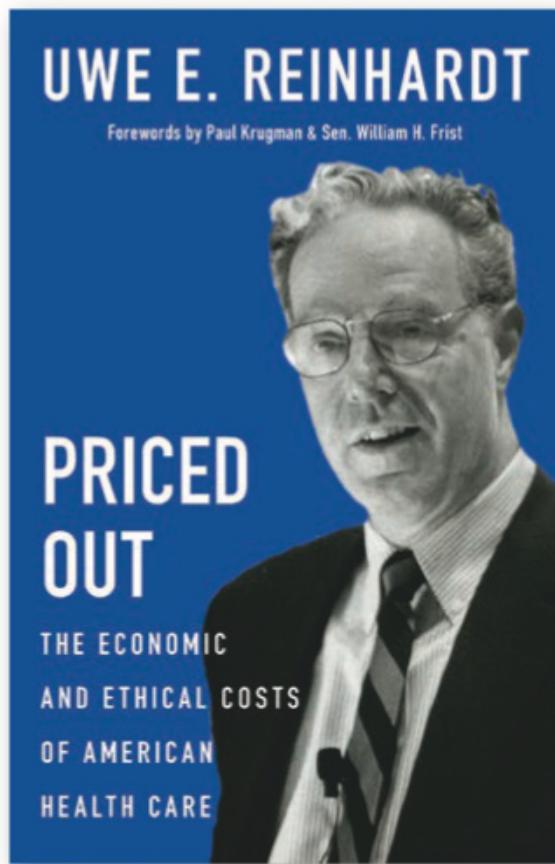
The Killer Comet



• Adapted from *Earth-Shattering: Violent Supernovas, Galactic Explosions, Biological Mayhem, Nuclear Meltdowns, and Other Hazards to Life in Our Universe*, by Bob Berman, published by Little, Brown in February

WHEN HALLEY'S COMET visited in 1910, it was not well received. That's because, with the help of the spectroscope, chemists and physicists had recently discovered cyanogen in comet tails. There was now a chemical explanation for their green color, and it seemed deeply ominous: Cyanide (one of the components of cyanogen) had recently surpassed arsenic in reputation as the deadliest of all poisons. The news that the Earth would brush through the comet's outer tail on the night of May 18, 1910, was enough to rouse concern that the atmosphere would be poisoned.

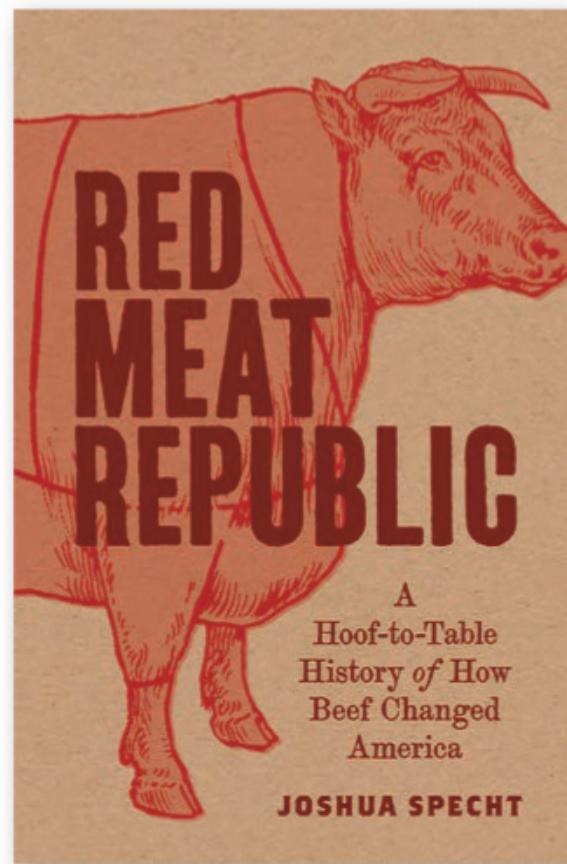
Astronomers tried to reassure the public that a comet tail was so skimpy and rarefied, no one would even notice when it met the Earth's far thicker atmosphere. Tabloids nonetheless proclaimed a coming cataclysm: It would be the death of all earthly life. The public's reaction was an uncanny mixture of panic and celebration as the date approached. Tonics and "comet pills" that would supposedly protect against the cyanide were peddled widely. Many people took to storm cellars or sealed off their homes, shutting the flues in chimneys, stuffing cloth into door cracks, and trying not to breathe too deeply. Others went out to pubs and dances and partied the night away, having decided to spend their final hours in the merry company of friends and strangers. The apocalypse, of course, didn't happen—although some believed that the comet was related to the outbreak of the Great War four years later.



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—David Blumenthal, MD, President,
The Commonwealth Fund

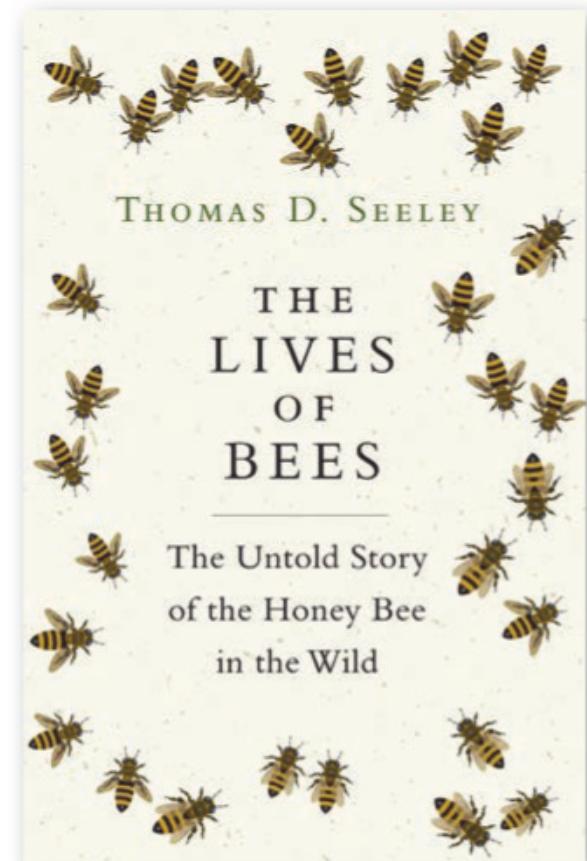
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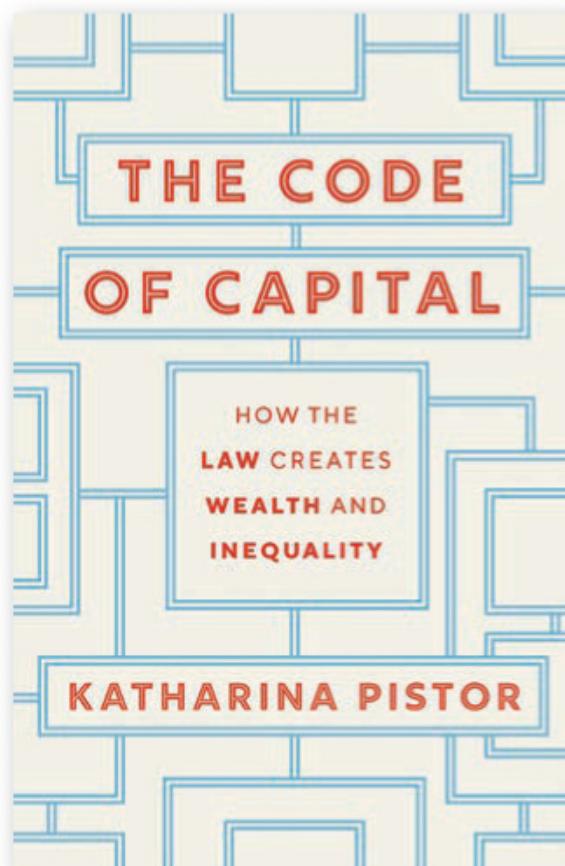
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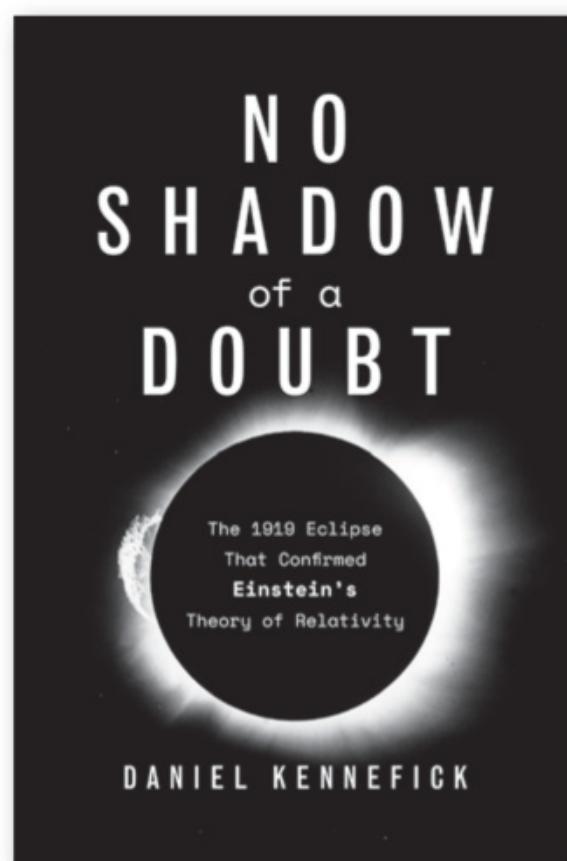
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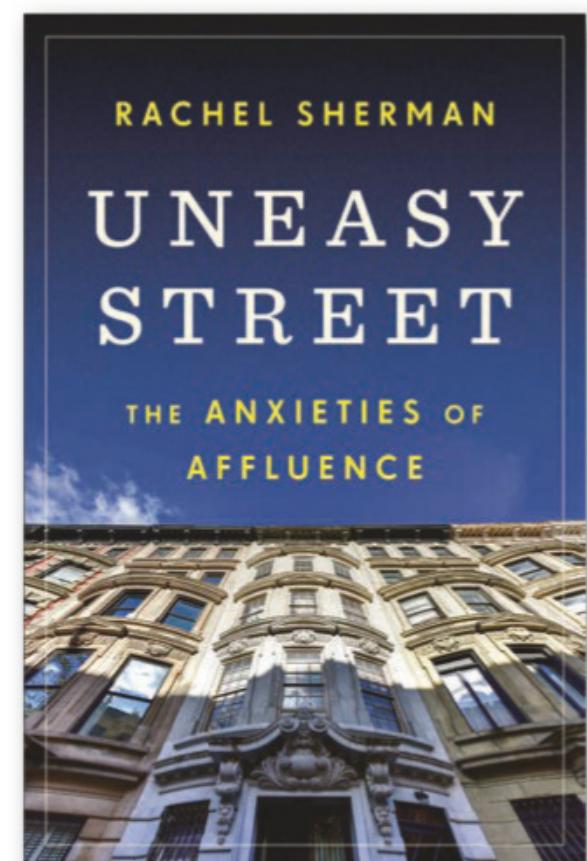
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—Simon Kuper, *Financial Times*

Paper \$17.95

Young's eyes convulse in their sockets. "President."

Now it's Desus's turn to have a small stroke.

"Of America?!"

Outside this studio, O'Rourke might be the darling of progressive elites, but in here, he's just another white guy tap-dancing for votes. Desus circles back to Sanders and asks whether he's older than Trump. "By, like, 18 decades," Mero cracks. Young does a quick Google search: "He's 77." "Wow," Desus says, his eyes wide. "When do people die nowadays? Damn." Mero starts giggling and rocking back and forth. His laugh sounds like a jug of water tipping over, and when Desus is next to him, it rarely stops. Desus, meanwhile, just grins like a villain.

All of this back-and-forth gives the audience ample time to consider Desus's sneakers. For about 30 percent of viewers, his footwear is the episode's biggest reveal; the identity of the guest—today, Ben Stiller—is a distant second. Desus feels a particular responsibility to delight deep-cut fans, the ones who have followed him and Mero from their first podcast for *Complex*, the street-style magazine and sneaker bible, through their stint on MTV2, through Viceland, all the way here. You've got to give the people what they want. You've got to give them what Desus and Mero's longtime manager, Victor Lopez, calls "a statement piece."

Today, Desus is rocking a pair of sky-blue Nike x Tom Sachs Mars Yard Over-shoes, a very limited release that retailed for about \$500—if you knew they existed in time to buy them at that price, which

Their audience is growing to include some white viewers who treat the show as a wokeness crash course—"a hood safari."

Right now, Desus and Mero are not just making each other laugh, but also waiting. The camera crew needs a few more minutes, so they kill time by serving as their own warm-up act for the studio audience. From a table just off camera, Julia Young, one of their producers, lobs topics that are in the news—the college-admissions bribery scandal, the 2020 presidential campaign, Jussie Smollett, the supposed "Jexodus"—and then watches, with a mixture of delight and dread, to see what will follow. A year ago, Desus and Mero were doing a version of this show four nights a week on Viceland, where they were limited to five *fucks* an episode. But Showtime is premium cable, with no advertisers to worry about; they've already aired a gleefully scatological ode to a very specific sex act, accompanied on piano by John Legend.

Desus asks for a recap of who's running for president so far, and Young starts rattling off names, pausing after each one to give the guys time to riff: Elizabeth Warren. Amy Klobuchar. Bernie Sanders. Kamala Harris. Kirsten Gillibrand, who is an actual, real-life *Desus & Mero* fan and, as it happens, next week's guest. Oh, and Beto O'Rourke.

Desus looks puzzled. "What is Beto running for?"

most people didn't. The Mars Yard Over-shoes are enormous, with red snowboard-style buckles and a billowy, waterproof white drawstring ruffle at the top. They are a statement piece for sure, one that seems to have begun with a question: *What if an anorak was a shoe?*

• SKETCH

DESUS AND MERO BEYOND THE BRONX

Can the stars of the hit podcast *Bodega Boys* subvert late-night TV?

BY DEVIN GORDON

D

ESUS AND MERO are sitting and talking and making each other laugh. This is what they do, for hours on end, for growing audiences and rapidly increasing sums of money. The rooms change, the chairs change, but the basic idea remains. They sit. They talk. They laugh. They also drink: Desus takes slugs from a beer that's been relabeled D+M, while Mero keeps a bottle of rum between his feet. This Thursday morning, Desus (a.k.a. Desus Nice, a.k.a. Daniel Baker) and Mero (a.k.a. The Kid Mero, a.k.a. Joel Martinez) are taping their new weekly Showtime series at a Manhattan TV studio that has been designed to look like a TV studio dropped onto a street corner in the Bronx, which is where they are from. The walls are graffitied. There's a subway-etiquette poster, like the real ones New Yorkers see every day, only this one urges passengers not to blast music "unless that shit slaps." Guests enter through a fake bodega storefront.

At least 15 minutes pass as Desus and Mero kvetch about the recent trade that shipped the New York Giants' star wide receiver, Odell Beckham Jr., to Cleveland. "Gimme a guy that plays the right way," Mero jokes. "Enough with all these touchdowns." On it goes, just like always, to the point where a ripple of confusion begins to spread through the audience. *Wait—is this the show? Have they already started rolling? Do I need to put my phone away?*

Just when it seems clear that this must, in fact, be the show, the stage manager calls out, "Okay, are we ready?" She fixes Desus and Mero with a hard stare and explains that she's going to do a silent countdown from five. "Do not start talking until I do this," she says, waving her index finger past the camera lens by way of demonstration.

And then, finally, for a brief *five-four-three-two-one*, Desus and Mero are silent.

IT'S FRIDAY, and Desus and Mero are sitting and talking and making each other laugh. Yesterday was the Showtime series, and today is the *Bodega Boys* podcast—their long-running chat-a-thon, just Desus and Mero and two hot mics—which they record in a dim basement grotto at Milk Studios in Chelsea. The contrast with yesterday's surroundings offers a tidy shorthand for the decline in respectability as they shift from TV to podcast. *Desus & Mero* tapes in the same building as *CBS Sunday Morning*. The room where they record *Bodega Boys* looks like a heroin den and smells lightly of stale blunts. The walls are covered with old magazine clippings of topless fashion models. The ceiling, too. An 8-foot-tall stuffed dog sits in the corner, slumped and dead in the eyes, like an enormous, strung-out Snoopy. The sun seems very far away.

Today is a big day in the *Bodega Boys* corner of the D+M multiverse, and they are eager to get to it: the anniversary of what has come to be known as "The DJ Envy Ambush." DJ Envy is a co-host of *The Breakfast Club* on Power 105.1 FM, one of New York City's biggest hip-hop stations; a year ago today, Desus and Mero stopped by the show to promote a comedy tour. Envy can get a little salty, and on this occasion he was fuming because at some earlier juncture, Desus had made a wisecrack about his wife. So Envy came out swinging, introducing the pair with epithets, the more polite of which was *dickhead*. As the cameras rolled (*The Breakfast Club* also airs on YouTube), Desus and Mero gritted their teeth, made jokes, and tried to calmly continue the interview. This seemed to only enrage Envy more, so much so that he walked off the set, leaving Desus



and Mero with no choice but to roast his empty chair.

If jokes about Beto O'Rourke and visits from Ben Stiller are the domain of *Desus & Mero*, the DJ Envy Ambush is pure *Bodega Boys*—hyper-local and hyper-viral. The podcast is where they can keep speaking to listeners in the neighborhood, even as their TV audience expands to include older and whiter people who mistake the X-shaped arm gesture they're always making—a shout-out to the Bronx—for the one that means “Wakanda forever.”

When Desus and Mero made the decision to leap from Viceland, where they'd been for nearly two years, Showtime promised not to tinker too much with the formula. Desus compares the choice to that of baseball free agents such as Manny Machado and Bryce Harper, who recently signed big contracts with new teams. The only difference, he says, “is we went somewhere nice.” Gary Levine, Showtime's president of entertainment, told me that the network hadn't necessarily been in the market for a late-night show, but Desus's and Mero's names kept coming up. “We want shows that are entertaining,” he said, “but also subversive.”

The prospect of a large corporation (like CBS, Showtime's parent company) hiring subversive talent (like Desus and Mero) is always tantalizing, though not necessarily in the way the large corporation might hope. This particular week, the biggest story in America is the college-admissions scandal that ensnared, among many others, the actress Felicity Huffman, whose husband, William H. Macy, is a star of *Shameless*, the longest-running series on ... Showtime! There is practically no chance Desus and Mero will avoid either the subject—it was a parade of white privilege—or the awkward coincidence. And they don't.

“This is very exciting for me,” Mero announced during the TV taping, bouncing in his seat. “A bunch of rich white people got arrested!” They rolled a clip of Huffman, and at the mention of Macy's name, Mero yelled, “SHOWTIME *yaaaaah!*,” while Desus, with mock indignation, insisted that their own hands were clean. That other Showtime series, he assured the world, “has no relation with us.”

Desus and Mero are well aware that as their audience swells, it will include some white viewers who watch the show less

for comic relief than for a crash course in wokeness. Or “a hood safari,” to use Desus's phrase. The dynamic also works in reverse, though: *Desus & Mero* is a sort of cultural Trojan horse, using laughs to slip past the gatekeepers, then, once inside, taking over the joint. Somehow they manage to clown a chunk of their audience and enlighten it at the same time. Take me, for instance: I'm a 40-ish white dad who doesn't need to watch *Desus & Mero* to know what *deadass* means, but I've picked up some pointers about how to use it in a sentence. Not that I would ever try.

This can be a fraught dynamic, of course. In the years since his heyday on Comedy Central, Dave Chappelle has talked about feeling eaten alive by the fear that he was helping white people laugh at black people. But Desus and Mero don't see it quite like that. “The thing of the show is, it should never feel like you're watching us,” Desus explains to me. “What we want you to feel like is you're in the middle.”

“You're participating along with us,” Mero adds.

“A lot of times people watch this show and immediately hate it,” Desus says. “They're like, ‘You talk too fast,’ ‘I don't get any references,’ whatever. But you stick with it—all the time we have people who hated it and now they love it.”

Comedians tend to have more demons than the average person, and Desus and Mero, who are 37 and 35, respectively, have had to work through their share. They grew up a few miles apart—Desus in the Wakefield section of the Bronx, Mero in Kingsbridge, then Throgs Neck—and met in summer school, but didn't become good friends until years later, when Twitter brought them together. Desus, the son of Jamaican immigrants, worked all kinds of lousy jobs in his late teens and 20s, including tech support for a pornography website, which required him to learn, in exhaustive detail, which types of sexual imagery were illegal in which countries. Mero, whose family is Dominican, absorbed his father's cynicism about life in the Bronx in the 1970s and '80s: “He was always very anti-establishment. I almost wanna say anti-America. He was

just mad at the country, and I was like, ‘Why are you so mad at this place?’ And then he broke it down for me.” Mero took the lessons to heart, and after brief stints at Hunter College, in the mail room and IT department at Lehman Brothers, and as a special-education teacher—the one job he actually liked—he started behaving badly.

“I was fucking wild,” Mero tells me at one point. “I was just kind of like, ‘I want instant gratification—I wanna get high now, and I wanna get laid now.’ I can get a

If candidates wander on set with no idea what they are signing up for, they could end up getting pantsed on national TV.

job, work 12 hours a day, wait until Friday for a check, or I can just go to Connecticut, hit 10 CVSes, steal all the hydroxyzine they have—” Desus cuts him off: “Okay, you're being very specific right now.” Mero dissolves into a giggle fit: “Operation Shoplift! We got him!”

Today's episode of *Bodega Boys* goes on for more than an hour and a half. Somehow they manage to get laughs out of a conversation that begins with the Boeing plane crash in Ethiopia. Many things are said that cannot be printed in this magazine, or any other, and that might make even Showtime blanch. In fact, Desus and Mero splinter off in so many directions that they never once mention the DJ Envy Ambush.

DEUS AND MERO have just finished taping their podcast, and they are sitting and talking and making each other laugh. They are also pondering the clout they've suddenly accumulated. Their first guest on Showtime was Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who represents the eastern part of the Bronx in Congress and whose easy mastery of its vernacular only underscored the desperation of Republican attacks on her authenticity.

Gillibrand, who appeared the week after my visit, won over Desus and Mero by being equally true to her own roots, which are in rural upstate New York. It

didn't matter that she's not from the Bronx; what mattered was that she didn't pretend to be. She didn't pander. She was herself. "It looks like she's just hanging with two people," Desus says. "And that's what we're going for."

Already, the Showtime series is beginning to play a king/queenmaker role among Democratic hopefuls, similar to the one played by Rachel Maddow's show on MSNBC; as of this writing, Cory Booker is up next. Desus and Mero are giddy about these appearances. They know that if a candidate wanders on set with no idea what she or he is signing up for, that person could end up getting pantsed on national TV.

"We're gonna be very up front," Mero says. "We'll be like, 'Yo, fam, watch the show before you come up here.' Because you're not gonna be able to come up here and be like, 'Don't ask me about this.' Say you come on this show, like, 'Oh, I wanna reach out to Millennials'?"

Desus jumps in and finishes the thought: "You might look like a complete asshole."

Sitting side by side in a pair of bucket seats ripped out of a scrapped car and planted beside a coffee table, they take turns answering what seems like a natural question: *Don't you ever get tired of talking to each other?*

Mero tilts his head as if he's trying to think, but he comes up empty. He shakes his head. *Nope. Never.* Once, during a gig in Boston, they went on so long that the theater owner had to intervene. "He was on the stage flashing a flashlight," Desus says. "He was like, 'You have to get the fuck off the stage. These people have homes. They wanna go home.'" Now many of their contracts for live gigs include a stipulation fining them if they go on too long. "It's the only way we'll get offstage," he explains, adding that their friendship has but one logical endpoint: "We're gonna get fused together."

"Just one big DXL suit," Mero jumps in, giggling.

"I don't know how your wife is gonna feel about my sex life, though," Desus says, dragging things into his favorite gutter. "I gotta put the sheet up."

And if the fusing doesn't take?

"Write this down," Desus says. "Both of us are gonna host *The Price Is Right*." 

Devin Gordon is a writer based in New York City.

• STUDY OF STUDIES

Hell Is Other People's Vacations

Getting away may be good for your soul—but is it good for everyone else?

BY BEN HEALY

If you feel like you need a vacation, you're almost certainly right. Americans get far fewer paid days off than workers in pretty much any other industrialized democracy, and the time we actually take off has declined significantly, from 20.3 days in 1987 to 17.2 days in 2017. **[1]**

Beyond souvenirs and suntans, the best reason to take a break may be your own health. For the Helsinki Businessmen Study—a 40-year cardiovascular-health study that also happens to be the working title of the solo album I'll probably never get around to recording—researchers treated men at risk of heart disease. From 1974 to 2004, those men who took at least three weeks of vacation were 37 percent less likely to die than those who took fewer weeks off. **[2]**

Even if we don't view time off as a matter of life and death, people who take more of their allotted vacation time tend to find their work more meaningful. **[3]** Vacation can yield other benefits, too: People who took all or most of their paid vacation time to travel were more likely than others to report a recent

raise or bonus. **[4]** And time not taken depresses more than individual career prospects: In 2017, the average U.S. worker left six paid vacation days unused, which works out to 705 million days of travel nationally, enough to support 1.9 million travel-related jobs. **[5]**

From longevity to career growth to macroeconomic feats of strength, the case for vacation seems open-and-shut. Yet the picture's not entirely rosy. Tourism's carbon footprint grew four times as much as expected from 2009 to 2013, and accounted for 8 percent of all greenhouse-gas emissions in that period. **[6]** What's more, the travel industry is expected to consume 92 percent more water in 2050 than it did in 2010, and



189 percent more land. **[7]**

In other environmental news, people are less likely to recycle while on vacation (both because they're unsure how to, and because getting away with things seems to be a key part of getting away from it all). **[8]**

The frisson of pitching plastic is not the only thrill tempting travelers. Interviews with tourists returning from various international destinations revealed that they used more drugs while on vacation than in everyday life. **[9]** Other studies have found that people are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior while traveling. **[10, 11]** We eat with abandon, too: On vacations of one to three weeks, tourists gain an average of 0.7 pounds, a significant portion of average annual weight gain. **[12]** Finally, a 2015 study found that "travel and leisure" provoked envy—perhaps the single most toxic substance known to man—more than any other attribute examined (including "relationship and family," "appearance," and "money and material possessions"). The effect may be especially acute on social media: 62 percent of people who described Facebook-induced bouts of jealousy said they'd been triggered by travel or leisure experiences—versus less than a quarter of people whose envy had been piqued in person. **[13]**

So for your own health and sanity, book that vacation. But for everyone else's, please travel as sustainably as you can, and take it easy with the Instagram. 

THE STUDIES:

- [1, 4, 5]** U.S. Travel Association, "The State of American Vacation 2018"
[2] Strandberg et al., "Increased Mortality Despite Successful Multifactorial Cardiovascular Risk Reduction in Healthy Men" (*The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*, Oct. 2018)

- [3]** West et al., "Taking Vacation Increases Meaning at Work" (NA—*Advances in Consumer Research*, 2017)
[6] Lenzen et al., "The Carbon Footprint of Global Tourism" (*Nature Climate Change*, June 2018)
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[12] Cooper and Tokar, "A Prospective Study on Vacation Weight Gain in Adults" (*Physiology & Behavior*, March 2016)
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• BUSINESS

THE PECULIAR BLINDNESS OF EXPERTS

Credentialed authorities are comically bad at predicting the future. But reliable forecasting is possible.

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

T

HE BET WAS ON, and it was over the fate of humanity. On one side was the Stanford biologist Paul R. Ehrlich. In his 1968 best seller, *The Population*

Bomb, Ehrlich insisted that it was too late to prevent a doomsday apocalypse resulting from overpopulation. Resource shortages would cause hundreds of millions of starvation deaths within a decade. It was cold, hard math: The human population was growing exponentially; the food supply was not. Ehrlich was an accomplished butterfly specialist. He knew that nature did not regulate animal populations delicately. Populations exploded, blowing past the available resources, and then crashed.

In his book, Ehrlich played out hypothetical scenarios that represented “the

kinds of disasters that *will* occur.” In the worst-case scenario, famine rages across the planet. Russia, China, and the United States are dragged into nuclear war, and the resulting environmental degradation soon extinguishes the human race. In the “cheerful” scenario, population controls begin. Famine spreads, and countries teeter, but the major death wave ends in the mid-1980s. Only half a billion or so people die of starvation. “I challenge you to create one more optimistic,” Ehrlich wrote, adding that he would not count scenarios involving benevolent aliens bearing care packages.

The economist Julian Simon took up Ehrlich’s challenge. Technology—water-control techniques, hybridized seeds, management strategies—had revolutionized agriculture, and global crop yields were increasing. To Simon, more people meant more good ideas about how to achieve a sustainable future. So he proposed a wager. Ehrlich could choose five metals that he expected to become more expensive as resources were depleted and chaos ensued over the next decade. Both men agreed that commodity prices were a fine proxy for the effects of population growth, and they set the stakes at \$1,000 worth of Ehrlich’s five metals. If, 10 years hence,

prices had gone down, Ehrlich would have to pay the difference in value to Simon. If prices went up, Simon would be on the hook for the difference. The bet was made official in 1980.

In October 1990, Simon found a check for \$576.07 in his mailbox. Ehrlich got smoked. The price of every one of the metals had declined. In the 1960s, 50 out of every 100,000 global citizens died annually from famine; by the 1990s, that number was 2.6.

Ehrlich's starvation predictions were almost comically bad. And yet, the very same year he conceded the bet, Ehrlich doubled down in another book, with another prediction that would prove untrue: Sure, his timeline had been a little off, he wrote, but "now the population bomb has detonated." Despite one erroneous prediction after another, Ehrlich amassed an enormous following and received prestigious awards. Simon, meanwhile, became a standard-bearer for scholars who felt that Ehrlich had ignored economic principles. The kind of excessive regulations Ehrlich advocated, the Simon camp argued, would quell the very innovation that had delivered humanity from catastrophe. Both men became luminaries in their respective domains. Both were mistaken.

When economists later examined metal prices for every 10-year window from 1900 to 2008, during which time the world population quadrupled, they saw that Ehrlich would have won the bet 62 percent of the time. The catch: Commodity prices are a poor gauge of population effects, particularly over a single decade. The variable that both men were certain would vindicate their worldviews actually had little to do with those views. Prices waxed and waned with macroeconomic cycles.

Yet both men dug in. Each declared his faith in science and the undisputed primacy of facts. And each continued to miss the value of the other's ideas. Ehrlich was wrong about the apocalypse, but right on aspects of environmental degradation. Simon was right about the influence of human ingenuity on food and energy supplies, but wrong in claiming that improvements in air and water quality validated his theories. Ironically, those improvements were bolstered through regulations pressed by Ehrlich and others.

Ideally, intellectual sparring partners "hone each other's arguments so that they are sharper and better," the Yale historian Paul Sabin wrote in *The Bet*. "The opposite happened with Paul Ehrlich and Julian Simon." As each man amassed more information for his own view, each became more dogmatic, and the inadequacies in his model of the world grew ever more stark.

The pattern is by now familiar. In the 30 years since Ehrlich sent Simon a check, the track record of expert forecasters—in science, in economics, in politics—is as dismal as ever. In business, esteemed (and lavishly compensated) forecasters routinely are wildly wrong in their predictions of everything from the next stock-market correction to the next housing boom. Reliable insight into the future is possible, however. It just requires a style of thinking that's uncommon among experts who are certain that their deep knowledge has granted them a special grasp of what is to come.

THE IDEA FOR the most important study ever conducted of expert predictions was sparked in 1984, at a meeting of a National Research Council committee on American-Soviet relations. The psychologist and political scientist Philip E. Tetlock was 30 years old, by far the most junior committee member. He listened intently as other members discussed Soviet intentions and American policies. Renowned experts delivered authoritative predictions, and Tetlock was struck by how many perfectly contradicted one another and were impervious to counterarguments.

Tetlock decided to put expert political and economic predictions to the test. With the Cold War in full swing, he collected forecasts from 284 highly educated experts who averaged more than 12 years of experience in their specialties. To ensure that the predictions were concrete, experts had to give specific probabilities of future events. Tetlock had to collect enough predictions that he could separate lucky and unlucky streaks from true skill. The project lasted 20 years, and comprised 82,361 probability estimates about the future.

The result: The experts were, by and large, horrific forecasters. Their areas of specialty, years of experience, and (for some) access to classified information made no difference. They were bad at short-term forecasting and bad at long-term forecasting. They were bad at forecasting in every domain. When experts declared that future events were impossible or nearly impossible, 15 percent of them occurred nonetheless. When they declared events to be a sure thing, more than one-quarter of them failed to transpire. As the Danish proverb warns, "It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future."

Even faced with their results, many experts never admitted systematic flaws in their judgment. When they missed wildly, it was a near miss; if just one little thing had gone differently, they would have nailed it. "There is often a curiously inverse relationship," Tetlock concluded, "between how well forecasters thought they were doing and how well they did."

Early predictions in Tetlock's research pertained to the future of the Soviet Union. Some experts (usually liberals) saw Mikhail Gorbachev as an earnest reformer who would be able to change the Soviet Union and keep it intact for

Insight into the future requires a style of thinking uncommon among experts.

a while, and other experts (usually conservatives) felt that the Soviet Union was immune to reform and losing legitimacy. Both sides were partly right and partly wrong. Gorbachev did bring real reform, opening the Soviet Union to the world and empowering citizens. But those reforms unleashed pent-up forces in the republics outside Russia, where the system had lost legitimacy. The forces blew the Soviet Union apart. Both camps of experts were blindsided by the swift demise of the U.S.S.R.

One subgroup of scholars, however, did manage to see more of what was coming. Unlike Ehrlich and Simon, they were not vested in a single discipline.

They took from each argument and integrated apparently contradictory worldviews. They agreed that Gorbachev was a real reformer *and* that the Soviet Union had lost legitimacy outside Russia. A few of those integrators saw that the end of the Soviet Union was close at hand and that real reforms would be the catalyst.

The integrators outperformed their colleagues in pretty much every way, but especially trounced them on long-term predictions. Eventually, Tetlock bestowed nicknames (borrowed from the philosopher Isaiah Berlin) on the experts he'd observed: The highly specialized hedgehogs knew "one big thing," while the integrator foxes knew "many little things."

Hedgehogs are deeply and tightly focused. Some have spent their career studying one problem. Like Ehrlich and Simon, they fashion tidy theories of how the world works based on observations through the single lens of their specialty. Foxes, meanwhile, "draw from an eclectic array of traditions, and accept ambiguity and contradiction," Tetlock wrote. Where hedgehogs represent narrowness, foxes embody breadth.

Incredibly, the hedgehogs performed especially poorly on long-term predictions within their specialty. They got worse as they accumulated experience and credentials in their field. The more information they had to work with, the more easily they could fit any story into their worldview.

Unfortunately, the world's most prominent specialists are rarely held accountable for their predictions, so we continue to rely on them even when their track records make clear that we should not. One study compiled a decade of annual dollar-to-euro exchange-rate predictions made by 22 international banks: Barclays, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, and others. Each year, every bank predicted the end-of-year exchange rate. The banks missed every single change of direction in the exchange rate. In six of the 10 years, the true exchange rate fell outside the *entire range* of all 22 bank forecasts.

IN 2005, TETLOCK published his results, and they caught the attention of the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity, or IARPA, a

government organization that supports research on the U.S. intelligence community's most difficult challenges. In 2011, IARPA launched a four-year prediction tournament in which five researcher-led teams competed. Each team could recruit, train, and experiment however it saw fit. Predictions were due at 9 a.m. every day. The questions were hard: *Will a European Union member withdraw by a target date? Will the Nikkei close above 9,500?*

Tetlock, along with his wife and collaborator, the psychologist Barbara Mellers, ran a team named the Good Judgment Project. Rather than recruit decorated experts, they issued an open call for volunteers. After a simple screening, they invited 3,200 people to start forecasting. Among those, they identified a small group of the foxiest forecasters—bright people with extremely wide-ranging interests and unusually expansive reading habits, but no particular relevant background—and weighted team forecasts toward their predictions. They destroyed the competition.

Tetlock and Mellers found that not only were the best forecasters foxy as individuals, but they tended to have qualities that made them particularly effective collaborators. They were "curious about, well, really everything," as one of the top forecasters told me. They crossed disciplines, and viewed their teammates as sources for learning, rather than peers to be convinced. When

those foxes were later grouped into much smaller teams—12 members each—they became even more accurate. They outperformed—by a lot—a group of experienced intelligence analysts with access to classified data.

One forecast discussion involved a team trying to predict the highest single-day close for the exchange rate between the Ukrainian hryvnia and the U.S. dollar during an extremely volatile stretch in 2014. Would the rate be less than 10 hryvnia to a dollar, between 10 and 13, or more than 13? The discussion started with a team member offering percentages for each possibility, and sharing an *Economist* article. Another team member chimed in with historical data he'd found online, a Bloomberg link, and a

bet that the rate would land between 10 and 13. A third teammate was convinced by the second's argument. A fourth shared information about the dire state of Ukrainian finances, which he feared would devalue the hryvnia. A fifth noted that the United Nations Security Council was considering sending peacekeepers to the region, which he believed would buoy the currency.

Two days later, a team member with experience in finance saw that the hryvnia was strengthening amid events he'd thought would surely weaken it. He informed his teammates that this was exactly the opposite of what he'd expected, and that they should take it as a sign of something wrong in his understanding. (Tetlock told me that, when making an argument, foxes often use the word *however*, while hedgehogs favor *moreover*.) The team members finally homed in on "between 10 and 13" as the heavy favorite, and they were correct.

In Tetlock's 20-year study, both the broad foxes and the narrow hedgehogs were quick to let a successful prediction reinforce their beliefs. But when an

In one exercise, generalists outperformed—by a lot—a group of experienced intelligence analysts with access to classified data.

outcome took them by surprise, foxes were much more likely to adjust their ideas. Hedgehogs barely budged. Some made authoritative predictions that turned out to be wildly wrong—then updated their theories *in the wrong direction*. They became even more convinced of the original beliefs that had led them astray. The best forecasters, by contrast, view their own ideas as hypotheses in need of testing. If they make a bet and lose, they embrace the logic of a loss just as they would the reinforcement of a win. This is called, in a word, *learning*. **A**

David Epstein is the author of Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World, from which this article is adapted.

• TECHNOLOGY

HOW I HACKED FACEBOOK

Algorithms have made the social network predictable and dreary. My quest to make it random and fun.

BY JOE PINSKER

FACEBOOK IS OFTEN sarcastically described as a platform for sharing baby pictures. When I log in, I do see some of those—but many of the babies in my feed are baby rats.

The story of how these hairless pups started populating my News Feed began when a friend told me about a Facebook group—a lively forum for discussing baby names—that had captivated her. I joined too, and soon afterward my timeline was peppered with requests for “a strong Irish name” or “a name similar to Everly which we unfortunately can’t use.”

I’m not currently in the market for a baby name, but the novelty was welcome. So I sought out more: I joined groups or liked pages for wine lovers, slow runners, appreciators of dinosaurs, southeastern-Michigan snow obsessives. Eventually, I found Everything Rat Breeding.

Before I started this experiment in joinerism, using Facebook felt like watching an algorithmically conducted parade of the lifestyles, accomplishments, and worldviews of my peers. The experience seemed calculated to produce envy and insecurity. But the pictures of dinosaur fossils and reviews of wines with “masculine fruit” transformed that procession into a bizarre and occasionally delightful show, affording me glimpses of all the things there are to care about beyond what pre-occupies my particular social circle.

I liked the variety; it made browsing feel less competitive. And witnessing strangers go on about some mundane subject that mattered deeply to them was oddly engrossing. The new occupants of my News Feed were giving

me a break from personalization that I didn’t know I needed.

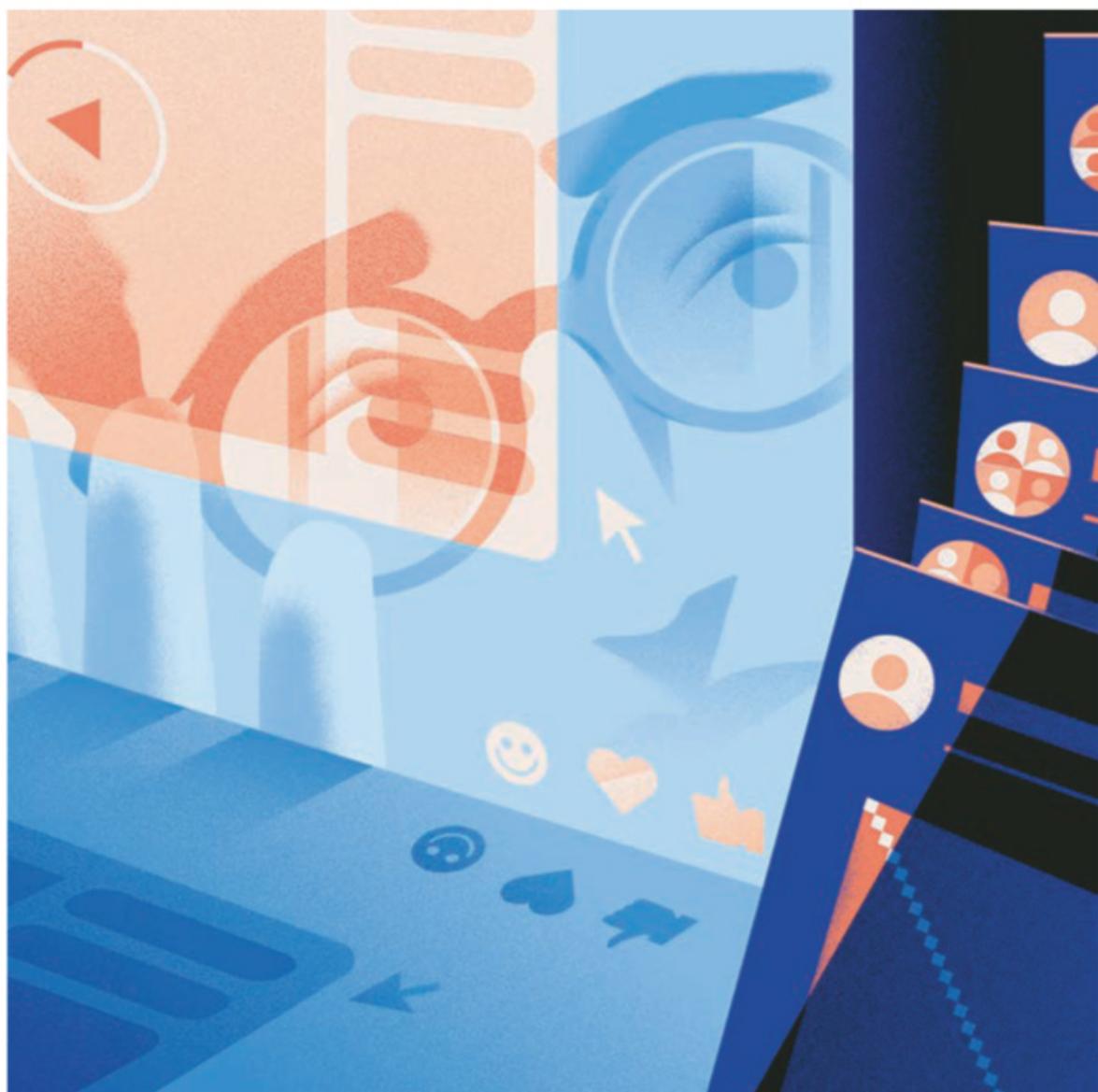
According to Ethan Zuckerman, the director of MIT’s Center for Civic Media, most of today’s social networks are predicated on bringing people’s offline relationships online. And since offline networks are shaped by homophily—people’s tendency to cluster with others who are like them—social networks, too,

tend to surround users with the types of people they already know. Homophily is an ancient human instinct, but Facebook’s algorithm reinforces it with industrial efficiency.

What I was trying to do, then, was stop Facebook from doing what it is inherently good at, and hack it to give me the reverse: serendipity, surprise, heterophily. Soon I started to wonder: Were there other, better ways to do this?

THROWING THE ALGORITHM off my scent got easier when I enlisted the help of other algorithms. I did this with a tool called Noisify, which populates one’s Facebook search bar with random words. Cathy Deng, a programmer in San Francisco, built Noisify after the 2016 election, when people she knew seemed obsessed with political “filter bubbles.” “It feels very limiting to be like, ‘The entire world exists on this axis of left-versus-right,’ ” she told me. “The way I was seeing it was: The world is so much richer than that.”

Installing Noisify supercharged my pursuit of novelty. The tool has directed me to corners of Facebook that feel like mini-vacations from the usual onslaught



of life updates and political news: pages devoted to intellectual-property rights, items for sale in small-town Maryland, and the apparently beloved 20th-century organist Virgil Fox.

This approach to browsing can work on other social-media platforms, too. "Every month or so," says Crystal Abidin, an anthropologist who researches internet culture, "I selectively follow a bunch of accounts—sometimes to do with a specific country or demographic of people or culture—on Instagram, in a bid to change up my feed." To achieve the same effect on YouTube, she'll binge-watch random videos.

Abidin's browsing is often for research purposes, and she wants to be able to survey a wide swath of the digital landscape instead of just the slice of it that social-media platforms tailor to her personal characteristics. She finds it useful to scroll through images on Instagram with hashtags that "are basically not very viable, because there are too many posts archived in them," like #japan or #babies. She says it's "bewildering, sometimes fun, but also really scary that there's just so much out there I would never be able to discover."

Max Hawkins, a 28-year-old programmer, elevated the goal of subverting algorithms to a way of life. After graduating from college in 2013 and getting a job at Google, Hawkins grew restless and sought ways to make his life more interesting. He built a tool that had Uber drop him off at random locations around the Bay Area. Then he built a tool that picked random publicly listed Facebook events for him to attend.

Hawkins found the variety refreshing, and after two years, he left his job. Every few months, he let a computer pick the city he would live in, based on airfare, cost-of-living estimates, and his projected income as a freelance programmer. He tried listening to music picked randomly by Spotify, wearing clothes bought randomly on Amazon, growing out random styles of facial hair, and arranging phone calls with friends on randomly selected topics.

Hawkins even chose to get a random tattoo based on a random image search. His commitment to the experiment was steadfast and somewhat terrifying. "I was really worried it was going to be anime porn or something," he said, "and I'd be

stuck with it for the rest of my life." But the computer's selection was an abstract illustration of a parent and child. "I super lucked out," he said. (Other outcomes of his experiments were, perhaps inevitably, less positive—like the time the computer told him to grow a soul patch.)

Hawkins was living out a sort of algorithmic jujitsu, using his own code to redirect recommendation engines toward the unexpected. "The nice thing about randomness is that it can give you something that is completely outside of what you would even imagine," he told

me. "And one place that computers can benefit us is that they have such a wider range of things that they can be aware of."

Unlike Hawkins, I couldn't fathom letting randomness rule my life. But when he put it like that, I felt a bit sad. In the greater scheme of things, so little computing power is harnessed to promote variety—and so much is channeled toward predictability.

FACEBOOK'S ALGORITHM didn't seem to know what to make of my newfound penchant for randomness.

• CRIMINAL TENDENCIES

Really Fake Money

How movie-prop cash and other dodgy bills are fooling cashiers nationwide

BY RENE CHUN

THE JOKER torching a mountain of cash in *The Dark Knight*. Walter White toting around his 55-gallon-drum nest eggs on *Breaking Bad*. The bags of \$100 bills that Jason Bateman's character launders on *Ozark*. Each scene was shot with prop money—phony bills that look real on-screen, but up close have certain glaringly obvious tweaks. Where an authentic \$100 bill says "The United States of America," prop money usually has this caveat: "For Motion Picture Use Only." Look even closer, and Ben Franklin might be smirking.

This kind of nonlegal tender is regulated by federal law and, until recently, was controlled

said prop money is the most popular type of counterfeit bill currently in circulation. "People don't have to make anything," he explained.

As the Secret Service has struggled to keep up, other types of fake money with ostensibly legitimate purposes have also popped up online—such as Chinese-made "training money," designed for bank tellers. In lieu of a "For Motion Picture Use Only" disclaimer, these bills are stamped with pink characters that translate to "Bill to Be Used for Counting Practice." Russian-made bills are harder to spot; serial-number fields are filled with a mix of numbers and Cyrillic characters (translation: "Souvenir"), while on a \$20 note, the image of the White House is relabeled "Donetsk City," the name of a shopping mall in Ukraine.

Sometimes the cheap money works: The police department in Grants Pass, Oregon, recently received reports of "movie money" being successfully passed at local businesses. Sometimes it doesn't: Last year, employees of a Safeway in Washington State

Once, I joined a group for python fanatics, and Facebook recommended that I check out Reptile Connection. I joined Dinosaurs, and the site suggested Paleo World. At times, my quest felt like pushing together two magnets of the same charge; I sought something different, but was steered toward more of what I'd already seen.

Facebook, Instagram, and other personalized platforms simply aren't built for what Deng, Abidin, Hawkins, and I were doing. Their business model—targeting advertisements based on users'

demonstrated preferences—depends on anticipating what will be relevant to people and using that information to entice them to buy products and services. Showcasing random interests wouldn't serve that goal.

The web hasn't always been structured like this. In the 1980s and '90s, Zuckerman told me, before platforms like MySpace and Friendster began to map the internet around our preexisting social lives, networks were usually organized by topic, with no algorithm steering you to what it thought you'd like. This older

internet, he noted, was homophilous as well, with a highly educated, demographically narrow user base. But it was typical, say, for three cat lovers to have a conversation across three different continents. People frequently had meaningful interactions with strangers.

Among today's major platforms, Reddit seems like the most direct heir to these early-internet networks, oriented as it is toward serendipitous and surprising niches. Facebook's groups seem like a throwback in that sense, too. Jennifer Dulski, the head of Facebook Groups, told me, "When people join groups and they meet other people who care about the same things that they do—maybe they live in the same neighborhood, or they're both military parents, or they both love mountain climbing, or they both own a corgi; the list goes on—it's like they're finding their hidden soulmates."

Every time I joined a group, however, Facebook inferred that my new groupmates were "people like me"—that I shared their interests, in other words, rather than being interested in them precisely because I do not. Even in its groups, Facebook is not designed to expand your social horizons; as Zuckerman noted, it's designed to surface things that are relevant to you and your offline peers. Groups are just another way of signaling what those things might be.

The more one pushes back against personalization, the closer one gets to Max Hawkins's unfiltered, randomized extreme, and all the delight, danger, and drudgery it entails. This can be inefficient and exhausting: There's a reason Chatroulette, the video-chat app that connects users to random strangers, doesn't have the same market share as Skype.

My fellow serendipity seekers had started to feel that exhaustion, it turns out, before I even met them. While Abidin still pursues variety as part of her job, Deng now spends less time on social media, and Hawkins has given up the platforms altogether. He says he's more interested in building his own networks than tinkering with others'.

It's certainly possible to battle the algorithms and discover new vistas from which to assess one's life—but the fight becomes wearying. After a while, the baby rats start to look like, well, baby rats. **A**

Joe Pinsker is an Atlantic staff writer.

called the police when a woman allegedly tried to buy a \$5,000 Visa card with a fistful of prop money. And sometimes people get killed: In 2017, a Georgia man was fatally shot during an alleged drug buy involving seven kilos of cocaine and \$230,000 in prop cash. A Texas teen died under similar circumstances last year in a bungled \$200 pot deal.

Tip: If you're going to pay with prop money, you're probably better off trying to score hamburgers than drugs. Criminals seeking to pass low-quality bills seem to do best targeting businesses where cashiers are bored and customers impatient, such as fast-food restaurants and

gas stations. Other tricks include crumpling bills (to disguise the cheap paper stock) and spraying them with starch (which helps evade detection by an iodine pen).

Rich Rappaport, the owner of RJR Props, has supplied millions in prop money to film projects including *Baby Driver* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. (One type is for "fanning, flashing, raining, counting"; a more expensive variety is for close-ups.) "If I broke the law, I could make [the money] much more realistic, but I simply won't," Rappaport told me, lamenting that other prop money has gotten too close to the real thing. People "cross the line, and then the money gets used in a felony crime."

But even if mail-order money is getting better, much of it is still conspicuously fake. The Chinese bills, after all, have pink Chinese characters stamped across them—wouldn't an average person notice?

Maybe, maybe not. A 1979 study titled "Long-Term Memory for a Common Object" tried to determine how accurately people recall a penny. On each of five tests, which included drawing a penny and finding an illustration of a real one in a group of fakes, subjects performed poorly. "I would guess the same thing is happening with prop money," says Daniel Schacter, a psychology professor at Harvard. "We generally do not need to remember all the specific visual details that make up bills or coins. So we have poor memory for those details."

If we're paying attention to details at all, that is. Carl Bombara, a rare-currency dealer in New York City, says that under most circumstances, we assume money is genuine. "People don't look at dollar bills," he told me. "If you give the cashier at Walmart a \$3 bill, they'll give you change." **A**





THE CULTURE FILE

BOOKS, ARTS, AND ENTERTAINMENT

THE OMNIVORE

The Story of a Song

The creative processes of Fleetwood Mac, Metallica, and Lorde, revealed

BY JAMES PARKER

HEADPHONES ON. Earbuds in. Seal your consciousness; prepare to fertilize the inner life. Now, what's it going to be: some music, or a podcast? A dose of (in my case) Iron Maiden doing "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," or (again in my case) three dudes muttering about the Premier League?

So far, the two spheres—music and words, rapture and sobriety—have been largely nonoverlapping. Few podcasts have had the resources or pluck to license music for their shows. But now a giant of music streaming has made a massive lurch into the podcast world: In February, Spotify announced its multimillion-dollar purchase of the podcast companies Gimlet and Anchor. Some industry watchers



believe the merger could clear the way for music from major record labels to replace the homely, pajama-inflected podcast scores of old. Pandora, meanwhile, has launched a new format, Pandora Stories, which promises to "combine the best of podcasts and music playlists" (Jane's Addiction front man Perry Farrell, for example, giving the lowdown on his back catalog). The market, as usual, wants it all, the music and the words.

Why do we care? Because we might, each in our private orb of listening, be about to enter a rich new era. Music plus commentary can be music magnified. We know this because, since 2014, one podcast has been elegantly interleaving layers of music with layers of talk, and conducting us thereby deep into the sonic-artistic mysteries.

Hrishikesh Hirway's *Song Exploder* does what it says on the tin. In each episode, a single song gets explained/expanded/exploded—broken down into its constituent parts and ideas, its drum tracks, its backing vocals and strata of emotion. After a brief intro, the host (previously Hirway; as of January, the musician Thao Nguyen) cuts out, so the only voices we hear are those of the composers and makers, telling the story. And telling it coherently, sequentially—a tribute to the show's agile editors, who construct narrative from even the most musically rambling.

It's a revelatory method. "Musicians like to exist in a state of pure potentiality," Joe Carducci, the author of *Rock and the Pop Narcotic*, once told me. "They never want to finish anything." But things do get finished somehow, thank God, and *Song Exploder* takes us—economically and expertly—from the roots of a song all the way to the completed work, which gets played in full at the end of the episode.

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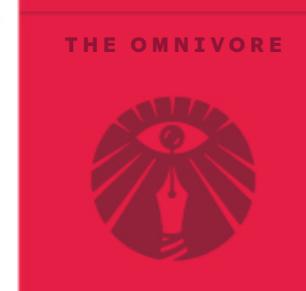


So where do songs begin? In states of heaviness and cloudiness, in moments of obscure magnetism. A lonely Thundercat gets drunk; now he's even lonelier. Lorde, during a "wild and fluorescent" summer in her native New Zealand, has one of those verbally constricted, charged-with-yearning conversations at a party. Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham needs to let his bandmate/ex-girlfriend Stevie Nicks know how he's feeling; his guitar starts chugging and smoldering with aggrieved punk-pop energy. So Thundercat writes "Them Changes"—a work of squelching melancholy, patterned around a splashy Isley Brothers hi-hat. Lorde writes the erotically cranked "Sober." This is how inspiration works. A word suggests itself, then another. A strand of tune floats by. Into the *khaos*—the dark jostle of instincts, the dim forms, the undeclared sensations—comes the *logos*: the transforming spirit. Art breathes upon the waters. And then you find that your drummer can't play it.

That's a great lesson, actually: It's what happens when Buckingham takes "Go Your Own Way" to his band. In his head he has a beat-scheme like the Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man," all cool and driving and syncopated—but Mick Fleetwood, rhythm's gravedigger, has a problem. "When I showed him the pattern, he couldn't actually play it," Buckingham recounts. "And finally I'm saying to him, 'Look, I mean, is there a way you can *paraphrase* that?'" Hence the distinctively lolloping, half-collapsing, stuttering-heart pulse—quite perfect for its theme—of "Go Your Own Way." *Loving you / Isn't the right thing to do.* An incapacity becomes an asset.

Such moments of instruction abound on *Song Exploder*. When Phoebe Bridgers, recording her lovely, doleful "Scott Street," got to the lines *There's helicopters over my head / Every night when I go to bed*, her guitarist made helicopter noises—shimmering blade-sounds—with his guitar. He was joking. Or was he? "I have a theory," Bridgers says, "that the jokes you make in the studio are actually just kind of the best ideas but you're just shoving them aside ... Whatever your joke idea is is probably just a genius idea you're a little nervous about." The helicopter noises stayed.

Metallica, on the other hand, has bypassed serendipity: In the band's senior years, its process seems to be completely and satisfactorily industrialized. As a prelude to writing its latest album, drummer Lars Ulrich is given an iPod containing 1,500 proto-riffs and maybe-ideas: chordal blurts, noise-stammers, and hummings-into-the-mic produced by guitarist James Hetfield during various sessions and sound checks. ("There's nothing that happens in this band these days that's not recorded.") Ulrich winnows it down, this vast germinal pile, to 20 or 30 viably squirming riffs, and takes them to Hetfield. Is this even songwriting? "I'm letting you in on a lot of trade secrets here!" says the jumpy Ulrich. "I've never



A strand of tune floats by. Art breathes upon the waters. And then you find that your drummer can't play it.

really talked about this stuff in this detail." One of these riffs—the one known as "plow" because, Hetfield says, "it had that feeling of just, it could push through anything. It's like, *Okay, nothing's gonna stop this riff*"—will eventually form the basic grid of Metallica's "Moth Into Flame." Which, as it happens, is not that great a song. It's no "Master of Puppets." But oh how I love, having enjoyed it in its nudity and sincerity, that beautiful plow riff.

Multiple collaborators; months, sometimes years of on-again, off-again work; false starts; fiddlings; breakthroughs; accidents; exposures. It is, or it can be, a proper *grind*, writing a song. This, too, *Song Exploder* teaches us: that as the initial song-impulse is mingled with the world, with the material and the technical and the mortal, it takes a certain kind of grit to see the thing through. Big Boi, building his hustler's anthem "Order of Operations," works with the producers Scott Storch and Diego Ave, the songwriter Eric Bellinger, and his own patient sense of craft. The words need to be right, but so does the timbre. "My voice has a little raspiness to it," Big Boi says, "and I know how to control it with breath control; I know how to make it hum, or make it smooth at certain times."

Sometimes a single comment or detail will, synesthetically speaking, illuminate our hearing. The composer Daniel Davies, on John Carpenter's twinkling, tight-as-cheese-wire *Halloween* theme: "The purity of that piano is what makes it scary." The techno auteur Jon Hopkins plays an A-flat bass note on his synth, but then pitch-bends it so low that the note separates into subterranean-sounding electronic pulses—a chthonic throb that will become the rhythm track for his magic-mushroom epic "Luminous Beings."

And sometimes the testimony has the heft of a sermon. Yo-Yo Ma, being Yo-Yo Ma, gets a special episode of *Song Exploder*, in which he talks about his lifelong relationship ("literally the first piece of music I learned") with the prelude to Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major. At weddings and funerals I have fidgeted like an oaf through many listless and creaking recitals of this piece. It has always seemed to me to be just *there*, inert, part of the furniture of tradition. But here comes Yo-Yo Ma, speaking with great eloquence about the filtration of the prelude, over the years, through his nervous system and through the totality of his livingness. "Any experience that you've had has to be somehow revealed in the process of making music. And I think that almost forces you to make yourself vulnerable to whatever is there to be vulnerable to. Because that, actually, is your strength." His performance, his cello, scrapes every membrane of culture off the prelude. I'm exposed to it, exposed by it. Made vulnerable to Bach, at last, by the words of a musician. A

James Parker is an Atlantic staff writer.



▼
BOOKS

Eat Food. All the Time. Mostly Junk.

How the “food revolution” turned us into snackers, guaranteeing the demise of healthy home cooking

BY LAURA SHAPIRO

ICAN’T STOP THINKING ABOUT CUPCAKES. No, not chic ones from the bakery, swathed in caramel buttercream, \$3.95 each—I mean real cupcakes, baked at home by Mom and the kids in a classic ritual of American domesticity. This evening, Ashley—she’s one of nine women whose relationships with food are at the center of *Pressure Cooker: Why Home Cooking Won’t Solve Our Problems and What We Can Do About It*—is making cupcakes with her two little girls. The family, which includes Ashley’s husband and his brother, as well as a cousin who’s just gotten out of jail and is temporarily sleeping on a couch, lives in a trailer near Raleigh, North Carolina. The household is busy, often frantic, because all the adults work at Wendy’s, in different locations, following unpredictable schedules and accepting every offer of an extra shift. The car is broken, the washing machine is broken, there’s no money to fix either of them, and a horror movie

is blaring on the TV, but right now Ashley is focused on baking. The cupcakes are a welcome-home gesture for Chris, the cousin released from jail.

She opens a box of Betty Crocker Rainbow Chip cake mix and pours it into the old plastic ice-cream tub that serves as a mixing bowl. The girls use child-size forks to stir the batter, tasting avidly as they go until it’s all over their hands, faces, and much of the kitchen. As soon as the cupcakes come out of the oven, the girls dig into a container of Betty Crocker frosting—which quickly melts since the cupcakes are still hot—and then shower their creations with pink sprinkles. The scene becomes a melee of excited children, smashed cupcakes, and raucous video games. As for Chris, he refuses the offer of a cupcake and steps outside the trailer to have a beer with a heavy-drinking friend from his old crowd. Ashley’s gesture hasn’t been received as she had planned, but she hopes a sense of the family’s goodwill and support will get through to him.

I confess that my instinctive reaction to Ashley’s story had to do with the Betty Crocker cake mix. Like many others who write about the history of home cooking, I want the food industry to have a much smaller footprint in the American kitchen. What could be easier than mixing butter and sugar, adding eggs and flour, and putting a pan in the oven? As far as I’m concerned, cake mixes should be treated like controlled substances and made available only by prescription. But the image of this determined mother pulling out a plastic ice-cream tub to use as a mixing bowl will be emblazoned in my memory for all time. I’m still at war with the food industry, but I think Ashley deserves a medal.

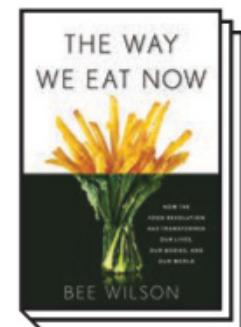
WE'RE NOW 50 YEARS or so into an unprecedented run of culinary activism known as "the food revolution"—a loose term, but in general think farmers' markets, school-lunch reforms, chefs rampant on TV, and middle-class kitchens stocked with olive oil and preserved lemons. That revolution is driving the politics of food, too: Federal policies targeting agriculture, hunger, nutrition, and food safety have jumped to the headlines and spurred a tremendous amount of local and national organizing. And, of course, we have celebrities—including chefs, nutritionists, movie stars, and Michelle Obama—telling us how to eat for optimal health and reminding us of the sacred importance of family dinner.

As you've noticed—especially if you're one of the countless home cooks who won't be serving wild-caught king salmon at \$30 a pound tonight, despite its impressive omega-3 status—the ideals of the food revolution may be everywhere, but the reality hasn't reached everyone and isn't likely to. The revolution's evil twin, by contrast, has been stunningly efficient in its spread. As Bee Wilson points out in *The Way We Eat Now: How the Food Revolution Has Transformed Our Lives, Our Bodies, and Our World*, junk food has overwhelmed traditional diets pretty much everywhere in the world, and at an astonishing speed. This revolution is making massive numbers of people fat and sick.

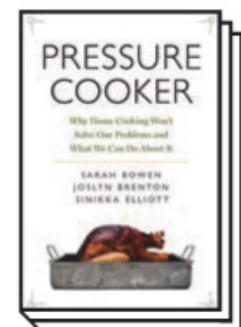
Both revolutions sprang from the 1960s, and both were aimed at bringing about a radical transformation of our relationship with food—emphasis on *radical*, which may account for the wildly divergent outcomes. During that decade, the counterculture was putting a political and environmental spin on the whole question of food. People who had been raised on Wonder Bread sandwiches and frozen blocks of vegetables had started growing their own bean sprouts, kneading their own whole-wheat dough, making their own yogurt, even trying their damnedest to master organic farming.

It was this sensibility, combined with cheap and head-spinning travel to Europe, that inspired young gastronomes such as Alice Waters to make "fresh and local" the basis for an entire culinary philosophy. Although she soon became famous as a restaurateur, Waters's writing and politicking have always focused on rethinking home cooking. As she once wrote, "My favorite recipe is: 'Go cut some mint from the garden, boil water, and pour it over the mint. Wait. And then drink.'" She opened Chez Panisse in 1971, and the good-food revolution was on its way.

The manufacturers of packaged foods saw the '60s very differently. From their viewpoint, it was a victory decade, the time when homemakers were finally getting comfortable with the idea that boxes and jars belonged at the center of their cooking. Ketchup, pancake mix, salad dressing, Jell-O—tems like these had been in widespread



THE WAY WE EAT
NOW: HOW THE FOOD
REVOLUTION HAS
TRANSFORMED OUR
LIVES, OUR BODIES,
AND OUR WORLD
BEE WILSON
Basic



PRESSURE COOKER:
WHY HOME COOKING
WON'T SOLVE OUR
PROBLEMS AND WHAT
WE CAN DO ABOUT IT
SARAH BOWEN,
JOSLYN BRENTON, AND
SINIKKA ELLIOTT
Oxford University Press

use before the war, but more ambitious products introduced in the '50s had been slow to catch on. Cake mixes and most frozen foods were greeted with indifference at first; more dramatic innovations like canned whole chicken never did reach the mainstream. By the '60s, however, resistance had abated. Speed, convenience, and the addictive nature of salt and sugar had done the trick, aided of course by voluminous advertising.

This winning formula proved to be just as successful in Canada, Britain, and other wealthy countries as it was in the U.S. Within a couple of decades, a huge swath of the population on both sides of the Atlantic was eating in a way people had never eaten before. They had dropped away from old-fashioned meals, even from tap water, in favor of soft drinks and all-day snacking. "Many people are scarcely acquainted with the feeling of hunger anymore," Wilson writes. "The new pattern is a series of solitary snacks that we often hardly notice or enjoy as they pass through our gullet." Today a third of all the calories consumed by an American adult comes from chips, protein bars, and the like. Soft drinks have had an especially pernicious impact: In America, consumption of them took a big leap in the '70s, and with that came unprecedented rates of obesity. After conquering the West, the same denatured, heavily processed foods marched on through the rest of the world like an army of high-calorie invaders. "Over just eleven years, from 1988 to 1999," Wilson reports, "the number of overweight and obese people in Mexico nearly doubled."

WILSON MAKES A POINT of acknowledging both versions of the food revolution, the beneficent as well as the disastrous, and it's true that for those who can afford organically raised beef and like trying new varieties of chard at the farmers' market, culinary life has never been more bountiful. But if Wilson has the big picture, the authors of *Pressure Cooker* have the close-up. Sarah Bowen, Joslyn Brenton, and Sinikka Elliott—sociologists from, respectively, North Carolina State, Ithaca College, and the University of British Columbia—did everything short of moving in with the nine Raleigh-area women they write about. They've produced an extraordinary report on how the values of the good-food revolution play out amid real-world struggles.

The women in the book, some of whose stories are drawn from a larger research project involving 120 households over five years, are mostly low-income. They know perfectly well what they're supposed to do: shop for bargain groceries, buy fresh produce, cook healthful meals, get everyone to the table at the same time. They try. But buying in bulk at the supermarket is impossible if you have no car. Serving healthful meals is impossible if the food pantry sends you home with frozen pizza,

chocolate peanut-butter crackers, and spinach-artichoke dip. Staging a picture-perfect family dinner is impossible if you have no table or too few chairs, or if you're due at work at 5 p.m.

Turning the pages of these two books, I wondered whether it was time to jettison my long-held belief that the best way to counter the food industry is to actually cook meals from scratch. Certainly the authors of *Pressure Cooker* have discarded any such notion. After all, they emphasize, it's not just Cokes and Doritos that are making American households sick, stressed, and chaotic. The stumbling blocks these women encounter hour by hour make it clear that our food crisis is deeply intertwined with related crises, including income inequality, a fragile safety net, inadequate public transportation, and the scarcity of affordable housing. We're not going to fix all of this with a nice pot of homemade chili.

"Trying to solve the environmental and social ills of our food system by demanding that we return to our kitchens en masse is unrealistic," they write, adding, "We need to uncouple the 'package deal' that links good mothering with preparing wholesome family dinners from scratch." Among other initiatives, they'd like to see schools, churches, and similar institutions with commercial kitchens pool their resources, maybe teaming up with local farms and providing "hearty, affordable" meals for families to pick up and take home.

Wilson, for her part, isn't fussy about whether the food is cooked at home or somewhere else; she just wants it to be nutritious and delicious. Her own extensive reporting indicates persuasively that the most effective way to counter a toxic food system is with government regulation. In Amsterdam, fast-food advertising is strictly controlled and no sweets or sodas are allowed in schools—and obesity rates among children have dropped by 12 percent since the rule was imposed in 2012. Three years ago, Chile passed what Wilson calls "the most aggressive range of laws against unhealthy foods that the world has yet seen," including an 18 percent soda tax and a ban on using cartoon characters to market breakfast cereals. Packaged foods high in sugar, salt, or fat now carry prominent black labels identifying the products as unhealthful, and surveys show that some 40 percent of Chileans shop with the labels in mind.

It's hard to imagine American politicians pushing back with such vigor against the food industry. All the focus on nutrition and food safety, and all the celebrity activism, is no match for the ferocious lobbying of big agriculture and industrial food producers. Some pretty effective brainwashing has been done, too. Many consumers, including the affluent, are now convinced that they can make what the industry loves to call "healthy choices" simply by turning to reformulated versions of familiar products: low-fat chips, reduced-fat cookies, sugar-free soda, "all natural" frozen burritos.

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Meanwhile, one of the industry's most resounding successes is to have retrained our culinary sensibilities, not merely our palates. Whenever we feel hungry or even just sense that mealtime is hovering, an ever-ready yen for something—anything—with a familiar brand name kicks in. If we can afford the more expensive version, we might even believe that we're eating well.

We aren't. Whether it's potato chips or air-popped organic corn puffs, "smart" frozen entrées or conventional frozen versions, these products are doing way more good for the companies producing them than they're doing for us. I'm not trying to force the exhausted women in *Pressure Cooker* to start massaging fresh kale for salad, I promise. We'll always need shortcuts, takeout, and convenience products to fall back on. But junk food, plain or fancy, stopped being a convenience a long time ago. Today it lives right in the house with us, greets us on the street, finds us at work, and raises our children for us. Our relationship with food, wholly transformed since the '60s in ways both heartening and horrifying, has lost touch with a truth none of us can afford to leave behind: Cooking isn't a luxury; it's a survival skill. **A**

Laura Shapiro is the author, most recently, of What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food That Tells Their Stories.



THE PAWPAW

A woman speaks to me
of a pawpaw tree.

I have never seen a pawpaw tree.
I have never eaten its fruit.

I nod.
The conversation continues.

So many things
we think we understand,
until we stop to think.

Her life.

My own.

Jane Hirshfield's
most recent
collection is
The Beauty (2015).

—Jane Hirshfield

▼
BOOKS

The Women Who Changed Spycraft

An old-boy operation was transformed during World War II, and at last the unsung upstarts are getting their due.

BY LIZA MUNDY

ARE WOMEN USEFUL AS SPIES? If so, in what capacity? Maxwell Knight, an officer in MI5, Britain's domestic counterintelligence agency, sat pondering these questions. Outside his office, World War II had begun, and Europe's baptism by blitzkrieg was under way. In England—as in the world—the intelligence community was still an all-male domain, and a clubby, upper-crust one at that. But a lady spy could come in handy, as Knight was about to opine.

In a memo “on the subject of Sex, in connection with using women as agents,” Knight ventured that one thing women spies could do was seduce men to extract



information. Not just any woman could manage this, he cautioned—only one who was not “markedly oversexed or undersexed.” Like the proverbial porridge, a female agent must be neither too hot nor too cold. If the lady is “undersexed,” she will lack the charisma needed to woo her target. But if she “suffers from an overdose of Sex,” as he put it, her boss will find her “terrifying.”

“What is required,” Knight wrote, “is a clever woman who can use her personal attractions wisely.” And there you have it—the conventional wisdom about women and spycraft. Intelligence officers had long presumed that women’s special assets for spying were limited to strategically deployed female abilities: batting eyelashes, soliciting pillow talk, and of course maintaining files and typing reports. Overseeing operations? Not so much.

Historically, women had indeed counted on their charms in practicing espionage, mostly because charms were often the only kind of weapon permitted them. During the American Civil War, when a group of elite hostesses relied on their social connections to gather intelligence for both sides, Harriet Tubman was an outlier who actually ran spying efforts. But the aggression, vision, and executive capacity required to direct an operation were not considered within the female repertoire.

Even as Knight was ordering his memo typed, however, change was at hand. World War II, a “total war” that required all able male bodies for global fighting, offered new opportunities. In the United States, “Wild Bill” Donovan recruited blue-blooded women for his Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA. Among them was the future chef Julia Child. But most OSS women were consigned to the secretarial pool, the “apron strings” of Donovan’s outfit, in his words. Those who went far beyond their brief—his secretary Eloise Page helped plan Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa—got little recognition.

Europe presented more possibilities. Spy agencies were expanding to cope with the need for covert action in countries where insurrection had to be plotted under the noses of occupying Germans. The French Resistance called on women’s courage, as did the Special Operations Executive, or SOE, created by Winston Churchill to “set Europe ablaze” by planting bombs, stealing plans, and stoking internal opposition. Colloquially known as the Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare, the SOE sought agents willing to parachute into occupied France or be off-loaded by air or sea. Behind enemy lines, SOE operatives had to recruit locals as agents, establish networks, receive clandestine shipments, set up safe houses, manage communications, suss out traitors.

The SOE’s leaders were readier than the old boys of MI5 and MI6, the foreign-intelligence agency, to grant that women enjoyed certain

advantages. Many French men had been sent to labor camps in Germany, so women operatives were better able to blend in with a mostly female population. As Sarah Rose writes in *D-Day Girls: The Spies Who Armed the Resistance, Sabotaged the Nazis, and Helped Win World War II*, a British captain who recruited three female SOE agents, Selwyn Jepson, believed that women were psychologically suited to behind-enemy-lines work—"secretive, accustomed to isolation, possessed of a 'cool and lonely courage.'" Some officers thought women had greater empathy and caretaking instincts, which equipped them to recruit and support ordinary citizens as agents. Women were considered good couriers—a high-risk role—because they could rely on ingratiating and seeming naïveté as tools in tight spots. The war also provided openings for women to show that they could execute operations, making strategic life-and-death decisions.

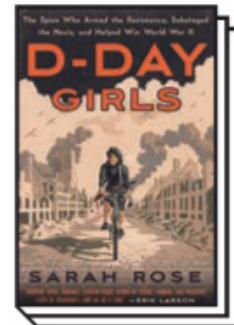
IN INTELLIGENCE, as in computer science and so many other fields associated with male prowess, women have made far more important contributions than they have gotten credit for—but a recent boom in attention to their stories is remedying that. "In the French resistance as a whole, women played crucial roles," the historian Lynne Olson writes in *Madame Fourcade's Secret War: The Daring Young Woman Who Led France's Largest Spy Network Against Hitler*, her masterful biography of Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, the *patronne*, or boss, of Alliance, one of the largest Resistance networks. Nazi sexism helped: Germans' stereotyped ideas about female domesticity blinded them, early on at least, to women spies in their midst.

In some cases, women had their own blinkered views of female leadership to overcome. Barely 30 when she was recruited in 1940, Fourcade had lived abroad, and relished the liberated environment of 1930s Paris. Still, she was astonished when "Navarre," the code name for Georges Loustaunau-Lacau, asked her to be his deputy. Being a woman surely ruled her out, she protested to the World War I hero, who was secretly mobilizing citizens worried by Nazi aggression in Europe. That was precisely why she would be above suspicion, he told her. "Good God—it's a woman!" cried another recruit, who became one of her most trusted aides. After Navarre was arrested in Algiers in 1941, Fourcade became the undisputed leader of Alliance.

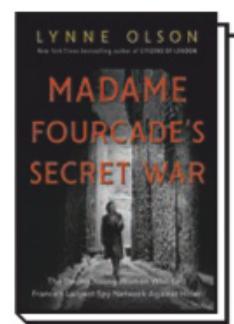
The Alliance network, backed by MI6, comprised thousands of agents; its main mission was to infiltrate German submarine bases along the coast and report on U-boat movements. The head of a shipyard provided crucial plans and drawings. On the bases, bartenders and prostitutes listened to chatter, which Fourcade passed on to the British in code. She and her lieutenants hiked into fields at night, waving in planes flown by Royal

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BOOKS



D-DAY GIRLS: THE SPIES WHO ARMED THE RESISTANCE, SABOTAGED THE NAZIS, AND HELPED WIN WORLD WAR II
SARAH ROSE
Crown



MADAME FOURCADE'S SECRET WAR: THE DARING YOUNG WOMAN WHO LED FRANCE'S LARGEST SPY NETWORK AGAINST HITLER
LYNNE OLSON
Random House

Air Force pilots. Fourcade's code name—POZ 55 at first, and later Hedgehog—initially enabled her to hide her gender from the old-line British officers. She feared they wouldn't take her seriously, and she didn't want to risk the lives of agents in her network, who depended on British support and funding. When she did meet one U.K. colleague, she was accompanied by a male deputy. "This is a joke, isn't it?" the British agent said. Looking at the man, he asked: "You are the real POZ 55?"

Fourcade showed the skeptics who was boss—not least by pushing the British to alter their communications routine to protect her agents. In occupied Europe, being a wireless-radio operator was one of the most dangerous jobs, and it often fell to women. Nazis on patrol would look for a signal emanating from a house or a hotel room, and then strike. For Fourcade's agents in touch with London, every moment spent awaiting a British response put them at risk. She wanted the Brits to make contact first. Hammering at the war bureaucracy of men in pin-striped suits, she persisted in making the case for her department's safety and welfare.

The intelligence her network provided was astonishing. One of her assets was the brilliant Jeannie Rousseau, who spoke five languages and at age 20 began working as a German translator. Rousseau hung around with Nazi officers, who seized the chance to mansplain their exploits, including a new rocket technology, the V-2, the first ballistic missile. As she later put it: "I was such a little one sitting with them, and I could not but hear what was said. And what they did not say, I prompted." They also showed her their plans. Rousseau had a photographic memory. Fourcade passed the material to the British, who bombed the rocket plant at Peenemünde. Impressed, the British sought to bring Rousseau to London for debriefing. En route, she was captured and taken to a concentration camp, where she survived through remarkable acts of defiance.

In 1943, when the Germans began to crack down on saboteurs in grim earnest, the Alliance network was a chief target. Scores of agents were arrested in successive waves. Among them were women tortured by Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon," who burned their breasts with cigarettes. "In my network, no woman ever faltered, even under the most extreme kinds of torture," Fourcade later remembered. "I owed my freedom to many who were questioned until they lost consciousness, but never revealed my whereabouts, even when they knew exactly where I was." She was exfiltrated to England, after a two-and-a-half-year career running operations against the Nazis—most Resistance leaders lasted no more than six months in place before their cover was blown—and continued to work from there. "I've often wondered what you were like," one male British colleague confessed upon meeting her.

IF OBSTACLES HONE LEADERSHIP (as research suggests), few female spies cleared more hurdles than Virginia Hall, one of the SOE's first operatives of either gender and the subject of *A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II*. She became, as the British journalist Sonia Purnell writes, "the most successful Allied female secret agent," unimpeded by her sex or by a wooden leg she nicknamed "Cuthbert." (According to a famous anecdote, Hall was trekking across the snowy Pyrenees to escape the Gestapo, and radioed to her handlers that Cuthbert was giving her trouble. The response from a novice: "Have him eliminated.")

Born into Baltimore high society in 1906, Hall grew up outdoorsy, adept with horses and guns. She ditched a boring fiancé, attended Barnard College, traveled to Jazz Age Paris, and studied in Vienna. When her father lost his fortune during the Depression and then died, she took jobs as a clerk in the American embassies in Poland and Turkey (where, while snipe-hunting, she blew off her foot and nearly died of sepsis). She tried over and over to join the U.S. diplomatic corps, but the State Department kept turning her down on flimsy pretexts. After war broke out, she began driving an ambulance in France, among the few active jobs for which women, even one missing a leg, were accepted.

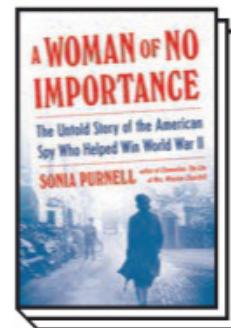
What many of these women spies had in common—along with grit and remarkable courage—was a man who saw their potential. Key in Hall's case was George Bellows, an undercover British agent milling around a Spanish border-town train station in 1940, gathering intelligence for the SOE. He chatted with Hall, whose sights were set on England as the Nazis overran France. The British realized that an American—the U.S. was still neutral—could move freely without attracting suspicion in occupied France.

Under the cover of being a newspaper reporter, Hall operated as a "secret liaison officer," on an ambitious and dangerous mission to build a Resistance network in Lyon, where she knew no one. "In the field, she would either learn fast or die," Purnell writes. Hall learned fast. In a city overrun with refugees from occupied sectors, she recruited women helpers from marginalized communities. Hall quickly went way beyond her job description. She began collecting details on the political situation in France. She helped downed British pilots escape, organizing French women to escort them to safety.

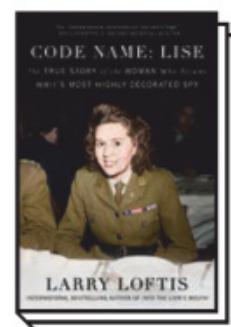
Much like successful women today, Hall was called brusque, and her handlers were reluctant to formalize her authority as chief. Instead they elevated a reckless and incompetent agent code-named Alain. Yet her self-taught professionalism and, yes, caretaking instincts made Hall a magnet

THE CULTURE FILE

BOOKS



A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE AMERICAN SPY WHO HELPED WIN WORLD WAR II
SONIA PURNELL
Viking



CODE NAME: LISE: THE TRUE STORY OF THE WOMAN WHO BECAME WWII'S MOST HIGHLY DECORATED SPY
LARRY LOFTIS
Gallery Books

for incoming operatives. "Her apartment had become the center of all resistance," Purnell writes, and she was soon directing operations herself. Alain, her nemesis, was fired for "womanizing, boasting, and boozing."

Hall's "success opened the gates to more women agents," Purnell points out—agents who faced mounting danger. Nazi reprisals became savage. Hitler wrote a memo saying that saboteurs would be "annihilated without exception," and of the 39 women sent to France by the SOE, a third never returned. Some ended up in Ravensbrück, the women's concentration camp. Some were poisoned, others shot. Odette Sansom, one of the operatives featured in Rose's *D-Day Girls* and the subject of a biography by Larry Loftis, *Code Name: Lise*, survived being burned and having her toenails pulled out. She never divulged the information the Germans wanted.

Virginia Hall, though hunted by Klaus Barbie and arrested at least once, always managed to get away. Eventually she was exfiltrated, and worked in Spain until late 1943. She was then finally hired by her own country, and the OSS sent her back into France, under heavy disguise. She directed guerrilla forces to support the D-Day landings by destroying railway communications, organizing roadblocks and ambushes, and cutting telephone wires. Incredibly, the OSS refused to put her officially in charge. Having a woman at the head of a paramilitary operation was considered "controversial," so putative control was given to her petulant, often-absent male boss. Disguised as a milkmaid, she sold cheese and eavesdropped on the German Seventh Army, which, Purnell writes, helped "pave the way for the Allied recapture of Paris."

After the war, the contribution of these women was overlooked and then forgotten. The CIA blossomed, becoming institutionalized, slick, and buttoned-down—a place where, in Purnell's words, "brilliant masculine brains and well-connected college kids had taken charge." Hall stayed on, but nobody quite knew what to do with the person one wet-eared upstart described as "the gung-ho lady" from the war. In 1953, the head of the CIA, Allen Dulles, convened a "Petticoat Panel" to look into attitudes toward women at the agency. Compared with men, they were seen as more emotional, less objective, and insufficiently aggressive.

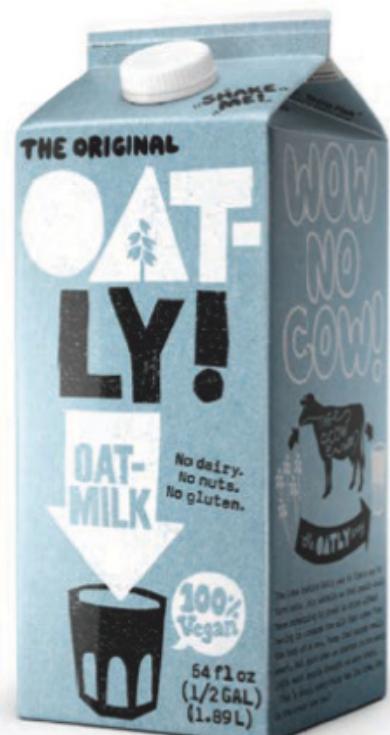
That was then. Now the CIA is directed by a woman, Gina Haspel, who has promoted veteran women to head top directorates. These leaders have antecedents, whether or not they know it. Thanks to these overdue volumes, they can now find out all about them. **A**

Liza Mundy is the author, most recently, of Code Girls: The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II.

Au revoir, middleman.



Many of today's most influential companies have become successful by cutting out the middleman and passing the benefits of a more direct relationship on to you, the consumer. It's a strategy that has proven beneficial to nearly everyone except, of course, the middleman. "When I finish my degree, I want to become a middleman," is not currently the chosen dream of our most ambitious youth. This development is nothing new to us. We've been cutting out the middleman for over 25 years by finding a way to go straight from oats to oatmilk, instead of feeding the oats to a cow and letting the cow preprocess the oats into milk. But just because we were ahead of the middleman curve doesn't mean we know who is going to win the World Series or if we are actually living in a simulation. All we know is how to make oatmilk. Our ability to predict the future beyond that is far from dependable.





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ART

Ethiopia's Image-Maker

Aïda Muluneh, whose vibrant photographs explore national identity, wants to upend portrayals of Africa.

BY HANNAH GIORGIS

IN THE SPRING OF 2016, the photographer Aïda Muluneh opened a solo exhibition at the David Krut Projects gallery in New York City. The showcase came nine years after Muluneh had returned to her native Ethiopia, which she'd left as a young child in the 1980s, during the height of the country's punishing Marxist regime. The

centerpiece of the exhibit was a series of photographs called *The World Is 9*, which drew its name from a saying of her grandmother's: "The world is 9, it is never complete and it's never perfect." For an artist whose identity is wrapped up in her delayed repatriation, the impossibility of closure—in the lives of people and nations—has proved to be a powerful theme.

Muluneh's work had attracted praise well before the 2016 exhibition. After attending middle and high school in Canada, she graduated from Howard University in 2000 and then worked as a photojournalist for *The Washington Post*. "Are you an artist, or are you a journalist?" her boss asked. Her work, which relied on a wide lens and gave priority to mood and composition over details, seemed to strain the conventions of photojournalism, and he told her, "You need to make up your mind." She disagreed, and continued to explore a variety of forms—studio portraits, commercial photography, journalistic coverage of quotidian black life across the diaspora, music videos, and her distinctive facial and figural images. By the time she was 30, two of her photographs had become part of the permanent collection at



the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, and since then her work has found a home at MoMA, as well as Dartmouth College's Hood Museum. Following on a couple of international photography prizes, *The World Is 9* confirmed her ascension to a thrilling, delicate post: one of Ethiopia's reigning image-makers.

"You can't fantasize about making an impact in Ethiopia by being in New York or somewhere else," Muluneh told me when we spoke in Addis Ababa late last year. "You have to actually be on the ground." In the series, a mix of highly stylized and representational images of vividly dressed figures, I saw inventive explorations of national belonging. The works' composition and coloring are arresting. So, especially for those fluent in the semiotics of African visual art, is their clever toying with history and familiarity.

The World Is 9 is steeped in identifiably Ethiopian visual cues. *The Departure*, for example, depicts melancholic female passengers seen through the windows of a defunct train. Its color palette, like that of many of Muluneh's photographs, is breathtakingly bold—variations on the green, yellow, and red of the country's flag, their

From left to right:
Denkinesh/Part One,
Denkinesh/Part Two,
Denkinesh/Part Three

vividness endowed with a painterly texture. For the Ethiopian viewer, the hues beckon home; for the Westerner, they offer clear focal points in an otherwise foreign scene.

Muluneh's vibrant acuity, as disorienting as it is alluring, has the power to evoke a place—Africa—and at the same time subvert conventional ideas about it. The *Denkinesh* triptych, sometimes exhibited with *The World Is 9*, is especially striking. The three photographs confront viewers with the scintillating danger of red. Each photo bears the same woman's name, presumably that of the pictured figure: Denkinesh. In Amharic, Ethiopia's official language and the one Muluneh was raised speaking, that translates roughly to "You are admirable, worthy of veneration" (and is another name Ethiopians have given Lucy, the early hominid whose fossilized bones were found in the country).

Situated in a harsh landscape dominated by dark-gray rock, Denkinesh wears a blood-red gown so long and billowy that it dwarfs her figure. In the first image, she is curled into herself on a pebble-strewn ground, the fabric spread around her like a pool of blood or a scarlet shroud, only

her white-painted face and black hair visible. Next she scales a mountainous incline on her hands and knees; now only the back of her head and one arm are visible, and an ominous, cloud-filled sky is the backdrop. In the final photograph, she stands at the summit, eyes trained on the viewer, the fabric sailing out behind her like a banner. The clouds are white now, and the visible sky is a bright blue. The images—even the triumphant third one—are haunting. They are also extravagantly beautiful. Absent the white body paint, any of them could very well serve as a chicly surreal advertisement for a luxury brand of evening wear.

That Muluneh is able to wed this lush *Vogue* look to the kind of stark imagery often associated with Africa—barren landscape, foreboding sky-scape, invocations of blood, traditionally painted skin—is a testament to her comfort working with contradictions. Muluneh’s art isn’t coy. It deals in high-stakes disparities: Africa as aspiration and Africa as abyss. Reconsider the continent, her images command, and they proceed to connect it to a genre-blending aesthetic that reconceives notions of place and otherness.

Even now, visual renderings of Africa commonly recall painful legacies of colonialism, and continue the sort of image-making that was essential to the project of empire. The *New York Times* photograph of a starving young child crouching within view of a vulture during the 1993 famine in Sudan is one well-known summation



Above: *Fragments*.
Below: *The Departure*.
Opposite page:
The Bridge Between.



of the trope of desperate emptiness and looming terror. More often, depictions of Africa betray a prosaic lack of interest in probing the continent’s depth. A cursory glance at Western-produced media about Africa will yield no shortage of shadowy warlords, shirtless women in body paint, and forlorn acacia trees.

Muluneh rejects these stereotypical visuals, which help entrench in the Western imagination what the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie famously referred to as “the single story” told about Africa. Instead, in merging allusions to those elements with a glossy presentation—and in drawing on both national symbolism and rootless surrealism—Muluneh’s photographs represent a bold reimaging. The catalyst for her entry into photojournalism was the intractable imagery of the famine that ravaged her birthplace in the 1980s. Later, impatient and curious, she began exploring stigmatized indigenous forms of expression and incorporating them into her artwork. “I started doing research on traditional body modification across the continent,” she told me when we met. Interested in temporary painting as well as scarification and tattooing, she was struck by how “highly sophisticated” traditional cultures’ modes of visual storytelling are, “even though they are disregarded as primitive.” (Picasso, she noted, lifted plenty from African art.)

It’s not about “trying to form a visual aesthetics that’s European-based or Western-based,” Muluneh said, referring to her own photography

as well as to the other project she undertook after moving back to Ethiopia in 2007. She founded a creative consulting agency devoted to “developing and educating society through art,” and got busy. Every other December since 2010, she has presented Addis Foto Fest, which I’d come to see—and which is now the largest photography festival in Africa. Muluneh is not modest about the endeavor: “I am basically taking the past to the future,” she said of her mission to galvanize the work of artistic self-portrayal and help shape a new vision of the continent. In the quest to figure out “what we want to say, how ... we want to say it, and to whom are we addressing this,” she feels she occupies a rare position. “I don’t think there are a lot of people like me that exist between these two worlds. I’m an insider and an outsider at the same time.”

THE IDEA OF Addis Foto Fest is to train emerging photographers, not just from Ethiopia but from the whole continent, of all stripes—working in journalism, portraiture, fashion, and even political messaging. The workshops are also occasions for networking with editors from the likes of *The Washington Post* and *National Geographic*, and mingling with more established photographers from other countries. Inspiring a continent-wide renaissance of photography and broadening the world’s perception of Africa—Muluneh’s aims fuel each other, and have a practical dimension, too. A culturally thriving modern Ethiopia will be a country whose tourism economy is thriving as well.

The undertaking has had its grueling side, and Muluneh noted that she often wished Foto Fest had more support from the Ethiopian government. For funding, “I shouldn’t have to go to the Europeans always, or to the foreigners or whatever,” she said. This struck me as especially true in 2018, when the festival coincided with a dizzying wave of once-unthinkable reforms and growth in Ethiopia, and a nation-building mood. The recently appointed prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has been credited with rallying the country’s ethnically divided citizens behind a sense of national pride as well as ending the long border war with neighboring Eritrea—and energizing the diaspora in the process. Citing an Ernst & Young study about the economic impact of the creative sector, Muluneh was insistent that businesses need to recognize the importance of a country’s cultural capital and shoulder the responsibility of helping to build it.

In her own recent works, Muluneh continues to draw on her home country’s visual hallmarks and its complicated history. Selected by the film director Ava DuVernay to be featured in *Time* magazine’s 2019 special issue on optimism,

THE CULTURE FILE

ART



Muluneh created three new photographs for the publication. One of them, titled *The Bridge Between*, depicts two Ethiopian women sitting in chairs, set against a cerulean backdrop with bright-white clouds painted on it. One figure is clad in a royal-blue dress, the other in a matching red version. Both women hold different parts of the same rose. A *jebena*, or traditional coffee pot, rests at their feet. A chair, facing away from both of them, bears a yellow star painted over a red hammer and sickle.

The paired figures in her photograph invite an upbeat reading, as a comment on the power of personal connection—particularly among women—during both the imperial era and the Marxist regime that forced Muluneh out of the country. The scene nods, too, to the homegrown facilitator of communal action: Coffee, Ethiopia’s most famous export, is as much a woman-centric social ritual as it is a national economic driver. Yet Muluneh’s signature blend of surrealism and national symbolism betrays a certain didactic flatness this time, almost as if to suggest that the tableau of progress risks seeming too facile. *The Bridge Between* is a commissioned piece, on a prescribed theme, and Muluneh specializes in defying expectations. The artist who has said she is “taking the past to the future” doesn’t lack ambition, but as her gorgeous yet jarring images convey, she isn’t peddling easy optimism. **A**

Hannah Giorgis is an Atlantic staff writer.



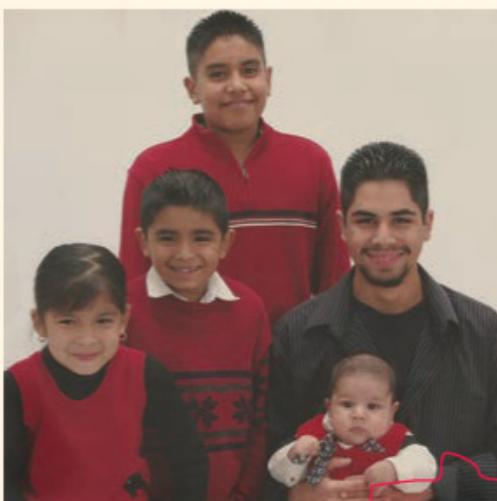


The first time, she was raped. The second, she nearly drowned. In order to live in the United States legally, she had to leave her family and attempt to cross the border once more.

BY DARCY COURTEAU

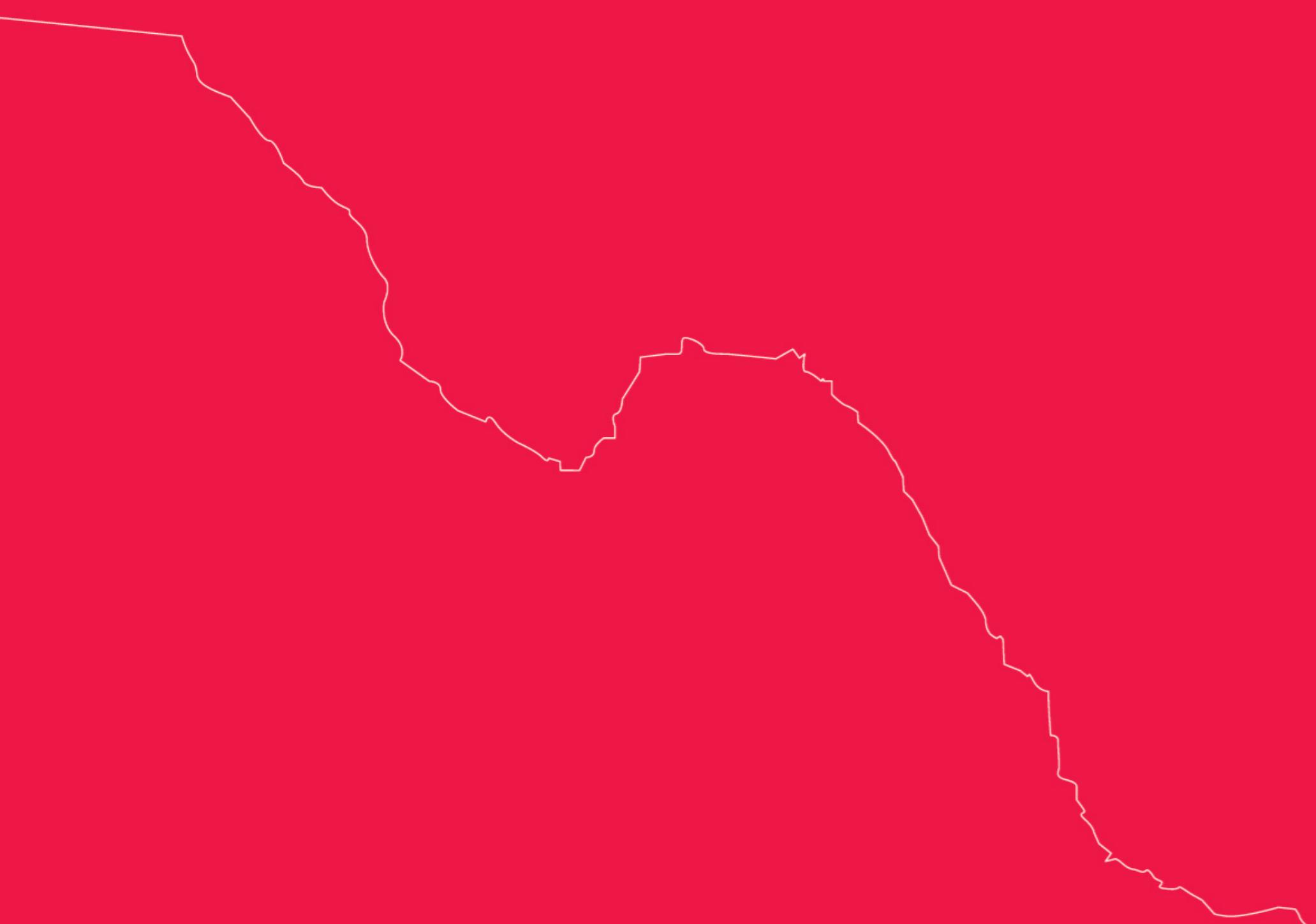
M I R E Y A ' S

T H I R D



C R O S S I N G

In January of last year, Mireya called me to say she was going to Juárez.



She had been living undocumented in the United States for 25 years, but now she was applying for permanent residency. The final step in the years-long process could be done only at the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

There, Luz Mirella Zamora (she spells her name with a *y* to avoid confusion; it is pronounced *Mee-ray-ah*) would stand across from a State Department employee with three stacks of papers: green, blue, and pink. If Mireya received a green slip, she'd get a visa and return to her husband and children. Blue and she'd have to stay and collect missing paperwork. Pink and she would be stuck in Mexico until her extended family could pool enough money for a smuggler to bring her home: \$8,000 to hide in the back of a vehicle, \$15,000 if she wanted to sit in the passenger seat.

Mireya had only 30 days to come up with the money to travel to Juárez for her appointment, and from her voice on the phone—victorious, hilarious—I could tell she had some kind of madcap plan. In fact, there had been a minor windfall: A cow had slipped in the mud and broken its leg, and its owner had asked Mireya and her husband to end its suffering and salvage the meat. They went around the house and found \$9 in coins, filled the truck with some gas, and drove out to the farm. Robert put the animal down, and they dressed it in the pasture. Now Mireya was turning 80 pounds of beef into jerky to sell by the bag.

I told Mireya I would go with her to Juárez. I'd been following her story for a few years, and I wanted to be there to see how it turned out. I was as strapped as she was, but I returned to the Ozarks, where I was born, and finally got around to selling for parts the Volkswagen Passat with a blown water pump that someone had left to my mother and whose title had somehow been signed over to me.

I FIRST MET Mireya in 2014.

During one of my trips home to Arkansas, my father asked me whether I knew I had another sister. He sat on the woodpile outside my parents' trailer, drinking a beer, and spoke in a rapture of the woman he had come to think of as his 10th child, though they shared no actual blood. He speaks fluent Spanish, and he and Mireya would talk through the afternoons in her language.

My parents had met Mireya and her five children through her husband, Robert, a third-generation Mexican American who was working in the area. Mireya had grown up in rural Mexico, and she and Robert wanted to go back to the land, in the Ozarks; my mom and dad decided to sell them a few acres of their property on a zero-interest loan.

Mireya and Robert named the place El Rancho and began filling it with geese, mules, and a split-rail pen of pigs. They planned to build a cabin there. Meanwhile, they rented an apartment in nearby Springdale, a cow town when I was a kid, best known for its annual rodeo, that has grown into a small city with the arrival of Latino and Marshallese immigrants. The big businesses in Northwest Arkansas—industrial chicken farms, Walmart, construction—depend on these newcomers for labor.

Mireya's husband and children are born-and-raised Americans, but she lacked a Social Security number and was forbidden to work. In truth, she worked circles around everyone, keeping the apartment spotless and her kids in new clothes, doing anything from building fences to cleaning houses for cash. When her daughter needed \$400 for a French horn and a band trip, she raised the money by selling homemade salsa.

Mireya never knew her real father, but my dad began calling her *hija*, daughter. She called my parents *padre* and *madre*. Among my eight brothers and sisters, I'd always drifted near the bottom of the pecking order. Mireya zoomed to the top. I was surprised to learn

that my parents had bragged to her about me, said we were alike, gutsy. But whereas I'd always been deemed rebellious and mouthy, she was "independent," "direct."

I liked having Mireya and her family around, but I was furious when I found out she and Robert were two years behind on their payments for El Rancho; they seemed more likely to inherit the property than pay it off. Only one of my siblings has been deeded land, the sole thing of value my parents possess.

Mireya's uncle had once mocked her for trying to learn English. It meant the world to her when my father, who long ago had taught Spanish at universities (*a professor!* she told people), praised her fluency. When I attempted to speak Spanish, she cheered on my efforts. But when I began to understand a lot, I sensed that she felt I'd poached something special of hers.

"She's smart," I once heard her say to friends, her tone unmistakably rueful. "She'll learn quickly."

If we'd been real sisters, somewhere along the way we would've had a blowout and cleared the air. Instead, we pulled on poker faces so tight that they began to crack around the edges.

IN APPLYING FOR RESIDENCY, Mireya feared she would be outing herself to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which once in a while flags undocumented people for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Robert didn't want her to risk it.

But she was tired of hiding, tired of being at the mercy of others' schedules when she needed a lift to a housekeeping job. A cop catching her speeding could turn her over to ICE. To ride in a car with Mireya was to spot every police cruiser hiding behind trees and learn the unpatrolled back roads.

Until a few years ago, trying to get a visa would have been unthinkable. Under current law, anyone who leaves the U.S. after living in the country without permission for a year or longer must wait 10 years before they can reenter legally. As the wife of an American citizen, Mireya was eligible to apply for an exemption to the 10-year rule, but she would have had to do so from Mexico and then wait there for a decision, a process that can take a year or longer, with no guarantee of success.

In 2013, Barack Obama's administration provided a workaround: Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens could apply for the exemption without leaving the country as long as they could prove that an extended separation would be a hardship for their family members. Spanish speakers call the I-601A Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver the *perdón*. To be pardoned, an undocumented immigrant must prove family ties and pay "forgiveness," a series of fees.

Mireya didn't have the \$6,000 it would cost to hire a good immigration lawyer, so she decided to go it alone. Every time I've told this to someone else who has applied for the waiver, that person has fallen silent.

She joined a Facebook group of 36,000 members, people applying for the *perdón* and their friends and families. Those who have hit paperwork roadblocks consult the group; others share their lawyers' advice. Members who are approved in Juárez post selfies with their green slips. They have to wait in Mexico for the consulate to mail their visa, and when it arrives via DHL, they post more selfies with the package, whose red-and-yellow corporate logo has become a stand-in for the documents sealed inside.

For three years, Mireya collected the required documents, first in a manila folder and then in an expanding accordion file known as "The Folder." It was black, with 25 titled subfolders, and Mireya decorated its surface with pictures of her family to remind her why she was spending so much time acquiring its notarized contents.

Mexico required that requests for an official birth certificate be

made in person. Mireya deputized a distant cousin in Michoacán, her state of birth, and armed her with copies of her and her mother's birth certificates and Mexican IDs. The cousin went to a courthouse and began negotiations with a judge. A year and \$400 later, the new birth certificate arrived in Arkansas. It was in Spanish, of course, and Citizenship and Immigration Services requires all documents to be translated into English, so Mireya paid for that too.

Having no laptop, she filed some forms on her phone, and walked to the public library to print hard copies of others. She put together the Petition for Alien Relative for Robert to file, to establish their relationship, and paid \$420. A year later, with the petition approved, she applied for the I-601A waiver. Wanting to make sure she'd ticked every box, she spent \$1,300 on a physical exam and vaccinations. The filing fee for the waiver itself was \$585.

Her waiver was approved in the spring of 2017; now she would have to go to Juárez for a medical exam and an interview at the consulate. Mireya sought the advice of a low-cost lawyer from a Catholic charity, but the woman dismissed her: Mireya had crossed the border twice—in 1989 and 1997—and if you'd entered the country illegally more than once, she said, your visa application would be denied.

shop and chipping in with bills. At age 18 he was killed in a car accident on a summer morning. Now Mireya mentions her son's death to strangers moments after meeting them, as though her name is inseparable from the loss.

In her grief, Mireya had let a year pass before returning to her visa application. Donald Trump was voted into office, and in the days after the election girls bullied Nani at school, telling her she would have to "build the wall" herself. Josh's sympathetic teacher called Mireya to pick him up when he cried and confessed that he was afraid his mom would be deported. Plans to build the cabin halted, but they moved to a rental in the town nearest El Rancho, the largely white and conservative Elkins, population 3,000.

Mireya had left her pueblo the first time at age 15. Her beloved grandmother was already in California, nursing a sick relative. A family friend had been molesting Mireya since she was 11. Fearing she would be raped, she decided to find her grandmother. A girl only a year older but much more worldly loaned her money for a coyote, and said she would go with her. The girl's cousin joined them. They took a bus 1,500 miles north to Tijuana, where at the time 200,000 migrants crossed every year and coyotes were

*In applying for residency,
Mireya feared she would out
herself to U.S. authorities.
Robert didn't want her to risk it.*



Mireya told the Facebook group what the lawyer had said. If she traveled to Juárez, would she get stuck there, separated from her family for who knows how long? She signed off with "*Dios sin mí sigue siendo Dios, pero yo sin él no soy nada*"—God without me continues to be God, but I without him am nothing.

Twenty-seven people responded; they concluded that since she had crossed so long ago, she would be forgiven.

WE WOULD DRIVE TO EL PASO, park Mireya's car there, then take a van to Juárez. Robert and Mireya packed the car at dawn. Itzanai—"Nani"—and Fernando, the teenagers, said goodbye. Clutching the family Chihuahua, Josh, 9, followed his mother around with growing agitation until she sat and held him.

Mireya's oldest, Joaquín, 25, would drive us. Her second son, Eliseo, had died in 2014. She'd risked her life for him when he was a squalling toddler with a heart problem, crossing into the U.S. the second time, in 1997, so that he could get better medical care. As a teenager he'd been the family charismatic, working in an ice-cream

cheap, \$250 to \$300. Mireya told me the story; I've edited her words for clarity and brevity here.

I didn't have any money. I didn't know anything about the United States.

At the bus station in Tijuana, this guy stopped us. "You going to *El Norte*? I can hook you up, I have friends, you'll make it in three hours. We got a house where you guys can rest and stay 'til it's safe to cross." He keeps on saying, "You can trust me. I'm not going to hurt you."

We made it to the house.

The upstairs was just a big room with four walls, no windows, and a metal door. No bed, only some sheets on the floor. There was this big lady, she was tall, kind of old, 45 maybe. Her husband was short and fat. They gave us showers and clothes, and they fed us. They put us in the room upstairs, said we're gonna sleep there and they gotta lock the door for our safety, and if we gotta pee or whatever, they gave us a bucket.

I got that feeling in my heart saying something's wrong. Why are they gonna lock us in the room? We slept there that night, and then in the morning, we heard a lot of people talking, yelling, partying. We heard steps on the stairs. We're all happy because it's time for us to either go away or go—do something, I don't know. They're supposed to let us know whatever happens.

Here comes the lady of the house, and she's just barely wearing clothes. She opens the door and says, "Good morning, my beautifuls, my princesses!"

We just looked at her.

Right behind her come three men, and this guy is looking at me, and he goes, "I'll pick her." The other guy is like, "Yeah, I'll pick her too." And the other guy—I didn't know what was going on, but my friend, she was hugging me, and she said, "No, not her, pick me. Let her go. She's 15."

They took me downstairs, where there was this little room.

They raped me.

That went on for days, nights. And all I got to eat was a glass of milk with an egg in it, raw, mixed in. They say it will give me energy. For days I was locked in that room.

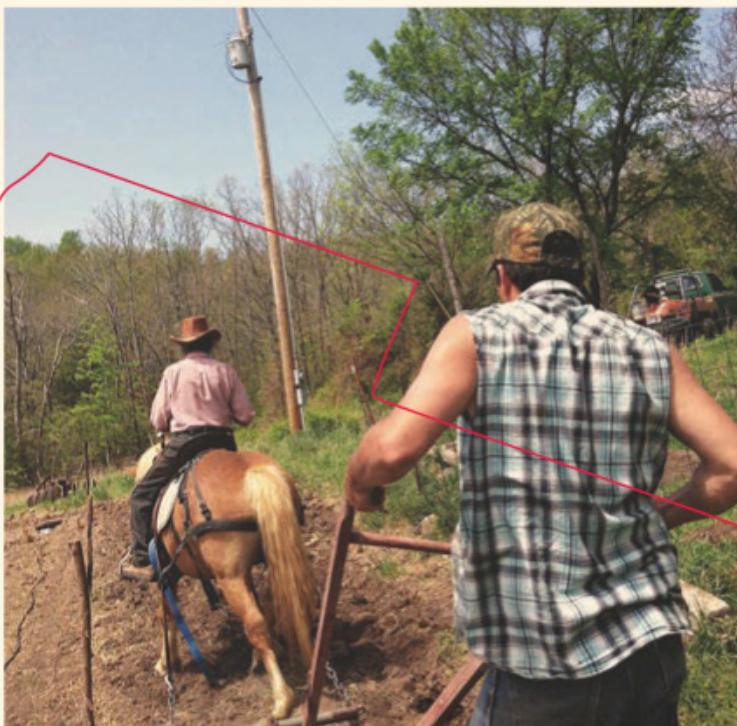
This new coyote said we were gonna walk for two or three hours to this bridge, we're gonna go underneath it, and then we're gonna make it to this big fence, and you girls gotta jump off it.

Those three hours became three days that we were walking. I don't know, maybe we were lost. It was dry and rocky and it was *hot*. We didn't have much water—we had to sip it and hold it in our mouths. We ended up sleeping in open fields, and I was so worried about scorpions. I don't care about snakes but I did care about scorpions.

We finally made it to the bridge and went underneath, and then we kept walking. We saw this big fence on the U.S. side. It was chain-link, 10 or 12 feet tall, like the ones in prison with barbed wire on top. Some parts of the wire were broken where other people had crossed before. My friend knew what to do and climbed up the chain-link and jumped off it. She was on the other side, calling, "Go, go, there he comes, there he comes, you better come soon!"

And we were like, "Who's coming?"

And she calls, "*¡La Migra!*"



Mireya and Robert live in the Ozarks with Mireya's children, Itzanaí, Fernando, Joaquín, and Josh.

Finally, the guy that brought us over there came in the room and took a look at me and he was like, "Are you okay?"

I couldn't talk. Said nothing. He took off his jacket and put it on me, because I was naked. He said, "I'm gonna get you girls out of here. They tricked me. They said if I bring more girls here, they were not gonna do this again."

It was so hard for me to trust him! There were no other choices. I had nothing else. Everything inside me was gone. So whatever comes next, it's fine. They're gonna cut me, they're gonna kill me? Fine. It's better than this. He opened the door and he told me to stay behind him, and we started walking upstairs. He opened the door where my friends were. They had been raped too. We started walking downstairs, out the back door. He had a car. He opened the trunk, said we'll be safe there, and then he started driving.

After a while, he let us out and said, "I've got a friend, and he's gonna help you girls cross. He's gonna take a shortcut." He told me, "I hope you'll forgive me for what I've done."

The coyote started running and disappeared. Here comes the other girl, and *whoosh*—she jumped off that fence. I was the last one and I'm so afraid, shaking. I don't know what to do—I don't know who *La Migra* is or what they're going to do to me, so I just started running, and I was getting close to the fence. I climbed halfway up but I couldn't make it and I fell back. Here comes this big old horse with the immigration guy on it.

He was telling me something in English. I didn't speak English then; I didn't know the words. He got off the horse and walked to me with a mean face. He was a big old guy with red hair and blue eyes, really blue eyes. Beautiful eyes. And then he was asking me questions. I couldn't understand what he was saying, and finally he said it in Spanish: "*¿Tu nombre?*"

"Mireya."

"Mireya."

"Sí."

He grabbed my face with one hand and looked at me. And he turned me to the fence. "*Aquí. Go, go, go! ¡Ve, ve! ¡Aquí!*"

I started walking where he pointed. I saw a big hole under the fence—there were branches covering it, but obviously he knew it was there. He told me to go underneath, cross from there. I moved the branches and went through—I was a little girl, skinny—and he got up on his horse and looked at me and said, “Good luck,” and disappeared on his horse, with the dust behind him.

OVER HERE. GO. The Border Patrol officer who let her go—he was an angel, Mireya said. She’ll always remember his face.

The coyote who turned her over to the rapists—she remembers him as an angel for coming back. “I forgive him. I do. It was hard, took me so long. But I think I got over that. I’m a mom, I’m a wife, I love my husband,” she told me. “It’s part of the life that came to me, and I think I handled it pretty good. I made it out of there alive.” Mireya has reconciled the men’s assaults with God: Maybe it was a test, or the price for good things in store.

In California, she found work babysitting for a couple from Africa. The man wouldn’t reveal his name—she thinks he was worried about getting caught employing an undocumented immigrant. Instead he called himself El Negro de Africa. He was the tallest,

and another woman by land, since they both spoke English and would present well, and to show forged documents to Border Patrol.

The deal was that I was gonna cross in a car, sit in the back seat, and not talk to anybody—they ask for your papers, and you show them. But when I got there our coyote said *La Migra* was checking everybody really good, so he goes, “We know this place where the river is shallow. The water will go up to your knees. You can’t cross during the day, because that’s when they’re looking for you harder. There’ll be a white van waiting on the other side at a gas station. They’ll take care of the rest.”

It’s like, *Hmm. Well*. Everybody’s thinking, talking to each other. Some were crossing for their first time, some their fifth. Everyone said, “Well, we gotta do it. There’s no way back.” They drove us to the river in an old black minivan with no seats. But once we made it to the river, we saw it was flowing like you can’t imagine—you’re seeing the sea! I said, “No, I cannot do that. I don’t know how to swim.” And even if I knew, that current was *fast*.

The guy said, “No, no, no, you’ll be fine. We did it yesterday and the days before.” It was getting dark. He said, “Everybody



*It's so dark. And you hear people yelling, screaming, “Please help me!”
People are going by you—the current took them.*

darkest man she’d ever seen, and he taught Spanish at a university. If she was going to live in America, he said, she had to learn English. He gave her lessons three times a week, a kindness that would change her life. Another angel.

She worked for a few years and gave birth to two boys, but she couldn’t make ends meet. Her grandmother had already returned to Mexico; Mireya decided to follow her. Back in the pueblo, Mireya discovered that Eliseo had a heart problem and needed a specialist. As a U.S. citizen, he was eligible for Medicaid. Mireya set out to join a cousin in Northwest Arkansas; she would then send for her sons. This time she would cross the Rio Grande at Piedras Negras, near Eagle Pass, Texas. She was 23 years old.

There had been heavy rains, and the local TV station was airing reports about migrants who had drowned. Mireya’s family said not to risk it. But Eliseo was sick.

Carrying only her asthma inhaler, some money, and one change of clothes, she took a bus to the border, where she met a group of other migrants. Some coyotes had offered to take Mireya

has to get naked. No clothes, no bra, no panties, nothing. No shoes. It’s just you. Here’s some bags. Throw your clothes in there. And one of us is gonna go to the other side and put the clothes over there. Once you make it to the bamboo on the other side, I’m gonna yell *¡María!* three times, and when you hear that, it means it’s time for everybody to get out of the water, get dressed, and go. You gotta do that *fast*.”

They said if you get out of the water and you’re soaking wet and *La Migra* sees you, they know right away you just crossed the river. You gotta have dry clothes. They said the floodlights on the river, if you were wearing clothes, they can see that, but if you’re naked, they can’t. At least that’s what they told us.

The guy said, “Girls or guys that don’t know how to swim—these two guys, you gotta get up on their shoulders. He’s gonna be walking with these two long metal bars so he can hold himself in the water, because there’s some places where he’s gonna go completely down, cover his head. The water will

WORTH EVERY EFFORT

GOING BEYOND THE LIMITS TO BRING MEDICAL CARE TO REFUGEES

Doctors Without Borders is constantly finding new ways to treat people wherever they are—even when they are on the move. We provide medical care and humanitarian aid to people who need it, including refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Why? Because everyone has the right to lifesaving care. Learn more at doctorswithoutborders.org/refugees.



go up to your chest.” The bars were taller than the guys—they had to be six or eight feet tall—and they would stick them in the ground really good.

We’re like, “How’s he gonna breathe?”

So here we go: Get in the water. You start the journey, and it’s so—*crazy*. You can’t see. It’s so dark. And you hear people yelling, screaming, “Please help me!” People are going by you—the current took them. And you feel so bad. You can’t let go of those metal bars and try to grab one of those people.

We made it to the other side, and then the guy who had me on his shoulders came out coughing and puking water. It took him a while to recover, and he told us, “Wait here. We’re going back to get the rest of the people. Wait for the call.” We waited and waited and waited, but that call never came. It was just the noise of the water.

I was the one who said—I could barely talk—“I’m getting out of this water.” It was so cold. I said, “I’m having an asthma attack. I don’t have my medicine. I can’t breathe. I’m not going to die here. No!”

beer at home before a friend at a party, drunk, called for a ride. And what would the antidepressant, prescribed after Eliseo died, mean?

Inside the facility, she and other women received bar-coded bracelets and took off their clothes. Then technicians X-rayed their lungs to check for tuberculosis. Children? Five. Natural births or C-sections? Natural births, she answered, but they checked her abdomen for a scar. The tattoos and the DUI were discussed and dismissed, and a psychiatrist determined that she was grieving, not mentally ill. Mireya received a sealed plastic envelope to give to her consulate interviewer.

On the way out, she studied the bill. The cost of the exam was \$220. The facility had not accepted proof of her previous vaccinations and had administered its own, bringing the total to \$445.

OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS a group coalesced in the Conquistador’s lobby, where a holiday atmosphere sprang up, as it does in places of purgatorial crisis.

Miguel had been stuck in Mexico for five months. An X-ray had showed a spot on his lung, so he would have to pass a series of sputum tests before going home. In California he was a diesel mechanic. He had found a job in Tijuana while he waited, but it



Mireya with the folder she used for her residency paperwork (left). At the Conquistador Inn in Juárez, Anabella showed Mireya photos of her family (right).

Mireya and the others climbed onto the riverbank, where they found clothing left by other migrants. She walked, barefoot, to the white van at the gas station, wearing a shirt and pants three times her size.

IN JUÁREZ, an industry of hotels, restaurants, and fixers has sprung up around the U.S. consulate, the only one in Mexico that processes immigrant visa applications. Mireya, Joaquín, and I decamped to the Conquistador Inn to wait for her appointments.

The medical exam, conducted at a private facility, would be the first and more difficult of her two interviews. Members of the Facebook group had told her what questions she would have to answer, which they believe are meant to trip up applicants, masking judgments of character as medical assessments. *Tattoos? What do they mean? DUI—so you have a drinking problem?* Mireya would have to confess to tattooed eyebrows and show the butterfly on her lower back—hardly gang symbols, but everyone was nervous about everything. She’d gotten a checkpoint DUI seven years earlier, when she’d had a

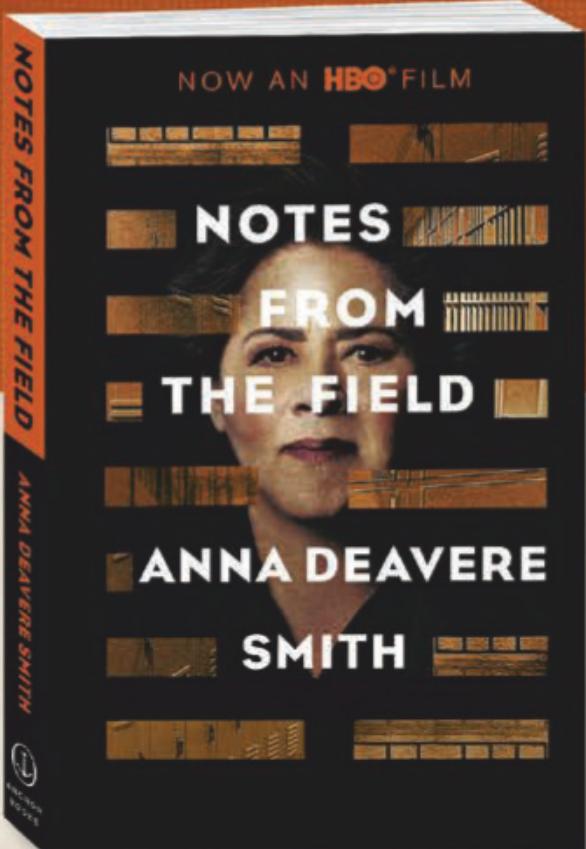
didn’t cover the mortgage and bills. He and his wife, Blanca, have two young children, and her uncle gave her gas money so they could drive to Tijuana on weekends and see Miguel.

Yovana and her sister Graciela, 14 years her junior, confounded everyone. Yovana was the U.S. citizen of the two, but strangers assumed the opposite, since she was brown-skinned and her sister fair. Yovana’s parents had divorced soon after she was born in the U.S. Her father had then returned to Mexico, and had Graciela with a light-skinned, hazel-eyed woman. He took Graciela north when she was 3. Yovana, now a dental assistant, had helped their father buy Rite-Aid gift cards for birthdays and otherwise raised her sister.

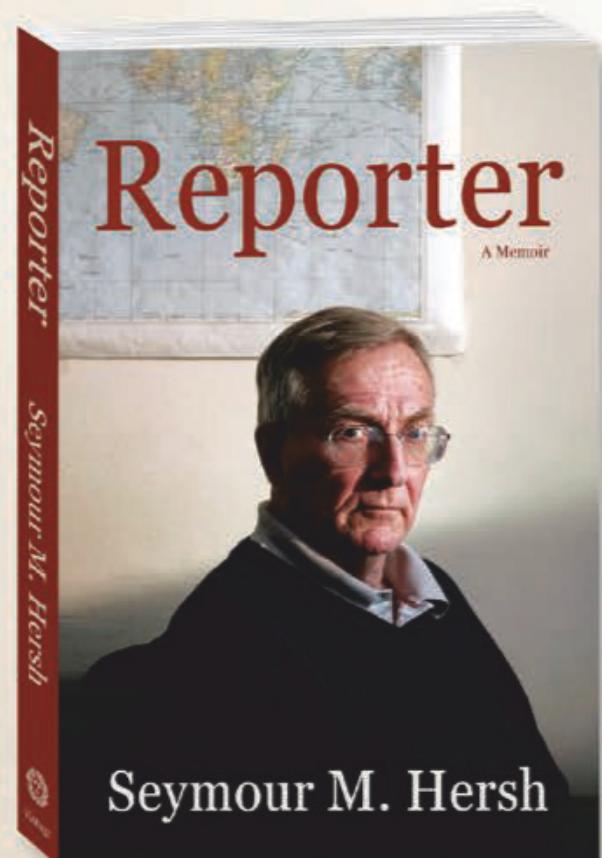
Graciela has her own small children. She’d put off applying for residency because she was afraid to leave them.

Why apply now? “Because of the president we have.”

A few days into our stay, Miguel walked into the Conquistador’s lobby holding a green slip. People passed the paper around, rubbing it for luck. Miguel sat on a sofa and shook his head. “*Creo en Dios.*” I believe in God.



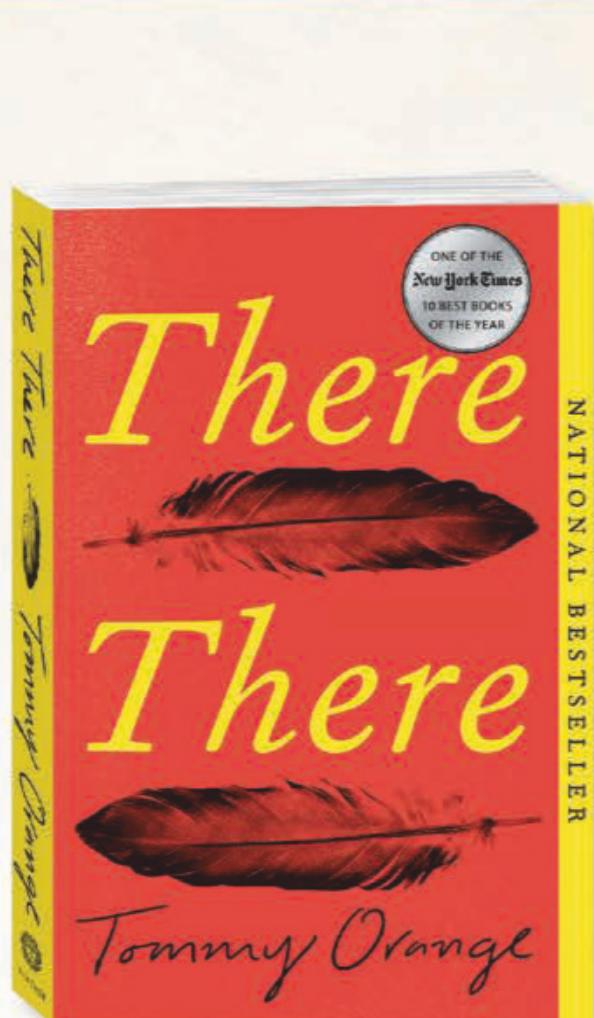
"One of her most ambitious and powerful works
on how matters of race continue to divide and enslave the nation."
—Variety



A Times Literary Supplement
Best Book of the Year

"A master class in
the craft of reporting."
—ALAN RUSBRIDGER,
The New York Times Book Review

IMPORTANT and POWERFUL BOOKS

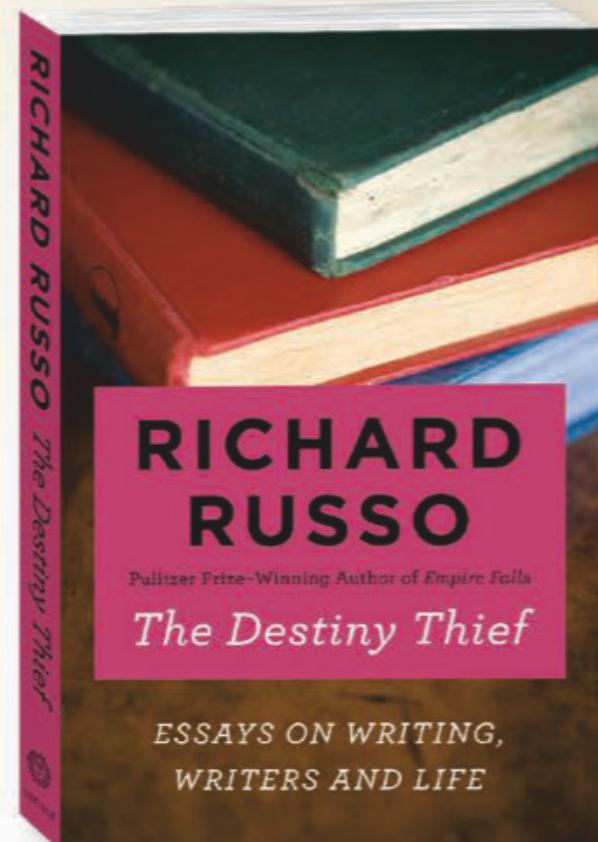


One of the *New York Times*
10 Best Books of the Year

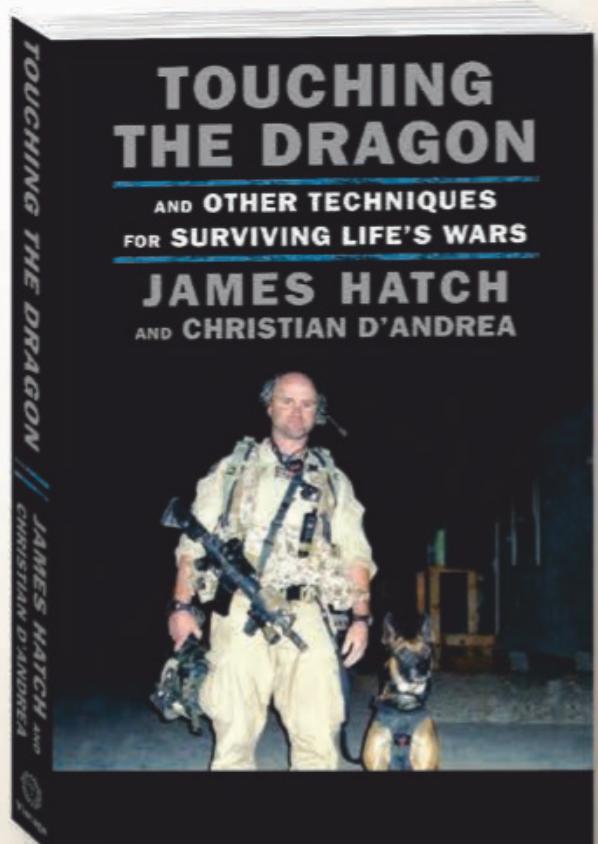
Winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award
and National Book Critics Circle
John Leonard Prize

Pulitzer Prize Finalist

"An astonishing literary
debut." —MARGARET ATWOOD via Twitter



"Admirable.... [Russo is] wry, idiosyncratic, vulnerably bighearted, a craftsman."
—The New York Times Book Review



"Jimmy Hatch is heroic...
for breaking the silence surrounding
the battles many service members
face when they return home."
—ANDERSON COOPER

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Tall, radiant Anabella rushed in the next morning—her visa had been approved! She spread pictures of her grandchildren on a table and gossiped with Mireya. She worried that Mireya’s two crossings would disqualify her.

Most of our group in the hotel had appointments on the same day, and the night before, everyone who was gathered in the lobby agreed to go over together. Miguel and his wife, Blanca, were there, and Yovana and Graciela. Claudia sat next to her husband, their hands on each other’s knees. Oscar showed us a video on his phone of a massive rave he DJ-ed once a year. He’d moved to Brooklyn 10 years ago—his plan had been to save some money and then come back to Mexico and open a business. But he had a baby.

Mireya rose to hold court, speaking in Spanish, telling the folks from California and New York about her garden harvests at El Rancho—the tomatoes, onions, and chilies she made into salsa. “It’s very rare that I shop at Walmart,” she boasted. On her phone she pulled up a picture of a black bear—“and there are dangerous cougars!” She was a jaunty country girl in a checkered work shirt, spooking the city slickers as my brothers and sisters and I used to do. I’d never felt closer to her.

crossed, but she couldn’t read or write. Would she get rattled? Could she remember the dates of birth for her many children if asked? He’d written them on a scrap of paper and tucked it in her hand.

We were in desert weather, our feet freezing on the ground, our head and shoulders roasting as the sun rose. A line formed behind us, eventually stretching a couple of blocks.

There was a stir in the crowd—our people were coming out.

Claudia fell into her husband’s arms, her cheeks wet with tears. Approved.

Graciela found her sister and smiled for what seemed like the first time in days. “I can go back to my children now.”

Oscar and the man who’d shared his almond cake disappeared. We heard they’d gotten blue slips.

Francisco’s parents walked up, stiff and formal but with victory in their eyes. Francisco raised a singed arm straight to heaven. “*¡Gracias a Dios!*” he called, loud enough for *Dios* to hear.

Mireya came out and found Joaquín. She had a green slip in her hand.

MIREYA WOULD WAIT in her family’s home in Jalisco, farther south, for DHL to deliver her visa. Her aunt had died a few

Anabella rushed in the next morning—her visa had been approved. She worried that Mireya’s two crossings would disqualify her.



Blanca wondered about the Latino population in Arkansas, jobs, the presence of ICE. Mireya talked about her house cleaning—“For the men, it’s easier, they work in construction”—and explained that in Elkins most of the locals have been welcoming.

“Is it a sanctuary city?” Yovana asked.

“No ...”

THE RUMOR WAS THAT, IN PRACTICE, appointments were first come, first served, so the next morning everyone lined up at the consulate before dawn, buying coffee at a corner store. A young man passed around almond cake. Once the consulate opened, those with appointments went inside while the others waited.

Francisco was agitated. He’s a naturalized citizen and works for \$13 an hour at a plant in Texas that makes aluminum rotors; their hot edges had burned a ladder of scars up his arms. Now his parents were seeking to join him. He believed his father would be okay—he had crossed illegally but returned 12 years ago. His mother had never

months before, and her uncle Odilón, a handyman, solemn with grief, lived there with his grown sons and their children. He picked us up at the airport in Guadalajara.

Mireya had not been to her pueblo in 20 years. It lies at the foot of a mountain, and a vandalized Spanish hacienda stands at the edge, its interior blue walls open to the sky. Villagers maintain the cobblestone streets. Men working in construction in the States have wired money to have the icons in the chapel leafed in gold, and a man named Alejandro rings its bell with a rope. For a few pesos, an old couple will milk one of their cows directly into your pail.

About 4,000 Mexicans live in the pueblo, along with a few hundred migrants from El Salvador and Guatemala who come there to pick the blackberries and raspberries surrounding the town—most Mexicans couldn’t get by on the wages.

The first night, there was tequila and Coca-Cola under the bougainvillea Mireya’s grandmother had planted decades ago. Her

cousins and their families filtered in, piling drinks and tacos on the card table before her, and pulling up chairs. A deliveryman brought Coronas in a bucket filled with ice, and then cracked one open himself and sat down. The younger men talked trash. Mireya sassed back, giving as good as she got, and they screamed with laughter.

Past midnight, the children put themselves to bed, and a cousin turned the radio from mariachi music to something slower. Odilón took Mireya's hand and she rested her head on his shoulder as they danced.

In the morning, Mireya brought duffels of her children's hand-me-downs to her childhood best friend, Ana. The women sorted through the pile just as they had in 1997, when Mireya gave all her clothes to Ana before heading to the Rio Grande.

Over the next few days, Mireya walked through the streets, greeting people. "¿Me recuerdas?" Do you remember me?

She bought snacks sold in a doorway and an old woman stepped out. "Do you remember me? I'm Mireya!"

"Mireya! I remember those eyes!"

"My son Eliseo died in an accident. I'm in Arkansas—"

"Remember how I used to take you from your mother when she was beating you?"

tamales as soon as her feet touched ground in Arkansas, if only she could get there.

Mireya was, finally, exhausted. When she was growing up, she said, they were so poor that at Christmas her grandmother decorated a scrub tree with cotton balls and gave each grandkid four candies. That was it. And they'd been happy because they were together.

She fell into solitude.

THE MEN FOUND THE RAT and a few days later the DHL package came. Mireya called my mom, and she sent money. Mireya, Joaquín, and I flew into Juárez at sundown and found a driver to take us to El Paso. We sat on a bridge high above the Rio Grande, stalled in traffic, the surrounding mountains disappearing as the sun set over a border finally made visible only with brake lights. A vendor walked among the cars, carrying a cluster of fluorescent balloons.

The driver studied Mireya in his rearview mirror and spoke of children who had died of cold in the desert and other grave things. "Cabrones, que bárbaro"—bastards, how cruel—she murmured from time to time, but she was buzzed with forward motion again. Melancholy couldn't touch her. And I knew that Mexico had made Mireya and me family after all: This journey would tie us.



Mireya hugged Joaquín after finding out she'd been approved for a visa (left). While waiting for her visa, Mireya stayed in her family's home in Jalisco (center) and visited her late aunt's grave with her uncle Odilón (right).

Yes.

Mireya walked on. There was the guava tree. There was the clinic where her little brother Alfonso was born. "There are the sheep! So big! See that cactus over there—it produces fruit, but only in May. Ah, *pinche madre*," motherfucker, she crooned.

Several days in, the DHL package still hadn't arrived, and Mireya had gone from dashing international visitor to servant of everyone but Odilón. She rarely left the house, cooking, cleaning, and washing her cousins' and Joaquín's laundry, unable to say no.

Mireya and I shared a bed, and Joaquín slept in the same room. Every night mariachi music blared from the patio. One morning Mireya announced that a rat had woken her, and the men and boys of the house tore the room apart, armed with machetes.

My family had passed the hat for Mireya's travel expenses, but clearly it had gone to household bills. There was no money left to get home. Robert called, desperate for her to return. Mireya told him to rustle up more work and sell some pigs. She would sell homemade

The driver left us at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection station, a huge room empty at this hour. He would wait for us on the other side.

A Border Patrol officer ripped open the DHL envelope and shook out an inch-thick stack of papers that he kept, and then Mireya's Mexican passport and U.S. visa. He was heartthrob-handsome, made handsomer because he was shy. He stamped Mireya's visa with a spring-loaded rubber stamp, one of those big physical things manufactured for the sole purpose, it seems, of sending echoes off the walls.

Mireya walked toward the door that would take her into the United States, where her taxi was waiting, and then she stopped and turned around to gaze at the officer. "He's another angel," she said. "I'll always remember his face." **A**

Darcy Courteau is a writer and photographer based in Washington, D.C., and Arkansas.

An Oral History
of Trump's Bigotry

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BY:

David A. Graham,
Adrienne Green,
Cullen Murphy,
and Parker Richards

The first quotation from Donald Trump ever to appear in The New York Times came on October 16, 1973. Trump was responding to charges filed by the Justice Department alleging racial bias at his family's real-estate company. "They are absolutely ridiculous," Trump said of the charges. "We have never discriminated, and we never would."

In the years since then, Trump has assembled a long record of comment on issues involving African Americans as well as Mexicans, Hispanics more broadly, Native Americans, Muslims, Jews, immigrants, women, and people with disabilities. His statements have been reflected in his behavior—from public acts (placing ads calling for the execution of five young black and Latino men accused of rape, who were later shown to be innocent) to private preferences ("When Donald and Ivana came to the casino, the bosses would order all the black people off the floor," a former employee of Trump's Castle, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, told a writer for The New Yorker). Trump emerged as a political force owing to his full-throated embrace of "birtherism," the false charge that the nation's first black president, Barack Obama, was not born in the United States. His presidential campaign was fueled by nativist sentiment directed at nonwhite immigrants, and he proposed barring Muslims from entering the country. In 2016, Trump described himself to The Washington Post as "the least racist person that you've ever encountered."

Instances of bigotry involving Donald Trump span more than four decades. The Atlantic interviewed a range of people with knowledge of several of those episodes. Their recollections have been edited for concision and clarity.

I.

**"You Don't Want to Live
With Them Either"**

The Justice Department's 1973 lawsuit against Trump Management Company focused on 39 properties in New York City. The government alleged that employees were directed to tell African American lease applicants that there were no open apartments. Company policy, according to an employee quoted in court documents, was to rent only to "Jews and executives."

The Justice Department frequently used consent decrees to settle discrimination cases, offering redress to plaintiffs while allowing defendants to avoid an admission of guilt. The rationale: Consent decrees achieved speedier results with less public rancor.

Nathaniel Jones was the general counsel for the NAACP. He later became a federal judge. John Yinger, an economist specializing in residential discrimination, served at the time as an expert witness in a number of fair-housing cases. Elyse Goldweber, a Justice Department lawyer, brought the first federal suit against Trump Management.

NATHANIEL JONES: The 1968 Fair Housing Act gave us leverage to go after major developers and landlords. The situation in New York was terrible.

JOHN YINGER: Community groups like the Urban League started doing audits and tests to show discrimination. In 1973, the Urban League found a lot of discrimination in some of the properties that Trump Management owned.

ELYSE GOLDWEBER: I went to a place called Operation Open City. What they had done was send "testers"—meaning one white couple and one couple of color—to Trump Village, a very large, lower-middle-class housing project in Brooklyn. And of course the white people were treated great, and for the people of color there were no apartments. We subpoenaed all their documents. That's how we found that a person's application, if you were a person of color, had a big C on it.

The Department of Justice brings the case and we name Fred Trump, the father,

CITY OF NEW YORK
Commission on Human Rights
on the complaint of

Complaint No. 4253H

Agnes Dunn Complainant

against

Green Park Essex, Inc.;
Fred C. Trump
and
Mr. & Mrs. Spitzer, Dupts.

I, Agnes Dunn, residing at [REDACTED] charge [REDACTED] whose address is [REDACTED] with an unlawful discriminatory practice relating to 41-10 Bowes Street, Flushing, New York, on or about February 1, 1970, by discriminating against me because of my RACE (), COLOR (), CREED (), NATIONAL ORIGIN (), AGE (), SEX ().

The particulars are: 1. I was made aware of a 3-1/2 and a 4-1/2 room apartment at 41-10 Bowes Street in Flushing, New York (Queens County) by a friend who lives at that address. On Friday, February 6, 1970, I saw an ad in the New York Times indicating that such apartments were available. I had been to this building about a month earlier in response to an ad in the New York Times, but was told by the Superintendent that no similar vacancies existed.

2. At about 4:15 in the afternoon of Friday, February 6, 1970, I went to the premises and rang the Superintendent's bell. A woman answered the intercom. I told her I was coming in reference to the ad in the New York Times and that I was interested in a 3-1/2 or 4-1/2 room apartment. She told me I could "forget" the 4-1/2 room apartment, and that there were no lights in the apartment and therefore it could not be seen. I insisted on asking her about the rents, and she finally told me that someone would be down to help me.

3. The Superintendent came down shortly afterwards. I showed him the ad that I had in my hand from the New York Times and asked him about the apartments in question. He told me that the ad had been running since last Monday and that the apartments were both taken. I asked him when the apartments were rented; he told me that they had been rented last Monday. I asked him how much was the rent for the 3-1/2 and the 4-1/2. He told me that the rents were \$235 and \$263.50 respectively. I then left the premises.

4. I am a Negro. I charge the respondents with discriminating against me in violation of the New York City Administrative Code.

I have not commenced any action, civil, criminal or administrative based upon the above allegation other than the following:

CITY OF NEW YORK, etc., COUNTY OF Queens, etc.
Agnes D. Dunn, being duly sworn, deposes and says that foregoing complaint and knows the contents thereof, that the same is true of her own knowledge, except as to the matters therein stated on information and belief, that as to those matters, she believes the same to be true.

Subscribed and sworn to before me on this 9th day of February, 1980.

E-29 (2 of 2)

Pages from a February 1970 complaint against Trump Management alleging discriminatory rental practices

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME -

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>

: and Donald Trump, the son, and Donald
: hires Roy Cohn, of Army-McCarthy fame.
: [Cohn, a Trump mentor, had served as
: Senator Joe McCarthy's chief counsel dur-
: ing his investigations of alleged Commu-
: nists in the government and was accused
: of pressuring the Army to give preferen-
: tial treatment to a personal friend.] Cohn
: turns around and sues us for \$100 million.
: This was my first appearance as a lawyer
: in court. Cohn spoke for two hours, then
: the judge ruled from the bench that you
: can't sue the government for prosecuting
: you. The next week we took the deposi-
: tions. My boss took Fred's, and I got to
: take Donald's. He was exactly the way he
: is today. He said to me at one point during
: a coffee break, "You know, you don't want
: to live with them either."

: Everyone in the world has looked for
: that deposition. We cannot find it. Trump
: always acted like he was irritated to be
: there. He denied everything, and we went
: on with our case. We had the records with
: the C, and we had the testers, and you
: could see that everything was lily-white
: over there. Ultimately they settled—they
: signed a consent decree. They had to
: post all their apartments with the Urban
: League, advertise in the *Amsterdam News*,
: many other things. It was pretty strong.

: **JOHN YINGER:** Trump had some
: interesting language after the settle-
: ment: He said that it did not require him
: to accept people on welfare, which was
: kind of beside the point.

:
: *Under the terms of the settlement, reached*
: *in 1975, the Trumps did not admit to any*
: *wrongdoing. But soon, according to the gov-*
: *ernment, they were back at it. In 1978, the*
: *Justice Department alleged that Trump*
: *Management was in breach of the agreement.*
: *The new case dragged on until 1982, when*
: *the original consent decree expired and the*
: *case was closed. Soon, Trump's headquarters*
: *would be installed in Trump Tower, which*
: *opened in February 1983. Barbara Res was*
: *the construction manager.*

:
: **BARBARA RES:** We met with the archi-
: tect to go over the elevator-cab interiors at
: Trump Tower, and there were little dots
: next to the numbers. Trump asked what
: the dots were, and the architect said, "It's
: braille." Trump was upset by that. He said,
: "Get rid of it." The architect said, "I'm
: sorry; it's the law." This was before the
: Americans With Disabilities Act, but New
: York City had a law. Trump's exact words
: were: "No blind people are going to live
: in this building."

: **ELYSE GOLDWEBER:** Was he con- :
: cerned about injustice? No. Never. This :
: was an annoyance. We were little annoy- :
: ing people, and we wouldn't go away. :
: **BARBARA RES:** As far as discrimina- :
: tion, he wouldn't discriminate against :
: somebody who had \$3 million to pay for a :
: three-bedroom apartment. Eventually he :
: had some very unsavory characters there. :
: But if you read John O'Donnell's book :
: [*Trumped! The Inside Story of the Real Don-* :
: *ald Trump—His Cunning Rise and Spectac-* :
: *ular Fall*, written with James Rutherford :
: and published in 1991], Trump talked :
: about how he didn't want black people :
: handling his money; he wanted the guys :
: with the yarmulkes. He was very much :
: the kind of person who would take peo- :
: ple of a religion, like Jews; or a race, like :
: blacks; or a nationality, like Italians, and :
: ascribe to them certain qualities. Blacks :
: were lazy, and Jews were good with :
: money, and Italians were good with their :
: hands—and Germans were clean.

: **NATHANIEL JONES:** Consent :
: decrees were an important tool. The sad :
: thing now is that, in his last act as Trump's :
: attorney general, Jeff Sessions issued a :
: memorandum curtailing enforcement :
: programs and consent decrees across the :
: board when it comes to discrimination.

:
: **II.**
: **"Bring Back the**
: **Death Penalty"**

:
: *The so-called Central Park Five were a group*
: *of black and Latino teens who were accused—*
: *wrongly—of raping a white woman in Cen-*
: *tral Park on April 19, 1989. Donald Trump*
: *took out full-page ads in all four major New*
: *York newspapers to argue that perpetrators*
: *of crimes such as this one "should be forced*
: *to suffer" and "be executed." In two trials,*
: *in August and December 1990, the youths*
: *were convicted of violent offenses includ-*
: *ing assault, robbery, rape, sodomy, and*
: *attempted murder; their sentences ranged*
: *from five to 15 years in prison. In 2002, after*
: *the discovery of exonerating DNA evidence*
: *and the confession by another individual*
: *to the crime, the convictions of the Cen-*
: *tral Park Five were vacated. The men were*

awarded a settlement of \$41 million for false arrest, malicious prosecution, and a racially motivated conspiracy to deprive them of their rights. Trump took to the pages of the New York Daily News, calling the settlement “a disgrace.” During his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump would again insist on the guilt of the Central Park Five.

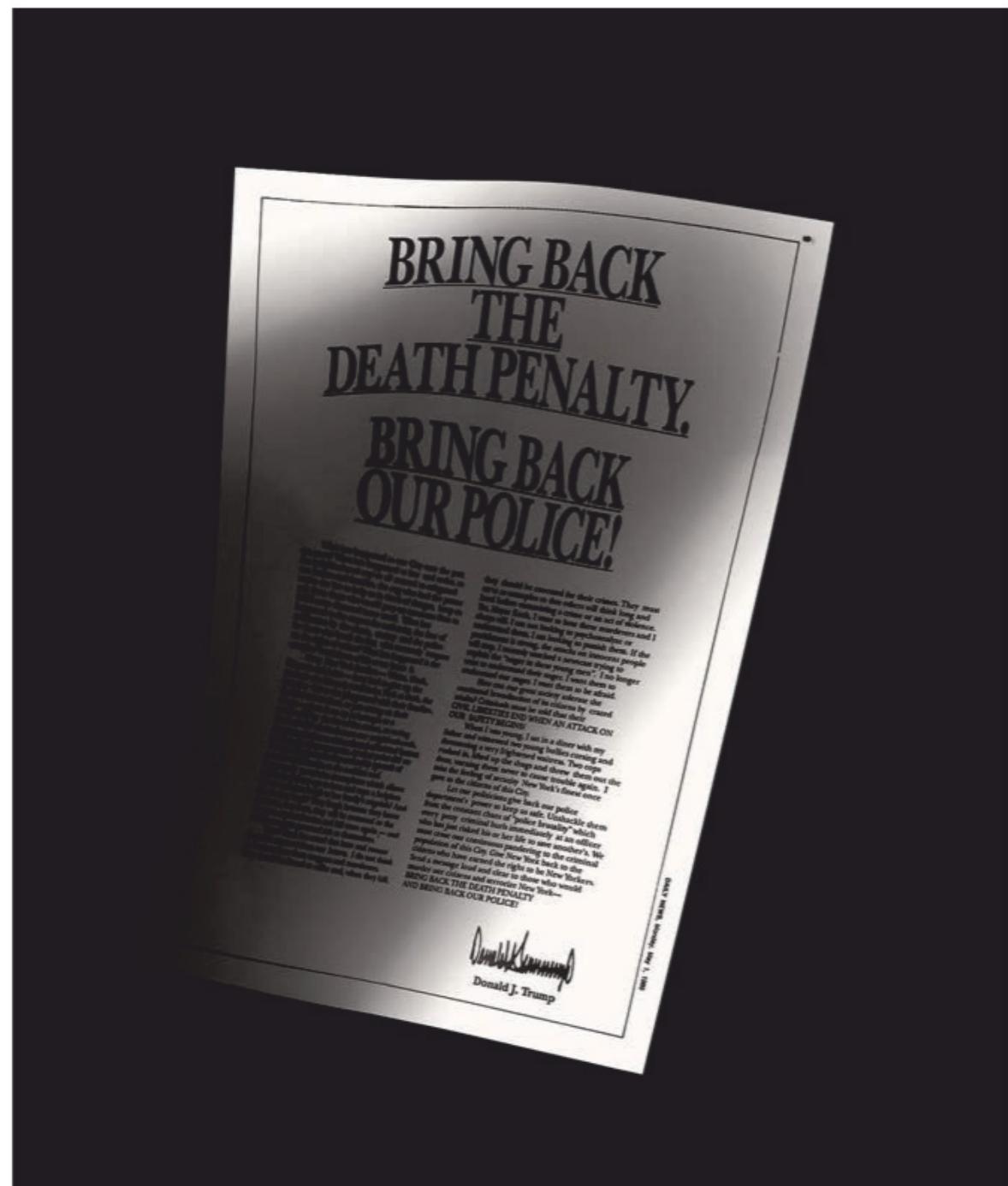
Jonathan C. Moore represented four of the Central Park Five when they later sued the City of New York. Yusef Salaam was one of the five young men who were wrongly convicted. Timothy L. O’Brien spent hundreds of hours with Trump while researching his 2005 book, *TrumpNation*. C. Vernon Mason represented Salaam and other defendants.

JONATHAN C. MOORE: The Trump ad was calling for the death penalty for juveniles. It was taken out at a time before there was any adjudication of their guilt. The theme was: Here are all these young black kids and Hispanic kids who are going to rape our young white women, so let’s put them all away. You know, we call them the Central Park Five, but it’s really the Central Park 15, or 18, or however many family members there were, because the family members suffered a great deal as well. They visited the boys in prison, on holidays; they did their birthdays inside, had Christmas parties. To this day I talk to some of them and they go into tears when they think about what happened.

YUSEF SALAAM: When we were accused of raping the Central Park jogger, it really wasn’t an accusation. It wasn’t like we were innocent and had to be proved guilty in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of the people. Everybody, including Donald Trump, rushed to judge us, and therefore it became that much more difficult to be able to mount a really successful fight. And, of course, we lost.

TIMOTHY L. O’BRIEN: One of the things Trump learned when he injected himself into the Central Park Five case was that he could get attention for himself because he was a spokesman for a certain type of Archie Bunker New Yorker. I think that’s one of the bonds that he shares with [Trump attorney and former New York City Mayor] Rudy Giuliani: They’re both profoundly guys from that moment in New York when a lot of racial boundaries got drawn.

C. VERNON MASON: The level of animosity and hatred was palpable. It was brutal. The language used around this case—“savages”—bordered on the kinds of stuff that Ida B. Wells and others wrote about during the lynching period.



An advertisement placed by Donald Trump in all four major New York newspapers on May 1, 1989, calling for the death penalty for the Central Park Five

YUSEF SALAAM: For him to say, *You know what? I’m going to take out an ad, and I’m going to call for the state to kill these individuals*—it was almost as if he was trying to get the public or somebody from the

darkest places in society to come into our homes. Remember, they had published our phone numbers, our names, and our addresses in New York City’s newspapers. So we were pariahs.

C. VERNON MASON: The defendants were afraid for their own safety and for their families. These were not people who had substantial means to protect themselves with security guards, or who were living in some gated community.

YUSEF SALAAM: I think about when they took our DNA and they tried to match it against what they had. And there was no match, and they still moved forward. The spiked wheels of justice continued to roll down the hill and mow us

down. And all of this on the heels of what Donald Trump had published. Donald Trump’s ad was vicious. It was very disrespectful of what the law is supposed to be about.

JONATHAN C. MOORE: I have children, and I can’t imagine my son being in prison from age 14 to age 21. You’re stealing the most innocent part of somebody’s life. None of these kids had ever had any real interactions with the law before. When they were finally vindicated, there was never any apology from Trump, or even a hint of an apology.

YUSEF SALAAM: Donald Trump’s ad ran on May 1, 1989. The crime had happened April 19, 1989. We hadn’t even started trial! That was just a few weeks after we were accused. He put nails in our coffin. He’s continuing to do that by continuing to say that we are guilty, by continuing to say that the police department

: had so much evidence against us. What :
: evidence did they have that stuck? They :
: had no evidence. They had manufactured :
: false confessions.

: **C. VERNON MASON:** In 2016—this is :
: 26 years after the case, and 14 years after :
: it had been proved that none of these :
: defendants had anything to do with that :
: rape—Donald Trump said, *I still believe* :
they're guilty. And I guess, in his mind, :
: he would suggest that they still should :
: be executed.

: **TIMOTHY L. O'BRIEN:** He trusts his :
: gut on issues surrounding race, because :
: he's got a simplistic, deterministic, and :
: racist perspective on who people are. I :
: think at his core he has a genetic under- :
: standing of what makes people good and :
: bad or successful. And you see it all the :
: time—he talks about people having good :
: genes. He looks at the world that way. He's :
: got a very Aryan view of people and race.

: **on Natural Resources.** The subcommittee :
: was chaired by Bill Richardson, later New :
: Mexico's governor. Trump was there to sup- :
: port an effort to modify legislation that had :
: given Native American tribes the right to :
: own and operate casinos. George Miller, a :
: Democrat from California and the chair of :
: the Committee on Natural Resources, was :
: also present.

: **Tadd Johnson,** of the Minnesota Chip- :
: pewa Tribe, Bois Forte Band, served as the :
: Democratic counsel on the subcommittee. :
: Rick Hill is a former chair of the National :
: Indian Gaming Association and of the :
: Oneida Tribe in Wisconsin. Pat Williams was :
: a member of Congress from Montana.

: **Trump** began by noting that he had :
: prepared a “politically correct” statement :
: for the committee, but almost immediately :
: went off script. The hearing became loud :
: and acrimonious.

: **BILL RICHARDSON:** He said he didn't :
: think that Native Americans deserved the :
: legislation, because there was a lot of cor- :
: ruption around Native American casinos. :
: I remember asking him after the hear- :
: ing, “Well, what's the evidence?” He said, :
: “The FBI has it.” I said, “You're making the :
: accusation; why don't you bring the evi- :
: dence?” He said, “No, you should ask the :
: FBI.” I said, “You're making the charge of :
: corruption and you're not backing it up— :
: that is unacceptable.”

: **TADD JOHNSON:** Trump was wear- :
: ing pancake makeup, which I hadn't seen :
: before, at least not on somebody testi- :
: fying in Congress. He was very evasive, :
: and he made all these allegations about :
: organized-crime activity but could pro- :
: duce no single incident, no tangible evi- :
: dence, nobody we could talk to. A lot of :
: what he was saying were just fabrications.

: **RICK HILL:** He said, “You guys are all :
: going to have egg on your faces.” This :
: was going to be the worst thing to hap- :
: pen since Al Capone. Trump went all :
: threatening, raving about how there is :
: no way we could stop the Mafia. He used :
: the phrase *Joey Killer*. He said there was :
: no way the tribal chairmen could stop :
: Joey Killer.

: **BILL RICHARDSON:** The second :
: allegation he made that was very disturb- :
: ing at that hearing was to examine some :
: Native American tribes' application as :
: Indian tribes—they were trying to get the :
: subcommittee to basically declare their :
: tribes or their group of individuals Native :
: Americans. Trump mentioned Native :
: Americans who had recently opened :
: casinos and said to George Miller, “They

Drug Dealing at Monticello?



The St. Regis Mohawk Indian Tribe proposes to open a gambling casino at the Monticello Race Track in Sullivan County.
How much do you really know about the St. Regis Mohawk Indians?
According to the New York Times (June 9, 1999), US and Canadian law enforcement officials broke up the biggest cocaine trafficking ring in northern NY operating on the 14,000 acre St. Regis Mohawk reservation. Twenty-six people were arrested. Police also confiscated 19 kilograms and handguns. According to CBS 60 Minutes II (January 18, 2002), the St. Regis Mohawk Indians, working with Organized Crime, ran an illegal cigarette smuggling ring near the Canadian border that netted \$1.6 million a week.

Under Federal law, the Monticello Race Track Casino would actually be off limits to federal, state and local police!

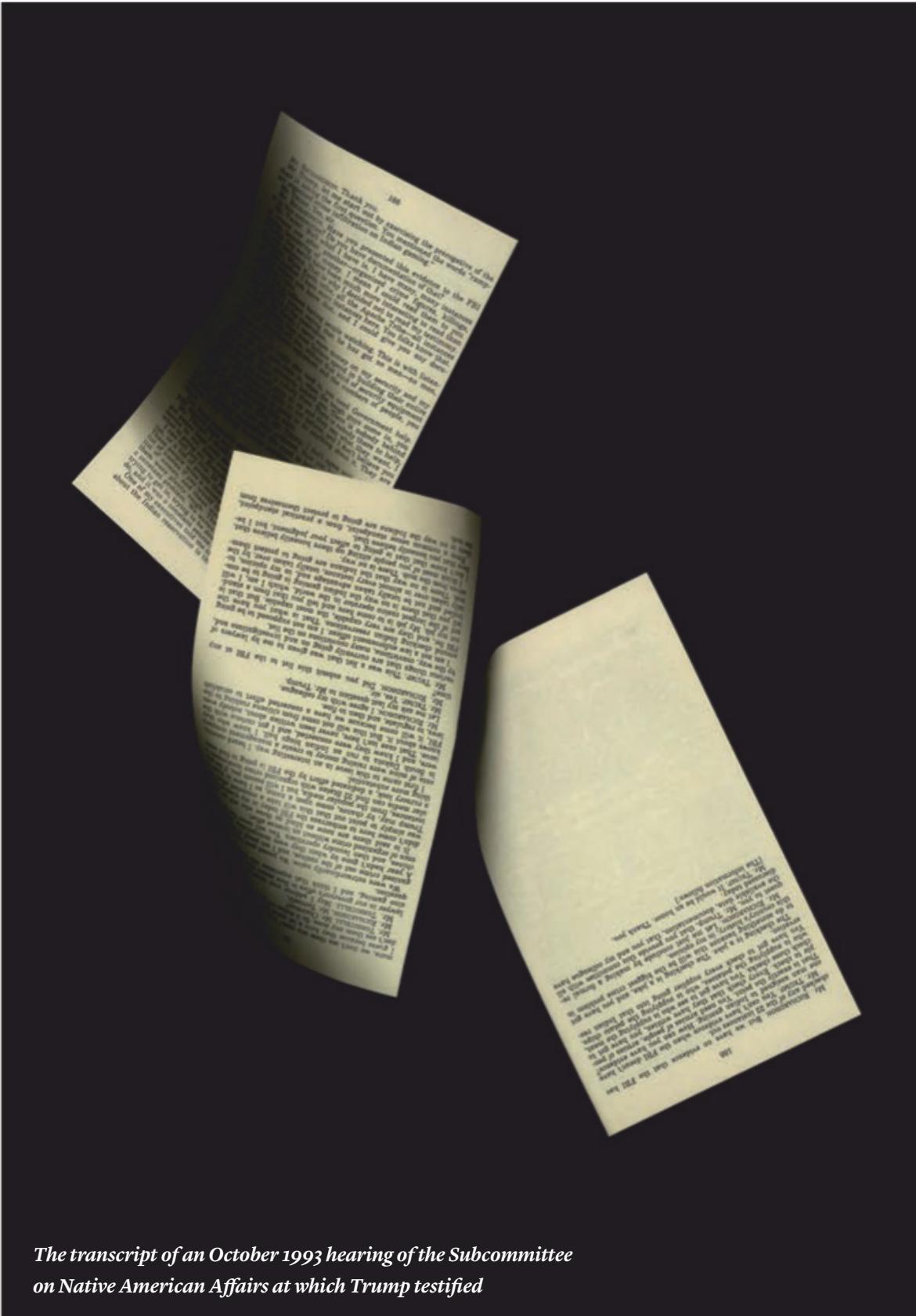
Are these the new neighbors we want? The St. Regis Mohawk Indians' record of criminal activity is well documented. The proposed Monticello Indian Casino is located directly across the street from Sullivan County's largest prison.

Root is cool.
Call Governor Pataki today at (518) 474-8390. Tell him you don't want Indians dealing in Sullivan County. Tell Governor Pataki to let our State Legislators vote on his Indian casino proposal for the Catakillas.

A Project of New York Institute For Law & Society
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The New York Institute For Law & Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit advocacy group.
The views expressed in any documents or publications of public offices, departments or the legislature are not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Page proof—with Trump's handwritten notation—of one of the ads Trump commissioned to oppose casinos run by Native Americans. The ad ran in 2000.



The transcript of an October 1993 hearing of the Subcommittee on Native American Affairs at which Trump testified

: don't look like Indians to me." He said : that. It was so outrageous.

: **RICK HILL:** Miller challenged him. He : said, "You know how racist what you're : saying is? How racist that is to judge peo- : ple by what we think they look like and : ignore their inherent rights as a person?"

: **TADD JOHNSON:** George responded, : "Well, thank God people don't have rights : based upon your look test. And, you : know, how many times have we heard : this before in this country?" And then he : went through a litany of various groups : that were discriminated against, which : is a long list.

: **PAT WILLIAMS:** I was stunned by the : openness of Trump's anger toward any- : one who would compete with him—and : particularly if they were people of color.

: **TADD JOHNSON:** I remember watch- : ing the faces of the Indian people in the : back. There were some tribal elders who : had come in from Minnesota, and were : giving looks that could kill.

: **BILL RICHARDSON:** It was the most : hostile hearing that I've ever been involved : in. And I was in Congress for 15 years.

: **PAT WILLIAMS:** I think the reason : Trump blew up at Miller didn't so much : have to do with whatever the debate was : about at the moment. He blew up because : he came to realize that Miller was more : important than he was.

:
: Later, using a front organization called : the New York Institute for Law and Soci- : ety, Trump and his associate Roger Stone : placed advertisements in upstate-New York

: newspapers in an attempt to block the Saint : Regis Mohawk Tribe's planned Sullivan : County casino. On a page proof of one ad, : featuring hypodermic needles and lines of : cocaine, Trump wrote: "Roger, this could : be good!" Trump, Stone, and the institute : would later pay \$250,000 in fines for vio- : lating disclosure rules governing political : advertising. Bradley Waterman served as : general counsel and tax counsel for the Saint : Regis Mohawks. Tony Cellini was the town : supervisor of Thompson, where the casino : was going to be built.

:
: **BRADLEY WATERMAN:** Trump and : Stone created an organization that was : said to be pro-family and anti-gaming. : Its real mission was to put the kibosh on : gaming by the Mohawks in the Catskills : and in that way protect Trump's casin- : os in Atlantic City. To that end, the : organization—actually Trump and : Stone—purchased ads that portrayed : the Mohawks as criminals, drug dealers, : etc. The Mohawks regarded the ads as : racist. So did I. So did everyone else who : weighed in.

: **TONY CELLINI:** We were hurting for : jobs in this area. And then all of a sudden : these attack ads came out, which were : financed, we found out later, to the tune : of more than \$1 million by Donald Trump.

: **BRADLEY WATERMAN:** Trump : personally approved the ads. For example, : he wrote comments on proofs such as : "Roger—do it." Not surprisingly, Trump : and Stone lied about the number of people : who contributed financially to the organi- : zation. It was strictly a Trump-Stone oper- : ation. The chiefs were furious, particularly : since Trump never met any Mohawks, set : foot on Mohawk territory, or otherwise : tried to learn about the Mohawks.

IV.

"Our Very Vicious World"

: In the summer of 2005, Donald Trump : had an idea: What if the next season of his : reality-TV show, *The Apprentice*, pitted "a : team of successful African Americans ver- : sus a team of successful whites"? Trump : thought the format would be a sort of social

: commentary—“reflective of our very vicious :
: world.” The concept never made it to air, but :
: Trump’s treatment of black contestants on :
: his show generated controversy.

: One contestant, Kevin Allen, a graduate :
: of Emory University, the University of Penn- :
: sylvania, and the University of Chicago, was :
: criticized by Trump on the show for being too :
: educated; at the same time, Trump suggested :
: that Allen was personally intimidating.

: Mark Harris was a television critic for :
: Entertainment Weekly. Kwame Jackson :
: was the runner-up on The Apprentice’s :
: first season.

:
: **MARK HARRIS:** We were still very :
: early in the history of reality-competition :
: TV. *The Apprentice* started in January :
: 2004, so the models that I was working :
: off of as a critic were really just *Survivor* :
: and *American Idol*. *The Apprentice* had :
: this very manipulative approach to race. I :
: felt that it was casting and shaping stories :
: toward stereotypes that a default white :
: audience would find somehow satisfying.

: **KEVIN ALLEN:** I remember Donald :
: Trump asking me, “Kevin, why are the :
: women in the suite scared of you?” I had :
: never heard this before from anybody. It :
: was shocking to me to hear that sort of :
: attack. There was a lot of picking at me :
: and trying to make me come out and be :
: that overly aggressive, overbearing, scary :
: African American male. But I was in law :
: school at the time and I had worked on :
: Capitol Hill, and I’m fairly adept at diffus- :
: ing that sort of thing. I think it made me :
: sort of a boring character. But there were :
: moments when I was put in situations :
: where it could have gone wrong.

: **MARK HARRIS:** It’s interesting to look :
: back at it now, because the way Kevin :
: Allen was treated was like a sneak preview :
: of white critical reaction to Obama. It was :
: like, *Well, maybe he’s too qualified, maybe* :
he’s too smart, maybe he’s too cerebral.

: **KWAME JACKSON:** I think that Don- :
: ald Trump had only been used to deal- :
: ing with black men of a very specific :
: genre: Mike Tyson, Don King, Herschel :
: Walker—celebrities, entertainers. So to :
: have a young African American man with :
: arguably a better education than him—I :
: don’t think that was something he was :
: used to, because obviously he didn’t hire :
: any in his organization.

:
: *Randal Pinkett, a black man and the show’s* :
: *2005 winner, was asked by Trump to share* :
: *his title with the white runner-up, Rebecca* :
: *Jarvis. Pinkett refused. As the winner, he later* :
: *worked briefly for the Trump Organization.*

: **RANDAL PINKETT:** He did not want :
: to see an African American as the out- :
: right and sole winner. I believe I backed :
: him into a corner. It goes back to an old :
: adage that I’ve been told throughout my :
: life as an African American man—that :
: you have to be twice as good just to be :
: considered equal. And that is a state- :
: ment that reflects the thinking of a :
: Donald Trump. Donald can be racist in :
: ways that he’s not even aware are racist, :
: because he is so out of touch with people :
: who are not like him.

: **TIMOTHY L. O’BRIEN:** The only :
: people of color he’s gone out of his way :
: to try to establish relationships with are :
: people who are athletes, celebrities, or :
: entertainers. He became close to Mike :
: Tyson because Donald and Don King :
: were trying to arrange heavyweight fights :
: in Atlantic City, to draw high rollers to the :
: casinos. It wasn’t because he was fond of :
: black athletes. It was because black box- :
: ers were good for his business.

: **RANDAL PINKETT:** I was the only :
: person of color that I saw at an executive :
: level in my entire year with the Trump :
: Organization. And to put that into context,

: this was 2006. This was the height of :
: Donald’s popularity with *The Apprentice*. :
: He had launched several ventures, most :
: of which are now defunct: Trump Univer- :
: sity, Trump Institute, Trump Ice, Trump :
: Mortgage, *Trump* magazine. All of those :
: companies were up and running. All of :
: them had employees; they had CEOs :
: who ran those companies—and still, as I :
: recall, none of them had persons of color :
: in executive roles. None of them.

v.

“He Doesn’t Have a Birth Certificate”

: “Our current president came out of nowhere, :
: came out of nowhere ... The people who went :
: to school with him—they never saw him; they



Donald Trump talks with The Apprentice’s Season 4 winner, Randal Pinkett, in 2005.

: don't know who he is." That statement, made : at the February 2011 Conservative Political : Action Conference, marked the launch of : Donald Trump's public efforts to sow doubt : about whether President Barack Obama had : been born in the United States. "Birtherism" : had been festering for several years before : Trump embraced it—supplanting other pro- : ponents and becoming its most prominent : advocate. In March, on *The View*, Trump : called on Obama to show his birth certificate. : In April, he said that he had dispatched a : team of investigators to Hawaii to search for : Obama's birth records.

For Trump, the run-up to birtherism : had been a controversy that flared when a : Manhattan developer proposed building an : Islamic cultural center on a site in Lower : Manhattan—the so-called Ground Zero : mosque. In 2010, on *The Late Show*, Trump : told David Letterman: "I think it's very : insensitive to build it there. I think it's not : appropriate." Letterman pushed back, say- : ing that blocking an Islamic facility would : be akin to declaring "war with Muslims." : Trump answered: "Somebody's blowing up : buildings, and somebody's doing lots of bad : stuff." Trump offered to buy out one of the : investors in order to halt the project. The : action made him one of the project's key : opponents and for the first time gave him : national visibility on the political right.

Anti-Muslim sentiment animated : Trump's birtherism campaign. He said of : Obama on *The Laura Ingraham Show* : in March 2011: "He doesn't have a birth : certificate, or if he does, there's something : on that certificate that is very bad for him. : Now, somebody told me—and I have no : idea whether this is bad for him or not, but : perhaps it would be—that where it says 'reli- : gion,' it might have 'Muslim.'"

Sam Nunberg became an adviser to : Trump after working with him to oppose the : Islamic cultural center. Jerome Corsi, the : author of *Where's the Birth Certificate?*, : and Orly Taitz, a dentist and an attorney, : are among the instigators of the birther : movement. Dan Pfeiffer was the White : House communications director.

SAM NUNBERG: I don't believe Don- : ald Trump would have done birther- : ism if he had not done the Ground Zero : mosque and gotten all the conservative : publicity he did. I had met Roger Stone, : and we briefed Trump on the issue, and : he came out and said he wanted to buy : the site. Then he got interviews on *Fox* : News. It also was a part of his brand—he : wasn't just somebody coming out saying, : "I'm opposed to you," but "I want to buy :

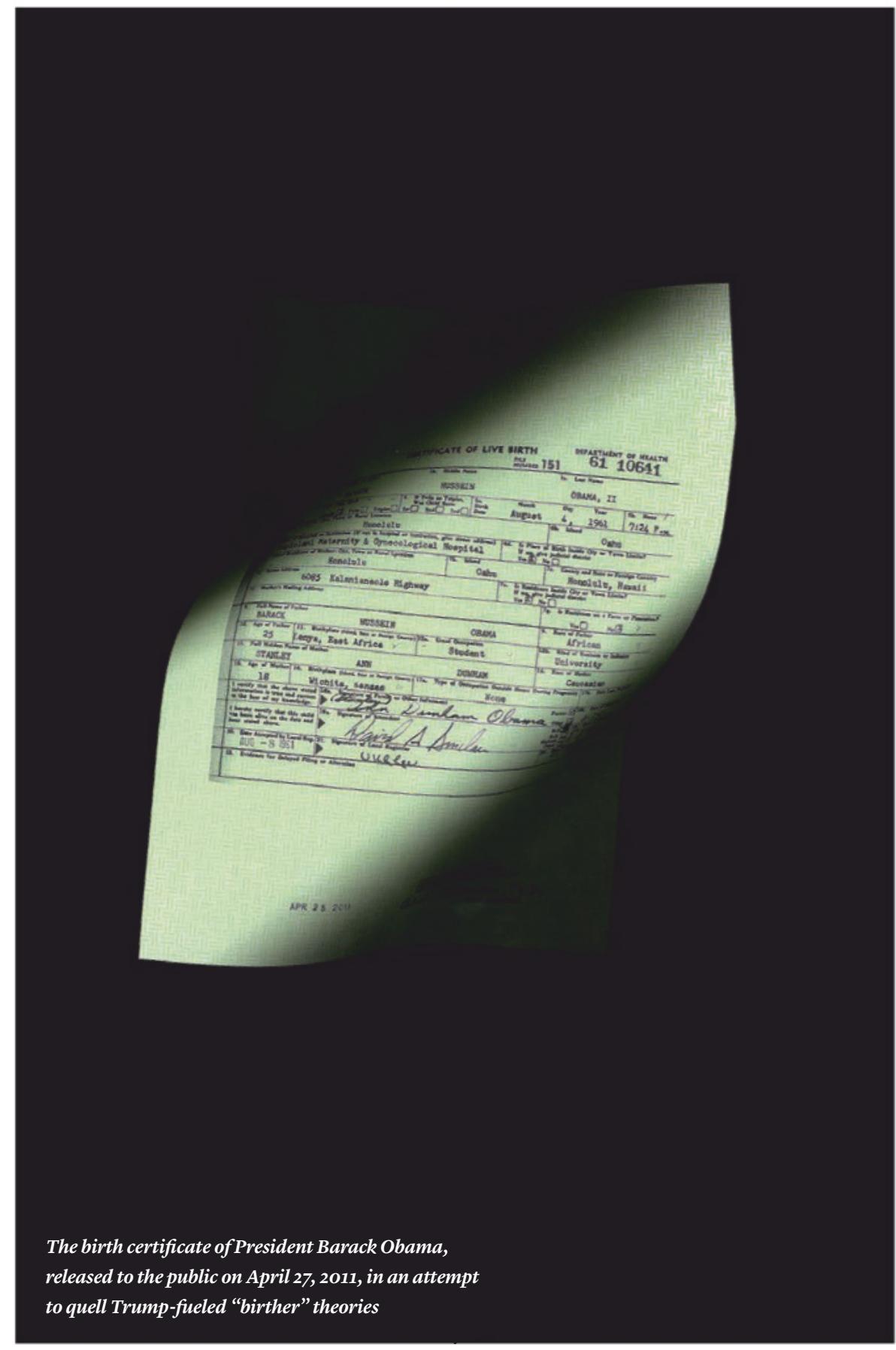
it." He went where the "Just run on lower- : ing taxes" Republican intelligentsia, the : Republican establishment, will tell you : not to go.

JEROME CORSI: Donald Trump came : into it pretty late. I was driving the story : well before Donald Trump. He called me : maybe three or four times in the period : around April and May 2011. Donald : Trump's interest advanced the story in : terms of public awareness.

ORLY TAITZ: I just turned over all the : information to him. I talked to his assistant. : She told me to forward all the information : to his attorney Michael Cohen. Because : Trump was a well-known public figure, the : issue did get attention.

DAN PFEIFFER: It wasn't until Trump : picked this up that it spilled into the main- : stream. It created a permission structure : for normal reporters to ask this question. : It's like, Well, Donald Trump, this famous : person, said this on *The View*, which is dif- : ferent than saying Jerome Corsi wrote it : in a book.

SAM NUNBERG: It was about destroy- : ing Obama's favorability, his likability. It : was this way to differentiate Trump from : Mitt Romney, who was dancing around : not wanting to criticize Obama directly. : We looked at Obama as a Manchurian : president. Trump will do anything to win. : Birtherism would brand Trump as the : guy who would do anything he could to



The birth certificate of President Barack Obama, released to the public on April 27, 2011, in an attempt to quell Trump-fueled "birther" theories

: take down Obama. He wasn't just going : to lose with a smile and lose respectably : the way John McCain and Mitt Romney : liked doing.

: *Attempting to quell the conspiracy theories, on April 27, 2011, Obama released his long-form birth certificate. Ben Rhodes was Obama's deputy national security adviser for strategic communications.*

: **BEN RHODES:** I remember Obama started : to get increasingly frustrated in Oval Office : sessions—not just that Trump would say : these things, but also that the media would : cover it as a story. Obama was angry that : he had to release the birth certificate. I : remember being in the Oval Office and : him commenting that he couldn't believe : he had to do this, but feeling he had to nip : it in the bud. Obama was more acutely : aware of issues involving race and rac- : ism than he sometimes projected. Obama : knew this wasn't going away, and he knew : it was racist, and he knew he needed as : much armor as he could get.

: *A few days later, at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, Obama and the comedian Seth Meyers mocked Trump's birther claims, leaving Trump red-faced and seething at a table in the audience. Jay Carney was the White House press secretary.*

: **SETH MEYERS:** We were constantly : getting a refreshed list of who was going : to be in the room. I will say that we were : happy when we saw that Trump was : going to be there. I think our best joke : about him being a racist that night was: : "Donald Trump said recently he has a : great relationship with the blacks, but : unless the Blacks are a family of white : people, I bet he is mistaken." There's a : thing Donald Trump does better than : anybody else, which is that by stating one : position, he reveals that he actually holds : the opposite position.

: One of the reasons we piled on with : our Trump jokes wasn't that he was a : reality star. It was that he was someone : who was doing the rounds, continuing to : double down and triple down and quad- : ruple down on this incredibly racist rhetor- : ic. Historically, if you look at other rooms : I've been in, I've never done a run of 10 : jokes about anyone before. Obviously we : felt pretty strongly for that to be the case.

: **JAY CARNEY:** After that, birther- : ism diminished as a subject in most : media, but I'm sure folks took notice : of what Trump had done, and how, by

: completely concocting this nonsense, : he had hijacked the conversation. It still : pisses me off.

: **DAN PFEIFFER:** The mainstream : political conversation after Obama : released his birth certificate was: *Trump : is a clown, right? He's a clown who got out : of his depth and has embarrassed himself : and should be run out of politics forever.* : It was not long after that that every : Republican—even, you know, putatively : serious Republicans like Mitt Romney— : went and begged Trump for his endorse- : ment. I don't think any of us realized that : there was a tremendous appetite for : anger in the Republican base that Trump : was seeking to use.

: *Trump did not let up. In May 2012, he told the CNN host Wolf Blitzer that "a lot of people do not think it was an authentic certificate."* *In August, he called the birth certificate "a fraud."* Finally, in September 2016, under : political pressure during his presidential : campaign, Trump acknowledged that : Obama had in fact been born in the United : States. That was not the end of the matter.

: *In November 2017, The New York Times reported that Trump was still privately asserting that Obama's birth certificate may have been fraudulent.*

: **BEN RHODES:** It cannot be overstated : that this is the creation story of Donald : Trump becoming president of the United : States. His whole brand is: *I will say the : things that the other guys won't.* Without : birtherism there is no Trump presidency.

: and groups of counterprotesters, includ- : ing members of the anti-fascist movement : known as "antifa."

: *Mike Signer, Charlottesville's mayor, had been dealing with far-right protests all summer. Richard Spencer was one of the key figures behind the "Unite the Right" rally.*

: **MIKE SIGNER:** The first event was in : May of 2017, led by Richard Spencer, who : invented the term *alt-right* and is a UVA : graduate. He had done an event right : after Trump's inauguration where he had : led a fascist salute with all these people : at a hotel in Washington, D.C.—buzz cuts, : uniforms, very frightening.

: **RICHARD SPENCER:** There is no : question that Charlottesville wouldn't : have occurred without Trump. It really : was because of his campaign and this : new potential for a nationalist candidate : who was resonating with the public in : a very intense way. The alt-right found : something in Trump. He changed the : paradigm and made this kind of public : presence of the alt-right possible.

: *David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader, who participated in the Charlottesville rally, called it a "turning point" for his own movement, which seeks to "fulfill the promises of Donald Trump."* Will Peyton, the rector of : St. Paul's Memorial Church, near the UVA : campus, hosted an interfaith service in : opposition to the rally. As alt-right protesters : marched by, the roughly 700 people in the : church were advised to stay inside for their : own safety.

: **WILL PEYTON:** I was out in a parking : lot during the morning while all the vari- : ous neo-Nazi people and different white- : supremacist groups were gathering and : unloading. They were piling out of vans : and trucks, and kind of giddy. I'd never : seen swastikas and Nazi salutes out in the : open like that—people wearing helmets : and carrying clubs and shields.

: **RICHARD SPENCER:** The whole day : was chaotic. I woke up that morning; we : had breakfast. We didn't quite know what : was going to happen. I certainly thought : it was going to be a big event, but I never : quite knew that it was going to turn into : this ultimately historic event.

: **MIKE SIGNER:** Richard Spencer and : David Duke spent time attacking me and : talking about the Jewish mayor of the : city. There was a threat against a syna- : gogue saying, "It's time to torch those : jewish monsters lets go 3pm." There was : an intensity in the anti-Semitism that

VI. "On Many Sides"

: previously was unthinkable in Ameri- :
: can political life. I grew up five blocks :
: from the headquarters of the American :
: Nazi Party, in Arlington, Virginia. It was :
: above what is now a coffee shop, in a :
: ramshackle house, and we laughed at :
: this lonely, pathetic old man who would :
: come in and out of that building. Now :
: you're seeing something different. I :
: was infuriated that you weren't seeing a :
: condemnation of this coming from the :
: White House.

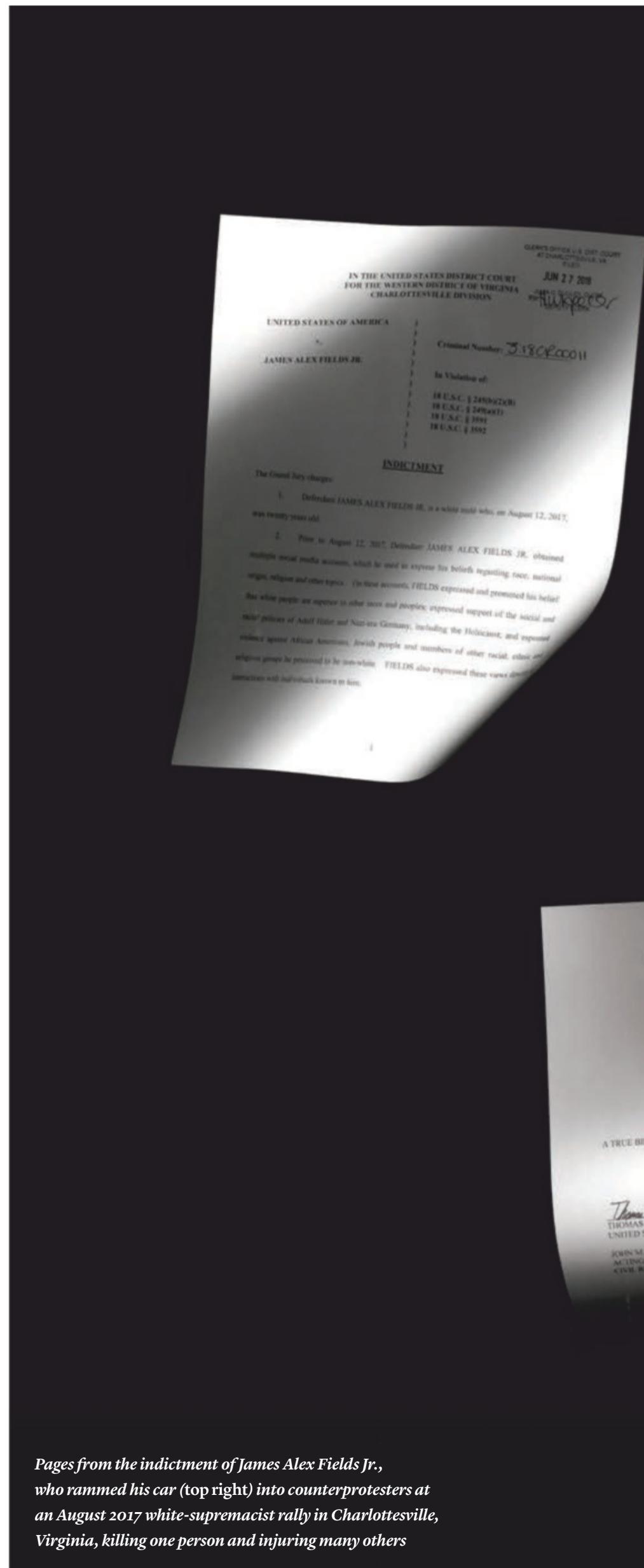
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On August 12, a black man named DeAndre Harris was beaten by at least four white supremacists. At about 1:45 p.m. that day, James Alex Fields Jr., a 20-year-old white supremacist from Ohio, drove his Dodge Challenger into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 35 others. Fields was convicted in December 2018 of first-degree murder. In March, he pleaded guilty to 29 of 30 federal hate-crime charges in a separate trial. Speaking on the afternoon of the attack from his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club, Trump denounced "this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides." He paused, then repeated: "On many sides." Lisa Woolfork is a UVA professor and an organizer with Black Lives Matter's Charlottesville chapter. Jason Kessler was an organizer of the rally.

RICHARD SPENCER: We were dealing with this terrible accident that occurred with James Fields and Heather Heyer, and it was certainly not why I came and I don't think it's why anyone else came. I was trying to deal with that situation in the best way I could by just saying that we simply don't know what happened and we should stress that this young man deserves a fair investigation and a fair trial. Trump, in his own way, was being honest and calling it like he saw it. I was proud of him at that moment.

MIKE SIGNER: This was a coordinated invasion of the city by violent right-wing militias. I watched a clip of the president and my mouth fell open, and I was at once ashamed for him and for the country.

LISA WOOLFORK: The car sped down Fourth Street and collided with the counterdemonstrators who were marching that way. I was about 100 feet from the impact, and it was complete chaos. I remember seeing a shoe fly into the air. I remember people screaming. It was an utterly terrible moment. After a long and traumatic day, the president's remarks



Pages from the indictment of James Alex Fields Jr., who rammed his car (top right) into counterprotesters at an August 2017 white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, killing one person and injuring many others



...killingly crowd a
dition to Heather Heyer

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were chilling. One of the dangers of having the president speak in the way that he spoke about the events in Charlottesville—about “many sides”—was that it promotes this very dangerous false equivalency. Trump made things much worse by explicitly stating that you can be a white supremacist or a Nazi or a neo-Confederate and still be a good person.

JASON KESSLER: The president was absolutely correct in blaming both sides. I’ve probably seen more video of the event than anyone alive. People who are upset feel that the majority of the blame should be with the alt-right because of the tragic death of Heather Heyer. It’s fair enough to acknowledge their emotional need for this, but no one at “Unite the Right” was responsible for that car accident but James Fields himself.

WILL PEYTON: I had a visceral, emotional reaction when I heard what the president said. I was an eyewitness. I saw with my own eyes that there was one side here that came planning and intending violence. There’s just no two ways about that.

.....

On August 14, Trump walked back his initial statement and specifically condemned “the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups.” A day later, he walked back his walk-back. There were “very fine people on both sides,” he said, adding that the “alt-left” had been “very, very violent.” White-nationalist leaders welcomed his remarks.

.....

MIKE SIGNER: There was a robocall that went out in November 2018, because the trial of Alex Fields was happening and he was about to be convicted. The call was all about how the Jew mayor and the Negro police chief had created this situation, and how we’re the ones who should be held responsible for Heather Heyer’s death.

VII. “Go Back to Their Huts”

In office, Donald Trump followed through on his promise to curb immigration from majority-Muslim countries. He created

a commission to investigate voter fraud (virtually nonexistent, according to state election officials), claiming that he would have won the popular vote but for millions of ballots cast by people in the U.S. illegally. He shut down the government for 35 days in an attempt to secure funding for a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. He reportedly referred to African countries as “shithole” nations—asking why the U.S. can’t have more immigrants from Norway instead—and complained that, after seeing America, immigrants from Nigeria would never “go back to their huts.” The administration favored victims of Hurricane Harvey, which hit Houston, over those of Hurricane Maria, which hit Puerto Rico, sending three times as many workers to Houston and approving 23 times as much money for individual assistance within the first nine days after each hurricane.

.....

SAM NUNBERG: Remember in 2011 he was criticized when he said, “I’ve always had a great relationship with the blacks”? I think he just doesn’t speak “politically correct.” It’s not in his vernacular, or consciousness. It’s generational. It’s also probably—not to play psychiatrist—it’s growing up where he grew up, in Queens, New York, and dealing with union members, dealing in a crime-riddled New York City. I think it’s just the way things were thought of as different then.

TIMOTHY L. O’BRIEN: This is the same debate we have about whether or not he’s a liar. And I get the journalistic need to be really clear about how we use terms. You know, *lying* implies volition and knowledge. But I’m very comfortable saying I think he’s got a pathology around lying. And when it comes to race, I don’t think it’s merely using racial animosities or race-baiting as tools to promote his business. I think it’s a seated reflection of what he thinks about how the world works.

KWAME JACKSON: America’s always trying to find this gotcha moment that shows Donald Trump is racist—you know, let’s find this one big thing. Let’s look for that one time when he burned a cross in someone’s yard so we can now finally say it. People refuse to see the bread crumbs that are already in front of you, leading you to grandma’s house. **A**

David A. Graham is an Atlantic staff writer. Adrienne Green is the magazine’s managing editor. Cullen Murphy is the editor at large. Parker Richards is an editorial fellow.



LIBERALISM'S LAST STAND

As Viktor Orbán systematically removed all impediments to his autocratic regime, one independent institution stood defiant: a university, in the heart of Budapest, founded by George Soros. The school's survival became a test of liberalism's ability to beat back its new ideological foe—in Hungary and beyond.

— ***By Franklin Foer*** —

O

n a relentlessly gray

Budapest morning, Michael Ignatieff took me to the rooftop of Central European University's main building. The newly erected edifice is all glass, sharp angles, exposed steel, and polished wood. Its roof had been landscaped with

billowing grasses and fitted with iron benches, as if a section of New York City's High Line had been transported to Hungary. "This is probably my favorite place on the campus," Ignatieff told me. He wore a newsboy cap in the winter chill; his reading glasses, which he'd absentmindedly neglected to remove, were wedged on the very end of his nose. The broad Danube and the architectural remnants of the city's imperial past were splayed out in front of us.

Ignatieff, an intellectual who made an unsuccessful bid to become prime minister of Canada, has spent much of his career studying the fragility of human rights and the irresistible impulse toward nationalism. When he became CEU's rector in 2016, however, he didn't believe the job would catapult him to the front lines of the fight for liberalism. He imagined it would be more like a pleasant homecoming. Hungary is the native land of his wife, Zsuzsanna; he had come to know the place intimately on regular visits to her family. "I'm of a certain age," he said. "I thought, *That's a nice way to top it off.*"

He pointed to nearby government buildings. In one of them, the authoritarian government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had, less than a year after Ignatieff's arrival, devised a plan to evict CEU from Hungary. The university is widely considered the country's most prestigious graduate school—it's been a training ground for presidents, diplomats, and even members of Orbán's own inner circle. But that inner circle had turned against the institution that had nurtured it and now sought to chase the school from the country's borders. As Ignatieff explained this to me, he shook his head. "This was not supposed to happen here," he said.

Hungary once had some of the best universities in postcommunist Europe. But Orbán's government has systematically crushed them. His functionaries have descended on public universities, controlling them tightly. Research funding, once determined by an independent body of academics, is now primarily dispensed by an Orbán loyalist. When I arrived in Budapest, a pro-government website had just called on students to submit the names of professors who espoused "unasked-for left-wing political opinions." A regime-friendly weekly published an "enemies list" that included the names of dozens of academics, "mercenaries" purportedly working on behalf of a foreign cabal.

Like Pol Pot or Josef Stalin, Orbán dreams of liquidating the intelligentsia, draining the public of education, and molding a more pliant nation. But he is a state-of-the-art autocrat; he understands that he need not resort to the truncheon or the midnight knock at the door. His assault on civil society arrives in the guise of legalisms subverting the institutions that might challenge his authority.

CEU is a private university, accredited in both the United States and Hungary, and for that reason it has posed a particular challenge to the regime. The school was founded by the Budapest-born financier George Soros, whom Orbán has vilified as a nefarious interloper in Hungary's affairs. Soros had conceived the school during the dying days of communism to train a generation of technocrats who would write new constitutions, privatize state enterprises, and lead the post-Soviet world into a cosmopolitan future. The university, he declared, would "become a prototype of an open society."

But open society is exactly what Orbán hopes to roll back; *illiberal democracy* is the euphemism he uses to describe the state he is building. The prime minister and his allies did their best to make life unpleasant for CEU. Then, in April 2017, Parliament passed a law setting conditions that threatened to render CEU's continued presence in the country illegal. All of Ignatieff's hopes of settling into a placid academic life dissipated. Eighty thousand protesters filled the streets.

The effort to evict CEU rattled liberals across the world. Academic freedom—a bloodless term, but a concept at the core of all that the West professes to treasure—seemed to be slipping away in a country where it had looked firmly established. Universities rushed to declare their solidarity; 17 Nobel Prize winners signed a letter of support. Even the United States, run by a president who is no fan of George Soros, offered to help the university.

And so, for much of the past two years, CEU has been the barricades of a civilizational struggle, where liberalism would mount a defense against right-wing populism. The fate of the university was a test of whether liberalism had the tactical savvy and emotional fortitude to beat back its new ideological foe.

A

charming fact about George Soros is that he keeps a court of eccentrics, loquacious intellectuals and academic theoreticians who have become his advisers and friends. Among them is a historian named István Rév. He presides

over the CEU archives, a collection of artifacts of communism and the movements that resisted it. Rév works in a dimly lit room at a rolltop desk, beside an antique radio. As he ushered me into his office, he said, "I was the first employee of the university here, and I hope I will not be the last."

When Rév met Soros, in the 1980s, the financier was already fantastically rich but as yet little known. Soros was just beginning to spend down his fortune, and he hurled himself into the work of philanthropy. "When he arrived in Budapest, he came alone, with a briefcase," Rév remembered. "After a long trip, he told me, 'I found worthy causes on which I could spend \$10 million, and I'm so happy.'"

Not many Jews of Soros's age would have returned to Budapest with such beneficent intentions. He was 13 when the Nazis invaded the city. Soros went into hiding and assumed a false identity; forged papers announced him as the Gentile Sandor Kiss. Liberation brought fresh horrors. Soros stepped over corpses in the street. Years later, he discovered that Russian soldiers had raped his mother.

Shaking off the traumas of the war, Soros sought to remake his life in London. He worked as a waiter and railway porter before eventually enrolling in the London School of Economics. Soon, he found himself sitting in classes taught by a fellow expatriate who would become his intellectual hero: the Viennese philosopher Karl Popper.

Popper had written one of the great works of Cold War liberalism, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. An open society, he wrote, demanded an ethic of tolerance and intellectual modesty. Through democratic debate, a nation could struggle toward knowledge, but there were no ultimate truths. Society could progress only through a process of intellectual experimentation, subjecting ideas to criticism and abandoning them in the face of contrary evidence.

When Soros pondered how he might help reshape the country of his birth as it emerged from communism, Popper's voice was still ringing in his ear. Hungary, like all Soviet societies, had been cordoned off from the wider world of knowledge. Through the foundation he established, Soros attempted to remedy this. In the last decade of the dying regime, he imported hundreds of Xerox machines to a country where only 12 had existed. The photocopiers were a revolution in Hungarian communications, allowing samizdat to travel faster and farther.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Soros deployed this model on a larger scale. He spent ecumenically and with minimal bureaucratic impediments. Balázs Trencsényi, a history professor at CEU, first heard of Soros's foundation as a student. Without an appointment, he strolled into the office, filled out a few forms, and left with a grant to fund a series of film screenings. His was a typical experience. "All the cultural journals were funded by Soros," Trencsényi said. "Left-wing, right-wing. It didn't matter." Soros's goal was to create the institutions that made an open society viable—not to predetermine which side prevailed in the debates those institutions would foster.

It was in this same audacious spirit that he launched CEU in 1991. The university, he hoped, would compensate for the sorry condition of higher education that had emerged from communism. It would train a new elite for the hard work of reconstructing trampled societies.

Rootless cosmopolitan is a slur often hurled against Soros by his anti-Semitic critics, but it is a worldview he proudly claims as his own. He initially imagined an institution that would transcend borders, fostering the movement of scholars and ideas across the former Soviet bloc. Václav Havel, who had just ascended to the presidency of Czechoslovakia, helped secure an old trade-union hall in Prague, which became one of several CEU outposts in the region. But the right-wing prime minister elected in 1992 was far less hospitable. Soros's decentralized vision quickly proved logically and politically impossible to sustain.

Reluctantly, he confined his university to his native city. It lived in the ruins of an old television production company; its buildings were ramshackle, the neighborhood even shabbier. But the university was a church key that opened a bottle of intellectual energies. It attracted

students who had come up through stultifying institutions where lecturers droned from prepared texts and censored their thoughts to conform to Marxist dogma. Students breathed the freedom of American-style seminars and encountered previously verboten texts, which they treated with a reverence that humbled their Western instructors.

Soros imbibed the atmosphere of experimentation and enthusiasm. "He was involved in every detail," according to Rév. Leaning on his network of intellectuals, he suggested people to hire, such as the great scholar of nationalism Ernest Gellner. He weighed in on which academic programs the school would offer. On many of his visits, he would stay in the CEU dorm, a building that had once housed the city's factory workers.

Soon, CEU's footprint in the city grew, with a gymnasium, a publishing house, and the most important social-science library in the region. The school could even

When Viktor Orbán attacks George Soros, he sometimes refers to him as "Uncle George," a moniker that drips with sarcasm but also has a fitting sense of familiarity.

be said to have achieved the lofty goals of its founding. A generation of alumni had remained tethered to the region. One former student became the president of the Republic of Georgia; others became members of the European Parliament. Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, setting the country on a liberal trajectory.

With a justified sense of self-satisfaction, Soros gave the university a \$250 million endowment in 2001. Six years later, he stepped down as chairman of its board. CEU modified its *raison d'être* to adapt to its success. It admitted more students from Africa, Latin America, and other noncontinental locales, reconstituting itself as a global university.

Sitting in the school's café this winter, I could still glimpse its achievements. A student wearing a hijab leaned over a laptop, a defiant sight in a country that has hermetically sealed itself off from Muslim migration. Several tables over, a professor (and former dissident) wiped croissant crumbs from his beard as he called to a student who had skipped his class to protest the current regime. I'd met the student earlier in the day; he had told me that he was gay, and that CEU was one of the few places in his native country where he could hold hands with a partner without fear of violent recrimination. He pointed in the direction of a nearby bathroom: "The only gender-neutral toilet facility in eastern Europe."

hen Viktor Orbán attacks George Soros, he sometimes refers to him as “Uncle George,” a moniker that drips with sarcasm but also has a fitting sense of familiarity. Before Orbán denounced Soros, he benefited from his philanthropy.

Soros’s patronage helped propel Orbán’s rise from the beet fields and pigpens of his village. At age 15, Orbán encountered his first bathroom and the miracle of hot water pouring from a tap. His diminutive size invited bullying, which he attempted to repel with displays of overwhelming force. “If I’m hit once, then I hit back twice,” he would bluster decades later. His aspiration to toughness manifested in a fanatical affection for Charles Bronson movies.

Orbán’s big break came in the mid-1980s, with his acceptance to a new college in Budapest called István Bibó. But before he could go to the big city, the state mandated a stint in the military. Orbán chafed at the army’s relentless indoctrination and its strict hold on his time. On several occasions, his superiors punished him for going AWOL to watch the World Cup. By the time he arrived at Bibó, he had settled into firm anticommunist convictions, which he voiced with stridency and courage.

Bibó was run by a reformer who permitted a freewheeling atmosphere. After Soros visited the school in 1985, he gave the students a photocopier, subsidized a feisty student journal (edited by Orbán), and paid for activists to take language courses and travel abroad.

If Bibó was an island in Budapest, Orbán lived on an island within the island. He roomed with other kids from the countryside. Kim Lane Scheppelle, a former CEU professor who now teaches at Princeton, calls them the “dorm kids”—their more urbane classmates from Budapest lived with their parents. It was with a small band of dorm kids that Orbán hatched the Alliance of Young Democrats, or Fidesz.

With his aura of fearlessness, Orbán became a salvific figure for older veterans of the struggle against the Soviet order. In his otherwise critical biography, the journalist Paul Lendvai concedes that Orbán was “blessed with exceptional personal talent and tactical skills.” But the battle-worn activists also saw in him a chance to leap over the demographic obstacles that they believed had constrained their success. The eternal division in Hungarian politics pits Budapest against the rest of the country, an extreme version of the urban-rural divide that afflicts most political cultures. Budapest had been the center of a great empire, a soi-disant capital of European civilization. Peasant life, meanwhile, remained frozen in premodernity.

During the 20th century, there was another way to express this division. Rural Hungary regarded Budapest as synonymous with Jewry. This association required wild exaggeration and sprung from deep reservoirs of anti-Semitism. But the leaders of the opposition understood the political challenge this perception presented. Hungary was home to central Europe’s largest Jewish population after the Holocaust: About 100,000 Jews remained in Budapest, and their children included important critics of communism. They hungered for a transcendent figure like Orbán, who could carry their message beyond the metropolis.

Soros’s friends in Hungary’s liberal intelligentsia recommended Orbán as one of their own. When Soros met him, he was captivated by the young activist’s charisma. He

made a donation to Fidesz and gave Orbán a scholarship to study civil society at Oxford. For a time, Orbán reciprocated the generosity. He railed against the “malicious attacks” of nationalists who waxed hysterical over Soros’s philanthropic presence in Hungary. In those years, Orbán proudly called himself a liberal, and his party distanced itself from anti-Semitism and revanchist nationalism.

How did the Orbán of the early ’90s, with his long hair and academic aspirations, become the architect of illiberalism? One theory suggests that political expediency pulled him to the right. But the liberals had also wishfully imposed their hopes on Orbán, never looking carefully enough at him to notice that he deeply resented them. “The dorm kids always wanted to show the urban intellectuals that they had always been the smarter, better leaders,” Scheppelle told me.

There’s a story, which might not be wholly accurate in its particulars, that captures this blister of anger. It was memorialized in verse by the poet István Kemény. At a reception for new parliamentarians in 1994, a liberal leader makes his way across the room to Orbán. The event was one of the rare occasions when the young Orbán, usually clad in blue jeans, wore a necktie. In front of the crowd, the liberal adjusts Orbán’s tie, a condescending gesture that reddens Orbán’s face. The poem declares this humiliation a transformational moment for the “last prime minister of the drowning country of Hungary.”

rbán’s first stint as prime minister ended after four years, with his defeat in the 2002 elections. The loss caught him by surprise, and it was followed by another, four years later. Orbán vowed that he would never suffer defeat again.

In a closed-door speech in 2009, leaked to Hungary’s formerly robust media, he said that he wanted to create “a central political force field” that would allow conservatives to rule for “the coming 15 to 20 years.” As he put it in another speech, “We have only to win once, but then properly.”

When scandal and recession crashed his socialist opponents in 2010, Orbán returned to power, reinventing himself as the field marshal of a civilizational Kulturkampf. His old resentments became the basis for his political platform. He alone would defend the integrity of the family, the nation, and Christendom against “the holy alliance of Brussels bureaucrats, the liberal world media, and insatiable international capital.” He stoked mass hysteria about a wave of immigrants from the Middle East and Africa that arrived in the autumn of 2015, passing through Budapest on their way north.

His masterstroke was to describe the migration crisis as the handiwork of an odious cabal, orchestrated by a Jewish puppet master. In one typical attack, he bellowed, “We are fighting an enemy that is different from us. Not open, but hiding; not straightforward, but crafty; not honest, but base; not national, but international; does not believe in working, but speculates with money.” All of the time-honored tropes of anti-Semitism were unmistakably heaped on George Soros. Soon billboards appeared across the country with an image of Soros cackling and the caption DON’T LET HIM HAVE THE LAST LAUGH.



This counteroffensive was wholly cynical. Soros had long ago ceased to be much of a player in the country. By 2016, his annual spending on nongovernmental organizations in Hungary had dwindled to \$3.6 million. “When they started the anti-Soros campaign, nobody thought it would be this successful,” Péter Kréko, a political analyst at the think tank Political Capital Institute, told me. “The polling data showed Soros was an unknown figure. Nobody hated him. In one and a half years, Orbán turned him into a diabolical figure.”

In the face of his demagoguery, the country had already suffered a brain drain. “Hundreds of thousands of people are leaving,” Kréko said. “They will transfer money home, but they don’t vote here. They don’t go to protests. The government likes having a smaller population that is more loyal.” But if one generation of critics exits, the universities can always generate another, so the government set out to shred the academy, too. When Orbán moved against CEU, it wasn’t just political posturing or spleen. Destroying Hungary’s finest institution of higher education was a crucial step in his quest for eternal political life.

Michael Ignatieff had barely unpacked his books when he first heard rumors about CEU’s endangered future, surreptitiously passed to his staff by a sympathetic source in the government. The source whispered about the possibility of an imminent attack encapsulating everything that made Orbán such a vexing opponent. Having studied law at Bibó, Orbán implemented his agenda with legalistic

aplomb. He constantly revised statutes to serve his own purposes.

The bureaucrat warned of an imminent amendment to the national higher-education law that had been scripted in secret. Although the legislation didn’t mention CEU by name, the school was its obvious—and only—target. The bill would suddenly make CEU’s existence in the country dependent on quickly meeting a series of impossible-seeming requirements. As a foreign university, it would have to operate a campus in its country of origin. (CEU was chartered in the state of New York, but it didn’t have any faculty or facilities there.) Its national government would need to enter into a bilateral accreditation agreement with Hungary. (In the U.S., accreditation agreements are the jurisdiction of the states, not the federal government.) “It was an absolute masterpiece of this style of legal mugging,” Ignatieff told me.

While he had the benefit of a warning, the broader community had no inkling of the attack. One evening, Judit Sándor, a law professor who had taught at CEU since its earliest years, arrived home from the symphony. With the music still thrumming in her head, she couldn’t sleep, so she reached for her phone. News of the amendment had broken. She told me: “My entire life changed while I was at the concert.”

Sándor came to campus the next day and consoled tearful colleagues and students. By that afternoon, however, the mood had begun to shift. Students from across Budapest descended on CEU with homemade placards—a prelude to a series of larger demonstrations. Protesters crowded the narrow streets and joined hands, creating a human chain that wrapped around the campus. “People were risking their jobs to stand with us,” Sándor said. For a country that had sleepwalked into an era of illiberalism, it was a startling display of resistance.

Despite the protests, the law was rushed through Parliament. Confronting the terrifying new reality that CEU might be evicted, Ignatieff began a good-faith effort to cut a deal with Orbán, although he had no illusions about the prime minister. Instead of feeding Orbán’s hunger for confrontation, Ignatieff made a calculated decision to cool the fervor of the university community. “I explicitly gave the order that we cannot be associated with street protests. It’s not what universities should do.” Soros also held his tongue for the sake of the institution. According to one adviser, “He felt that he was not able to respond, because he did not want to endanger CEU.”

The law mandated a U.S. campus, so Ignatieff opened one. He quickly managed to procure space at Bard College, in New York’s Hudson Valley; in three months, he created a program and sent 15 students there. Lawyers from the office of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo started to hammer out an agreement with the government of Hungary. The European Union, in theory, afforded the university a canopy of protections. Early on, Ignatieff believed that it was only a matter of time before the whole mess went away. “I’m not prey to many illusions,” he told me, “but I kind of thought the machinery would work.”

The machinery, however, wasn't designed for a confrontation with this sort of adversary. The public face of the regime's war on CEU is a graduate of the institution. When I went to meet the government's official spokesman, Zoltán Kovács, in his office, he had crammed himself into a corner of the spacious room. He was working at a small antique side table that held an open MacBook and a Coke Zero. A television mounted across the room was tuned to CNN International.

Kovács looks like a functionary who could have been plucked from any European capital. Rimless glasses sit on a face coated in stubble, which extends toward a shaved scalp. His starched shirt was open at the collar. During his years at CEU, Kovács wrote a doctoral dissertation titled "The Political Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Mid-18th Century England," as if he was always studying to flack on behalf of an absolutist ruler. There's a poster on Kovács's wall, in the style of an advertisement for a boxing match, with an image of him standing next to the political theorist Francis Fukuyama. It hyps a bout that supposedly pits Kovács against the author of *The End of History and the Last Man*, a text that has become a shorthand for neoliberal triumphalism. In actuality, Kovács has never met Fukuyama, though he did submit some letters to the editor quibbling with an essay that Fukuyama wrote in a small-circulation journal. "It was rather a kind of symbolic fight," he explained.

Kovács delivers his spin with an even temper and a British inflection, obtained through his own Soros-funded scholarship to Oxford. He presents himself as possessing a superior grasp of the facts, an aura of confidence that permits him to speak in long paragraphs filled with obfuscation. Using the legalistic talk that is the métier of his government, he tried to convince me that CEU is somehow the academic equivalent of an offshore shell company. When I seemed confused by his debater's point, he fell back on invective, denouncing Ignatieff as a "failed liberal politician coming from Canada."

The argument he pressed hardest was, in some ways, his most honest. He insisted that CEU would "need to operate according to the rules, full stop." If the government wanted to change those rules, that was the regime's prerogative. "What you see is an effort on behalf of a pretty small state, actually, to regain much of its independence—or sovereignty, rather." *Sovereignty*, in this illiberal use of the term, means the freedom to exert control over an independent institution. CEU could either submit to the will of the state or leave.

W

Ith one week left for the government and CEU to strike a deal, students attempted another round of protests in November. An organizer of the effort was a 26-year-old from the suburbs of Budapest named Imre Szijarto. I met him outside a tent village, modeled after Occupy Wall Street, in the square beside the parliament building. He was wearing a wool cap, work boots, and a backpack strapped over both shoulders.

Like so many Hungarians, Szijarto describes life in the Orbán era as if it were a dream sequence. Not very many years ago, his parents would tell him, "You're so lucky to live in a democracy." His mother had been rejected from

university after admitting that she hadn't joined a communist youth league.

Perhaps the biggest thrill of liberty was the ability to move easily across Europe. Szijarto went to live in Berlin and to study at University College London. When he heard about Orbán's attempt to expel CEU, he was living abroad. The protests he saw from afar inspired him. He hopped a flight home to join the marches in the street. The next fall he enrolled as a student at CEU, despite the threat of eviction hanging over his new school.

In his year at CEU, he watched as the regime deadened the spirit of resistance. Its legalistic approach—its feints toward compromise, followed by inexplicable delays—left CEU twisting for months. In the meantime, the public's outrage dissipated. Szijarto found it hard to recruit other Hungarian students, who worried that their CEU degree might be a "scarlet letter." Protesting would only make their chances of landing a good job, especially in the public sector, harder.

Szijarto was working tirelessly to keep CEU in Hungary, but, he told me, he could no longer imagine his own future there. The relentless presence of propaganda demoralized him. "Since I don't believe Hungary is a democracy anymore, I don't think I can have an impact." He had already mentally committed himself to a life in exile.

As I stood with Szijarto, I found it hard to believe that 80,000 protesters had once marched on behalf of CEU. Here were four tents and maybe 20 souls. A mist settled on the encampment as the small crowd stood close to gas heaters, a cold and lonely last stand.

In his bleakest moments, Ignatieff would hang his hopes on a new arrival to the city. He would make the five-minute walk from his office to the American embassy to meet with the freshly installed ambassador, an 80-year-old jeweler from New York City named David Cornstein. A long friendship with Donald Trump had landed him the gig, in his grandmother's ancestral homeland.

When I visited the embassy to meet Cornstein, he sauntered into the room in a purple turtleneck sweater, a large watch on his wrist. A public-affairs officer sat nearby as we talked, taking careful notes on a legal pad. With each adjustment of his necktie, he projected the anxiety that comes from having a self-confident boss who might revise his talking points in the middle of a sentence.

Ignatieff had reason to hope that Cornstein might elevate the school into a priority of American foreign policy. During the confirmation process, senators from both parties pressed him to take up the cause. On his fourth working day in Budapest, he visited the campus, a display of support that Ignatieff had craved.

But if Cornstein was going to confront the Orbán government over CEU, he would have to redirect the Trump administration's tendencies. Until recently, the State Department bureau that oversees Hungary was run by a foreign-policy hand named A. Wess Mitchell, who came from a Washington think tank that had once received payments totaling \$20,000 from the Orbán government. In speeches, Mitchell made it clear that the

days of tongue-lashing Orbán over human-rights abuses had come to an end. The Trump administration spiked a program that would have given \$700,000 to support independent Hungarian media, grants that the Orbán government had lobbied American lawmakers to prevent.

Two months before our meeting, Cornstein had gathered representatives of the university and the Orbán government in his office to cut a deal. But Cornstein's sympathy for the university didn't prove to be terribly deep. He didn't see himself as an advocate for the U.S.-chartered school so much as an honest broker, bringing two sides together, each with a valid case. "It is not Viktor Orbán and the government of Hungary alone that caused this to happen," he told me. Cornstein said that Soros (whom he has never met) was driven by a crazed hatred of Orbán that prevented him from making concessions that could save CEU. He even felt some sympathy for Orbán: "If you see what has been said by Soros regarding Orbán, you would say, 'I don't want this guy near me. I don't want anything to do with him.'"

When I asked Cornstein about Orbán's description of his own government as an "illiberal democracy," the ambassador shifted forward and rested his elbows on a table. "It's a question of a personal view, or what the American people, or the president of the United States, think of illiberal democracy, and what its definition is." As he danced around the question, never quite arriving at an opinion, he added, "I can tell you, knowing the president for a good 25 or 30 years, that he would love to have the situation that Viktor Orbán has, but he doesn't."

In October, a pipe bomb arrived at George Soros's mansion in Westchester. Police detonated the device without harm, but the story dominated the national news nonetheless. The failed attack seemed to encapsulate how Trump's demagoguery had migrated into dangerous territory.

While the press dwelled on the bomb, Soros's own mind quickly pivoted away from his brush with death. About 90 minutes after learning of the bomb, he called an aide to discuss the security of CEU students in the shadow of Orbán's campaign against the school.

More than most human beings, Soros is skilled at deflecting personal attacks. His protective layers have been tested by war, by a career as a speculator who placed outrageously large bets, and by decades in which mouthpieces of the global right have assailed him.

Even Orbán's insults didn't seem to bother him deeply, with one exception. "The only time I saw a flicker of pain across his face was when he was told that his picture had been put on the floor of a tram in the city where he was born," Ignatieff told me. "The malignity of that, the meanness of putting his face in a place it would be trampled, a reminder of so much history. There was physical pain."

Although Soros didn't wallow in his victimhood, by the height of Orbán's campaign against him, he no longer felt welcome or safe in Budapest. For decades, he had

enjoyed strolling the city of his youth. He took special pleasure in his annual pilgrimage to CEU graduation, an event that he etched into his calendar. As he walked from his hotel to campus, bystanders would recognize him. He would speak with them in what remained of his Hungarian. When the university's board of trustees convened in Manhattan last October, Soros hadn't set foot in Budapest in two and a half years. Several classes of students had graduated without Soros handing them a diploma.

When Orbán moved against CEU, it wasn't just political posturing or spleen. Destroying Hungary's finest institution of higher education was a crucial step in his quest for eternal political life.

As the board debated how to manage CEU's existential crisis, a handful of trustees urged that the university defiantly remain in Budapest, no matter what the new law mandated. Soros didn't do much talking, but he was clearly unmoved by the argument. The university had been toyed with long enough, he believed. There was a new class of students to admit, and they needed to know whether they would be living in Budapest. One trustee remembers looking over at Soros: "He had this look of finality. I thought, *He's just done with Hungary.*"

As the government's attacks on the school escalated, Ignatieff began to imagine a relocated campus in Vienna. He scouted for real estate and met with Austrian officials. In December, when the government failed to sign an agreement securing CEU's existence, the plans were activated. A makeshift campus will open this fall.

What does it really mean to suffer such an assault on academic freedom? Re-creating CEU in Vienna will cost Soros a hefty sum—193 million euros have been budgeted over the next six years—but he can afford it. Ignatieff says that there is opportunity in the crisis. In Vienna, internships at international organizations abound.

While CEU hopes to maintain a presence in Budapest—it will perhaps host public lectures and adult-education programs there—the university is devoting its resources and attention to building a new identity in a new land. But Soros's concern was always about those left behind. He founded the university to counteract the possibility of a regional brain drain. In 1994, he said in a speech that he hoped his efforts would turn Hungary into a "country from which I wouldn't want to emigrate."

Implicit in his worry about flight was an anxiety that those who remained would consist of the uneducated and disengaged, people susceptible to political manipulation.

This grim vision is becoming Hungary's reality. Orbán has lowered the age at which compulsory education ends from 18 to 16, triggering a spike in high-school dropouts. Textbooks and curricula, once the domain of municipalities, have been centralized and now inculcate the regime's politics. "The government is quite clear that patriotic education is as important as transferring knowledge," Péter Kréko, the political analyst, told me. An eighth-grade history book praises Orbán as a "foundational figure." A high-school textbook opens a section on "multiculturalism" with an image of refugees huddled at the Budapest train station, accompanied by a quotation from the prime minister: "We consider it a value that Hungary is a homogeneous country."

The country's universities, which had been free, have begun charging tuition, and the cost now exceeds the reach of most Hungarians. Hungary used to have the highest level of university enrollment in postcommunist Europe; it now has one of the lowest. Once-great institutions have become venues for cronyism. Law students

Nearly 1 million Hungarians have emigrated over the past decade—a stunning number, considering that Hungary's total population is less than 10 million. Every intellectual in Budapest can list the names of fellow intellectuals who have left.

are more likely to receive stipends if they study at the one institution filled with Fidesz loyalists.

This assault has helped create conditions that many Hungarians simply can't abide. Nearly 1 million have emigrated over the past decade—a trend that began before Orbán assumed power but has accelerated in the years since. It's a stunning number, considering that Hungary's total population is less than 10 million. Many of these exiles are college-educated. Every intellectual in Budapest can list the names of fellow intellectuals who have gone off to places like Berlin or Salzburg.

All of this has transpired without much substantive criticism from abroad. A quirk of European politics is its transcontinental political parties. Orbán is a stalwart of the European People's Party, a center-right coalition that features Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats. Terrified of nationalist revolt in their own ranks—and resigned to Orbán's status as an icon of the anti-immigrant right—his more reputable partners have largely refrained from meaningfully chastising him. Germany, which has posed

as the leading protector of Europe, has been especially mute. This silence stems, in part, from economic self-interest. In the past two decades, Audi and Mercedes have invested billions in building new plants in Hungary, with its pool of skilled, cheap labor.

Orbán, however, has done his best to provoke his partners. This spring, he described some of them as "useful idiots"—a slander that finally elicited a reprimand. The European People's Party voted to suspend Orbán for three months, and its leaders insisted that Orbán keep CEU in Budapest, part of a longer list of democratic displays it demanded. In the face of the suspension, Orbán remained true to his tactics. Once again, he gestured in the direction of compromise, issuing a statement about his willingness to entertain the possibility of CEU remaining in Budapest, in the hopes that appearing to relent might preserve his place in the center-right coalition—and with the knowledge that CEU had signed complex agreements with the Austrian government and irreversibly committed itself to placing the core of the institution in Vienna. The conductor Leon Botstein, the chair of the CEU board, told me, "You can only abuse an institution for so long." According to Botstein, nearly the entirety of CEU's academic operation

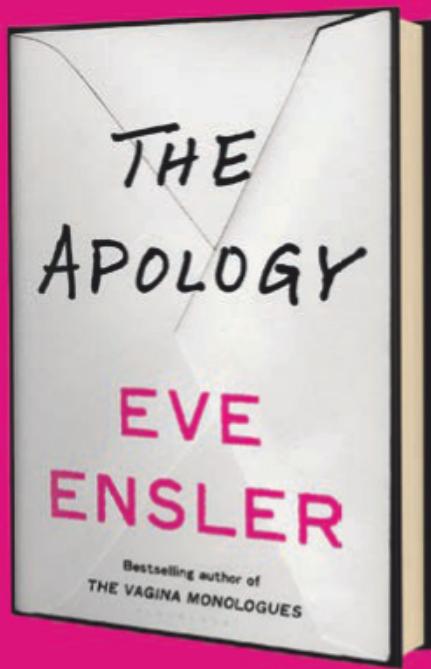
will depart Budapest within the next two years. After voting to suspend Orbán, politicians congratulated themselves on finally standing up to the bully, but the bully had already prevailed.

When I asked David Cornstein whether U.S. relations with Hungary would suffer as a result of Orbán's treatment of CEU, he quickly replied, "Not really." There was no hint of sorrow or regret in his voice. The answer unnerved his press aide, who asked the ambassador to step out of the room as our interview was winding down. "I'm in trouble," the ambassador said on his way out the door. After he returned, he admitted that he should probably show greater sensitivity to the plight of CEU: "I am saddened that they are leaving." But he explicitly refused to amend the substance of his answer. "I'm hopeful we can turn the page and move on to other subjects." Two weeks after the university's deadline for an agreement passed, Cornstein joined Orbán and officials from his regime to watch a soccer game.

One of the fears about the move to Vienna is that it will deprive the university of its visceral connection to history. CEU could settle into a vapid bourgeois existence, insulated from the events roiling Hungary. But Austria, too, is a country experiencing a rightward turn. While the country's right-wing chancellor has welcomed CEU, his nationalistic vice chancellor has nastily protested its arrival. He argued against providing a home to a "wandering university," a remark widely interpreted as carrying classical anti-Semitic insinuations. Even the government officials positively inclined to the university have proved tone-deaf. They want the university founded by a Holocaust survivor to move into an old hospital where the Nazis once performed medical experiments. Illiberalism has forced the open society's retreat, but there may no longer be a place where it is truly safe. 

Franklin Foer is an Atlantic staff writer.

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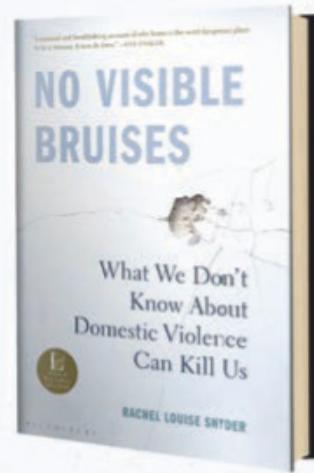
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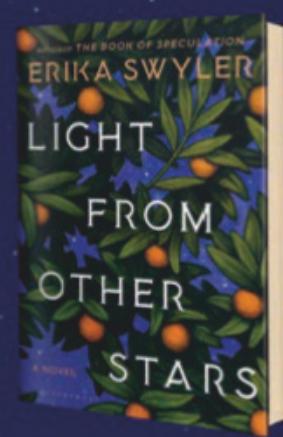
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Catholics must detach themselves from the clerical hierarchy—and take the faith back into their own hands.



ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER MUNDAY

I. “THE MURDER OF A SOUL”



I feel relief at my mother’s being dead was once unthinkable, but then the news came from Ireland. It would have crushed her. An immigrant’s daughter, my mother lived with an eye cast back to the old country, the land against which she measured every virtue. Ireland was heaven to her, and the Catholic Church was heaven’s choir. Then came the Ryan Report.

Not long before *The Boston Globe* began publishing its series on predator priests, in 2002—the “Spotlight” series that became a movie of the same name—the government of Ireland established a commission, ultimately chaired by Judge Sean Ryan, to investigate accounts and rumors of child abuse in Ireland’s residential institutions for children, nearly all of which were run by the Catholic Church.

The Ryan Commission published its 2,600-page report in 2009. Despite government inspections and supervision, Catholic clergy had, across decades, violently tormented thousands of children. The report found that children held in orphanages and reformatory schools were treated no better than slaves—in some cases, sex slaves. Rape and molestation of boys were “endemic.” Other reports were issued about other institutions, including parish churches and schools, and homes for unwed mothers—the notorious “Magdalene Laundries,” where girls and women were condemned to lives of coercive servitude. The ignominy of these institutions was laid out in plays and documentary films, and in *Philomena*, the movie starring Judi Dench, which was based on a true story. The homes-for-women scandal climaxed in 2017, when a government report revealed that

from 1925 to 1961, at the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, in Tuam, County Galway, babies who died—nearly 800 of them—were routinely disposed of in mass graves or sewage pits. Not only priests had behaved despicably. So had nuns.

In August 2018, Pope Francis made a much publicized visit to Ireland. His timing could not have been worse. Just then, a second wave of the Catholic sex-abuse scandal was breaking. In Germany, a leaked bishops’ investigation revealed that from 1946 to 2014, 1,670 clergy had assaulted 3,677 children. Civil authorities in other nations were launching investigations, moving aggressively to preempt the Church. In the United States, also in 2018, a Pennsylvania grand jury alleged that over the course of 70 years, more than 1,000 children had been abused by more than 300 priests across the state. Church authorities had successfully silenced the victims, deflected law enforcement, and shielded the predators. The Pennsylvania report was widely taken to be a conclusive adjudication, but grand-jury findings are not verdicts. Still, this record of testimony and investigation was staggering. The charges told of a ring of pedophile priests who gave many of their young targets the gift of a gold cross to wear, so that the other predator priests could recognize an initiated child who would not resist an overture. “This is the murder of a soul,” said one victim who testified before the grand jury.

Attorneys general in at least 15 other states announced the opening of investigations into Church crimes, and the U.S. Department of Justice followed suit. Soon, in several states, teams of law-enforcement agents armed with search warrants burst into diocesan offices and secured records. The Texas Rangers raided the offices of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, which was presided over by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. DiNardo had been presented by the Church as the new face of accountability and transparency when he came to Galveston-Houston in 2004. The rangers seized an archive of abuse—boxes of sex-allegation files along with computers, including DiNardo’s. The cardinal was accused of protecting a particularly egregious predator priest.

These and other investigations will produce an avalanche of scandal for years to come. As all of this was unfolding, Pope Francis responded with a meek call for a four-day meeting of senior bishops, to be held in Rome under the rubric “The Protection of Minors in the Church.” This was like putting Mafia chieftains in charge of a crime commission.

Before, during, and after his trip to Ireland, Francis had expressed, as he put it, “shame and sorrow.” But he showed no sign of understanding the need for the Church to significantly reform itself or to undertake acts of true penance.

One of the astonishments of Pope Francis’s Irish pilgrimage was his claim, made to reporters during his return trip to Rome, that until then he had known nothing of the Magdalene Laundries or their scandals: “I had never heard of these mothers—they call it the laundromat of women, where an unwed woman is pregnant and goes into these hospitals.” *Never heard of these mothers?* When I read that, I said to myself: *A lie. Pope Francis is lying.* He may not have been lying—he may merely have been ignorant. But to be uninformed about the long-simmering Magdalene scandal was just as bad. As I read the pope’s words, a taut wire in me snapped.

The wire had begun to stretch a quarter of a century ago, when I was starting out as a *Boston Globe* columnist. Twenty years earlier, I had been a Catholic priest, preoccupied with war, social justice, and religious reform—questions that defined my work for the *Globe*. One of my first columns, published in September 1992, was a reflection on the child-sex-abuse crimes of a Massachusetts priest named James Porter. I argued that Porter’s predation had been enabled by

*"More is at stake here than the
anguish of a lone man on his knees."
The author, a Catholic priest
from 1969 to 1974, photographed
in Boston on April 10, 2019.*



the Church's broader culture of priest-protecting silence. Responding to earlier *Globe* stories about Porter, an infuriated Cardinal Bernard Law, the archbishop of Boston, had hurled an anathema that seemed to come from the Middle Ages: "We call down God's power on the media, particularly the *Globe*." It took a decade, but God's power eventually came down on Law himself.

In tandem with the "Spotlight" series and afterward, more than a dozen of my columns on priestly sex abuse ran on the op-ed page, with titles such as "Priests' Victims Victimized Twice" and "Meltdown in the Catholic Church." I became a broken record on the subject.

I bring all of this up to make the point that, by the summer of 2018, as a still-practicing Catholic, I harbored no illusions about the Church's grotesque betrayal. So it took some doing to bring me to a breaking point, and Pope Francis—whom in many ways I admire, and in whom I had placed an almost desperate hope—is the unlikely person who brought me there.

For the first time in my life, and without making a conscious decision, I simply stopped going to Mass. I embarked on an unwilling version of the Catholic tradition of "fast and abstinence"—in this case, fasting from the Eucharist and abstaining from the overt practice of my faith. I am not deluding myself that this response of mine has significance for anyone else—*Who cares? It's about time!*—but for me the moment is a life marker. I have not been to Mass in months. I carry an ocean of grief in my heart.

II. THE TRAPPINGS OF EMPIRE

The virtues of the Catholic faith have been obvious to me my whole life. The world is better for those virtues, and I cherish the countless men and women who bring the faith alive. The Catholic Church is a worldwide community of well over 1 billion people. North and South, rich and poor, intellectual and illiterate—it is the only institution that crosses all such borders on anything like this scale. As James Joyce wrote in *Finnegans Wake*, Catholic means "Here Comes Everybody." Around the world there are more than 200,000 Catholic schools and nearly 40,000 Catholic hospitals and health-care facilities, mostly in developing countries. The Church is the largest nongovernmental organization on the planet, through which selfless women and men care for the poor, teach the unlettered, heal the sick, and work to preserve minimal standards of the common good. The world needs the Church of these legions to be rational, historically minded, pluralistic, committed to peace, a champion of the equality of women, and a tribune of justice.

That is the Church many of us hoped might emerge from the Second Vatican Council, which convened in the nave of Saint Peter's Basilica from 1962 to 1965. After the death, in 1958, of Pope Pius XII—and after 11 deadlocked ballots—a presumptive non-entity from Venice named Angelo Roncalli was elected pope, in effect to keep the Chair of Peter warm for the few years it might take one or another of the proper papal candidates to consolidate support. Roncalli—Pope John XXIII—instead launched a vast theological recasting of the Catholic imagination. Vatican II advanced

numerous reforms of liturgy and theology, ranging from the jettisoning of the Latin Mass to the post-Holocaust affirmation of the integrity of Judaism. Decisively, the council defined the Church as the "People of God," and located the clerical hierarchy within the community as servants, not above it as rulers. The declaration, though it would turn out to have little practical consequence for the clergy, was symbolized by liturgical reform that brought the altar down from on high, into the midst of the congregation.

I was a teenager at the time, living with my family on a military base in Germany, but I paid close attention to the impression Pope John was making in Rome. He stopped his car as it passed the city's main synagogue one Saturday and informally greeted the Jewish congregants who'd been milling about after services. He ordered the anti-Jewish adjective *perfidious* deleted from the Catholic liturgy. As the apostolic delegate to Turkey and Greece during World War II, he had supplied fake baptismal certificates to hundreds or perhaps thousands of Jews, aiding their escape; now, as pope, he met with a noted Jewish historian who had accused the Church—rightly—of complicity in Nazi anti-Semitism, and endorsed the historian's work. In calling his council, Pope John had instructed organizers to put the Church's relationship with the Jewish people high on the agenda—a result of his intimate experience of the Church's failure to forthrightly defend the Jews during the Holocaust. When he received a Jewish delegation at the Vatican, he came down from his elevated platform to greet its members, saying, "I am Joseph, your brother"—a reference to the biblical Joseph greeting his long-lost family.

In one area after another, the council raised basic questions of ethos, honesty, and justice, setting in motion a profound institutional examination of conscience. I was very much a part of the Vatican II generation. In due course I would become a priest—a member of a liberal American order known as the Paulist Fathers. The Paulists redefined themselves around the vision of Pope John, and made me an advocate of that vision.

What Vatican II did not do, or was unable to do, except symbolically, was take up the issue of clericalism—the vesting of power in an all-male and celibate clergy. My five years in the priesthood, even in its most liberal wing, gave me a fetid taste of this caste system. Clericalism, with its cult of secrecy, its theological misogyny, its sexual repressiveness, and its hierarchical power based on threats of a doom-laden afterlife, is at the root of Roman Catholic dysfunction. The clerical system's obsession with status thwarts even the merits of otherwise good priests and distorts the Gospels' message of selfless love, which the Church was established to proclaim. Clericalism is both the underlying cause and the ongoing enabler of the present Catholic catastrophe. I left the priesthood 45 years ago, before knowing fully what had soured me, but clericalism was the reason.

Clericalism's origins lie not in the Gospels but in the attitudes and organizational charts of the late Roman empire. Christianity was very different at the beginning. The first reference to the Jesus movement in a nonbiblical source comes from the Jewish Roman historian Flavius Josephus, writing around the same time that the Gospels were taking form. Josephus described the followers of Jesus simply as "those that loved him at the first and did not let go of their affection for him." There was no priesthood yet, and the movement was egalitarian. Christians worshipped and broke bread in one another's homes. But under Emperor Constantine, in the fourth century, Christianity effectively became the imperial religion and took on the trappings of the empire itself. A diocese was originally a Roman administrative unit. A basilica, a monumental hall where the emperor sat in majesty, became a place of worship. A diverse and decentralized group of churches was transformed into a quasi-imperial institution—centralized and hierarchical, with the bishop

of Rome reigning as a monarch. Church councils defined a single set of beliefs as orthodox, and everything else as heresy.

This character was reinforced at about the same time by Augustine's theology of sex, derived from his reading of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis. Augustine painted the original act of disobedience as a sexual sin, which led to blaming a woman for the fatal seduction—and thus for all human suffering down through the generations. This amounted to a major revision of the egalitarian assumptions and practices of the early Christian movement. It also put sexuality, and anything related to it, under a cloud, and ultimately under a tight regime. The repression of desire drove normal erotic urges into a social and psychological netherworld.

The celibacy of priests, which grew out of the practice of ascetic monks and hermits, may have been put forward, early on, as a mode of intimacy with God, appropriate for a few. But over time the cult of celibacy and virginity developed an inhuman aspect—a broader devaluation and suspicion of bodily experience. It also had a pragmatic rationale. In the Middle Ages, as vast land holdings and treasure came under Church control, priestly celibacy was made mandatory in order to thwart inheritance claims by the offspring of prelates. Seen this way, celibacy was less a matter of spirituality than of power.

The Church's maleness and misogyny became inseparable from its structure. The conceptual underpinnings of clericalism can be laid out simply: Women were subservient to men. Laypeople were subservient to priests, who were defined as having been made "ontologically" superior by the sacrament of holy orders. Removed by celibacy from competing bonds of family and obligation, priests were slotted into a clerical hierarchy that replicated the medieval feudal order. When I became a priest, I placed my hands between the hands of the bishop ordaining me—a feudal gesture derived from the homage of a vassal to his lord. In my case, the bishop was Terence Cooke, the archbishop of New York. Following this rubric of the sacrament, I gave my loyalty to him, not to a set of principles or ideals, or even to the Church. Should we be surprised that men invited to think of themselves on such a scale of power—even as an *alter Christus*, "another Christ"—might get lost in a wilderness of self-centeredness? Or that they might find it hard to break from the feudal order that provides community and preferment, not to mention an elevated status the unordained will never enjoy? Or that Church law provides for the excommunication of any woman who attempts to say the Mass, but mandates no such penalty for a pedophile priest? Clericalism is self-fulfilling and self-sustaining. It thrives on secrecy, and it looks after itself.

Pope John XXIII's successors were in clericalism's grip, which is why the reforms of his council were short-circuited. John had, for instance, initiated a reconsideration of the Church's condemnation of artificial contraception—a commission he established overwhelmingly voted to repeal the ban—but the possibility of that change was preemptively shut down by his successor, Pope Paul VI, mainly as a way of protecting papal authority. Now, with children as victims and witnesses both, the corruption of priestly dominance has been shown for the evil that it is. Clericalism explains both how the sexual-abuse crisis could happen and how it could be covered up for so long. If the structure of clericalism is not dismantled, the Roman Catholic Church will not survive, and will not deserve to.

I know this problem from the inside. My priesthood was caught up in the typhoon of the 1960s and '70s. Ironically, the Church, which sponsored my civil-rights work and prompted my engagement in the antiwar movement, made me a radical. I was the Catholic chaplain at Boston University, working with draft resisters and protesters, and soon enough I found myself in conflict with the conservative Catholic hierarchy. It only gradually dawned on me

Clericalism, with its cult of secrecy, its theological misogyny, and its hierarchical power, is at the root of Roman Catholic dysfunction.

that there was a tragic flaw deep inside the institution to which I'd given my life, and that it had to do with the priesthood itself. My priesthood. I heard the confessions of young people wracked with guilt not because of authentic sinfulness but because of a Church-imposed sexual repressiveness that I was expected to affirm. Just by celebrating the Mass, I helped enforce the unjust exclusion of women from equal membership in the Church. I valued the community life I shared with fellow priests, but I also sensed the crippling loneliness that could result from a life that lacked the deep personal intimacy other human beings enjoy. My relationship with God was so tied up with being a priest that I feared a total loss of faith if I left. That very fear revealed a denigration of the laity and illustrated the essential problem. If I had stayed a priest, I see now, my faith, such as it was, would have been corrupted.

III. “A TINY OPENING”

Still, the fact that Vatican II had occurred at all, against such great odds, was enough to validate a hope, half a century later, that the Church could survive the contemporary moral collapse of its leadership. That was the hope kindled by the arrival, in 2013, of the pope from Argentina. We would do well to step back from Francis's apparent failures, six years into his pontificate, and recall what made those early possibilities so riveting, not just for believers but for many who had left religion behind.

Pope Francis seemed to me, in the beginning, like a rescuer. I think of his surprisingly simple first words from the balcony of Saint Peter's right after his election: "*Fratelli e sorelle, buonasera!*" He had no use for the red-velvet slippers or the papal palace, and made a point of chastising rank-conscious prelates. He cradled and kissed the blistering feet of a Muslim inmate in a Roman prison and made a pilgrimage to the U.S.-Mexico border. He opened the door to Cuba and shut down the ancient Catholic impulse to convert the Jews. He has argued that religion is not a zero-sum enterprise in which the truth of one faith comes at the expense of the truth of others. ("Proselytism," he told a journalist, "is solemn nonsense.") He issued an encyclical urging care for the global environment, and gave that effort a theological underpinning.

The pope began as a man of science, which scrambles the old assumptions about the clash between religious belief and rational inquiry. The chemist turned Jesuit is presumably familiar with the principle of paradigm shift—the overturning through new evidence

*Saint Peter's Basilica,
in the Vatican*



DAVID SEYMOUR/MAGNUM

of the prevailing scientific framework. Settled ideas are forever on the way to being unsettled. So too with religion. Francis holds to the “fundamentals” of tradition, which is why a large population of the traditionally devout recognize him as one of their own. But he holds to the fundamentals loosely. In his book *The Name of God Is Mercy*, Francis explores the connection between specifically religious ideas and the concerns that all human beings share. By publicly measuring what he says, does, and believes against the simple standard of mercy—“God’s identity card”—Francis has consistently transcended the constraints of his position.

There is an undefined horizon of—let’s call it by an old name—the holy, toward which human beings still instinctively move. But today such longing for transcendence exists beyond categories of theism and atheism. Francis somehow gestured toward that horizon with innate eloquence. He offered less a message that explains than an invitation to explore. For Francis, an understanding of his role comes not from ideology (he is not a “liberal”) but from long and intimate relationships with the poor and the homeless. In the discarded people of Buenos Aires he recognized, as he put it, “all the abandoned of our world.”

Francis’s critics have found many reasons to push back against his initiatives. He has been attacked by proponents of unfettered free-market capitalism and by bigots who despise his appreciation of Islam. Steve Bannon, a former adviser to President Donald Trump, has attacked Francis for his criticism of nationalist populism (and Francis draws fire in some circles as the embodiment of anti-Trump conviction). But inside the Church, the fiercest opposition has come from defenders of clericalism—the spine of male power and the bulwark against any loosening of the sexual mores that protect it. Among the broader community of Catholics, the wedge issue has been the question of readmitting the divorced and remarried to the sacrament of Communion. The issue has sorely divided the hierarchy, and Francis has sided with those who would change the rule. “The Church does not exist to condemn people,” he has said, “but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy.” To deny beleaguered people the consolations of Communion for the sake of an abstract doctrine verges on cruelty. “Even when I have found myself before a locked door,” Francis once explained, “I have always tried to find a crack, just a tiny opening so that I can pry open that door.”

But this particular door—Communion for the divorced and remarried—opens onto the whole range of questions raised by the sexual revolution, which has been dramatizing the limits of the Church’s moral theology for a century. When the Catholic imagination, swayed by Augustine, demonized the sexual restlessness built into the human condition, self-denial was put forward as the way to happiness. But sexual renunciation as an ethical standard has collapsed among Catholics, not because of pressures from a hedonistic “secular” modernity but because of its inhumane and irrational weight. The argument within the Church hierarchy on divorce and remarriage has amounted to an overdue attempt to catch up with the vast population of Catholic laypeople who have already changed their minds on the subject—including many divorced and remarried people who simply refuse to be excommunicated, no matter what the bishops say.

The pope’s critics among his fellow prelates have engaged in intrigue, rumormongering, leaks, and open defiance—a desperate rearguard effort aimed at weakening a pope deemed insufficiently committed to the protection of clerical power. Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, formerly the Vatican nuncio in Washington, D.C., ambushed Francis during that pilgrimage to Ireland, publishing a letter claiming that the pope himself had covered up the abusive behavior of clergy. Viganò had ambushed Francis before, during his

2015 visit to Washington, by arranging a private meeting with the Kentucky court clerk who had refused to certify same-sex marriages. Viganò is supported by the pope’s American nemesis, Cardinal Raymond Burke, who has paired with Bannon in promoting a right-wing school for theological “gladiators” in Italy. Foreshadowing these events was a letter addressed to the pope—and later leaked—by 13 cardinals ahead of a synod in 2015, warning against any change on the question of divorce and remarriage. Critics such as these worry that a shift in Church discipline on this single question will pave the way—even if Francis and his allies do not quite see it—to a host of other changes regarding matters of sexuality, gender, and indeed the entire Catholic worldview. On this, the conservatives are right.

All of which, again, points a finger at the priesthood itself and its theological underpinnings. That is the crux of the matter. For years, I refused to cede my faith to the corruptions of the institutional Church, but Vatican bureaucrats and self-serving inquisitors are not the issue now. The priests are.

IV. A CULTURE OF DENIAL

The body knows when it’s in love, and the body knows when it’s ensnared in something beyond endurance. My body knew last summer, as the revelations in Ireland provoked a visceral collapse of faith.

Pope Francis, challenged by the disgrace of his close ally, the now-defrocked Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, of Washington; by accusations, like Viganò’s, of his own complicity in the cover-up of sexual abuse; and by the moral wreckage of the Church around the world, responded with silence, denial, and a business-as-usual summoning of crimson-robed men to Rome.

Events in subsequent months only magnified the scale of the Church’s failure. With maddening equilibrium, Pope Francis acknowledged, in response to a reporter’s question early this year, that the rape of nuns by priests and bishops remains a mostly unaddressed Catholic problem. In Africa, once AIDS became common, priests began coercing nuns into becoming sexual servants, because, as virgins, they would likely not carry the HIV virus. It was reportedly common for such priests to sponsor abortions when the nuns became pregnant. “It’s true,” Francis said calmly. “There are priests and bishops who have done that.” Nuns have come forward in India to charge priests with rape. In April, a bishop was charged with the rape and illegal confinement of a nun, whom he allegedly assaulted regularly over two years, in the southern state of Kerala. (The bishop has denied the charges.) The nun said she reported the bishop to the police only after appealing to Church authorities repeatedly—and being ignored.

In February, a *Washington Post* report suggested that early in his pontificate, Francis learned about the systematic priestly abuse of institutionalized deaf children in Argentina, decades ago. The abuse had originally been brought to light not by Church officials but by civil authorities. The deaf victims reported that they were discouraged from learning sign language, but that one hand sign often used by the abusive priests was the forefinger to the lips: *Silence*.

That same month, the Vatican was forced to acknowledge that it had long-established secret protocols for handling “children of

the ordained.” According to this policy, a priest who violated his vow of celibacy and fathered a child was encouraged to resign from the priesthood in order to “assume his responsibilities as a parent,” but was in no way required to do so. A Vatican expert stated that a priest’s fathering a child was “not a canonical crime.”

As for McCarrick, the cardinal was found guilty by a Vatican tribunal of abusing minors and was punished by being stripped of his clerical standing. A “reduction to the lay state” was described as the clerical equivalent of the death penalty. In truth, this supposedly humiliating punishment meant only that McCarrick would now share the secular status of every other unordained person on the planet. Here, too, clericalism rules: Because a defrocked priest retains his “ontological” superiority, the humiliation consists in his being made to appear, and live, like everyone else, which in itself reveals how the clerical caste perceives the laity.

A signal of what to expect from the meeting of bishops in Rome came in February from Francis himself, who, on the eve of the gathering, turned on those he called “accusers.” He said, with pointed outrage, “Those who spend their lives accusing, accusing, and accusing are ... the friends, cousins, and relatives of the devil.” His spray-shot diatribe seemed aimed as much at victims seeking justice as at the right-wing critics who have clearly gotten to him. At the meeting, the bishops dutifully employed watchwords such as *transparency* and *repentance*, yet they established no new structures of prevention and accountability. An edict promulgated in March makes reporting allegations of abuse mandatory, but it applies only to officials of the Vatican city-state and its diplomats, and the reporting is not to civil authorities but to other Vatican officials. Francis proclaimed “an all-out battle” against priestly abuse and said the Church must protect children “from ravenous wolves.” But he said nothing about who breeds such wolves or who sets them loose. Worse, he deflected the specifically Catholic nature of this horror by noting that child abuse and sexual malfeasance happen everywhere, as if the crimes of Catholic clergy are not so bad. Coming like a punctuation mark the day after the Vatican gathering adjourned was a full report from Australia on the matter of Cardinal George Pell. Formerly the head of Vatican finances and one of Francis’s closest advisers, Pell had been found guilty of sexually violating two altar boys in a sacristy right after presiding at the Eucharist.

In the Americas and Africa; in Europe, Asia, and Australia—wherever there were Catholic priests, there were children being preyed upon and tossed aside. Were it not for crusading journalists and lawyers, the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests would still be hidden, and rampant. A power structure that is accountable only to itself will always end up abusing the powerless. According to one victim, Cardinal Law, of Boston, before being forced to resign because of his support for predator priests, attempted to silence the man by invoking the sacred seal: “I bind you by the power of the confessional,” Law said, his hands pressing on the man’s head, “not to speak to anyone else about this.”

A priest did this. That is the decisive recognition. The abuse of minors occurs in many settings, yes, but such violation by a priest exists in a different order, and not simply because of its global magnitude. For Catholics, priests are the living sacrament of Christ’s presence, delegated above all to consecrate the bread and wine that define the soul of the faith. This symbol of Christ has come to stand for something profoundly wicked. Even as I write that sentence, I think of the good men on whom I have depended for priestly ministry over the years, and how they may well regard my conclusion as a friend’s betrayal. But the institutional corruption of clericalism transcends that concern, and anguish should be reserved for the victims of priests. Their suffering must be the permanent measure of our responses.

While a relatively small number of priests are pedophiles, it is by now clear that a far larger number have looked the other way. In part, that may be because many priests have themselves found it impossible to keep their vows of celibacy, whether intermittently or consistently. Such men are profoundly compromised. Gay or straight, many sexually active priests uphold a structure of secret unfaithfulness, a conspiracy of imperfection that inevitably undercuts their moral grit.

At a deeper level, Catholic clerics may be reluctant to judge their predatory fellows, because a priest, even if he is a person of full integrity, is always vulnerable to a feeling of having fallen short of an impossible ideal: to be “another Christ.” Where in such a system is there room for being human? I remember retreat masters citing scripture to exhort us priests during our seminary days “to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Moral perfection, we were told, was a vocational mandate. That such hubristic claptrap came from blatantly imperfect men did nothing to lighten the load of the admonition. I know from my own experience how priests are primed to feel secretly unworthy. Whatever its cause, a guilt-ridden clerical subculture of moral deficiency has made all priests party to a quiet dissembling about the deep disorder of their own condition. That subculture has licensed, protected, and enabled those malevolent men of the cloth who are prepared to exploit the young.

The very priesthood is toxic, and I see now that my own service was, too. The habit of looking away was general enough to have taken hold in me back then. When I was the chaplain at Boston University, my campus-ministry colleague, the chaplain at Boston State College, was a priest named Paul Shanley, whom most of us saw as a hero for his work as a rescuer of runaways. In fact, he was a rapacious abuser of runaways and others who, after being exposed by *The Boston Globe*, served 12 years in prison. It haunts me that I was blind to his predation, and therefore complicit in a culture of willed ignorance and denial.

Insidiously, willed ignorance encompasses not just clerics but a vast population of the faithful. I’ve already noted the broad Catholic disregard of the Church’s teachings about divorce and remarriage, but on the issue of artificial contraception, Catholic dissent is even more dramatic: For the past two generations, as Catholic birth rates make clear, a large majority of Church members have ignored the hierarchy’s solemn moral proscription—not in a spirit of active antagonism but as if the proscription simply did not exist. Catholics in general have perfected the art of looking the other way.

V. “THERE AM I”

Pope Francis expresses “shame and sorrow” over the sexual abuse of children by priests, yet he instinctively defends perpetrators against their accusers. He has called clericalism “a perversion of the Church.” But what does he actually mean by that? He denounces the clerical culture in which abuse has found its niche but does nothing to dismantle it. In his responses, he embodies that culture. I was never surprised when his papal predecessors behaved this way—when, for instance, Cardinal Ratzinger, before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, prohibited bishops from referring cases of predator priests to civil authorities, binding them under what he called the “pontifical secret.” Even now, as a supposedly sidelined pope emeritus,

Ratzinger is still defending the old order. In April he published, in a Bavarian periodical, a diatribe that was extraordinary as much for its vanity as for its ignorance. Benedict blamed sex abuse by priests on the moral laxity of the 1960s, the godlessness of contemporary culture, the existence of homosexual cliques in seminaries—and the way his own writings have been ignored. His complaint offered a barely veiled rebuttal to the pontificate of his successor, and is sure to reenergize the present pope's right-wing critics. But alas, the pope emeritus and his allies may not have real cause for worry. That an otherwise revolutionary pope like Francis demonstrates personally the indestructibility of clericalism is the revelation.

Francis has stoutly protected the twin pillars of clericalism—the Church's misogynist exclusion of women from the priesthood and its requirement of celibacy for priests. He has failed to bring laypeople into positions of real power. Equality for women as office-holders in the Church has been resisted precisely because it, like an end to priestly celibacy, would bring with it a broad transformation

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The Church is the people of God.
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complicit bishop rip my faith from me.*

of the entire Catholic ethos: Yes to female sexual autonomy; yes to love and pleasure, not just reproduction, as a purpose of sex; yes to married clergy; yes to contraception; and, indeed, yes to full acceptance of homosexuals. No to male dominance; no to the sovereign authority of clerics; no to double standards.

The model of potential transformation for this or any pope remains the radical post-Holocaust revision of Catholic teachings about Jews—the high point of Vatican II. The formal renunciation of the “Christ killer” slander by a solemn Church council, together with the affirmation of the integrity of Judaism, reaches far more deeply into Catholic doctrine and tradition than anything having to do with the overthrow of clericalism, whether that involves women’s ordination, married priests, or other questions of sexuality. The recasting of the Church’s relationship with the Jewish people, as I see it, was the single largest revision of Christian theology ever accomplished. The habit of Catholic (or Christian) anti-Judaism is not fully broken, but its theological justification has been expunged. Under the assertive leadership of a pope, profound change can occur, and it can occur quickly. This is what must happen now.

It likely won’t. Francis will almost certainly come and go having never reckoned with the violent corruptions of the priesthood. Clerics on the right are determined to defeat him, no matter what he does. The Church conservatives know better than most that the opposite of the clericalism they aim to protect is not some vague elevation of laypeople to a global altar guild but democracy—a robust overthrow of power that would unseat them and their ilk.

But Catholic clericalism is ultimately doomed, no matter how relentlessly the reactionaries attempt to reinforce it. The Vatican, with its proconsul-like episcopate, is the pinnacle of a structure of governance that owes more to emperors than to apostles. The profound discrediting of that episcopate is now underway. I want to be

part of what brings about the liberation of the Catholic Church from the imperium that took it captive 1,700 years ago.

I know that far more is at stake here than the anguish of a lone man on his knees. In North America and Europe, the falloff of Catholic laypeople from the normal practice of the faith has been dramatic in recent years, a phenomenon reflected in the diminishing ranks of clergy: Many parishes lack any priests at all. In the United States, Catholicism is losing members faster than any other religious denomination. For every non-Catholic adult who joins the Church through conversion, there are six Catholics who lapse. (Parts of the developing world are experiencing a growth in Catholicism, but those areas face their own issues of clericalism and scandal—and the challenge of evangelical Protestantism as well.)

But to simply leave the Church is to leave its worst impulses unchallenged and its best ones unsupported. When the disillusioned depart, Catholic reactionaries are overjoyed. They look forward to a smaller, more rigidly orthodox institution. This shrinkage is the so-called Benedict option—named for the sixth-century founder of monasticism, not for Benedict XVI, although the pope emeritus probably approves. His April intervention described an imagined modern dystopia—pedophilia legitimated, pornography displayed on airplanes—against which the infallible Church must stand in opposition. Benedict’s Catholicism would become a self-aggrandizing counterculture, but such a puritanical, world-hating remnant would be globally irrelevant.

The renewal offered by Vatican II may have been thwarted, but a reformed, enlightened, and hopeful Catholic Church is essential in our world. On urgent problems ranging from climate change, to religious and ethnic conflict, to economic inequality, to catastrophic war, no nongovernmental organization has more power to promote change for the better, worldwide, than the Catholic Church. So let me directly address Catholics, and make the case for another way to respond to the present crisis of faith than by walking away.

What if multitudes of the faithful, appalled by what the sex-abuse crisis has shown the Church leadership to have become, were to detach themselves from—and renounce—the cassock-ridden power structure of the Church and reclaim Vatican II’s insistence that that power structure is *not* the Church? The Church is the people of God. The Church is a community that transcends space and time. Catholics should not yield to clerical despots the final authority over our personal relationship to the Church. I refuse to let a predator priest or a complicit bishop rip my faith from me.

The Reformation, which erupted 500 years ago, boiled down to a conflict over the power of the priest. To translate scripture into the vernacular, as Martin Luther and others did, was to remove the clergy’s monopoly on the sacred heart of the faith. Likewise, to introduce democratic structures into religious governance, elevating the role of the laity, was to overturn the hierarchy according to which every ordained person occupied a place of superiority.

I brought up James Joyce earlier, and his declaration that Catholic means “Here Comes Everybody.” But, referring to the clerical establishment, not to that “everybody,” Joyce also said, less sweetly: “I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do.” That spirit of resistance is what must energize reform-minded Catholics now—an anticlericalism from within. That is the stance I choose to take. If there are like-minded, anticlerical priests, and even an anticlerical pope, then we will make common cause with them.

Joyce was a self-described exile, and exile can characterize the position of many former Catholics, people who have sought refuge in another faith, or in no faith. But exile of this kind is not what I suggest. Rather, I propose a kind of *internal* exile. One imagines the inmates of internal exile as figures in the back of a church, where,

in fact, some dissenting priests and many free-spirited nuns can be found as well. Think of us as the Church's conscientious objectors. We are not deserters.

Replacing the diseased model of the Church with something healthy may involve, for a time, intentional absence from services or life on the margins—less in the pews than in the rearmost shadows. But it will always involve deliberate performance of the works of mercy: feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, visiting the sick, striving for justice. These can be today's chosen forms of the faith. It will involve, for many, unauthorized expressions of prayer and worship—egalitarian, authentic, ecumenical; having nothing to do with diocesan borders, parish boundaries, or the sacrament of holy orders. That may be especially true in so-called intentional communities that lift up the leadership of women. These already exist, everywhere. No matter who presides at whatever form the altar takes, such adaptations of Eucharistic observance return to the theological essence of the sacrament. Christ is experienced not through the officiant but through the faith of the whole community. “For where two or three are gathered in my name,” Jesus said, “there am I in the midst of them.”

In what way, one might ask, can such institutional detachment square with actual Catholic identity? Through devotions and prayers and rituals that perpetuate the Catholic tradition in diverse forms, undertaken by a wide range of commonsensical believers, all insisting on the Catholic character of what they are doing. Their ranks would include ad hoc organizers of priestless parishes; parents who band together for the sake of the religious instruction of youngsters; social activists who take on injustice in the name of Jesus; and even social-media wizards launching, say, #ChurchResist. As ever, the Church's principal organizing event will be the communal experience of the Mass, the structure of which—reading the Word, breaking the bread—will remain universal; it will not need to be celebrated by a member of some sacerdotal caste. The gradual ascendance of lay leaders in the Church is in any case becoming a fact of life, driven by shortages of personnel and expertise. Now is the time to make this ascendance intentional, and to accelerate it. The pillars of Catholicism—gatherings around the book and the bread; traditional prayers and songs; retreats centered on the wisdom of the saints; an understanding of life as a form of discipleship—will be unshaken.

The Vatican itself may take steps, belatedly, to catch up to where the Church goes without it. Fine. But in ways that cannot be predicted, have no central direction, and will unfold slowly over time, the exiles themselves will become the core, as exiles were the core at the time of Jesus. They will take on responsibility and ownership—and, as responsibility and ownership devolve into smaller units, the focus will shift from the earthbound institution to its transcendent meaning. This is already happening, in front of our eyes. Tens of millions of moral decisions and personal actions are being informed by the choice to be Catholics on our own terms, untethered from a rotted ancient scaffolding. The choice comes with no asterisk. We will be Catholics, full stop. We do not need anyone's permission. Our “fasting and abstaining” from officially ordered practice will go on for as long as the Church's rebirth requires, whether we live to see it finished or not. As anticlerical Catholics, we will simply refuse to accept that the business-as-usual attitudes of most priests and bishops should extend to us, as the walls of their temple collapse around them.

The future will come at us invisibly, frame by frame, as it always does—comprehensible only when run together and projected retrospectively at some distant moment. But it is coming. One hundred years from now, there will be a Catholic Church. Count on it. If, down through the ages, it was appropriate for the Church to take on the political structures of the broader culture—imperial Rome, feudal

Europe—then why shouldn't Catholicism now absorb the ethos and form of liberal democracy? This may not be inevitable, but it is more than possible. The Church I foresee will be governed by laypeople, although the verb *govern* may apply less than *serve*. There will be leaders who gather communities in worship, and because the tradition is rich, striking chords deep in human history, such sacramental enablers may well be known as priests. They will include women and married people. They will be ontologically equal to everyone else. They will not owe fealty to a feudal superior. Catholic schools and universities will continue to submit faith to reason—and vice versa. Catholic hospitals will be a crucial part of the global health-care infrastructure. Catholic religious orders of men and women, some

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voluntarily celibate, will continue to protect and enshrine the varieties of contemplative practice and the social Gospel. Jesuits and Dominicans, Benedictines and Franciscans, the Catholic Worker Movement and other communities of liberation theology—all of these will survive in as yet unimagined forms. The Church will be fully alive at the local level, even if the faith is practiced more in living rooms than in basilicas. And the Church will still have a worldwide reach, with some kind of organizing center, perhaps even in Rome for old times' sake. But that center will be protected from Catholic triumphalism by being openly engaged with other Christian denominations. This imagined Church of the future will have more in common with ancient tradition than the pope-idolizing Catholicism of modernity ever did. And as all of this implies, clericalism will be long dead. Instead of destroying a Catholic's love of the Church, the vantage of internal exile can reinforce it—making the essence of the faith more apparent than ever.

I began this long reckoning with an unwished-for sense of relief that my mother did not live to see the Church's grotesque unraveling, but I understand now that if she had lived to see it, she too would recognize in this heartbreak the potential for purification.

What remains of the connection to Jesus once the organizational apparatus disappears? That is what I asked myself in the summer before I resigned from the priesthood all those years ago—a summer spent at a Benedictine monastery on a hill between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. I came to realize that the question answers itself. The Church, whatever else it may be, is not the organizational apparatus. It is a community of memory, keeping alive the story of Jesus Christ. The Church is an in-the-flesh connection to him—or it is nothing. The Church is the fellowship of those who follow him, of those who seek to imitate him—a fellowship, to repeat the earliest words ever used about us, of “those that loved him at the first and did not let go of their affection for him.” **A**

James Carroll is the author of 20 books, including his memoir, An American Requiem, which won the National Book Award; Constantine's Sword, a history of Christian anti-Semitism; and, most recently, the novel The Cloister.

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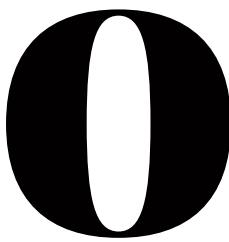
Was Shakespeare a Woman?

The authorship controversy, almost as old as the works themselves, has yet to surface a compelling alternative to the man buried in Stratford. Perhaps that's because, until recently, no one was looking in the right place. The case for Emilia Bassano.

By ELIZABETH WINKLER

Illustration by Stephen Doyle





ON A SPRING NIGHT in 2018, I stood on a Manhattan sidewalk with friends, reading Shakespeare aloud. We were in line to see an adaptation of *Macbeth* and had decided to pass the time refreshing our memories of the play's best lines. I pulled up Lady Macbeth's soliloquy on my iPhone. "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here," I read, thrilled once again by the incantatory power of the verse. I remembered where I was when I first heard those lines: in my 10th-grade English class, startled out of my adolescent stupor by this woman rebelling magnificently and malevolently against her submissive status. "Make thick my blood, / Stop up th' access and passage to remorse." Six months into the #MeToo movement, her fury and frustration felt newly resonant.

Pulled back into plays I'd studied in college and graduate school, I found myself mesmerized by Lady Macbeth and her sisters in the Shakespeare canon. Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, raging at the limitations of her sex ("O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace"). Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, affecting the swagger of masculine confidence to escape those limitations ("We'll have a swashing and a martial outside, / As many other mannish cowards have / That do outface it with their semblances"). Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, fearing no one will believe her word against Angelo's, rapist though he is ("To whom should I complain? Did I tell this, / Who would believe me?"). Kate, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, refusing to be silenced by her husband ("My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, / Or else my heart concealing it will break"). Emilia, in one of her last speeches in *Othello* before Iago kills her, arguing for women's equality ("Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them").

I was reminded of all the remarkable female friendships, too: Beatrice and Hero's allegiance; Emilia's devotion to her mistress, Desdemona; Paulina's brave loyalty to Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*; and plenty more. ("Let's consult together against this greasy knight," resolve the merry wives of Windsor, revenging themselves on Falstaff.) These intimate female alliances are fresh inventions—they don't exist in the literary sources from which many of the plays are drawn. And

when the plays lean on historical sources (Plutarch, for instance), they feminize them, portraying legendary male figures through the eyes of mothers, wives, and lovers. "Why was Shakespeare able to see the woman's position, write entirely as if he were a woman, in a way that none of the other playwrights of the age were able to?" In her book about the plays' female characters, Tina Packer, the founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company, asked the question very much on my mind.

Doubts about whether William Shakespeare (who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died in 1616) really

Who was this woman writing “immortal work” in the same year that Shakespeare’s name first appeared in print?

wrote the works attributed to him are almost as old as the writing itself. Alternative contenders—Francis Bacon; Christopher Marlowe; and Edward de Vere, the 17th earl of Oxford, prominent among them—continue to have champions, whose fervor can sometimes border on fanaticism. In response, orthodox Shakespeare scholars have settled into dogmatism of their own. Even to dabble in authorship questions is considered a sign of bad faith, a blinkered failure to countenance genius in a glover's son. The time had come, I felt, to tug at the blinkers of both camps and reconsider the authorship debate: Had anyone ever proposed that the creator of those extraordinary women might be a woman? Each of the male possibilities requires an elaborate theory to explain his use of another's name. None of the candidates has succeeded in dethroning the man from Stratford. Yet a simple reason would explain a playwright's need for a pseudonym in Elizabethan England: being female.

Long before Tina Packer marveled at the bard's uncanny insight, others were no less awed by the empathy that pervades the work. "One would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman," wrote Margaret Cavendish, the 17th-century philosopher and

playwright. The critic John Ruskin said, "Shakespeare has no heroes—he has only heroines." A striking number of those heroines refuse to obey rules. At least 10 defy their fathers, bucking betrothals they don't like to find their own paths to love. Eight disguise themselves as men, outwitting patriarchal controls—more gender-swapping than can be found in the work of any previous English playwright. Six lead armies.

The prevailing view, however, has been that no women in Renaissance England wrote for the theater, because that was against the rules. Religious verse and translation were deemed suitable female literary pursuits; "closet dramas," meant only for private reading, were acceptable. The stage was off-limits. Yet scholars have lately established that women were involved in the business of acting companies as patrons, shareholders, suppliers of costumes, and gatherers of entrance fees. What's more, 80 percent of the plays printed in the 1580s were written anonymously, and that number didn't fall below 50 percent until the early 1600s. At least one eminent Shakespeare scholar, Phyllis Rackin, of the University of Pennsylvania, challenges the blanket assumption that the commercial drama pouring forth in the period bore no trace of a female hand. So did Virginia Woolf, even as she sighed over the obstacles that would have confronted a female Shakespeare: "Undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned."

A tantalizing nudge lies buried in the writings of Gabriel Harvey, a well-known Elizabethan literary critic. In 1593, he referred cryptically to an "excellent Gentlewoman" who had written three sonnets and a comedy. "I dare not Particularise her Description," he wrote, even as he heaped praise on her.

All her conceits are illuminate with the light of Reason; all her speeches beautified with the grace of Affability ... In her mind there appeareth a certain heavenly Logic; in her tongue & pen a divine Rhetoric ... I dare undertake with warrant, whatsoever she writeth must needs remain an immortal work, and will leave, in the activest world, an eternal memory of the silliest vermin that she should vouchsafe to grace with her beautiful and affective style, as ingenious as elegant.

Who was this woman writing “immortal work” in the same year that Shakespeare’s name first appeared in print, on the poem “Venus and Adonis,” a scandalous parody of masculine seduction tales (in which the woman forces herself on the man)? Harvey’s tribute is extraordinary, yet orthodox Shakespeareans and anti-Stratfordians alike have almost entirely ignored it.

Until recently, that is, when a few bold outliers began to advance the case that Shakespeare might well have been a woman. One candidate is Mary Sidney, the countess of Pembroke (and beloved sister of the celebrated poet Philip Sidney)—one of the most educated women of her time, a translator and poet, and the doyenne of the Wilton Circle, a literary salon dedicated to galvanizing an English cultural renaissance. Clues beckon, not least that Sidney and her husband were the patrons of one of the first theater companies to perform Shakespeare’s plays. Was Shakespeare’s name useful camouflage, allowing her to publish what she otherwise couldn’t?

But the candidate who intrigued me more was a woman as exotic and peripheral as Sidney was pedigreed and prominent. Not long after my *Macbeth* outing, I learned that Shakespeare’s Globe, in London, had set out to explore this figure’s input to the canon. The theater’s summer 2018 season concluded with a new play, *Emilia*, about a contemporary of Shakespeare’s named Emilia Bassano. Born in London in 1569 to a family of Venetian immigrants—musicians and instrument-makers who were likely Jewish—she was one of the first women in England to publish a volume of poetry (suitably religious yet startlingly feminist, arguing for women’s “Libertie” and against male oppression). Her existence was unearthed in 1973 by the Oxford historian A. L. Rowse, who speculated that she was Shakespeare’s mistress, the “dark lady” described in the sonnets. In *Emilia*, the playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm goes a step further: Her Shakespeare is a plagiarist who uses Bassano’s words for Emilia’s famous defense of women in *Othello*.

Could Bassano have contributed even more widely and directly? The idea felt like a feminist fantasy about the past—but then, stories about women’s lost and obscured achievements so often have a dreamlike quality, unveiling a history different from the one we’ve learned. Was I

getting carried away, reinventing Shakespeare in the image of our age? Or was I seeing past gendered assumptions to the woman who—like Shakespeare’s heroines—had fashioned herself a clever disguise? Perhaps the time was finally ripe for us to see her.

THE RANKS OF Shakespeare skeptics comprise a kind of literary underworld—a cross-disciplinary array of academics, actors (Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance are perhaps the best known), writers, teachers, lawyers, a few Supreme Court justices (Sandra Day O’Connor, Antonin Scalia, John Paul Stevens). Look further back and you’ll find such illustrious names as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James, Sigmund Freud, Helen Keller, and Charlie Chaplin. Their ideas about the authorship of the plays and poems differ, but they concur that Shakespeare is not the man who wrote them.

Their doubt is rooted in an empirical conundrum. Shakespeare’s life is remarkably well documented, by the standards of the period—yet no records from his lifetime identify him unequivocally as a writer. The more than 70 documents that exist show him as an actor, a shareholder in a theater company, a moneylender, and a property investor. They show that he dodged taxes, was fined for hoarding grain

Shakespeare’s life is remarkably well documented—yet no records from his lifetime identify him unequivocally as a writer.

during a shortage, pursued petty lawsuits, and was subject to a restraining order. The profile is remarkably coherent, adding up to a mercenary impresario of the Renaissance entertainment industry. What’s missing is any sign that he wrote.

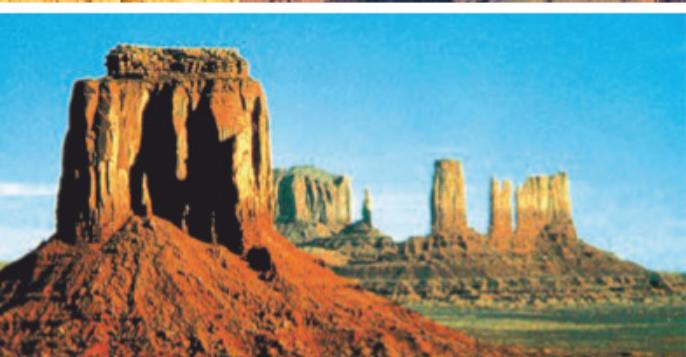
No such void exists for other major writers of the period, as a meticulous scholar named Diana Price has demonstrated. Many left fewer documents than

Shakespeare did, but among them are manuscripts, letters, and payment records proving that writing was their profession. For example, court records show payment to Ben Jonson for “those services of his wit & pen.” Desperate to come up with comparable material to round out Shakespeare, scholars in the 18th and 19th centuries forged evidence—later debunked—of a writerly life.

To be sure, Shakespeare’s name can be found linked, during his lifetime, to written works. With *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in 1598, it started appearing on the title pages of one-play editions called “quartos.” (Several of the plays attributed to Shakespeare were first published anonymously.) Commentators at the time saluted him by name, praising “Shakespeare’s fine filed phrase” and “honey-tongued Shakespeare.” But such evidence proves attribution, not actual authorship—as even some orthodox Shakespeare scholars grant. “I would love to find a contemporary document that said William Shakespeare was the dramatist of Stratford-upon-Avon written during his lifetime,” Stanley Wells, a professor emeritus at the University of Birmingham’s Shakespeare Institute, has said. “That would shut the buggers up!”

By contrast, more than a few of Shakespeare’s contemporaries are on record suggesting that his name got affixed to work that wasn’t his. In 1591, the dramatist Robert Greene wrote of the practice of “underhand brokery”—of poets who “get some other Batillus to set his name to their verses.” (Batillus was a mediocre Roman poet who claimed some of Virgil’s verses as his own.) The following year, he warned fellow playwrights about an “upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers,” who thinks he is the “onely Shakescene in a country.” Most scholars agree that the “Crow” is Shakespeare, then an actor in his late 20s, and conclude that the new-hatched playwright was starting to irk established figures. Anti-Stratfordians see something else: In Aesop’s fables, the crow was a proud strutter who stole the feathers of others; Horace’s crow, in his epistles, was a plagiarist. Shakespeare was being attacked, they say, not as a budding dramatist, but as a paymaster taking credit for others’ work. “Seeke you better Maisters,” Greene advised, urging his colleagues to cease writing for the Crow.

Ben Jonson, among others, got in his digs, too. Scholars agree that the character of Sogliardo in *Every Man Out of His*



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Humour—a country bumpkin “without brain, wit, anything, indeed, ramping to gentility”—is a parody of Shakespeare, a social climber whose pursuit of a coat of arms was common lore among his circle of actors. In a satirical poem called “On Poet-Ape,” Jonson was likely taking aim at Shakespeare the theater-world wheeler-dealer. This poet-ape, Jonson wrote, “from brokage is become so bold a thief,”

At first he made low shifts, would pick
and glean,
Buy the reversion of old plays; now
grown
To a little wealth, and credit in the
scene,
He takes up all, makes each man’s wit
his own

What to make of the fact that Jonson changed his tune in the prefatory material that he contributed to the First Folio of plays when it appeared seven years after Shakespeare’s death? Jonson’s praise there did more than attribute the work to Shakespeare. It declared his art unmatched: “He was not of an age, but for all time!” The anti-Stratfordian response is to note the shameless hype at the heart of the Folio project. “Whatever you do, Buy,” the compilers urged in their dedication, intent on a hard sell for a dramatist who, doubters emphasize, was curiously unsung at his death. The Folio’s introductory effusions, they argue, contain double meanings. Jonson tells readers, for example, to find Shakespeare not in his portrait “but his Booke,” seeming to undercut the relation between the man and the work. And near the start of his over-the-top tribute, Jonson riffs on the unreliability of extravagant praise, “which doth ne’er advance / The truth.”

The authorship puzzles don’t end there. How did the man born in Stratford acquire the wide-ranging knowledge on display in the plays—of the Elizabethan court, as well as of multiple languages, the law, astronomy, music, the military, and foreign lands, especially northern Italian cities? The author’s linguistic brilliance shines in words and sayings imported from foreign vocabularies, but Shakespeare wasn’t educated past the age of 13. Perhaps he traveled, joined the army, worked as a tutor, or all three, scholars have proposed. Yet no proof exists of any of those experiences, despite, as the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper

pointed out in an essay, “the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person.”

In fact, a document that does exist—Shakespeare’s will—would seem to undercut such hypotheses. A wealthy man when he retired to Stratford, he was meticulous about bequeathing his properties and possessions (his silver, his second-best bed). Yet he left behind not a single book, though the plays draw on hundreds of texts, including some—in Italian and French—that hadn’t yet been translated into English. Nor did he leave any musical instruments, though the plays use at least 300 musical terms and refer to 26 instruments. He remembered three actor-owners in his company, but no one in the literary profession. Strangest of all, he made no mention of manuscripts or writing. Perhaps as

Emilia Bassano’s life encompassed the breadth of the Shakespeare canon: its low-class references and knowledge of the court; its Italian sources and Jewish allusions; its music and feminism.

startling as the gaps in his will, Shakespeare appears to have neglected his daughters’ education—an incongruity, given the erudition of so many of the playwright’s female characters. One signed with her mark, the other with a signature a scholar has called “painfully formed.”

“Weak and unconvincing” was Trevor-Roper’s verdict on the case for Shakespeare. My delving left me in agreement, not that the briefs for the male alternatives struck me as compelling either. Steeped in the plays, I felt their author would surely join me in bridling at the Stratfordians’ unquestioning worship at the shrine—their arrogant dismissal of skeptics as mere deluded “buggers,” or worse. (“Is there any more fanatic

zealot than the priest-like defender of a challenged creed?" asked Richmond Crinkley, a former director of programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library who was nonetheless sympathetic to the anti-Stratfordian view.) To appreciate how belief blossoms into fact—how readily myths about someone get disseminated as truth—one can't do better than to read Shakespeare. Just think of how obsessed the work is with mistaken identities, concealed women, forged and anonymous documents—with the error of trusting in outward appearances. What if searchers for the real Shakespeare simply haven't set their sights on the right pool of candidates?

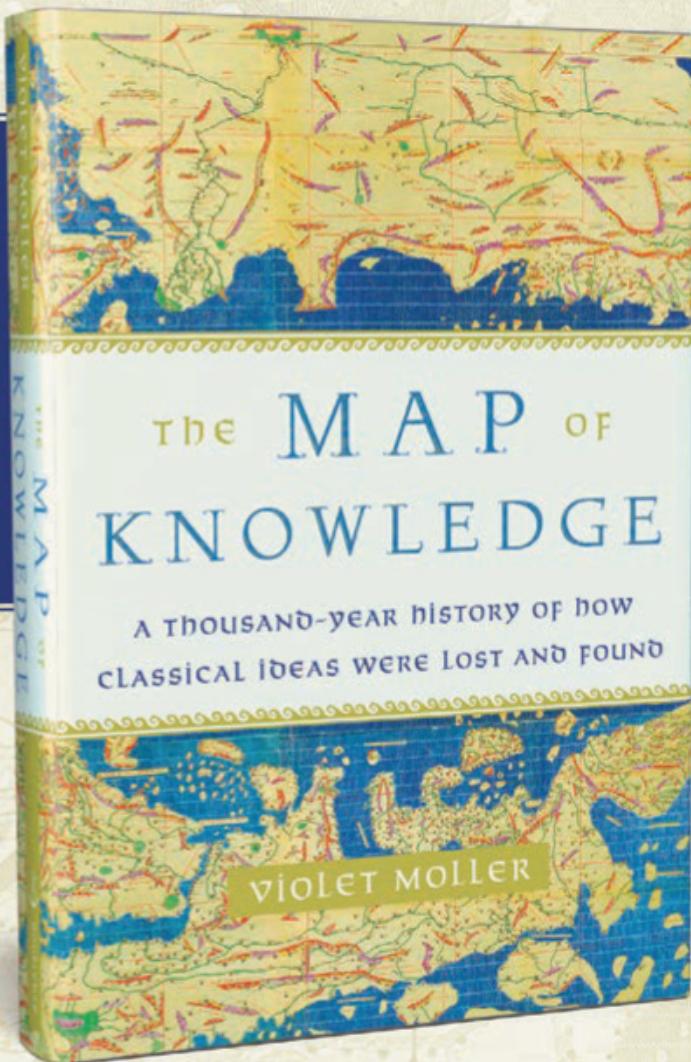
IMET EMILIA BASSANO'S most ardent champion at Alice's Tea Cup, which seemed unexpectedly apt: A teahouse on Manhattan's Upper West Side, it has quotes from *Alice in Wonderland* scrawled across the walls. ("OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!") John Hudson, an Englishman in his 60s who pursued a degree at the Shakespeare Institute in a mid-career swerve, had been on the

Bassano case for years, he told me. In 2014, he published *Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Amelia Bassano Lanier, the Woman Behind Shakespeare's Plays?* His zeal can sometimes get the better of him, yet he emphasizes that his methods and findings are laid out "for anyone ... to refute if they wish." Like Alice's rabbit hole, Bassano's case opened up new and richly disorienting perspectives—on the plays, on the ways we think about genius and gender, and on a fascinating life.

Hudson first learned of Bassano from A. L. Rowse, who discovered mention of her in the notebooks of an Elizabethan physician and astrologer named Simon Forman. In her teens, she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the master of court entertainment and patron of Shakespeare's acting company. And that is only the start. Whether or not Bassano was Shakespeare's lover (scholars now dismiss Rowse's claim), the discernible contours of her biography supply what the available material about Shakespeare's life doesn't: circumstantial evidence of opportunities to acquire an impressive expanse of knowledge.

Bassano lived, Hudson points out, "an existence on the boundaries of many different social worlds," encompassing the breadth of the Shakespeare canon: its coarse, low-class references and its intimate knowledge of the court; its Italian sources and its Jewish allusions; its music and its feminism. And her imprint, as Hudson reads the plays, extends over a long period. He notes the many uses of her name, citing several early on—for instance, an Emilia in *The Comedy of Errors*. (Emilia, the most common female name in the plays alongside Katherine, wasn't used in the 16th century by any other English playwright.) *Titus Andronicus* features a character named Bassianus, which was the original Roman name of Bassano del Grappa, her family's hometown before their move to Venice. Later, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the romantic hero is a Venetian named Bassanio, an indication that the author perhaps knew of the Bassanos' connection to Venice. (*Bassanio* is a spelling of their name in some records.)

Further on, in *Othello*, another Emilia appears—Iago's wife. Her famous speech against abusive husbands, Hudson notes,



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doesn't show up until 1623, in the First Folio, included among lines that hadn't appeared in an earlier version (lines that Stratfordians assume—without any proof—were written before Shakespeare's death). Bassano was still alive, and by then had known her share of hardship at the hands of men. More to the point, she had already spoken out, in her 1611 book of poetry, against men who "do like vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred."

Prodiced by Hudson, you can discern traces of Bassano's own life trajectory in particular works across the canon. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, a lowborn girl lives with a dowager countess and a general named Bertram. When Bassano's father, Baptista, died in 1576, Emilia, then 7, was taken in by Susan Bertie, the dowager countess of Kent. The countess's brother, Peregrine Bertie, was—like the fictional Bertram—a celebrated general. In the play, the countess tells how a father "famous ... in his profession" left "his sole child ... bequeathed to my overlooking. I have those hopes of her good that her education promises." Bassano received a remarkable humanist education with the countess. In her book of poetry, she praised her guardian as "the Mistris of my youth, / The noble guide of my ungovern'd dayes."

As for the celebrated general, Hudson seizes on the possibility that Bassano's ears, and perhaps eyes, were opened by Peregrine Bertie as well. In 1582, Bertie was named ambassador to Denmark by the queen and sent to the court at Elsinore—the setting of *Hamlet*. Records show that the trip included state dinners with Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, whose names appear in the play. Because emissaries from the same two families later visited the English court, the trip isn't decisive, but another encounter is telling: Bertie met with the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, whose astronomical theories influenced the play. Was Bassano (then just entering her teens) on the trip? Bertie was accompanied by a "whole traine," but only the names of important gentlemen are recorded. In any case, Hudson argues, she would have heard tales on his return.

Later, as the mistress of Henry Carey (43 years her senior), Bassano gained access to more than the theater world. Carey, the queen's cousin, held various legal and military positions. Bassano was "favoured much of her Majesty and of many noblemen," the physician Forman noted, indicating the kind of extensive

aristocratic associations that only vague guesswork can accord to Shakespeare. His company didn't perform at court until Christmas of 1594, after several of the plays informed by courtly life had already been written. Shakespeare's history plays, concerned as they are with the interactions of the governing class, presume an insider perspective on aristocratic life. Yet mere court performances wouldn't have enabled such familiarity, and no trace exists of Shakespeare's presence in any upper-class household.

And then, in late 1592, Bassano (now 23) was expelled from court. She was pregnant. Carey gave her money and jewels and, for appearance's sake, married her off to Alfonso Lanier, a court musician. A few months later, she had a son. Despite the glittering dowry, Lanier must not have been pleased. "Her husband hath dealt hardly with her," Forman wrote, "and spent and consumed her goods."

Bassano was later employed in a noble household, probably as a music tutor, and roughly a decade after that opened a school. Whether she accompanied her male relatives—whose consort of recorder players at the English court lasted 90 years—on their trips back to northern Italy isn't known. But the family link to the home country offers support for the fine-grained familiarity with the region that (along with in-depth musical knowledge) any plausible candidate for authorship would seem to need—just what scholars have had to strain to establish for Shakespeare. (Perhaps, theories go, he chatted with travelers or consulted books.) In *Othello*, for example, Iago gives a speech that precisely describes a fresco in Bassano del Grappa—also the location of a shop owned by Giovanni Otello, a likely source of the title character's name.

Her Bassano lineage—scholars suggest the family were conversos, converted or hidden Jews presenting as Christians—also helps account for the Jewish references that scholars of the plays have noted. The plea in *The Merchant of Venice* for the equality and humanity of Jews, a radical departure from typical anti-Semitic portrayals of the period, is well known. "Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" Shylock asks. "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" *A Midsummer Night's Dream* draws from a passage in the Talmud about marriage vows; spoken Hebrew is mixed into

the nonsense language of *All's Well That Ends Well*.

What's more, the Bassano family's background suggests a source close to home for the particular interest in dark figures in the sonnets, *Othello*, and elsewhere. A 1584 document about the arrest of two Bassano men records them as "black"—among Elizabethans, the term could apply to anyone darker than the fair-skinned English, including those with a Mediterranean complexion. (The fellows uttered lines that could come straight from a comic interlude in the plays: "We have as good friends in the court as thou hast and better too ... Send us to ward? Thou wert as good kiss our arse.") In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the noblemen derisively compare Rosaline, the princess's attendant, to "chimney-sweepers" and "colliers" (coal miners). The king joins in, telling Berowne, who is infatuated with her, "Thy love is black as ebony," to which the young lord responds, "O wood divine!"

Bassano's life sheds possible light, too, on another outsider theme: the plays' preoccupation with women caught in forced or loveless marriages. Hudson sees her

misery reflected in the sonnets, thought to have been written from the early 1590s to the early 1600s. "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, / I all alone beweep my outcast state, / And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, / And look upon myself and curse my fate,"

Bassano's life sheds possible light on the plays' preoccupation with women caught in forced or loveless marriages.

reads sonnet 29. (When Maya Angelou first encountered the poem as a child, she thought Shakespeare must have been a black girl who had been sexually abused: "How else could he know what I know?")

For Shakespeare, those years brought a rise in status: In 1596, he was granted a coat of arms, and by 1597, he was rich enough to buy the second-largest house in Stratford.

In what is considered an early or muddled version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, a man named Alphonso (as was Bassano's husband) tries to marry off his three daughters, Emilia, Kate, and Philema. Emilia drops out in the later version, and the father is now called Baptista (the name of Bassano's father). As a portrait of a husband dealing "hardly" with a wife, the play is horrifying. Yet Kate's speech of submission, with its allusions to the Letters of Paul, is slippery: Even as she exaggeratedly parrots the Christian doctrine of womanly subjection, she is anything but dutifully silent.

Shakespeare's women repeatedly subvert such teachings, perhaps most radically in *The Winter's Tale*, another drama of male cruelty. There the noblewoman Paulina, scorned by King Leontes as "a most intelligencing bawd" with a "boundless tongue," bears fierce witness against him (no man dares to) when he wrongfully accuses Queen Hermione



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of adultery and imprisons her. As in so many of the comedies, a more enlightened society emerges in the end because the women's values triumph.

I was stunned to realize that the year *The Winter's Tale* was likely completed, 1611, was the same year Bassano published her book of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*. Her writing style bears no obvious resemblance to Shakespeare's in his plays, though Hudson strains to suggest similarities. The overlap lies in the feminist content. Bassano's poetry registers as more than conventional religious verse designed to win patronage (she dedicates it to nine women, Mary Sidney included, fashioning a female literary community). Scholars have observed that it reads as a "transgressive" defense of Eve and womankind. Like a cross-dressing Shakespearean heroine, Bassano refuses to play by the rules, heretically reinterpreting scripture. "If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake," she writes. Arguing that the crucifixion, a crime committed by men, was a greater crime than Eve's, she challenges the basis of men's "tyranny" over women.

"**I** ALWAYS FEEL SOMETHING Italian, something Jewish about Shakespeare," Jorge Luis Borges told *The Paris Review* in 1966. "Perhaps Englishmen admire him because of that, because it's so unlike them." Borges didn't mention feeling "something female" about the bard, yet that response has never ceased to be part of Shakespeare's allure—embodiment though he is of the patriarchal authority of the Western canon. What would the revelation of a woman's hand at work mean, aside from the loss of a prime tourist attraction in Stratford-upon-Avon? Would the effect be a blow to the cultural patriarchy, or the erosion of the canon's status? Would (male) myths of inexplicable genius take a hit? Would women at last claim their rightful authority as historical and intellectual forces?

I was curious to take the temperature of the combative authorship debate as women edge their way into it. Over more tea, I tested Hudson's room for flexibility. Could the plays' many connections to Bassano be explained by simply assuming the playwright knew her well? "Shakespeare would have had to run to her every few minutes for a musical reference or an Italian pun," he said. I caught up with Mark Rylance, the actor and

former artistic director of the Globe, in the midst of rehearsals for *Othello* (whose plot, he noted, comes from an Italian text that didn't exist in English). A latitudinarian doubter—embracing the inquiry, not any single candidate—Rylance has lately observed that the once heretical notion of collaboration between Shakespeare and other writers “is now accepted, pursued and published by leading orthodox scholars.” He told me that “Emilia should be studied by anyone interested in the creation of the plays.” David Scott Kastan, a well-known Shakespeare scholar at Yale, urged further exploration too, though he wasn’t ready to anoint her bard. “What’s clear is that it’s important to know more about her,” he said, and even got playful with pronouns: “The more we know about her and the world she lived in, the more

we’ll know about Shakespeare, whoever she was.”

In the fall, I joined the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Authorship Trust—a gathering of skeptics at the Globe—feeling excited that gender would be at the top of the agenda. Some eyebrows were raised even in this company, but enthusiasm ran high. “People have been totally frustrated with authorship debates that go nowhere, but that’s because there have been 200 years of bad candidates,” one participant from the University of Toronto exclaimed. “They didn’t want to see women in this,” he reflected. “It’s a tragedy of history.”

He favored Sidney. Others were eager to learn about Bassano, and with collaboration in mind, I wondered whether the two women had perhaps worked together,

or as part of a group. I thought of Bassano’s *Salve Deus*, in which she writes that men have wrongly taken credit for knowledge: “Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / From Eve’s faire hand, as from a learned Booke.”

The night after the meeting, I went to a performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre. I sat enthralled, still listening for the poet in her words, trying to catch her reflection in some forgotten bit of verse. “Give me my robe, put on my crown,” cried the queen, “I have / Immortal longings in me.” There she was, kissing her ladies goodbye, raising the serpent to her breast. “I am fire and air.” **A**

Elizabeth Winkler is a reporter for The Wall Street Journal. She studied Shakespeare at Princeton and Stanford.

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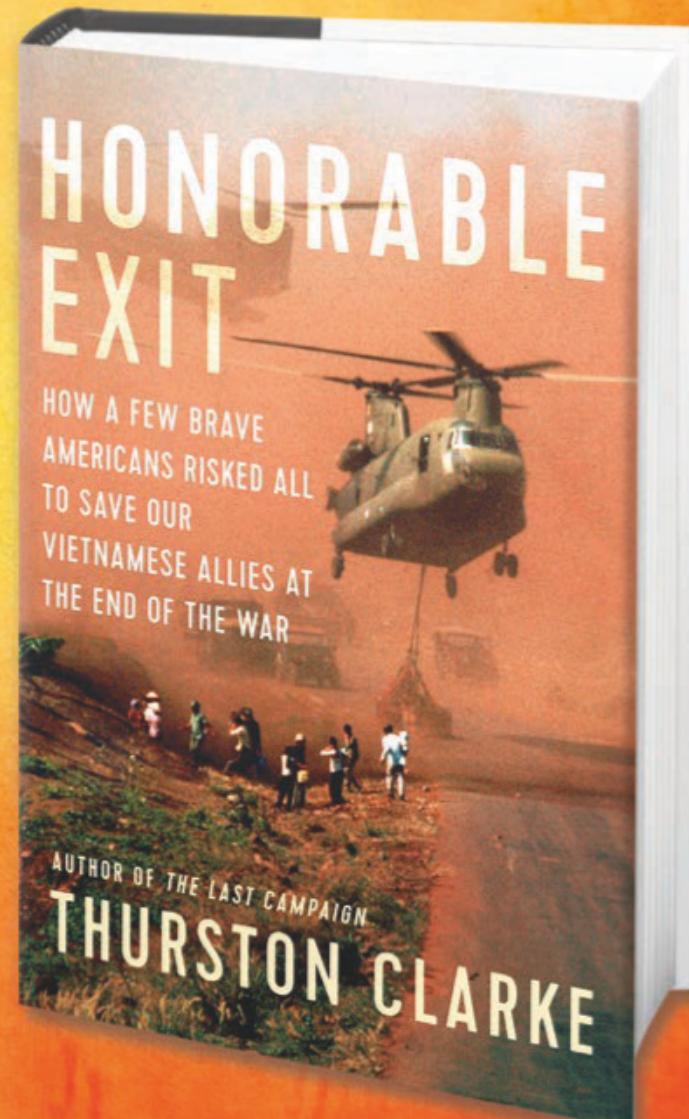
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What is the most overrated invention?

**Lee Jackson, author,
*Palaces of Pleasure***

The internet. As early as 1858, *Punch* magazine commented on the prospect of new technology creating “house telegraphs” that would put one constantly “within five minutes of every noodle who wants to ask you a question ... every acquaintance who has a favour to beg, or a disagreeable thing to communicate.” Sound familiar?

Robert P. Crease, author, *The Workshop and the World*

IQ tests: widely administered, morally pernicious.



Finn Brunton, author, *Digital Cash*

With perhaps the most hype for the least consequence of any media technology so far, **virtual reality**—the Smell-O-Vision of the 1990s—keeps going from icon of the future to relic of the past without a present in-between.

Clive Thompson, author, *Coders: The Making of a New Tribe and the Remaking of the World*

For generations, we've regarded **the automobile** as a symbol of personal freedom and autonomy. It has certainly propelled a ton of economic activity, but it also generates monstrous amounts of CO₂ and environmentally ruinous sprawl. The sooner we detach our personal identity from cars and car ownership, the better.

Dorian Lynskey, author, *The Ministry of Truth*

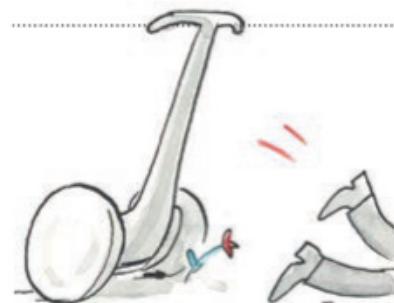
Virtual assistants epitomize the tech industry's unfortunate habit of building dystopia by accident and the public's eager complicity. Most of us trade privacy for convenience, but my laziness goes only so far—there's no task I'd rather delegate to a data-harvesting digital spy instead of doing myself. Alexa is not your friend.

READER RESPONSES

Andrew M. Gombos Jr., Houston, Texas

The Dreadnought-class battleship. In the early part of the 20th century, the ships

became symbols of British national pride and power and were thought of as the ultimate weapon. Yet they were terribly expensive, and their guns were not accurate. They were seldom used in battle and nearly bankrupted the British empire. They could be sunk by a single, far cheaper torpedo. They did nothing to prevent World War I and even less to win the war.



Frank LaPosta Visco, Troy, N.Y.

The Segway.

Andrew Hellman, Shoreline, Wash.

What's so great about **sliced bread**? You want toasted bread? Try naan or an English muffin. You want a sandwich? Try a sub or a pita pocket. You want a piece of bread? Try tearing.

J. P. Paz Soldáz, Lima, Peru

The clock. The inventor must have thought he or she had subjugated time, but now we know that it was the other way around.

Emily Myers, York, Pa. **Engagement rings** were a ploy crafted by greedy diamond companies, and now they are a seeming requirement for any couple looking to get married.

Eric Scigliano, Seattle, Wash.

Defensive walls. Many of them are gratuitous and soon abandoned (Hadrian's Wall; its successor, the Antonine Wall; those surrounding countless forts and castles) or futile (ancient Troy's, the Great Wall of China, the Maginot Line). President Donald Trump's border wall would be both.

Richard Iverson, Hood River, Ore.

The chair, intended to provide a comfortable respite, has instead had a debilitating effect on countless desk-bound humans.

Anne Wells, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Without question, the most overrated invention has to be **the car alarm**. Has anyone ever rushed to a scene upon hearing its klaxons? I rest my case.

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