

The Atlantic

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Keep Losing

By Franklin Foer

How Power
Damages
the Brain

CAN NORTH KOREA BE STOPPED?

BY
MARK
BOWDEN

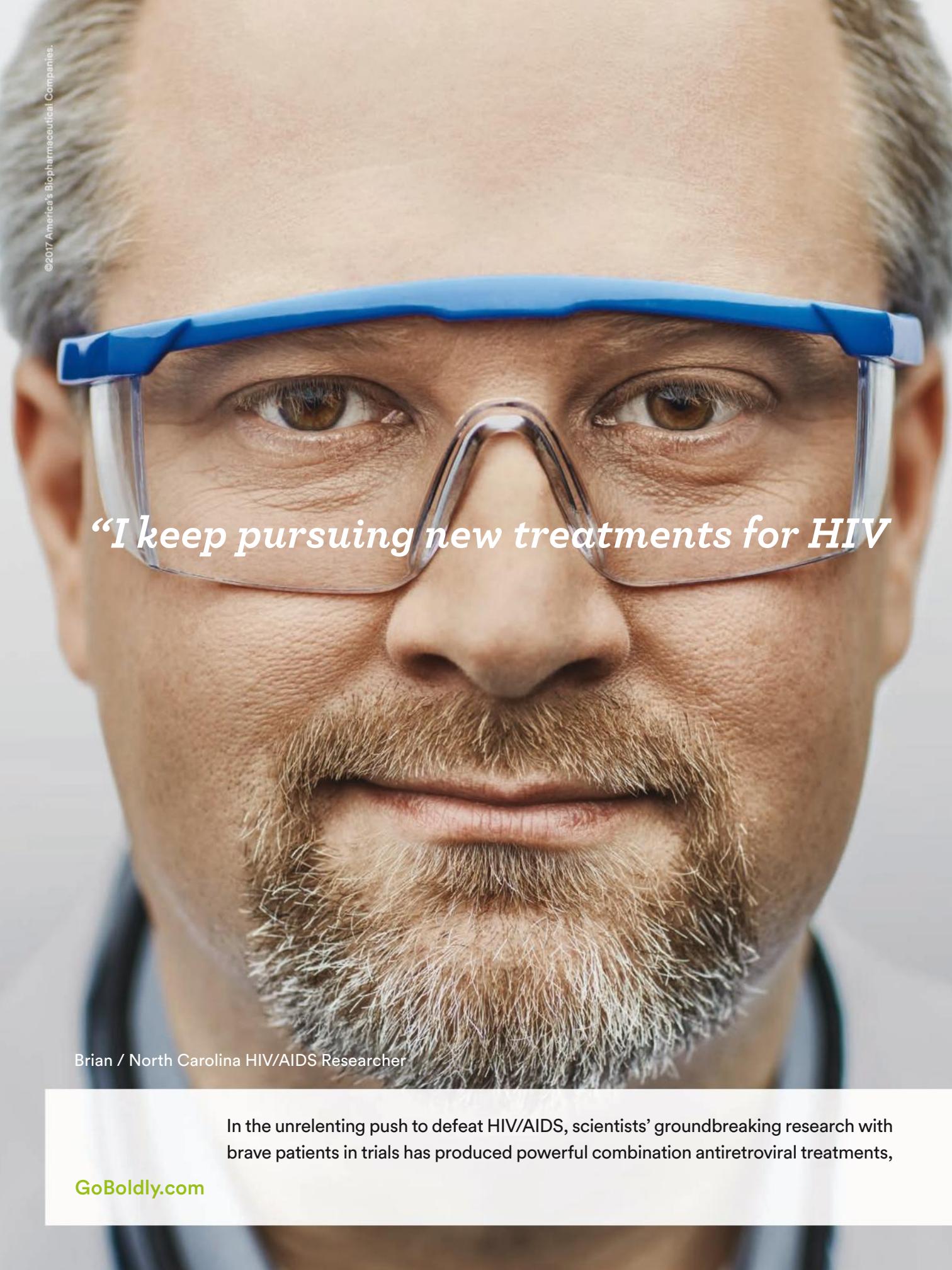


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The Psychiatrist
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Sleuthing for
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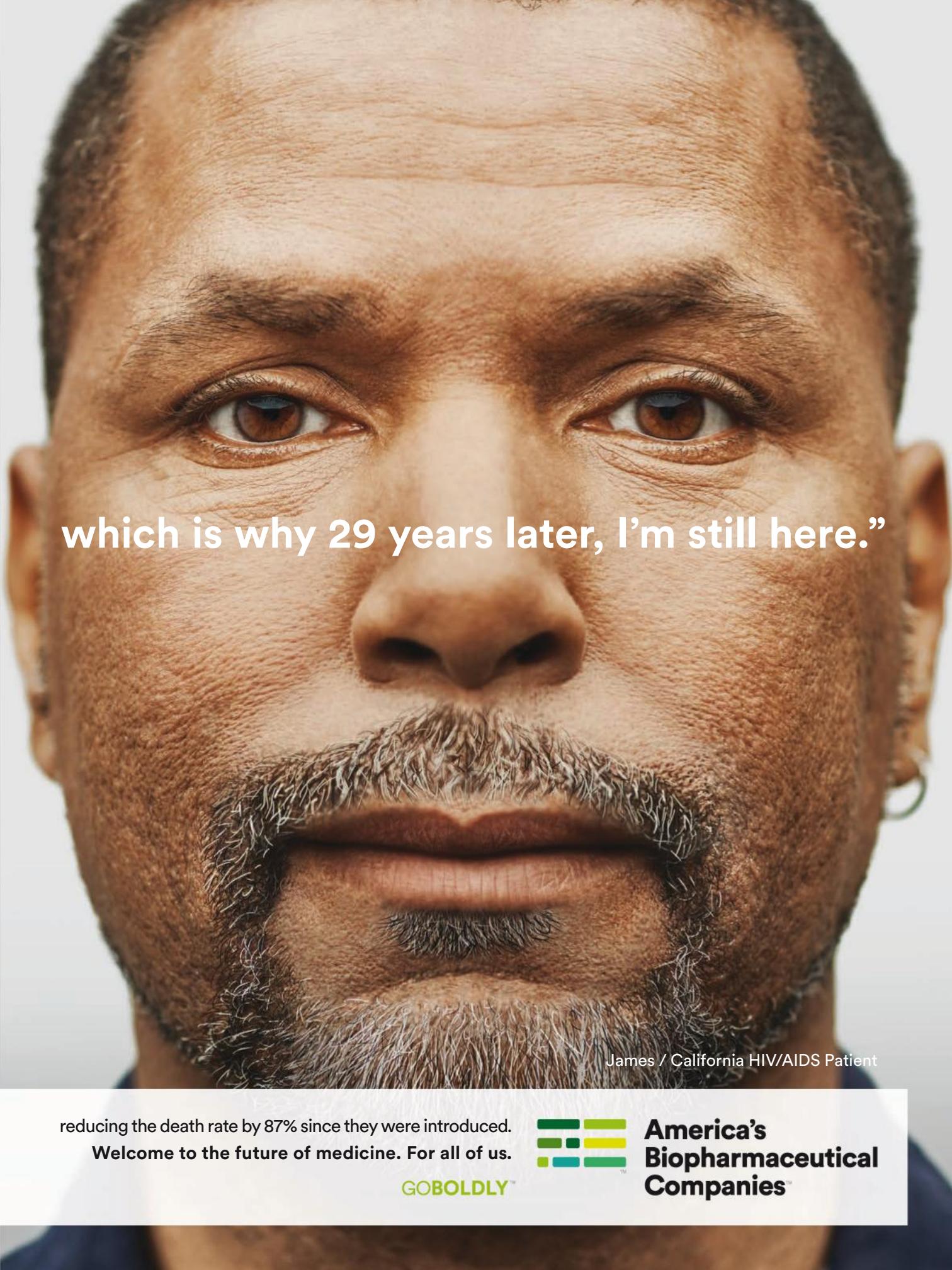


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OF NO PARTY OR CLIQUE

CONTENTS | JULY/AUGUST 2017

VOL. 320-NO. 1

Features

Adam Roberts has tested thousands of samples of bacteria, found everywhere from parties to classrooms to the Houses of Parliament, in search of new antibiotics.



48 What's Wrong With the Democrats?

BY FRANKLIN FOER

The party's choices have been disastrous. If Democrats care about winning, they must learn to appeal to the white working class.

60 The Democrats' Immigration Mistake

BY PETER BEINART

In the past decade, liberals have emphasized diversity over unity. It's time to address Americans' yearning for cohesion.

66 The Worst Problem on Earth

BY MARK BOWDEN

Here's how to deal with North Korea. It's not going to be pretty.

THE HEALTH REPORT

78 The Smartphone Psychiatrist

BY DAVID DOBBS

Tom Insel, one of the world's most influential psychiatrists, believes the best hope for treating mental illness may be in your pocket.

88 Could the Answer to Our Most Urgent Health Crisis Be Found on a Toilet Seat?

BY MARYN MCKENNA

How crowdsourcing bacteria could stave off the growing threat of antibiotic resistance

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THINK BEFORE YOU BREATHE

You've spent 90 percent of your life inside. What have you been breathing in that whole time?

Conversations about pollution tend to focus on the outdoors—the exhaust from cars and buses, the contaminant smog that comes wheezing out of smokestacks and factories. But we're missing what's right in front of our noses, what we breathe in for most of our lives: indoor air.

INDOOR AIR POLLUTION is “an area that’s relatively unexplored compared to other fields in public health,” says Dr. Joseph Allen, director of the Healthy Buildings Program at Harvard’s Center for Health and the Global Environment. Despite the fact that indoor air is sometimes more polluted than outdoor air, “we haven’t dedicated comparable resources to it.”

The issue of indoor air pollution was all but unspoken until the 1970s, when buildings started to get sealed with energy-conscious insulation. That’s when so-called ‘sick building syndrome’ started to pop up nationwide, with huge numbers of tenants complaining about sickness and discomfort. Their symptoms were mostly caused by indoor pollutants, particularly what scientists call volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. VOCs are especially harmful

in indoor spaces because they easily evaporate; formaldehyde, for instance, boils at -2 degrees Fahrenheit, meaning it will sublime in any indoor environment that isn’t a deep freezer.

VOCs are everywhere, in some of the most common materials and products of home and office—there is benzene in art supplies, formaldehyde comes in paint, perchloroethylene comes in fabric-, wood-, and shoe-cleaning products. They present a whole host of health threats, as do other types of indoor chemicals and pollutants, including the risk of causing cancer and “damage to the liver, kidneys, and central nervous system,” according to the National Institutes of Health.

WHAT CAN WE DO to protect ourselves? Allen says the solution may lie in the people responsible for making buildings, who have the power to control and monitor indoor air quality. And while the bigger solution may lie in ground-up renovations, everyone can help improve the air we breathe by looking for toxic chemicals on the labels on the products we buy, keeping up regular cleaning routines, and making sure to monitor and purify indoor air quality.

“[We must] understand that the indoor environment influences your health,” Allen says. “When people start thinking about where we spend our time and all that’s around us, I think things will start to change.”

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Dispatches



POLITICS

15**The Conservative Case for Unions**

A new kind of labor organization could address populist grievances.

BY JONATHAN RAUCH



SKETCH

20**The Defector**

How Trump and Twitter turned Evan McMullin into the GOP's leading dissident.

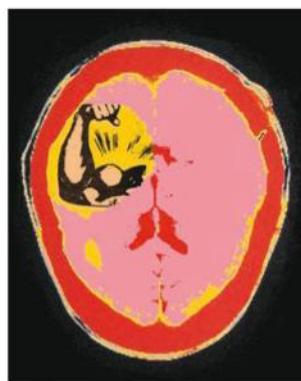
BY MCKAY COPPINS

BUSINESS

24**Power Causes Brain Damage**

Over time, leaders lose mental capacities that were essential to their rise.

BY JERRY USEEM



STUDY OF STUDIES

26**Ecomaniacs**

How vanity might save the planet

BY MATTHEW HUTSON



TECHNOLOGY

28**Beyond the Five Senses**

Telepathy, echolocation, and the future of perception

BY MATTHEW HUTSON



WORKS IN PROGRESS

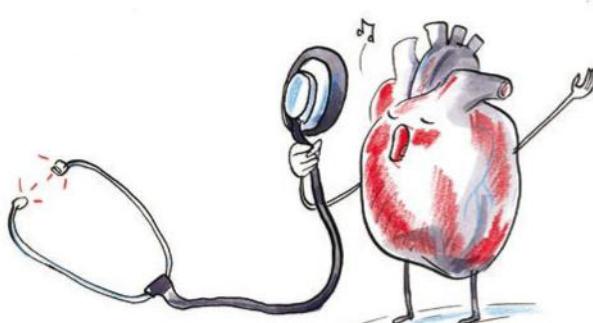
30**Black Gotham**

Memorializing Manhattan's earliest African residents

BY JESSICA LEIGH HESTER

Departments**10****The Conversation****104****The Big Question**

What is the most underappreciated medical invention in history?

**Poetry****58****I Am Not Italian**

BY BILLY COLLINS

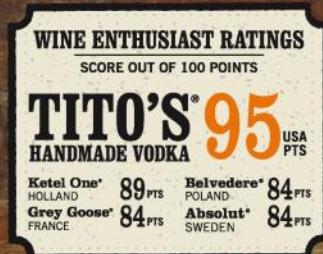
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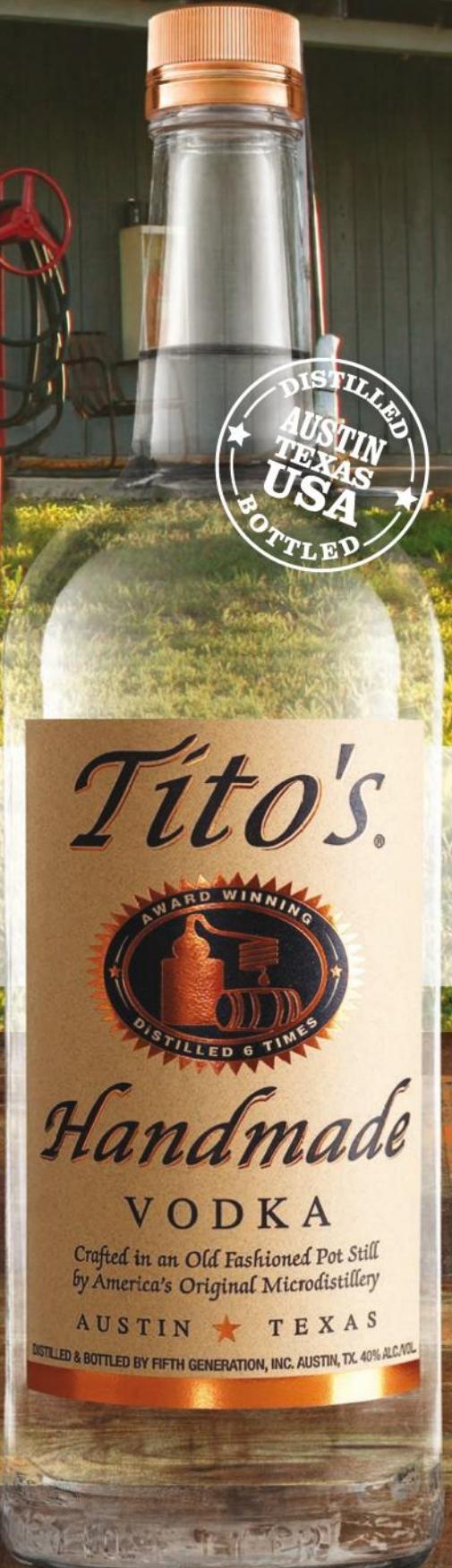


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CNN

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The Culture File



THE OMNIVORE

32

What Inspired the Summer of Love?

Love, sure—but mostly drugs.

BY JAMES PARKER



BOOKS

36

Arundhati Roy's Fascinating Mess

Being an activist and an artist is trickier than it sounds.

BY PARUL SEHGAL



Essay

94

Yayoi Kusama's Existential Circus

Is the current participatory-art craze about seeking profound experiences—or posting selfies?

BY SARAH BOXER

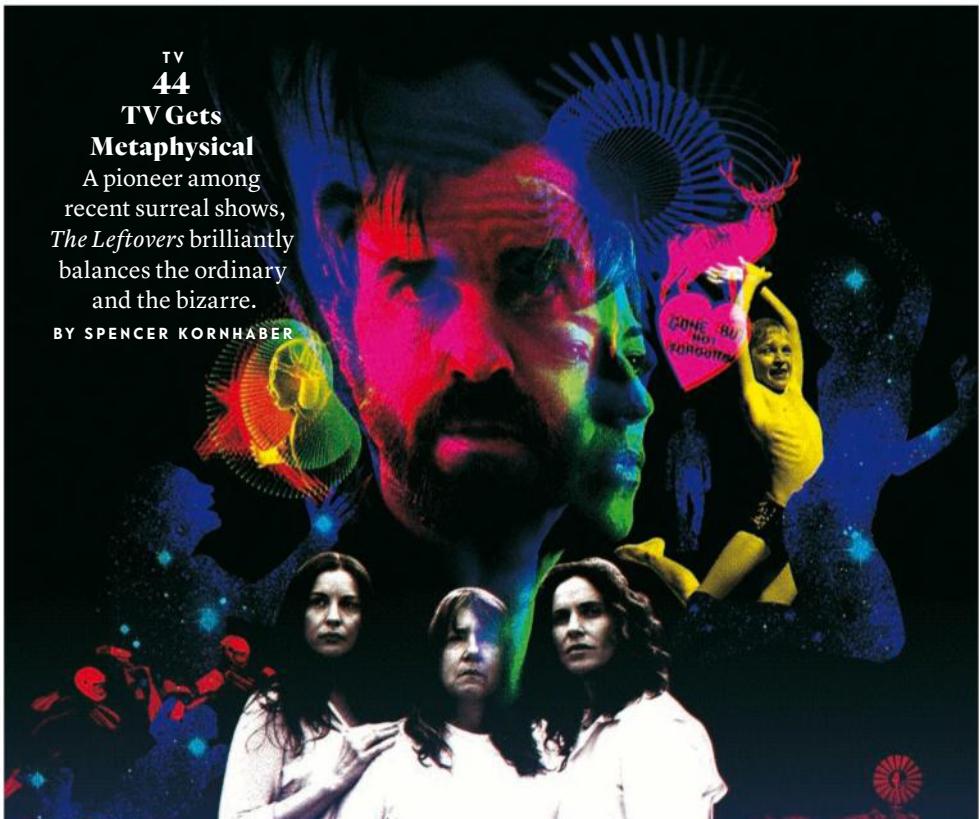
BOOKS

40

The Architect of the Radical Right

How the Nobel Prize-winning economist James M. Buchanan shaped today's antigovernment politics

BY SAM TANENHAUS



On the Cover

Illustration by
Justin Metz

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THE CONVERSATION

RESPONSES & REVERBERATIONS

The Politics of Late-Night Comedy

Caitlin Flanagan's May article, "How Late-Night Comedy Alienated Conservatives, Made Liberals Smug, and Fueled the Rise of Trump," provoked responses from, among others, Michael Gerson, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, and Trevor Noah, the host of *The Daily Show*.

“Trump and Bee,” Flanagan argues, “are on different sides politically, but culturally they are drinking from the same cup, one filled with the poisonous nectar of reality TV and its baseless values ... Trump and Bee share a penchant for verbal cruelty and a willingness to mock the defenseless.”

It is far more consequential, of course, when Trump does the mocking. But Flanagan is correct that the attitude of late-night television gets mixed up in the public mind with the mainstream media and appears to many as a monolith of cruel, establishment bias.

On the whole, people can better tolerate being shouted at than being sneered at. And the sneer of the knowledge class was clearly a motivating factor for many Trump voters. They felt condescension from the commanding heights of the culture and set out to storm its highest point. The pose of late-night television— duplicated by many on the left—is a continuing provocation. It is the general,

obnoxious attitude in which it is somehow permissible for the Democratic National Committee to hawk a T-shirt on its website saying, “Democrats give a sh*t about people.”

This leads to a second, divisive and counterproductive tendency among anti-Trump forces. For many on the left, the energy of opposition to the president is useful only to drive an existing agenda—and to drive the Democratic Party leftward ...

Consider where trends might take us. At the presidential level, there is currently no center-right party in the United States. With the ascendancy of its Elizabeth Warren–Bernie Sanders wing, there would be no center-left party in the country. The ideological and cultural sorting of the two parties would be complete, and nearly every issue would become a culture-war battle ...

A substantive, centrist response to Trump has a chance of releasing his hold on the GOP and the country. A sneering, dismissive, dehumanizing, conspiratorial



hard-left-leaning response to Trump is his fondest hope.

Michael Gerson
EXCERPT FROM A
WASHINGTON POST OP-ED

There are many things that contributed to Donald Trump. With regards to the sneering comedy, does that alienate some people? Yes. We're all different in our styles of comedy. I'm very different to Sam Bee, who's very different to John Oliver, who's very different to Stephen Colbert. Yes, we're all operating in the same space. But just like players on a sports team, we're all slightly different. You know? I mean, that was part of the thing with me when I started, is people said, "Oh, he's not

#TWEET of the Month

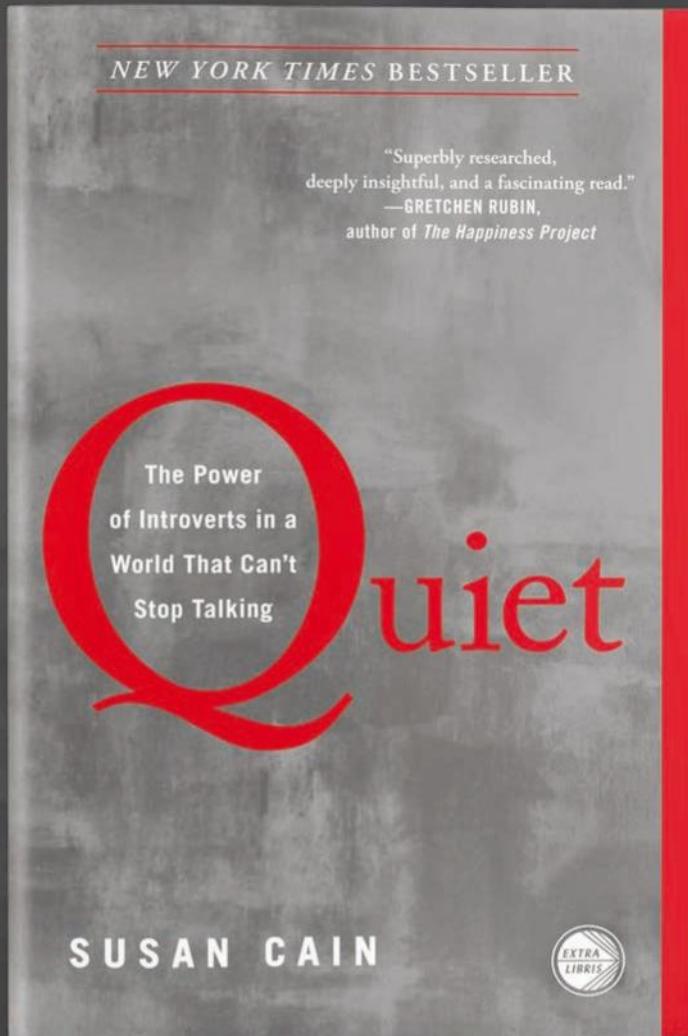
A brilliant, stinging, truthful piece. Note the part on the humiliated child.

— @Peggynoonannyc
Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy
Noonan on Flanagan's article

sneering enough.” “He’s not angry enough.” And I was like, “Okay, well that’s not what I’m trying to do.” And over time, I guess I’ve grown with an audience now that accepts how I do my comedy. But I don’t know if that contributes directly. Yeah, there will always be people who feel like they’re being, you know—they feel condescended [to]. But I would argue that politicians have more of that power than comedians do. When a politician’s out there on the stump, they have the ability to connect. That’s what Obama did really well. You know? It’s the difference between saying “We’re gonna shut down coal” and saying “We’re going to make sure your jobs are intact.” I feel like those are the things—I doubt that somebody’s at the voting booth going, “Yeah, this will show you, Trevor Noah. Ha ha! Take that! Electoral votes—that’ll show you!”

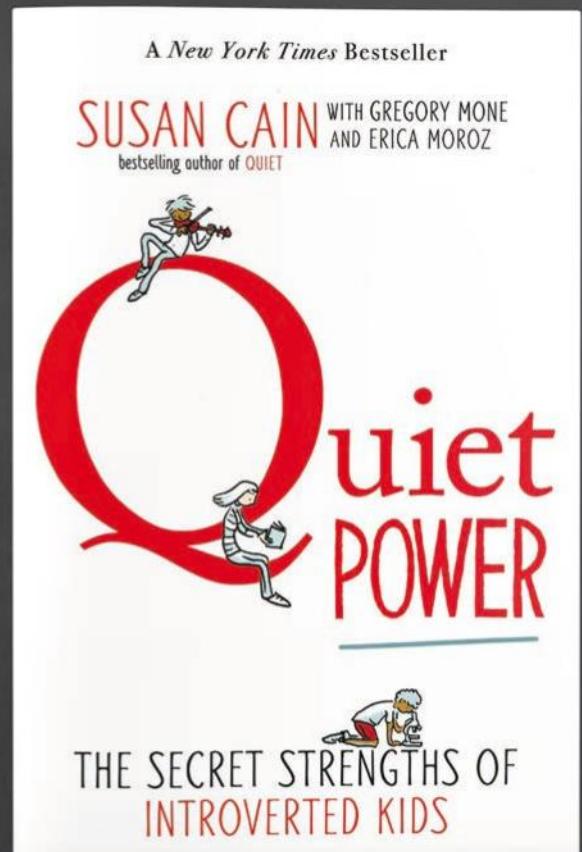
Trevor Noah
EXCERPT FROM A
POD SAVE AMERICA INTERVIEW IN
WHICH HE WAS ASKED ABOUT HIS
RESPONSE TO THIS ARTICLE

THE POWER OF INTROVERTS IN A WORLD THAT CAN'T STOP TALKING



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PENGUIN
YOUNG
READERS

THE BIG QUESTION

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

Q: What is the best exit of all time?

5. The last man on the moon, the astronaut Eugene Cernan, left his daughter's initials behind for eternity.

— Ed Gawdzik

4. Thelma and Louise joyously driving at top speed over a cliff—credits roll.

— Margaret Whitt

3. Socrates crushed his persecutors' arguments, took his poison, and left a legacy that has lasted through the ages.

— Gary Kohl

2. It has to be Thomas Jefferson and John Adams dying on the same day, exactly 50

years after the date on the Declaration of Independence, on July 4, 1826.

— E. Diane DaCosta

1. George Washington leaving the presidency. He provided the example of serving only two terms, a precedent that was followed by every president until 1940, and later was written into the Constitution. In his farewell address, he warned the country against becoming involved in the internal affairs of foreign countries, advice that is as valid today as it was in 1796.

— Jerry Weaver

Caitlin Flanagan makes three unsubstantiated and, frankly, wrong assertions about the political climate in the U.S. I'll discuss the last one first. If you accept the idea that late-night comedians fueled the rise of Trump, then you have to accept that Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Megyn Kelly, Rush Limbaugh, Laura Ingraham, Glenn Beck, and hundreds of other conservative "entertainers" fueled the rise of Barack Obama. Of course, that would be ridiculous because they were popular long before Obama came on the scene.

They enjoyed heightened popularity after Obama was elected because, like the late-night comedians Flanagan cites, they provided an outlet for voter anger and frustration. Their veiled and unveiled racist rhetoric (Limbaugh's "Barack the Magic Negro" and Kelly's sneering at the mere idea that black lives matter) was manna for conservatives who were incensed that a black man who is a liberal was in the White House. When then-candidate Obama was asked to react to Limbaugh's parody, he didn't fall into the

trap. He coolly explained that he didn't feel the need to react to such stupidity, because he knew that anyone who would likely vote for him didn't listen to Limbaugh, a person Obama characterized as an entertainer. Late-night comedians will readily admit that they are entertainers, unlike Hannity and the rest, who call themselves journalists providing substantive political analyses.

What actually fueled the rise of Trump was the increasingly vitriolic and disrespectful comments made about President Obama and liberals. John McCain called Obama "delusional"; other conservatives on Fox News or talk radio or elsewhere said Obama was "out of touch with reality" and "unhinged." Conservatives' rhetoric got bolder and louder as each one tried to out-insult the other. Trump, the insulter in chief, benefited from this competition. Flanagan admits that "Trump has it coming"; however, she's not ready to acknowledge that Trump is conservative hosts' baby. Which is why the idea that late-night comedy has alienated conservatives is ridiculous; they don't watch late-night comedians excoriate Trump any more than I watch Fox News hosts spew their silly garbage.

And on the alienation thing: Why is it that the country is divided only when conservatives get angry? I remember conservatives' outrage over affirmative

action. They said it was "polarizing," as if racial discrimination is not. Conservatives, apparently, can dish it but can't take it.

Smug? No. But even a worm will turn.

Gwendolyn Scott
LOVELADY, TEXAS

Advice and Consent

A reader offers a trivia lesson about May's Very Short Book Excerpt, "How to Kill a Lake."

It's a minor item, but in your recent book excerpt from Dan Egan's *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*, the author states, "If Lake Michigan were drained, it would now be possible to walk almost the entire 100 miles between Wisconsin and Michigan on a bed of ... quagga mussels." While we do like to spin Paul Bunyan stories about "our" Great Lakes here in Michigan, I'm afraid I must report that the longest interstate width, Milwaukee to Grand Haven, is roughly 85 miles. Intrepid souls can cross 118 miles from Michigan to Michigan, or it's approximately 62 miles from Manitowoc, Wisconsin, to Big Sable Point, Michigan, for less ambitious walkers. Either way, bring robust walking shoes; that's still a lot of sharp mussel shells.

Paul Erickson
BEVERLY HILLS, MICH.

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DISPATCHES

IDEAS & PROVOCATIONS
July/August 2017

Dacher Keltner,
a psychology professor
at UC Berkeley, has
found that subjects
under the influence
of power act as if they
have suffered a tra-
umatic brain injury.
—Jerry Useem, p. 24



• POLITICS

The Conservative Case for Unions

How a new kind of labor organization could address the grievances underlying populist anger

BY JONATHAN RAUCH

ALTHOUGH I WAS as dumbfounded on Election Day as the next D.C. bubble-dweller, I did feel that I had one scrap of insight into the working-class anger that helped power Donald Trump's improbable victory. Last year, I got a taste of what many Americans are coping with in a globalized economy—a globalized economy, more specifically, in which many workers feel voiceless and powerless. A taste was more than enough.

Early last year, my husband, Michael, took a part-time service job with an international airline. He immediately encountered the practice called just-in-time scheduling. The company would distribute shift schedules in advance, but then it would adjust them at will, often with only a couple of days' notice and without bothering to consult the affected workers. Michael might be told on a Thursday that he would be working the Saturday-afternoon shift, and never mind our plans to be at a wedding that day.

He didn't have kids to pick up, or classes to attend, or a second job to work, or any of the other commitments that make just-in-time scheduling an intolerable burden for many workers. Even so, the disruption to our lives soon became unbearable. The unpredictable hours were problematic, but even more demoralizing was the sense of being treated like a machine part. Most frustrating of all was that the company's random, dysfunctional scheduling practices could easily have been improved by worker input, had there been channels for worker input; but Michael's supervisor seemed just as helpless as he was, and unsurprisingly, ground-based workers like Michael had no union representation.

I say "unsurprisingly" because private-sector unions are close to extinct. In the 1950s, more than one in three private-sector workers belonged to a union; today, unionization is down to

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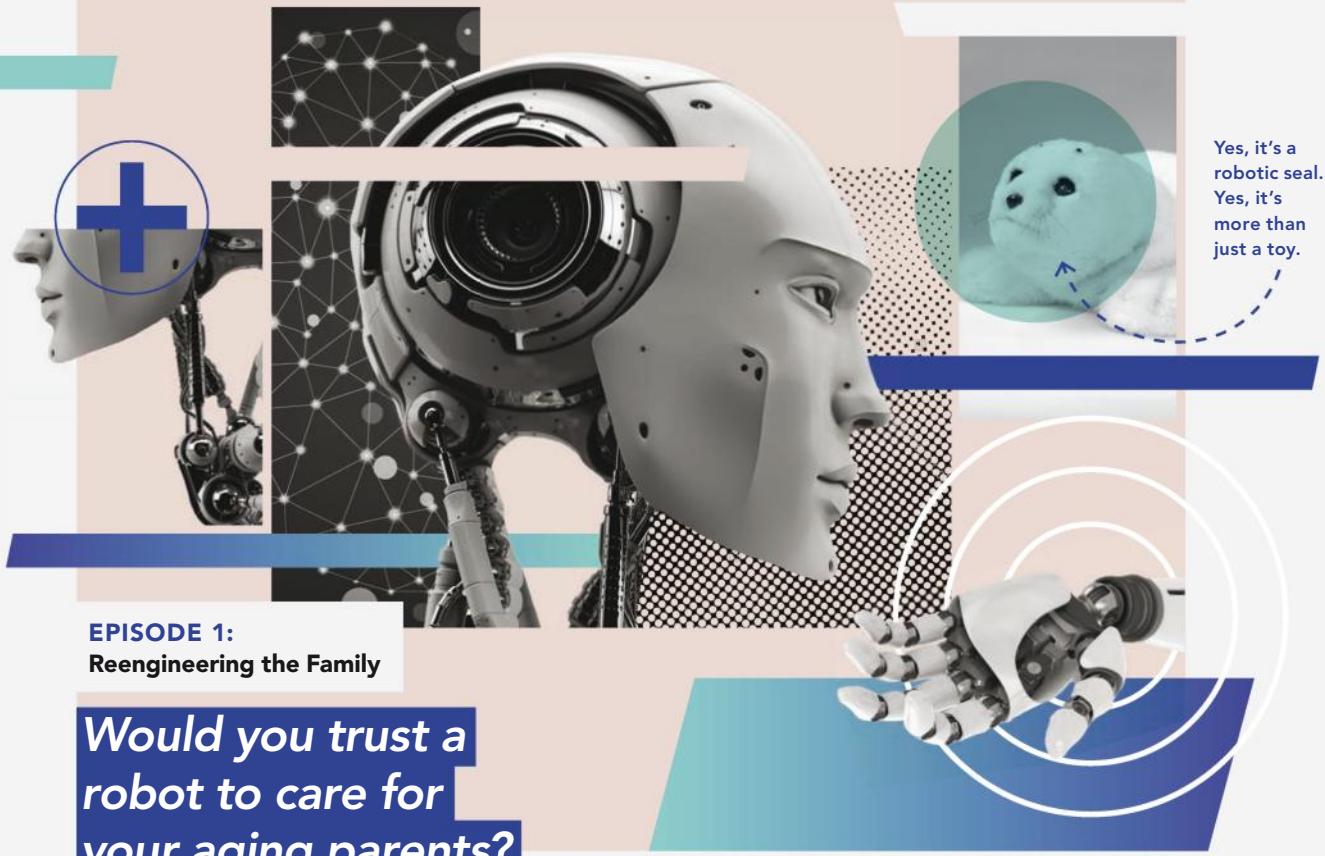
There's so much, so often—
which ones really matter, right now?



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EPISODE 1:
Reengineering the Family

Would you trust a robot to care for your aging parents?

There's a silver tsunami coming: By 2050, the number of Americans over the age of 65 will double, and the number over 85 will triple. In an ideal world, each would have at least one kind and capable human caregiver to meet their physical and emotional needs as they age. But that's not a reality for most people. Enter the robot caregiver. Robots will soon ease and enhance the work of caregivers.

We explore their potential in this episode of "The Future According to Now," a podcast from Fidelity Investments and Atlantic Re:think, the branded content studio at The Atlantic.

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June 14

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June 28

EPISODE 4:
My Paralegal Is a Robot
July 12

EPISODE 5:
What's the Moral Compass of Your Car?
July 26

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6 percent of the private-sector workforce, which is lower than it was a century ago, before the modern labor movement took off. And the rate continues to drop.

Even before getting my small taste of what working-class Americans are experiencing in horse doctors' doses, I had come to see the decline of unions as one of the country's most pressing problems—and at least as much a social and political problem as an economic one. Old-style, mid-20th-century industrial unions had their flaws, unquestionably. But when unions work as they should, they serve important social functions. They can smooth the jagged edges of globalization by giving workers bargaining power. They are associated with lower income inequality, as the accompanying graph shows. Perhaps most important, they offer workers a way to be heard. "Unions provide a mediating function," Matthew Dimick, a labor-law expert at SUNY Buffalo's law school, told me. "Their social-capital function creates ties that reduce anomie and the sense of being abandoned and forgotten." No other social institution, or at least none yet discovered, can serve that mediating function for workers.

All workers do not suffer equally from the decline of unions: In today's fragmented, hypercompetitive, and globalized workplace, high-powered professionals enjoy more autonomy and respect than ever. Less educated workers, by contrast, have lost agency and, in many cases, dignity. Edward Luce of the *Financial Times* puts the problem well in his new book, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*: "In survey after survey, the biggest employee complaint is being treated with a lack of respect. Whether they work in an Amazon warehouse, serve fast food, or sit in a ... customer-service cubicle, they feel diminished by how they are treated." That has implications not just for the well-being of workers, but for the health of capitalism and even of democracy.

In America, the modern conservative movement was founded on anticommunism and antiunionism. Senator Barry Goldwater ("Mr. Conservative") built his career bashing unions.

President Ronald Reagan, although a former union leader himself, made his bones by breaking the air-traffic controllers' union. Just this past February, Republicans succeeded in their long push for a right-to-work law in Missouri. But the conservative war on unions is beginning to look like a Faustian bargain. If 2016 taught us anything, it was that miserable workers are angry voters, and angry voters are more than capable of lashing out against trade, immigration, free markets, and for that matter liberal democracy itself.

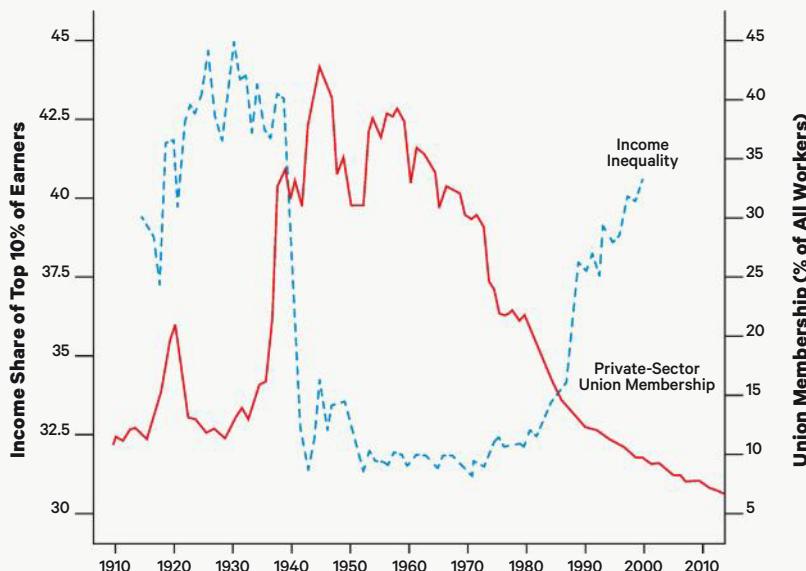
THIS IS NOT to say the old style of American industrial unions will come back, or should. The mid-20th-century enterprise model, as it was called, relied on confrontational tactics to organize particular companies or factories. That may have succeeded in an era of oligopolistic, locally rooted corporations. However, in an era when even a slight increase in labor costs at a North Carolina factory sends jobs to China, organizing just a single company can boomerang against workers and management alike.

Fortunately, other models have emerged elsewhere in the world, models that can benefit both companies and labor. A well-known example, popular in Europe, is the so-called works council, which gives workers a voice in company affairs without triggering the fraught, complex process of creating a formal union. In Germany, unions can organize entire sectors, rather than particular companies, giving employers and workers incentives to cooperate in ways that improve industries' competitive position.

Even more intriguing is the Ghent system, successful in Denmark and Sweden, under which unions administer government-funded unemployment benefits. Providing that safety net helps unions to shift their focus from protecting individual jobs to maintaining workers' overall income security; this in turn allows employers more flexibility in hiring and firing.

In principle, unions could offer skills training that qualifies workers for better jobs, a role that individual employers are not always eager to fill (they might be training employees to go work

The Fall of Labor Unions and the Rise of Income Inequality



somewhere else). Unions could act as employment agencies, matching workers with jobs. They could offer and manage health-insurance plans and benefits programs. They could administer wage insurance, thereby helping workers through disruptive job transitions.

I could go on, but the point is not to endorse those or other specific ideas; it's to show that there is no shortage of ways to modernize unions. Unfortunately, in America in 2017, we don't know how a truly modern union would look, because it is mostly illegal to find out.

ON A SPRING MORNING last year, two men from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum met at a Manhattan diner for brunch and, somewhat to their own surprise, discovered they agreed on a way to address that problem. One was Eli Lehrer, who co-founded and runs the R Street Institute, a free-market-oriented, Republican-leaning think tank in Washington. Lehrer believes the time has come for the American right to reconsider its decades-long war on unions. Their collapse, he says, has fueled the growth of government and of the welfare state, which has stepped in to regulate workplaces and provide job security as unions have died out.

His unlikely dining companion was Andy Stern. As the president of the Service Employees International Union from 1996 to 2010, Stern had become the labor-movement equivalent of a rock star by more than doubling the union's membership. Unions, he thinks, cannot survive unless they innovate and change, but laws intended to protect and preserve them get in the way. "Anytime anybody gets creative, these laws stop us," he said when I spoke with him and Lehrer recently.

The laws he refers to are hard-won federal enactments dating back to the early decades of the last century. The most foundational is the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, which has not had a major revision since Dwight Eisenhower was president. The law, along with a complex superstructure of regulations and court rulings interpreting it, sets out how and when private-sector

workers can organize, mandates how companies recognize and deal with unions, dictates the bundle of services and benefits unions can provide, and precludes many other forms of employer-employee interaction.

Rigid and archaic as that structure may be, to many on the American left, it is sacred writ. They regard it as a form of life support for unionization. Stern and Lehrer, though, believe the status quo has become something more like a death grip. Imagine that American retailers were locked by law into doing things the same way they did them in the 1950s, and you can see the problem.

Stern and Lehrer joined forces to argue their case in the journal *National Affairs*. "The fundamental federal rules governing employer-worker relations were written for a different era," they explain. For example: "Right now, union officials can face criminal charges if they sell anything to employers—even services like a health plan that employers might be willing to spend good money to buy in a free and open market." In creating legal barriers to change, labor law's ossification has stifled fresh thinking. David Rolf, the president of Service Employees International Union 775 (which represents home-health-care workers in Washington State and Montana), told me, "If you're a union leader—if you're one of hundreds of people like me around the country—the reality is that your range of motion is very constrained. We're so conditioned to the parameters of our model that most of us can't even think about doing different things."

Efforts to revise labor law at the federal level (most recently, during President Barack Obama's first term) have gone nowhere. That seems unlikely to change anytime soon. So Stern and Lehrer propose a workaround. Why not give states the authority to grant labor-law waivers that would allow experimentation? If an employer and a union came up with an interesting model

that met certain guidelines, they could try it. In education and health care, state waivers have sparked all kinds of experimentation. They might do the same for unions.

The Stern-Lehrer waiver idea is a no-brainer if we want to address the deeper causes of the malaise and distemper afflicting America's lower-middle class. Although income stagnation is certainly one culprit, another, perhaps still more important, is the decline of the civic organizations and social institutions that help people feel connected and efficacious. Service fraternities, volunteer clubs, youth groups, churches, political parties, widespread military service, unions, and the rest—in their prime, all

fostered social interaction and face-to-face collaboration, cultivating a sense of social cohesion even when times were much tougher than they are today.

Among those institutions, none matter more than unions. My late uncle, a blue-collar garment worker in New York City, was a devoted union member, and I still recall how his union brotherhood gave him a sense of solidarity and dignity that no paycheck could have provided. Facebook and Instagram, it turns out, cannot come close to replicating that function.

Pondering the working-class grievances that helped elevate Donald Trump to the Oval Office in 2016, I often ask myself: How different might the political climate have been if 25 percent of the private sector were unionized, as was the case in the early 1970s? If more working-class Americans felt listened to and represented? If modernized unions could buffer economic shocks and improve productivity? The decline of the business model of old-style industrial unions may have been economically inevitable, but the lack of any new model to replace it has been socially calamitous. Unions will not be easy to fix, but allowing them to innovate would be a first step, and possibly also a last chance. **A**

When unions work as they should, they smooth the jagged edges of globalization.

•SKETCH

The Defector

How Trump and Twitter turned Evan McMullin into the GOP's leading dissident

BY MCKAY COPPINS

WHEN EVAN MCMULLIN arrived at the Four Seasons in Washington, D.C., one afternoon in early April, he sensed right away that he was in enemy territory. After more than a decade in the CIA, he knows how to case a room, and the heightened security outside the building that day suggested to him the presence of someone from Donald Trump's administration—a White House official, perhaps, or a member of the first family. As he passed through the lobby, a gaggle of Republican staffer types glared at him. By the time he joined me at a table in the hotel's restaurant, where he noticed the conservative radio host and Trump enthusiast Laura Ingraham seated nearby, he appeared exhausted. He ordered a virgin mojito—something to help the teetotaling Mormon take the edge off—and sighed.

"These people," he muttered.

"These people," I reminded him helpfully, "run Washington now."

He slumped slightly, and sighed again. "You're right about that."

McMullin, who typically affects the eager manner of an Eagle Scout leading his troop in the Pledge of Allegiance, could be forgiven a moment of bitterness. Ever since he quit his job as a GOP policy wonk on Capitol Hill last year to launch a long-shot presidential bid under the Never Trump banner, he has been locked in near-daily battle with Trump and his supporters. On any given day, he can be found on CNN rallying viewers to resist the president's attacks on "our system of government," or in *The New York Times* warning of America's possible descent into despotism, or on HBO's *Real Time*

With Bill Maher detailing the dangers of the commander in chief's "bewildering" foreign policy. The ongoing media blitz has not escaped the attention of Trump himself, who has mockingly called McMullin "McMuffin."

McMullin is not entirely comfortable with this newfound notoriety. Trim and neatly dressed, with a shaved head and a face composed of generic white-guy features, he doesn't naturally stand out in crowds (an advantage, no doubt, in his undercover life). But in Donald Trump's Washington, establishments like the Four Seasons are often teeming with partisans and loyalists who view McMullin as something between a nuisance and a menace. More than once as we ate, I caught him scanning the perimeters of the steak house, as though still on the lookout for adversaries.

"Sometimes," he told me, "I will wear what at the agency we would call a 'light disguise' when I go out in public—like a hat and glasses." But these days, he said, "my CIA tricks aren't working. Maybe I've got to pull out one of my masks."

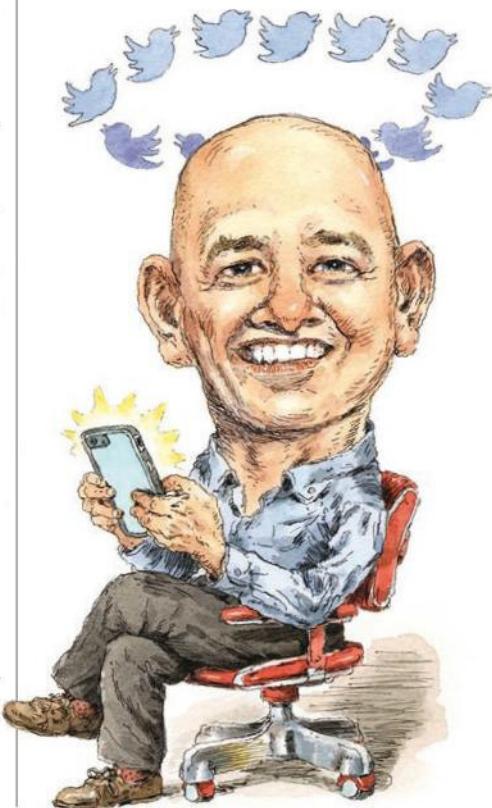
THE FIRST TIME I met McMullin last summer, he emanated a certain *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* quality. Just a few hours after he had declared his candidacy for president—an announcement to which America responded with a resounding *Huh?*—we sat at a hotel bar in Midtown Manhattan, while a TV mounted above us periodically flashed images of his face. He seemed slightly overwhelmed, and though he tried not to look, he couldn't help himself.

As a campaign neophyte with no national profile, McMullin knew he wasn't the ideal man for the job he was taking on. For weeks, he had been among a contingent of conservatives seeking to recruit a better-known Republican to stand up and challenge Trump with an independent candidacy. But the effort proved futile. Conservative opposition was crumbling, and party leaders were swiftly falling in line behind their nominee. McMullin realized that no one else was going to step up, so he entered the race, holding out hope that principled Republican leaders would eventually

join his cause. "It's never too late to do the right thing," he told me then, wide-eyed and dutiful-sounding.

McMullin headquartered his campaign in Utah—his birthplace, and a deep-red state where polls showed overwhelming dissatisfaction with the major-party nominees—and got to work giving stump speeches that blended the unbridled idealism of a *West Wing* episode with the unremarkable delivery of a high-school social-studies teacher. His optimistic calls for a "new conservative movement" untainted by Trumpism caught on in Utah, where he ended up winning more than 20 percent of the vote. But endorsements from courageous conservative leaders never materialized in any significant number—and with no serious financial backing, he struggled to compete elsewhere.

Since the election, McMullin has emerged as an even more strident, and high-profile, Trump adversary. He spends less time than he once did fretting about Trump's corruption of Republicanism, and more time making the case that his presidency constitutes



a national emergency. At the core of McMullin's argument is a belief that America has elected an unambiguous authoritarian to the Oval Office.

McMullin is perhaps at his most effective on Twitter, where he has amassed hundreds of thousands of followers. The voice he deploys on the platform—righteous, authoritative, shot through with earnestness—is profoundly appealing to a certain stressed-out segment of liberal America. In his Twitter persona, they find a patriot who uses terms like *the Republic* without irony; who writes *must* where others might write *should*; who types things like *there is still much work to do in the defense of liberty* and doesn't follow up with a self-aware *lol*. While the rest of the internet sinks further into cynicism each day, McMullin's greatest appeal may be his capacity to stay shocked.

Coming from someone else, this shtick might seem sanctimonious or performative, but McMullin's fear of despots and autocrats is deeply rooted in family history. From a young age, he was taught about his forebears fleeing strongmen and demagoguery—his mother's grandparents escaped Poland around the time of World War II; a century before that, his father's Mormon ancestors were driven into the desert by a campaign of religious persecution. He carried these stories with him when, in 2001, he graduated from college and entered the CIA full-time.

McMullin served for nine years as an undercover officer in South Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, spending much of his time in countries ruled by despots. He saw that authoritarians, wherever they were, worked from the same playbook—installing family members in key positions, brazenly enriching themselves, cracking down on the press, and arresting political enemies. McMullin had a visceral reaction to these injustices. “It sickened me,” he said. “The willingness to subjugate so

many other people, all for your personal gain—it’s just pure evil.”

And yet, for all his time spent studying authoritarianism overseas, he says, “I didn’t expect to see [it] here in the United States in my lifetime.” Now that he believes American democracy is at risk, McMullin says he’s less fixated than he once was on the ideological debates that have dominated partisan politics. “When authoritarians come to power,” he told me, “it can reshuffle the political spectrum. Instead of having the traditional right versus left, you end up with a dynamic in which there are those who decide they are supporting the authoritarian regime, and then you have a group that opposes them.”

What’s needed, he argues, is for antiauthoritarians of all ideological persuasions to set aside their disagreements and link arms in defense of core democratic principles.

IN THE WAKE of Trump’s election, a loose coalition of donors, activists, and political operatives—many of them inspired by McMullin’s message and his surprising success in Utah—have begun laying the groundwork for what they hope will be a national insurgency of independents. The mission is to recruit an army of mini-McMullins ahead of the 2018 midterms, and provide them the resources (fund-raising, legal support, media consulting) that have traditionally been available via political parties.

One group, the Centrist Project, is working to identify closely divided legislative bodies—from small state legislatures to the U.S. Senate—where electing a handful of independents could deny the major parties an outright majority. Joel Searby, McMullin’s former campaign manager, who joined the group after the election, says this scheme—known as the “fulcrum strategy”—aims to form a disproportionately powerful “swing coalition” of lawmakers who are unbound by partisan pressures.

Meanwhile, McMullin’s grassroots supporters have established what they call New Conservative Movement clubs in more than a dozen cities. They meet in small groups to assemble hygiene kits for homeless shelters, or organize “nonpartisan rallies for the Constitution.” Brad Hoganson, the network’s coordinator, says they hope to support candidates in next year’s elections—but added that any Republican who comes courting will face an uphill battle.

Of course, American history is littered with third-party flameouts and abandoned centrist crusades. Elites may fetishize independence and moderation, but voters have not shown much of an appetite for either one. For this time to be different, a considerable part of the electorate would have to buy McMullin’s argument that the defining conflict of American politics today is not right versus left, but pro-Trump versus anti-Trump. Earlier this year, he co-founded a nonprofit called Stand Up Republic aimed at reframing the national debate to this end, but it’s not an easy sell.

McMullin, who was considering a run for Congress when we spoke, has become a polarizing figure. To many on the right, he is the embodiment of the Never Trump movement’s vanities—a self-righteous virtue-signaler more interested in winning praise and retweets from liberal celebrities like George Takei and Debra Messing than in advancing a conservative agenda. Mark Hemingway, a writer for *The Weekly Standard* who voted for McMullin, told me his “relentless” attacks on the president amounted to “giving aid and comfort to the left.” Hemingway added: “He has an incredibly inflated sense of self-regard when really he’s just a whiner with a Twitter account.” Some suspicious Democrats, meanwhile, look past McMullin’s lofty rhetoric about democracy and see a right-winger who wants to cut social-welfare programs and limit abortion access.

In the early months of Trump’s presidency, McMullin found himself confronted with yet another problem: how to keep rallying Americans against a dangerous strongman who didn’t seem to be getting anything done. For all the

McMullin's Twitter feed is deeply appealing to a certain stressed-out segment of liberal America.

president's bluster, his first 100 days had passed without a major legislative accomplishment, let alone a constitutional crisis. "I've been hearing people say, 'Donald Trump has not become a dictator—were all those warnings about authoritarianism warranted?'" McMullin said.

He seemed frustrated by the question, and concerned by the growing complacency he sensed among some of Trump's opponents. As he saw it, the "blistering opposition" to Trump deserved credit for constraining him. "The system was designed to protect against someone like Donald Trump, and it has largely succeeded at doing that." But, he hastened to add, "it's early."

ONE EVENING IN MAY, about a month after our lunch, McMullin was perched on a sofa in a cramped dressing room at Washington's Warner Theatre. *Slate's* popular podcast *Political Gabfest* was recording that night in front of a live audience, with McMullin as the guest star. The timing was serendipitous: Just 24 hours earlier, Trump had abruptly fired James Comey, the FBI director, unleashing a firestorm unlike any up to that point in his presidency. The chatter in Washington was laced with words like *coup* and *Watergate*.

While the *Gabfest*'s co-hosts—John Dickerson, Emily Bazelon, and David Plotz—bantered backstage about likely fallout, McMullin came up to me, oddly buoyant. He said he was heartened by some of the reactions from Capitol Hill, and predicted that the scandal would serve as an "inflection point" in the way Republicans dealt with the president.

"This Comey situation validates a lot of what we have been talking about," he said. "In a strange way, I think it could be good for the country."

Shortly after 7:30, the show began. The audience was composed of nicely dressed, overwhelmingly white Beltway dwellers, some of whom had paid \$100 to attend a taping of their favorite political podcast. It was, in other words, precisely the kind of crowd that treats Evan McMullin like he's Beyoncé. They hung on his every word—laughing at his jokes, cheering his digs at Trump, bathing him

in applause when he pleaded for Americans to unite in defense of democratic ideals, norms, and institutions.

But when the conversation turned from Trump-bashing to the traditional issues that divide conservatives and liberals—taxes, regulation, the size of government—the mood in the room cooled noticeably. Whoops and cheers were replaced with scattered applause; vigorous head-nodding with discreet phone-checking. Had McMullin's conservative critics been watching, they might have been forgiven for wondering precisely how much of the audience's hand-wringing over authoritarianism was fueled by simple partisanship.

McMullin navigated the discussion carefully, taking pains not to endorse

any specific policy positions that the audience might find unpalatable, and stressing that no legislative victory was worth Republicans selling their souls to Trump. But as Bazelon drilled down on the issues, the inherent difficulty of the cross-ideological coalition that McMullin envisioned became evident.

"We're in this moment here where we have a president who absolutely has authoritarian tendencies," he said to Bazelon at one point, "and you're still arguing for a large, centralized government. Now is a moment where we *may* want to rethink that."

It was a good line, and McMullin's delivery begged for applause. What he got instead was a solitary *whoop* echoing across an otherwise silent theater. A



• VERY SHORT BOOK EXCERPT

INHUMANE SOCIETY

IN THE FIRST week of the war in September 1939, at least 400,000 cats and dogs in London were destroyed. Pet owners themselves took the decision to kill their animals; the British government had not issued a diktat or emergency measures requiring the mass killing, which was criticized at the time by animal charities and individual animal supporters. The popular disc jockey Christopher Stone broadcast to the nation in November 1939 that "to destroy a faithful friend when there is not need to do so is yet another way of letting war creep into your home." Nina, Duchess of Hamilton, a co-founder of the Animal Defence Society, declared, "We should be horrified if this had happened abroad. How can we explain such a thing to our foreign friends in this so-called animal-loving England."

— Adapted from *The Great Cat & Dog Massacre: The Real Story of World War II's Unknown Tragedy*, by Hilda Kean, published in March by University of Chicago Press

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WHEN YOU

ARE AT YOUR WORST.



• BUSINESS

Power Causes Brain Damage

Over time, leaders lose mental capacities—most notably for reading other people—that were essential to their rise.

BY JERRY USEEM

IF POWER WERE a prescription drug, it would come with a long list of known side effects. It can intoxicate. It can corrupt. It can even make Henry Kissinger believe that he's sexually magnetic. But can it cause brain damage?

When various lawmakers lit into John Stumpf at a congressional hearing last fall, each seemed to find a fresh way to flay the now-former CEO of Wells Fargo for failing to stop some 5,000 employees from setting up phony accounts for customers. But it was Stumpf's performance that stood out. Here was a man who had risen to the top of the world's most valuable bank, yet he seemed utterly unable to read a room. Although he apologized, he didn't appear chastened or remorseful. Nor did he seem defiant or smug or even insincere. He looked disoriented, like a jet-lagged space traveler just arrived from Planet Stumpf, where deference to him is a natural law and 5,000 a commendably small number. Even the most direct barbs—"You have got to be kidding me" (Sean Duffy of Wisconsin); "I can't believe some of what I'm hearing here" (Gregory Meeks of New York)—failed to shake him awake.

What was going through Stumpf's head? New research suggests that the better question may be: What *wasn't* going through it?

The historian Henry Adams was being metaphorical, not medical, when

he described power as "a sort of tumor that ends by killing the victim's sympathies." But that's not far from where Dacher Keltner, a psychology professor at UC Berkeley, ended up after years of lab and field experiments. Subjects



under the influence of power, he found in studies spanning two decades, acted as if they had suffered a traumatic brain injury—becoming more impulsive, less risk-aware, and, crucially, less adept at seeing things from other people's point of view.

Sukhvinder Obhi, a neuroscientist at McMaster University, in Ontario, recently described something similar. Unlike Keltner, who studies behaviors,

Obhi studies brains. And when he put the heads of the powerful and the not-so-powerful under a transcranial-magnetic-stimulation machine, he found that power, in fact, impairs a specific neural process, "mirroring," that may be a cornerstone of empathy. Which gives a neurological basis to what Keltner has termed the "power paradox": Once we have power, we lose some of the capacities we needed to gain it in the first place.

THAT LOSS IN CAPACITY has been demonstrated in various creative ways. A 2006 study asked participants to draw the letter *E* on their forehead for

others to view—a task that requires seeing yourself from an observer's vantage point. Those feeling powerful were three times more likely to draw the *E* the right way to themselves—and backwards to everyone else (which calls to mind George W. Bush, who memorably held up the American flag backwards at the 2008 Olympics). Other experiments have shown that powerful people do worse at identifying what someone in a picture is feeling, or guessing how a colleague might interpret a remark.

The fact that people tend to mimic the expressions and body language of their superiors can aggravate this problem: Subordinates provide few reliable cues to the powerful. But more important, Keltner says, is the fact that the powerful stop mim-

icking others. Laughing when others laugh or tensing when others tense does more than ingratiate. It helps trigger the same feelings those others are experiencing and provides a window into where they are coming from. Powerful people "stop simulating the experience of others," Keltner says, which leads to what he calls an "empathy deficit."

Mirroring is a subtler kind of mimicry that goes on entirely within our heads,

and without our awareness. When we watch someone perform an action, the part of the brain we would use to do that same thing lights up in sympathetic response. It might be best understood as vicarious experience. It's what Obhi and his team were trying to activate when they had their subjects watch a video of someone's hand squeezing a rubber ball.

For nonpowerful participants, mirroring worked fine: The neural pathways they would use to squeeze the ball themselves fired strongly. But the powerful group's? Less so.

Was the mirroring response broken? More like anesthetized. None of the participants possessed permanent power. They were college students who had been "primed" to feel potent by recounting an experience in which they had been in charge. The anesthetic would presumably wear off when the feeling did—their brains weren't structurally damaged after an afternoon in the lab. But if the effect had been long-lasting—say, by dint of having Wall Street analysts whispering their greatness quarter after quarter, board members offering them extra helpings of pay, and *Forbes* praising them for "doing well while doing good"—they may have what in medicine is known as "functional" changes to the brain.

I wondered whether the powerful might simply stop trying to put themselves in others' shoes, without losing the ability to do so. As it happened, Obhi ran a subsequent study that may help answer that question. This time, subjects were told what mirroring was and asked to make a conscious effort to increase or decrease their response. "Our results," he and his co-author, Katherine Naish, wrote, "showed no difference." Effort didn't help.

This is a depressing finding. Knowledge is supposed to be power. But what good is knowing that power deprives you of knowledge?

The sunniest possible spin, it seems, is that these changes are only sometimes harmful. Power, the research says, primes our brain to screen out peripheral information. In most situations, this provides a helpful efficiency boost. In social ones, it has the unfortunate

side effect of making us more obtuse. Even that is not *necessarily* bad for the prospects of the powerful, or the groups they lead. As Susan Fiske, a Princeton psychology professor, has persuasively argued, power lessens the need for a nuanced read of people, since it gives us command of resources we once had to cajole from others. But of course, in a modern organization, the maintenance of that command relies on some level of organizational support. And the sheer number of examples of executive hubris that bristle from the headlines suggests that many leaders cross the line into counterproductive folly.

Less able to make out people's individuating traits, they rely more heavily on stereotype. And the less they're able to see, other research suggests, the more they rely on a personal "vision" for navigation. John Stumpf saw a Wells Fargo where every customer had eight separate accounts. (As he'd often noted to employees, *eight* rhymes with *great*.) "Cross-selling," he told Congress, "is shorthand for deepening relationships."

S THERE NOTHING to be done?

No and yes. It's difficult to stop power's tendency to affect your brain. What's easier—from time to time, at least—is to stop *feeling* powerful.

Insofar as it affects the way we think, power, Keltner reminded me, is not a post or a position but a mental state. Recount a time you did not feel powerful, his experiments suggest, and your brain can commune with reality.

Recalling an early experience of powerlessness seems to work for some people—and experiences that were searing enough may provide a sort of permanent protection. An incredible study published in *The Journal of Finance* last February found that CEOs who as children had lived through a natural disaster that produced significant fatalities were much less risk-seeking than CEOs who hadn't. (The one problem,

says Raghavendra Rau, a co-author of the study and a Cambridge University professor, is that CEOs who had lived through disasters *without* significant fatalities were *more* risk-seeking.)

But tornadoes, volcanoes, and tsunamis aren't the only hubris-restraining forces out there. PepsiCo CEO and Chairman Indra Nooyi sometimes tells the story of the day she got the news of her appointment to the company's board, in 2001. She arrived home percolating in her own sense of importance and vitality, when her mother asked whether, before she delivered her "great news," she would go out and get some milk. Fuming, Nooyi went out and got it. "Leave that damn crown in the garage" was her mother's advice when she returned.

The point of the story, really, is that Nooyi tells it. It serves as a useful reminder about ordinary obligation and the need to stay grounded. Nooyi's mother, in the story, serves as a "toe holder," a term once used by the political adviser Louis Howe to describe his relationship with the four-term President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom Howe never stopped calling Franklin.

For Winston Churchill, the person who filled that role was his wife, Clementine, who had the courage to write, "My Darling Winston. I must confess that I have noticed a deterioration in your manner; & you are not as kind as you used to be." Written on the day Hitler entered Paris, torn up, then sent anyway, the letter was not a complaint but an alert: Someone had confided to her, she wrote, that Churchill had been acting "so contemptuous" toward subordinates in meetings that "no ideas, good or bad, will be forthcoming"—with the attendant danger that "you won't get the best results."

Lord David Owen—a British neurologist turned parliamentarian who served as the foreign secretary before becoming a baron—recounts both Howe's story and Clementine Churchill's in his 2008 book, *In Sickness and in Power*, an

"Hubris syndrome," Owen writes, "is a disorder of the possession of power."

inquiry into the various maladies that had affected the performance of British prime ministers and American presidents since 1900. While some suffered from strokes (Woodrow Wilson), substance abuse (Anthony Eden), or possibly bipolar disorder (Lyndon B. Johnson, Theodore Roosevelt), at least four others acquired a disorder that the medical literature doesn't recognize but, Owen argues, should.

"Hubris syndrome," as he and a co-author, Jonathan Davidson, defined it in a 2009 article published in *Brain*, "is a disorder of the possession of power, particularly power which has been associated with overwhelming success, held for a period of years and with minimal constraint on the leader." Its 14 clinical features include: manifest contempt for others, loss of contact with reality, restless or reckless actions, and displays of incompetence. In May, the Royal Society of Medicine co-hosted a conference of the Daedalus Trust—an organization that Owen founded for the study and prevention of hubris.

I asked Owen, who admits to a healthy predisposition to hubris himself, whether anything helps keep him tethered to reality, something that other truly powerful figures might emulate. He shared a few strategies: thinking back on hubris-dispelling episodes from his past; watching documentaries about ordinary people; making a habit of reading constituents' letters.

But I surmised that the greatest check on Owen's hubris today might stem from his recent research endeavors. Businesses, he complained to me, had shown next to no appetite for research on hubris. Business schools were not much better. The undercurrent of frustration in his voice attested to a certain powerlessness. Whatever the salutary effect on Owen, it suggests that a malady seen too commonly in boardrooms and executive suites is unlikely to soon find a cure. ■

Jerry Useem has covered business and economics for Inc. magazine, The New York Times, Fortune, and other publications.

Ecomaniacs

How vanity might save the planet

BY MATTHEW HUTSON

WHETHER YOU follow a vegan diet or are a devoted carnivore, carry canvas or plastic, you are one of 7.5 billion people. The ecological effect of your choices is minuscule. And yet they have a big effect on how others see you, and how you see yourself. Psychologists found that prodding people to worry about social status increased their interest in buying green versus nongreen items—but only if they were shopping in public. [1] People in Washington State and Colorado were willing to pay a premium of \$430 to \$4,200 (results varied by zip code) for the green-signaling Prius over an equally efficient car that didn't broadcast its virtue. [2]

Surveys of tens of thousands of British people suggest that green behaviors such as buying recycled products and taking public transit increased life satisfaction—but only insofar as they made people feel green. And feelings can be misleading: Most people who called themselves green never carpooled or avoided flying. [3]

Self-congratulation, moreover, can lead to self-indulgence. When people shopped in a green

(versus conventional) simulated online store, they felt like they'd done their good deed for the day and were more likely to cheat or steal in a subsequent task—an effect psychologists call "moral licensing." [4] Similarly, getting weekly feedback on water consumption reduced people's water use by 6 percent, but it increased their electricity use by 5.6 percent—as if they felt that being careful in one area entitled them to relax in another. [5]



Trying to bribe people into green behavior may also backfire, by crowding out motivations like civic duty. When Indian villagers were given material incentives to conserve forest resources, they grew more likely to say that protecting forests is important for economic (versus environmental) reasons—and their behavior grew less conservation-oriented. [6] Likewise, when Swiss people were asked whether they'd

support a nuclear-waste facility in their community (thus putting the need for low-carbon power sources ahead of local safety concerns), half said yes; when several thousand dollars were offered to sweeten the deal, however, three out of four said no. [7]

Not everyone wants to be seen as a tree-hugger, of course. While some people try to look green, others do the opposite—they adopt Earth-unfriendly behaviors so as to avoid appearing green. People who reject a "pro-environment" identity carried out low-visibility green behaviors more than high-visibility ones. [8]

Men are more likely than women to hide their greenness—maybe because both sexes associate environmentalism with femininity. In experiments, shoppers who used a canvas versus a plastic bag were rated as more feminine, and men avoided products that were marketed as green—unless their manhood was affirmed first. Given all this, the researchers suggested, environmentalists might want to emulate companies that have successfully marketed stereotypically feminine products to men, such as the diet soda Pepsi Max, Powerful Yogurt, and Broga—yoga classes for bros. [9] ■

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

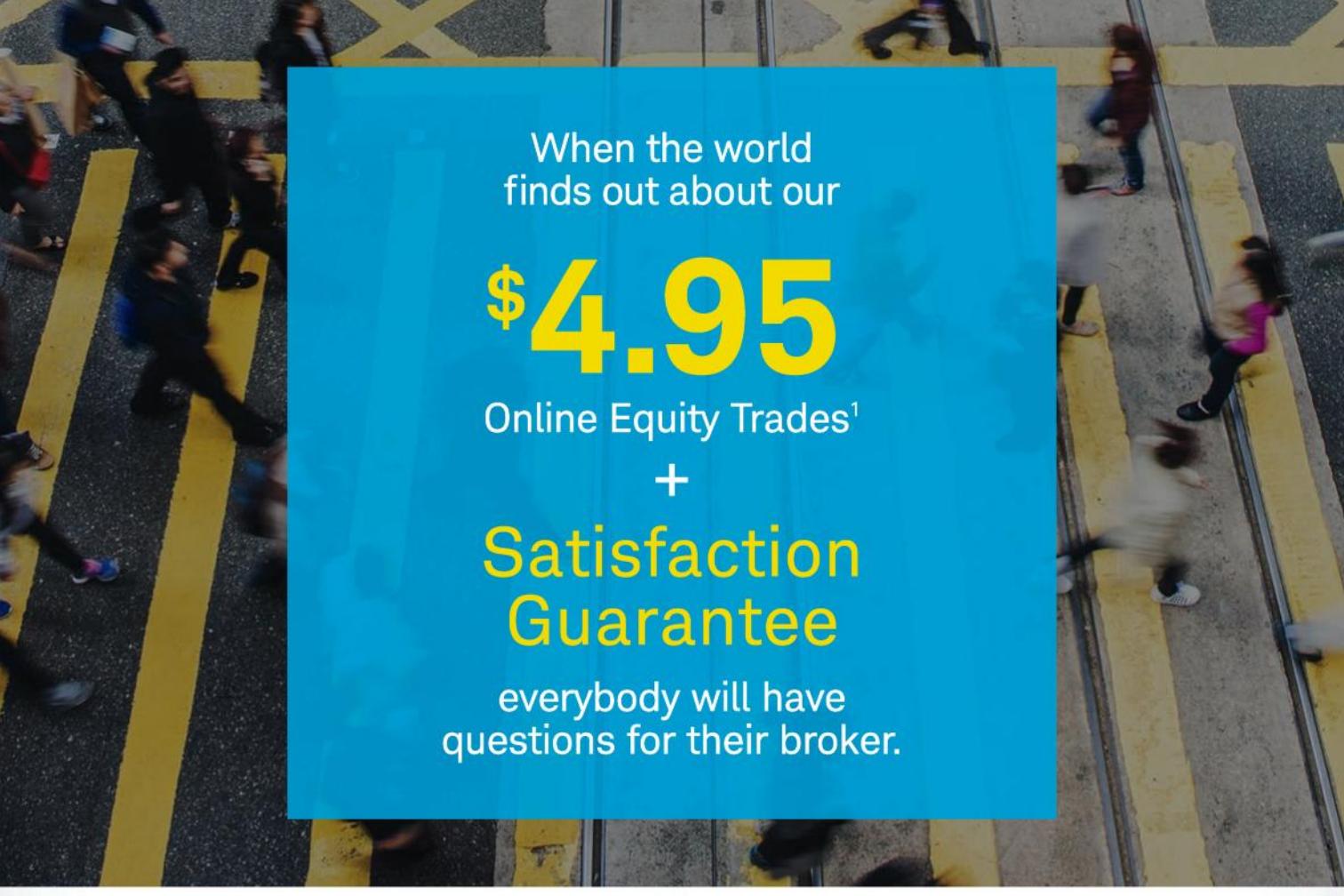
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• TECHNOLOGY

Beyond the Five Senses

Telepathy, echolocation, and the future of perception

BY MATTHEW HUTSON

THE WORLD we experience is not the real world. It's a mental construction, filtered through our physical senses. Which raises the question: How would our world change if we had new and different senses? Could they expand our universe?

Technology has long been used to help people who have lost, or were

born without, one of the five primary senses. More recently, researchers in the emerging field of "sensory enhancement" have begun developing tools to give people additional senses—ones that imitate those of other animals, or that add capabilities nature never imagined. Here's how such devices could work, and how they might change what it means to be human.

A BRIEF CHRONICLE OF SENSORY ENHANCEMENT

CIRCA 6000 B.C.: What may be the first known written language appears in ancient China, an early example of substituting visual for auditory perception.



1888: The first contact lenses, which were made of glass, are manufactured by a Swiss physician.



1960: The Smell-O-Vision, a system designed to add odors to the movie-theater experience, is deployed for the film *Scent of Mystery*.

HISTORY

6000 B.C.

1800

1900

1 | Hearing Pictures

For decades, some deaf people have worn cochlear implants, which use electrode arrays to stimulate the auditory nerve inside the ear. Researchers are working on other technologies that could restore sight or touch to those who lack it. For the blind, cameras could trigger electrodes on the retina, on the optic nerve, or in the brain. For the paralyzed or people with prosthetic limbs, pressure pads on real or robotic hands could send touch feedback to the brain or to nerves in the arm.

Autistic people might even gain a stronger social sense. Last year, MIT researchers revealed the EQ-Radio, a device that bounces signals off people to detect their heart rate and breathing patterns. A yet-to-be-invented device might infer a target's mood from those data and convey it to an autistic user—or anyone who wants to improve their emotional intuition.

We can also substitute one sense for another. The brain is surprisingly adept at taking advantage of any pertinent information it receives, and can be trained to, for instance, "hear" images or "feel" sound. For the blind, a device called the BrainPort V100 connects a camera on a pair of glasses to a grid of electrodes on a person's tongue. At first the effect just feels like tiny bubbles, but eventually users can learn to read stronger points of stimulation as bright pixels and weaker points as dark ones, and can form a mental picture.

Somewhat similarly, a Dutch device called the vOICe ("Oh I see!") uses a camera to create a soundscape that the vision-impaired wearer hears through headphones. To the uninitiated it sounds like bursts of static, but with training, people can discern images. Every second or so, the sound pans from left to right, using frequency to indicate an object's height (the taller the object, the higher the pitch) and volume to indicate its brightness.

For the deaf, David Eagleman, a neuroscientist at Stanford University, has developed a vest that turns sound into a pattern of vibrations on the torso. With practice, people can learn to use it to interpret speech and other sounds.

2 | Borrowing From Nature

Scientists are also exploring ways to add senses found elsewhere in the animal kingdom. For instance, a handheld device called the Bottlenose, built by amateur biohackers, uses ultrasound to detect the distance of objects, then vibrates the user's finger at different frequencies, giving him or her echolocation. Other devices provide the navigational sense of migratory birds: A company called feelSpace sells the naviBelt, a belt that points you in your desired direction by vibrating on your waist. Another company, Cyborg Nest, sells the North Sense, a device you can attach to your chest that vibrates when pointing north.

In the future, cochlear implants could be tuned to pick up really low frequencies, such as those used by elephants, or really high ones, such as those used by dolphins. Bionic eyes could be built to allow humans to see ultraviolet rays (as butterflies, reindeer, dogs, and other animals can) and infrared light (as certain snakes, fish, and mosquitoes can).

Some researchers think we may eventually install a port in our brains that would allow us to swap in different sensors when we need them. "Maybe there's a Swiss Army Knife of sensors that you carry with you," says Rajesh P. N. Rao, the director of the National Science Foundation's Center for Sensorimotor Neural Engineering. You might rely on a distance sensor when climbing a mountain, then plug in night vision after dark.

3 | Sensing Moonquakes

We might also gain senses that no other animal has. The vibrating vest

Eagleman created can be programmed to receive any input, not just sound. He says it could be used to monitor the stock market, or sentiment on Twitter, or the pitch and yaw of a drone, or one's own vital signs. You could of course display these things on a computer screen, but our brains can't attend to lots of visual details at once, Eagleman says. The body, on the other hand, is used to monitoring dozens of muscles just to keep us balanced, so would be more adept at handling multidimensional inputs.

A cortical implant could also theoretically take in just about any type of information, which the brain could process as a new sense. "You can do whatever you want," says Neil Harbisson, a "cyborg artist" who's originally from Spain. "You can design a unique sense that is related to your interests or to your curiosity."

Harbisson was born seeing in gray scale. In 2004, he had an antenna surgically attached to his skull. The antenna has a camera at the end and vibrates at different frequencies, turning colors into sound. (He can also use the antenna to take phone calls and listen to music.) He plans to implant a band around his head with a warm spot that orbits every 24 hours, giving him a temporal organ. His friend and collaborator Moon Ribas has a wireless chip in her arm that vibrates when earthquakes occur anywhere in the world, giving her a seismic sense. She hopes to put vibrating implants in her feet that convey moonquakes.

But Bernd Fritzsch, a neuroscientist at the University of Iowa, cautions that for every patch of neural real estate we dedicate to interpreting a new sense, we leave fewer neurons for processing the others. So with each sense we add, we're also taking something away.

4 | Literal Groupthink

Perhaps we'll even achieve that so-called sixth sense: ESP. Kevin Warwick, an engineer at Coventry University,

in the U.K., wirelessly connected an electrode in his arm to one in his wife's arm, so that wherever they were, they could feel when the other flexed a hand. Eagleman wants to take that idea one step further and wirelessly connect heart and sweat monitors on his wife and himself so they can sense each other's moods.

Research by Rao shows that people can send yes/no messages telepathically: An EEG senses brain activity in the sender and another device applies magnetic pulses to the brain of the receiver. Eventually, we might have brain implants connected wirelessly. "This kind of communication might get over some of the limitations of language," Rao says. It could help people share sensations or express thoughts that are hard to put into words, and enhance collaboration. "I think that will completely change how we are as humans," Warwick says. "Telepathy is the future." Indeed, Elon Musk recently started a company called Neuralink focused on connecting brains to computers; he says it could someday enable computer-mediated telepathy.

Exactly how all this tinkering will change us remains to be seen. Harbisson says that gaining animals' senses "would allow us to connect with nature and to other species in a more profound way." But if shared senses connect us to other species, might sensation inequality pull people apart by creating new categories of haves and have-nots? We already struggle to agree on what's real and what's fake; that problem seems likely to get worse as technology creates new means of perception. "Society is stretched like an elastic band," Warwick says. Radical sensory enhancement for some could stretch it even more. "The question is, does the elastic band break?" □

Matthew Hutson is a science writer based in New York. He is the author of The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking.



• WORKS IN PROGRESS

Black Gotham

Memorializing Manhattan's earliest African residents

BY JESSICA LEIGH HESTER

KAMAU WARE **①** surveys the East River. As the sun sinks behind the towers of the Financial District, trucks grumble past, cyclists ding their bells, and a ferry slices by. He encourages the seven people who are following him to tune all this out and imagine what the view might have looked like 300 years before, when the harbor was likely speckled with galleons and sloops—many carrying slaves. “How does it feel in your stomach?” he asks.

Ware is leading a walking tour, one prong of Black Gotham Experience, or BGX, an evolving and immersive storytelling project that aims to bring to life the history of black people in early colonial New York—starting before the city was even called that, back when Dutch and English settlers and Native Americans were still wrestling for control of it.



The project was born in 2008, when Ware, then an educator at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, was asked a question that he couldn't answer. The museum, which aims to honor the immigrant experience, offers tours of the apartments inhabited in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by recent arrivals—most of them Irish, Jewish, or Italian. As one of Ware's tour groups trudged along, a little girl wanted to know: Where were the black people?



- Ⓐ TRINITY CHURCH
- Ⓑ FEDERAL HALL (THEN CITY HALL)
- Ⓒ FORMER SLAVE MARKET
- Ⓓ SITE OF THE 1712 REBELLION
- Ⓔ BGX POP-UP SPACE

In pursuit of an answer, Ware started with Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris's anthology, *Slavery in New York*, and a related exhibit at the New-York Historical Society. Soon he was poring over primary sources, including court documents on slave uprisings, trying to stitch together a more complete picture of daily life for the city's earliest African residents.

The first Africans arrived in New Amsterdam in 1626; by the 1740s, the city—then called New York—was a center of urban slavery: Slaves made up 21 percent of its population. Ware's walking tours **②**, which launched in 2010, invite participants to envision themselves moving through this bygone landscape. Most tours wind past the South Street Seaport, where many slave ships off-loaded their human cargo. They stop on Wall Street, where the city's slave market **③** opened in 1711, and at the site, now flanked by a parking lot and office towers, of a slave revolt the following year.



They also visit Federal Hall (then City Hall), where 30 black New Yorkers were sentenced to death for their alleged role in another rebellion, in 1741.

As he goes, Ware narrates the squabbles between the Dutch and the British, and tells how, when the island changed hands in 1664, slaves' thin freedoms—to travel, to gamble and drink, to marry and own land—began to wither. He invokes the lives of real slaves and freemen, among them Domingo and Catalina Anthony and Manuel Trumpeter, who settled the Land of the Blacks, a patchwork of homes and farmland north of contemporary SoHo. Each

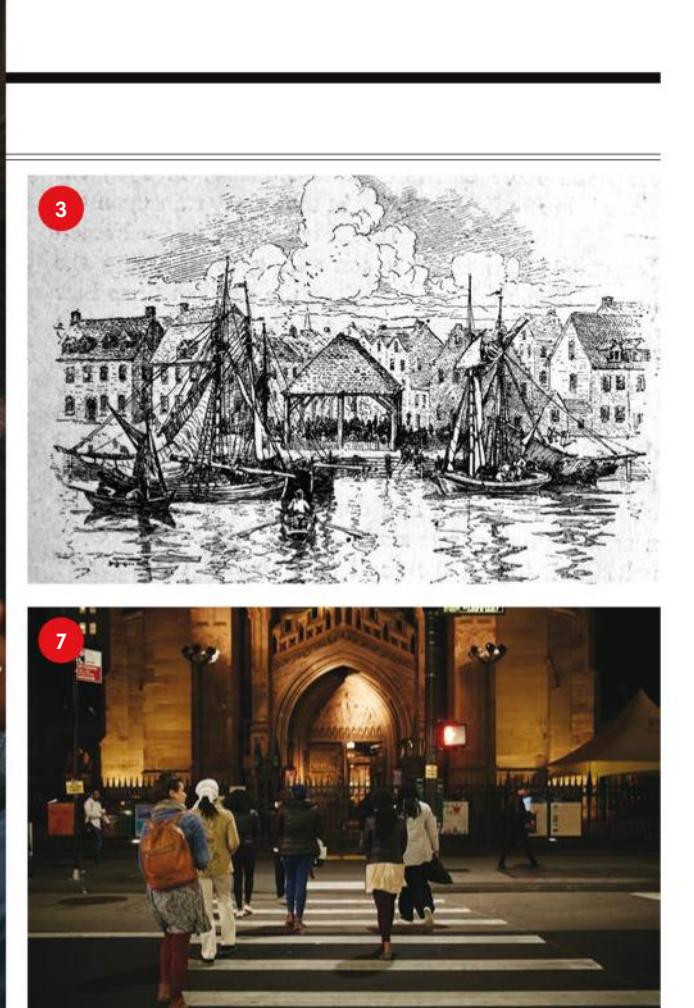


tour-goer receives a note card with the name and story of one such individual; sometimes, members of the group act out historical scenes.

These scenes draw heavily on imagination, as few historic images flesh out this world. Ware hopes to haul the era up from what he describes as a “visual abyss” with a forthcoming series of graphic novels, the first of which is titled *Other Side of Wall Street*. The novels layer Ware’s own photographs of costumed actors ④ with illustrations by William Ellis and snippets of historical letters and maps. Given the dearth of archival material from New York, Ware and Ellis found inspiration in images from

other parts of North America (like an engraving of a Jamaican slave uprising ⑤). Part of the first volume, charting an ocean voyage, came out in June; Ware plans to stretch the multi-century story across five installments.

Meanwhile, Ware’s team is working to share *Other Side*



of Wall Street with the people who today inhabit the Financial District. With the backing of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and the Department of Transportation, BGX has put up posters featuring imagery from the series, together with historical context, on kiosks near the Seaport. Through August, it is also hosting events and exhibits at a pop-up space ⑥ a few blocks from the water.

Ware’s tour ends at Trinity Church ⑦, where slaves

once congregated and took classes. (They also helped construct the church’s original building, which later burned down.) New York’s slave owners were more likely than their Southern and rural counterparts to train slaves for skilled work, Ware explains. As a result, many local slaves were multilingual, literate, or both. Behind him, the church’s graveyard is filled with centuries-old tombstones. During the colonial era, Ware notes, thousands of slaves were interred at a burial ground half a mile away; the African Burial Ground National Monument was dedicated there in 2006.

Ware says he sees his tours, and the novels he is unspooling from them, as a way to honor the area’s ghosts. “This is a ceremony of sorts,” he says, before we scatter into the night, and back to the land of the living. **A**



The CULTURE ELLE



THE OMNIVORE

What Inspired the Summer of Love?

Love, sure—but mostly drugs.

BY JAMES PARKER

THE RESPONSIBLE THING TO DO, before I walked into San Francisco's de Young Museum to check out "The Summer of Love Experience"—the ethical thing, journalistically speaking—would have been to drop acid. To have popped a vintage dose of White Lightning, wandered in there with my ego in dancing splinters and my hindmost brain chambers all throbbing illuminated, and just let it happen, daddy-o. But no more acid for me, thank you. No more tripping—not since the Great Ontological Destabilization of my mid-20s. These days I value my private pizza slice of reality too much. So I approached this large and many-faceted exhibition not humming in vibrational sympathy, not like a glowing child of the universe, but with the skeptical, half-despairing sobriety that passes for ordinary, unmedicated consciousness in 2017.

Those dirty hippies and their blown minds—why are we thinking about them now? Because the Summer of Love, when the continent decisively tipped and everything in America that wasn't nailed down went sliding and clattering westward into the foggy bowl of San Francisco, was precisely 50 years ago. Psychedelia, like your correspondent,

just hit middle age. So here we are at the beautiful de Young, moving through the 10-room exhibition at that characteristic dazed-survivor museumgoing pace, surrounded by Jefferson Airplane posters and looming faceless, bell-bottomed mannequins, with light shows flickering and acid rock radically rocking and Peter Coyote narrating the audio tour in his pleasantly attitudinal veteran's rasp. Look, over there in that glass case: It's Jerry Garcia's "Captain Trips" top hat, a bespoke item decorated with stars and stripes and bearing a large scorch mark, like the *Beowulf* manuscript. And look: There's Janis Joplin's handbag.

"The Summer of Love Experience" ... You can track some of America's social changes since 1967 in the shifting codes of that final word, from "Are you experienced?" to "How was your experience?", from Hendrixian initiation to consumer satori, from personal liftoff to wraparound retail. Which this show at the de Young does at times resemble, or feel like: a charged commercial space. Not an easy effect to avoid, I suppose, when so much of the assembled material—the hip, jabbing language, the sensory engineering—has the pulse of a kind of delirious advertising. (Also, those damn mannequins.)

But I'm formulating a larger quibble with this show: Where are the drugs? Their symptoms and sequelae are everywhere, of course, splattered wall-to-wall and chiming from the overhead speakers. But where, in this "Summer of Love Experience," is LSD itself? Because—not to be too drearily materialistic about it—without *that*, none of this. Without the willing deliverance of an entire generation to artificially induced mental blowout, to swiftly sacramentalized psychic disruption/expansion,



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no Jefferson Airplane posters. Indeed, no Jefferson Airplane. A 50-year retrospective might have been a good moment to confront this a little more squarely: The pop culture of the '60s, with all its ideological ramifications and projections, was a by-product of the drugs.

If there's one man who should have his own room at this exhibition, his own shrine—perhaps a reproduction of one of his bootleg laboratories, where from 1965 to 1967 he lovingly distilled about 800,000 doses of acid—that man is Augustus Owsley Stanley III. *Who?*, you might well ask. Potent personality though he was, Owsley—as the Deadheads knew him—was not a face (he was seldom photographed) and not a promoter-guru like, say, Timothy Leary. He made no speeches and issued no manifestos. Yet no single individual did more than he did to hot-wire the new mind. Ancestrally cranky and libertarian—his grandfather and namesake, a U.S. senator and former Kentucky governor, once complained, "You cannot milk a cow in America without a federal inspector at your heels"—Owsley channeled his wild Americanism through diligent processes of testing and refinement, a profane postindustrial alchemist whose crucible of transformation was mass consciousness itself. His Blue Cheer, his White Lightning—practically, programmatically, brain by brain, they got the job done, the distribution being handled in large part by his friends the Hells Angels. Owsley also used sound waves: A swimming accident when he was a teen had left him with peculiar hearing powers, and for several years he was the Grateful Dead's obsessively innovative and perfectionist soundman, prime technologizer of the drugs-music nexus.

So it is quite proper that the de Young's "Summer of Love Experience" begins, in January 1966, with the Trips Festival. Though he goes unhonored here, this was Owsley's great subterranean debut: a three-day gonzo bacchanal and genesis event held at Longshoreman's Hall, where Merry Pranksters cavorted with Hells Angels, the underground felt its oats for the first time, and Owsley made sure that everyone had as much of his latest batch as they needed. LSD, unlike peyote or ayahuasca or even hallucinogenic mushrooms, was (as yet) without anthropological baggage. As Jesse Jarnow notes in his psychedelic history, *Heads*, it belonged "to no particular tradition anywhere in the world ... Invented in Switzerland, it [was] manufactured in the United States ... indigenous to any region where American ingenuity might make it so." And Owsley's acid was the newest and the best. At the de Young, the furor of those nights is transmitted to us—in a thin, fluttering signal—via a multiscreen looping of Ben Van Meter's

▼
**The
CultureFile**

THE OMNIVORE

**Today in
Berkeley,
the very air
smolders.
It's the
Summer
of Hate
Speech.**

S.F. Trips Festival, An Opening. Van Meter legendarilly filmed the first night of the festival with his Bolex camera, re-exposed the original film on the second night, and did the same on the third night. The resulting blobs-in-nirvana footage, if nothing else, is a monument to that era's high tolerance for chaos. (If you could take it, you got an Acid Test diploma, like the one featured on a wall in the museum.)

A couple of rooms over, I do at last find—expressed in a curatorial masterstroke—something so drug-redolent that I nearly fall over. I mistake it, at first, for some kind of magical leftover or religious relic. It looks like a shaman's tunic, the jerkin of a medicine man, stiff with dense embroidery: gods and maidens and galloping horses. But what it is, the label on the glass case tells me, is the top half of a set of hospital scrubs, decorated—as art therapy—by an ontologically destabilized post-LSD psychiatric patient. The symbols are from the tarot: Major and Minor Arcana. Wow. Here we are at the cave-mouth of the archetypal, trying to get ourselves together. Here, poignantly conjoined, are breakdown and (we hope) recovery—stitch-by-stitch reintegration of the surging, inundating mind-stuff that was Owsley's prescription for America.

"The counterculture epitomized by the Summer of Love," writes the historian Dennis McNally in an essay in the exhibition's catalog, "touched every facet of American culture, offering alternatives to the mainstream that still flourish." Psychosis is certainly an alternative to the mainstream, as are organic bananas. These days we're taking drugs just to feel normal, and the binary thinking for which LSD was supposedly the cure has possessed us on every level. Everywhere you look, and even in the depth of your own nature, the deadly dualisms are running neck and neck. "The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin," writes Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical on climate change, "is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life." As the de Young smoothly receives its visitors, kissed by the zephyrs of Golden Gate Park, across the bay in Berkeley the very air smolders. It's the Summer of Hate Speech: Someone punches an antifascist; someone pepper-sprays a Trumpeter. Free speech has gotten all fucked up. The question *Are you for Ann Coulter or against her?* is clearly the wrong one. But what is the right one? What did you leave us with, Owsley? Holistic wreckage. A momentary zap of the annealing vision. And now it's gone, long gone. ■

James Parker is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

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BOOKS

Arundhati Roy's Fascinating Mess

Being an activist and an artist is trickier than it sounds.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

ON THE NIGHT she won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her novel, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy had a strange and frightening dream. She was a fish being ripped from the water by a bony emerald hand. A voice instructed her to make a wish. *Put me back*, she responded. She knew she was on the cusp of cataclysmic fame, she later said in an interview. She knew her life would explode—“I’d pay a heavy price.”

She has. It is almost impossible to see Roy clearly through the haze of adulation, condescension, outrage, and celebrity that has enveloped her since the publication of *The God of Small Things*, a gothic about an illicit intercaste romance in South India. She was feted as a symbol of an ascending India, paraded along with bomb makers and beauty queens. Much was made of the author’s looks—she was named one of *People* magazine’s most beautiful people—and lack of literary background; there was titillated interest in her days living in a slum and working as an aerobics instructor. Praise for her novel was extravagant—she was compared to Faulkner and García Márquez—but it was also frequently patronizing. “There is something childish about Roy. She has a heightened capacity for wonder”—this from

one of the judges who awarded her the Booker Prize. (Meanwhile, a writer who had judged the Booker the previous year publicly called the book “execrable,” and the award a disgrace.)

Roy appeared to want no part of any of this. She chopped off her hair after the Booker win, telling *The New York Times* she didn’t want to be known “as some pretty woman who wrote a book,” and donated her prize money to the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a group protesting the construction of a series of dams that threatened to displace millions of villagers. She turned her attention from fiction to people’s movements all over India—Kashmiris resisting the Indian military’s occupation, tribal communities fighting to protect their ancestral lands. She decried India’s nuclear testing (a source of much national pride at the time) and became an outspoken critic of America’s war in Afghanistan. She was praised for her commitment and derided for her naïveté, and faced charges of obscenity and sedition (later dropped). She was invited to model khakis for Gap (she declined) and to march through the forests of central India with Maoist insurgents (she accepted). And now, after 20 years, she has finally returned to fiction with a new novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Is novel the right word, though? I hesitate. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, hulking, sprawling story that it is, has two main strands. One follows

Anjum, a *hijra*, or transwoman, struggling to make a life for herself in Delhi. The other follows Tilo, a thorny and irresistible architect turned activist (who seems to be modeled on Roy herself), and the three men who fall in love with her. But as was true of *The God of Small Things*, there is more than a touch of fairy tale in the book's moral simplicity—or clarity, if you're feeling charitable. Roy will say of a character, "He was a very clean man. And a good one too," and he is swiftly, unequivocally pinned to the page.

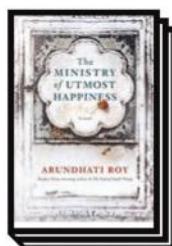
The world she conjures is often brutal, but never confusing or even very complex. Manichaean dualities prevail: innocence (embodied by puppies, kittens, little girls) versus evil (torture, torturers, soldiers, shopping malls). If this tendency felt less troubling in her first book—think of handsome, heroic Velutha, the untouchable, and his foil, the almost comically evil Baby Kochamma—it was perhaps because the narration was trained so closely on children. Given that the central characters were a pair of young twins, Rahel and Estha, it felt natural that the world would be read this way.

Yet to simply find fault with the lack of psychological shading would be, I think, a genre mistake. Roy's indifference to precisely that problem suggests that something interesting is afoot. Consider the book's dedication—"To, The Unconsoled." Note the cover photograph, a grave, and the setting: The story begins and ends in a graveyard. More than a novel, this book wants to be an offering. It isn't concerned with the conventional task (or power) of fiction to evoke the texture and drama of consciousness. Instead, it acts like a companion piece to Roy's political writings—collected in books such as *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001) and *Walking With the Comrades* (2011). It tours India's fault lines, as Roy has, from the brutal suppression of tribal populations to the 2002 pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat.

Just about every resistance movement is embodied in a character, and the lives and struggles of these characters intersect. The queers, addicts, Muslims, orphans, and other casualties of the national project of making India great again find one another and form a raucous community of sorts. And this novel—this fable—is as much for them as about them; it commemorates their struggles and their triumphs, however tiny. You will encounter no victims in this book; the smallest characters are endowed with some spit. A kitten, about to be drowned by a group of soldiers, bares her fangs, unafraid to take on the Indian army. At night, a dung beetle lies on his back in the graveyard, pointing his feet to the sky, to help prop it

▼
**The
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=====

**The world
Roy conjures
is often
brutal,
but never
confusing or
even very
complex.**



THE MINISTRY
OF UTMOST
HAPPINESS
ARUNDHATI ROY
Knopf

up should it fall. Even he is given a name: Guih Kyom. Even he does what he can.

"I'll have to find a language to tell the story I want to tell," Roy said in an interview in 2011, as she discussed returning to fiction. "By language I don't mean English, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, of course. I mean something else. A way of binding together worlds that have been ripped apart." As it happens, she didn't really settle on a new way of telling the story—this novel shares the same playful, punny argot of *The God of Small Things* (more on this later)—but she tries to pull all those worlds into an unwieldy embrace.

It may seem like the pamphleteer has subsumed the novelist. But Roy's enterprise is less dutiful than it sounds. There is no grudging marriage of art and politics in her work; as John Berger, one of her longtime interlocutors and a formative influence, wrote, "Far from my dragging politics into art, art has dragged me into politics." Roy's work conveys a similar spirit. She is a great admirer of the world. Her strongest writing is always at the margins of the main story—the pleasure of finding "an egg hot from a hen," or this passing detail from *The God of Small Things*: "A thin red cow with a protruding pelvic bone appeared and swam straight out to sea without wetting her horns, without looking back." From the fine-grained affection that stirs her imagination springs an ethical imperative—after all, how can one appreciate the world without desiring to defend it? And it must be defended not merely from war or political calamity, but from that natural, more insidious phenomenon: forgetting.

THIS IS THE literary tradition that Roy belongs to—and that was intimately transmitted to her by Berger and her other great friend, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano (she has called him her twin), for whom the great tragedy of humanity wasn't that we die or suffer or make each other suffer. It was that we forget. And because we are so prone to forgetting—because it is so easy to *make us forget*—we accept the conditions of our suffering as inevitable and cannot fathom alternatives. ("The world, which is the private property of a few, suffers from amnesia," Galeano once said. "It is not an innocent amnesia. The owners prefer not to remember that the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.")

Like Galeano's *Mirrors*, an ode to "human diversity" in which a history of the world unfolds in 600 short stories, Roy's novel is a compendium of alternatives—alternative structures of kinship, resistance, and romance. Anjum lives in a multigenerational joint family of other *hijras*;

together they raise a child. Later, she and a few other characters move into a graveyard. They sleep between the headstones, plant vegetables, create a new kind of human family that can obliterate the divisions between the living and the dead. Roy has imagined an inverse of the Garden of Eden—a paradise whose defining feature, rather than innocence, is experience and endurance.

And what better place to set this graveyard, and this book about forgetting, than in Delhi, Roy's home for much of her adult life. It's a palimpsest of a city—occupied continuously for at least 3,000 years, surviving and absorbing the Mughals, the British, the refugees after India's partition from Pakistan. A city whose own founding myths tell of amnesia, and of the power of texts to resist it. As one story goes, Brahma the creator god suddenly forgot the scriptures. He performed various rites and austerities and plunged into one of Delhi's rivers. During the monsoon, the waters rose and flung up the sacred texts onto a riverbank that is still known today as Nigambodh Ghat, "the Bank of Sacred Knowledge." Even the gods may be wired to forget, but we are also wired for narrative, to build what bulwarks we can.

In this context, any notion of a fissure between art and activism would seem absurd. To be both artist and activist, to expend oneself in both places, on the page and in the world, is the duty of the writer. It is to be "integrated," as Vivian Gornick described Grace Paley; it is to be "a writer in the most comprehensive sense," as the biographer Richard Holmes wrote of Shelley. But to live and write with the consciousness of this integration is trickier than it sounds.

To so confidently believe oneself to be on the right side of history is risky—for a writer especially. In that balmy glow of self-regard, complacency can easily take root. And good prose demands a measure of self-doubt—the worry that nags at a writer, that forces her to double back on her sentences, unravel and knit them up again, asking repeatedly: Is this clear? Is this true? Is this enticing? This book has a slackness to it that suggests Roy has abdicated some of these anxieties.

ROY HAS SAID that she never revises her books, that her essays and fiction write themselves, and that she rarely takes edits. I've always interpreted—and enjoyed—such statements as a bit of swagger. It's dispiriting to see that they might be true. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is plagued by almost rudimentary errors: There is near-total confusion about point of view. Messages and morals come ponderously underscored. The two central stories never convincingly come together. In the absence

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of psychological development or real suspense, chapters end with portentous rhetorical ellipses. Worse still, the creation of characters as stand-ins for causes results in formulaic depictions of the very people she is trying to humanize. Anjum, for example, never becomes more than her "patched-together body and her partially realized dreams."

The voice that carried *The God of Small Things* emanated from the characters. The elasticity of language, the silliness and sappiness, felt very much like the expression of the twins. It captured their way of being, of merging with each other and the world. Here that voice feels distracting, imported from a different universe. I thought often of *Walking With the Comrades*, Roy's account of traveling through the forests with Maoist insurgents. She was full of admiration for their discipline, for the care they took of their woods and of one another. She was awed by how everything in their world was "clean and necessary." Something of this aesthetic stole into her style in that book. Roy trusted the reader enough to just point the camera, to let us see what she saw: "Three beautiful, sozzled men with flowers in their turbans walked with us for about half an hour, before our paths diverged. At sunset, their shoulder bags began to crow. They had roosters in them, which they had taken to market but hadn't managed to sell." Details gleam (a woman's anklets shine in the firelight) and horrify; she hears the story of three Maoist girls raped by the army: "They raped them on the grass ... But after it was over there was no grass left."

The epigraph of *The God of Small Things* is a line from John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." What's disappointing about *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is that it can feel like a collection of so many single stories and stock figures—heroic martyrs and tragic transgender characters. Roy has a ready response to the criticism that she isn't an especially subtle writer. She cops to it directly: "I want to wake the neighbors, that's my whole point. I want everybody to open their eyes." I remember something Cézanne supposedly said: "I know what I am looking at, but what am I seeing?" Roy is a champion at waking the neighbors, at getting our attention, and as an offering, this book is a beautiful act of witness. But harnessing our attention—getting us to see as well as to look—that is perhaps a different, and more intricate, matter. It's a matter of tactics, a matter of art. **A**

Parul Sehgal is a columnist and senior editor at The New York Times Book Review.

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FOR THE FUTURE



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The Architect of the Radical Right

How the Nobel Prize-winning economist James M. Buchanan shaped today's antigovernment politics

BY SAM TANENHAUS

IF YOU READ the same newspapers and watch the same cable shows I do, you can be forgiven for not knowing that the most populous region in America, by far, is the South. Nearly four in 10 Americans live there, roughly 122 million people, by the latest official estimate. And the number is climbing. For that reason alone, the South deserves more attention than it seems to be getting in political discussion today.

But there is another reason: The South is the cradle of modern conservatism. This, too, may come as a surprise, so entrenched is the origin myth of the far-westerners Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan as leaders of a Sun Belt realignment and forerunners of today's polarizing GOP. But each of those politicians had his own "southern strategy," playing to white backlash against the civil-rights revolution—"hunting where the ducks are," as Goldwater explained—though it was encrypted in the states'-rights ideology that has been vital to southern politics since the days of John C. Calhoun.

Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains* is part of a new wave of historiography that has been examining the southern roots of modern conservatism. That lineage features episodes like the third-party presidential ticket headed by the Virginian T. Coleman Andrews in 1956, with its double-barreled attack on the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the federal income tax. Further back lies the breakaway Dixiecrat candidacy of the South Carolinian Strom Thurmond in 1948, after the Democratic Party added a civil-rights plank to its platform. Earlier still was the quixotic insurrection in 1936 led by Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge, the front man for something called the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution. A Dixie offshoot of the more visible Liberty League, it shared that group's conviction that "an ever spreading governmental bureaucracy" spelled "the end of democracy."

Talmadge's movement is a footnote now, but it boasted delegates from 18 states and offered an early mix of the populist grievance and anti-tax fervor that presaged Tea Party protests, though the original brew had a pungent tang of racism. At a rabble-rousing "grassroots convention" held in Macon, Georgia, delegates received a news sheet that showed a photo of Eleanor Roosevelt in the company of two Howard University ROTC

students. Her husband, the caption warned, was permitting "negroes to come to the White House banquets and sleep in the White House beds." What looked like a redneck eruption was in fact financed by northern capitalists nursing their own hatred of the New Deal. Talmadge's promise to slash property taxes brought in big checks from the du Ponts, among others.

WHY DOES ALL THIS matter today? Well, we might begin with the first New Yorker elected president since FDR, a man who has given new meaning to the term *copperhead* (originally applied to Northern Democrats who opposed the Civil War). Lost amid the many 2016 postmortems, and the careful parsing of returns in Ohio swing counties, was Donald Trump's prodigious conquest of the South: 60 percent or more of the vote in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and West Virginia, with similar margins in Louisiana and Mississippi. And the message is still being



James M. Buchanan emphasized the coercive effect of government programs.

missed. We've heard much about the "older white men" in the administration, but rather less about where they come from. No fewer than 10 Cabinet appointees are from the South, in key positions like attorney general (Alabama) and secretary of state (Texas), not to mention Trump's top political adviser, Steve Bannon, who grew up in Virginia.

All of this, so plainly in view but so strangely ignored, makes MacLean's vibrant intellectual history of the radical right especially relevant. Her book includes familiar villains—principally

the Koch brothers—and devotes many pages to think tanks like the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, whose ideological programs are hardly a secret. But what sets *Democracy in Chains* apart is that it begins in the South, and emphasizes a genuinely original and very influential political thinker, the economist James M. Buchanan. He is not so well remembered today as his fellow Nobel laureates Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Yet as MacLean convincingly shows, his effect on our politics is at least as great, in part because of the evangelical fervor he brought to spreading his ideas.

It helped that Buchanan, despite his many accomplishments, continued to think of himself as an embattled outsider and also as a revolutionary. In 1973, well before the term *counterestablishment* was popularized, Buchanan was rallying like-minded allies to “create, support, and activate an effective counterintelligentsia” that could transform “the way people think about government.” Thirteen years later, when he won his Nobel Prize, he received the news as more than a validation of his work. His success represented a victory over the “Eastern academic elite,” achieved by someone who was, he said, “proud to be a member of the great unwashed.”

This is the language of a movement intellectual. But a movement isn’t the same thing as a conspiracy. One openly declares its intentions. The other keeps them secret. It’s not always clear that MacLean recognizes the difference. Nevertheless, she has dug deep into her material—not just Buchanan’s voluminous, unsorted papers, but other archives, too—and she has made powerful and disturbing use of it all. A historian at Duke who has written a good deal about the South, she comes at her subject from the inside, with a feel for the legends and stories that southerners have long told themselves and others about the kind of country America is supposed to be. The behind-the-scenes days and works of Buchanan show how much deliberation and persistence—in the face of formidable opposition—underlie the antigoverning politics ascendant today. What we think of as dysfunction is the result of years of strategic effort.

BUCHANAN OWED his tenacity to blood and soil and upbringing. Born in 1919 on a family farm in Tennessee, he came of age during the Great Depression. His grandfather had been an unpopular governor of that state, and Buchanan grew up in an atmosphere of half-remembered glory and bitterness, without either money or useful connections. His exceptional mind was his visa into the academy and then

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**Buchanan
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into the world of big ideas. “Better than plowing,” which he made the title of his 1992 memoir, was advice he got from his first mentor, the economist Frank Knight at the University of Chicago, where Buchanan received his doctorate in 1948. During the postwar years, other faculty included Hayek and Friedman, who were shaping a new pro-market economics, part of a growing backlash against the policies of the New Deal. Hayek initiated Buchanan into the Mont Pelerin Society, the select group of intellectuals who convened periodically to talk and plot libertarian doctrine.

Buchanan got his first plum teaching job at the University of Virginia, in 1956, during the single most crucial event in the birth of the modern conservative movement, the rise of the strategy of “massive resistance” to the Supreme Court’s mandate for school desegregation. Since the New Deal, conservatives like Herbert Hoover and Robert A. Taft had pushed back hard against the expanding federal government and its tentacular programs. But it was an uphill battle; the public was grateful for Social Security. *Brown* changed all that. More than the economic order was now under siege. So was a way of life, with its cherished “mores and folkways,” in the phrase favored by defenders of Jim Crow. A new postwar conservatism was born, mingling states’-rights doctrine with odes to the freedom-loving individual and resistance to the “social engineering” pursued by what conservative writers in the mid-1950s began to call the “liberal establishment.”

Today we remember ferocious civil-rights struggles waged in Birmingham and Selma. But ground zero for the respectable defense of Jim Crow was Virginia, where one of the nation’s most powerful politicians, Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., ruled with the authority of an old-style feudal boss. His notorious “machine” kept the state clenched in an iron grip; the oppressions included a poll tax that suppressed black voter turnout so that it was on a par with the Deep South’s (and kept overall turnout under 20 percent). Byrd had allies in the president of the University of Virginia, Colgate Darden, and the newspaperman James Jackson Kilpatrick, who, long before his lovable-curmudgeon TV role on the “Point-Counterpoint” segment of *60 Minutes* in the 1970s, was a fanatical and ingenious segregationist.

Buchanan played a part, MacLean writes, by teaming up with another new University of Virginia hire, G. Warren Nutter (who was later a close adviser to Barry Goldwater), on an influential paper. In it they argued that the crux of the desegregation problem was that “state run” schools had become a “monopoly,” which could be broken by privatization. If authorities sold off

school buildings and equipment, and limited their own involvement in education to setting minimum standards, then all different kinds of schools might blossom. Each parent "would cast his vote in the marketplace and have it count." The argument impressed Friedman, who a few years earlier had published his own critique of "government schools," saying that "the denationalization of education would widen the range of choice available to parents."

Far-fetched though these schemes were, they gave ammunition to southern policy makers looking to mount the nonracial case for maintaining Jim Crow in a new form. Friedman himself left race completely out of it. Buchanan did too at first, telling skeptical colleagues in the North that the "transcendent issue" had nothing to do with race; it came down to the question of "whether the federal government shall dictate the solutions." But in their paper (initially a document submitted to a Virginia education commission and soon published in a Richmond newspaper), Buchanan and Nutter were more direct, stating their belief that "every individual should be free to associate with persons of his own choosing"—the sanitized phrasing of segregationists.

Either way, the proximate result of Buchanan's privatizing scheme was to help prolong the stalemate in Virginia. In Prince Edward County, to cite the most egregious example, public schools were padlocked for a full five years. From 1959 to 1964, white children went to tax-subsidized private schools while most black children stayed home—roughly what some politicians had in mind all along. The episode was, among other things, a vivid early instance of the bait and switch, so familiar now, whereby many libertarians seem curiously indifferent to the human cost of their rigid principles, even as they denounce the despotism of all three branches of the federal government.

Yet race, MacLean acknowledges, was not ultimately a major issue for Buchanan. Fending off desegregation was only a skirmish in the long campaign to revive antigovernment ideas. That campaign dated back to the nation's founding, gained new strength in the pre-Civil War nullification arguments of John Calhoun, and reached its modern apogee in debates over taxes and spending. Here the enemies were unions ("the labor monopoly movement," in Buchanan's phrase), leftist policy makers, and also Keynesian economists. Together these formed a "ruling class" that was waging war against the marketplace. This was not a new argument, but Buchanan gave it fresh rigor in his theory of "public choice," set forth in his pioneering book, *The Calculus of Consent* (1962),

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**Why not see
politicians
as players in
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written with Gordon Tullock. Governments, they argued, were being assessed in the wrong way. The error was a legacy of New Deal thinking, which glorified elected officials and career bureaucrats as disinterested servants of the public good, despite the obvious coercive effects of the programs they put into place. Why not instead see politicians and government administrators as self-interested players in the marketplace, trying to "maximize their utility"—that is, win the next election or enlarge their department's budget?

This idea turned the whole notion of a benevolent government, and of programs and policies designed more or less selflessly, into a kind of fairy tale expertly woven by politicians and their flacks. Not that politicians were evil. They were looking out for themselves, as most of us do. The difference was in the damage they did. After all, the high-priced programs they devised were paid for by taxes wrested from defenseless citizens, who were given little or no effective choice in the matter. It was licensed theft, reinforced by the steep gradations in income-tax rates.

BUCHANAN EXPERTLY MAXIMIZED his own utility. Money was flowing into the Thomas Jefferson Center he established at the University of Virginia in 1957, enabling him to run it as an autonomous entity, with its own lecture series and fellowship programs. Free of oversight, Buchanan gathered disciples—he screened applicants according to ideology—and his semiprivate school of thought flourished. The obstacles lay in the body politic. The 1960s looked even worse than the '50s. Not long after Buchanan's big book was published, the War on Poverty began and then the Great Society—one lethal program after another.

Nixon called himself a Keynesian and committed a succession of sins, from creating government agencies (like the Environmental Protection Agency) to instituting wage and price controls. Meanwhile, the government kept expanding through entitlements and programs aimed at the middle class. You didn't have to accept Buchanan's ideology to see that he had a point about the growth of government-centered clientelism—"dependency," in the term used by a new wave of neoconservatives such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan. For Buchanan, the trouble now went beyond the government. The enemy was the public itself, expressed through the tyranny of majority rule: The have-nots preyed on the rich, egged on by the new elite—labor bosses, benevolent corporations, and pandering politicians—who fell over themselves promising more and more.

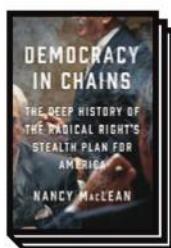
With Reagan, deliverance seemed possible. Buchanan's political influence reached its zenith. By this time, he had left the University of Virginia. As early as 1963, there were concerns—on the part of the dean of the faculty, for one—that Buchananism, at least as practiced at his Thomas Jefferson Center, had petrified into dogma, with no room for dissenting voices. After a battle over a promotion for his co-author, Tullock, Buchanan left in a huff. He went first to UCLA, next to Virginia Tech, and in 1983, climactically, to George Mason University, not far outside the Beltway—and much nearer to the political action. *The Wall Street Journal* soon labeled George Mason “the Pentagon of conservative academia.” With its “stable of economists who have become an important resource for the Reagan administration,” it was now poised to undo Great Society programs. In 1986, Buchanan won the Nobel Prize for his public-choice theory.

But triumph gave way again to disappointment. Not even Reagan could stem the collectivist tide. Public-choice ideas made a difference—for instance in the balanced-budget act sponsored by Senators Philip Gramm, Warren Rudman, and Ernest Hollings in 1985. Buchanan's theory found another useful ally in the budget-slasher and would-be government-shrinker David Stockman, who idolized Hayek and declared that “politicians were wrecking American capitalism.” But Stockman also discovered that restoring capitalism to a purer condition would mean declaring war on “Social Security recipients, veterans, farmers, educators, state and local officials, the housing industry.” What president was going to do *that*? Certainly not Reagan. As Stockman reflected, “The democracy had defeated the doctrine.”

That was Buchanan's view, too. It wasn't enough to elect true-believing politicians. The rules of government needed to be rewritten. But this required ideal conditions—a blank slate. This had happened once, in Chile, after Augusto Pinochet's coup against the socialist Salvador Allende in 1973. A vogue for public choice had swept Pinochet's administration. Buchanan's books were translated, and some of his acolytes helped restructure Chile's economy. Labor unions were banned, and social security and health care were both privatized. On a week-long visit in 1980, Buchanan gave formal lectures to “top representatives of a governing elite that melded the military and the corporate world,” MacLean reports, and he dispensed counsel in private conversations. But Buchanan said very little about his part in assisting Chile's reformers—and he said very little, too, when the country's economy cratered, and Pinochet at last fired the Buchananites.

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The rules of government needed to be rewritten.



DEMOCRACY IN CHAINS:
THE DEEP HISTORY OF
THE RADICAL RIGHT'S
STEALTH PLAN
FOR AMERICA
NANCY MACLEAN
Viking

At his death in 2013, Buchanan was hardly known outside the world of economists and libertarians, but his ideology remains much in force. His view of Social Security—a “Ponzi scheme”—is shared by privatizers like Paul Ryan. More broadly, Buchananism informs the conviction on the right that because the democratic majority can't really be trusted, empowered minorities, like the Freedom Caucus, are the true guardians of our liberty and if necessary will resort to drastic measures: shutting down the government, defaulting on the national debt, and plying the techniques of what Francis Fukuyama calls our modern “vetocracy”—refusing, for example, to bring an immigration bill to a House vote lest it pass (as happened in the Obama years) or, in the Senate, defying tradition by not granting a confirmation hearing to a Supreme Court nominee.

To see all this as simple obstructionism, perversity for its own sake, is a mistake. A cause lies behind it: upholding the sanctity of an ideology against the sins of the majority. This is what drives House Republicans to scale back social programs, or to shift the tax burden from the 1 percent onto the parasitic mob, or to come up with a health-care plan that would leave Trump's own voters out in the cold. To many of us, it might seem heartless. But far worse, Buchanan once explained in a famous essay, is misguided Good Samaritanism, which, by helping the unlucky, cushions them against the consequences of their bad choices. This is exactly the sentiment voiced by the House Republican who voted to strip away Obamacare and then explained that the new proposal, which punishes people with preexisting medical conditions, has the advantage of “reducing the cost to those people who lead good lives.”

With a researcher's pride, MacLean confidently declares that Buchanan's ideological journey, and the trail he left, contains the “true origin story of today's well-heeled radical right.” Better to say that it is one story among many in the long narrative of conservative embattlement. The American right has always felt outnumbered, even in times of triumph. This is the source of both its strength and its weakness, just as it was for Buchanan, a faithful son of the South, with its legacy of defeats and lost causes. MacLean's undisguised loathing of him and others she writes about will offend some readers. But that same intensity of feeling has inspired her to untangle important threads in American history—and to make us see how much of that history begins, and still lives, in the South. ■

Sam Tanenhaus, a contributor to Bloomberg View, is writing a biography of William F. Buckley Jr.

TV Gets Metaphysical

A pioneer among recent surreal shows, *The Leftovers* brilliantly balances the ordinary and the bizarre.

BY SPENCER KORNHABER

TWO EPISODES INTO the first season of HBO's *The Leftovers*, the beleaguered suburban police chief Kevin Garvey faced an existential crisis because of a bagel. He placed its two halves onto the conveyor belt of the office toaster—but no bagel, toasted or untoasted, materialized on the other side. The camera peered out from inside the toaster's maw as Kevin peered in; the actor Justin Theroux flared his nostrils and arched his jet-black eyebrows into a visage of horror. Kevin violently slammed the machine against the counter. Still no bagel emerged. Where the hell had it gone?

Kevin, the viewer could guess, was considering two rather bonkers answers. One was that he had lost his mind and not his bagel, and would soon join his delusional father in a mental hospital. The other was that the bagel had supernaturally vanished—in the same way that 140 million people, 2 percent of the Earth's population, had inexplicably disappeared on October 14, 2011. Either way, Kevin was reevaluating his perception of the world—and viewers were doing the same as they struggled to make sense of what they'd seen on-screen.

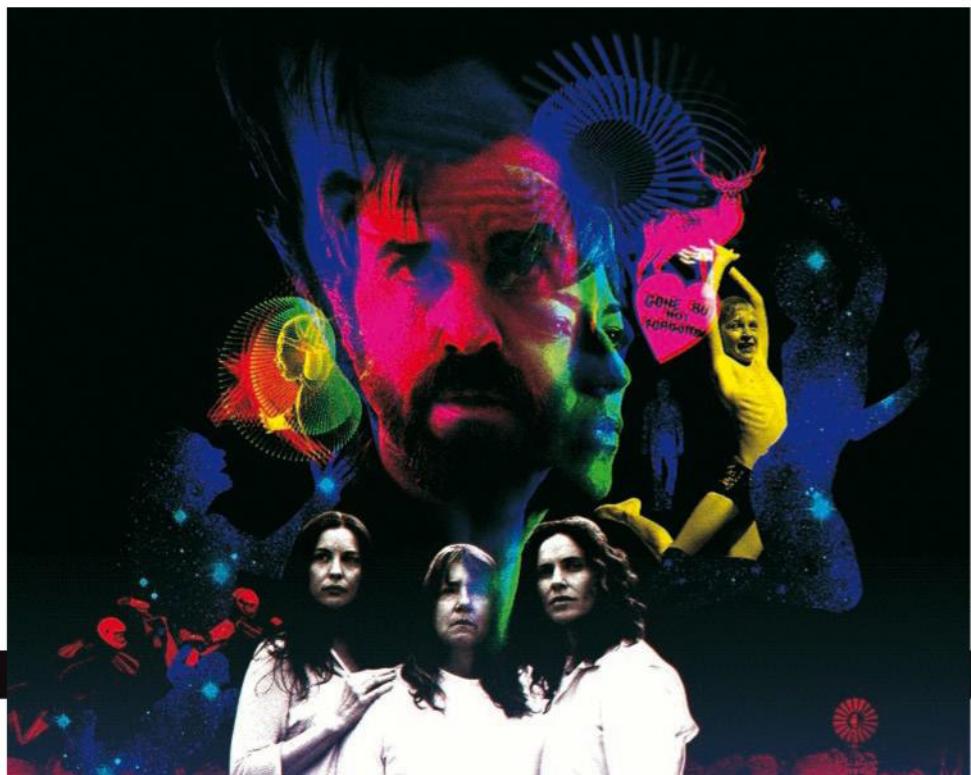
The scene was typical of *The Leftovers'* three-season run, which began in 2014 and ended in June, though it was hardly the strangest situation the show presented. Imagining the aftermath of an event like the Christian rapture, but implemented in an inscrutable way and without confirmation by God, Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta's series often felt like a blackly comic dare to see how far a handsomely realist television drama could push an aesthetic of disorientation. Dream sequences, freaky coincidences, and disturbing images were as much the driving source of thrills as the plot action was. Essential to viewers' appreciation of the series was an appetite for philosophical pondering and the Kafkaesque. Critics, it turned out, were hungry for those things—they came to love the show. But the audience remained small, which seemed like a sign that few other TV creators would head down a path this bewildering.

And yet, by the time *The Leftovers* ended, the series stood out as a pioneer in a new wave of risky, metaphysically minded TV shows. HBO's *Westworld* and *The Young Pope*, USA's *Mr. Robot*, Netflix's *The OA*, FX's *Legion*, and a few other recent prestige dramas all feint and parry with

coherence—and take up the challenge posed this way by a Westworld engineer to his artificially intelligent creations: "Have you ever questioned the nature of your reality?" Watching these shows means continually wondering whether what you're being shown is true. In March, James Poniewozik at *The New York Times* labeled the crop "surreality TV," calling it "an art form for the days of fake news, gaslighting and contested objectivity."

This emerging subgenre is, of course, not entirely new. The dream logic and disturbing visual swerves of *Twin Peaks* (now back on TV in a Showtime revival) and the flashbacks and flash-sideways of *Lost* (the work that made Lindelof famous) preceded it. So did decades of experimental and existential cinema. And basic business concerns surely play a role in the trend: As the Netflixes of the world join HBO in the race to stock up on original subscription content—one analysis counts more than 450 scripted shows in production across TV last year—building buzz from blown minds can be nearly as valuable as retaining a mass audience.

Yet the philosophical underpinnings of these shows are remarkably similar. In a variety of unusually explicit ways, they each probe how our world can be made anew—or turned askew—by the mind. The nesting-doll narratives of *Westworld*, for example, appear to happen in a future where robots begin realizing their own consciousness. The self-proclaimed angel of *The OA* may or may not be inventing her account of alternate dimensions. And the young pope of *The Young Pope* voyages through his memories and dreams en route to embracing his faith. In every case, the human impulse to wonder about a reality other than this



one underlies the formal freakiness. *The Young Pope*'s creator, Paolo Sorrentino, once offered up a term just as apt as *surreality TV: thriller of the soul*.

Of this trippy generation of shows, *The Leftovers* staged the most convincing relationship between the real and the imagined, the banal and the bizarre. Using an appealing cast of small-town characters whose lives were suddenly upended, the show mixed grief memoir and savage comedy with speculation about how a civilization ill at ease with mystery might deal with the truly unfathomable. The results felt like a buffet of surprises, and not merely because the filmmakers were trying to keep the audience off-balance: The characters themselves were off-balance. By avoiding the definitively supernatural (aside from the October catastrophe) while still maintaining a deep sense of the weird, *The Leftovers* was more than just a riveting example of contemporary surrealism TV. The series turned out to be a genuine—and profound—work of modern surrealism. After all, for every one of us in this life, the simple act of making breakfast can feel, on certain days, like a test of sanity.

IN THE FIRST "Manifesto of Surrealism," published in 1924, André Breton wrote that "under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy." Influenced by the Dadaists, who reacted to the horror of World War I with artistic anarchy, and by Sigmund Freud's insistence on the importance of the subconscious, Breton's surrealism sought more than the deconstruction of our world as we know it. On the agenda was a reenchantment of the world. Paying serious attention to dreams, automatic thoughts, and the strange juxtapositions of modern life, the surrealists mounted a critique of narrow rationality. A pursuit of science-fiction-inflected fantasy wasn't the point. The goal was to resurrect the sensibility that invented religion. At the animating core of surrealism was a "quest for primitive culture," as Georges Bataille wrote.

The inhabitants of the world of *The Leftovers* indeed experienced a mental and spiritual reset at odds with "civilization and progress." Science couldn't explain the instantaneous disappearance of millions. A committee investigating the "Sudden Departure" ended up stumped. Answers weren't forthcoming from the major religions, either: October 14 claimed saints and sinners and atheists alike. The Episcopalian priest Matt Jamison, his congregation wan and his wife rendered vegetative by a Departure-related accident, took to preposterous expressions of faith; at one point

▼
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he locked himself in a stockade on top of a taco truck. This was not *The Leftovers'* only insertion of a medieval image into modern life. A busy diner became the site of impromptu goat sacrifices; mortification of the flesh made a comeback, in the form of teenage party games, public paddling, and (nonerotic) auto-asphyxiation with plastic bags.

The most overtly surrealizing force of the show's first season was the nihilistic Guilty Remnant cult. Wearing white, smoking incessantly, and observing a vow of silence, its recruits disrupted the fragile social order and unsettled the community subconscious. A brochure they handed out at a bus stop advertised that "Everything That Matters About You Is Inside"; the inside, of course, was blank. "The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly... into the crowd," Breton once wrote; the Remnant didn't go that far, but its acolytes coolly simulated random terror by, say, throwing a fake hand grenade into a school bus full of children. Their targets reacted with violent rage or acquiescence—becoming silent trolls themselves—or, in Kevin Garvey's case, a dip into madness.

Some amount of madness ended up being a fact of life for all the characters as they coped with a reality that had developed a glitch. Nora Durst, a pugnacious fraud investigator who lost her husband and two children in the Departure, acquired a habit of hiring prostitutes to shoot her while she wore a bulletproof vest. But her eventual new beau, Kevin, an emotionally smoldering cop largely abandoned by his family despite his attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy post-Departure, succumbed to more severe derangement.

His bagel saga did have a rational resolution—eventually he took a power drill and opened up the toaster to find two crispy circles stuck in the back of the machine. Nevertheless, he unraveled. A significant percentage of *The Leftovers* was spent inside his head as viewers kept him company on some very strange adventures. In the show's penultimate episode, he found himself in an underground bunker where two Kevins, one bearded and one not, faced off.

In staging this journey into possible insanity, *The Leftovers* had a lot in common with other recent Jekyll-and-Hyde stories on TV, including *Mr. Robot* and *Legion*, both of which have featured moments that later turned out to be more or less psychotic experiences. But unlike those shows, *The Leftovers* almost never tried to trick the viewer into believing that what was on-screen was real when it wasn't: Kevin's every vision was explicitly ambiguous in authenticity, even if other characters, wowed by his repeated survival of deadly experiences, imbued

the resurrections with religious meaning. (Lindelof has pointed out that stories of astonishing death-defiance abound in our own world.)

By constantly balancing the uncanny and the genuinely unbelievable, the show heightened a dynamic by now familiar in our time. Perrotta's novel *The Leftovers* was, in large part, an allegory for post-9/11 grief, and Lindelof visited post-massacre Newtown, Connecticut, site of Sandy Hook Elementary School, while researching *The Leftovers'* bleak first season. Incomprehensible violence and the tragedy that follows, the implication goes, inject a surreal dimension into existence. The conspiracy theories and social upheavals spawned by our own world's mass departures—and, Lindelof has noted, electoral surprises—suggest that the strangeness of *The Leftovers* is mostly one of degree, not kind.

YE T HOW, in the face of the abnormal, might society itself avoid madness? *The Leftovers* moved from a chilly upstate-New York setting in Season 1 to Texas in Season 2 and then Australia in Season 3. Along the way, the grief-stricken nightmare of its original concept was leavened with whimsy and grandeur as the show probed whether people can, in the words of the second season's perky theme song, "let the mystery be." The final episode of the series (spoiler alert for those who may be behind in their viewing) posed the most radically disorienting test yet for audience and characters alike.

The finale opened with the show's only real flirtation with science fiction: Nora preparing to enter a radioactive contraption that would either kill her or, according to the physicists who invented it, send her to where the Departed had gone. But the authentically surreal stuff came once the show cut to an older Nora, alone in rural Australia, where—to her bafflement—an older Kevin suddenly showed up, acting as though they had never had a life together. Was Kevin just going cuckoo again? Or was this another reality, an alternate universe?

Almost everything about the scenario seemed impossible, until almost everything was revealed to be a plausible result of human behavior. Nora went missing the day she entered the machine, and Kevin then spent a decade looking for her despite being told she was gone for good. When he found her, and learned that she'd been hiding from him for years, he decided to behave like a near-stranger, inviting her on a first date. Before long, Kevin owned up to Nora about faking amnesia, and the urge to deny history—their own and the world's—didn't seem so far-fetched. Who wouldn't want to start over again?

The Culture File

TV

***The Leftovers* almost never tried to trick viewers into believing what was on-screen was real when it wasn't.**

If the desire to revert is primal, so is the desire to have all the answers, a desire Nora proceeded to satisfy with the tale she then shared with Kevin. The radioactive machine did in fact bring her, she told him, to the realm of the Departed. There she saw that her kids and husband—joined by a new mom/wife—were one of the few happy families in a grim alternate dimension: 98 percent of that realm's population had disappeared on October 14. So she decided not to stay or interfere. The process of getting back took so long, and her story seemed so improbable, that she didn't seek Kevin out upon her return. In the show's final moments, he grasped her hand and said he believed her story.

With this jarring but understated finish, *The Leftovers* exposed the allure and the limits of the human hope for new beginnings. If we do believe Nora's report of traveling across dimensions, she came back certain that some pain never heals. And what if we don't trust her account? In fact, *The Leftovers'* closing story could be read as an endorsement of faith both blind and unblinkered. Gnawing, irrational, loving faith that she would see her family again led Nora to enter the machine. The same sort of faith led Kevin to spend years tracking her down. The story Nora told can't be verified, but believing it offers greater solace than the alternative: that she didn't cross over, and instead simply decided to live out her life in isolation.

The early-20th-century surrealists challenged rationality not to escape from the world we live in but to plumb its full, and often frightening, depths. For many of the surreal offerings on TV lately, knowingness eventually surrenders to mysticism and irrationality. *The OA* saw jaded 21st-century teens give themselves over to arcane ritual in a moment of crisis; *Westworld*'s first season climaxed in a terroristic disavowal of work that let humans play God. Both twists certainly offer plenty of grist for anyone looking to analyze our era's anxieties about faith versus science.

The Leftovers, meanwhile, skirted violent standoffs and stark conversions to close on a note that felt both primitive and postmodern. In the end, these characters calibrated their belief systems to accord not with illusory claims to universal truth, or some transcendent order, but with the everyday pursuit of peace and happiness. This conclusion is more grounded, and less romantic, than the final shot of Kevin and Nora holding hands might suggest. Viewers aren't fooled that the struggle for security and meaning in the face of the preposterous is over, or ever will be. *The Leftovers* has shown otherwise, and so has our own world. **A**

Spencer Kornhaber is a staff writer at The Atlantic.



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WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE DEMOCRATS?

By **FRANKLIN FOER**

THE STRATEGY WAS SIMPLE. A demographic wave—long-building, still-building—would carry the party to victory, and liberalism to generational advantage. The wave was inevitable, unstoppable. It would not crest for many years, and in the meantime, there would be losses—losses in the midterms and in special elections; in statehouses and in districts and counties and municipalities outside major cities. Losses in places and elections where the white vote was especially strong.

But the presidency could offset these losses. Every four years the wave would swell, receding again thereafter but coming back in the next presidential cycle, higher, higher. The strategy was simple. The presidency was everything.

Anyone who examined the strategy that the Democratic Party has embraced ever more tightly in recent years could see its essential precariousness. And anyone could see that investing such grave hopes in the person of Hillary Clinton—who had

lost the party's nomination to a little-known senator in 2008; who had struggled to win it against a little-known socialist eight years later—was particularly risky.

But liberals' fears were softened in 2016 by a widely shared belief: that the candidacy of Donald Trump would shatter the Republican Party, at least in the form in which we had long known it. His trail of wreckage would force a painful reckoning with the party's shortcomings—the narrowness of its coalition, the cloistered cluelessness of its elites, its intramural disagreements about the future of the nation. After a season of Trump's destruction, the party would lie in rubble.

On November 8, that prophecy was realized, true in every regard, except that it described the Democrats. On Inauguration Day, the party's power ebbed to its lowest level since the 1920s.

If there's any consolation to the realization of terrible fears, of worst-case scenarios springing to life, it's that they are invigorating. Donald Trump's presidency has rocked a long-complacent Democratic Party like nothing in recent history. Liberals, with their confidence that the trajectory of the country points in their direction, never had quite as much practice as conservatives in expressing their anger. That's what makes the "Resistance"—the many marches, the seething hostility at town-hall meetings, the anti-Trump placards shouting at passersby from bungalow windows—a transformational break in the pattern.

Leaderless and loud, the Resistance has become the motive power of the Democratic Party. Presidential hopefuls already strive to anticipate its wishes. Elected officials have restructured their political calculus to avoid getting on its wrong side. The feistiness and agitation of the moment are propelling the party to a new place.

But where? The question unnerves Democrats, because the party has no scaffolding. All the dominant leaders of the last two generations—the Clintons, Barack Obama—have receded. Defeat discredited the party's foundational strategy—or, at the very least, exposed it as a wishful description of a more distant future, rather than a clear plan for victory in the present. Resistance has given the Democrats the illusion of unity, but the reality is deeply conflicted. Two of the party's largest concerns—race and class—reside in an increasing state of tension, a tension that will grow as the party turns toward the next presidential election.

To produce a governing majority, the party will need to survive an unsettling reckoning with itself. Donald Trump didn't just prevail over the Democrats; he called into doubt their old truths.

A YEAR BEFORE HIS wife lost, Bill Clinton had a premonition of how things could go very wrong. He revealed his foreboding—perhaps fittingly—at fund-raising events. He would hint at what he considered his wife's glaring vulnerability: the roiling discontent of the white working class. The travails

of the group—44 percent of eligible voters—preoccupied him. He could recite one grim statistic after another. Even at this early date in the campaign, he knew that their cultural alienation might place them beyond the reach of a Democrat. And while most pundits at that point still considered Trump the second coming of Herman Cain, a circus act rather than a serious candidate, Clinton feared Trump's ability to channel white-working-class rage. "He's a master brander and he's sensing sort of the emotional landscape of people he's selling to," Clinton told donors gathered in Atlanta in October 2015.

Hillary Clinton always had trouble getting right with the zeitgeist, and her aides worried about that flaw. She began her first presidential bid as her party exploded in anger over the Iraq War, an adventure she had sanctified in the Senate. The specter of that vote and the campaign that followed, the fear that the political moment might again turn against her, continued to haunt her closest aides, especially Neera Tanden, the head of the Center for American Progress and one of her longest-standing advisers. Five months before the 2016 Iowa caucus, Tanden warned that Clinton would be punished for supporting banking deregulation—"the closest thing to an Iraq vote we have to face," she wrote her fellow members of the campaign's inner sanctum. Her analysis proved wrong in the particulars, but broadly captured a central tension of the campaign. Some in Clinton's camp could clearly see that a large chunk of the country seethed against elites, yet the candidate could never quite understand the need to insulate herself from the ire, much less harness it.

At first, the challenge of Bernie Sanders looked like a gift. All of the Democrats with big benefactors and well-tended reputations sensed the futility of running against Clinton, because she had started with imposing poll numbers, a well-funded apparatus, and the goodwill of a party that felt her loyal service to Obama merited reward. That left her facing a cantankerous, aging democratic socialist with a small following. Even Sanders—a luftmensch who ran his operation with about the same attentiveness he brings to getting dressed—seemed to doubt the potential of his own candidacy. A year before the first primary, he told Elizabeth Warren that he would cease his

campaign preparations if she wanted to run. "He would have given her a clear lane," one former Sanders adviser told me. But Warren demurred. She had only recently arrived in the Senate, and it wasn't hard to imagine a fusillade of Clinton-campaign attacks, an opposition-research file disgorged, leaving her too damaged for future fights.

Sanders, however, would prove a flummoxing rival. To win the Democratic presidential nomination, it helps to secure the African American vote. But another path to victory involves rallying white voters with a populist bent. This can create an uncomfortable dynamic in presidential primaries, where race vies with class to become the defining concern of the party. Politicians rarely vocalize

A YEAR BEFORE HIS WIFE LOST, BILL CLINTON HAD A PREMONITION OF HOW THINGS COULD GO WRONG. HE REVEALED HIS FOREBODING AT FUND-RAISERS.

the tension. But the socialism of Bernie Sanders—which hindered his efforts to explain the centrality of race to American life—made this split less subterranean than usual.

Of course, Hillary Clinton would have preferred to avoid an argument about the primacy of race versus class. But African American voters provided her the surest path to primary victory. They gravitated to her, in no small measure out of loyalty to Obama. Where Clinton posed as the president's anointed successor, Sanders questioned Obama's legacy and called for revolutionary change. He never dedicated himself to making meaningful inroads with African American or Latino voters, and so Clinton doubled down. After she lost New Hampshire in February, she began traveling with the grieving mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and other African American casualties of violence. Criminal-justice issues became an elevated feature of her standard pitch.

This was an inversion of the 2008 primary campaign. Desperately attempting to forestall Barack Obama by collecting wins in Appalachia, Clinton posed then as the tribune of “hardworking Americans, white Americans.” But her reinvention last year followed the party’s prevailing wisdom. The Democrats had slowly transformed themselves since the 1960s, when working-class voters of every ethnicity had been reliable constituents. As the party had shed white southerners, it had trodden less tentatively on issues of race. And the swell of immigration that had begun with the Johnson administration’s liberalization of quotas had finally yielded enough citizens to lay a foundation for a cosmopolitan party. That direction suited white urban professionals, who considered themselves tolerant members of a globalized world. Working-class whites hadn’t been lost completely, of course; they remained important to the party in places like the upper Midwest, and unions, however shrunken, continued to provide support. But it was the mélange of minorities, Millennials, and white professionals that provided the basis for the so-called Obama coalition. And if Clinton had carried over any lesson from the 2008 race, it was the necessity of mimicking Obama’s tactics and methods, even if she sometimes produced only ersatz copies of them.

Sanders hardly represented a mortal threat to her nomination, but his campaign did real damage to her chances in November. Alert to her flaws, he portrayed her as a greedy insider, tightly tethered to Goldman Sachs—an image that would reappear in the closing ads Trump ran against her. Clinton, meanwhile, could hardly take the African American vote for granted—a worrying number of black Millennials distrusted her, and some blamed her husband for ushering in the age of mass incarceration. She needed to prove the authenticity



Race typically vies with class to become the defining concern of the Democratic Party. In 2016, the democratic socialism of Bernie Sanders made this split less subterranean than usual, and persuaded Hillary Clinton to elevate criminal-justice issues rhetorically.

of her critique of that system, which meant she returned to that issue far more than any strategist focused on a general election would have deemed prudent. As one Clinton aide told Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes, the authors of *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton’s Doomed Campaign*, “Our failure to reach out to white voters, like literally from the New Hampshire primary on, it never changed.”

By the spring of 2016, one top Clinton adviser explained to me, the campaign’s own polling showed that white voters without a college degree despised Clinton. The extent of their loathing was surprising—she polled far worse with them than Obama ever had, especially in states like Ohio and Iowa. Trump compounded her challenge. From the moment he announced his candidacy, he aimed his message at the white working class. He pursued that group with steadfastness. The threat that he might capture an unusually large chunk of it persuaded Clinton to pursue professionals with even greater intensity in an attempt to offset Trump’s potential gains.

With hindsight, it’s possible to see the risks of her strategy. Her campaign theorized that dentists, accountants, and middle managers needed to fully understand how Donald Trump surrounded himself with bigots and anti-Semites. “From the start,” she argued in a sharply worded speech in August, “Donald Trump has built his campaign on prejudice and paranoia.” Her campaign ads against Trump emphasized his misogyny. The attacks highlighted Trump’s greatest weakness, but also played to his greatest strength. Trump had spent the entirety of his campaign trying to foment a culture war, and Clinton zealously joined it. He talked endlessly about political



Clinton banked on a coalition of Millennials, minorities, and white professionals. By spring of 2016, her campaign's own polling showed that whites without a college degree despised her.

correctness—trying to convince his voters that they weren't just losing the debates over gay marriage or immigration, but that the elite wanted to banish them as bigots if they even dared to question the prevailing liberal view. Clinton boosted that cause when she told donors in September, "To just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the 'basket of deplorables.'" It was meant to be a *sotto voce* comment, but that's never how it works, as Mitt Romney could confirm.

Clinton apologized, but she didn't have any credibility to fall back on. She never fully met her most important political challenge: the need to both celebrate multiculturalism *and also* cushion the backlash against the celebration. A look back on some of the campaign's slogans—to be fair, she reportedly didn't love any of them—captures her difficulties on this score. First there was "I'm With Her," not exactly brimming with substance, aside from its plea for gender solidarity. Then she turned to "Breaking Down Barriers," which also highlighted the historic nature of her candidacy, yet made no effort to appeal to either the self-interest or the patriotism of white men. Finally she settled on "Stronger Together," which got closer to an appeal to all Americans. But it still read more like an indictment of Trump's intolerance than a vision for the nation. All the while, as Clinton groped for a summation, Trump never veered from the words stitched onto his red hat.

What's worse, in focusing so intently on Trump's temperament, Clinton neglected to make a robust economic argument. Democratic presidential candidates have traditionally closed on a populist note, arguing that while Republicans are for the rich, Democrats fight for the working stiff. The pitch might sound hackneyed, but it has a solid record of bolstering

support. Nonetheless, neither Clinton nor her campaign manager, Robby Mook, had any apparent interest in that appeal. They considered Trump's disreputable character the issue that would carry the election. One Clinton adviser describes watching drafts of speeches begin with a strong populist message. But with each revision, as the drafts advanced to the highest reaches of the campaign, those lines would steadily weaken and then disappear. So instead of having to rebut the traditional Democratic attack, Donald Trump came to own it. He ran ads that portrayed Clinton as a puppet of Wall Street. Trump never missed an opportunity to ding "Crooked Hillary," caricaturing her as a self-righteous elite who bent the rules for her own gain.

It didn't need to be this way. While Clinton sought to copy Barack Obama, his example in fact suggested a more nuanced approach. Even though many on the left have come to consider him an avatar of the neoliberal establishment, Obama ran two of the most populist campaigns in recent American history. In 2008, he presented himself as a figure untainted by the prevailing political culture; he would arrive in Washington carried by a transformational gust, a prefiguring of Trump's promise to "drain the swamp." In 2012, his campaign mercilessly pummeled Mitt Romney as the cold-hearted representative of plutocracy.

And where Clinton found herself bogged down in the quagmire of a culture war, Obama had stepped around such debates. Confident that his campaign would generate overwhelming African American turnout, he celebrated a vision of "one America" that seemed carefully designed to assuage racist anxieties that he would favor one group at another's expense—and more generally to reassure whites, particularly those past middle age and with an acute sense of cultural and economic anomie, that America wasn't kicking them to the side. (Indeed, his most effective ads against Romney sympathetically portrayed precisely those voters and blamed the Republican nominee for their suffering.) He spoke of his desire to broker a compromise on immigration—an issue he framed as a matter of good governance. His campaign explicitly targeted rural counties. Obama didn't believe he could win them, and by and large he didn't, but by redirecting populist anger and allaying cultural anxieties, he reduced his deficit among white noncollege voters to a tolerable margin. (When Bill Clinton asked his wife's campaign to dispatch him to such small towns in 2016, campaign officials refused, because it would take him away from cities with larger vote hauls.) This tactic enabled Obama to win the upper Midwest so decisively that many analysts began to describe the region as part of a "blue wall."

That blue wall, of course, turned out to be less sound than Democrats allowed themselves to understand. In an election so close, any number of explanations for defeat are plausible. Hillary Clinton didn't battle just a demagogue, but also the adroit meddling of Vladimir Putin, the pious intervention of

James Comey, and widespread misogyny. Still, the nagging question remains: If the Democrats couldn't muster a coalition of the cosmopolitan to take out Donald Trump, can they ever count on that coalition? Clinton's defeat reflects badly on her candidacy, but also exposes the limits of the Democratic Party, which has sustained failures at nearly every tier of government over the past eight years.

Demography's long arc may yet favor the Democrats, but in the meantime the U.S. electoral system penalizes a party with support concentrated within and around metropolises. White voters without college educations remain a vast voting bloc—especially important to Democrats in Senate races and in contests to control state governments. As the Democrats seek to recover, they need a deeper understanding of the forces that have driven these voters beyond the party's reach.

IVER THE DECADES, the Democratic Party's quest to understand the white working class kept doubling back to the suburbs of Detroit, to a county called Macomb. For a time, Macomb was a cliché in political journalism, examined relentlessly as a symbol of the disaffected Reagan Democrats. But if the county was a trope, it became so thanks to the work of Stanley Greenberg.

After Ronald Reagan's defeat of Walter Mondale in 1984, a drubbing for the ages, Democratic Party elders summoned Greenberg, a Yale political scientist turned freelance pollster. Once upon a time, Macomb was a testament to the force of the New Deal, a vision of middle-class life made possible by the fruits of American industry. The county rewarded Democrats for this prosperity in overwhelming numbers. John F. Kennedy carried it with 63 percent of the vote. But over the years, Macomb grew distant from the party, and then furious with it. The state's party organization asked Greenberg to figure out the roots of voters' estrangement.

Greenberg is diminutive and prone to mumbling. He wasn't an obvious choice to send out to connect with factory workers. But in the small focus groups he convened in the backs of restaurants and in hotel conference rooms, his style yielded brutal candor.

Many political analysts who puzzled over Democratic losses described how the backlash against the civil-rights era had propelled white voters away from liberalism, but none gave racism quite the same centrality as Greenberg did. He found "a profound distaste for black Americans, a sentiment that pervaded almost everything" that Macomb residents thought about government and politics. Denizens of Macomb—the county was 97 percent white—did little to disguise their animosity. African Americans, they complained, had benefited at their expense. Their tax dollars were funding a welfare state that plowed money into black communities, while politicians showed no concern

for their own plight. (That plight was real: The auto industry, which provided the undergirding for middle-class life in Michigan, had collapsed in the face of foreign competition.)

Greenberg's study of Macomb became a canonical text for Democrats attempting to recover from a decade of pummeling. Bill Clinton hired him in 1992, and in his presidential campaign he spoke directly to the racial anxieties revealed in the focus groups. Clinton distanced himself from the welfare state, which he damned as bloated and inefficient. He promised to pour money into the middle class itself, through tax cuts and spending on education and health care. "Let's forget about race and be one nation again," he told an audience in Macomb. "I'll help you build the middle class back."

The strategy that Bill Clinton pursued worked, eroding the Republican advantage in the county. Then Barack Obama won Macomb in 2008, the first of his two victories there. Greenberg declared that Macomb had become "normal and uninteresting." In a *New York Times* op-ed, he vowed to walk away from his great subject: "Good riddance, my Macomb barometer."

That was a wishful farewell. Not only did Trump reclaim Macomb for the Republicans—trouncing Clinton by 12 percentage points there—but he turned the Democratic establishment back to Greenberg's central question about working-class whites: Did racism put many of them beyond reach? When Greenberg traveled to Michigan in February, to conduct his first focus groups in Macomb in nearly a decade, he was genuinely unsure of what he might find. Trump's naked appeals to racism were far more intense than anything he had ever witnessed. The scenes from Trump's rallies created a plausible impression that the president had activated long-suppressed feelings of hatred. To probe their disaffection, Greenberg pulled together voters who, for the most part, had defected from Obama to Trump, who had gone from voting for the first African American president to siding with his racist successor. I joined him as an observer.

Greenberg doesn't give his subjects a clear sense of why they have been gathered or what they have in common. When they figure out that they all belong to the same politically incorrect tribe, the shock of familiarity and solidarity, like a shot of whiskey, frees the conversation of inhibition, especially since many feel the stigma of supporting Trump.

Over the years, Greenberg had heard the worst from Macomb. Back in the '80s, he knew precisely the buzzwords that could ignite a torrent of racism. The mere mention of Detroit would send people into paroxysms of rage. Decades later, Detroit didn't provoke any extreme expressions of animus, only comments marveling that the city finally picked up the garbage and cleaned the streets of snow. When the moderator mentioned Flint, the largely African American city whose drinking water had been steeped in lead, the focus groups professed sympathy for the community. The lack of angry responses seemed to shock Greenberg. "There's so much less about race," he leaned over to tell me.

CLINTON NEVER MET HER CRUCIAL CHALLENGE: TO BOTH CELEBRATE MULTICULTURALISM AND ALSO CUSHION THE BACKLASH AGAINST THE CELEBRATION.

Prejudice, however, remained very real. The old complaints about African Americans had affixed themselves to immigrants. Dearborn, which has a thriving Muslim immigrant community, is a short drive away. Just as Macomb's whites had once accused African Americans of prospering at their expense, members of Greenberg's focus groups spoke openly about being displaced by immigrants. "We need to take care of home first," one participant said, as if the immigrant neighbors weren't also living at home. When asked to explain their greatest hopes for Trump, many cited his promise to build a border wall.

There was a strong element of self-loathing in the hostile view of immigrants. A 60-year-old woman described her work as a cashier at Kroger. What she hated, she said, was waiting on immigrants who didn't bother to smile. "They act like they can't do that, even." Another woman described going to sign up for Medicaid: "I'm looking around at all these people that can't even say hello to me in English." Greenberg's subjects had expected to occupy a higher rung in society. That they exist on par with newcomers to the country feels like a betrayal of what they thought to be the natural order.

It's one thing to know that nativism exists; it's another to hear it espoused so casually in the presence of strangers. Many of the voters Greenberg had gathered seemed beyond the grasp of any plausible Democratic appeal, their hatred of immigrants racialized, paranoid, and unshakable. But not everyone harbored those convictions. To test their view of multiculturalism, Greenberg played a Coca-Cola ad that had aired a few weeks earlier, during the Super Bowl. The ad, a rendition of "America the Beautiful" sung in a babel of languages, represented the corporate bet on the Obama coalition. Plenty of people objected to it. "I just don't know why they can't all sing it in English, since it's America," one woman blurted out. But the ad also seemed to have performed its intended trick, spurring a patriotic appreciation for the ethnic patchwork of the country. The anger directed at the ad was counteracted by defenses of it. "That's the way America should be," one man explained. "Multicultural's a good thing—it really is."

The focus groups were designed to probe for weakness in Trumpism, to test lines of attack that might neutralize his appeal. Once Greenberg has earned a room's trust, he introduces new ideas to it. His moderator asked the subjects whether it worried them that Trump had stocked his administration with Wall Street chieftains. That piece of news, it seemed, hadn't traveled widely in Macomb, and it consistently rattled the groups. "It's going to be a lot of the same old garbage," one man groused. Concerns about Trump's temperament did nothing to dislodge the participants' support—the connection these voters felt with Trump was personal and deep—but the fact that he might align with traditional Republicans annoyed them to no end. (The groups reacted angrily when shown photos of Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell. People described them as "shifty" and "for the upper class.") What many Macomb voters value about Trump is that he represents an unaligned force in American politics. That's the very quality that in earlier election cycles led them to Obama.

The spectacle of Democratic elites flagellating themselves for their growing distance from these voters has the whiff of the comic—the office-tower anthropologists seeking to understand Appalachia from their Kindles. But there's another way

of putting the problem. If the stagnation of the middle class and the self-reinforcing advantages of the rich are among the largest issues of our time, the Democrats have done a bad job of attuning themselves to them. The party that has prided itself on representing regular people has struggled to make a dent in the problem—and at times has given the impression of indifference to it. A healthy republic can't afford for a seething populace to fall deeper into its hostilities. A healthy party, arguably, ought never to write off a whole category of voters. Greenberg's focus groups begin to hint at a way that Democrats can stay true to their principles and still reverse some of their losses with the white working class—but will their leaders pursue that path?

T'S HARD TO FORECAST

a front-runner for the 2020 presidential nomination so many years in advance. Anita Dunn, the communications czar in the early days of the Obama White House, told me in March that a group of party insiders had recently met socially and compiled a list of potential contenders, both those actively exploring a run and those who were likely mulling the idea. It had 28 plausible names on it—and that didn't include oddballs with a delusional sense of their own potential. Donald Trump profited from such a densely populated Republican field in 2016, which raises the possibility of an outsider similarly prevailing in a many-sided melee among Democrats.

The current politics of the Democratic Party make it less likely than usual that the nominee will be a centrist in the traditional mold. During the Democrats' long losing streaks in the late 20th century, the party ritualistically engaged in postmortems that propelled it toward the center. That was the natural cycle of politics: Getting repeatedly clubbed by conservatives suggested trekking in a more conservative direction. But as a candidate, Trump placed little priority on traditional conservative positions, and often flouted them. His victory suggests a very different set of lessons, lessons in tune with the mood of the Democratic Party's base.

Since 2008, energies have been building on the left—fueled by growing inequality, mass incarceration, and the inevitable frustration with a party that held the White House for eight years but couldn't deliver everything activists wanted. Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter arose. A self-proclaimed democratic socialist captured 43 percent of the primary vote. Then Trump was elected, an event that was received by the party as a catastrophe and that has extended the activist spirit to a far broader audience.

Anger and activism are an opportunity for Democrats to grow their nucleus of supporters motivated to vote in midterm elections. The main question is whether those energies will be channeled in a way that reinforces the long-building demographic divide in American politics or in a way that—at least to some extent—blurs it. Or to put it another way: whether the Democrats accept the continued outflow of the white working class into the arms of the GOP as a fait accompli, or whether they try to stanch it.

There are in fact two different lefts in bloom today, with differing understandings of American politics. One strain practices what its detractors call identity politics—it exists to combat the bias and discrimination that it believes is built into the system. What it seeks isn't just the protection of minorities'

and women's rights, but the validation of minorities and women in the eyes of the national culture, which it believes has marginalized them.

The cultural left was on the rise for much of the Obama era (and arguably, with the notable exception of Bill Clinton's presidency, for much longer). It squares, for the most part, with the worldview of socially liberal whites, and is given wind by the idea that demography is destiny. It has a theory of the electorate that suits its interests: It wants the party to focus its attentions on Texas and Arizona—states that have growing percentages of Latinos and large pockets of suburban professionals. (These states are also said to represent an opportunity because the party has failed to maximize nonwhite turnout there.) It celebrates the openness and interdependence embodied in both globalization and multiculturalism.

While this cultural left has sprung into vogue, the economic left has also been reenergized. It has finally recovered from a long abeyance, a wilderness period brought on by the decay of organized labor and the libertarian turn of the post-Cold War years. As the financial crash of 2008 worked its way through the Democratic Party's intellectual system, the economic left migrated from the fringe protests of Occupy Wall Street to just outside the mainstream. While the cultural left champions a

coalition of the ascendant, the economic left imagines a coalition of the despondent. It seeks to roll back the dominance of finance, to bust monopolies, to curb the predations of the market. It wants to ply back the white working-class voters—clustered in the upper Midwest—whom Greenberg deemed persuadable.

Neither strain of activism has much disagreement with the broad goals of the other. On paper, they can peacefully coexist within the same platform. But political parties can have only one main theory of the electorate at any given time—and the prevailing theory tends to prioritize one ideology. The Republican Party's pursuit of the South shaped its view of race; the Democratic Party's wooing of professionals led it to embrace globalization.

The tensions between the cultural left and the economic left were evident in the last Democratic primary, and they have persisted. In a November talk after the election, Bernie Sanders railed against identity politics with an abandon that would have been foolish on the campaign trail. "It is not good enough for somebody to say, 'I'm a woman, vote for me,'" he complained. In a way, this squabbling is a prelude to the next presidential primary, a contest that will be packed with candidates, each attempting to show him- or herself as the truest champion of minorities or women or the working and middle classes. Seeking victory, candidates will accuse their competitors of not authentically believing in the cause they themselves elevate most highly.

IN MARCH, I visited Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, one of the many denizens of Capitol Hill widely thought to be considering a presidential run in 2020. When I stopped by his office, late in the evening, he was sporting an Apple Watch and preparing to speak at the SXSW tech conference in Austin, Texas. The semiotics of Cory Booker are highly intentional. He is the embodiment of the Obama coalition—his moderate economic views comfort professionals while his pursuit of racial justice pleases the cultural left. On the wall of his office hangs a map of Newark's Central Ward, a high-mileage conversation piece that allows him to note that he still lives in the same poor, mostly black neighborhood where he launched his career: "I go back and live in the community with median income for individuals of \$14,000 a year." At the same time, he has defended Wall Street and Big Pharma—positions that endear him to elites.

Just before making my way to Booker, I had met with Bernie Sanders. Interviewing Sanders requires some fortification—and my exchange ended when he peremptorily dismissed me from his office for asking a question about his political relationship with Elizabeth Warren. (Sanders had expected Warren to endorse him in the 2016 primary, and her failure to do so sent him into a funk.) I recounted the episode to Booker, along with Sanders's thoughts about the future of the Democratic Party, which were



Cory Booker is the embodiment of the Obama coalition today. His moderate economic views comfort elites.



Elizabeth Warren has outlined a new kind of liberal populism, focused on the ways the economic system is rigged in favor of the rich and powerful.

characteristically splenetic: “Whatever the Democratic Party has been doing for the last several decades has been a dismal failure,” he had grumbled. But Booker waved this argument away. “I’ve heard the dire assessments before,” he told me.

Booker said that he has no interest in high-minded discussions about the future of the party and pointed to the map on the wall. “I want my voters to know that I am authentically fighting for them.” He wanted me to know that his political program consisted of an unbending commitment to his community—and that he had little patience with attempts to change the party’s image in order to appease critics of the cultural left. “I don’t see any evidence of a problem with so-called identity politics,” he told me. The term itself bothered him, he said: Too many people were throwing it around without bothering to define what they meant by it.

The underlying moral logic of Booker’s case is unassailable. Identity politics might make for a fair description of the environment on some college campuses. But the issues that Booker described as his driving passion—the depredations of private prisons, hefty sentences for nonviolent drug offenders—are hardly akin to protesting that a cafeteria’s attempt at bánh mì is cultural appropriation. Recent (and compelling) scholarship blames liberals for their complicity in the scourge of mass incarceration, what Booker calls the “new Jim Crow,” a term he borrows from the title of Michelle Alexander’s 2010 book. This critique of the party, which lands on Bill Clinton and the tough-on-crime era over which he presided, is harsh and fair. Over the past few years, Clinton himself has conceded the excesses of his administration’s agenda. Hillary Clinton was pushed to apologize for a speech she gave in 1996 fomenting fear of “superpredators.” And in fact, her campaign went further than

Barack Obama’s had in blaming structural racism and implicit bias for the struggles of many African Americans.

This belated recognition makes the present moment fraught. After years of neglect, African Americans have finally received a spoonful of the attention that should go to the party’s most loyal voting bloc. The prospect of the party’s attention turning back to the same white working class that rejects multicultural America will not be met eagerly by many on the left—particularly given the shadow cast by the politics and policies of Bill Clinton’s presidency.

As Booker pressed his case, it was not hard to imagine the campaign he might run. Racial and criminal-justice issues would provide him a platform, and his point of differentiation would be his willingness to trumpet it to the whitest audiences—the starker evidence of the authenticity he claims. He joked about being asked to stump for senators in red states (“Are you bringing me out because of the large black vote?”). More earnestly, he said that the skin color of his audience wouldn’t cause him to make any adjustment: “The message to Montana voters is going to be no different” from that in Newark or elsewhere. Reduced to its essence, his strategy

would seem a straight continuation of Hillary Clinton’s.

BOOKER’S OPPOSITE NUMBER, in some ways, is Elizabeth Warren, the great hope of the populist left. Before there was a resistance to Trump, Warren had prefigured its combative style. In moments designed to spread virally across Facebook, she would ask sharp, angry questions of bankers and regulators. (“Did you have your eyes stitched closed?” she said last year to a former Federal Reserve official who was testifying that nothing in the data had suggested a mortgage meltdown in the run-up to the 2008 crash.) Her latest book is called *This Fight Is Our Fight*. The book before that: *A Fighting Chance*.

I first spoke with Warren just after she lucked into another such viral moment. The night before, Mitch McConnell had stopped her from speaking out against Jeff Sessions’s nomination for attorney general. In words destined for college-feminist T-shirts, he accused Warren of transgressing a rule intended to preserve the Senate’s bonhomie: “She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” As I walked with Warren across the Capitol, she seemed almost punch-drunk after a night of fawning press coverage and little sleep. She stepped with the bounce of a lottery winner. A few weeks earlier, she had found herself reamed by anti-Trump forces for voting in committee to confirm Ben Carson to the Cabinet, a vote that was unexpectedly condemned as a concession to tyranny. McConnell had restored her bona fides.

Warren’s social-media moments create the impression that she is radical. But in fact, she didn’t spend her youth protesting, and she never joined a movement. Voter-registration records from the early ’90s list her as a Republican. “I sound like I

come from the left” to people on the left, she told me. “I don’t sound that way to a lot of folks on the right, or a lot of people who are just fundamentally apolitical.”

Nor is Warren’s driving obsession wealth redistribution. That’s important politically, because many Americans simply don’t begrudge wealth, and “inequality” as a clarion call hasn’t stuck. (Indeed, Democrats have begun to shift away from inequality as a label for what ails America’s economy and culture. Some fear that white voters who are predisposed to racial resentments hear the word as code for a desire to transfer wealth from whites to blacks.)

Rather, Warren is most focused on the concept of fairness. A course she taught early in her career as a law professor, on contracts, got her thinking about the subject. (Fairness, after all, is a contract’s fundamental purpose.) A raw, moralistic conception of fairness—that people shouldn’t get screwed—would become the basis for her crusading. Although she shares Bernie Sanders’s contempt for Wall Street, she doesn’t share his democratic socialism. “I love markets—I believe in markets!” she told me. What drives her to rage is when bankers conspire with government regulators to subvert markets and rig the game. Over the years, she has claimed that it was a romantic view of capitalism that drew her to the Republican Party—and then the party’s infidelity to market principles drove her from it.

Trump managed to exploit populist anger in part because he could go places ideologically that no Democrat would ever travel. As a matter of politics and policy, Democrats will never be the party of economic nationalism. Its voters are, on balance, more globalist than the Republican base. They tend to live in places that have prospered from trade and technology. They typically support immigration. But Warren has begun to outline the possibilities of a new center-left populism—one that gets beyond wealth redistribution alone.

At the core of Warren’s populism is a phobia of concentrated economic power, an anger over how big banks and big businesses exploit Washington to further their own interests at the expense of ordinary people. This fear of gigantism is a storied American tradition, descended from Thomas Jefferson, even if it hasn’t recently gotten much airtime within the Democratic Party. It justifies itself in the language of individualism—rights, liberty, freedom—not communal obligation.

There’s a growing consensus among center-left economists that the dominance of entire industries by a few enormous companies is one of the defining economic problems of the era. The issue has gravitated toward the mainstream of Democratic Party thinking partly due to the work of Barack Obama’s in-house economist, Jason Furman, a protégé of former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers. Furman revolted against the behavior of business leaders who came to call at the White House. Many of them didn’t seem especially committed to capitalism. With their privileged access, they groveled for favors that would further their

dominance. “They were like the Chinese,” he told me recently. “They craved certainty. They wanted everything planned.”

Everyone can plainly see the lack of competition in many sectors—the way that there are five big banks, four big airlines, one dominant social-media company, one maker of EpiPens. What’s more, a small set of institutional investors—BlackRock, Fidelity, Vanguard—holds stock in a vast percentage of public companies, so even sectors that look somewhat competitive are less so than they appear. CVS and Walgreens, for instance, have a strikingly similar set of major shareholders. The same is true for Apple and Microsoft.

Furman argues that such business concentration is a leading cause of inequality and wage stagnation. Warren has come to believe in this same idea. As a senator, she can see how the ills of finance—the industry’s concentration, its abuse of political power—have been replicated across the American economy. Last June in Washington, she gave an important speech, naming a long new list of enemies—oligopolistic companies like Comcast and Google and Walmart, which she blamed for sapping the life from the American economy. “When Big Business can shut out competition, entrepreneurs and small businesses are denied their shot at building something new and exciting.” In making a Jeffersonian argument, she has begun to deploy Jeffersonian rhetorical trappings. “As a people, we understood that concentrated power anywhere was a threat to liberty everywhere,” she argued. “Competition in America is essential to liberty in America.”

Warren has not committed to running for president, either publicly or, according to close associates of hers, privately. But if she does run, she will likely seek to channel working-class anger toward behemoth firms, their executives, and the government officials who coddle them. It’s not a terribly complicated case to build, since the headlines are so packed with the rent-seeking exploits of those firms: the continued predations of banks on their own customers; airline overbooking; life-saving allergy injections that cost hundreds of dollars; cable companies exacting ever-higher fees; the exposure of low-level workers to such erratic hours that it becomes impossible to establish a daily routine; a broad indifference to consumers.

The approach exudes a Trump-like hostility to Washington elites, but not necessarily to government. And nearly the entire Democratic agenda can be justified through its prism: Obamacare preserves freedom and loosens corporations’ grip on their employees, by allowing workers to switch jobs without fear of losing health insurance. Criminal-justice reform is an effort to secure liberty and equality from an abusive apparatus of the state.

A turn toward populism will never be enough to win back a state like West Virginia, which is now deep-red. And there are legitimate questions about whether a strident former Harvard professor, no matter her Oklahoma roots, can effectively purvey that message to a sufficiently

**NEWS THAT
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broad audience. But Warren's brand of populism could help cool white-working-class hostility toward the Democrats and persuade the likes of Greenberg's focus-group members to switch allegiance again. Empathy with economic disappointment, and even anger over the status quo, might reduce the sense that Democrats are perpetrators of the status quo. And liberal populism would take the party beyond ineffectual arguments about Trump's temperament. A populist critique of Trump would point to his fraudulence as an enemy of the system, a fraudulence that perfectly illustrates everything wrong with plutocracy.

WHETHER OR NOT Warren runs for president, evidence for the resurgence of liberal populism can now be seen in numerous parts of the Democratic establishment—not least in the barometrically sensitive form of Chuck Schumer, whose new job as the Senate's minority leader demands that he understand and distill the mood of his caucus. This March, I met him in his ornate lair just off the floor of the Senate. When I entered his office, Schumer was compressed into the corner of an antique sofa, his tie loosened and his feet resting on a coffee table.

The populists have never considered Schumer one of their own. But as he riffed about the trajectory of the party, he mouthed their talking points. Insufficient fidelity to populist ideas, he argued, had cost Democrats the election: "We didn't have a strong, bold—populist, if you will—economic message." He blasted financial elites, monopolies, and Chinese mercantilism. These weren't stray observations. He has included Warren and Sanders on his Senate leadership team, and traveled with Sanders to rally support for Obamacare in Macomb County.

The party's movement toward populism, ironically, could also be seen well before Election Day—in the guts of the Clinton campaign. Clinton leaned heavily on Elizabeth Warren's allies to craft her regulatory apparatus. Heather Boushey, who led economic-policy planning for Clinton's transition team, told me, "This was set up to be the most progressive administration in recent American history." There's a certain tragedy to that description. Clinton had developed what was in many ways a populist agenda, but she apparently could never get past her own self-consciousness about Wall Street speeches and fund-raising in the Hamptons to make these issues her own.

To win again, the Democrats don't need to adopt an alien agenda or back away from policies aimed at racial justice. But their leaders would be well advised to change their rhetorical priorities and more directly address the country's bastions of gloom. The party has been crushed—not just in the recent presidential election, but in countless down-ballot elections—by its failure to develop a message that can resonate with people beyond the core members of the Obama coalition, and by its unwillingness to blare its hostility to crony capitalism. Polling by the group Priorities USA Action shows that a stunning percentage of the voters who switched their allegiance from Obama to Trump believe that Democratic economic policies favor the rich—42 percent, nearly twice the number who consider that to be true of Trump's agenda.

The makings of a Democratic majority are real. Demographic advantages will continue to accrue to the left. The party needs only to add to its coalition on the margins and in the right patches on the map. Doing that does not require the abandonment of any moral principles; persuasion is a different

I AM NOT ITALIAN

I am not Italian, technically speaking,
yet here I am leaning on a zinc bar in Florence
on a sunny weekday morning,
my foot up on the smooth iron railing
just like the other men, who,
it must be said, are officially and fully Italian.

It's 8:40 and they are off to work,
some in offices, others sweeping the streets,
while I am off to a museum or a church
to see paintings, maybe light a candle in an
alcove.
Yet here we all are in our suits and work shirts
joined in the brotherhood of espresso,

or how is it said? *La fratellanza dell'espresso*,
draining our little white cups
with a quick flourish of the wrist,
each of us tasting the same sweetness of life,
if you take a little sugar, and the bitterness
of its brevity, whether you choose to take sugar or
not.

—Billy Collins

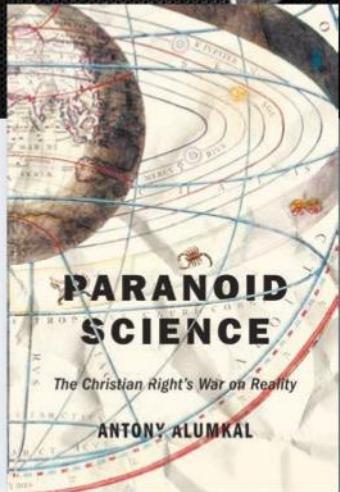
Billy Collins's most recent collection is *The Rain in Portugal* (2016).

category of political activity from pandering. (On page 60 in this issue, Peter Beinart describes how Democrats might alter their language and policies regarding immigration to broaden appeal without sacrificing their principles.) A decent liberalism, not to mention a savvy party, shouldn't struggle to accord dignity and respect to citizens, even if it believes some of them hold abhorrent views.

Victories in the culture wars of the past decade seemed to come so easily to liberals that they created a measure of complacency, as if those wars had been won with little cost. In actuality, the losers seethed. If the Democrats intend to win elections in 2018, 2020, and beyond, they require a hard-headed realism about the country that they have recently lacked—about the perils of income stagnation, the difficulties of moving the country to a multicultural future, the prevalence of unreason and ire. For a Democratic majority to ultimately emerge, the party needs to come to terms with the fact that it hasn't yet arrived. **A**

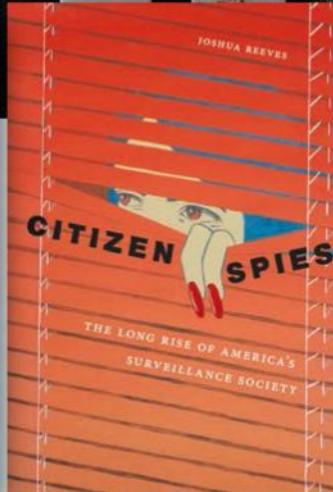
Franklin Foer is a national correspondent for The Atlantic and the author of the forthcoming *World Without Mind*.

PAY ATTENTION.



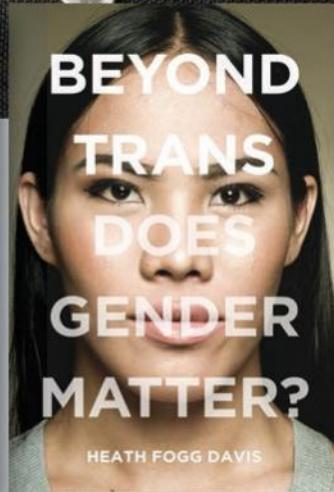
"His conclusions indicate that when such a powerful paranoia cannot be deescalated, it must be contained. Education and persuasion are the tools for change, and Alumkal's book succeeds in both respects."

—*Publishers Weekly*



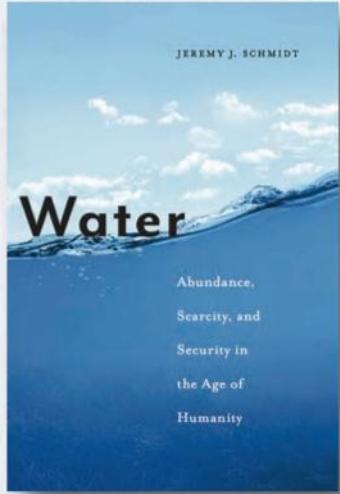
"Carefully examines historical accounts and court cases up to present day, and the withering effects of police crowdsourcing on America's dream of security, comfort, and liberty."

—*Starred Library Journal*



"Challenges readers to consider why binary sex identity categories are used so pervasively, and whether such routine categorization is needed. The author, a transgender man of color, approaches this as both an expert scholar and an individual whose own identity has been subject to hostile scrutiny."

—*Starred Publishers Weekly*



"Brilliant, refreshing and bold...[this book] asks two fundamental questions in which we should all be interested: where have the ideas of water as a 'resource' to be 'managed' for the good of society or the nation come from?

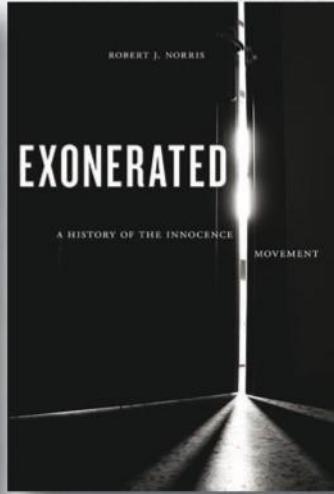
And how have they driven world-wide economic development that has not infrequently done more harm than good?"

—Steve C. Caton, Harvard University



"A heady and rewarding explanation of our lives in the data age. [Cheney-Lippold's] discussion of privacy will fascinate many. Essential reading for anyone who cares about the internet's extraordinary impact on each of us and on our society."

—*Starred Kirkus Reviews*



"An informative overview of the development of the innocence movement. A useful contribution to an important national conversation about crime and punishment."

—*Kirkus Reviews*



THE DEMOCRATS' IMMIGRATION MISTAKE

IN THE PAST DECADE, LIBERALS HAVE EMPHASIZED DIVERSITY OVER UNITY, AND AVOIDED INCONVENIENT TRUTHS ABOUT IMMIGRATION. IT'S TIME TO ADDRESS AMERICANS' YEARNING FOR SOCIAL COHESION.

THE MYTH, WHICH LIBERALS like myself find tempting, is that only the right has changed. In June 2015, we tell ourselves, Donald Trump rode down his golden escalator and pretty soon nativism, long a feature of conservative politics, had engulfed it. But that's not the full story. If the right has grown more nationalistic, the left has grown less so. A decade ago, liberals publicly questioned immigration in ways that would shock many progressives today.

In 2005, a left-leaning blogger wrote, "Illegal immigration wreaks havoc economically, socially, and culturally; makes a mockery of the rule of law; and is disgraceful just on basic fairness grounds alone." In 2006, a liberal columnist wrote that "immigration reduces the wages of domestic workers who compete with immigrants" and that "the fiscal burden of low-wage immigrants is also pretty clear." His conclusion: "We'll need to reduce the inflow of low-skill immigrants." That same year, a Democratic senator wrote, "When I see Mexican flags waved at proimmigration demonstrations, I sometimes feel a flush of patriotic resentment. When I'm forced to use a translator to communicate with the guy fixing my car, I feel a certain frustration."

By **PETER BEINART**
Illustrations by **LINCOLN AGNEW**



The blogger was Glenn Greenwald. The columnist was Paul Krugman. The senator was Barack Obama.

Prominent liberals didn't oppose immigration a decade ago. Most acknowledged its benefits to America's economy and culture. They supported a path to citizenship for the undocumented. Still, they routinely asserted that low-skilled immigrants depressed the wages of low-skilled American workers and strained America's welfare state. And they were far more likely than liberals today are to acknowledge that, as Krugman put it, "immigration is an intensely painful topic ... because it places basic principles in conflict."

Today, little of that ambivalence remains. In 2008, the Democratic platform called undocumented immigrants "our neighbors." But it also warned, "We cannot continue to allow people to enter the United States undetected, undocumented, and unchecked," adding that "those who enter our country's borders illegally, and those who employ them, disrespect the rule of the law." By 2016, such language was gone. The party's platform described America's immigration system as a problem, but not illegal immigration itself. And it focused almost entirely on the forms of immigration enforcement that

Democrats opposed. In its immigration section, the 2008 platform referred three times to people entering the country "illegally." The immigration section of the 2016 platform didn't use the word *illegal*, or any variation of it, at all.

"A decade or two ago," says Jason Furman, a former chairman of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, "Democrats were divided on immigration. Now everyone agrees and is passionate and thinks very little about any potential downsides." How did this come to be?

THERE ARE SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS for liberals' shift. The first is that they have changed because the reality on the ground has changed, particularly as regards illegal immigration. In the two decades preceding 2008, the United States experienced sharp growth in its undocumented population. Since then, the numbers have leveled off.

But this alone doesn't explain the transformation. The number of undocumented people in the United States hasn't gone down significantly, after all; it's stayed roughly the same. So the economic concerns that Krugman raised a decade ago remain relevant today.



A larger explanation is political. Between 2008 and 2016, Democrats became more and more confident that the country's growing Latino population gave the party an electoral edge. To win the presidency, Democrats convinced themselves, they didn't need to reassure white people skeptical of immigration so long as they turned out their Latino base. "The fastest-growing sector of the American electorate stampeded toward the Democrats this November," *Salon* declared after Obama's 2008 win. "If that pattern continues, the GOP is doomed to 40 years of wandering in a desert."

As the Democrats grew more reliant on Latino votes, they were more influenced by pro-immigrant activism. While Obama was running for reelection, immigrants'-rights advocates launched protests against the administration's deportation practices; these protests culminated, in June 2012, in a sit-in at an Obama campaign office in Denver. Ten days later, the administration announced that it would defer the deportation of undocumented immigrants who had arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16 and met various other criteria. Obama, *The New York Times* noted, "was facing growing pressure from Latino leaders and Democrats who warned that because of his harsh immigration enforcement, his support was lagging among Latinos who could be crucial voters in his race for re-election."

Alongside pressure from pro-immigrant activists came pressure from corporate America, especially the Democrat-aligned tech industry, which uses the H-1B visa program to import workers. In 2010, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, along with the CEOs of companies including Hewlett-Packard, Boeing, Disney, and News Corporation, formed New American Economy to advocate for business-friendly immigration policies. Three years later, Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates helped found FWD.us to promote a similar agenda.

This combination of Latino and corporate activism made it perilous for Democrats to discuss immigration's costs, as Bernie Sanders learned the hard way. In July 2015, two months after officially announcing his candidacy for president, Sanders was interviewed by Ezra Klein, the editor in chief of *Vox*. Klein asked whether, in order to fight global poverty, the U.S. should consider "sharply raising the level of immigration we permit, even up to a level of open borders."

Sanders reacted with horror. "That's a Koch brothers proposal," he scoffed. He went on to insist that "right-wing people in this country would love ... an open-border policy. Bring in all kinds of people, work for \$2 or \$3 an hour, that would be great for them. I don't believe in that. I think we have to raise wages in this country."

Sanders came under immediate attack. *Vox*'s Dylan Matthews declared that his "fear of immigrant labor is ugly—and wrongheaded." The president of FWD.us accused Sanders of "the sort of backward-looking thinking that progressives have rightly moved away from in the past years." *ThinkProgress* published a blog post titled "Why Immigration Is the Hole in Bernie Sanders'

Progressive Agenda." The senator, it argued, was supporting "the idea that immigrants coming to the U.S. are taking jobs and hurting the economy, a theory that has been proven incorrect."

Sanders stopped emphasizing immigration's costs. By January 2016, FWD.us's policy director noted with satisfaction that he had "evolved on this issue."

But has the claim that "immigrants coming to the U.S. are taking jobs" actually been proved "incorrect"? A decade ago, liberals weren't so sure. In 2006, Krugman wrote that America was experiencing "large increases in the number of low-skill workers relative to other inputs into production, so it's inevitable that this means a fall in wages."

It's hard to imagine a prominent liberal columnist writing that sentence today. To the contrary, progressive commentators now routinely claim that there's a near-consensus among economists on immigration's benefits.

There isn't. According to a comprehensive new report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "Groups comparable to ... immigrants in terms of their skill may experience a wage reduction as a result of immigration-induced increases in labor supply." But academics sometimes de-emphasize this wage reduction because, like liberal journalists and politicians, they face pressures to support immigration.

Many of the immigration scholars regularly cited in the press have worked for, or received funding from, pro-immigration businesses and associations. Consider, for instance, Giovanni Peri, an economist at UC Davis whose name pops up a lot in liberal commentary on the virtues of immigration. A 2015 *New York Times Magazine* essay titled "Debunking the Myth of the Job-Stealing Immigrant" declared that Peri, whom it called the "leading scholar" on how nations respond to immigration, had "shown that immigrants tend to complement—rather than compete against—the existing work force." Peri is indeed a respected scholar. But Microsoft has funded some of his research into high-skilled immigration. And New American Economy paid to help him turn his research into a 2014 policy paper decrying limitations on the H-1B visa program. Such grants are more likely the result of his scholarship than their cause. Still, the prevalence of corporate funding can subtly influence

which questions economists ask, and which ones they don't. (Peri says grants like those from Microsoft and New American Economy are neither large nor crucial to his work, and that "they don't determine ... the direction of my academic research.")

Academics face cultural pressures too. In his book *Exodus*, Paul Collier, an economist at the University of Oxford, claims that in their "desperate [desire] not to give succor" to nativist bigots, "social scientists have strained every muscle to show that migration is good for everyone." George Borjas of Harvard argues that since he began studying immigration in the 1980s, his fellow economists have grown far less tolerant of research that emphasizes its costs. There is, he told me, "a lot of

PROGRESSIVE COMMENTATORS ROUTINELY CLAIM THAT THERE'S A NEAR-CONSENSUS AMONG ECONOMISTS ON IMMIGRATION'S BENEFITS. THERE ISN'T.

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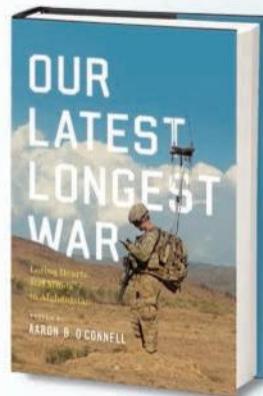
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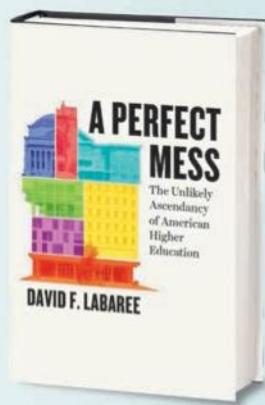
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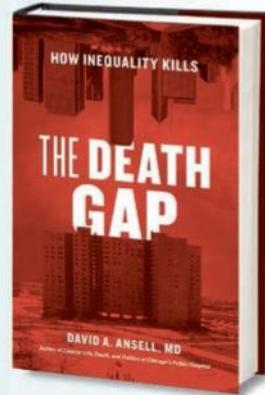
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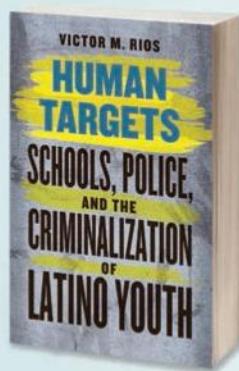
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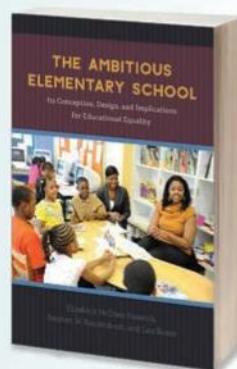
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self-censorship among young social scientists.” Because Borjas is an immigration skeptic, some might discount his perspective. But when I asked Donald Davis, a Columbia University economist who takes a more favorable view of immigration’s economic impact, about Borjas’s claim, he made a similar point. “George and I come out on different sides of policy on immigration,” Davis said, “but I agree that there are aspects of discussion in academia that don’t get sort of full view if you come to the wrong conclusion.”

NONE OF THIS means that liberals should oppose immigration. Entry to the United States is, for starters, a boon to immigrants and to the family members back home to whom they send money. It should be valued on these moral grounds alone. But immigration benefits the economy, too. Because immigrants are more likely than native-born Americans to be of working age, they improve the ratio of workers to retirees, which helps keep programs like Social Security and Medicare solvent. Immigration has also been found to boost productivity, and the National Academies report finds that “natives’ incomes rise in aggregate as a result of immigration.”

The problem is that, although economists differ about the extent of the damage, immigration hurts the Americans with whom immigrants compete. And since more than a quarter of America’s recent immigrants lack even a high-school diploma or its equivalent, immigration particularly hurts the least-educated native workers, the very people who are already struggling the most. America’s immigration system, in other words, pits two of the groups liberals care about most—the native-born poor and the immigrant poor—against each other.

One way of mitigating this problem would be to scrap the current system, which allows immigrants living in the U.S. to bring certain close relatives to the country, in favor of what Donald Trump in February called a “merit based” approach that prioritizes highly skilled and educated workers. The problem with this idea, from a liberal perspective, is its cruelty. It denies many immigrants who are already here the ability to

reunite with their loved ones. And it flouts the country’s best traditions. Would we remove from the Statue of Liberty the poem welcoming the “poor,” the “wretched,” and the “homeless”?

A better answer is to take some of the windfall that immigration brings to wealthier Americans and give it to those poorer Americans whom immigration harms. Borjas has suggested taxing the high-tech, agricultural, and service-sector companies that profit from cheap immigrant labor and using the money to compensate those Americans who are displaced by it.

Unfortunately, while admitting poor immigrants makes redistributing wealth more necessary, it also makes it harder, at least in the short term. By some estimates, immigrants, who are poorer on average than native-born Americans and have larger families, receive more in government services than they pay in taxes. According to the National Academies report, immigrant-headed families with children are 15 percentage points more likely to rely on food assistance, and 12 points more likely to rely on Medicaid, than other families with children. In the long term, the United States will likely recoup much if not all of the money it spends on educating and caring for the children of immigrants. But in the meantime, these costs strain the very welfare state that liberals want to expand in order to help those native-born Americans with whom immigrants compete.

What’s more, studies by the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam and others suggest that greater diversity makes Americans less charitable and less willing to redistribute wealth. People tend to be less generous when large segments of society don’t look or talk like them. Surprisingly, Putnam’s research suggests that greater diversity doesn’t reduce trust and cooperation just among people of different races or ethnicities—it also reduces trust and cooperation among people of the same race and ethnicity.

Trump appears to sense this. His implicit message during the campaign was that if the government kept out Mexicans and Muslims, white, Christian Americans would not only grow richer and safer, they would also regain the sense of community that they identified with a bygone age. “At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America,” he declared in his inaugural address, “and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.”

Liberals must take seriously Americans’ yearning for social cohesion. To promote both mass immigration and greater economic redistribution, they must convince more native-born white Americans that immigrants will not weaken the bonds of national identity. This means dusting off a concept many on the left currently hate: assimilation.

PROMOTING ASSIMILATION NEED not mean expecting immigrants to abandon their culture. But it does mean breaking down the barriers that segregate them from the native-born. And it means celebrating America’s diversity less, and its unity more.

Writing last year in *American Sociological Review*, Ariela Schachter, a sociology professor at Washington

University in St. Louis, examined the factors that influence how native-born whites view immigrants. Foremost among them is an immigrant's legal status. Given that natives often assume Latinos are undocumented even when they aren't, it follows that illegal immigration indirectly undermines the status of those Latinos who live in the U.S. legally. That's why conservatives rail against government benefits for undocumented immigrants (even though the undocumented are already barred from receiving many of those benefits): They know Americans will be more reluctant to support government programs if they believe those programs to be benefiting people who have entered the country illegally.

Liberal immigration policy must work to ensure that immigrants do not occupy a separate legal caste. This means opposing the guest-worker programs—beloved by many Democrat-friendly tech companies, among other employers—that require immigrants to work in a particular job to remain in the U.S. Some scholars believe such programs drive down wages; they certainly inhibit assimilation. And, as Schachter's research suggests, strengthening the bonds of identity between natives and immigrants is harder when natives and immigrants are not equal under the law.

The next Democratic presidential candidate should say again and again that because Americans are one people, who must abide by one law, his or her goal is to reduce America's undocumented population to zero. For liberals, the easy part of fulfilling that pledge is supporting a path to citizenship for the undocumented who have put down roots in the United States. The hard part, which Hillary Clinton largely ignored in her 2016 presidential run, is backing tough immigration enforcement so that path to citizenship doesn't become a magnet that entices more immigrants to enter the U.S. illegally.

Enforcement need not mean tearing apart families, as Trump is doing with gusto. Liberals can propose that the government deal harshly not with the undocumented themselves but with their employers. Trump's brutal policies already appear to be slowing illegal immigration. But making sure companies follow the law and verify the legal status of their employees would curtail it too: Migrants would presumably be less likely to come to the U.S. if they know they won't be able to find work.

Schachter's research also shows that native-born whites feel a greater affinity toward immigrants who speak fluent English. That's particularly significant because, according to the National Academies report, newer immigrants are learning English more slowly than their predecessors did. During the campaign, Clinton proposed increasing funding for adult English-language education. But she rarely talked about it. In fact, she ran an ad attacking Trump for saying, among other things, "This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish." The immigration section of her website showed her surrounded by Spanish-language signs.

Democrats should put immigrants' learning English at the center of their immigration agenda. If more immigrants speak English fluently, native-born whites may well feel a stronger connection to them, and be more likely to support government policies that help them. Promoting English will also give Democrats a greater chance of attracting those native-born whites who consider growing diversity a threat. According to a preelection study by Adam Bonica, a Stanford political scientist, the single best predictor of whether a voter supported Trump was whether he or she agreed with the statement "People living in the U.S. should follow American customs and traditions."

In her 2005 book, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, which has been heralded for identifying the forces that powered Trump's campaign, Karen Stenner, then a professor of politics at Princeton, wrote:

Exposure to difference, talking about difference, and applauding difference—the hallmarks of liberal democracy—are the surest ways to aggravate those who are innately intolerant, and to guarantee the increased expression of their predispositions in manifestly intolerant attitudes and behaviors. Paradoxically, then, it would seem that we can best limit intolerance of difference by parading, talking about, and applauding our sameness.

The next Democratic presidential nominee should commit those words to memory. There's a reason Barack Obama's declaration at the 2004 Democratic National Convention that "there is not a liberal America and a conservative America ... There is not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America" is among his most famous lines. Americans know that liberals celebrate diversity. They're less sure that liberals celebrate unity. And Obama's ability to effectively do the latter probably contributed to the fact that he—a black man with a Muslim-sounding name—twice won a higher percentage of the white vote than did Hillary Clinton.

In 2014, the University of California listed *melting pot* as a term it considered a "microaggression." What if Hillary Clinton had traveled to one of its campuses and called that absurd? What if she had challenged elite universities to celebrate not merely multiculturalism and globalization but Americanness? What if she had said more boldly that the slowing rate of English-language acquisition was a problem she was determined to solve? What if she had acknowledged the challenges that mass immigration brings, and then insisted that Americans could overcome those challenges by focusing not on what makes them different but on what makes them the same?

Some on the left would have howled. But I suspect that Clinton would be president today. ■

Peter Beinart is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

IN 2014, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LISTED THE TERM MELTING POT AS A "MICRO-AGGRESSION." WHAT IF HILLARY CLINTON HAD CALLED THAT ABSURD?



THE WORST PROBLEM ON EARTH

BY
MARK BOWDEN

HERE'S HOW TO DEAL WITH NORTH KOREA. IT'S NOT GOING TO BE PRETTY.

THIRTY MINUTES. That's about how long it would take a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launched from North Korea to reach Los Angeles. With the powers in Pyongyang working doggedly toward making this possible—building an ICBM and shrinking a nuke to fit on it—analysts now predict that Kim Jong Un will have the capability before Donald Trump completes one four-year term. ¶ About which the president has tweeted, simply, “It won’t happen!” ¶ Though given to reckless oaths, Trump is not in this case saying anything that departs significantly from the past half century of futile American policy toward North Korea. Preventing the Kim dynasty from having a nuclear device was an American priority long before Pyongyang exploded its first nuke, in 2006, during the administration of George W. Bush. The Kim regime detonated four more while Barack Obama was in the White House. In the more than four decades since Richard Nixon held office, the U.S. has tried to control North Korea by issuing threats, conducting military exercises, ratcheting up diplomatic sanctions, leaning on China, and most recently, it seems likely, committing cyber-sabotage. ¶ For his part, Trump has also tweeted that North Korea is “looking for trouble” and that he intends to “solve the problem.” His administration has leaked plans for a “decapitation strike” that would target Kim, which seems like the very last thing a country ought to announce in advance. ¶ None of which, we should all pray, will amount to much. Ignorant of the long history of the problem, Trump at least brings fresh eyes to it. But he is going to collide with the same harsh truth that has stymied all his recent predecessors: There are no good options for dealing with North Korea. Meanwhile, he is enthusiastically if unwittingly playing the role assigned to him by the comic-book-style foundation myth of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.



ILLUSTRATION BY
JUSTIN METZ

The myth holds that Korea and the Kim dynasty are one and the same. It is built almost entirely on the promise of standing up to a powerful and menacing foreign enemy. The more looming the threat—and Trump excels at looming—the better the narrative works for Kim Jong Un. Nukes are needed to repel this threat. They are the linchpin of North Korea's defensive strategy, the single weapon standing between barbarian hordes and the glorious destiny of the Korean people—all of them, North and South. Kim is the great leader, heir to divinely inspired ancestors who descended from Mount Paektu with mystical, magical powers of leadership, vision, diplomatic savvy, and military genius. Like his father, Kim Jong Il, and grandfather Kim Il Sung before him, Kim is the anointed defender of all Koreans, who are the purest of all races. Even South Korea, the Republic of Korea, should be thankful for Kim because, if not for him, the United States would have invaded long ago.

This racist mythology and belief in the supernatural status of the Mount Paektu bloodline defines North Korea, and illustrates how unlikely it is that diplomatic pressure will ever persuade the present Dear Leader to back down. Right now the best hope for keeping the country from becoming an operational nuclear power rests, as it long has, with China, which may or may not have enough economic leverage to influence Kim's policy making—and which also may not particularly want to do so, since having a friendly neighbor making trouble for Washington and Seoul serves Beijing's interests nicely at times.

American sabotage has likely played a role in Pyongyang's string of failed missile launches in recent years. According to David E. Sanger and William J. Broad of *The New York Times*, as the U.S. continued its covert cyberprogram last year, 88 percent of North Korea's flight tests of its intermediate-range Musudan missiles ended in failure. Given that these missiles typically exploded, sometimes scattering in pieces into the sea, determining the precise cause—particularly for experts outside North Korea—is impossible. Failure is a big part of missile development, and missiles can blow up on their own for plenty of reasons, but the percentage of failures certainly suggests sabotage. The normal failure rate for developmental missile tests, according to *The Times*, is about

5 to 10 percent. It's also possible that the sabotage program is not computer-related; it might, for instance, involve more old-fashioned techniques such as feeding faulty parts into the missiles' supply chain. If sabotage of any kind is behind the failures, however, no one expects it to do more than slow progress. Even failed tests move Pyongyang closer to its announced goal: possessing nuclear weapons capable of hitting U.S. cities.

Kim's regime may be evil and deluded, but it's not stupid. It has made sure that the whole world knows its aims, and it has carried out public demonstrations of its progress, which double as a thumb in the eye of the U.S. and South Korea. The regime has also moved its medium-range No-dong and Scud missiles out of testing and into active service, putting on displays that show their reach—which now extends to South Korean port cities and military sites, as well as to the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan. In mid-May, the regime successfully fired a missile that traveled, in a high arc, farther than one ever had before: 1,300 miles, into the Sea of Japan. Missile experts say it could have traveled 3,000 miles, well past American forces stationed in Guam, if the trajectory had been lower. Jeffrey Lewis, an arms-control expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, wrote in *Foreign Policy* in March:

North Korea's military exercises leave little doubt that Pyongyang plans to use large numbers of nuclear weapons against U.S. forces throughout Japan and South Korea to blunt an invasion. In fact, the word that official North Korean statements use is "repel." North Korean defectors have claimed that the country's leaders hope that by inflicting mass casualties and destruction in the early days of a conflict, they can force the United States and South Korea to recoil from their invasion.



Pyongyang, April 15, 2017: North Korean ballistic missiles pass through Kim Il Sung Square during a military parade. In recent years, the rate at which the Kim regime has launched test missiles has increased.

This isn't new. This threat has been present for more than 20 years. "It is widely known inside North Korea that [the nation] has produced, deployed, and stockpiled two or three nuclear warheads and toxic material, such as over 5,000 tons of toxic gases," Choi Ju-hwal, a North Korean colonel who defected, told a U.S. Senate subcommittee in 1997. "By having these weapons, the North is able to prevent itself from being slighted by such

major powers as the United States, Russia, China, and Japan, and also they are able to gain the upper hand in political negotiations and talks with those superpowers.”

For years North Korea has had extensive batteries of conventional artillery—an estimated 8,000 big guns—just north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ), which is less than 40 miles from Seoul, South Korea’s capital, a metropolitan area of more than 25 million people. One high-ranking U.S. military officer who commanded forces in the Korean theater, now retired, told me he’d heard estimates that if a grid were laid across Seoul dividing it into three-square-foot blocks, these guns could, within hours, “pepper every single one.” This ability to rain ruin on the city is a potent existential threat to South Korea’s largest population center, its government, and its economic anchor. Shells could also deliver chemical and biological weapons. Adding nuclear ICBMs to this arsenal would put many more cities in the same position as Seoul. Nuclear-tipped ICBMs, according to Lewis, are the final piece of a defensive strategy “to keep Trump from doing anything regrettable after Kim Jong Un obliterates Seoul and Tokyo.”

H OW S H O U L D the United States proceed?

What to do about North Korea has been an intractable problem for decades. Although shooting stopped in 1953, Pyongyang insists that the Korean War never ended. It maintains as an official policy goal the reunification of the Korean peninsula under the Kim dynasty.

As tensions flared in recent months, fanned by bluster from both Washington and Pyongyang, I talked with a number of national-security experts and military officers who have wrestled with the problem for years, and who have held responsibility to plan and prepare for real conflict. Among those I spoke with were former officials from the White House, the National Security Council, and the Pentagon; military officers who have commanded forces in the region; and academic experts.

From these conversations, I learned that the U.S. has four broad strategic options for dealing with North Korea and its burgeoning nuclear program.

1. *Prevention*: A crushing U.S. military strike to eliminate Pyongyang’s arsenals of mass destruction, take out its leadership, and destroy its military. It would end North Korea’s stand-off with the United States and South Korea, as well as the Kim dynasty, once and for all.

2. *Turning the screws*: A limited conventional military attack—or more likely a continuing series of such attacks—using aerial and naval assets, and possibly including narrowly targeted Special Forces operations. These would have to be punishing enough to significantly damage North Korea’s capability—but small enough to avoid being perceived as the beginning of a preventive strike. The goal would be to leave Kim Jong Un in power, but force him to abandon his pursuit of nuclear ICBMs.

3. *Decapitation*: Removing Kim and his inner circle, most likely by assassination, and replacing the leadership with a more moderate regime willing to open North Korea to the rest of the world.

4. *Acceptance*: The hardest pill to swallow—acquiescing to Kim’s developing the weapons he wants, while continuing efforts to contain his ambition.

Let’s consider each option. All of them are bad.

PREVENTION

An all-out attack on North Korea would succeed. The U.S. and South Korea are fully capable of defeating its military forces and toppling the Kim dynasty.

For sheer boldness and clarity, this is the option that would play best to President Trump’s base. (Some campaign posters for Trump boasted, FINALLY SOMEONE WITH BALLS.) But to work, a preventive strike would require the most massive U.S. military attack since the first Korean War—a commitment of troops and resources far greater than any seen by most Americans and Koreans alive today.

What makes a decisive first strike attractive is the fact that Kim’s menace is growing. Whatever the ghastly toll in casualties a peninsular war would produce today, multiply it exponentially once Kim obtains nuclear ICBMs. Although North Korea already has a million-man army, chemical and biological weapons, and a number of nuclear bombs, its current striking range is strictly regional. A sudden hammer blow before Kim’s capabilities go global is precisely the kind of solution that might tempt Trump.

Being able to reach U.S. territory with a nuclear weapon—right now the only adversarial powers with that ability are Russia and China—would make North Korea, because of its volatility, the biggest direct threat to American security in the world. Trump’s assertion of “America First” would seem to provide a rationale for drastic action regardless of the consequences to South Koreans, Japanese, and other people in the area. By Trumpian logic, the cost of all-out war might be acceptable if the war remains on the other side of the world—a thought that ought to keep South Koreans and Japanese up at night. The definition of “acceptable losses” depends heavily on whose population is doing the dying.

The brightest hope of prevention is that it could be executed so swiftly and decisively that North Korea would not have time to respond. This is a fantasy.

“When you’re discussing nuclear issues and the potential of a nuclear attack, even a 1 percent chance of failure has potentially catastrophically high costs,” Abe Denmark, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia under Barack Obama, told me in May. “You could get people who will give you General Buck Turgidson’s line from *Dr. Strangelove*,” he said, referring to the character played by George C. Scott in Stanley Kubrick’s classic film, who glibly acknowledges the millions of lives likely to be lost in a nuclear exchange by telling the president, “I’m not saying we wouldn’t get our hair mussed.”

Kim’s arsenal is a tough target. “It’s not possible that you get 100 percent of it with high confidence, for a couple of reasons,” Michèle Flournoy, a former undersecretary of defense in the Obama administration and currently the CEO of the Center for a New American Security, told me when we spoke this spring. “One reason is, I don’t believe anybody has perfect intelligence about where all the nuclear weapons are. Two, I think there is an expectation that, when they do ultimately deploy nuclear weapons, they will likely put them on mobile systems, which are harder to find, track, and target. Some may also be

in hardened shelters or deep underground. So it's a difficult target set—not something that could be destroyed in a single bolt-from-the-blue attack."

North Korea is a forbidding, mountainous place, its terrain perfect for hiding and securing things. Ever since 1953, the country's security and the survival of the Kim dynasty have relied on military stalemate. Resisting the American threat—surviving a first strike with the ability to respond—has been a cornerstone of the country's military strategy for three generations.

And with only a few of its worst weapons, North Korea could, probably within hours, kill millions. This means an American first strike would likely trigger one of the worst mass killings in human history. In 2005, Sam Gardiner, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel who specialized in conducting war games at the National War College, estimated that the use of sarin gas alone would produce 1 million casualties. Gardiner now says, in light of what we have learned from gas attacks on civilians in Syria, that the number would likely be three to five times greater. And today North Korea has an even wider array of chemical and biological weapons than it did 12 years ago—the recent assassination of Kim's half brother, Kim Jong Nam, demonstrated the potency of at least one compound, the nerve agent VX. The Kim regime is believed to have biological weapons including anthrax, botulism, hemorrhagic fever, plague, smallpox, typhoid, and yellow fever. And it has missiles capable of reaching Tokyo, a metropolitan area of nearly 38 million. In other words, any effort to crush North Korea flirts not just with heavy losses, but with one of the greatest catastrophes in human history.

Kim would bear the greatest share of responsibility for such a catastrophe, but for the U.S. to force his hand with a first strike, to do so without severe provocation or an immediate and dire threat, would be not only foolhardy but morally indefensible. That this decision now rests with Donald Trump, who has not shown abundant capacity for moral judgment, is not reassuring.

If mass civilian killings were not a factor—if the war were a military contest alone—South Korea by itself could defeat its northern cousin. It would be a lopsided fight. South Korea's economy is the world's 11th-largest, and in recent decades the country has competed with Saudi Arabia for the distinction of being the No. 1 arms buyer. And behind South Korea stands the formidable might of the U.S. military.

But lopsided does not necessarily mean easy. The combined air power would rapidly defeat North Korea's air force, but would face ground-to-air missiles—a gauntlet far more treacherous than anything American pilots have encountered since Vietnam. In the American method of modern war, which depends on control of the skies, a large number of aircraft are aloft over the battlefield at once—fighters, bombers, surveillance planes, drones, and flying command and control platforms. Maintaining this flying armada would require eliminating Pyongyang's defenses.

Locating and securing North Korea's nuclear stockpiles and heavy weapons would take longer. Some years ago, Thomas McInerney, a retired Air Force lieutenant general and a Fox News military analyst who has been an outspoken advocate of a preventive strike, estimated with remarkable

optimism that eliminating North Korea's military threat would take 30 to 60 days.

But let's suppose (unrealistically) that a preventive strike did take out every single one of Kim's missiles and artillery batteries. That still leaves his huge, well-trained, and well-equipped army. A ground war against it would likely be more difficult than the first Korean War. In David Halberstam's book *The Coldest Winter*, he described the memories of Herbert "Pappy" Miller, a sergeant with the First Cavalry Division, after a battle with North Korean troops near the village of Taejon in 1950:

No matter how well you fought, there were always more. Always. They would slip behind you, cut off your avenue of retreat, and then they would hit you on the flanks. They were superb at that, Miller thought. The first wave or two would come at you with rifles, and right behind them were soldiers without rifles ready to pick up the weapons of those who had fallen and keep coming. Against an army with that many men, everyone, he thought, needed an automatic weapon.

Today, American soldiers would all have automatic weapons—but so would the enemy. The North Koreans would not just make a frontal assault, either, the way they did in 1950. They are believed to have tunnels stretching under the DMZ and into South Korea. Special forces could be inserted almost anywhere in South Korea by tunnel, aircraft, boat, or the North Korean navy's fleet of miniature submarines. They could wreak havoc on American and South Korean air operations and defenses, and might be able to smuggle a nuclear

EVEN FAILED TESTS MOVE NORTH KOREA CLOSER TO ITS GOAL—POSSESSING NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABLE OF HITTING U.S. CITIES.

device to detonate under Seoul itself. And for those America Firsters who might view Asian losses as acceptable, consider that there are also some 30,000 Americans on the firing lines—and that even if those lives are deemed expendable, another immediate casualty of all-out war in Korea would likely be South Korea's booming economy, whose collapse would be felt in markets all over the world.

So the cost of even a perfect first strike would be appalling. In 1969, long before Pyongyang had missiles or nukes, the risks were bad enough that Richard Nixon—hardly a man timid about using force—opted against retaliating after two North Korean aircraft shot down a U.S. spy plane, killing all 31 Americans on board.

Jim Walsh is a senior research associate at the MIT Security Studies Program and a board member of the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. I talked with him this spring, as tensions between North Korea and the U.S. escalated. "I had a friend who just returned from Seoul, where he had a chance to talk with U.S. Forces Korea—uniformed military officers—and he asked them, 'Do you have a capability to remove North

Korea's nuclear weapons?' And the response was 'Can we use nuclear weapons or not?'"

Putting aside the irony of using nuclear weapons to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, the answer Walsh got in that scenario was still: No guarantee.

"If we don't get everything, then we have a really pissed-off adversary who possesses nuclear weapons who has just been attacked," Walsh said. "It's not clear even with nukes that you could get all the artillery. And if you did use nukes, is that something South Korea is going to sign up for? There's three minutes' flight time from just north of the DMZ to Seoul. Do you really want to be dropping nuclear weapons that close to our ally's capital? Think of the radioactive fallout. If you don't take out all the batteries, then you have thousands of munitions raining down on Seoul. So I don't get how an all-out attack works." Even if a U.S. president could get Americans to support such an attack, Walsh added, the South Koreans would likely object. "All the fighting is going to happen on Korean soil. So it seems to me the South Koreans should certainly have a say in this. I don't see them signing off."

Especially not now, with the election in May of Moon Jae-in as president. Moon is a liberal who has said he might be willing to reopen talks with Pyongyang and, far from endorsing aggressive action, has criticized the recent deployment around Seoul of America's THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missiles, which are designed to intercept incoming missiles.

These aren't the only problems with a preventive strike. To be effective, it would depend on surprise, on delivering the maximum amount of force as quickly as possible—which would in turn require a significant buildup of U.S. forces in the region. At the start of the Iraq War, American warplanes flew about 800 sorties a day. An all-out attack on North Korea, a far more formidable military power than Saddam Hussein's Iraq, would almost certainly require more. In order to resist a ground invasion of South Korea, the U.S. would need to bolster the assets currently in place. U.S. Special Forces would need to be positioned to go after crucial nuclear sites and missile platforms; ships would have to be stationed in the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea. It's highly improbable that all of this could happen without attracting Pyongyang's notice. One of the things North Korea is better at than its southern neighbor is spying; recruiting and running spies is much easier in a free society than in a totalitarian one.

But suppose, just for argument's sake, that a preventive strike could work without any of the collateral damage I've been describing. Suppose that U.S. forces could be positioned secretly, and that President Moon were on board. Suppose, further, that Pyongyang's nukes could be disabled swiftly, its artillery batteries completely silenced, its missile platforms flattened, its leadership taken out—all before a counterstrike of any consequence could be made. And suppose still further that North Korea's enormous army could be rapidly defeated, and that friendly casualties would remain surprisingly low, and that South Korea's economy would not be significantly hurt. And suppose yet further that China and Russia agreed to sit on the sidelines and watch their longtime ally fall. Then Kim Jong Un, with his bad haircut and his legion of note-taking, big-hat-wearing, kowtowing generals, would be gone. South Korea's fear of invasion from the North, gone. The menace of the state's using chemical and biological weapons, gone. The nuclear threat, gone.

Such a stunning outcome would be a mighty triumph indeed! It would be a truly awesome display of American power and know-how.

What would be left? North Korea, a country of more than 25 million people, would be adrift. Immediate humanitarian relief would be necessary to prevent starvation and disease. An interim government would have to be put in place. If Iraq was a hard country to occupy and rebuild, imagine a suddenly stateless North Korea, possibly irradiated and toxic, its economy and infrastructure in ruins. There could still be hidden stockpiles of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons scattered around the country, which would have to be found and secured before terrorists got to them. "Success," in other words, would create the largest humanitarian crisis of modern times—Syria's miseries would be a playground scuffle by comparison. Contemplating such a collapse in *The Atlantic* back in 2006, Robert D. Kaplan wrote that dealing with it "could present the world—meaning, really, the American military—with the greatest stabilization operation since the end of World War II."

How long would it be before bands of armed fighters from Kim's shattered army began taking charge, like Afghan warlords, in remote regions of the country? How long before they began targeting American occupation forces? Imagine China and South Korea beset by millions of desperate refugees. Would China sit still for a unified, American-allied Korea on its border? Having broken North Korea, the U.S. would own it for many, many years to come. Which would not be easy, or pretty.

The ensuing chaos and carnage and ongoing cost might just make America miss Kim Jong Un's big-bellied strut.

Which brings us to the second option.

TURNING THE SCREWS

What if the United States aimed to punish Pyongyang without provoking a full-on war—to leave Kim Jong Un in power and the North Korean state intact, but without a nuclear arsenal?

Given all the saber-rattling in Washington, but also the enormous downsides to a preventive strike, this middle route seems to be the most likely option that involves using force. The strategy would be to respond to the next North Korean affront—a nuclear test or missile launch or military attack—sharply enough to get Pyongyang's full attention. The strike would have to set back the regime's efforts significantly without looking like the start of an all-out, preventive war. If Kim responded with a counterattack, another, perhaps more devastating, American blow would follow. The hope is that this process might convince him that the U.S., as Trump has promised, will not allow him to succeed in developing a weapons program capable of threatening the American mainland.

This pattern of dealing with North Korea is an amped-up version of what Sydney A. Seiler, a North Korea expert who spent decades at the CIA, the National Security Council, and elsewhere, has called the "provocation cycle": Pyongyang does something outrageous—such as its first successful nuclear test, in 2006—and then, having inflamed fears of war, offers to return to disarmament negotiations. When Pyongyang returned to talks in 2007, the Bush administration agreed to release

illicit North Korean funds that had been frozen in Macau's Banco Delta Asia bank—effectively rewarding Kim for his nuclear defiance.

The Obama administration attempted to break this cycle. When North Korea sank the South Korean warship *Cheonan* with a torpedo in 2010, killing 46 of the vessel's 104 crew members, South Korea imposed a near-total trade embargo on the North—the most serious response short of a military strike—and refused to reenter disarmament talks without a formal apology. Obama pursued a policy of “strategic patience,” using no force but also offering no concessions to restore good feelings and in fact working through regional allies to further isolate and punish Pyongyang. By stepping out of the provocation/charm cycle, the hope was that North Korea would behave like a more responsible nation. It didn’t work, or hasn’t worked—some feel that the effects of economic sanctions have yet to fully play out. Conservatives, and Donald Trump, tend to regard “strategic patience” as a failure. So why not radically turn the screws? The way to stop someone from calling your bluff is to stop bluffing.

An opening salvo would likely hit important nuclear sites or missile launchers. Perhaps the most tempting and obvious target is the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, which made news in April when satellite images looking for signs of an expected underground detonation instead found North Korean soldiers playing volleyball. Another major piece of the nuclear program is the reactor at Yongbyon, which produces plutonium. Hitting either site would do more than send a message; it would impede Kim’s bomb program (although North Korea already has stockpiles of plutonium). The strikes themselves would be risky—radioactive material might be released, which would certainly draw widespread (and justified) international condemnation. Targeting missile launchers would entail less risk, but would require a larger and more complex mission, given the number of launchers that would need to be destroyed and the defenses around them.

Choosing how and where to strike would be a delicate thing. If the U.S. went after all or most of North Korea’s launchers at once, it might look to Pyongyang like an all-out attack, and trigger an all-out response. Targeting too few would advertise a reluctance to fully engage, which would just invite further provocation.

Key to the limited strike is the pause that comes after. Kim and his generals would have time to think. Some analysts feel that, in this scenario, he would be unlikely to unleash a devastating attack on Seoul.

But the threat of Seoul’s destruction by North Korean artillery “really constrains people, and it’s really hard to combat,” says John Plumb, a Navy submarine officer who served as a director of defense policy and strategy for the National Security Council during the Obama administration. “If I were the Trump administration, I would be looking at the threat to incinerate Seoul and



Baengnyeong Island, South Korea, April 24, 2010: A crane salvages the South Korean warship *Cheonan*, which sank following a mysterious explosion near the disputed sea border with North Korea, leaving 46 crew members dead.

trying to figure out how real it is. Because to me, it’s become such a catchphrase, and it almost—it starts to lose credibility. Attacking Seoul, a civilian population center, is different from attacking a remote military outpost. It’s dicey, there’s no doubt about it.”

The problem with trying to turn the screws on Pyongyang is that once the shooting starts, containing it may be extremely difficult. Any limited strike would almost certainly start an escalating cycle of attack/counterattack. Owing to miscalculation or misunderstanding, it could readily devolve into the full-scale peninsular war described earlier. For the strategy to work, Pyongyang would have to recognize America’s intent from the outset—and that is not a given. The country has a hair-trigger sensitivity to threat, and has been anticipating a big American invasion for more than half a century. As Jim Walsh of MIT’s Security Studies Program points out, just because America might consider an action limited doesn’t guarantee North Korea will see it that way.

And once the violence begins, North Korea would have an advantage, in that its people have no say in the matter. The death and misery of North Koreans would just be one more chapter in decades of misrule. The effects of North Korean strikes in the free society to the south would be a far different thing. The introduction of THAAD missiles earlier this year brought thousands of protesters into the streets, where they clashed with police. It would be much harder for Moon and Trump to stoically absorb punishment in any protracted test of wills. And North Korea would have more to lose by folding first. For Kim and his generals, the endgame would require abandoning the linchpin of their national-defense strategy.

Pyongyang is, if anything, inclined to exaggerate threat. According to a 2013 analysis by Scott A. Snyder, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the regime “thrives



on crisis and gains internal support from crisis situations.” Trump may believe it serves his purposes to be seen as dangerously erratic, but he is surrounded by relatively responsible military and congressional leaders and is presumably bound to act in concert with South Korea, which would be loath to act rashly. The American president can fulminate all he likes on Twitter, but he has constraints. Kim does not. His inner circle is regularly thinned by one-way trips to the firing range; lord help anyone who—forget about voicing an objection—fails to clap and cheer his pronouncements with enough enthusiasm. His power is absolute, and pugnacity is central to it. He may be one of the few people on Earth capable of out-blustering Trump. And he has repeatedly backed up his words with force, from the sinking of the *Cheonan* in 2010 to the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island that same year, in response to South Korean military exercises there. It takes far less than an actual military strike to set him off. Kim recently threatened to sink the U.S.S. *Carl Vinson*, which arrived in the region in April.

AN AMERICAN FIRST STRIKE WOULD LIKELY TRIGGER ONE OF THE WORST MASS KILLINGS IN HUMAN HISTORY.

Sinking an aircraft carrier is hard. Kim’s forces would first have to find it, which, despite satellite technology, is not easy. Neither is hitting it, even for a very sophisticated military. But suppose North Korea did manage to find and attack an aircraft carrier. If tensions can be cranked this high just by sailing a carrier into Korean waters, imagine how fast things might escalate when actual shooting starts.

“If I am sitting in Pyongyang, and I think you are coming after me, I’ve got minutes to decide if this is an all-out attack, and if I wait, I lose,” Jim Walsh told me. “So it’s use nuclear weapons or lose them—which makes for an itchy trigger finger. The idea that the U.S. and South Korea are going to have a limited strike that the North Koreans are going to *perceive* as limited, and that they are willing to stand by and let happen, especially given the rhetorical context in which this has been playing out, complete with repeated, stupid statements about ‘decapitation’—I can’t see it happening.”

Even if Kim did perceive limited intent in a first strike, he would readily and correctly interpret the effort as an assault on his nuclear arsenal, and perhaps the initial steps on a road to regime change. Under those circumstances, with the fate of Seoul in the balance, which side would likely blink first?

Maybe Kim would. It’s possible. But given the nature of his regime and his own short history as Dear Leader, it would have to be considered a small chance. More likely is that a limited-intent first strike would slide quickly into exactly what it was designed to prevent.

DECAPITATION

The third option has Hollywood appeal: Target Kim Jong Un himself and overthrow the dynasty.

South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo said earlier this year that his country was preparing a “special brigade” to remove the North’s wartime command structure. During military exercises in March, U.S. and South Korean troops took part in a rehearsal for a strike like this. That same month, the South Korean newspaper *Korea JoongAng Daily* reported that a U.S. Navy SEAL team had been deployed to train for just such a mission. In May, the North Korean government announced that it had foiled an assassination plot hatched by the CIA and South Korea’s National Intelligence Service.

The latter two claims have been officially denied, but decapitation is almost certainly being considered. The U.S.–South Korea war strategy, OPLAN 5015, portions of which have leaked to the South Korean press, calls for strikes targeting the country’s leaders. Any U.S. plot would be a breach of long-standing American policy—an executive order bans the assassination of foreign leaders. But such an order can be rewritten by whoever presides in the White House.

A former senior adviser to the White House on national security, who asked not to be named, told me recently: “Decapitation does seem to be a way to get out of this problem. If a new North Korean leader could arise who is willing to denuclearize and be somewhat of a normal actor, it might lead us out. But there are so many wild cards involved that I’ve been reluctant to endorse that approach so far.”

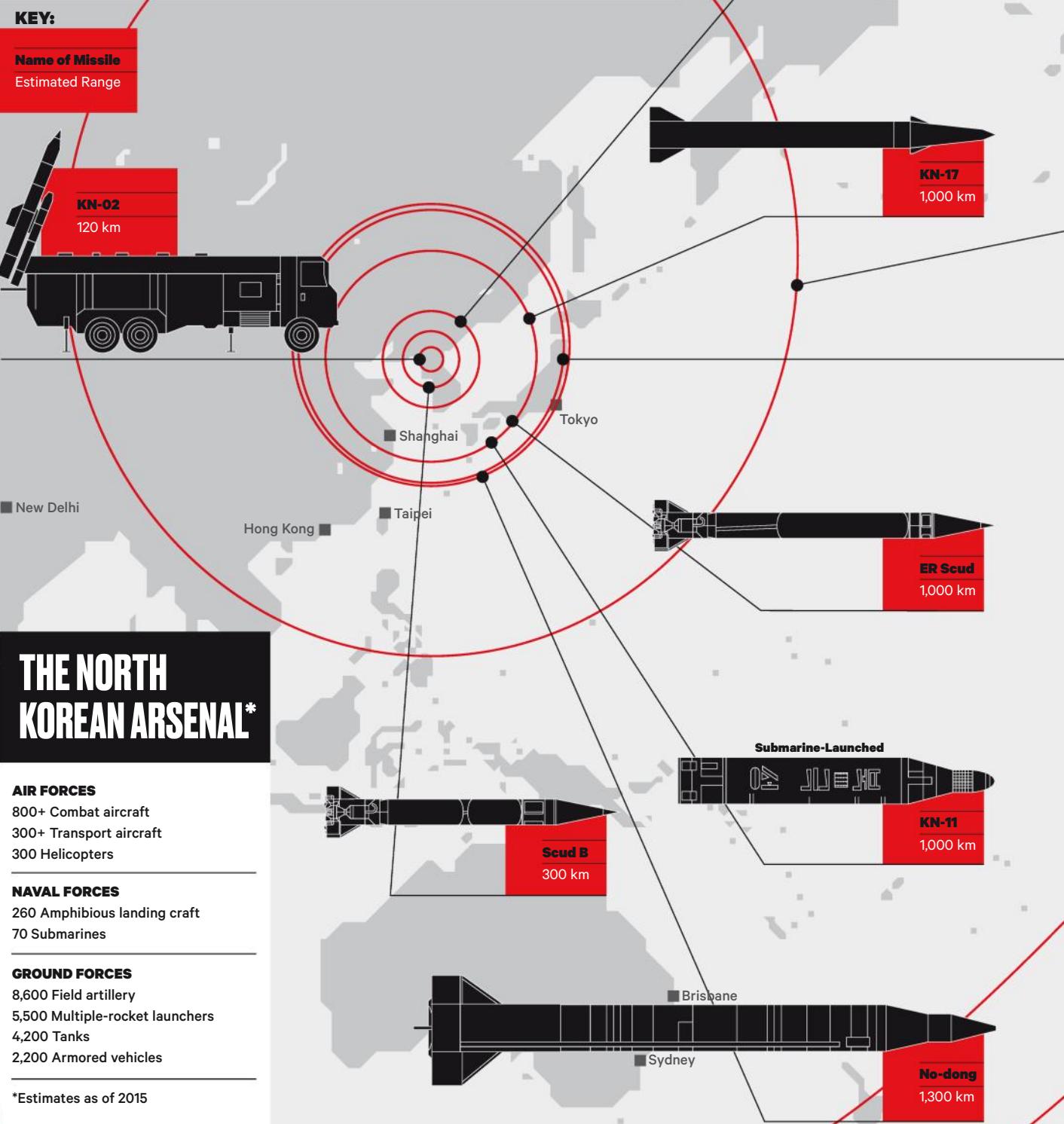
For a plot against Kim to succeed, it would most likely have to be initiated from inside Kim’s circle. It would be exceedingly difficult, even for a suicidal team of special operators, to get close enough to Kim to kill him, given the closed nature of the North Korean state and the security that surrounds him. Unless it came during a scheduled public appearance (when defenses would be on high alert), an aerial attack by cruise missile or drone would depend on accurate and timely intelligence regarding his whereabouts, something that only an insider could provide. Americans have successfully hunted down and killed al-Qaeda and Islamic State leaders with the aid of drones, which can conduct long-term, detailed surveillance and provide timely precision strikes. But the use of drones for these purposes depends on complete control of airspace. They are slow-moving and electronically noisy, so they are relatively easy to shoot down—and North Korea’s air defenses are robust.

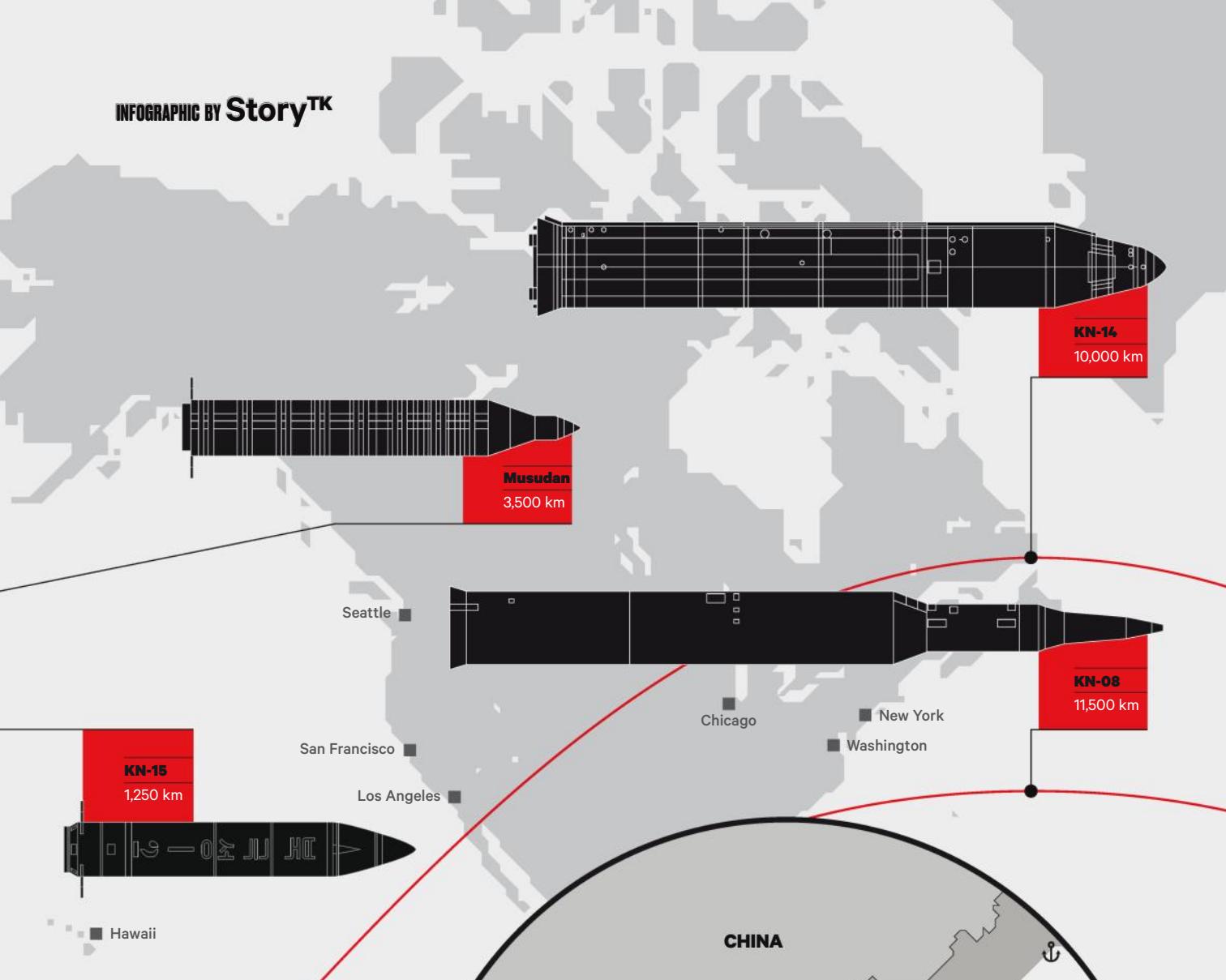
If China were sufficiently fed up with its belligerent neighbor, however, it might be capable of recruiting conspirators in Pyongyang. Money or the promise of power might be enough to turn someone in Kim’s inner circle, where his practice of having people executed is bound to have sown ill will and a desire for revenge. But the tyrant’s menace cuts both ways. It would be a terribly risky undertaking for anyone involved.

The consequences could also be disastrous: Given the reverence accorded Kim, his sudden death might trigger an

MAPPING THE THREAT

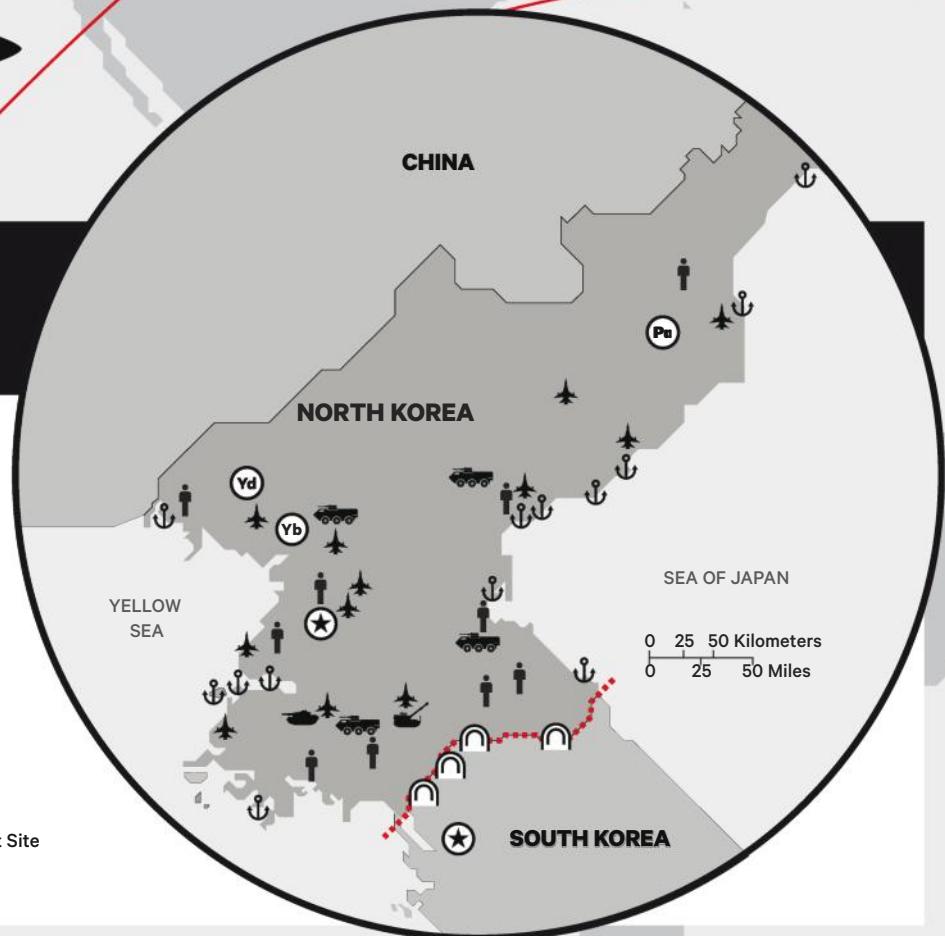
For decades, undeterred by sanctions and international isolation, North Korea has been increasing the power and range of its arsenal of missiles. It is in a position today to rapidly hit densely populated targets throughout East Asia. With an intercontinental ballistic missile, its reach would become global. The missiles shown here include those already in the Kim regime's arsenal—the Scud series, the No-dong, and the KN-02—and those in development.





KEY MILITARY SITES

- Demarcation Line
- Known Tunnel (Now Sealed)
- Air Force Fighter Base
- Naval Base
- Infantry Corps
- Armor Corps
- Artillery Corps
- Mechanized Infantry Corps
- Capital
- Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site
- Yongdeok-dong High-Explosive Test Site
- Yongbyon High-Explosive Test Site



Missiles and estimated ranges: Center for Nonproliferation Studies and Department of Defense; Nuclear Threat Initiative; Center for Strategic and International Studies' Missile Defense Project. Arsenal: Department of Defense. Peninsula zoom-in: Department of Defense; Nuclear Threat Initiative.

automatic military response. And what guarantees are there that his replacement wouldn't be worse?

Without some sense of what would follow, in both the short and long term, decapitation would be a huge gamble. You don't play dice with nukes.

ACCEPTANCE

Unless Kim Jong Un is killed and replaced by someone better, or some miracle of diplomacy occurs, or some shattering peninsular conflict intervenes, North Korea will eventually build ICBMs armed with nuclear warheads. In the words of one retired senior U.S. military commander: "It's a done deal."

Acceptance is likely because there are no good military options where North Korea is concerned. As frightening as it is to contemplate a Kim regime that can successfully strike the United States, accepting such a scenario means living with things only slightly worse than they are right now.

Pyongyang has long had the means to all but level Seoul, and weapons capable of killing tens of thousands of Americans stationed in South Korea—far more than those killed by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, an atrocity that spurred the U.S. to invade two countries and led to 16 years of war. Right now North Korea has missiles that could reach Japan (and possibly Guam) with weapons of mass destruction. The world is already accustomed to dealing with a North Korea capable of sowing unthinkable mayhem.

Pyongyang has been constrained by the same logic that has stayed the use of nuclear arms for some 70 years. Their use would invite swift annihilation. In the Cold War this brake was called MAD (mutual assured destruction). In this case the brake on North Korea would be simply AD: assured destruction, since any launch of a nuclear weapon would invite an annihilating response; even though its missiles might hit North America, it cannot destroy the United States.

There is already a close-to-even chance that, in the 30 minutes it would take a North Korean ICBM to reach the West Coast of the United States, the missile would be intercepted and destroyed. But the other way of looking at those odds is that such a missile would have a close-to-even chance of hitting an American city.

This is terrible to ponder, but Americans lived with a far, far greater threat for almost half a century. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. faced the potential for complete destruction. I

was one of the kids who performed civil-defense drills in the 1950s, ducking under my school desk while sirens wailed. During the Cuban missile crisis, the possibility seemed imminent enough that I plotted the fastest route from school to home. The threat of nuclear attack is a feature of the modern world, and one that has grown far less existential to Americans over time.

It is expensive to build an atom bomb, and very hard to build one small enough to ride in a missile. It is also hard to build an ICBM. But these are all old technologies. The know-how exists and is widespread. Preventing a terrorist group from acquiring such a weapon may be possible, but when a nation—whether North Korea or Iran or any other—commits itself to the goal, stopping it is virtually impossible. A deal to halt Iran's nuclear program was doable only because that country has extensive trading and banking ties with other nations. The Kim regime's isolation means that no country besides China can really apply meaningful economic pressure. Persuading a nation to



Pyongyang, April 15, 2017: Kim Jong Un arrives for a military parade marking the 105th anniversary of the birth of his grandfather Kim Il Sung. The Kim regime displayed a panoply of new missiles for the occasion—but the test-firing of a missile the next day failed, perhaps as a result of American sabotage.

abandon nuclear arms depends less on military strength than on the collective determination of the world, and a decision made by the nation in question. What's needed is the proper framework for disarmament—the right collection of incentives and disincentives to render the building of such a weapon a detriment and a waste—so the country decides that abandoning its pursuit of nukes is in its best interest.

It is hard to imagine Pyongyang making such a decision anytime soon, but creating a framework that renders that decision at least conceivable is the only sensible way forward. This is not a hopeless strategy. Over the years Pyongyang, in between its

threats and provocations, has more than once dangled offers to freeze its nuclear progress. With the right inducements, Kim very well might decide to change direction. Or he might die. He's an obese young man with bad habits, a family history of heart trouble, and a personal record of poor health. In such a system, things might change—for better or worse—overnight.

Moon Jae-in, South Korea's new president, wants to steer his country away from confrontation with Pyongyang, and possibly open talks with Kim. This is likely to put him at odds with Donald Trump, but reduces the chances of the U.S. president doing something rash. China has also expressed more willingness to put pressure on Kim, although it has yet to act emphatically on this. And time might allow the working-out of a peaceful path to disarmament. Better to buy time than to risk mass death by provoking a military confrontation.

"I don't think now is the time we should be substituting a policy of strategic haste for one of strategic patience—and I was a critic of strategic patience," Jim Walsh said.

EVERY OPTION THE UNITED STATES HAS FOR DEALING WITH NORTH KOREA IS BAD. BUT ACCEPTING IT AS A NUCLEAR POWER MAY BE THE LEAST BAD.

For all these reasons, acceptance is how the current crisis should and will most likely play out. No one is going to announce this policy. No president is going to openly acquiesce to Kim's ownership of a nuclear-tipped ICBM, but just as George W. Bush quietly swallowed Pyongyang's successful explosion of an atom bomb, and just as Barack Obama met North Korea's subsequent nuclear tests and missile launches with strategic patience, Trump may well find himself living with something similar. If there were a tolerable alternative, it would long ago have been tried. Sabotage may continue to stall progress, but cannot stop it altogether. Draconian economic pressure, even with China's help, is also unlikely to curb Pyongyang's quest.

"The North Koreans have demonstrated a strong willingness to continue this program, regardless of the price, regardless of the isolation," says Abe Denmark, the former deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia under Obama. "To be frank, my sense is that their leadership really could not care less about the country's economic situation or the living standards of their people. As long as they are making progress toward nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and they can stay in power, then they seem to be willing to pay that price."

In short, North Korea is a problem with no solution ... except time.

True, time works in favor of Kim getting what he wants. Every test, successful or not, brings him closer to building his prized weapons. When he has nuclear ICBMs, North Korea will have a more potent and lethal strike capability against the United States and its allies, but no chance of destroying America, or winning a war, and therefore no better chance

of avoiding the inevitable consequence of launching a nuke: national suicide. Kim may end up trapped in the circular logic of his strategy. He seeks to avoid destruction by building a weapon that, if used, assures his destruction.

His regime thrives on crisis. Perhaps when he feels safe enough with his arsenal, he might turn to more-sensible goals, like building the North Korean economy, opening trade, and ending its decades of extreme isolation. All of these are the very things that create the framework needed for disarmament.

But acceptance, while the right choice, is yet another bad one. With such missiles, Kim might feel emboldened to move on South Korea. Would the U.S. sacrifice Los Angeles to save Seoul? The same calculation drove the U.K. and France to develop their own nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Trump has already suggested that South Korea and Japan might want to consider building nuclear programs. In this way, acceptance could lead to more nuclear-armed states and ever greater chances that one will use the weapons.

With his arsenal, Kim may well become an even more destabilizing force in the region. There is a good chance that he would try to negotiate from strength with Seoul and Washington, forging some kind of confederation with the South that leads to the removal of U.S. forces from the peninsula. If talks were to resume, Trump had better enter them with his eyes open, because Kim, who sees himself as the divinely inspired heir to leadership of *all* the Korean people, is not likely to be satisfied with only his half of the peninsula.

There is no sign of panic in Seoul. Writing for *The New York Times* from the city in April, Motoko Rich found residents busy with their normal lives, eating at restaurants, crowding in bars, and clogging some of the most congested highways in the world. In a poll taken before the May election, fewer than 10 percent of South Koreans rated the North Korean nuclear threat as their top concern.

"Since I have been living here for so long, I am not scared anymore," said Gwon Hyuck-chae, an elderly barber in Munsan, about five miles from the DMZ. "Even if there was a war now, it would not give us enough time to flee. We would all just die in an instant."

Although in late April Trump called Kim "a madman with nuclear weapons," perhaps the most reassuring thing about pursuing the acceptance option is that Kim appears to be neither suicidal nor crazy. In the five and a half years since assuming power at age 27, he has acted with brutal efficiency to consolidate that power; the assassination of his half brother is only the most recent example. As tyrants go, he's shown appalling natural ability. For a man who occupies a position both powerful and perilous, his moves have been nothing if not deliberate and even cruelly rational.

And as the latest head of a family that has ruled for three generations, one whose primary purpose has been to survive, as a young man with a lifetime of wealth and power before him, how likely is he to wake up one morning and set fire to his world? ■

Mark Bowden is a national correspondent for The Atlantic. His most recent book is Hué 1968.

THE SMARTPHONE PSYCHIATRIST

For more than a decade, Tom Insel was the director of the National Institute of Mental Health, which made him one of the most influential psychiatrists in the world. But, frustrated by psychiatry's inability to effectively help people suffering from mental illness, he began to question some of the basic premises of his field. So he left for Silicon Valley, where he's trying to use smartphones to reduce the world's mental anguish.

By
DAVID DOBBS

Photographs by

MICHAEL FRIBERG

SOMETIME AROUND 2010, about two-thirds of the way through his 13 years at the helm of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)—the world's largest mental-health research institution—Tom Insel started speaking with unusual frankness about how both psychiatry and his own institute were failing to help the mentally ill. Insel, runner-trim, quietly alert, and constitutionally diplomatic, did not rant about this. It's not in him. You won't hear him trash-talk colleagues or critics.

Yet within the bounds of his unbroken civility, Insel began voicing something between a regret and an indictment. In writings and public talks, he lamented the pharmaceutical industry's failure to develop effective new drugs for depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia; academic psychiatry's overly cozy relationship with Big Pharma; and the paucity of treatments produced by the billions of dollars the NIMH had spent during his tenure. He blogged about the failure of psychiatry's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*



Disorders to provide a productive theoretical basis for research, then had the NIMH ditch the *DSM* altogether—a decision that roiled the psychiatric establishment. Perhaps most startling, he began opening public talks by showing charts that revealed psychiatry as an underachieving laggard: While medical advances in the previous half century had reduced mortality rates from childhood leukemia, heart disease, and AIDS by 50 percent or more, they had failed to reduce suicide or disability from depression or schizophrenia.

"You'll think that I probably ought to be fired," he would tell audiences, "and I can certainly understand that."

It was unsettling—as if the kindly captain of the world's biggest ocean liner had sat down with his guests at dinner one evening and told them that their ship was unexpectedly lost and, if the crew could not soon correct course, they might well run aground, founder, and die.

Around this time, Insel told me recently, he'd just finished a talk describing the wonderful things the NIMH was discovering about the brain when a man in the audience said, "You don't get it."

"Excuse me?" Insel said. "I don't get what?"

"Our house is on fire," the man said, "and you're telling us about the chemistry of the paint. We need someone to focus on the fire."

"I heard that," Insel told me. "I went home and thought, *There's truth to that*. It's not just that we don't know enough. The gap between what we know and what we do is unacceptable."

For decades, most psychiatric research, and the NIMH's in particular, had followed leads—clues about the brain's hidden connections, the genome's elusive secrets—that took decades to pay off. It was necessary work. But it had done far too little for those who were ill today.

NOT LONG AFTER THAT TALK, at a conference in June 2015, Insel met Andy Conrad, who led Google's new health spin-off, Verily. The two hit it off. That July, Insel visited Google's Mountain View, California, headquarters. Conrad asked him: How would you like to run Verily's new mental-health team? Instead of focusing on connections among neurons and genes, how about focusing on the connections between people that Google can track, analyze, and organize—the signals flashing across our world's digital synapses—to better understand and treat mental illness?

Insel was in his mid-60s. Many people would have been thinking about retirement. But five months later, he had traded a kingdom of some 3,000 NIMH-funded researchers for a staff of one assistant, and he began working out of Google's headquarters. He found in California's digital culture a freedom he could previously only dream of.

"We are wildly ambitious," he says. Insel hopes to use data—especially the rich, ongoing streams of data that a smartphone can provide—to detect a deteriorating state of mind faster and more reliably than we can now, and then to respond and turn things around more quickly. He believes a smartphone can be both a diagnostic instrument and, through the links it gives us to others, a life-saving mode of connection and treatment.

At any given moment, roughly one in seven of the world's 7.5 billion people is struggling with mental illness. "We're not

going to reach all those people by hiring more psychiatrists," says Insel. But we might reach them with smartphones.

Already, some 5 billion people worldwide have mobile phones. By 2020, it's expected that 6 billion will use smartphones with the capability of capturing mental-health data and apps that can provide a form of treatment.

Insel wants to make those phones the central hub in a new way of delivering mental-health care. Former longtime colleagues speak of him the way baseball players speak of an ace pitcher who just signed with a rising franchise: *I'm eager to see what he does.*

**"You'll think that I probably ought to be fired,"
Insel would tell audiences, after explaining
the paltry progress in treating the mentally
ill, "and I can certainly understand that."**

THINGS ALWAYS SEEMED to come easy to Tom Insel. His father, H. Herbert Insel, an eye surgeon in Dayton, Ohio, told him and his three brothers that they could do anything they wanted to as long as they became doctors first. As the youngest, Insel says, "I learned early on that the path to success was finding something others weren't into." He found his first niche outdoors, collecting crawly things that he kept in the basement. He did so well in school that when he was 15, he left high school and—without a diploma—entered a six-year B.A./M.D. program at Boston University.

Then, at 17, he did something that announced a pattern: Moving smoothly along an enviable track, he jumped off of it. With his bachelor's work done and med school waiting for him, he got a year's leave from the university; married his college girlfriend, Deborah Silber; and took off. They spent the 1969–70 school year skirting the Vietnam War, alternating stints of service work (a Hong Kong tuberculosis clinic for boat people; a Mennonite hospital in India) with travel around Nepal, Cambodia, and Thailand. Then he returned to Massachusetts, finished medical school and a year-long internship, took another year off to travel and study philosophy, and spent another three years in a psychiatry residency at UC San Francisco. After that, he presented himself, at age 27, for employment at the massive National Institute of Mental Health campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

WORKING IN BETHESDA as a research psychiatrist—increasingly studying patients, rather than treating them—Insel soon made a mark by running a drug trial that helped turn psychiatry away from talk therapy and toward chemistry. The trial showed that the antidepressant clomipramine helped people with obsessive-compulsive disorder faster and in more cases than psychoanalysis or standard talk therapy did. Today such a finding would go unnoticed. But this was the early 1980s, before Prozac and other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors took over the world. At the time, OCD was seen as "the classic neurotic illness," Insel recalls, Freudian anxiety run

amok—"the prototype of what you got psychoanalysis for." Yet Insel's trial showed that a drug worked better and faster.

The papers Insel and others wrote about clomipramine over the next few years "really launched the field" of using antidepressants to treat OCD, he says, and helped pave the way for the Prozac era.

This irked some people. Freud may have been going out of fashion, but he still dominated psychiatry. His followers did not like losing to molecules. Insel hadn't meant to stoke controversy. He liked Freud. That the drug became part of this turf war surprised him.

But as he followed up with other papers on the neurobiology of OCD, he soon found himself a leader in anti-anxiety-drug research. At 30, just three years into the job, he had his own research unit. "I could have just done drug trials for the next 20 years," he says, "become a full professor, spent my time giving lectures and doing drug-company gigs." Instead, he jumped the track. He closed his lab in Bethesda to study neuroscience at Johns Hopkins for a year, then returned to the NIMH. But rather than going back to Bethesda, he went to the sticks to work with one of the oddest people in neuroscience.

SURROUNDED BY FARM COUNTRY, the National Institutes of Health's facility outside of Poolesville—a scattered collection of low-slung labs, barns, and barebones offices an hour from Bethesda—was lonesome in a way that's hard to find in Maryland. Even today, one route between there and D.C. involves a cable-guided ferry that crosses at a languid pace. It was sleepy. "I needed that," Insel says. "I needed a place where nobody was around."

The man he joined there, a renowned neuroanatomist named Paul MacLean, was, Insel says, "from another era."

MacLean, who died in 2007, had studied English literature at Yale and chemistry and physics in Edinburgh, Scotland, before getting an M.D. back at Yale in 1940. He loved brains. His lab was stuffed with drawers holding hundreds of micro-thin cortical cross sections, and with shelves holding "jars of formaldehyde," Insel says, "with—I'm not making this up—roadkill." Whenever MacLean came across something dead on the road, he'd put the carcass in his trunk and drive it to the lab. The idea was that one of his technicians would saw open the animal's skull, snip its brain free of its spinal cord, and slice, stain, and mount some brain cross sections onto slides. MacLean would then compare the brain's structure with that of other roadkill. He didn't much care what kind. "He just wanted to see how, say, the hippocampus of a deer differed from that of a possum."

MacLean named his lab the Laboratory of Brain Evolution and Behavior. "No commas," notes Insel. "Syntax entirely unclear, so you could read or say it any way you wanted." Insel had "almost complete freedom," of a sort you can't really get now.

Insel's landmark work was a run of vole studies that he started at Poolesville in the late 1980s.

Voles are rodents, mouselike but rounder, that live in burrows. In the '70s, an ecologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign named Lowell Getz was trapping small mammals in the Midwest for a population census. He kept catching one particular vole species—the prairie vole—in pairs. This was odd. Voles, like most rodents, generally show up in traps alone. But one out of 10 times that Getz caught a prairie vole, he caught a couple—a male and a female.

In a string of work requiring several years, much trapping, and many papers, Getz established that prairie voles were monogamous. This monogamy distinguished them from most of the other 150 vole species and, for that matter, about 95 percent of all other mammals. Most voles, for instance, mate and then stay together only minutes (or less) before moving on, and males pay little heed to their pups. But once a pair of prairie voles mates—an event typically triggered when a young female licks the urine of a male—they generally stick together till death. They cuddle and groom each other, and they cooperatively raise up to four litters a year. When one of the pair dies, the survivor generally foregoes all other voles.

Getz and Sue Carter, a behavioral endocrinologist, had already identified some of the hormones that drove prairie-vole monogamy. Insel and his lab picked up this thread. In one experiment after another, they outlined the genetic,

molecular, and neural mechanisms that led to the prairie vole's distinctive family life. Collaborating first with Carter and then mostly with his own colleagues Zuoxin Wang and Larry Young, Insel eventually showed how certain genes made the prairie-vole brain especially sensitive to two hormones, oxytocin and vasopressin, that surged at key times in a vole couple's romance. Their work got heavy, often breathless press, which dubbed oxytocin "the love hormone."

Their best work was astoundingly clever. For instance, by finding ways to bypass or silence some of the genetic signals and neurochemical receptors involved in the voles' behavior, Insel, Wang, and Young proved the function of those signals and receptors. They'd identify, say, a gene that coded for an oxytocin receptor in the brain and delete the gene in an animal. With the receptor gone, the bonding behavior would disappear.



NIMH, 1993: Tom Insel with a vole, the rodent upon which he established his reputation as a brilliant researcher

Thus they turned speculative hypotheses into demonstrated findings. They showed that one could lay bare the biology of behavior.

THE VOLE WORK made the careers of Insel, Wang, and Young. It also helped psychiatry with two perennial problems tormenting the discipline.

Psychiatry has always struggled to be taken seriously as a science. By the 1980s, the field seemed especially lost. Its best drugs were from the 1950s and '60s. Most of its hospitals, their failings made infamous by works such as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, had been closed. Talk therapy, which often works, but by psychobiological pathways painfully difficult to discern, was frequently lampooned.

For these and other reasons, including its penchant for savage infighting, psychiatry in the '70s was "a collection of diverse cults rather than a medical science," as Melvin Sabshin, a onetime medical director of the American Psychiatric Association, later put it.

The field was also trying to adjust to one of the 20th century's long, slow pendulum swings between environmental and biological explanations for behavior. In the century's opening years, behaviorism was dominant in the wider culture, casting environment as the key variable in how people behaved; change a person's environment, it was argued, and you'll usually change his or her behavior. By the 1930s, the new science of genetics had bolstered the view that genetic (and thus

work took a place amid a handful of other new studies of social species, such as honeybees, songbirds, and cichlids (a fish), that showed how chains of neurobiological events produce fascinating and sometimes bizarre behaviors involving everything from mating and murder to language acquisition and social dominance. These studies did not really ignore environment. Rather, they explored the interplay of biology and environment by focusing on the former. And while these studies did not involve humans, they often explored human-like behaviors.

These studies were exactly what psychiatry needed, offering to make it a discipline of numbers, mechanisms, circuits, and chemicals. The power of such work was almost certainly one reason Insel would later become the director of the NIMH. He came to represent a new way to explore behavior.

But first he had to get fired.

"WHAT'D YOU DO?" I asked Insel when he told me he got sacked. "It wasn't what I did," he said, smiling. "It was what I didn't do"—focus directly on humans.

When Insel started the vole work, in the late '80s, the NIMH did not yet consider animal studies of basic behaviors likely to reveal much about human mental health. Insel's decade of work on family and social bonds in animals had done little to change that. "You're talking about why a mother rat takes care of its baby?" says his former colleague Larry Young. "It was too fluffy." So in 1994, three years after Insel published his first vole paper, he got canned.

Getting fired, Insel says, "was actually the best thing that ever happened to me." It got him to see the importance of telling a clear story with his research, which proved essential in making that research successful. And it let him take another job that ultimately paved the way for his return to the NIMH as director.

Just weeks before Insel got fired, the famed Yerkes National Primate Research Center at Emory University had offered him an interview for the job of director. Insel, studying voles in Poolesville, figured he had no real shot at it. But by the time of the interview, he was newly fired, highly prepared, and keenly focused. He got the gig.

Insel spent eight years at Emory. While there, he worked with Wang and Young to expand their vole research into the magnum opus it became.

Running the primate center, meanwhile, gave Insel "a chance," he says, "to understand how to build programs, how to build institutions, how to mentor, how to help people grow within an institution." His changes at Yerkes upset some primatologists and drove some of them away. Yet he managed to get people to follow him, says Young, "not by force, but by being a nice guy and instilling excitement in others." Insel showed that he could take the helm of an institution and change its course without causing mutiny.

N HIS 13 YEARS as the director of the NIMH, from 2002 to 2015, Insel would become one of the best-known directors the institute ever had. His renown came partly from the length of his tenure, second only to the 15-year run (1949–64) of the founding director, Robert Felix.

When one member of a prairie-vole pair dies, the survivor generally foreswears all other voles. Insel discovered the neurochemical reason for this, laying bare the biology of behavior.

presumably innate) differences were a crucial variable. After the Nazis exploited this view to help justify murdering 6 million Jews and hundreds of thousands of people with mental illnesses, the pendulum swung back the other way, toward the notion that a stressful environment could create social, educational, and mental-health deficits. Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty funded studies on the environmental roots of crime, minority-group mental health, and urban discord.

By the 1980s, however, this emphasis on the environment had come to be seen as misguided and overdone. It became harder to attribute schizophrenia or autism to emotionally cool "refrigerator mothers," or youth violence to poverty.

These forces, then—the pressure for credibility, the swing toward biology as destiny—encouraged psychiatric research to focus less on environment itself and more on the biological mechanisms that responded to it.

Insel's vole studies did precisely that. They were not the only works to do so, but they were among the earliest, cleanest, and most publicized. Beginning in the mid-'90s, Insel's



Emory University, 2001: Insel (top row, center), Larry Young (plaid shirt, in front of Insel), and their research team at the Yerkes Center

When he became director, he took custody of a gluttonous giant that was being forced to diet. In the previous two decades, the institute's budget had effectively tripled. But when Insel arrived, George W. Bush's administration had just cut taxes and entered one war; it was preparing to enter another. Insel would work his entire tenure with an essentially flatlined budget—one in which, furthermore, 70 percent of each year's expenditures was determined by prior commitments to ongoing programs.

If Insel wanted to change things, he would have to do so slowly, and he did. He devoted more research to the most-serious mental disorders, such as major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Anticipating that pharmacology would produce few effective new psychiatric drugs, he cut NIMH involvement in drug trials. And when, in 2010, he decided that psychiatry's official diagnostic categories in the *DSM* no longer served the NIMH's needs well, he spoke against them. In 2013, he rejected the *DSM* as a research guide, even though doing so infuriated many in the psychiatric establishment.

Throughout his tenure at the NIMH, Insel explicitly defined mental disorders as brain disorders. Critics of this approach expressed several complaints. Allen Frances is one of the world's most prominent psychiatrists. He led an overhaul of the *DSM* in the early 1990s, producing its fourth edition, and has since become a vocal critic of psychiatry's medicalization of normal distress, of its overuse of drugs—and of what he calls the NIMH's overly brain-centric view of mental health.

"I think very highly of Tom Insel," Frances says. "Right motives, decent guy, very smart, honest. But what he did at NIMH is disastrous. He inherited an institution that was already moving to a narrow, bioreductionist view of mental illness, and he moved it even further." The translational jump

from basic science to treatment is big in most of medicine, Frances says, but it's especially big in psychiatry because the brain is the most complicated thing in the known universe. "Tom was naive about that. It's not clear that any one patient, even today, has been helped by the neuroscientific advances made under his tenure."

Almost all medical research faces the same challenge: striking the right balance between basic research (how does this work?) and translational research that converts the basic findings into treatments (how can we make this work differently?). To Frances and many other critics, the NIMH had that balance wrong, focusing too heavily on basic neuroscience research.

Another criticism leveled by Frances and others is that defining mental disorders as brain disorders underplays what psychiatrists call the psychosocial nature of mental states and mental health—the countless dynamics in social relationships that affect our psyches. A reductive biological model arguably neglects, for instance, the growing evidence that social isolation aggravates mental illness, while social support ameliorates it. Trying to understand mental illness without account-

ing for the power of social connection, this line of thinking goes, is like studying planetary motion without accounting for gravity.

Likewise, defining mental illness as a brain disorder short-changes the role played by environment in general. Mental illness often occurs when a vulnerable psyche faces stress—sometimes chronic, sometimes sudden and acute. Many brain and large-scale genomic studies ignore this because the researchers don't think environment is important, or because it's hard to parse environmental effects into measurable components. Either way, a key element of mental health and illness can go overlooked.

Insel and his defenders say he did his best to respond to these problems. They note that he pushed NIMH research to yield more help faster for the sickest patients, and that he funded plenty of research on environment, behavior-based therapy, and social connection.

E. Fuller Torrey is a psychiatrist who worked at the NIMH in the 1970s and then became one of its fiercest critics as its emphasis increasingly focused on basic neurobiology in the 1990s. He was not thrilled about Insel's appointment. "He'd worked on voles," Torrey says. "My expectations were low."

Torrey, among those who called loudest for the NIMH to generate not just findings but treatments, had developed a metric to tally what percentage of NIMH studies stood a reasonable chance of helping patients. When Insel took over, Torrey told me, that estimate stood at about 5 percent. Insel brought it up into the 20s.

"He did a yeoman's job. I have nothing bad to say about Tom except that he didn't stay longer."

INSEL NEVER WAVERED from framing the institute's mission as biological. When I asked him about this directly, he

unambiguously defended the NIMH's biocentric stance. But if you examine the later years of his tenure closely enough, you see signs of vacillation—of someone still believing something, but without as much conviction.

This comes across in his 2013 TED Talk. Insel—as at ease, confident, and disarming as ever—opens with his iconic graphs showing how psychiatry has gone nowhere for decades. Then, after telling the audience members that he can understand why they think he should be fired, he pivots to say, “I think we are about to be in a very different world as we think about these illnesses,” and describes the newest wonders the NIMH is discovering about the brain.

I keep going back to that talk because, right there on the TED stage, Insel seems to be of two minds. When he embraces his dismay and then sets it aside, I feel I'm seeing a person who is in the process of flipping his allegiance between two contradictory ideas. By the time of his TED Talk, Insel had ceased believing not just in the categories used to describe mental illnesses but in the magic of drugs or genomics to diagnose and treat them. He was essentially saying of psychiatry: *We've fallen short of our promises for decades, but we're finally figuring out the brain, so we'll deliver.* Yet even as he described the brain's wonders, Insel seemed to understand that he was still talking paint chemistry, and not attending enough to the raging fire.

“Tom was very blunt” toward the end of his tenure, says Bruce Cuthbert, who worked alongside Insel at the NIMH and served for 10 months as the acting director after Insel left. “He was brave enough to say, ‘Actually, we don’t know much of anything at all that could help individual patients.’”

INSEL IS IMPATIENT. When he'd been at the NIMH, he told me recently, he'd thought of the results horizon as being 10 to 30 years out. But he is 65, and tired of waiting. “I want to make something happen in three years.” He told me this as we sat in the enormous, airy lobby of the new Verily building in South San Francisco. Early this May, as I was putting the final touches on this story, I emailed Insel to confirm and update a few things—and found that he was leaving Verily the next day. As small and nimble as Verily was compared with the NIMH, he said, he was now joining a far smaller outfit called Mindstrong Health, a start-up co-founded by three people—himself, Paul Dagum, and Richard Klausner—that would pursue an agenda much like the one he'd outlined at Verily.

“A similar path,” he told me.

Insel had jumped the track again.

Two weeks later I visited him at home in Pleasanton, California.

“I loved working at Verily,” he told me. It was only after he started there, he said, that he grasped the scale of ambition and possibility that today’s biotech landscape offered. He liked Verily’s CEO, Andy Conrad, whose brash, sometimes profane style has reportedly driven away some other top

Verily employees. “It was hard to leave,” Insel said. But the features inevitable in a 500-person company (Verily) that was part of a 74,000-person company (Alphabet, Google’s holding company) made a smaller option look much better. “The speed bumps you have to go over to get something out the door,” Insel said, would now be fewer and lower.

As we talked, Mindstrong was remodeling offices in Palo Alto, an hour’s drive away. Insel said he plans to work most days from home, where he can have lunch with his wife, and where a garden, a pool, a chicken coop, and a 350-vine vineyard beckon out back. But Insel didn’t join Mindstrong for the barefoot commute. He likes his co-founders and the greater agility offered by what he calls “a ‘two pizza’ company—small enough to feed with two pizzas.” Currently Mindstrong has about a dozen employees. Talking to me on his second day as Mindstrong’s president, Insel told me he had already found it far easier to strike research partnerships with caregiver or insurer networks to test and refine the patient-monitoring systems that are at the core of the company’s plan. “We actually did one of those last week,” he said, “and the network will start collecting the data this week. We can just move much faster at this size.”

Mindstrong’s plan, much like that of Insel’s unit at Verily, is to use the smartphone’s powers to do two things that psychiatry hasn’t figured out how to do: easily detect early, or even predict, the onset of mental illness; and quickly get effective, affordable care to those who need it.

This idea has been floating around Silicon Valley and mental-health circles for several years. Insel estimates that a



Palo Alto, May 2017: Thomas Insel with his Mindstrong co-founders, Richard Klausner (left) and Paul Dagum (center)

good five or 10 other companies or research teams—including Verily—are trying to do something similar. Mindstrong hopes to gain an edge by combining Insel's expertise and connections in the mental-health field with Klausner's business experience and Dagum's data-analysis tools and skills—and by moving quickly.

The force they hope to harness is the power of daily behavior, trackable through smartphone use, to reflect one's mental health. As people start to slide into depression, for instance, they may do several of the following things easily sensed by a phone's microphones, accelerometers, GPS units, and keyboards: They may talk with fewer people; and when they talk, they may speak more slowly, say less, and use clumsier sentences and a smaller vocabulary. They may return fewer calls, texts, emails, Twitter direct messages, and Facebook messages. They may pick up the phone more slowly, if they pick up at all, and they may spend more time at home and go fewer places. They may sleep differently. Someone slipping toward a psychotic state might show similar signs, as well as particular changes in syntax, speech rhythm, and movement.

Insel says such data provide "a more objective, textured picture of people's lives," one collected continuously, rather than just at weekly sessions. (A therapist, the joke goes, knows in great detail how a patient is doing every Thursday at 3 o'clock.) With inputs like these, a phone could sense the beginning of a crisis and trigger an appropriate response. Because this response would come earlier, it could be more measured, less jarring, and less medication-heavy. "The earlier you intervene, the better the outcomes," Insel says. "Instead of detect and treat, it's predict and pre-empt."

Mindstrong has three patents for a data-collection-and-analysis system built roughly for such purposes. Dagum designed this system, which can harvest some of the smartphone's scores of data streams.

HOW MIGHT MINDSTRONG'S SYSTEM actually work in practice? Insel points to two prototype examples.

The first is a company called 7 Cups, which Insel first learned about because his daughter works there. 7 Cups provides text-based peer counseling and support for people with depression or anxiety or a long list of other conditions. Registering for the simpler services, such as peer connection, takes only seconds, and users can also get referrals to either coaches or licensed mental-health counselors and psychologists.

According to the CEO, Glen Moriarty, 7 Cups serves a young, diverse demographic (90 percent are under the age of 35) that is likely to go underserved by traditional mental-health care. When Insel first heard about these demographics, he said, "a light bulb went off. This is about providing access for the first time"—and to people who don't necessarily want to talk to a psychotherapist. They want to help each other. With a simple smartphone app and website, 7 Cups seeks to quickly and inexpensively connect such people while also providing a range of clinical support.

The company collects an astounding amount of anonymized data—a key to increasing its accuracy in detecting

mental states, and to the efficacy of its response to signs of worsening illness. When 7 Cups told Insel that it gives everyone who registers the chance to take a standardized screening test for depression, anxiety, and stress, called DASS-21, he asked how long it would take to get him, say, 1,000 of those, scrubbed of identifying information.

"They said, 'We'll do 2,000 this afternoon. You want all of them, or what part?'"

A second rough model for Mindstrong's approach is an app called PRIME, developed by Danielle Schlosser, a clinical psychologist whom Insel recruited to Verily from the

Insel believes that a smartphone can be both a diagnostic instrument—it can detect a deteriorating state of mind—and a life-saving mode of treatment.

psychiatry department at UC San Francisco. PRIME (Personalized Real-time Intervention for Motivation Enhancement) was inspired partly by research showing that social connection and peer support can reduce the severity of depression and schizophrenia. Schlosser designed it for people ages 14 to 30 who'd been recently diagnosed with schizophrenia. It could be adapted for use by people diagnosed with or at risk for other mental disorders.

The heart of PRIME is a Facebook-like mobile app that connects members to both a circle of peers (in this case, others who have had psychotic episodes) and professional clinicians who can assist as needed. Currently about 50 people use PRIME at any given time, with at least five clinicians logged on and available. Most members use it daily. Members tell Schlosser they gain enormously simply by seeing that other members are perfectly normal people who happen to have schizophrenia.

The app has three real functions. One is connecting people so they can turn to one another for help, perspective, and affirmation. Another is providing a set of motivational essays, talks, and interactive modules that help with decisions and dilemmas common among the membership. The third is quickly spotting emerging crises and responding with peer, social-service, and clinician support.

Sometimes it works in more dramatic fashion. Schlosser describes one participant who, because he regularly conversed with people in the group, felt free to volunteer something he might not have if he were more isolated: He confessed that he was feeling a bit off, as if he might be sliding back toward psychosis. When Schlosser's team reviewed his message history, it saw changes in syntax and language use that suggested emerging psychosis. His physician then tweaked his meds, and both his unease and his disordered syntax resolved.

A system like PRIME or the one used by 7 Cups, notes Insel, combines the two components necessary to any approach to mental-health care—assessment, by collecting and analyzing

the data a person and his smartphone can provide; and intervention, which might include anything from informal social support to medical support (either inpatient or outpatient).

Mindstrong, he says, will first focus on assessment, spending the next year or so testing phone-based data-collection-and-analysis systems; and then explore ways to partner with others to provide intervention through what Insel calls “learning-based mental-health care.” Continuous assessment and feedback would drive the interventions. Likewise, all therapies would use measurement-based practices, which give clinicians and patients steady feedback on what’s working and what isn’t—an approach shown to sharply improve outcomes.

TO PRESERVE USERS’ PRIVACY, Insel says, Mindstrong will collect information only on an opt-in basis, and all data will be strongly encrypted. For most services, Mindstrong will save not actual data streams, such as what is said in spoken or typed conversations, but only metadata that reflect state of mind without revealing actual conversation. This might include semantic structures or the repeated use of key words or phrases that can reveal emotional or cognitive states such as depression, mania, psychosis, and cognitive confusion. All data will be firewalled according to strict patient-privacy practices.

Even such metadata, of course, might make an attractive target for people who’d want to exploit it. (Picture a digital-era version of the Nixon administration’s bungled attempt to steal the psychiatric records of Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers, so that it could blackmail or smear him.) The only thing stopping such an effort in digital form might be the strength of Mindstrong’s firewall or its willingness to defy a government request for data. This danger is real. Google, for instance, has steadily reduced the proportion of government data requests it responds to, but in the second half of 2016, the company reports, it still produced data for 60 percent of such requests overall, and 79 percent of such requests from the U.S. The company reveals little to the public about which requests it honors or why. For these reasons, some digital-privacy experts think

it’s dangerous for any company to collect and keep something as sensitive as psychiatric-patient data. For his part, Allen Frances feels it’s naive to trust any commercial entity to permanently protect such data from other commercial interests, hackers, or a government bent on getting the information. Others argue that this worry is itself naive, since most of us already leave enough footprints with smartphones, computers, phone calls, and credit-card purchases to forfeit the privacy Frances wants to protect. The question may not be whether a Mindstrong firewall would be perfect, but whether it would be stronger than the many porous containers already holding our personal and medical information.

I ONCE ASKED INSEL how he saw his move to Silicon Valley in relation to the rest of his career. I expected he’d say it was a complete departure.

Instead he said it felt to him like a return to his first concerns—“a return to behavior.” He meant the voles.

The fundamental assumption behind the vole work, and behind Insel’s career at the NIMH, was that beneath behavior lay biological mechanisms you could discern and then tweak to change that behavior. The crux of the biological model, in other words, was that you could and should address mental illness from within. Otherwise, why bother with the nearly impossible job of figuring out how it all worked? You looked for mechanisms so you could fix the machine.

Now, however, Insel means to address mental disorders not from the inside, but from the outside; and not with something new, but with things at hand. He’s shifting from mechanistic discovery to practical application. He is acting on the epiphany he had when the man at his talk complained that Insel was discussing paint chemistry when he should have been putting out fires. It was then, Insel says, that he began “to realize that the really urgent issue isn’t that our treatments get better, but that we don’t use what we have today.”

Insel will always believe in the value of research, of figuring out how things work. But our most pressing problem, he says—what keeps psychiatry from making the huge strides that have been made in disciplines like infectious disease and cardiology—is not what we don’t know. We know well enough what works. Our problem is that we’re not doing it.”

The other big development in Insel’s work today is his embrace of social contact as a basic health necessity. For this he credits Schlosser’s work. “She convinced me that people with psychotic illness really crave social connections,” he said. “This was a great wake-up call for me: to see they want to connect on their own terms, sometimes anonymously, on their own

Smartphones can track daily behaviors that reflect mental health. A phone can sense the beginning of a crisis and trigger an appropriate treatment response.

schedule, in a way that they feel they can control”—often with others like them, in relationships that feel equal, rather than only with clinicians who may seem to hold too much power.

Why didn’t he come to all this sooner? Why now?, I asked. “I have always believed,” he said, “that to get the most impact, you should go where you get the most traction.” Even five years ago, he said, he could not have gotten traction on the ground that he and Mindstrong are working today. Smartphones weren’t ubiquitous enough; the data weren’t rich enough.

“But now,” he said to me, “now we can do this.” He was leaning forward and smiling and holding both hands up in front of him as if he were fixing to catch something—as if he were a basketball player who’d just shook his defender and was calling for the ball to take an open shot. His eyes had the look of someone who felt he couldn’t miss. □

David Dobbs writes for The Atlantic, The New York Times, National Geographic, Pacific Standard, and other publications.



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Adam Roberts is searching the world's dirtiest places for new antibiotics, in the hopes of staving off the growing threat of drug resistance.

By

MARYN MCKENNA





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On

tries to appear inconspicuous. This is harder than it sounds, and not only because he's 6 foot 3.

Roberts pulls a plastic-wrapped package from his pocket, tears it open, and slides out a long, slender tube and a swab that looks like an overgrown Q-tip. After checking again for anyone watching, he trots down the stairs, dragging the swab along the handrail, and slips the swab into the tube and the tube into his pocket. Then he strolls away.

After a block, Roberts veers off busy Euston Road and down side streets toward his lab at University College London. He's not up to anything nefarious—quite the opposite—but with closed-circuit TVs everywhere and London on high alert for terrorist threats, he worries about raising alarms. Only once he reaches the middle of St. George's Gardens, a green space of big trees and old tombstones, does he relax.

What Roberts has just done, in an action that he and people who support him have performed hundreds of times, is to return to a practice that was abandoned more than 40 years ago. He has sampled the environment, hoping to find in the dirtiest, most germ-filled places an answer to one of the most pressing problems of our day.

Drug resistance—the ability of bacteria to defend themselves against the compounds we use to kill them—has impaired the effectiveness of almost every antibiotic produced since the first ones were developed, in the 1940s. At least 700,000 people are estimated to die worldwide every year from infections that no longer respond to antibiotics. That toll could balloon to more than 10 million a year by 2050 if we can't slow the spread of resistance or find new drugs; routine surgeries and minor injuries will become life-threatening.

Yet making the necessary changes to stave off this catastrophe seems to be beyond us. We continue to take antibiotics with abandon (nearly a third of antibiotic prescriptions in the U.S. aren't actually needed) and feed huge quantities of them to farm animals. And pharmaceutical companies—daunted by how quickly resistance can undermine drugs that may take a decade and a billion dollars to develop—are not rushing to fill the gap.

That's where Roberts, a 43-year-old microbiologist from central England, comes in. Back at his lab, he pulls out a handful of tubes that he collected during his walk and labels them: *shoe, bathroom-door handle, tree, bench, handrail*. He reaches for a stack of petri dishes, each holding a layer of clear-yellow growth medium. One by one, he opens the dishes, swipes the tip of a swab over the agar, closes and marks them, and sets them aside to be incubated.

"The natural microbial world has a whole array of chemistry we haven't yet looked into," he tells me, recording the dishes in a ledger. "And we don't have to go to the bottom of the ocean or an extreme environment to find it."

THERE WAS A TIME when all of our antibiotics came from natural sources. That is how the antibiotic era began, in 1928: Sir Alexander Fleming reputedly left a

a chilly autumn morning in northwest London, just outside the Euston train station, Adam Roberts stops at the top of an outdoor staircase, looks around for police, and window open in his London laboratory, and discovered weeks later that specks of the mold *Penicillium*, blown in on the breeze, excreted a chemical that killed the bacterium *Staphylococcus*. That chemical became the first antibiotic, penicillin. It was followed by chloramphenicol, made by a bacterium found in compost in Venezuela, and chlortetracycline, excreted by a bacterium found in a field at the University of Missouri, a test plot for growing hay.

These were the foundational drugs of the antibiotic era, which turned the historical menace of infection from a death sentence into an inconvenience. Their ability to kill disease bacteria was not an accidental property. The earliest antibiotics were refined versions of chemical weapons that bacteria had developed over millennia to fend off other microorganisms as they competed for living space and food. The organisms that made these weapons seemed to thrive in damp and dirty places.

Those early antibiotics were so successful and so lucrative that manufacturers began scouring the world for additional ones. Bristol-Myers (now Bristol-Myers Squibb) included a pre-addressed envelope in its 1951 annual report, along with a note asking shareholders to scoop up "a teaspoon of soil, slightly moist but not wet, and free from large stones," and mail it to company headquarters. Eli Lilly struck an agreement with members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance: Ministers going to the developing world were given test tubes to take with them. Pfizer recruited explorers, pilots, and foreign correspondents to send it soil samples.

Those searches resulted in antibiotics that remain crucial today: erythromycin, from the Philippines; vancomycin, from the jungle floor in Borneo; daptomycin, from the foothills of Mount Ararat, the biblical resting place of Noah's Ark. But the work of identifying and isolating useful compounds was punishingly slow. Selman Waksman, a microbiologist who was funded by Merck, processed 10,000 samples before identifying streptomycin. Pfizer went through more than 130,000 samples before finding terramycin, an early tetracycline.

Soil teems with microorganisms—a teaspoon can contain millions—yet only a subset of them make compounds that may prove useful as antibiotics. And within that subset, only a tiny fraction will grow in a lab, away from the complex natural environments in which they evolved. Researchers who thought they were soaring into an entire new universe of cures—and profits—found themselves stuck on the launchpad, discovering the same antibiotic compounds over and over again. The developers of terramycin told *The New Yorker* in 1951 that before finding it, they had rediscovered streptomycin "at least a hundred times."

By the end of the 1960s, drug companies gave up on finding antibiotics in soil and turned to assembling synthetic compounds in labs. Not coincidentally, the rate of finding new drugs dropped. From 1940 to 1970, a dozen different classes of antibiotics got all the way through clinical testing and entered the American market. Since 1970, only a few new classes have, which means that almost all the new antibiotics produced since then have been variations on existing ones, with mechanisms that bacteria already have learned to defend against.

With no new drugs to curb their spread, disease bacteria took off. MRSA, multidrug-resistant staph, jumped out of hospitals in the mid-'90s, sidelining athletes and creating cases of fast-moving pneumonia that can kill a child in days. The



Every year, at least 700,000 people die worldwide from infections that no longer respond to antibiotics. That toll could balloon to 10 million by 2050.

early 2000s brought the spread of VRE, which causes grave hospital infections and is resistant to vancomycin, a last-resort drug. NDM, a gene that confers resistance to a family of drugs called carbapenems, was transported out of India and around the globe by infected travelers in the late 2000s. Another resistance gene, MCR, which disables the very-last-resort antibiotic colistin (like vancomycin, a holdover from the 1950s), was identified in China in 2015 and has since turned up in more than 30 countries around the world.

By last year, the rising tide of multidrug resistance had caught the attention of the United Nations, which held a rare special summit during a meeting of its General Assembly. The convocation committed world governments to cracking down on antibiotic misuse within their borders and supporting research to find new drugs. Ban Ki-moon, then the secretary-general, called drug resistance “a fundamental, long-term threat to human health.”

COMPOST BIN. Pig trough. Dog-food bowl. Laptop keyboard.

Roberts is flipping through a thick binder in his lab, reading off the places where the samples in his collection came from. He didn’t collect most of them himself. They were provided by a network he built, through a crowdsourcing campaign and a Facebook page—a modern version of the drug-company campaigns of the 1950s, aimed at harvesting samples from a wider geographic range than he could ever reach on his own.

Roberts asks people to send him samples from places where bacteria are likely to thrive—the less sanitary, the better.

Roberts earned his doctorate here at University College London in 2002, and for more than a decade he studied one of the main ways bacteria acquire antibiotic resistance: passing genes back and forth by trading segments of DNA. Transmissible resistance, as it is called, was described in the 1960s by two Japanese researchers, who noticed that strains of the food-borne-illness bacterium *Shigella* had become resistant to drugs that patients had never received.

It has been a microbiological nightmare ever since. Transmissible resistance allows the mutations that confer protection against antibiotics to spread not just through inheritance, from mother cell to daughter, but also among unrelated bacteria via the exchange of plasmids, small loops of DNA that exist separate from the chromosomes. Plasmids can transport multiple genes at the same time, so they allow resistance against multiple drugs to stack up in bacteria like cards in a winning hand of poker.

Roberts was fascinated by this phenomenon. But after years of study, he decided to shift his focus. “I started to think we could go on forever finding new resistance genes, because they are always evolving,” he says. “Instead of looking for new genes, why not look for new drugs?”

He decided to start where pharmaceutical chemistry had left off decades earlier: in the messy real-world settings where bacteria duke it out. He launched his campaign, called Swab and Send, in February 2015. For £5, participants got a sample tube, a mailing envelope, and an explanation of what Roberts wanted them to look for: a spot in the environment where bacteria were

Roberts has found 18 bacteria, so far, that were able to kill a strain of *E. coli* resistant to 15 different drugs.



"Toilet in the third tier of the football ground in Manchester," Roberts reads as he opens a petri dish, and then another: "Fridge puddle of yuck from a forgotten and moldy lettuce."

likely to be competing for nutrition and room to reproduce. He asked them to use their imagination. The less sanitary, the better.

In a departure from the first antibiotic searches, Roberts does not ask his sample-collectors to focus on soil. Instead he wants them to search in places his predecessors may have overlooked. "There's such a rich microbial environment everywhere around us," he says. "Every single place is a niche, where bacteria will have evolved and adapted independently. Soil may have evolved biological warfare, if you like, completely differently than a marine environment, or a muddy environment, or contaminated pond water. There's a possibility of different chemistry everywhere."

The Swab and Send campaign fired people's enthusiasm: Within two months, Roberts received more than £1,000, and hundreds of swabs. Small checks continue to arrive by mail. (The price of participation has gone up, to £30 for five swabs.) Elementary schools invite Roberts to make presentations, and he gives the kids swabs to take home. He has taken sample tubes to parties and to newsrooms. He has two swabs that were swiped across desks in the Houses of Parliament.

TOILET IN THE THIRD TIER of the football ground in Manchester," Roberts reads. (That one arrived with a sketch of a football fan using the toilet.) "Fridge puddle of yuck from a forgotten and moldy lettuce." We're sitting in his lab. Roberts is opening petri dishes that have been incubating overnight and transferring samples of whatever bacteria

have grown into 96 tiny indentations in a culture plate. He is repeating a process that the scientists of the 1940s followed, growing bacteria in the lab to see what they could do.

The first step is to scribble a swab over a dish of culture medium and let it incubate. The second is to separate all the bacteria that grow on the gel—one swab might have picked up many species—and plop them into individual wells on a fresh plate, to let them multiply without interference from one another. In the third step, Roberts dabs each of these samples into culture dishes that contain another microorganism, to see whether they can hold their own against competition. He's looking for a "zone of inhibition": a clear ring around a bacterium indicating that it produces a compound that can kill.

A bacterium that clears that hurdle then faces a higher one: being tested against a strain of *E. coli* resistant to 15 different drugs. If the bacterium survives that challenge, the compound it produces is considered worthy of further scrutiny. Roberts uses analytic tools that did not exist in the 1940s to find out whether the survivor is really something new.

Since Swab and Send began, Roberts and his graduate students have painstakingly coaxed thousands of bacteria samples through the successive rounds of incubation. Out of all those, hundreds have secreted compounds that killed at least one test bacterium, and a few killed a fungus—potentially precious finds, because antifungal drugs are in even shorter supply than antibiotics. He has found 18 promising bacteria, so far, that killed the multidrug-resistant *E. coli*.

It is slow work, judged against the pace of bacterial evolution. That frustrates Roberts, because he knows firsthand the risk that resistance poses. Three years ago, his daughter, who was 6 at the time, was playing in the countryside and scratched her leg. The scratch turned into a pustule, and a wash of red began to spread up and down her shin. Doctors tried three different types of antibiotics. None worked. Within 12 hours of her arrival at University College Hospital, she was carted into surgery.

His daughter recovered, though she still has a dent on her shin where the infection was cut out. But for Roberts, the episode brought home how unpredictable antibiotic resistance is, and how short the distance might be between a single recalcitrant infection and the future he's trying to prevent: multiple tries at treatment, long hospital stays, huge health-care costs, early deaths.

"If the health-care system could not have kept up with her infection, she could have lost her leg," Roberts says. "The way you get to having a health-care system that can't keep up is to have it collapse under the pressure of having no antibiotics. I can see that happening really easily."

THE SLOW PACE of Roberts's research hints at the enormity of the challenge of finding new antibiotics.

"The hard thing isn't finding things that kill bacteria; steam, fire, bleach can do that," says John Rex, who led clinical antibiotic development at AstraZeneca and now is the chief medical officer at F2G, a firm working on new antifungal drugs. "The challenge is to find things that kill bacteria but don't harm the person taking them. You're talking about a chemical that goes into your mouth, into your gut, into your blood, unchanged, and winds up where the infection is and kills the bacteria, and yet is not toxic to you."

The beauty of man-made antibiotics was that they could be tailored to those challenges, and to whatever clinical need drug developers perceived. But as antibiotics have fallen to the onslaught of resistance, developers are turning back to natural sources.

"We haven't come close to tapping the potential of the natural world," Gerry Wright, the director of the Michael G. DeGroote Institute for Infectious Disease Research at McMaster University in Ontario, told me. Wright is the co-founder of the university's High Throughput Screening Lab, a lab that can automate the testing of compounds. In the days it takes Roberts and his team to do a few dozen tests, a lab like Wright's can perform tens of thousands.

"A typical *Streptomyces* in soil has the genetic programming to produce 20 to 40 different compounds," Wright says. "Every one of those things has some biological activity. Not all of them are antibiotics, of course, but they're products of evolution. They're not kept around for nothing. If you compare that to 30 random chemicals made by a chemist, you'd be lucky if one or two have any biological activity at all."

These days, Roberts isn't the only one looking to the natural world for new antibiotics. A team at Northeastern University has invented a device, called the iChip, that allows bacteria that do not thrive in laboratory cultures to be grown in soil; its use led to the isolation of a promising compound, teixobactin, which is still being studied. And a project called the Small World Initiative—created in 2012 by Jo Handelsman, a University of Wisconsin professor who served as the Obama

administration's associate director for science—is similar to Roberts's campaign, but with more emphasis on education. It teaches basic microbiology to thousands of high-school and college students each year by having them collect soil samples, isolate the bacteria the samples contain, test the bacteria for antibiotic activity, and then present their research at a symposium. The goal is to find novel compounds that companies or academic researchers could take through the next steps.

Even if those efforts succeed, it's unclear how a new antibiotic would reach the market. The later stages of drug development—the multiphase clinical trials that test the safety and efficacy of a new antibiotic in thousands of patients—require a level of funding that only large pharmaceutical companies can muster, and that they have been reluctant to commit. How best to persuade companies to return to making antibiotics is a hot policy topic in the United States and Europe, with various incentives—grants, prizes, extended patents—all up for debate.

Roberts—who has held Swab and Send together with supporters' small checks, one grant of £20,000, and stubborn belief—speaks wistfully of the difference that more resources could make for his project. During my visit to London, we sit on high stools in his lab while he holds culture plates up to the ceiling light, looking for telltale zones of inhibition. It's a motion that Fleming might have made in the 1930s, when antibiotics were too new for anyone to recognize the moneymaking machine they would briefly become.

"If I had a bigger pot of money, it would really improve the amount of work we could do," Roberts says, pulling another stack of plates toward him. "I would try to create a team with every necessary piece of expertise and all the kit they need. They would all be in one place. They would all be talking to each other. At the moment—which is normal for an academic environment—everything just takes a little bit longer than it should."

After I return to the U.S., I call Roberts to check in. His mood is utterly different; his voice, and his finances, have gotten a lift. He has been recruited to move to the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, to work in a £25 million facility that will enable him to do just what he had envisioned: bring together teams from different scientific disciplines to work on new antibiotics. He is taking Swab and Send with him. The project will have its own budget, and a new lab and new equipment; any promising compounds he finds can be tested and developed by teams already working within the school. (Late-stage trials, with their huge logistical demands, will require a commercial partner.)

When I ask how much these resources might accelerate his search for a new drug, he corrects me.

"We don't need just one," he says. "Or five. If we get just a few, we're still just playing leapfrog. We need a thousand new drugs, so that clinicians can go to the cupboard and say, 'Right, in this decade, we're using these 200, and we're saving the other 800 for when the usefulness of these runs out.'"

"I think that is achievable," he says. "But it's going to take a massive amount of work." 

Maryn McKenna is the author of *Superbug* and the forthcoming *Big Chicken: The Incredible Story of How Antibiotics Created Modern Agriculture and Changed the Way the World Eats*.



ESSAY

Yayoi Kusama's Existential Circus

Is the current participatory-art craze about seeking profound experiences—or posting selfies?

By SARAH BOXER



WELL BEFORE THE YAYOI KUSAMA SHOW opened in Washington, D.C., I heard from total strangers that I would not be able to get in. I heard about the lines, the waits, the tickets that would be released in batches every Monday at noon, the need to make arrangements now now now. The craze was on, though the exhibition was still more than a month away. “Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors” was starting its multicity tour at the Hirshhorn Museum. The circus was coming to town.

Back in January, I knew that this once-in-a-lifetime chance to see those half-dozen mirrored rooms—those infinite dreamworlds for one, created by Yayoi Kusama, who is 88 and lives by choice in a mental hospital in Japan—needed to be on my art bucket list.

As I look over my ever-growing list, I see that it is chock-full of certain kinds of art—site-specific art, participatory art,

relational art, land art, art that is hard to get *to* or hard to get *into*. Art that I’ve been told I absolutely, positively must experience in person before I die. Art that I can see only alone or in a small group. Art that will bring out in me an exquisite existential alertness. Art that I will complete by simply being present—art that without me is nothing.

Much of the art on my list is designed to involve the observer in ways that no mere gallery-going ever could—and indeed makes the blockbuster exhibitions of the 20th century (Picasso, King Tut, the treasure houses of Britain) seem quaint. Yes, the long lines are still part of the experience, but new elements have been added. Cameras are often allowed, which opens the door to Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media. The visitor’s encounter is, in many cases, time-limited. Most important, many of the works on my bucket list invite the spectator to engage more personally with the art.

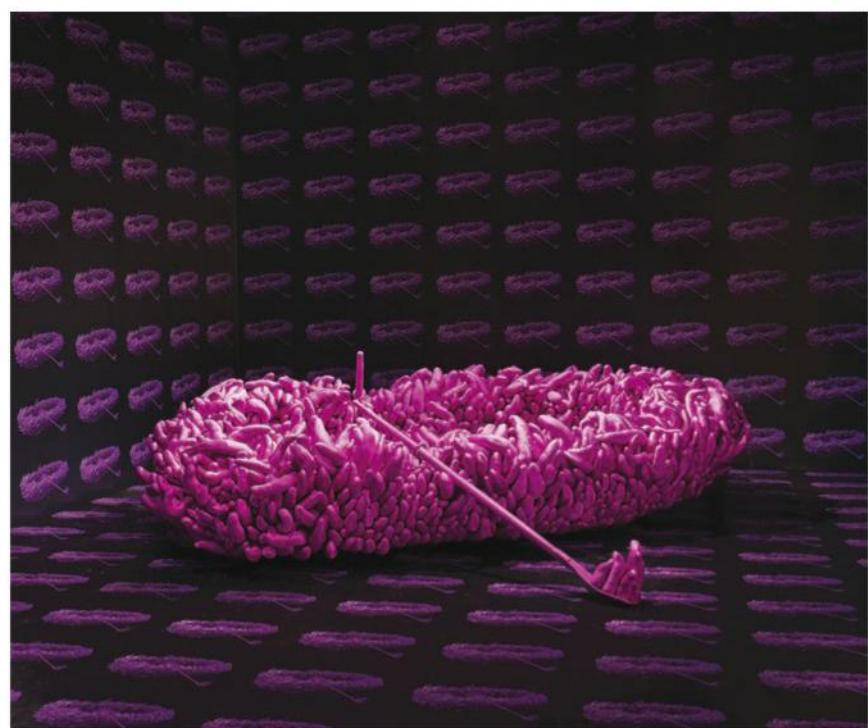
What's that you say? You don't have an art bucket list? Well, you can borrow mine. First, though, I should warn you that you have already missed many of the unmissable experiences I have had on my list.

Take New York alone. Kara Walker's *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, a giant sphinx made of sugar, topped with a mammy head, is no longer at the Domino Sugar refinery on the East River (which has since been demolished). You can no longer see Cate Blanchett's dramatic recitations of various art manifestos at the Park Avenue Armory. (However, her performance can now be seen as a movie, *Manifesto*.) You can no longer pay your respects, at the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest on Fifth Avenue, to Sophie Calle's dead mother by watching an 11-minute video of her death. Marina Abramović, the performance artist, is no longer available to sit with you at MoMA. You missed staying dry (or getting wet) in the Rain Room while MoMA had it. (Good news, though: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art recently acquired it for its permanent collection, so you might have another chance.) You cannot float nude in salt water at Manhattan's New Museum in an "Experience" designed by Carsten Höller. Rirkrit Tiravanija

The art on my bucket list is designed to involve observers in ways that no mere gallery-going ever could.

isn't making Thai curry for visitors at the David Zwirner gallery in Chelsea or at MoMA anymore. The chance to walk through Christo and Jeanne-Claude's orange *Gates* in Central Park has long since passed. Sigh.

But that's half the fun! The fact that some folks have managed to make the scene while others get left out in the cold is integral to the excitement of participatory art. The thrill is akin to exotic travel, or getting to see *Hamilton*. Because not everyone who wants the experience actually gets the experience; these works, even if their intentions and messages are democratic, tend to become exclusive affairs. As the art historian Claire Bishop notes in *Artificial Hells*:



Soft phallic shapes were a form of self-therapy for Kusama, who made a rowboat out of them in *Violet Obsession*.

Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, one paradox of this sort of participatory work "is that in intensifying convivial relations for a small group of people ... it produces greater exclusivity vis-à-vis the general public."

But cheer up, general public! Plenty of other can't-miss art experiences aren't going anywhere. I'm thinking of land art and site-specific art. Robert Smithson, for instance, created *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on the Great Salt Lake, in Utah, by arranging large rocks in a huge spiral. Michael Heizer made *Double Negative* (1969–70) near Overton, Nevada, by cutting two huge trenches into a mesa there. Walter De Maria composed *The Lightning Field* (1977) in the high desert of New Mexico by planting a vast field of 400 tall, lightning-attracting poles in a grid pattern. For the people who manage to make these treks, the dividend is not only the awesome sense of landscape transformed into art but also the keen realization that you and your journey are part of it.

If you can't reach those places, don't worry. There are other site-specific works that occupy whole rooms (De Maria's Earth Room in New York), buildings (the Rothko Chapel in Houston), islands (the Benesse Art Site in Japan dominates Naoshima, in the Seto Inland Sea), and towns. For instance,

much of Marfa, Texas, is devoted to the minimalist art of Donald Judd (known for his aluminum-and-concrete boxes), Carl Andre (known for his metal floor tiles, which visitors are allowed to walk on), and Dan Flavin (known for his arrays of fluorescent bulbs). Like old World's Fair sites, these places and works are not going anywhere; you just have to get yourself to them. And keep in mind that the more remote they are, the more bucket-list-worthy they are, too.

IF THERE IS a poster artist for the current participatory-art craze, it has got to be Yayoi Kusama, whose exhibits—especially her Infinity Mirror rooms—have drawn record crowds around the world for the past few years. In her case, the challenge is not so much getting *to* the show, but getting *into* the show, and then getting into each individual room in the show. After you get your prized time slot—and good luck with that—you must wait your turn in not just one line but six. Most of the Infinity Mirror rooms can fit two or three people, and each has its own line to stand in.

Luckily, as with any good amusement park, there are, along with the main rides, plenty of other entertainments. At the Kusama show, the side attractions amount to a more conventional museum

experience: a short course in Kusama's early obsessional work—her repetitive nets, polka dots, and phalluses. You will learn that it was by wrestling with her mental illness and her compulsion to spread those forms on every surface—walls, floors, furniture—that Kusama began to lay the groundwork for the Infinity Mirror rooms.

Kusama's Infinity Nets, a series of large paintings that she began in 1958, are canvases entirely covered with beautiful, repetitive loops and waves of paint that give the impression of a rippled oceanic surface that could go on and on, into infinity. (When Kusama first made them, she was compared to Jackson Pollock.) Then come the dots. Dots mean Kusama and Kusama means dots. But long before there was the circuslike Kusama we know today, her dots had a serious side. She discovered that she (like all of us) was "one of the dots among the millions of dots in the universe," and decided to use them to evoke individual disintegration and cosmic unity. "Polka dots," she has said, "are a way to infinity."

Around 1961, Kusama's two-dimensional obsessions began to overflow into three dimensions, as she made soft tubes out of cloth—first just plain white cloth, then striped or polka-dotted—and stuffed them like sausages. She called these soft phallic objects "Accumulations." En route to the Infinity Mirror rooms, you'll encounter a few. On the floor of one darkened gallery is

Violet Obsession (1994), a rowboat and oars covered, both inside and out, with cuddly purple phalluses. Nearby are two chairs from the mid-1960s, sprouting soft, bulging white phalluses. Extending through the length of one gallery is *A Snake* (1974), a long, silver serpentine form on the floor, bristling with baked-potato-like phalluses.

There's an embarrassment of phalluses, and that is the point. The phalluses were Kusama's way of turning fear into something funny. Mika Yoshitake, the curator of the exhibition, explains that when Kusama was a child, her mother, suspecting that Kusama's father was having an affair, had young Yayoi spy on the lovers and report back. This early vision of sex left her traumatized; she suffered hallucinations. Years later, as self-therapy, she began making soft phalluses and attaching them to furniture and floors. "By continuously reproducing the forms of things that terrify me," Kusama has said, "I am able to suppress the fear ... and lie down among them. That turns the frightening thing into something funny, something amusing."

These ridiculous objects, simultaneously comic and tragic, are the perfect warm-up act for the main show, the six Infinity Mirror rooms. The first room, *Phalli's Field* (1965/2016), is, if you'll excuse the expression, Kusama's seminal work, the bridge between the polka dots and the phalluses. It is also the bridge between Kusama's New York

Kusama grew tired of sewing thousands of stuffed phalluses, so she turned to mirrors to achieve repetition.



INSTALLATION VIEW OF INFINITY MIRROR ROOM—PHALLI'S FIELD (1965) IN FLOOR SHOW, CASTELLAINE GALLERY, NEW YORK, 1965. COURTESY OF OTA FINE ARTS, TOKYO/SINGAPORE; VICTORIA MIRO, LONDON; DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK. © YAYOI KUSAMA. PHOTOGRAPH BY EIKOH HOSOE

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To peer into Love Forever is to be reminded of old Broadway, and to feel uncomfortably voyeuristic, too.

experiments of the '60s and her more recent mirrored works. The precursor to *Phalli's Field* had no mirrors. It was a carpet of soft phalluses on which she could lie and be photographed. But after growing weary of sewing thousands of stuffed phalluses, she happened on the brilliant idea of achieving repetition with mirrors.

A version of *Phalli's Field* was incorporated into Kusama's public performances. She lolled in the field of her

fabric phalluses on 14th Street while a camera captured the scene. Kusama's work fit right in with the art events that were proliferating at the time—mostly one-off performances, part art and part theater, many of them involving nudity and paint, poetry and music, destruction and silence. They were called "Happenings." (The painter and performance-art pioneer Allan Kaprow came up with the term in the late 1950s.)

The idea was to liberate art from museum boundaries, to blur the line between art and nonart, and to take the result to the streets and to the people. Unscripted immediacy was key, yet sometimes a running camera was part of the performance, too. For *Meat Joy* (1964), for instance, Carolee Schneemann and other participants rolled around on an assortment of raw fish, sausages, chickens, wet paint, paper scraps, transparent plastic; the whole thing was filmed.

Back in the '60s, Kusama was not as famous as, say, Andy Warhol. But by the end of the decade, she had everything in place for the wildly popular experience we have now—the dots, the phalluses, the mirrors, the rooms.

LET ME IMMERSE YOU in my immersive experience—not that it's any substitute for being there yourself. Before we start, I should tell you that your experience will certainly be different from mine; I was lucky enough to go during a press opening, so I didn't have to stand in any lines, I got to enter each room alone, and I was



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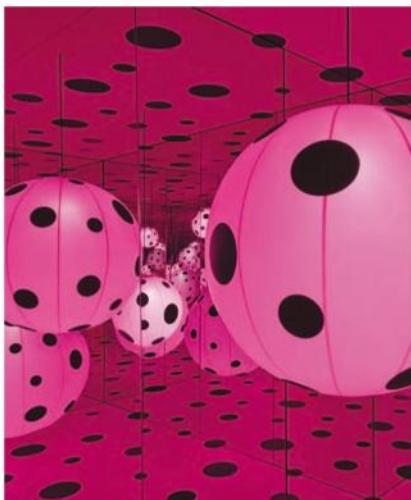
An attendant waved me into the mirrored room that is *Phalli's Field*. As I walked down a short plank leading to the edge of what looked like an endless pasture of red-and-white polka-dotted phalluses, the attendant shut the door behind me. For a second, as I became aware of myself in the mirrors, I had the sensation of being in a department store's changing room. But I had choices to make, and quickly. I could stand there and confront myself in this field of phalluses, or perhaps I could try to cancel myself out of the space by ducking. Neither felt right. I knelt on the little dock and regarded myself at roughly

"Infinity Mirrors" offers the chance to capture the lonely existential experience of infinity and send it to others as a selfie.

the height of the blooming polka-dot things (mushrooms without caps!). I confronted myself many times over in many mirrors in this crazy landscape. Before the attendant came to usher me out, I snapped a picture or two on my cellphone, and did a quick video-pan around the place.

My next stop was *Love Forever*, a room that is mirrored on both the inside and the outside—my chance to be a peeping Tom, or rather a peeping Yayoi, if only for a minute. This six-sided chamber—first constructed in 1966, in

Kusama's work also has a silly dimension.



part as a protest against the Vietnam War—was then reconstructed in 1994, and seems to hark back to Kusama's childhood trauma. Instead of entering, you peer into it while another voyeur, catty-corner to you, can peer in at the same time. The room is radiant, and literally hot, because of the lights inside it. Although the view you have is abstract—an infinite hexagonal pattern of colored lights that reminded me of old Broadway—it also feels a bit dirty and illicit. You are aware of the reflection of your own eyes across the room and also of the eyes of whoever else is gazing into the box at the same time. It's embarrassing by design. The viewer is the voyeur, and the voyeur is you.

By now, as I moved on to *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* (2013), I had become aware that my awareness of myself was shifting with each room. In this one I was keenly alert to my size and scale. I had the sense of being alone in a city, where hiding is always a possibility. Because the world looked better without me in it, I ducked and took a selfie with no self in it. Shortly after I emerged, I could hear a recording of Kusama incanting words I couldn't decipher. She was reciting, in Japanese, her poem "A Manhattan Suicide Addict" (2007). The lines, once I read them in English, seemed fitting after my recent attempt at self-eradication:

The present never ends...
I become a stone
Not in time eternal
But in the present that transpires

I was pushed out of my reverie by a jumble of gigantic spotted pink-and-black beach balls beckoning like carnival barkers toward the next Kusama ride. *Dots Obsession—Love Transformed Into Dots*, first made in 2007, was crammed with more beach balls. I quickly moved through this experience, which was as unethereal as you'll get from Kusama—Kusama silly. Kusama psychedelic. Kusama Lite.

Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity (2009) was Kusama Heavy. Was she perhaps taking on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? With small lights hung low in the darkened and mirrored room, this work evokes the look and feel of *toro nagashi*, the ceremony in which paper lanterns are lit and floated down a river in the evening. I had the by-now famil-



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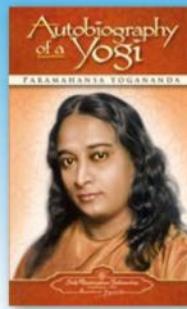
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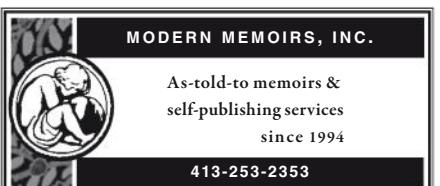
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iar feeling of being small and absorbed in some vastness, where I knew no one but myself. This time the experience was exhilarating. I was on the dock of the bay of infinity. I had no urge to hide myself. I was only a silhouette anyway. I didn't want to leave, but my minute was up.

And so I walked beside a field of yellow-and-black polka-dotted tentacles and on to the very last Infinity Mirror room, *All the Eternal Love I Have for the Pumpkins* (2016). I was conscious of the stark difference between what was above—a stormy sky, looming with dark and dangerous pumpkins—and what surrounded me at ground level: a field of happy, gleaming yellow pumpkins with black spots on them. Was I a faithful Linus shivering at night in the darkness, waiting for the Great Pumpkin? No. As I again viewed myself on the horizon line, I saw that I had become a bridge between two realms, up and down. I was an upright, rectilinear self in a world of orbs.

With its surreal backdrop, the pumpkin room was, I noticed, perfect for selfies. Well, who was I *not* to take a picture? I snapped 10 or so, and because the pumpkins were even more photogenic without me, once again I tried to expunge myself from some of the photos by lying low. (I learned only after seeing the show that lying down is prohibited.) Then my time was up.

I left the show by way of *The Obliteration Room*, a large space where visitors can decompress. On the preview day, it was an almost all-white room with all-white IKEA furniture. By the time the circus left D.C. in May, thousands of visitors had adorned every surface with the colorful sticker dots that were distributed there. The white had been vanquished by a riot of Wonder Bread spots. This place, the only one where viewers got to make their mark, was the most communal and relaxing and also, I have to say, the least existentially affecting.

PEOPLES WHO KNOW that I have had the Kusama experience look at me like someone who has been to Mecca. They ask, anxiously, whether it's worth it. Should they take extraordinary measures to get to this exhibit on its two-year-long tour? As I've thought about how to respond, I've also been puzzling over

the peculiarities of our particular art moment: Why has the apprehension of art become so like theater? And why is Kusama, who never received as much attention in the 1960s as many of her contemporaries did, finally in the spotlight now?

I was given a one-word answer to that question—Instagram!—and surely that is right. The Kusama show has just about everything the Happenings once had—the chance to see something extraordinary, the chance to participate, and the chance to photograph (or be photographed). But the “Infinity Mirrors” exhibition has added one key ingredient to the mix—the chance to capture the lonely existential experience of infinity and send it to others in the form of a selfie. People—thousands of them (check out #Kusama and #InfiniteKusama)—Instagram themselves in the exhibit.

By offering up to the public the solo art experience that was once her own private world—a primal and personal space for looking and healing and thinking about one’s own place in the cosmos—and then by also allowing self-

ies in it, Kusama has created the perfect art experience for the social-media age.

Her shows are crowded because, as many viewers will tell you, you really do have to see these works in person to appreciate them. No photograph, however good, can deliver that existential jolt of being there, seeing yourself repeated ad infinitum. At the same time, Instagram is helping to drive Kusama’s popularity; it is the means by which people advertise to the world that they are among the precious few who have

People who know that I have had the Kusama experience look at me as though I have been to Mecca.

had this lonely experience of being one dot among millions. The visual proof has helped propel Kusama’s work to the forefront of destination art in its latest form.

Of course, destination art isn’t exactly new; the frisson that accompanies a firsthand encounter has always been an element of art appreciation. In

the late 18th century, Europeans flocked to see panoramic paintings, thrilled to be immersed in a 360-degree experience. In the early 19th century, a walk through the Louvre or a tour of Italy became de rigueur for any cultured European. In 1913, the Armory Show, where Marcel Duchamp showed *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2), was an essential art pilgrimage. From the 1930s to the 1950s, every city that exhibited Picasso’s *Guanica* on its European and American tour drew crowds. By the 1990s—30 years after New York emerged as the Happenings capital, and some two decades after land art lured viewers farther afield—the new draw was destination architecture. Think of Bilbao, Spain.

Now the magnet has moved again. Museums and galleries are currently trying to attract visitors by engineering immersive environments and interactions. From Kusama on the grand end of the scale, offerings extend down to the circumscribed and understated: In “Sara Berman’s Closet,” at the Met, Maira Kalman, with her son, Alex, has re-created her mother’s closet, holding mostly white clothing. Meanwhile,



✓Yes



✓Yes



✓Yes



✓Yes



xNo



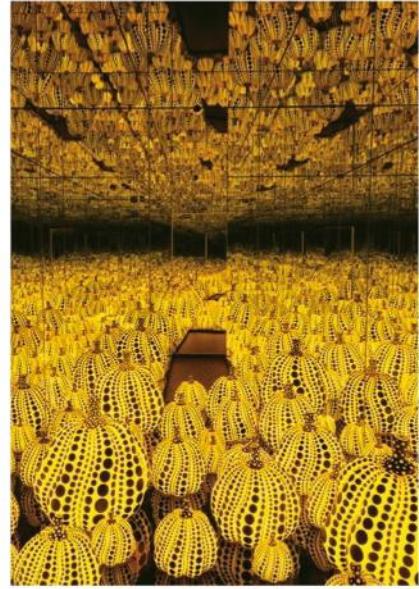
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The surreal pumpkin room is perfect for selfies.

this summer the Guggenheim in New York is exhibiting Doug Wheeler's "PSAD Synthetic Desert III." Installed near the top of the Guggenheim's spiral, this small show—a "semi-anechoic chamber" filled with beautiful, sound-absorbing foam stalagmites and stalactites—promises visitors in small groups (with timed tickets) the experience of the silence of the desert.

Drawn, yet again, to the lure of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I went to see Wheeler's chamber. And I am happy I did, because I had an epiphany about exactly what sort of art moment we are in. Although I did not experience the sublime silence I was hoping for (I was actually overwhelmed by a pulsating ringing in my ears), I had an important encounter on my way out of the museum. I spied the stanchions that signal a wait-in-line-to-see experience. I stood and waited. For what? A toilet. It was a solid-gold toilet, titled *America*—the work of the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, installed in one of the museum's bathrooms. Visitors, after standing in line, can not only behold and admire the toilet, but also use it. "Its participatory nature, in which viewers are invited to make use of the fixture individually and privately," the museum's brochure notes, "allows for an experience of unprecedented intimacy with a work of art." Intimacy indeed.

I went in, took a picture of the gold toilet, sat down, and tried to get a selfie that included both me and the work of

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art. From the sink, after washing my hands, I got another picture of the gold toilet, alone. And I suddenly understood that, taken in the right spirit, *America* is not just a riff on Duchamp's infamous *Fountain*—a porcelain urinal signed with the name R. Mutt, which, by the way, is 100 years old this year. It is also a supreme example of relational aesthetics, whose core idea is that the give-and-take of a social situation can itself be a work of art. You donate pee, you take away a photo. What will your photo be? Your face as you sit on the gold toilet? Your contribution to the gold toilet? It's up to you! (I was told that one employee had been fired for standing on the toilet in an attempt to get a good selfie, which he then sent out to his friends.)

If you look around you, you'll see examples of relational aesthetics everywhere. Over the past few years, for instance, several museums have offered up Yoko Ono's *Wish Tree*, on which people can hang their wishes, written on little paper tags. Recently the Jewish Museum, in New York, hosted "Take Me (I'm Yours)," in which visitors were supposed to take whatever they wanted from the exhibition—plaster casts of coffee lids, ribbons with slogans, buttons, T-shirts, clips of film, vials of air.

In our trophy-getting, Instagramming, participatory era, the taking and posting of selfies has become an important and unintentional extension of relational aesthetics. Whether spectators are invited to take pictures or not (cellphones are not allowed, for instance, in Wheeler's silence chamber), many visitors now experience museums and galleries with a cellphone in hand and a Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook account at the ready. You take a picture, you post it for your friends, and they receive the favor, and do the same in return.

Indeed, some museums have started loosening up their rules about photography, on the theory that people are more inclined to come if they are allowed to take pictures. Regardless of the rules,

though, viewers snap and viewers chat, and the resulting experience is hard for any museum to control or to script—which is, after all, a basic (and potentially unnerving) principle of participatory art.

Case in point: In its inaugural show last year, the Met Breuer included Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*)—a 175-pound pile of candy from which visitors were allowed to take a piece. Despite a sign on the wall telling viewers that photography was not allowed, the pile of candy inspired, as *W* magazine noted, pictures aplenty on Instagram. "The good ones are on the bottom!" read a caption that was hashtags #GettinItIn; the picture showed a visitor plunging his hand to the bottom of the candy pile. Another Instagrammer wrote: "The Met Breuer giving out free candy on the 4th floor and other cool things that you should def go see"—a caption that yielded the comment "Omfg."

What those exuberant viewers might not have realized, though the wall text explained it, was that by taking a piece of candy they were taking part in a performance that refers to, among other things, the physical decline of the artist's partner, Ross Laycock, who died of complications from AIDS (as did Gonzalez-Torres). The weight of the pile of candy, at its outset, was Laycock's ideal weight, 175 pounds, before he got sick.

Will Kusama's exhibition—where photography is obviously welcome—suffer similar indignities? It already has. One visitor to *All the Eternal Love I Have for the Pumpkins* reportedly tripped over one of the gleaming pumpkins and damaged it while trying to capture a self-portrait in a mirror. What has become almost laughably clear is that Kusama's mirrored investigations into existentialism and infinity have become theaters of infinite narcissism.

But does it really matter? Narcissism, after all, is one of the inescapable ingredients of participatory art, which not only highlights the give-and-take involved in any art experience, but

also calls attention to the power of the audience to complete, or complicate, or confound an artist's intention. Like Gonzalez-Torres's pile of candy, Kusama's works were created, at least in part, to deal with personal trauma, but they are also asking viewers to have their own experience. Surely Gonzalez-Torres knew that some visitors wouldn't be thinking about AIDS while sucking the pieces of candy they took from his pile, and surely Kusama knew that no one would experience her works as she did.

In fact, maybe the distance between the sorrow and the silliness is part of the point. I do wonder, though, what in the world Kusama, who doesn't have a cellphone and doesn't do Facebook, Snapchat, or Instagram, would make of the circus that is "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors." What would she make of spectators so busy trying for the perfect selfie that they fail to feel any sense of existential angst or joy? I have a suspicion that she might smile.

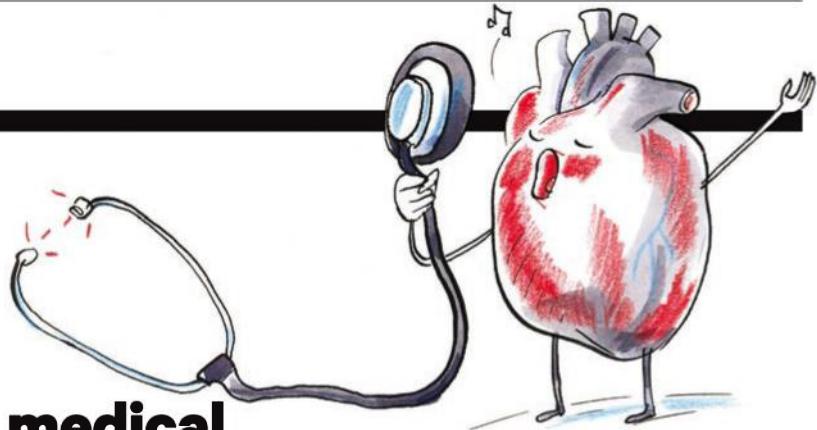
Although you may have missed your shot to see the exhibit in Washington, D.C., Kusama will be coming soon to a city that might be somewhere near you: Seattle, Los Angeles, Toronto, Cleveland, and Atlanta. If you ask me, I would say go ahead and put it on your art bucket list. Why miss out on the chance, before you die, to wander through fields of phalluses and polka dots and watch yourself contemplate your own insignificance in the universe? The experience is well worth it, if only to get an intimation of where every bucket list points—to the finitude of your existence in this infinite cosmos. You wait in line, you get your turn, you look around in awe, you snap a few pictures, and then, like everyone else, you are escorted out.

Well, that's life. It may look infinite, but you are not. You are just a dot, there and then not. **A**

*Sarah Boxer is a writer, critic, and cartoonist. She is the creator of the comic book *In the Floyd Archives* and its sequel, *Mother May I?**



What is the most underappreciated medical invention in history?



Jack Ende, president, American College of Physicians

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McKinley Belcher III, actor, *Mercy Street*

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wounds. **Antisepsis** changed the game. The advent of medical practitioners cleaning wounds and instruments and maintaining a sterile surgical environment dramatically increased the likelihood that patients would survive.



Christopher Crenner, president, American Association for the History of Medicine

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Sheri Fink, author, *Five Days at Memorial*

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Nita Landry, ob-gyn and co-host, *The Doctors*

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Steve Harris, St. Louis, Mo.
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