

NATIONAL REVIEW



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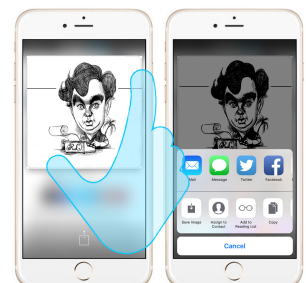


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Abortion and Birth Rates

In his article “Our Global Birth Dearth” (January 27), Lyman Stone gives a thorough analysis of the lower birth rates that are occurring worldwide, and many causes are explored to explain them. But mysteriously lacking is the impact that abortion has on low birth rates. There is credit given to contraceptive technology as a factor in effectively controlling the population. However, according to the World Health Organization, worldwide every year there are 40–50 million abortions. Shouldn’t we recognize abortions since 1973 as significantly impacting low birth rates, or is abortion just part of the “contraceptive technology”?

*Diane Bialecki
Prospect, Pa.*

Too Many People?

In his article about declining birth rates, the author speaks about the decline as though it’s a bad thing. Would he have the human population grow unchecked forever until we have a trillion humans on the face of the earth? Quality, not quantity, is what matters. It is not necessary for a country’s gross domestic product to always grow for the economy to be successful. An increase in growth per capita indicates that citizens are achieving a higher standard of living. This could occur while gross domestic product as an aggregate declines.

*Mark McKenzie
Asheville, N.C.*

LYMAN STONE RESPONDS: Several readers noted two conspicuous absences in my recent article: abortion and overpopulation. I avoided these two topics for three reasons: practicality, empirical import, and moral concerns.

First, the practical: The article was, as I am sure readers noticed, already quite long.

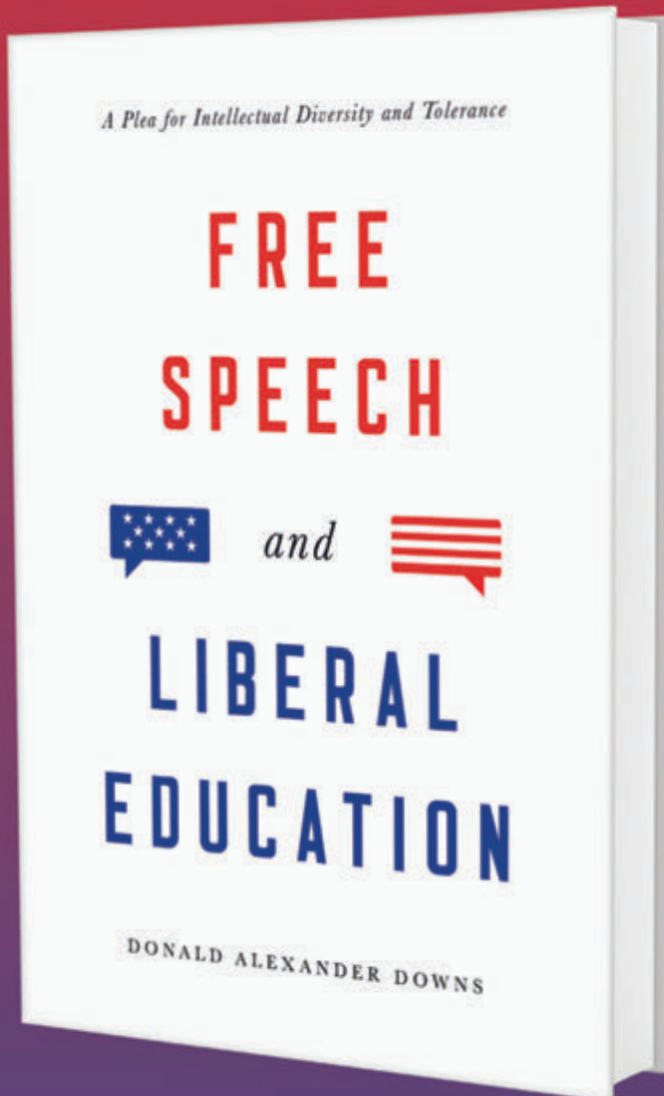
Second, the empirical import of such questions: Much as existing academic research suggests that the impact of contraception on birth rates has been greatly inflated by both its critics and its enthusiasts, so too with abortion. While research suggests that restricting access to abortion does have some modest impact on birth rates, research has also clearly shown that readily accessible abortion creates its own demand. And when abortion is restricted, contraceptive use rises. Thus, it is statistically improper to assume that the many millions of abortions that have occurred around the world in the last few decades would not have happened but for the legality of abortion. In fact, were abortion illegal, many of those children would never have been conceived in the first place (and a considerable share would have miscarried). The significance of abortion as a driver of declining birth rates is greatly overstated.

Finally, the moral issue: Both abortion and overpopulation are topics so near to the darkest moments that modern man has experienced that I cannot write about them as secondary themes in a larger work. My view of abortion is simple: It’s murder and ought to be banned. But I am a demographer, not an ethicist or a theologian, and so I leave it to others to explain why killing a very tiny human is nonetheless killing a human.

My view of overpopulation takes rather longer to articulate, because this Hydra has many heads: Overpopulation concerns relate to climate, water, food, land, energy, traffic, hierarchy, genetics, democracy . . . everyone has a different reason why it’s bad to share the world with an ever-growing number of bearers of the image of God. But for me and my house, we will go forth and multiply. More pointedly, I view worries about overpopulation as a kind of gateway drug to genocide.

Letters may be submitted by email to letters@nationalreview.com.

Is There a Free Speech Crisis in Higher Education?



“I have intensely studied the issues surrounding free speech and higher education. But in *Free Speech and Liberal Education*, Donald Downs has provided me with invaluable, thought-provoking new insights...”

—**NADINE STROSSEN**

Former president of the American Civil Liberties Union and author of *HATE: Why We Should Resist It with Free Speech, Not Censorship*

The status of free speech and academic freedom in the nation's colleges and universities has become an explosive issue. Reports of disruptions, disinvitations of speakers, and a host of new speech-inhibiting policies instituted by campus bureaucracies are now commonplace.

Free Speech and Liberal Education dissects the nature, extent, and causes of speech suppression. It emphasizes the need for intellectual diversity and discusses the harms that the new policies and actions pose to liberal education, as well as the broader structural and societal threats to academic freedom. It also shows how to mobilize to protect campus freedom using resources both inside and outside the classroom.

The Week

Text

■ It will be something if 2020 ends up being a choice between a crass and vain New York City billionaire with an ugly Twitter habit and Donald Trump.

■ As the Senate voted on whether to remove President Trump from office, Mitt Romney had a harrowing moment. His attitude toward Trump has wavered, in a manner that reflected the unpredictable shifts in his own political profile over the years: condemning Trump during the 2016 campaign, meeting him after his victory to audition for secretary of state, condemning him once more after he took office. Now came the inescapable decision: Should the president stay or go? As a 72-year-old, twice-failed presidential candidate occupying a safe Senate seat, Romney had nothing to gain or lose. He concluded that one of the counts against Trump justified his going. This was emphatically not NR's conclusion, but it was self-evidently one that Romney had reached with deliberation and heart-searching. Trump's supporters may properly be critical, but those who called for him to be recalled from the Senate (impossible) or expelled from its Republican conference were petty and infantile. They might profit from the example of the man they mocked.

■ Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, the National Security Council staffer who questioned President Trump's July 25 phone call with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, both with superiors and before Congress, was dismissed from his job and returned to active service in the Army. Presidents are entitled to National Security Council staffs of their liking. But the manner of his removal (marched out of the White House on same-day notice); the simultaneous firing of his twin brother, Yevgeny, another lieutenant colonel who served the NSC as an attorney; and the attendant Trump tweet, suggesting that the Pentagon investigate Vindman for the "horrible things" he said, paint a too-familiar picture. Pettiness and resentment got President Trump into his Ukraine mess (get the Bidens! find the CrowdStrike server!). They characterize his post-op housecleaning.

■ Attorney General Bill Barr rebuked President Trump for his tweets about ongoing criminal cases and investigations—to no avail. The precipitating event was an imbroglio over the DOJ's sentencing recommendation in the Roger Stone case. The initial recommendation was for Stone to serve seven to nine years. This was firmly within Justice Department guidelines and yet was still excessive, treating Stone as if he were a mobster or gangbanger instead of a kooky 67-year-old with no history of violent crime. The recommendation also apparently wasn't what Bill Barr, by his own account, had expected. According to Barr, he had already decided to revise the recommendation when Trump began tweeting his outrage at the handling of the case, creating the inevitable impression that the president had intervened in a criminal matter to help a friend. Hence, Barr's warning that Trump's tweets made his job "impossible."

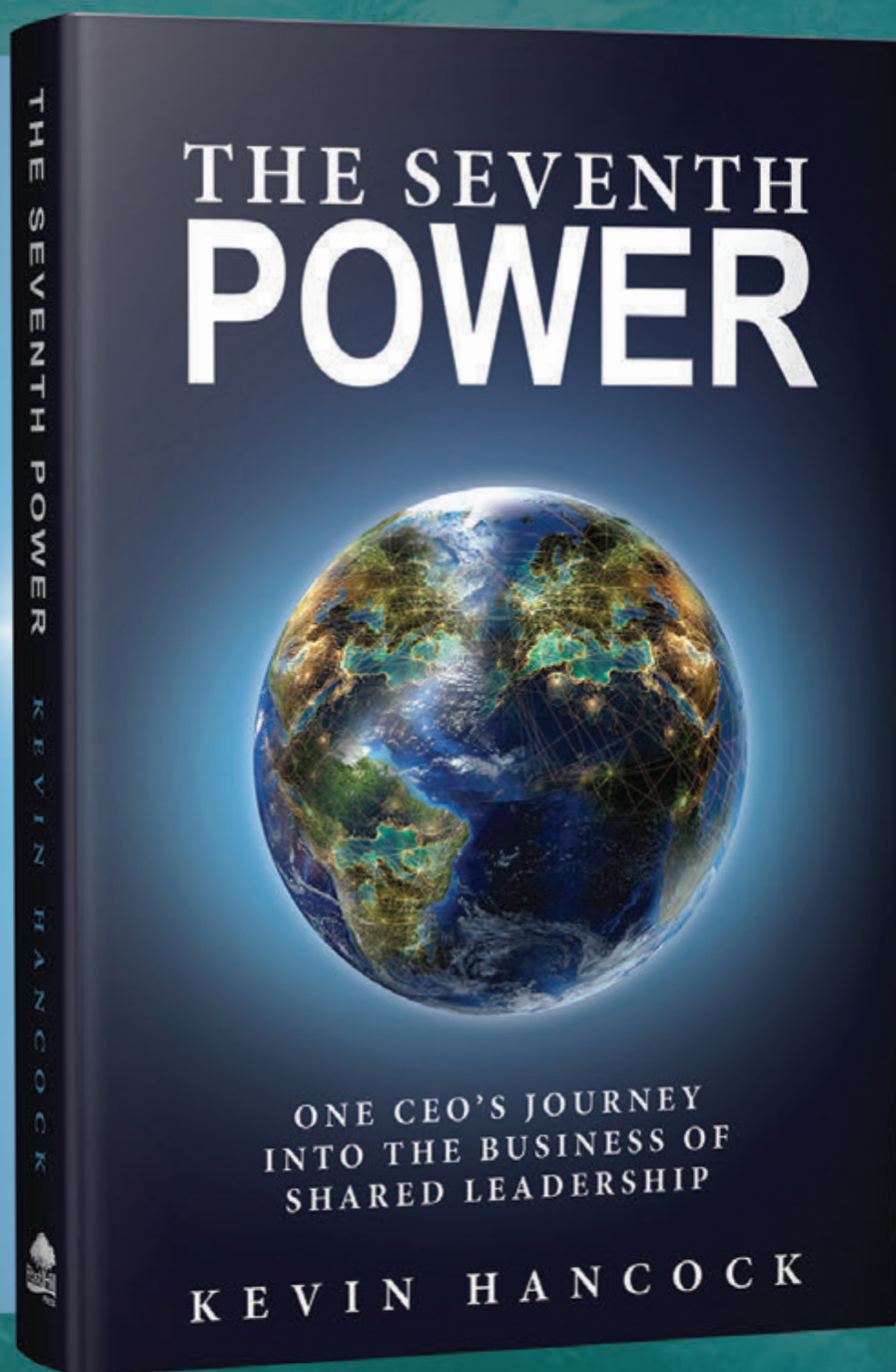
See page 12.



But nothing has been able to get between the president's thumbs and his Twitter account to this point, and Bill Barr is no exception. The attorney general now has the choice of simply putting up with Trump's constant commentary on sensitive legal matters, or quitting.

■ The false-statements investigation of the FBI's former deputy director, Andrew McCabe, has been closed without charges. The investigation was based on a referral by the Justice Department's inspector general, Michael Horowitz, who documented McCabe's serial misrepresentations to investigators, in which he denied knowledge of a leak to the media. In fact, McCabe had orchestrated the leak to rebut bad press about him—press that included reports of his overseeing Clinton-related probes even though Clinton-tied sources had given lavishly to his wife's state political campaign. McCabe undeniably gave false information to investigators, and his claims that he did not intentionally lie are implausible. Yet the case had problems. Key witnesses (such as former FBI director James Comey and FBI lawyer Lisa Page) were sympathetic to McCabe and hostile to the Trump Justice Department. The McCabe investigation may have been mishandled by the U.S. attorney's office. Moreover, President Trump's tweets against McCabe bolstered the latter's contention that the investigation was political retaliation rather than good-faith law enforcement. Factoring in the anti-Trump bent of the Washington, D.C., jury pool, Justice likely decided the possibility of acquittal was too high. The mendacious McCabe remains a CNN commentator.

WHAT IF EVERYONE ON EARTH
FELT VALUED, RESPECTED,
TRUSTED, AND HEARD?



■ President Trump and presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg had a Twitter spat, which was both amusing (if you like mean girls) and instructive. Trump led off: “Mini Mike Bloomberg is a LOSER who has money but can’t debate and has zero presence, you will see . . .” Bloomberg responded: “We know many of the same people in NY. Behind your back they laugh at you & call you a carnival barking clown. They know you inherited a fortune & squandered it with stupid deals and incompetence.” Bloomberg’s description of Trump’s pre-2016 career is accurate, and attributing it to “people . . . we know” who laugh “behind your back” is sharp. But Trump understands that Twitter wars are about characterization, not argument. “Mini” and “zero presence” are descriptions of qualities—short stature, a dry manner—that Bloomberg inescapably possesses. Trump will hammer at them like a woodpecker for the next nine months if Bloomberg wins the Democratic nomination. Which, love it or hate it, is one reason he is now president.

■ James Carville has been warning Democrats against Bernie Sanders, and the senator called him a “political hack” in response. Carville shot back: “I am a political hack! I am not an ideologue. I am not a purist. He thinks it’s a pejorative. I kinda like it! At least I’m not a Communist.” Point to the Cajun.

■ In recent weeks, several Democratic presidential contenders have been asked whether there is room in their party for pro-life Democrats, who make up about one-third of the party’s membership. Bernie Sanders responded in the negative: “I think being pro-choice is an absolutely essential part of being a Democrat.” Former mayor Pete Buttigieg was a bit more polite, but his conclusion was essentially the same. Amy Klobuchar sounded more hospitable. “I believe we’re a big-tent party,” she told Meghan McCain, “and there are pro-life Democrats, and they are part of our party.” Klobuchar deserves slight praise for taking this lonely stance, but her position on abortion is nearly as radical as that of her primary opponents. Pro-lifers might be welcome, but they’d better not expect the party to move an inch toward their views.

■ Stop-and-frisk was one of the policing techniques that caused New York City’s 20-year decline in crime beginning in 1994. Stop-and-frisk relies on *Terry v. Ohio*, a 1968 Supreme Court decision that allowed short, forcible, warrantless stops of those whom cops had a “reasonable suspicion” of being engaged in criminal activity. Any good thing can become overly routine, and such stops began to be used as a metric in their own right of police activity. By the mid 2010s, even those who had first recommended the policy—police commissioner William Bratton, academic George Kelling—were arguing that it must not be overused. Michael Bloomberg gave a defense of stop-and-frisk, in his bluntest know-it-all way, before the Aspen Institute in 2015 (“You can just take the description [of likely perps], Xerox it, and pass it out to all the cops”). His Democratic rivals have been hammering him for it, and he now says “I was wrong” to have permitted it. So a good policy was first twisted, then trashed. Meanwhile crime in stop-less, friskless New York ticks up.

■ President Trump is diverting money appropriated for the military to his border wall: raiding the Pentagon budget for

\$3.8 billion. This is foolish for a number of reasons. One is the Constitution: Congress, not the president, is supposed to decide how much money is appropriated and to what ends, and President Trump, in spite of his purported standing as a master negotiator, has not managed to persuade Congress to appropriate those funds. And this money was intended for things that are, in fact, needed by the military: for replenishing the armories, vehicles, and equipment of Reserve and National Guard units that have been neglected, and for funding warships and fighter jets. Representative Mac Thornberry, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, says those projects are “critical” and rightly argues that border security is a matter for Homeland Security rather than Defense. Trump had the opportunity to secure funding for the wall when his party controlled both houses of Congress; somehow, that errand slipped the collective Republican mind, Trump’s included. We agree that border security should be adequately funded. But the decision ultimately is Congress’s. Call it the art of dealing with reality, unpleasant as it might be.

■ Under the title “Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again,” an executive order requiring that new construction conform to classical design has been written and awaits the president’s signature as we go to press. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson “consciously modeled the most important buildings” in the nation’s capital on the architecture of “democratic Athens and republican Rome,” the executive order reads. Furthermore, the modernist federal architecture of the mid 20th century has not been well received by the public and in some instances is “just plain ugly.” News of the guidelines has provoked objections from some architects and critics, to which the most sensible reply is *De gustibus* etc.—there is no disputing about taste. If you prefer brutalism, be assured that plenty of federal monuments to it will still stand. Our thanks to the National Civic Art Society, which is reported to have initiated this move to return to classical elegance in government architecture.

■ Congress has honored its ancient tradition of ignoring presidential budget proposals, and President Trump’s most recent is well worth ignoring. The \$4.8 trillion proposal would add trillions to the debt in the best-case scenario—and the best-case scenario is not likely to come to pass: Previous Trump budgets have assumed GDP growth of 3 percent, in line with his campaign promises, and this one ups it to 3.1 percent. Back in the real world 2019 growth was 2.3 percent. Trump’s proposal includes steep cuts to social-welfare programs that could use some cutting. But House Democrats are not interested, and Trump has already demonstrated that he is willing to sign spending bills that go in the opposite direction from his budget proposals. Even the proposal studiously refuses to contemplate serious reforms of Social Security and Medicare, the two most important drivers of long-term federal debt. The Trump budget would add \$1 trillion for unspecified infrastructure spending and cut taxes, too—hence the usual fantasy of eliminating the deficit in ten years has been supplanted by a fantasy of eliminating the deficit in 15 years. Both parties, like the public they represent, must hope for the best, because that is all they are planning for.

■ The Senate will soon vote on two pieces of pro-life legislation: the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act and the

"NATIONAL REVIEW PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICA TODAY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE"

"Though liberals do a great deal of talking about hearing other points of view, it sometimes shocks them to learn that there are other points of view." — William F. Buckley Jr., *Up From Liberalism*

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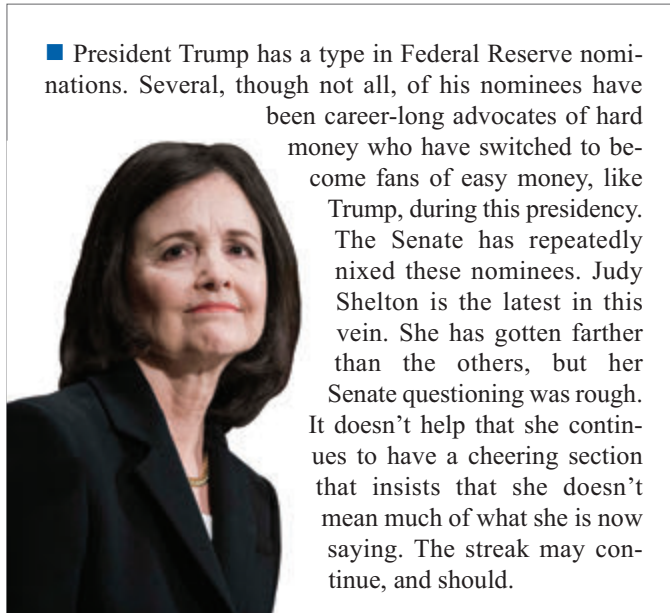
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Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. The first bill requires doctors to provide standard medical care to any newborn infant who survives an attempted abortion procedure. The second would prohibit abortion after 20 weeks' gestation, based on scientific research suggesting that fetuses are capable of feeling pain by that point in pregnancy. Both bills were blocked by Democratic senators the last time they received a vote. While each is unlikely to pass, the votes will expose lawmakers willing to subject children—both born and unborn—to violence and neglect. Just as important, they will expose the legal and practical reality that the slogan of “choice” is designed to obscure.

■ The Republican Party is taking a new approach to climate change. In an interview with *Axios*, House minority leader Kevin McCarthy outlined that approach, which would not set a carbon-emissions target but would work to lower the impact of emissions: by planting more trees for the purpose of carbon sequestration, by raising federal research-and-development spending for low-emissions energy, and by providing tax incentives for companies to develop carbon-capture technology. The plan is an extension of salutary efforts that the congressional GOP has quietly undertaken in the last two years, but there's room for improvement. Republican leaders should work to increase exports of natural gas to coal-dependent developing countries (which would lower emissions while boosting the U.S. economy) and should continue their support for nuclear power. But the approach outlined by McCarthy is a minimally invasive way to tackle a real problem, which is to say it has the beginnings of good legislation.



■ President Trump has a type in Federal Reserve nominations. Several, though not all, of his nominees have been career-long advocates of hard money who have switched to become fans of easy money, like Trump, during this presidency. The Senate has repeatedly nixed these nominees. Judy Shelton is the latest in this vein. She has gotten farther than the others, but her Senate questioning was rough. It doesn't help that she continues to have a cheering section that insists that she doesn't mean much of what she is now saying. The streak may continue, and should.

■ Rear Admiral Collin Green, the commander of the Navy SEALs, will step down a year before his tenure was to be up. In so doing, he is declining a third star. During his command, Green has been a reformer, holding wayward SEALs to account. In the case of Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher, President Trump repeatedly interfered. Gallagher has since been a guest at Mar-a-Lago, started a clothing line, etc. As for Collin Green, he has upheld honor in the military, or tried to, and, as the saying today goes, we thank him for his service.

■ Substantial gun control continues to prove elusive in the United States, even where the Republican Party and the NRA are outnumbered. In 2019, voters in Virginia put Democrats in charge of the governor's mansion, the House of Delegates, and the state senate. In return, those Democrats promised to use their trifecta to ban the sale of the most commonly owned rifle in America and confiscate standard-issue magazines. As is common, the informed citizenry had other ideas. Within a few months of the Democrats' proposals' being made public, a supermajority of Virginia's counties had declared themselves “sanctuaries” in which any laws that were deemed unconstitutional would be ignored, and a set of rolling protests had been organized across the state. The pushback worked. In mid February, the senate killed the bill in committee, with a vague promise to study it further. Making his case for the measures, Governor Northam promised to “stand up to the NRA.” As always, the task turned out to be the harder one of standing up to the voters it represents.

■ The Republican-controlled South Dakota senate voted to kill a bill that would have deterred doctors from medically experimenting on gender-confused minors by making it easier for those harmed to file malpractice lawsuits later in life. Previously, the South Dakota house had passed the Vulnerable Child Protection Act by a margin of 46 to 23. It was then amended to remove criminal penalties for doctors, instead treating malpractice as a cause of civil action. While the senate heard from a powerful array of victims and medical experts urging it to pass the bill, it also heard another concern: that the bill could harm the state economically. Debra Owen, the director of public policy for the Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, said that “as South Dakota moves forward and seeks to be open for business, diversity and inclusion is not an option.” When future historians search through public records of this frightful craze, they will find much to be depressed by in the South Dakota senate.

■ Three high-school girls have filed a federal lawsuit against Connecticut for allowing boys to compete against them in sports. The girls, who are being represented by the conservative law firm Alliance Defending Freedom, had previously filed a civil-rights complaint with the Education Department, but this proved to be too lengthy a process. Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, designed to protect women from sexism, states that it is illegal to discriminate “on the basis of sex.” In their suit, the female athletes demonstrate that their “opportunities for participation, recruitment, and scholarships” have all been “directly and negatively impacted” by Connecticut's transgender-athlete policy. One can only hope that they emerge victorious and set a precedent against the displacement of women in their own sports.

■ The case of Jussie Smollett took a step closer to a satisfying resolution when the P. T. Barnum of hate crime was charged in a six-count felony indictment for lying to investigators in filing four separate false police reports. Smollett has never ceased lying since he came up with his cockamamie story about being assaulted by two homophobic Trump-loving thugs (later revealed to be associates he had paid to play the part) last January 29 in the pre-dawn streets of frosty Chicago. Smollett claimed, ludicrously, that he had been telling the truth

all along when the office of Cook County state's attorney Kim Foxx last March let him off the hook without a guilty plea, extracting only a few hours of community service and the forfeiture of a \$100,000 bond—of which, it turned out, he had paid only \$10,000. After the then-mayor and then-police superintendent raised an outcry, Cook County judge Michael Toomin appointed former U.S. attorney Dan Webb as a special prosecutor to look into the circumstances of the case and its strange dismissal. Hence the new charges against Smollett, returned by a grand jury after Webb subpoenaed, among other things, Smollett's text messages and emails. Foxx is fighting for her political life in a Democratic primary election next month; may Chicago voters hold her accountable for her role in a perversion of justice. As for Smollett, his demonstrated lack of remorse and his fabrication of a serious crime clearly merit jail time.

■ Attorney Michael Avenatti, the exhibitionist clown who was briefly a Democratic presidential candidate, has been found guilty on three counts of attempted extortion of the sports giant Nike. It was only the latest reversal for the flimflam man; he had been searching for a new source of income after being unceremoniously fired by alleged Donald Trump paramour Stormy Daniels, who had come to find his legal counsel in the Trump hush-money case somewhat lacking. Avenatti's sentencing will come in June.

■ In Jacksonville, Fla., volunteers at a GOP voter-registration drive were forced to lurch out of the way of an oncoming vehicle. Gregory Timm was arrested and charged with two counts of aggravated assault after driving his truck through the volunteers' tent, exiting his vehicle, and making obscene gestures at the Republican volunteers before speeding away. Timm later told police that he disliked President Trump, and he insisted that "someone had to take a stand" against the volunteers' drive. Republicans in Florida condemned Timm's alleged conduct, with Senator Marco Rubio calling it a "politically motivated attack" and Senator Rick Scott insisting that the Duval County GOP "will not be silenced or intimidated." If convicted on charges stemming from the destruction of a voter-registration drive, there is a significant chance that Mr. Timm will himself be unable to vote in the next election. Karma.

■ In spite of a coordinated effort by a baker's dozen of Democratic state attorneys general, the planned merger between Sprint and T-Mobile is moving forward. The merger already had been approved by the DOJ and the FCC, but Democrats in New York, California, Connecticut, and a few other states sued on specious grounds, delaying the transaction until a federal judge threw out their meritless complaint. New York's dopey attorney general, Letitia James, complained that the merger would "endanger" mobile-phone users and decried the pursuit of "massive corporate profits." We are generally in favor of that pursuit. There is also no good *legal* reason to block the merger, and the Democrats know it: James et al. already have announced that they will not appeal the ruling against their lawsuit. When companies make the case that a merger will serve the public interest with better service at lower prices, the opponents should have the burden of proving them wrong before the government steps in. Now the FCC et al. have to keep an eye on whether the promises are kept.

■ An ancient concept in Chinese thought is "the mandate of heaven." It describes the favor shown by the universe to the dynasties that cycle through Chinese history. In moments of crisis the mandate passes to a new one; in another moment, the mandate is withdrawn. It is unenforceable—no constitution writes it down. It is unpredictable: Some catastrophes—the Taiping Rebellion under the Manchus, the famines and purges of Mao—leave the mandate unshaken. Yet the idea remains. Xi Jinping, and possibly the Chinese Communist Party, may be in danger of losing it, thanks to the lies and bungling with which they have handled the Wuhan coronavirus. The outpouring of grief that followed the death of Li Wenliang, the doctor who first blew the whistle on the epidemic, only to be silenced for doing so, has gotten the regime's attention. It has responded with a combination of oppression and farce, putting the populations of entire cities under house arrest, claiming that Xi Jinping knew of the disease weeks before the public caught on. The apparatus of terror remains formidable. But Xi's disease should at least serve as a warning to Hong Kong and Taiwan, if they needed another, about the regime of lies in Beijing.

■ U.S. federal prosecutors indicted four members of China's military on charges of hacking into the credit-reporting agency Equifax and stealing the sensitive data of 145 million Americans. The hackers obtained phone numbers, Social Security numbers, and addresses, as well as the company's proprietary technology. This type of attack is in keeping with China's long-term strategy of "asymmetric warfare" against the U.S. in the economic and technological realms. The Chinese previously hacked the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Marriott hotels, and the health-insurance company Anthem, accessing both trade secrets and data on government officials. Beijing can use this information to strengthen its artificial-intelligence systems and conduct espionage. The indictments demonstrate the failure of a 2015 deal between Barack Obama and Chinese president Xi Jinping in which the two committed to refraining from cybertheft for commercial purposes, and they accentuate Beijing's commitment to flouting international agreements. Something to keep in mind as our government pursues additional agreements.

■ The Equifax indictments weren't the only ones handed down to Chinese citizens. Executives of the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei were charged with racketeering and conspiracy to steal trade secrets. According to the indictment, Huawei stole intellectual property from six U.S. companies over the course of two decades. These charges add to previous accusations against Huawei, which included allegations that the company misled banks about its business dealings in Iran. The White House has effectively banned Huawei from the U.S., but last month, the U.K. government announced its intention to allow the firm to build and operate parts of its fifth-generation mobile network. The new charges provide further proof that the Trump administration was right to caution the U.K. against doing business with Huawei and increase the pressure on Germany to follow the U.S.'s lead. While the signing of a trade deal between Washington and Beijing signaled a temporary cease-fire in the bilateral confrontation, the Huawei and Equifax cases demonstrate just how far the two countries are from a lasting *détente*.

■ Seven years of civil war have reduced Syria to an antechamber of hell. At least half a million are thought to have been killed, and 10 million, about half the population, are refugees. Horror is reaching a climax in Idlib, a province in the northwest of the country. Bashar al-Assad, the blood-stained president in Damascus, had let his opponents, a ragbag of Islamists and rebels, assemble there. Power politics then played out. Assad decided that he had the military strength to clean out Idlib. Vladimir Putin, president of Russia and an old-style imperialist, supported Assad with ground forces and aircraft. Until recently, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, president of Turkey, had taken his family to visit Assad and his family in Damascus. Reversing this friendship, Erdogan backed the rebels in Idlib and invaded Syria. Three million people were in Idlib, and they could not tell whether Assad's troops would be fighting Erdogan's troops, or whether Erdogan's troops would be fighting Putin's, but they could tell that it was time to run for their lives. So far, there are almost a million new refugees who have nowhere to live and nowhere to go as winter rain and snow set in.

■ There are many monstrous leaders in the world, but Omar Bashir stands out. He was the dictator of Sudan for 30 years, 1989 to 2019. Since his toppling, he has been under arrest. Now it appears that the current Sudanese government will send him to The Hague, to be tried for genocide by the International Criminal Court. By someone, somewhere, Bashir should be held to account. Genocide is not a parking violation. Such forums as Nuremberg cannot bring back the murdered, and they provide little satisfaction. But little is better than none.

■ World Bank chief economist Penny Goldberg resigned after only 15 months on the job, reportedly in protest of Bank officials' refusal to publish a paper critical of the institution. The paper in question finds that aid provided by the World Bank often ends up in offshore accounts held by developing countries' political elites. The more dependent a country is on aid, the authors conclude, the higher the portion of money that "leaks" offshore. Even though the paper passed peer review in November, Bank officials have cast doubt on the results. While Goldberg has not confirmed her reasons for quitting, the Bank's efforts to stymie research that questions its efficacy raise obvious red flags. Goldberg's early resignation follows that of Paul Romer, who was also chief economist for 15 months before stepping down. The World Bank's tumultuous leadership does little to inspire confidence.

■ Debate at the University of California over standardized tests is creating a ripple effect across the U.S. A committee within the university system has released a preliminary recommendation to keep using the tests in admissions, but there is intense internal and external pressure to drop them on the grounds that they are poor predictors of success in higher education and unfairly penalize black and Hispanic students. But as NATIONAL REVIEW's Robert VerBruggen noted, these anti-test assertions are easily dismantled. The report makes it clear that high-school grades and tests are better predictors of success than grades alone. A final recommendation will go to UC's Board of Regents in April.

■ Hundreds of bishops, priests, experts, and observers met in Rome in October to examine problems faced by the indigenous people and other residents of the Amazon region. For the range of the synod's agenda, see the title of the final document: "The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology." Its brief section on the priest shortage in the region concludes with the recommendation that the celibacy requirement for Latin-rite priests be waived in the special case of the Amazon. Alarmed, traditionalists speculated that the exception would be established only to be made, eventually, the rule. Cardinal Robert Sarah published a book in defense of priestly celibacy and was joined in that effort by Pope Emeritus Benedict, although the nature of the latter's involvement is disputed. The public was drawn to the controversy, neglecting the larger issue, so give credit to Pope Francis for *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon), his document in response to the synod. Prudently, he omits any mention of celibacy and focuses his attention where it belongs, on the people of the Amazon and on how the Church can serve them.

■ When words are the only tool you have, everything looks like a word problem. This is why we so often encounter the euphemism spiral: a series of polite synonyms, each more abstract than the last, rolled out over the decades to describe the same phenomenon. For example: What had once been simply "bad kids" were fancied up as "juvenile delinquents," then called "underprivileged," then "at risk," and then, during the Obama era, the triumphantly bureaucratic "justice-involved." "Disconnected youth" had its day, and now the social workers' latest term for this unfortunate sector of society seems to be "opportunity youth." If only our bureaucracies were as good at improving these children's prospects as they are at redescribing them.

■ For those who think every episode of *House Hunters* is basically the same, the show recently introduced a new wrinkle: three potential buyers arguing cutely, instead of just two. The house hunters in this case were a "throuple"—a group of three people committed to sharing their lives together—that consisted of a married couple plus a woman that they met in a bar and joined in a relationship. As you'd expect, what's wrong with a three-way house hunt is the same thing that's wrong with a three-way "marriage": three times the opportunity for disagreement. In the real-estate context, this translates to numerous extra must-haves (e.g., three sinks in the bathroom), which in the end meant the trio exceeded their budget considerably. In view of this, the seller and the realtor did not seem to mind the buyers' unconventional lifestyle.

■ A video that made the rounds recently showed a woman sitting patiently in her airline seat as the man behind her, annoyed that she was reclining into his space, banged and punched the back of her seat in protest. The woman summoned a flight attendant, who unfortunately was unable to broker a peace treaty, and now the reclining passenger is giving interviews and talking lawsuits. In our view, a polite request (i.e. not punching the seat) to sit up straight should be accommodated if the passenger can do so without discomfort, but similarly, passengers should accept that some people do need



A leading Jewish-American is speaking out.
He sees a war against Christians in court and the media.
Their goal: to destroy Christianity in America

“Dark Agenda: The War to Destroy Christian America,” is David Horowitz’s extraordinary look into the left’s calculated efforts to create a godless, heathen American society.

Horowitz argues that even Jews – and anyone who believes in God – will be in danger if Christians are not protected.

Horowitz is a New York Times bestselling author and leading conservative thinker.

Horowitz argues that Judeo-Christian values are at the very root of America’s democracy and success. Kill off such values and all of our freedoms could perish. Everybody could be in danger.

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- The shocking way Congress scrubbed every mention of God from The U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. (Chapter 4, Page 37)
- Why Hollywood stars like Bill Maher, who belligerently states “religion must die in order for mankind to live,” are finding a huge following among the Democratic left and Millennials. (Chapter 1, Page 6)
- The real story of Obama’s relationship with Saul Alinsky, a man who openly said Lucifer was his role model. (Chapter 10, Page 128)
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■ How Barack Obama has become the hero of the anti-God, anti-religious left. (Chapter 10, Page 75)

■ The New Jersey middle school on trial for inexplicably trying to convert students to Islam. (Chapter 5, Page 36)

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to recline, and in any case they have a right to do so if they wish. Making a scene, however, is definitely wrong, for victim and perp alike. Air travel is miserable enough already.

■ Texas is a larger-than-life state, and Clayton Williams was a larger-than-life Texan. Indeed, he was many Americans' idea of a Texan. He was a businessman, an oilman, with his fingers in several business pies. He liked politics, too. In 1990, he was the Republican nominee for governor, and there has hardly ever been a more colorful candidate. Too colorful, in the end. He committed a series of gaffes that helped the Democrat, Ann Richards, win. He took his loss gamely. When a crowd of supporters urged him to run again in four years, he said, "I may be an Aggie"—meaning, a graduate of Texas A&M—"but I'm not crazy." Paul Johnson, the British historian, sometimes says that some figure "added to the gaiety of life." "Claytie" Williams did that. He died on Valentine's Day at 88. R.I.P.



■ "I covered a team that no longer exists in a demolished ballpark for a newspaper that is dead," Roger Kahn explained in *The Boys of Summer* (1972), referring to the Brooklyn Dodgers, Ebbets Field, and the *New York Herald Tribune*. Into his reportorial, where-are-they-now treatment of the members of the Dodgers teams of 1952 and '53, he folded his lyrical reminiscence of them in their glory days, when Jackie Robinson, Duke Snider, and the whole "Wait until next year!" gang scored a lot of runs but then came up short against their American League crosstown rivals in the Fall Classic. *The Boys*

of Summer fast became a classic for all seasons: Kahn could turn a phrase, craft lapidary sentences, and lay it on thick with appropriate sentimentality—his subject was the national pastime, after all, and youth and age and mortality. He wrote 18 other books, most of them about baseball. From the *Herald Tribune*, he moved to *Newsweek*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Sports Illustrated*. He taught journalism at universities here and there. "The golden age has passed as in a moment. So will all things. So will all moments. *Memento mori*." Dead at 92. R.I.P.

POLITICS

Sanders Rising

SOONER or later, the Democrats' decades-long march to the left was bound to end in the explicit embrace of socialism. That moment may now have arrived. A self-described socialist, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, has won the New Hampshire primary after getting the most votes in Iowa's shamolic caucuses. Sanders has strong supporters nationwide—"cadres," you might call them—and enough money to go the distance.

Socialism remains unpopular, for very good reason, in the United States, and it is least popular among those Americans

old enough to have seen what it meant in the era when the senator took up the cause. They learned something from the world's experience, even if he did not. Many Democrats remain dubious about socialism. In New Hampshire, Sanders got only a quarter of the vote while the relatively moderate candidates (Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, and Amy Klobuchar) combined to get a majority among them.

Except, of course, that they did not combine, and show no sign of doing so. And there is another claimant for the not-Sanders position in the primary, Michael Bloomberg, who decided to skip New Hampshire. A dedicated core of Sanders supporters could keep forming a plurality and win the most delegates for Sanders. Because Sanders had a strong showing in the primary four years ago, this possibility startles Americans less, perhaps, than it should. America's rejection of socialism has made it exceptional among advanced nations. For the country's oldest political party to nominate a proud supporter of it would be a major change for the worse.

Sanders has for decades praised left-wing authoritarian dictators, especially in Latin America, so much so that it is fair to question the importance of the adjective in his label of "democratic socialism." His agenda involves federal spending increases of a fantastic \$100 trillion, according to a critic who, unlike the senator, has thought it worthwhile to add it all up. And he has the ideologue's habit of wishing away aspects of reality that are inconvenient for him. Thus our economy, with falling poverty rates and rising wages, is in his mind failing; and the country will save money by giving more lavish health benefits to a larger number of people.

The Sanders phenomenon thus raises two urgent questions: Will the Democratic Party decide to walk off a cliff? And will it manage to get Americans to come along for the trip?



Bernie Sanders speaks at a campaign rally in New Hampshire, February 8, 2016.

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Can He Be Stopped?

Bernie Sanders could follow a Trump-like path to his party's nomination

BY JOHN McCORMACK

Durham, N.H.

WHEN he takes the stage, the first thing the anti-establishment presidential candidate does is boast about the size of his huge, adoring crowd.

"In case you haven't noticed," he tells a packed arena on the eve of the New Hampshire primary. "In fact, there are three times more people here tonight than at any other . . . campaign rally in New Hampshire."

There is an almost palpable energy in the arena that tells you this isn't merely a campaign, it's a movement.

The anti-establishment candidate is mocked by late-night comedians for his manner of speaking and outer-borough New York accent, but the more you listen, the more you realize he is his party's most effective (and, yes, demagogic) communicator. His speech is direct, blunt, clear. You don't need a college degree to understand it.

His support in the primary is not yet close to a majority, but he's consolidating his wing of the party—while the

establishment fractures—and that's enough to win the most votes in a multicandidate field.

The similarities between the Bernie 2020 and Trump 2016 campaigns are indeed uncanny. The anti-establishment front-runner in both cycles even benefited from a Friday-night ABC debate in Manchester, N.H., that took place a few days before the primary: His rivals mostly ignored him and attacked the candidate who had momentum coming out of Iowa. (Although Amy Klobuchar didn't send Pete Buttigieg tumbling down in New Hampshire in 2020 the way that Chris Christie did Marco Rubio in 2016, she did halt Buttigieg's momentum while—again, unlike Christie—helping herself.)

I find myself now wondering which Senate Democrat will play the part of Utah Republican Mike Lee, desperately trying to forge a Klobuchar-Warren unity ticket the way Lee tried to broker a Cruz-Rubio partnership before it was too late. You can see it now: Some in the press will begin talking about a

"Soul Sisters" 2020 ticket—à la "Los Hermanos Cubanos" in 2016—just before the dream is dashed.

Is it already too late? Can Sanders be stopped?

Following his victory in New Hampshire, the political-statistics website *FiveThirtyEight* estimated that Sanders had a 36 percent chance of winning an outright majority of delegates to take the Democratic nomination—nearly three times that of any other individual candidate in the race. *FiveThirtyEight* also estimated that there was a 38 percent chance of no candidate winning a majority of delegates, and that scenario still presents Sanders with an excellent opportunity to become the nominee. It's going to be very difficult to deny the nomination to any candidate with a significant plurality of delegates and total votes.

With Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Joe Biden, and Michael Bloomberg threatening to divide the anti-Sanders vote—just as Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich divided the anti-Trump vote in 2016—Sanders could very well follow Trump's path to the nomination.

Yet for all the similarities between Sanders 2020 and Trump 2016, there are some important differences. And those differences help shed light on how and why Sanders could be denied his party's presidential nomination. Here are five.

1. *New Hampshire.* Trump won New Hampshire by 20 points in 2016; Sanders won New Hampshire by 1.3 points in 2020. The margin of victory says something about the front-runner's overall strength in the primary—Sanders starts out significantly weaker than Trump—and also the degree to which voters are fractured among the front-runner's rivals. Trump won 35.2 percent in New Hampshire in 2016, while the next four candidates were bunched between 10.5 percent and 15.7 percent. The top three Democratic candidates in New Hampshire in 2020 were fairly close: Sanders won 25.7 percent, Buttigieg 24.4, and Klobuchar 19.8, with all the other candidates in the single digits. This is perhaps a sign that Democrats could consolidate around an anti-Sanders candidate earlier in the primary than anti-Trump Republicans settled on Cruz in 2016.

2. *Momentum and demographics.* After Trump won the New Hampshire primary, he went on to carry Nevada by

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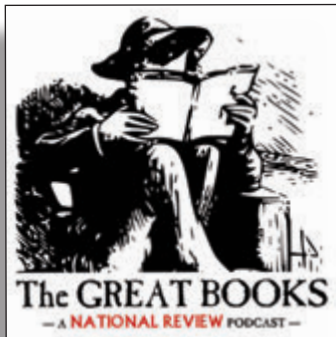
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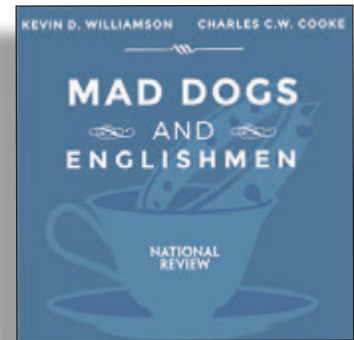
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22 points and South Carolina by ten points. Three double-digit victories in a row gave him a full head of steam going into Super Tuesday, when he came in first in seven out of eleven states.

Sanders's weaknesses among certain demographic groups in the Democratic primary could prevent him from building up the momentum needed to win the nomination. The Vermont socialist performs very poorly among African-American voters (who account for two-thirds of South Carolina Democratic-primary voters), and the first poll of South Carolina voters conducted after Sanders's victory in New Hampshire showed Biden holding an eight-point lead over Sanders (28 percent to 20 percent).

Sanders is incredibly weak among elderly voters: He typically polls in the single digits among Democrats over the age of 65. A survey of voters in Florida's Democratic primary (which takes place on March 17) that was conducted after Sanders's New Hampshire win showed him polling at an anemic 10 percent, with Michael Bloomberg and Joe Biden vying for first place at 27 percent and 26 percent, respectively.

In 2016, Sanders lost the South Carolina primary to Hillary Clinton by a whopping 48 points after scoring a 22-point victory in New Hampshire. Democrats vote in the first-in-the-South primary just three days before Super Tuesday, and a poor performance there could blunt Sanders's momentum.

3. *The rules.* The Democratic presidential nominee, just like the Republican nominee, will be the man or woman who can cobble together a simple majority of delegates at his party's convention. But the parties have different rules for awarding delegates. Republican primary contests start out awarding delegates on a proportional basis but allow later states to award delegates on a winner-take-all basis: The candidate with the most votes gets all the delegates. In the Democratic primary, delegates are rewarded proportionally in all of the states' contests among candidates who clear a threshold of 15 percent.

As mentioned above, it seems quite likely that a Democratic candidate lacking a majority of delegates heading into the Democratic National Convention would still win the nomination

if he or she had a solid plurality of the vote. But likely does not mean certain. If Sanders wins more votes than any other candidate but has only 35 percent of delegates, the 65 percent of non-Sanders delegates could certainly deny him the nomination, though how realistic and controversial that move would be would probably depend on how close the runner-up was in delegates and votes.

The Democratic Party's consistent rule of proportional representation also denies Bernie Sanders a powerful argument that benefited Trump down the homestretch in 2016: that it had become "mathematically impossible" for any other candidate to win a majority of delegates and avoid a contested convention. If Democrats come to see a contested convention as inevitable, there won't be such a strong incentive to rally behind the front-runner.

4. *The media.* Donald Trump has a famously hostile relationship with the mainstream media, but a better word to describe their relationship during the Republican primary was "symbiotic": Trump was good for TV ratings; TV ratings were good for Trump. The former TV star has dominated the political conversation in America for nearly five years. Sanders lacks such star power, and the media are mightily interested in the potential rise of Michael Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, or Amy Klobuchar.

Trump also benefited from media bias during the 2016 primary: Jonathan Chait, the kind of liberal writer from whom mainstream TV producers and hosts take their cues, published an article in *New York* magazine a few days after the 2016 Iowa caucuses: "Why Liberals Should Support a Trump Republican Nomination." Many thought Trump would be easy to beat in November 2016. This time around, many are worried a Sanders nomination would be suicidal. "Running Bernie Sanders against Trump Would Be an Act of Insanity," read the headline of a piece by Chait in late January 2020.

The night after the New Hampshire Democratic debate, Chris Matthews mused about whether Sanders was sympathetic toward Communist dictator Fidel Castro. "I have my own views of the word 'socialist,' and I'd be glad to share them with you in private,"

Matthews said. "I believe if Castro and the Reds had won the Cold War, there would have been executions in Central Park, and I might have been one of the ones getting executed. And certain other people would be there cheering, okay?"

Matthews continued, "What does [Sanders] think of Castro? That's a good question, what's he think of Fidelismo?"

That same night, Matthews let MSNBC viewers know that Amy Klobuchar's candidacy was sending a thrill up his leg. If the liberal and mainstream media see an opportunity to boost a potentially stronger alternative to Sanders, they will take it.

5. *The agenda.* The final words spoken by Bernie Sanders at his election-eve rally in New Hampshire were: "Let's win this thing! Let's transform America!"

It's hard to think of a sharper contrast in political slogans than the one between "Let's transform America!" and "Make America great again." The latter is broadly within the American tradition (it was in fact copied from Ronald Reagan's 1980 slogan "Let's make America great again"). For all the controversy that Trump stirred up in 2016—for all the criticism of his character and temperament—he was not promising a radical transformation of the American economy. He broke with his party on entitlement reform, for example, by abandoning a controversial but sound plan to reform Medicare for Americans under the age of 55. Sanders, by contrast, is the only remaining Democrat in the race firmly committed to Medicare for All and its politically toxic plan to eliminate private insurance for more than 180 million Americans. Sanders wants to gut spending on the military while increasing funding for domestic programs by some \$97 trillion over the next decade.

Sanders's pledge to "transform America" with a radical economic agenda may win him a plurality of Democrats, but it is causing a lot of angst among those in the party who are concerned most with beating Trump in 2020. If Democrats opposed to Sanders don't unite around one alternative early enough, they are going to fail, and the socialist from Vermont will be the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nominee. **NR**

Text

Britain Carries On

So far the U.K. is weathering Brexit quite well

BY DOUGLAS MURRAY

THE morning of the day that Britain left the European Union, I happened to be at the Royal Academy, on London's Piccadilly, for a private viewing of *Picasso and Paper*—a fact I mention not to culture-brag, but rather to point to another fact: that an exhibition spanning the entirety of Picasso's career includes major loans from collections across France, Spain, and many other nations.

The United Kingdom left the European Union that evening: the 31st of January, 2020. The next morning I bumped into

a friend. "Any planes landed on your head yet?" I asked him. "None so far!" came the reply. Very good.

Two days later I got on a flight from London to Rome, sailing through passport control at Heathrow and progressing—slightly swifter than usual, as it happened—through the superb electronic passport-control gates at Fiumicino Airport. A few days later the Italians permitted me to leave their country and I returned to London. At neither end was I a hostage.

Why do I bore NATIONAL REVIEW readers with these nuggets from a life? For one reason alone: to point out the normality of things.

Ever since David Cameron announced a referendum on Britain's EU membership in February 2016, the British people have been issued the direst imaginable warnings. Before the referendum, the then-chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, among others, predicted an immediate recession in the U.K. if the voters were unwise enough to disregard his instructions and vote to leave the EU. But we did disregard his instructions, as

we did those of the prime minister and the heads of all the other major parties. We disregarded everybody, in fact, who warned us that our future would be darker, poorer, more ignorant, and more insular. In June 2016 we voted to leave the EU.

For a variety of reasons that arose after that decision (not least the ineptitude of Theresa May's government and her minority rule after the 2017 election), the scare stories stepped up. The warned-of recession was claimed to have merely been deferred. And the financial threats were the least of it. The media and politicians on the Remain side upped the volume on all their dire warnings. Disappointment and rage about losing the referendum were transferred into a number of vitriolic behaviors, but most prominent amongst them was the claim of increased insularity.

Media, including a new, strange propaganda paper called the *New European*, offered the British public "farewell tours" to the Continent. Such publications strongly suggested that once Britain left the EU, we Brits would be



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unable to visit again. We would return to where we were before we entered the Common Market in 1975. And as centuries of literature and history attest, until 1975 nobody from Britain ever went to the Continent. In fact, prior to 1975 we had been a strange, hobbit-like people, famously incurious about abroad and choosing never to visit the place.

Over the wasteful last four years, the world of the arts was filled with people pointing to the cultural diminishment that would occur once Britain left the EU. Musicians and film types who had never previously uttered a word about the European Union suddenly became ventriloquists of the status quo and Cassandras of the future. Similar coverage in the *New York Times*—whose vitriolic antipathy to Brexit has become a source of niche humor in the U.K.—presented the Brexit vote as a sign that the British public no longer wished to engage with the art and culture of the Continent, and that anyone inclined to do so would

works on loan from it because Britain had left the European Union? Did the propagandists honestly believe that without its EU membership, Britain would return to some pre-Picasso world? Some *echt* period of British art in which we strove to eradicate all Continental influence from our pure British culture? The idea is laughable, and yet in young people in particular it caused fear where it should have caused giggles.

The truth is that in these factors, as in almost every other factor to do with the everyday life of the population, it can truthfully be said that absolutely nothing practical has changed for the British public. Perhaps this will change very slightly in the years ahead. Perhaps the cost of living will rise slightly at some point. Perhaps it will fall. Much depends on the success of our free-trade deals with the U.S. and others of our historic partners. In any case, the British public were never persuaded to vote Brexit because of a tiny

not fall out of the sky. The population is not locked in. And the culture of the whole world remains open—as it always did—for anyone who wants to reach out and live in it.

Things that are not happening do not make headlines. They rarely even cause much comment. But the acknowledgment of what isn't happening is creeping its way into the minds of even the most determined British Cassandras. And perhaps there is a wider lesson in this for America and other countries going through this hyperbolic era.

In our politics as in our media, a premium—at least in the short term—always goes to whoever is willing to shout the loudest about the most headline-seizing subjects. Mention that there might be a very slight reduction in the VAT during the next-but-one financial quarter, and only specialists will take note. Shout that planes are going to fall out of the sky, or that the end is nigh, and the structure of our public squares

The simple fact is that every day more and more people can see what some of us always predicted: that in almost every imaginable way, **life continues as normal.**

no longer be able to. After Brexit it would be Morris dancing or nothing.

Of education it was claimed that students from the Continent would no longer come to study in Britain and that British students would no longer be able to go to study on the Continent. The Erasmus scheme, which had facilitated much cultural interchange, was presented as though it were inextricably tied up with British membership of the EU. “There goes the Erasmus scheme,” friends and foes of Brexit alike told me. Except that Britain remains a part of the scheme and there is no alteration in the arrangements. Foreign-student applications to study in the U.K. have continued, and in fact there were 485,654 international students pursuing degrees in the U.K. in 2018–19, up more than 25,000 from the previous year.

Of course the alarmism was all nonsense. The Royal Academy, whose Picasso exhibition I was lucky enough to view, is a world-class institution. Why would the Prado in Madrid or the Louvre in Paris refuse to lend to it and receive

potential fluctuation in their disposable income. That was the mistake that George Osborne, David Cameron, and others now acknowledge that they made. The British public accepted that it was possible that they might be slightly richer or slightly poorer after Brexit, but they accepted this as a worthwhile risk for the greater prize of taking back control of the mechanisms by which they were governed.

Ever since Boris Johnson won his 80-seat-majority Conservative mandate in December, and even more since Brexit became not a threat or a sentence but a simple transition and reality, the vitriol has abated. The Cassandras have dried up, perhaps finally hoarse as well as provably wrong.

But the rest of us are considerably buoyed up by all this. The simple fact is that every day more and more people can see what some of us always predicted: that in almost every imaginable way, life continues as normal. The EU turned out not to be our cement, our gravity, our earth and foundations. The planes do

now guarantees that you will not only find an audience but be handed a microphone. As the American media have led the world in demonstrating, the most extreme take is what gives you the platform. This is the rule that has also dominated the British debate in recent years. Every figure of any authority who was willing to make an outrageous claim found himself at the beating center of the debate. And yet the world turns out not to work on these merrily vulgar lines. It responds instead to those common, unreported realities—the most underreported of which is the simple desire of people and nations to get along with each other.

It was in nobody's interest to make Brexit harder than it needed to be. There was no interest in making British and EU citizens unable to enter each other's countries, or in creating some kind of cultural or artistic boycott among the most artistically fruitful cultures in history. Brexit has happened. And for now the most striking feature is the beautiful, too often overlooked marvel of nothing happening. **NR**

A Zombie Amendment

*The ERA, back from
the Seventies*

BY RAMESH PONNURU

NOT many people have had a kind word for Prohibition on its hundredth anniversary, but let us pause to note that its proponents and opponents alike displayed a constitutional scrupulosity that has rarely been seen since in our country. The Prohibitionists conceded that a constitutional amendment was necessary to enable the federal government to ban alcohol, rather than trying to retrofit an existing provision of the Constitution for their purpose. Sean Beienburg,

author of *Prohibition, the Constitution, and States' Rights*, tells the stories of many politicians who opposed the 18th Amendment but nonetheless felt obligated by its existence to support its execution—and sometimes took real political risks to provide that support.

The campaign for an Equal Rights Amendment has been less marked by constitutional fidelity. It began abusing the constitutional process for amendments in the 1970s, and that abuse continues to this day.

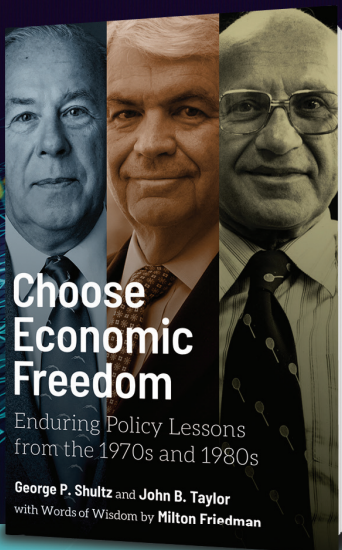
Article V of the Constitution lays out that process. Congress can propose an amendment by a two-thirds vote of each house. In 1972, it did so for the ERA. Its key provision read, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” The resolution proposing the amendment said that if three-quarters of states’ legislatures ratified it within seven years, it would become law. The same time limit had been included in the text of the 18th Amendment and had been upheld as

constitutionally proper by a unanimous Supreme Court in 1921. The resolutions proposing several other amendments also included time limits.

By the end of 1972, 22 states had ratified the ERA. Another eleven ratified it by mid February 1974. The amendment was only five states short of the necessary 38. But opposition, led by social-conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, was growing. She warned that the amendment’s seemingly innocuous words would be used to impose unpopular policies: Bathrooms would have to be unisex, abortion subsidized, and young women eligible for any military draft.

Only 35 states had ratified the ERA by the 1979 deadline, and four of them had rescinded their ratifications. Depending on whether those retractions count, the amendment was either three or seven states short. As the deadline approached, Congress in 1978 voted to extend it by three years. But this extension passed Congress by a simple majority, not the two-thirds supermajority

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—Arthur B. Laffer, former chief economist, Office of Management and Budget, and member of Ronald Reagan’s Economic Policy Advisory Board

that the original proposal had garnered and that the Constitution requires for Congress to send an amendment to the states. In part because the constitutionality of the extension resolution was in question, President Jimmy Carter signed it—even though presidents have no formal role in constitutional amendments under Article V, and the Supreme Court had underlined the point as far back as 1798.

South Dakota, just to complicate matters further, passed a resolution after the extension but before the original deadline. It said that the state's earlier ratification should be considered null if the amendment didn't get 38 states on the original timeline.

A federal court ruled that the extension was unconstitutional, but it didn't matter anyway: The amendment didn't get

acterize as an unconstitutional ratification process.

The second group of states is surely correct about both the letter and the spirit of the law. Article V is designed as it is to ensure that any constitutional amendment reflects a broad social consensus. Congress, in proposing the ERA, reasonably specified a deliberative moment during which that consensus could be attained. It wasn't. To deny this point requires constitutional contortions. One of the arguments behind the recent pro-ERA moves holds, for example, that the original 1972 time limit was unconstitutional but that the proposal to which the time limit was attached was nevertheless valid. The claim that the ERA is now part of the Constitution must also insist that there is a no-takebacks clause hiding in the penumbra of Article V.

The debate over the 1970s debate over the ERA is comprehensible only in the context of the federal judiciary's growing power during the decades preceding it. It had become widely accepted that the Constitution was full of "majestic generalities" ("both luminous and obscure," Justice William Brennan would add in 1985) and that it fell to the justices to fill in the details. Provisions of the Constitution such as the 14th Amendment's due-process clause thus became a license for judges to make law. The ERA was an attempt to give the federal courts additional leeway by adding one more majestic generality to the constitutional text.

The opponents understood the strategy, and it was that understanding that motivated them. There was no good reason for Americans, and especially for traditionalists, to give a liberal-dominated

The growing power of the courts has probably reduced the demand for formal constitutional amendments in general.

any more ratifications during the three-year period. When the extension expired in 1982, everyone accepted that the amendment was dead. The Supreme Court therefore declared the court's ruling moot. Feminists would make periodic attempts in the following decades to begin the process anew in Congress.

In recent years, though, advocates of the ERA have reached the liberating conclusion that they do not need to start over. They can bank all the previous ratifications, ignore the states that rescinded their ratifications, and get three additional states to put the ERA over the top. Over the last three years, Nevada, Illinois, and Virginia purported to provide those last three ratifications. In mid February, a simple majority of the House passed a bill purporting to remove the deadline. The qualifiers are there because the legitimacy of these acts is so dubious.

There are now, inevitably, dueling lawsuits over the issue. The three states that just tried to ratify the ERA are in court demanding that the National Archives recognize that the amendment is now part of the Constitution. Three other states—Alabama and Louisiana, which never ratified it, as well as South Dakota—sued to stop what they char-

All these acrobatics are being performed for what seems like a very small prize. The Supreme Court's interpretation of the equal-protection clause of the 14th Amendment, together with changes in public attitudes, has accomplished much of the legal revolution that 1970s feminists sought. By 1997, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg could say, "There is no practical difference between what has evolved and the ERA," while adding, "I would still like it as a symbol to see the ERA in the Constitution for my granddaughter."

The practical effect of the ERA would be to strengthen the hand of progressives on the bench. Laws that discriminate on the basis of sex, or are thought to do so, are currently subject to "intermediate scrutiny" under the Supreme Court's equal-protection jurisprudence. A ratified ERA might move the Court to apply "strict scrutiny" instead. Such feminist legal goals as requiring the federal government and states to fund abortion for those who cannot easily afford it—something the Supreme Court rejected in the 1970s—might be realized. A cynic might note, however, that if five justices want that policy badly enough to read the ERA to impose it, they already have the ability to use equal protection the same way.

federal judiciary a blank check. The growing power of the courts has probably reduced the demand for formal constitutional amendments in general: Why go to the trouble if the courts will do all the work? It stoked opposition to this amendment in particular.

There is some dissent on the left about the ERA, at least on tactics. Advocates of a balanced-budget amendment have gotten many state legislatures to call for a constitutional convention to consider the proposal. Progressives' main weapon in fighting back against this proposal has been getting legislatures to undo their requests. So anti-BBA progressives need rescissions to count, even as pro-ERA progressives swear that rescissions are void.

Another dissenter is Justice Ginsburg, the most prominent feminist lawyer in U.S. history. She has repeatedly and recently said that advocates of the ERA have to start the amendment process again if they are to get their way. A strong argument can be made that the justices should be silent about such matters, especially given the lawsuits mentioned above, but Ginsburg has made a practice of disregarding such niceties. In this case, though, the justice is right. Article V is still alive, and the ERA is a zombie that cannot be reanimated. **NR**

The New Forgotten Man

Neither elite manager nor wage-earner

BY RYAN STREETER

DURING this season of populist fervor and resurgent nationalism, center-right policymakers and pundits have joined progressives in dividing America into two classes, workers and the managerial elite. Like those on the left, they regard the social and economic gulf between corporate owners and managers and the people they employ as one of the foremost policy problems of our time. They have fallen silent about the millions of Americans who are neither managerial elites nor stereotypical wage-earners. These are the shop owners, self-employed workers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and salaried employees who save their money and improve their credentials hoping to branch out and move up. They have long been at the heart of American economic growth, collectively creating massive numbers of jobs every year and keeping the American dream alive for themselves and others.

In conservative circles today, this sort of worker has become the new “forgotten man” (or woman). The aftermath of the Great Recession, followed by Trump’s 2016 election, produced a new group of pro-worker conservatives who advocate a combination of protectionism and industrial policy, expanded wage subsidies, new forms of unionizing, and new family benefits such as paid parental leave and more generous child tax credits and cash allowances. They have arisen in opposition to those—let’s call them the “traditional Reaganite conservatives”—who endorse low taxes, limited government, and other policies that favor CEOs and managerial elites ostensibly in the name of economic growth.

Pro-worker conservatives are right to criticize pro-business conservatives for having neglected the needs of workers over the years. Trump’s appeal in 2016 was authentic and based on important, deeply held sentiments shared by millions of Americans. But the agenda advocated by pro-worker conservatives is much less aspirational than they make it out to be. Providing \$9-an-hour workers with a wage subsidy to lift their pay to \$12 an hour, offering them membership in a “works council” that (supposedly) provides solidarity and some limited power to negotiate interests with employers, and offering tax and paid-leave benefits to make it marginally easier for them to raise a child—all of these reduce the pain of low-wage employment but do little to help people take advantage of opportunities and achieve the kind of upward mobility we typically associate with the American dream.

But when pro-worker conservatives talk of entrepreneurs, they fasten on the untrustworthy titans of Silicon Valley as their only reference point. All other types have vanished from their landscape. Hourly workers have become their image of “real America” today and the focus of their policy ideas.

The result has been an odd kind of grievance populism, disconnected from the populist tradition that historian Christopher Lasch brilliantly analyzed in his classic *The Revolt of the Elites*. Lasch claimed that, properly understood, American populism is rooted in a rich understanding of self-reliance and independence. “Populists regarded self-reliance (which, of course, does not preclude cooperation in civic and economic life) as the essence of democracy, a virtue that never went out of demand,” he wrote. As, in fact, “the authentic voice of democracy,” populism “assumes that individuals are entitled to respect until they prove themselves unworthy of it, but it insists that they take responsibility for themselves.”

This was the populism of Ronald Reagan, however much he is remembered today as a tax-cutting friend of big business. “Without self-reliant, creative citizens,” he said, “no nation can be self-sufficient politically or economically.” Self-reliance and “the skills of the people” were critical to the success of free-

market policies in promoting economic growth. While addressing the board of governors of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in 1981, Reagan said, “Only when the human spirit is allowed to invent and create, only when individuals are given a personal stake in deciding economic policies and benefiting from their success—only then can societies remain alive, dynamic, prosperous, progressive, and free.”

This understanding of the American worker is at the heart of the grassroots dynamism that Edmund Phelps, Nobel laureate in economics, has described as a “vast imaginarium” in which workers throughout the economic landscape—hourly wage-earners, salaried employees, small-scale business owners—have incentives to create, build, and make new things and new ways of doing things. Such an economic culture always leaves open the possibility of ownership and self-direction, even for someone who has spent 20 years as a salaried employee at a big company. Innovators and owners may be a minority of the workforce, but their flourishing benefits the rest of us in the form of the jobs they create, the wages those jobs offer, and the unforeseen opportunities that their new ideas and products give rise to—which is why policy should be designed to serve them.

Today’s pro-worker conservatives sing a different song. They have gone much farther than their decaffeinated progenitors, the reform conservatives, who also tried to focus the conservative intellectual project on the needs of everyday workers, in that they have made redistribution and protectionism central tenets of their cause. They have concluded that a strong federal government is required to unrig the game that the managerial elite has designed to enrich itself. Rather than seeking to bolster the independence and self-reliance of people living in flyover country, they call for wage subsidies. If you believe Phelps, this is a recipe for European-style stagnation, but that caveat does not dissuade pro-worker conservatives.

Oren Cass, a conservative proponent of industrial policy, wage subsidies, and trade restrictions, has thoughtfully argued that public policy should aim to help workers support “strong families and communities.” But in his telling, dynamism comes almost entirely in the

form of disruption, which needs to be balanced with redistributive supports for displaced workers, rather than being an economic force that benefits people up and down the income spectrum. Senator Marco Rubio, who has spoken and written thoughtfully on the dignity of work, largely stays within the “corporations vs. workers” framework in his rhetoric and proposed solutions. Senator Josh Hawley supports wage subsidies because, he says, for too long our economy “hasn’t rewarded workers.” In one of the earliest essays of the Trump era aimed at diagnosing the elite-worker divide, Michael Lind wrote of the emergence in the 20th century of “managerial capitalism,” which has in turn given way to new forms of “global oligopolies” in which the managerial elites have rigged the game for themselves, making entrepreneurial capitalism a thing of the distant past.

Variations on these themes have now become standard fare on conservative talk radio, cable TV, and the pages of conservative publications. They are part of a new ideological milieu in which Fox’s Tucker Carlson has catapulted to the top of prime-time cable ratings by ginning up resentment against big companies and elite institutions, even remarking that Democratic senator and presidential hopeful Elizabeth Warren “sounds like Donald Trump at his best” when she is talking about trade and American manufacturing.

Pro-worker conservatives are mathematically correct that employees outnumber entrepreneurs and business owners, but a policy agenda focused solely on improving the conditions of workers and restraining globalist executives is short-sighted. Reagan’s reasons for promoting small-scale business owners and scrappy entrepreneurs in his day are just as valid in ours. New businesses create a disproportionate number of all new jobs created every year. The pay those jobs offer is competitive and rises more swiftly amid greater dynamism. And the nature of dynamism is such that, the more people hear about someone who started and runs a successful business, the more they will gain the motivation and know-how to do the same.

Pro-worker conservatives also misread the mood of working-class Americans,

whose populist anti-elitism is more cultural than economic. In fact, an American Enterprise Institute survey found that working-class Americans, defined as those with a high-school degree but less than a college degree and earning between the 20th and 50th income percentiles, are bullish about their personal financial situation and the economy. Asked whether they are living the American dream, the vast majority say they are on a path to it or already living it.

A policy agenda focused on aspirations—on the Main Street flower-shop owner, the jewelry-maker selling earrings on Etsy, the former delivery-service driver who borrowed enough to lease two trucks and hire six people to start a local moving company—would likely have as much appeal to American workers as one focused on wage subsidies, industrial policy, and tax credits. And, given the salutary effects that increasing small-business formation would have on earnings, such an agenda would have at least as good a chance of raising wages as would the policies of the pro-worker camp.

Some may believe that technology and globalization have changed the economy so much that small-scale entrepreneurs are a thing of the past. I think such a conclusion is premature. We have not even begun to remove the barriers to grassroots dynamism that have been in place for more than a generation, such as land-use policies that prevent lower-income people from living in prospering areas, or licensing laws that discriminate against small-scale entrepreneurs, or non-compete agreements that keep young workers from job-hopping up the income ladder, or the depletion of local sources of capital for smaller enterprises. Additionally, policy entrepreneurs should develop proposals for tax relief, portable health benefits, and income insurance for certain classes of the self-employed.

But before such an agenda can be worked out, conservative policymakers need to rediscover that there is much more to the American economy than managers and workers. Dynamism is not a given, and if we do not intentionally cultivate it at the community level all across the country, the future will be bleaker for managers and workers alike. **NR**

South Park as Healing Mechanism

Everyone’s taste doesn’t have to conform to your sensibilities

BY KATHERINE TIMPF

It didn’t take too long into 2020 for people on Twitter to start earnestly debating whether *South Park*, an extremely popular show that has been on air for decades, has been wreaking havoc on our society with its offensiveness. As far as I can tell, the conversation started with a series of tweets from *She-Hulk* writer Dana Schwartz, who claimed that it “seems impossible to overstate the cultural damage done” by the show, adding that it has “portrayed earnestness as the only sin and taught that mockery is the ultimate inoculation against criticism.”

She continued: “Smugness is not the same as intelligence; provocation isn’t the same as bravery.”

The debate raged on for days, to the point where it became impossible to log on to the Twitter app without seeing something about it. Although the vast majority of the people in the replies disagreed with Schwartz, it was still disheartening to see people agreeing, saying that she was “absolutely right,” that the show was nothing more than “a ‘safe space’ for white guys,” or that the people criticizing Schwartz’s thread were merely “proving its point.” One user even claimed that he knows “for a fact” that the show “f***ed with [his] childhood,” because he and his friends had “ultimately ruined [their] friendship” by too frequently speaking to each other with the same kind of crassness that they’d seen on the show.

I try to avoid getting involved in controversies that originate on Twitter (that website is nothing but trouble; I should know—I am on it constantly), but the way I saw Schwartz and those who agreed with her talk about *South Park* made it impossible for me not to say something. This is especially true because this thread was not the first time I had seen *South Park* criticized in this way. For example: In November, the show was accused of

“transphobia” for its episode about transgender athletes. In December, feminist writer and activist Lindy West attacked the show for overusing irreverence, claiming that “irreverence needs to be deployed strategically, tactically,” while *South Park* “has always fetishized irreverence in this way where it’s like irreverence for irreverence’s sake—anything that anyone holds sacred deserves to be lampooned and satirized.”

These critics are correct about one thing: *South Park* is consistently offensive, and it absolutely has gone after every sacred subject under the sun. Where the critics are wrong, though, is in their contention that this is a bad thing, that this approach has led only to nihilism and cruelty. In fact, I can confidently say that *South Park*’s penchant for unbridled derision has been directly responsible for my own joy in some times of terrible sadness.

Make no mistake . . . *South Park* is brutal. It takes subjects that aren’t supposed to be touched *at all* and handles them roughly.

looks at me, trying to make sure I was “okay” without having to take the risk of saying the wrong thing.

Of course, I wasn’t okay. How could I be? But here’s the thing: I hadn’t been okay before the episode came on. It’s not like, because of that episode, I had just remembered that my mom had cancer, or that it had somehow gotten worse because Cartman was making fun of it. I had already been thinking about it, because I was thinking about it nonstop. When I saw the episode, though, I did something that I hadn’t done in a while:

I laughed . . . and laughing felt amazing.

See, during this time, I had already had plenty of support. I had plenty of shoulders to cry on, plenty of hugs, and more than enough *OMG-I’m-so-sorry-do-you-need-anything’s*. But this episode—which I would later learn was titled “Breast Cancer Show Ever”—gave me something that I hadn’t had before I saw it: the ability to actually laugh at the object of my grief. My friends had, of course, expected the

insurmountable after you’ve found a way to make it a joke.

Now I am not, of course, saying that everyone in these situations would have felt the same way. In fact, I am certain that a lot of people wouldn’t have. But guess what? It doesn’t matter. Not all comedy has to work for all people, and it is wrong to expect it to do so.

Make no mistake: The people accusing *South Park* of ruining our culture, of being terrible because of its rough treatment of delicate subjects, *think* that they’re being compassionate. They think that they speak for the people who feel mocked by the show and that they are standing up for them. They fancy themselves selfless, loving heroes.

They’re not. In fact, they are the opposite: They are so self-centered that they expect the entire world’s tastes and values to conform to their own sensibilities.

Far too many people, it seems, are incapable of responding to a joke that they don’t care for by saying, simply, “Hey, maybe

Though the issue my family was facing was serious, that didn’t mean it was untouchable by **humor and laughter**.

It’s true that it’s crude and rude and disgusting, even in its treatment of subjects that are supposed to be solemn—spoken of only in polite whispers and polished platitudes if they’re ever spoken of at all.

The thing is, though, that’s precisely why I think it’s so great—because it’s taught me that I *can* laugh, even at life’s most horrific atrocities, disarming its toughest challenges by demonstrating that even they are not untouchable by the powerful healing forces of humor.

One time in particular comes to mind: I was in college and had just found out that my mom had breast cancer. I was young; I was away from home; I was scared, and I was lost. It was, perhaps, the first time I felt that terrifying feeling that nothing truly is unshakable; that the things we consider to be the “foundations” in our lives are truly too unreliable to be thought of in that way at all.

That week, as I was relaxing and watching episodes of *South Park* with my friends, an episode came up that was centered on jokes about breast cancer. I will never forget what happened to everyone’s eyes in that room, darting around between nervous looks at one another and nervous

show material to weaken me, but it did the opposite. Seeing that little cartoon sociopath, Eric Cartman, unable to restrain his laughter when a classmate is trying to give an impassioned speech about breast cancer because it has the word “breast” in it (Cartman calls it “potty talk” and repeats the expression “killer titties”) made me feel a sort of power over my distress. It gave me a break from having to think of my mom’s illness only in terms of the pain, destruction, and death that it can cause. It comforted me by showing me that, though the issue my family was facing was serious, that didn’t mean it was untouchable by humor and laughter.

This wasn’t the only time that *South Park* did me this kind of favor, either. For example, I have struggled with ADD, anxiety, and depression since childhood, and seeing these topics effectively satirized with the show’s character Tweek Tweak gave me permission to laugh at myself when it came to something that everyone around me had only ever treated painfully seriously. Seeing someone else finding humor in it gave me permission to find things about it that were funny, too, and nothing seems quite as

this joke isn’t for me, but I understand that maybe someone else is getting some joy out of it, and that is okay—because there are other jokes that are for me, so all of them don’t have to be.” Now, instead, it’s common practice to disparage the creators of the joke as evil and wholly bad at their craft.

Perhaps the most common argument against the advocates of cancel culture is that they’re lame and uncreative—and I think they generally are. After all, if you could never hope to be even a fraction as creative and fearless and funny as a show like *South Park* (I remember writing a college paper detailing the ways in which its approach is similar to Chaucer’s, and I think most people would place him firmly in the category of *not* a hack), then I guess the only option you have is to say that the show is ruining society or whatever.

The thing is, though, being lame and uncreative is also probably the least objectionable thing that these sorts of people do. What’s worse is that, by telling people to avoid joking about sensitive topics, or to use irreverence sparingly, they are advocating that coping mechanisms should be taken away from people who may need them.

NR



Billionaires and Baristas

A visit to a place where millionaires need affordable housing

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Text

Aspen, Colo.

TIM FOSTER won the lottery. He was, he says, “pleasantly surprised.”

On the second-to-last day of 2019, Foster got the news that he had won the Aspen housing lottery, meaning that he will be able to buy a subsidized home in the famous resort town, which has for years been either at or near the top of the list of most expensive residential-real-estate markets in the United States. “Winning the lottery” here means the chance to buy a condo that is still pretty expensive, but not as expensive as it might be without Aspen’s robustly interventionist local housing authority. Aspen maintains two separate residential real-estate markets. In one, the free market prevails and prices are bananas; in the other, deed restrictions cap property appreciation at 3 percent per year (vs. the 12 percent annual appreciation typical of recent years in Aspen) and limit the sale of homes to people who hold regular employment in Aspen or elsewhere in Pitkin County. Some of those deed-restricted properties sell for upwards of \$1 million, but they are, by local standards, a bargain.

Foster, a former Peace Corps volunteer who now serves as CEO of a tourism-related business with employees in resort towns around the country, believes that Aspen has one of the

better affordable-housing programs he has seen.

“It’s nice that some people can live here who aren’t millionaires,” he says.

Millionaires? Please.

Mere measly *millionaires* of the one-or-two-million-dollar variety need not even bother looking too hard in Aspen. This is a town of billionaires and baristas, a place where rich progressives (the county went 70 percent for Mrs. Clinton in 2016) have got together and, despite their best intentions, created the greenback-caste dystopia of their own worst nightmares: an economy with Silicon Valley kingpins and Wall Street douche-rockets at the top, relatively low-wage service workers at the bottom, and not a hell of a lot in the middle. And this isn’t Houston or Las Vegas or some other place with a more or less unlimited capacity for suburban sprawl: In the high season, there is one road in and out of Aspen. Commuting is complicated. And so Aspen’s housing authorities aim to put *half* of the workers who are locally employed into subsidized housing of one kind or another.

Half. Teachers and police officers and hotel staff—but also CEOs, lawyers, and business owners.

Aspen is expensive. It is *shockingly* expensive. Maybe you've heard that. But it is even more shockingly, *outlandishly*, punitively expensive than you might guess watching the fit and burnished beautiful people of the world meandering through downtown streets in which Dior and Loro Piana boutiques snuggle up against outposts of Moncler and other traditional winter-sports brands, cutting *bellas figuras* Alpine-style, which means sipping a turmeric latte in tailored skiwear that doesn't take up too much space in the close quarters of the local cafés, sunglasses perched just so, or enjoying a \$1,700 bottle of Le Chemin vers l'Hérésie and foie gras at Cache Cache, or jamming their skis into the racks mounted on the outside of city buses here and making their way to Steeplechase or Thunder when they've had enough of Ajax.

The bus stops in front of a house that is for sale—not a time-share or a condo but an honest-to-goodness free-standing house, albeit a two-bedroom, one-bath affair that is less than 1,000 square feet. It is listed at . . . \$3 million, making it one of the cheapest houses on the market in Aspen. The houses for sale within a few blocks range from \$6 million to \$31.5 million. One-bedroom condos commonly command a million bucks.

And that is why a family earning nearly \$300,000 a year with just under \$1 million in assets—enough to put it well into the nation's 98th income percentile—is, in this absurd and absurdly beautiful place, eligible for housing assistance.

Aspen is a city that needs more affordable housing for millionaires.

BUT if a mere millionaire can't quite afford a place in Aspen, the big kahunas—the “Aspen 50”—often own more than one. The late David Koch owned two homes in Aspen; brother Bill has *four*. (Frugal brother Charles owns only one.) Roman Abramovich has two. Leonard Lauder has four, as does Ann Walton Kroenke, the Walmart heiress who met her billionaire husband, Stanley Kroenke, in Aspen. (“It's a small world when you're rich and white,” says one Aspen regular.) Stanley Kroenke's Aspen portfolio is described as including “adjoining Red Mountain properties, an Aspen Mountain townhome, and a commercial building on Galena Street,” worth about \$30 million in 2014. His 2011 house purchase was Aspen's most expensive residential transaction that year. Jeff Bezos and Michael Dell have homes for their parents in Aspen but none for themselves.

And there are a great many less famous names attached to fortunes in the mere hundreds of millions. People who buy \$40 million homes in general do not want affordable apartments built next door—or in the line of sight from their balconies. Aspen's politics may be progressive, but its real-estate ethos is profoundly *conservative*. These people are happy with Aspen the way it is, and they have good reason to be.

“If it's Aspen, Crested Butte, or the South Side of Chicago—if it's next door to you, it's next door to you,” says newly elected city councilman Skippy Mesirow, a young man with a mid-period-Morrissey hairdo and eight or so silver rings on his fingers. “People in this community are very active and engaged, and that's an awesome thing.” He chooses his next words carefully. “In some limited instances, people are so *resourced*”—he means gobsmackingly wealthy—“that they are able to influence things in a way that other people couldn't. That happens.

It's not the norm, but every couple of years, there's some project that has that issue.”

If Councilman Mesirow is circumspect, there's a good reason for that. He's just been at the center of what passes for a political hurricane in this quiet little town, for an offense that is very much of our time: a profane Instagram rant, one in which he declared Aspen's traffic situation to be “a f***ing disaster,” with “goddamned people and things and accidents everywhere,” and suggesting that Aspen might be better off with fewer visitors.

Most of the “Aspen 50” billionaires don't keep homes in Aspen proper but in Pitkin County, outside the city limits, particularly around Red Mountain, a.k.a. “Billionaires' Mountain,” a place where, as *Forbes* anachronistically put it, the “phone book reads like a Davos VIP list.” But they and members of the adjacent class of slightly less splendidly super-rich exercise an outsize influence on the town, the county, local politics, and the local culture.

And as in a hundred similar resort communities, the locals' seething resentment of the moneyed visitors and part-time residents—THOSE PEOPLE—is always there, simmering just short of a boil. “I think it's time we have the conversation about it's too many people in town at peak season,” Mesirow wrote in his jeremiad, “and they are not the right people.” The *right* people: That got up the noses of a few Aspen taxpayers—and some Aspen residents who are there only a few weeks a year are substantial taxpayers—and more than a few local business owners, too, who didn't appreciate the snooty attitude toward the people whose spending pays the bills. Mesirow apologized for his outburst in the now-familiar neo-Maoist fashion (“Thank you to the community members who reached out to me and criticized me”) and blamed his irritable mood on the conclusion of a two-month stint of cleansing veganism that he broke with “a steak, compound butter, creamed spinach, and bread,” as the *Aspen Times* dutifully reports.

Councilman Mesirow may be exactly the kind of meretricious preening weenie thrown up by the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez generation of progressive activists, but his take on Aspen's housing scene is more or less spot-on. “We're a town that likes its open space, that doesn't like development, and that wants more housing—these are competing interests,” he says. “That's the challenge.” Hiring is a problem. “I was talking to a business owner the other day who told me that when he put out an ad for an open position, he used to get 60, 70 applications—now he's lucky if he gets two. If you are hiring from outside of Aspen, you can assume a 50 percent attrition rate just because of cost of living, and housing in particular.”

This is partly a question of—as Mesirow and others put it in the grating argot of skiers and surfers everywhere—“*vibe*.” Aspen is not supposed to be Beverly Hills on ice. Its secret sauce comes from the same recipe that once made San Francisco and New York City such desirable and interesting cities: the mix of high and low, money and culture, old and young, capital and labor. Aspen still has its young ski bums sleeping five or six to an apartment meant for two or three, and the Aspen Ideas Festival and the area's other summer offerings have made it less of a single-purpose ski town and more of a year-round destination. But a year-round destination for *whom*? Partly for the Cannes-and-Davos gang, but also for a

decidedly less glamorous old, rich, and boring set. And the full-time locals are getting richer and older, too.

Aspen boasts an inventory of 3,000 deed-restricted units, mostly workforce housing that is available only to those who work 1,500 hours a year or more in Pitkin County. But one of Aspen's problems is that much of the affordable *worker* housing that came onto the market 20 or 30 years ago is in effect slowly turning into *retiree* housing. "We have a demographic shift under way," Mesirow says. "We have a commitment to care for the people who built that housing and created this town, but we still need to house our workforce. And we need to do all of that in an environment that is constrained by dramatically increasingly free-market values." One way Aspen regulates its affordable housing is by limiting the sale of certain properties to people who work a minimum number of hours a year. But in a town with a highly seasonal ski economy, that can get complicated. "How do we count *work*?" Mesirow asks. "Where do you have to be? What are minimum-income requirements? If we want to have elder care in unit, is that allowed?"

ASPEN is an extreme example—maybe the most extreme example the United States has to offer—but the phenomenon is pretty much the same from coast to coast. Like the Bay Area and New York City, Aspen has some natural geographic limits on growth, but those are less important than you might imagine: While the densest parts of Manhattan are unlike anything you'll see in Southern California, the New York City metro is in fact a little less dense than the sprawling Los Angeles metro, with 5,239 people per square mile compared with 7,009 in greater Los Angeles. And even the very dense sections of New York City, which sits on three islands and the tip of one peninsula, are less dense than comparable areas in less geographically constrained world capitals such as Paris. Of course history and geography play a role, but the factors that most severely constrain housing are in the main *political*.

For generations in the United States (and in the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world), rising home prices have been treated as an unadulterated good—by the politicians, at least. There is a pretty straightforward political-economy reason for that: Homeowners are on average older and wealthier than non-homeowners, more likely to have children, and less likely to be contemplating a move to a new city in the near future—which is to say, they are much more likely to be politically engaged and politically powerful, especially at the local level, where the most important housing-policy decisions are made. But their power is felt at the federal level, too: The U.S. government has for years worked to keep housing prices moving in one direction—up—while at the same time trying to mitigate the unpleasant economic consequences for homebuyers by subsidizing debt, making it easier and cheaper to borrow enough money to pay for those more expensive houses.

Houses do not break down and wear out as quickly or completely as automobiles, but they do break down and wear out—and there is no good economic reason to expect a 30-year-old house to be worth more than a new one, or to expect a house to appreciate in real (inflation-adjusted) terms at all, much less to appreciate in real terms more than business stock or

other kinds of investments. From a basic supply-and-demand perspective, houses might be expected to increase dramatically in value if the population is growing quickly or if supply cannot keep up with demand. But the U.S. population is not growing nearly as fast today as it did in the past—our growth rate today is half of what it was in the early 1990s and less than half of what it was in the early 1960s.

But housing demand is not evenly distributed across the country: Metro Austin grew by 37 percent from 2000 to 2010 and then by 26 percent from 2010 to 2018. Metro San Francisco has added about 1 million people since 1990. The populations of economically vibrant smaller cities such as Saint George, Utah, and Midland, Texas, are booming. The United States is becoming more urban as economically stagnant rural areas lose population, and the most desirable urban areas offer a textbook case of the rich getting richer: High-income newcomers reshape the economies and the cultures of those areas, which is why cities such as San Francisco and Austin offer so many interesting new ways to make money and so many delightful new ways to spend it.

There are little Aspens all over the place.

"The nationwide housing crunch has been noticeable here in Aspen for a long time," says Chris Everson, the City of Aspen's affordable-housing project manager. The underlying economics of Aspen may be more radical, but they are in many ways similar. "The forces that are at work on this small community are more intense than they are on average in the rest of the U.S., and they've been at work here since at least the mid 1980s." In fact, Aspen's newspapers contain columns about the local housing crunch going back to the 1960s. "Fundamentally, you've got ultra-wealthy folks driving up the price of land, and so folks who work in the community have less opportunity to live in the community where they work. Aspen used to have the goal of housing 60 percent of the local workforce in Pitkin County. That goal has been dropped for a number of reasons. One is that it's not achievable. We can't build our way out of this crisis."

For one thing, it isn't only a housing issue, even though soaring land prices are the top economic constraint on building affordable housing in Aspen. The housing problem is also a parking problem, a traffic problem, and a road-and-bridge-capacity problem, a general infrastructure problem. Local business owners speak highly of the bus service that shuttles many Aspen workers to work from their homes down valley, but there remains a great demand for parking and for the ability to drive—people may take the bus to work, but they want to be able to have a car of their own, and maybe more than one, for other transportation needs. Everson tells the story of one affordable-housing development that was built with 1.6 parking spaces per unit and then given a whole range of transportation support—a dedicated bus route, an additional shuttle service, and even vouchers for ride-share services. A few years later, when the city was engaged in negotiations with the housing association over building on some adjacent land, the residents told them they could keep their vouchers and their shuttle—what they really wanted was a couple dozen new parking spaces. "They had the opportunity to get whatever they wanted, really," Everson says, "and what they wanted was—more parking."

People want what they want—just as though they had minds of their own. The central planners may envision soaring

apartment towers sitting atop rail-based transit hubs in densely packed urban cores, but the American taste for four walls and a quarter acre of one's own, and maybe a big V-8 engine, is not going to be revoked via plebiscite.

BACK at the Jerome Hotel, at the bar where longtime Pitkin County resident Hunter S. Thompson used to do a lot of his drinking, Councilman Mesirow's wrong men—the WRONGEST MEN, really—are out in BRO!-BRO!-ing force, trying to figure out which overproof rum in what precise quantity will allow them to most effectively set a mug of hot chocolate on fire. Mission accomplished, a little volcano of very expensive lava flows over the edges onto the saucer. The valets out front wear cowboy hats with horsehair braids, but the theme here is less Old West than New Money.

It's cold here in January, but I am thinking of a warm place farther west: In Malibu, right there on Pacific Coast Highway, sits a Jack in the Box restaurant. It opens at 6 A.M. and stays open until midnight. Somebody is the manager of that Jack in the Box, and somebody is the assistant manager. Somebody gets there before 6 A.M. to prepare those Extreme Sausage Sandwiches, and somebody stays after midnight cleaning up after the last rich hippie in Malibu has finished the last Spicy Nacho Chicken Sandwich Munchie Meal of the evening. Where do *they* live? How do they get there? Not long ago, I saw a *mobile home* for sale near there—for \$1.5 million. Location really is everything—the mobile homes around Malibu are pretty nice, but you're really paying that \$1.5 million for the right to rent for a few thousand dollars a month the lot the mobile home sits on. As the investors' proverb has it: They aren't making new land, especially not on the beach in California. Not in Aspen, either.

At the same time, there are cities and small towns in this country jam-packed with houses that you couldn't give away, and a great many more that can be had for the price of a modest automobile. There is a Great Sorting under way—if not quite into Aspen's world of billionaires and baristas, nonetheless into one of real-estate haves and have-nots, some of them climbing the ladder of real-estate-based wealth and some of them finding it increasingly difficult to get a firm and stable foothold on the first rung of it. Winning the housing lottery may be a solution for a few families every year in Aspen, but winning the lottery is not really much of a plan for those Americans who want to go where the jobs and the wealth are but whose housing budgets are more suited to the places where the despair and the stagnation are—people who, perversely, simply can't *afford* a higher-paying job elsewhere. Los Angeles, Orlando, Austin, Chicago, Boston—none of these may have Aspen's *vibe*, but they do have a version of its housing problems. Those problems may seem less dramatic to the beautiful people meandering from the Little Nell lobby to the Ajax Tavern in this shining city on a hill, but they are the stuff of very heavy drama indeed for families at the very edges of economic viability in many of our other shining cities on hills, on bays, on rivers, on the coasts . . .

Funny thing about Aspen: The dizzying heights of its mountain peaks and the dizzying heights of its real-estate market provoke the same queasy understanding: The view from the top is spectacular, but it is an awfully long way to fall. **NR**

The Google Piñata

Text

Opposition to development has made housing unavailable in the Bay Area

BY MICHAEL GIBSON

MAYBE it was the \$2,070 bottle of wine. Or the junket to a hot spring in China. Or perhaps it was the John Deere tractor gifted for a vacation home in Colusa County. Or blabbing to his girlfriend about how he had granted a Chinese developer a shortcut through the maze of San Francisco's permit process for new housing. Whatever the racket, by January 28 the FBI had seen enough, and its agents arrested San Francisco's public-works director, Mohammed Nuru, on charges of fraud.

At a post-arrest news conference, the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of California quoted the complaint as alleging "corruption pouring into San Francisco from around the world." Though he isn't named in the complaint, Zhang Li, a billionaire hotel magnate from China, is alleged to have bribed Nuru to speed up the approval process on a condo project. Li had spent five years developing a property located at 555 Fulton Street while also trying to get permission to have a grocery store in the building. The plot thickened three weeks after Nuru's arrest when London Breed, the mayor of San Francisco, revealed that she had dated Nuru 20 years ago and had recently received a small gift from him. Now the U.S. attorney may rightly decry the corruption inherent in giving gifts for favors, but we can hardly be surprised that an approval process that takes years set the stage for it. The bigger question is how the stakes for building anything new ever got so high.

San Francisco has virtually banned new housing. It forbids apartments of all shapes and sizes, limits the number of units per property, caps the number of small "shoebox" units to a few hundred, and has outlawed building anything higher than 40 feet in 80 percent of the city. What few skyscrapers there are cluster near the base of the Bay Bridge. There is no end to the stupidity and triviality of calls to preserve the character of a neighborhood and enrich its current inhabitants by limiting the construction of new apartments and houses. Unsurprisingly, because of this constrained supply and stoked demand, the median price for a one-bedroom rental is the highest in the nation, at \$3,700 per month. To buy a single-family home, a starter home with flaking and rotting surfaces, a family needs \$1.5 million on average and had better be paying cash. The cost to construct a single new

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apartment unit is over \$700,000, nearly triple what it was a decade ago.

Rather than address the problem, however, the mayor, board of supervisors, planning commission, and land-use commission, together with a myriad of cracked, has-been community groups, have built for developers an obstacle course that even the most energetic minds cannot navigate. The permit process is fraught with trapdoors every step of the way in the highest-stakes game of Chutes and Ladders known to man. A shudder, a sense of fated financial ruin, passes across the face of any developer called to yet another hearing before the planning commission. Just about anyone anywhere has the standing to protest and cause delays. One constituent worries about a cast shadow or the preservation of a historic coin-operated laundromat and—crack!—the door opens and you fall back down all the way to square one. Meanwhile, you have lost years and spent millions. As Matt Haney, a member of the city’s board of supervisors, recently admitted in a tweet, the city’s process is bewildering “almost by design.” The result, he says, “is that the insiders get through, if slowly, and everyone else waits. It’s fundamentally broken and can breed corruption.”

Here are a few by-no-means-extraordinary recent examples: It took one man 41 years—he started the process in 1978—and more than \$2 million to get approval from the

groups have been shouldered out. San Francisco’s black community, which in 1970 accounted for 13 percent of the city’s population, has now shrunk to 5 percent.

IT is the best of times, it is the worst of times by the Bay. At the end of the 1980s, the venture capitalist John Doerr summed up Silicon Valley’s decade by saying he had witnessed “the largest legal creation of wealth on the planet.” He soon apologized. How silly in retrospect, for the roar of the 2010s would make him look like a tame little kitten meowing for milk. During the last decade, Apple became the first company worth more than \$1 trillion. Google later joined it. On the morning of May 18, 2012, Facebook sold its stock at \$38 a share to the public in its IPO. Those shares are now worth over \$200 apiece.

If the Bay Area were its own country, it would rank among the 20 largest economies in the world, having produced \$748 billion in goods and services last year. From 2010 to 2018, the Bay added 29,000 jobs per month, which is a little more than 3 million in total over the period. With all that wealth-creation, the state and city coffers have swelled with tax revenues. San Francisco’s budget has ballooned to \$12 billion for next year. That’s almost double the \$6.4 billion in 2010. California collected nearly \$103 billion in income taxes last year, up \$28 billion in five years,

San Francisco’s cultural pulse is dead, and what remains is on life support.

planning commission to build five duplexes in Bernal Heights. In another case, the owner of a nude bathhouse invoked the California Environmental Quality Act, a 1970 law that allows anyone to bring any development to a halt on environmental grounds. He argued that the construction of 1,500 new apartments would pose an environmental hazard to his naked spa patrons. It took a \$100,000 side payment to quiet him down.

Land-use restrictions have hollowed out the middle class and extinguished the city’s artistic ferment. The only poetry in North Beach can be found in a shabby museum about the Beat Generation that looks like a rotting convenience store in a bus station. More than 400 restaurants have closed in San Francisco in the last year, including, after 94 years, the famed Lucca Ravioli Co. in the Mission District and, after 47, Cafe Flore in the Castro neighborhood. Guitars, drums, and bass have fallen silent: You cannot have a garage band if the garage costs a million bucks. The Punch Line comedy club, where Robin Williams got his start, was on the precipice, saved only at the stroke of midnight by grants from the city and mercy from Google and Morgan Stanley. Nevertheless, the city’s cultural pulse is dead, and what remains is on life support.

The city’s policies have also prevented social mobility by pushing lower-income residents to areas with less opportunity and saddling them with interminable commutes or lower-paying jobs way out in the sticks. About 5 percent of the Bay Area workforce commutes three hours or more each day. Marginalized

owing largely to the success of tech companies and other mainstay industries.

But that is not the only way the state and city rely on the tech industry. The state pension funds and the endowments of the University of California system finance all of the retirement payments for teachers, firefighters, professors, cops, and other public employees. All of them depend on large equity holdings in Apple, Facebook, and Google, among other companies, to meet their future unfunded obligations. Who invests in venture-capital funds? Who benefits from the next IPO? The teachers’ pension fund, CalPERS, and other such entities that help the middle class save for retirement and give the state a shot at paying its future promises.

But instead of gratitude, we have the Google piñata.

Progressives blame high-earning employees at Google, Facebook, Uber, and other tech companies for displacing the poor and driving up the cost of housing. The bitterness and resentment expressed in hatred for these employees, despite the taxes they pay, is really quite something. Here are some descriptions that have appeared in op-eds and essays over the years: “tech bros,” “Stanford douchebags with stock options,” “technological privilege,” “feudal overlords,” the equivalent of the Prussian Army invading Paris, “tech supremacists.” The writer-activist Rebecca Solnit speaks of “the siege of San Francisco.”

But how could it be their fault? Down in Silicon Valley, Mountain View’s city council has shot down efforts by

Google to build new housing for its employees, even on its own property. It is also very stingy with its zoning and will allow only 7,000 new units to be built by the end of the 2020s. The lack of housing led Google to start providing commuter buses for its employees, which I once heard referred to as “Google piñatas.” The idea was for progressive protesters to throw rocks at them, shake ’em up, hit ’em hard, and see what fell out. Over the last decade the plan worked. Protesters have destroyed many commuter-bus windows, made threats of violence against tech workers, and disrupted service. Worst of all, they accused the tech companies of that greatest of all evils, gentrification.

By last fall, Google, Facebook, and Apple had had enough and decided to buy their way into the hearts of the locals. Together they have pledged \$4.5 billion in aggregate to the region in investments in affordable housing and grants for non-profits that help the displaced. As it turned out, the Google piñata had treats inside.

What is unique about this situation is how the tech companies have utterly failed to transform the wealth generated in this boom into any political power at the local or regional level. Tech companies appear to influence national elections and foment revolutions abroad, yet they can do little to change the land-use ordinances around their home offices. So powerful are these giants that candidates for the presidency are

family that wished to build a house near San Diego. In effect, excessive regulations on building and glacial approval processes represent a public taking of private property, which, according to Epstein, the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution forbids “without just compensation.” His clients, Frank and Nina Bottini, complied with every zoning ordinance and followed every procedure, but after eight years and a fortune spent, the city still denied them their permit, and their lot remains vacant. The courts appear satisfied that these delays are “normal” and that governments should pay no penalty for the time wasted. The next option, Congress, has long had the power to set local zoning ordinances aside, but it has never once entered the fray of local land-use politics. Which leaves the last option: voting to change the rules in Sacramento and San Francisco. But this too has failed at every try. In the end, the insiders will always have the votes, and the outsiders can’t even think of moving to the city.

And so it is that San Francisco, now past the peak of its power and wealth, begins a new decade paradoxically richer than ever before yet also poorer than ever before. Bureaucratic gunk and sideshow cons have turned the city’s impressive endowments into disasters. It continues to commit itself to outcomes no one can understand, through a set of processes all know to be corrupt. Nevertheless, year after year city offi-

If the **chokehold on housing** continues and the Bay Area economy can’t grow as it did over the last decade, this idiocy could take the whole state of California down with it.

calling for them to be broken up, but they are also prohibited from building so much as one new home for one employee in a leafy suburb.

I reached out to Alain Bertaud, the renowned urban economist at New York University and author of *Order without Design: How Markets Shape Cities*. “When I read [that] Google says it’s going to give \$1 billion to housing,” he told me, “I think it’s completely misplaced. Now, of course, we have to address homelessness in a non-market way, through social welfare, to help people out of their misery and bad luck. But what disturbs me is when I read some large percent of the housing should be affordable, which means below market-rate through subsidies. That only means waitlists and lotteries. As soon as the system doesn’t allow firefighters, cops, and schoolteachers to afford a house, you know that it is a broken system and no amount of subsidy will solve the problem.”

According to Bertaud, Google’s, Facebook’s, and Apple’s billions might be better spent lobbying city and suburban governments to relax their restrictions and free up the housing market.

Good luck. The options for reform are meager. The California courts and the U.S. Supreme Court will not strike down unreasonably restrictive zoning laws or curb interminable permit processes on anti-competitive grounds. The libertarian lawyer and scholar Richard Epstein tried and failed to get the Supreme Court to hear a case involving a

calling for them to be broken up, but they are also prohibited from building so much as one new home for one employee in a leafy suburb.

THE city seen from the Golden Gate Bridge is the city seen in the shimmering promise of all that the future might hold. Coming down the 101 from Sonoma, shooting out of the Robin Williams Tunnel, you see for an enchanted three seconds the most resplendent view on earth, of a city floating on the glittering water. Just think of the tens of millions, from all over the world, who yearn to be in that city! There it is, the Athens, the Florence, the Paris of the 21st century, the city of ambition, where the future will be made . . . or not, as is more likely now, thanks to restrictive zoning laws.

The only world in which California doesn’t go bankrupt is a world in which the visions pitched in Silicon Valley continue to come to life. If the chokehold on housing continues and the Bay Area economy can’t grow as it did over the last decade, this idiocy could take the whole state of California down with it as municipalities default on their unfunded-pension obligations and the income taxes used to pay for basic public services evaporate—surely an episode that history will record as one of the most extraordinary economic squanderings of all time.

NR

The Unbuildable American Home

Text

*How regulations and land-use restrictions
have made it too expensive to build*

BY KEVIN ERDMANN

THE UNITED STATES has developed a split housing market. There are cities where homes have become extremely expensive, and others where home prices have stayed low. Look at it from the perspective of a young family: In the expensive cities, it probably seems as though homes have been spectacular investments for their parents, but now housing is overpriced and makes for a poor investment. In the cheaper cities, it may appear as though their parents' homes haven't been such spectacular investments.

So, for those young families, the American dream seems to be a one-time asset bubble. Now it's done, and all they have are poor choices.

It is tempting to try to address these incongruities with a targeted patchwork of solutions: rent control so families aren't priced out of their neighborhoods, down-payment assistance to help new buyers in expensive markets, government watchdogs to make sure buyers aren't overextended.

The problem is, much of the stress and instability that we see in housing markets today is a result of a tangled web of existing barriers, taxes, and subsidies: This family gets a big income-tax write-off, and that family doesn't. This family in one city rents a home for \$4,000 per month, and that family in another pays \$800 per month for a similar home. This family cannot meet the standards for mortgage approval and pays \$1,200 in rent on a home owned by that family, whose mortgage costs only \$700 per month.

All of these inequities are the result of thinking of public policy in terms of favoring or protecting a certain group or a certain behavior. One policy is meant to favor renters, another to encourage homeownership, another to prevent a new bubble from developing. Broadly beneficial housing policy doesn't need to favor or protect anyone. It also needn't be concerned with what the "right" price is, or even whether housing is affordable. Broadly beneficial housing policy needs to be

focused on favoring just one thing: free and open markets. This is true at both the local level and the national level.

WHAT Americans need is the ability to purchase shelter. Today, home purchases are bundled with tax subsidies. The government estimates that homeowners saved more than \$200 billion in 2018 because of untaxed rental value, the tax deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes, and capital gains on owner-occupied homes. There ain't no such thing as a free lunch, as Milton Friedman was fond of saying. A home with tax subsidies is worth more than a home without them, so its price will be higher.

They are also bundled with the power to decide what homes your neighbors can or cannot build. A major reason the expensive cities are expensive is that whenever new homes are proposed, current residents are able to mount an endless barrage of complaints: The new units are too tall or too expensive, they cast shadows, they don't match the existing character of the neighborhood, they will attract the wrong sorts of new residents, etc. If you want a house in those cities, you have to pay dearly for it. But that high value might collapse if you and your neighbors start letting developers increase the local supply of housing.

In both of these cases, you may prefer a house that lacks those high-priced endowments, but if enough of your neighbors prefer them, the price of your home will reflect it.

It is tempting to excuse the expensive cities by blaming high prices on geographical limitations to building. It is true that building can be more expensive in dense cities with more local amenities. That can explain the difference between a high-rise condo in downtown Atlanta and a modest apartment in the nearby suburbs. But the difference between a house in L.A. today and a similar house in Atlanta is explained by politics.

This is clear if you consider the reaction of local regulators in L.A. to new developments. If geography were the limiting factor, when a developer proposed a new 100-unit project, the planning commission would be ecstatic, and it would enter into quick negotiations to see whether the developer could squeeze in 200 units. Instead, developers today typically must engage in years of negotiations just to get permission to build 50 units loaded with mandates and fees.

What is in short supply is simply shelter. Instead of tweaking the bundle of subsidies, taxes, and gatekeepers, we should get rid of the bundle. Make the market for shelter simple again.

The perception that homes aren't affordable stems from letting the market for homes slip out of the realm of "free and open." At the local level, housing markets are restricted by zoning laws and other regulations that prevent new units from being built. It's in the cities with the least new housing that prices have shot up the most drastically. The New York, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas are outliers with regard to both low supply and high prices. They don't even allow enough building to accommodate natural growth, let alone transplants.

I call these the "closed access" cities. Year after year, thousands of their residents—usually people with lower incomes—must pack up and move away.

In Phoenix, I have met many families who have been forced out of the California metropolitan areas. There were no options

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in Los Angeles for them to mull over and no units within their price range in the Bay Area. Their only option was to leave.

These differences in costs affect our expectations. The cities with \$4,000-a-month apartments exist in a society that has the ability to rent similar apartments for \$800 a month elsewhere. People in expensive cities notice that their friends and family who live in less expensive cities rent better, larger homes. Shouldering a \$4,000 payment each month forces some renters and homeowners to lower their expectations about what they can afford.

The vast gap between housing prices in different cities creates a sense of unfairness. The owners of modest homes in, say, the Bay Area that now rent for \$4,000 a month or that sell for a million dollars didn't earn that wealth by creating something. Their profits are a direct result of policymakers' preventing developers from building new housing units.

In short, we suffer from a lack of choices, though we know more choices should be available. That is what creates so much frustration.

In a free and responsive market, the market price *is* the affordable price. This is obvious in markets that have changed a lot over time. Take television sets. In 1950, they were much more expensive than they are today. Was there a television-affordability crisis? No. The cost reflected the

home should be about the cost of building a similar home down the street. Some of those homes will be 600-square-foot studio apartments in the heart of a bustling metropolis, some will be 5,000-square-foot villas overlooking the ocean, and some will be 80-year-old, out-of-date, rural two-bedroom units. Whatever conditions homes are in, the key to making them affordable is to protect the right to build a new home down the street. That includes both the right to build it and the right to finance it.

Building homes that are "too nice" doesn't make housing unaffordable. Here it is helpful to think about televisions again. As TVs get cheaper, we don't just spend less and less money on twelve-inch black-and-white ones. Some families might spend more on TVs (in relative terms) than they would have in 1950, if they conclude that the new 70-inch ultra-high-definition TV, which might cost more, is a better value. It looks better, gets more channels, and plays music. If TV-makers decide to market 70-inch color units, the sticker price alone doesn't make them less affordable.

On the other hand, if the government allowed TV-makers to sell only a limited number of TVs, then they might decide to sell *only* the 70-inch sets. In that case, TVs would be less affordable—because of the lack of choices, not because the TVs happened to be expensive to make. Would limiting the number of TVs while insisting they all have to be twelve-inch black-and-whites make them more affordable? No. If the supply were limited enough, the families with the most money to spend

The **average home size** in the United States has more than doubled since World War II, even though family sizes have declined dramatically.

incomes, culture, and technology of the day. Both consumers and producers were free to buy or sell televisions that were appropriate for them. So families didn't buy 70-inch TVs. They bought twelve-inch black-and-white TVs and saved the rest of their income for goods and services that provided more value in that time and place.

Housing is different from televisions. Every family will always need exactly one roof over their heads. For families in dire circumstances, a home is a basic right we should help to provide. Yet most families who are providing for their own shelter have a remarkable range of available options.

The average home size in the United States has more than doubled since World War II, even though family sizes have declined dramatically. There is a huge difference between the size and cost of a Manhattan condo and that of a farmhouse a few hours upstate. We make countless substitutions tailored to suit our lifestyles and budgets: new vs. run-down, large vs. small, quiet neighborhood vs. bustling.

With so many choices, it doesn't make any more sense to ask whether housing is affordable than it does to ask why some people buy large TVs and some people prefer streaming Netflix on their iPad. Better questions are "Why isn't there enough of the affordable housing we need?" and "Why isn't affordable housing where we need it to be?"

The cost of a TV should be approximately equal to the cost of the similar TV next to it on the store shelf, and the cost of any

would bid up the price. There would be a queue for \$1,000 twelve-inch TVs, just as there are waiting lists today for glorified closets in San Francisco. This is why, ironically, blocking new housing because the units will be "luxury" units makes the housing problem worse. The blocking is the problem, not the condition of the units.

Homes will also not be made affordable by the financial securities that fund them, or by the taxes and subsidies that apply to them. Consider again those twelve-inch TVs. If there were only a million TVs available, and families of means had bid the price up to \$1,000 each, would they become more affordable if we created a new subsidy that offered a \$200 grant and low-interest financing to first-time TV buyers? Those subsidies might change who can buy a TV, but there would still be only a million of them, and they would now probably cost more than \$1,000. Public programs that make homebuying more accessible can create public benefits, but we should judge them on whether they increase choices, not on how they affect prices—either up or down.

If the price of existing homes increases to a level that is higher than the cost to build a similar unit down the street, then more new units will be built. If the price of existing homes decreases below that, few new units will be built.

The irony today is that housing affordability is increasingly a concern, yet we are building new units at historically low rates. This is because policy interventions have made the

prices of existing homes lower than the price of the potential new home down the street.

At the local level, the closed-access cities are the epitome of the problem. By harassing and taxing developers and builders, policymakers in these urban areas help elevate the prices of new homes above those of existing homes.

The financial crisis didn't change the closed-access cities as much as you might think. Building has recovered and returned to a pace similar to what it was before the crisis. But it's still an exceedingly slow pace.

To varying degrees, much of the rest of the country has the same problem—few new homes being built because they cost more than existing homes—but for the opposite reason. The national crackdown on mortgage lending has prevented millions of Americans from buying entry-level homes. This lack of new buyers has driven prices lower. In most U.S. cities today, mortgage payments compare more favorably with rents than they have for decades, but many potential buyers cannot qualify for mortgages under current regulations.

Where the crackdown on mortgage lending is most binding, the shifts in markets are extreme. Among homebuyers with the highest credit scores (over 760), mortgage originations did not really decline during and after the financial crisis. Today, in inflation-adjusted dollars, this group is borrowing more than in 2005. Lending to applicants who have FICO scores between 720 and 760—which is above average—is down 35 percent. Lending to those with FICO scores below 720 is down more than 50 percent. And, contrary to popular belief, lending to people with low FICO scores was not elevated before the financial crisis.

In major metropolitan areas where the median household income is around \$50,000 or less, which have been affected the most by tighter lending regulations, homes are being built at less than half the rate they were before the financial crisis.

From 2002 to 2005, an average of 522,000 new homes were sold across the country each year for less than \$200,000. In 2018, only 72,000 in that price range were sold, and the number is still shrinking. A country desperate for affordable homes is hardly building any.

On the other hand, new mortgage-lending regulations don't affect corporate access to funding. Apartment buildings are being built at a higher rate than they were before the financial crisis, but they would need to be built at roughly double today's pace to make up for the collapse in the construction of low-priced single-family units.

The best solution to the entire problem is greater access: freer and more-open markets, in both mortgage-funding and urban land use.

The financial return on owning a house should come mainly from its rental value, not from excessive capital gains. That should be enough to make owning a home worthwhile. If it isn't enough, more people will choose to rent, rents will rise, and so will the rental value of homes and the financial return on homeownership.

Today, families are not necessarily *choosing* to be renters. Many are renters even though it would be worthwhile to them to own their home if they could. Rents are rising just about everywhere today because we have eliminated choices.

Solve the problem of access, and affordability will follow. Choices are the key to the goal of affordability and fairness. We need to make more of those choices legal again. **NR**

A Life in Mexico

Text

The historian and 'cultural entrepreneur'
Enrique Krauze reflects

BY JAY NORDLINGER

Mexico City

FOR many years, Enrique Krauze had a dream for Mexico: that the country have “real elections, a free press, separation of powers, and the rule of law.” This was “my very modest utopia,” he says—and this very modest utopia came to life in the year 1997.”

In that year, there were free and fair elections, supervised by an independent body. These elections broke the monopolistic power of the PRI—whose initials stand for “Partido Revolucionario Institucional.” We are talking about the party that ruled Mexico for some 70 years.

Krauze sees his “very modest utopia” in jeopardy now—thanks to the ascendancy of a master populist, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a.k.a. AMLO, as president. In fact, Krauze fears that Mexican democracy will be lost for generations.

He is one of the leading intellectuals in the country, and in great Latin America at large. He is a historian, an essayist, an editor, a TV producer, and more. I have come to see him at his home in Mexico City. It strikes me as a writer's paradise, this home, with books, desks, paintings, objets d'art, and lots of natural light. *If a writer can't get work done here, I think, he can't get it done anywhere.*

Krauze has a lot of work to do. He runs *Letras Libres*, the magazine he founded in 1999. (It is a literary-intellectual journal.) He runs Clío, the company he founded in 1992. It produces documentaries about Mexican history, and publishes books about the same. (You remember from Greek mythology that Clio is the muse of history.) He writes a biweekly column. And he writes his books and essays. “I have always combined many tasks in my life,” he says. “If you take life seriously, you can do that.”

I can't help thinking of William F. Buckley Jr., the founder of *NATIONAL REVIEW*, who kept up a range of activities, with energy and aplomb.

Krauze tends to do most of his writing on the weekend, particularly at his home in Cuernavaca, some 55 miles from Mexico City. He cites Philippe Ariès, a French historian of the 20th century. Ariès wrote a memoir called “Un historien du dimanche”: “A Sunday Historian.” Krauze allows Saturday too. And when it is time to draft a book, he puts everything else on hold—trusting those tasks to his colleagues—until the draft is complete.

In an aside, Krauze tells me this, about Cuernavaca: “It is a beautiful place, known as the ‘City of Eternal Spring.’” Humboldt gave it that name in the 19th century. “Now it is hellish, because of the violence we have through all Mexico—but that is another subject.”

He was born in 1947, here in Mexico City. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland. With other family members, they came here in the 1930s. Enrique's father, Moisés, started a printing business. His mother, Helen, was a journalist. (She is in her mid 90s today and still active.) To one another, the extended family tended to speak Yiddish.

Enrique speaks good English, by the way. He protests that he is "not fluent," but he is more fluent than a good many native English-speakers. He never had formal instruction, he says. He learned the language mainly from reading—that and "listening to music, from Frank Sinatra to the Beatles." In the early 1980s, he was a visiting professor at St. Anthony's College, Oxford.

I ask whether he has experienced much anti-Semitism in his life. The answer is no. In the past, there have been attacks from the far Right, and now, he says, there are attacks from the far Left, especially in the social media. This is because he is a critic of the populism now regnant. But "I can say confidently, at the age of 72, and after an intellectual career of 50 years, that I have never had major problems as a Mexican Jew."

Krauze earned an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering and a doctorate in history. He worked in his father's printing business for a couple of decades. All the while, he was writing. Then he became a full-time writer and "cultural entrepreneur," to borrow his phrase.

By some Americans, he is thought of as a conservative, because he has stood for democracy against dictatorships, not only of the Right but also of the Left. (Few are those who are consistent in this regard.) By some Mexicans, he is tagged as a conservative—even a reactionary—because he opposes the Left populism of López Obrador (and Right populism elsewhere). Strictly speaking, however, he is a liberal, he says—a liberal "in the classical sense." He is an admirer of George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Karl Popper, and Isaiah Berlin, to name four.

When he mentions Berlin, I think of Charles Krauthammer—who told me about his intellectual development. When a young man, he read Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*, and thought, *That's what I believe*. He never wavered from it. When Berlin died in 1997, Krauthammer paid tribute to him in a beautiful column, hailing the *Four Essays* in particular.

Krauze got to know Berlin in Oxford. Once, he asked Berlin how the Bolshevik Revolution succeeded. Lenin, Berlin said. If not for Lenin, that revolution would not have been pulled off. That is a powerful statement about the effect one man can have, for good or ill. Krauze tells me, "The only dogma I have in my life is this: Total power concentrated in one man leads to disaster and doom. If we didn't learn that from the 20th century—Mao and the rest—we didn't learn anything."

Early in his career, Krauze had a mentor, an "intellectual grandfather," he says. That was Daniel Cosío Villegas, who lived from 1898 to 1976. He was a Mexican economist, historian, and diplomat. He was also "a builder of institutions," as Krauze says. Most significantly, he founded a prestigious publishing house, the Fondo de Cultura Económica. In his politics, Cosío Villegas was "a pure liberal," says Krauze—a liberal in the classical sense. "He believed in human freedom. He was not an anarchist, mind you. He believed in freedom within the framework of a republic, within the framework of institutions."

Krauze says that he has tried to model his life on Cosío Villegas's. No one would say he has not succeeded. Krauze himself says simply this: "You feel you are building a culture,

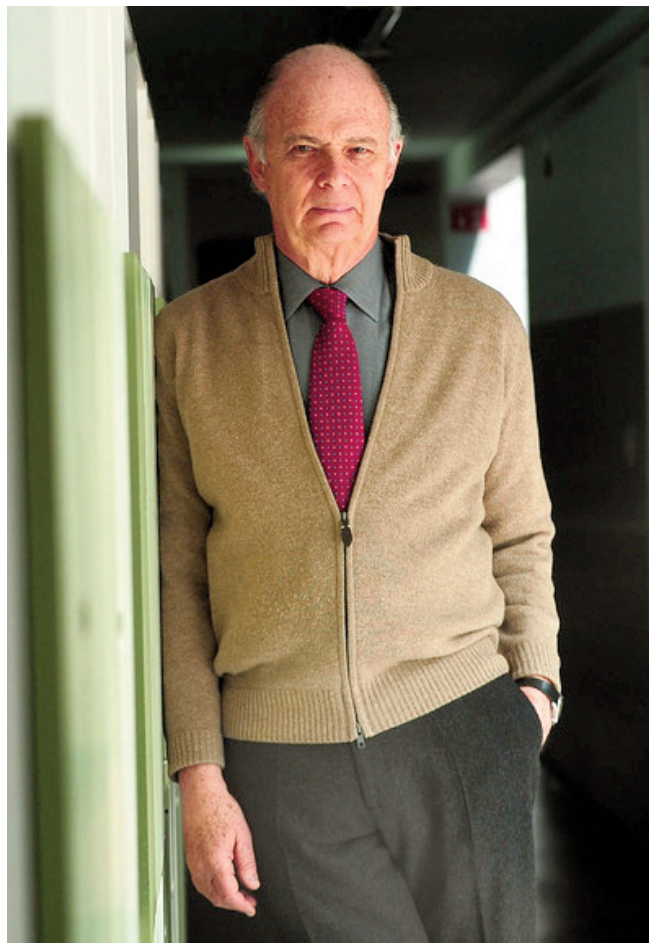
and that you have a responsibility to the country." He continues, "I have devoted my life to Mexico, out of love—and out of thankfulness, to a country that opened its hearts to my family, Jews who came from Europe." (They could not get into the United States, Krauze says, owing to a quota.)

If Daniel Cosío Villegas was his "grandfather," Octavio Paz was his "father," intellectually. Paz was another all-purpose writer and intellectual, who also served as a diplomat. In the early 1970s, Krauze started to contribute to Paz's magazine, *Plural*. He met Paz, face to face, for the first time at Cosío Villegas's funeral. Not long after that, Paz started another magazine—another literary-intellectual journal—*Vuelta*. Krauze worked with Paz at *Vuelta* for almost 20 years.

Octavio Paz is probably best known for his poetry. It is for this, primarily, that he won the Nobel prize in 1990. But Krauze thinks he was actually best as a cultural essayist.

LIONEL TRILLING, the American critic, once spoke of "the dark and bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet." (His student Norman Podhoretz borrowed the language for the title of a 1986 collection, *The Bloody Crossroads*.) Enrique Krauze, like Octavio Paz and many others, has worked at these crossroads for a long time. Today, the focus of attention in Mexico is the populist, and popular, president, López Obrador.

AMLO is "more than a populist," says Krauze: "He is a messianic figure." When AMLO first ran for president in 2006, Krauze wrote an essay about him titled "The Tropical Messiah."



Enrique Krauze

AMLO grew up in the state of Tabasco, which is in the southeast of the country, on the Gulf of Mexico. He absorbed the political culture there. He sees himself as called to save the people, according to Krauze, and he convinces others that this is his calling, too. AMLO is not a cynic, Krauze stresses. No, he is a true believer, in himself and in his destiny.

He lost that race in 2006. He lost again in 2012. And in 2018, at age 65, he made it. López Obrador is a very talented, canny, dangerous performer, says Krauze.

In a 2016 article, Krauze sketched out a type:

The Latin American populist leader harangues his people (or hers, in the case of Peronist Argentina) against those who are not “our people.” He proclaims the dawn of a new history and promises the advent of heaven on earth. Once in power, microphone in hand, he installs a pattern of systematic lying, decrees that his official truth is the only truth, invents external enemies to blame for his own failures, unhinges the economy, feeds hatred between classes, races, or other groups, maintains a continual mobilization of the masses, disdains parliaments and judges, manipulates elections, persecutes the press and media, and destroys civil liberties.

If populists can be counted on for one thing, it is talking. They talk and talk and talk. Often, they are entertaining, and sometimes they are mesmerizing. In conversation with me, Krauze remembers *Aló Presidente*, Hugo Chávez’s talk show in Venezuela. Chávez did it on Sunday. Here in Mexico, López Obrador speaks to the public every day, in his *mañanera*—his morning performance, which takes place from 7 to 9. In these hours, he sets the agenda, even the tone, of the country for the day. *La mañanera* is an ersatz press conference, in which the president holds forth in front of friendly media figures, with a few others in attendance to serve as foils.

Recently, AMLO praised what he called “the blessed social media.” And he blasts what he terms “la prensa fifi,” i.e., “the fancy press.” He creates the impression that only he himself, and his enthusiasts, can be trusted to deliver the news.

Enrique Krauze recalls what Gabriel García Márquez, the great Colombian novelist, said about the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, whom he adored. In 1975, García Márquez singled out Castro’s “genius as a reporter.” Castro was always talking to people, for hours on end, giving them the news. “Thanks to those spoken reports,” said García Márquez, “the Cuban people are some of the best informed in the world about their own reality.”

A very different Gabriel, Gabriel Zaid, has dubbed López Obrador “el poeta del insulto”—“the poet of the insult.” Zaid is a Mexican writer, born in 1934, whom Krauze regards as the top intellectual in the country. AMLO indeed has “a truly poetic gift for insulting,” says Krauze. Chávez had it, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil has it, others have it—but López Obrador has it in abundance. “He has coined scores, if not hundreds, of insults,” says Krauze, “in order to attack, diminish, delegitimize, and harm people who don’t agree with him.” If you disagree with the president, you are an enemy of the people, *fifi* at best.

Horribly, says Krauze, López Obrador is “destroying institutions that took decades to build,” governmental institutions that have been independent. Currently in his crosshairs is the National Electoral Institute, which has organized Mexico’s federal elections. It has ensured that those elections are clean, at least relatively so. AMLO is determined to bring governmental bodies under his personal control.

Krauze talks of other populists too, including Bolsonaro—who holds his own *mañanera*, by the way—and our own Donald J. Trump. Krauze has always expressed a strongly negative view of the American president, seeing in him a nativist. He is also amazed that we have a president whose style resembles a caudillo’s. Many others here, and throughout Latin America, share that amazement. But U.S. democracy is strong and entrenched, notes Krauze. Mexico’s, not so: It is fragile.

In the late 2000s, he spent time in Venezuela, and published a book: *Power and Delirium*. It is about the Chávez effect on that country. Chávez and *chavismo* led to “the most gruesome and terrible human disaster in Latin American history,” says Krauze. He is not predicting the same for Mexico. He is not predicting a collapse on that scale. Still, he is worried. “There is a temptation to say, ‘Well, Mexico is different, and López Obrador means well. Also, you can’t deny that people like him.’ I heard just the same about Chávez, when I was in Venezuela. *Exactly* the same.”

Earlier in our conversation, I used the American expression “to have seen this movie before.” Krauze now says, referring to populist Mexico, “I have seen this movie before,” in Venezuela. “The actors are different, and some scenes are different, but the script is the same.”

He further points out that if Mexico hits the skids, economically and socially, the United States will have a huge problem on its hands. It behooves us Americans, says Krauze, to pay attention to our southern neighbor.

TOWARD the end of our morning together, Krauze and I talk about Mexican movies, and, in particular, the much-honored 2018 film *Roma*. (The title refers not to the capital of Italy but to a neighborhood here in Mexico City.) The film is, in part, about a woman abandoned by her man. This is a common theme in Mexico, says Krauze—and not just in the movies but in life. Yet women persevere, he says, trying to make a life for themselves and, especially, their children. He is deeply impressed by what they do.

I say, “There’s a lot of quiet, everyday heroism, isn’t there? Pardon the cliché.” Krauze then rebukes me, memorably. “Are you afraid of clichés, Jay? You shouldn’t be. And I will not be afraid of clichés.” Then, with emotion, he tells me about some of the people he has encountered in Mexico, in his years of traveling the country: ordinary people, poor people, trying to keep their dignity, and often succeeding.

“I can tell you something,” he continues: “People in Mexico are of a very sweet nature, and of a very religious nature.” Now his voice becomes indignant. “That is why I’m so furious at López Obrador for taking advantage of that sweet, religious nature, and making people believe that he is a demigod who will save them. The people of Mexico do not deserve that. They did not deserve the authoritarian and corrupt regime of the PRI, and they don’t deserve this populist regime either. They deserve the slow, difficult building of a democracy. But maybe my very modest, humble utopia was, after all, a utopia”—in other words, a place that does not and cannot exist.

It occurs to me that Krauze may be feeling the spirit of defeat. That he fears his lifework—all those books, all those documentaries, etc.—has been in vain. I don’t forbear to mention this to him. He answers me, “Don’t get me wrong. I’m a fighter, and I will fight to the end.”

NR

Escape From Wuhan

*An account of the coronavirus
quarantine in China*

Text

BY SPENCER CASE

THE onset of the crisis in Wuhan startled me like a jump scare in a horror movie. You've seen the kind I mean. The audience is led to believe that the monster, psycho killer—or what have you—pursuing the intended victim is still distant. Then whatever it is stands up from behind, leaps out in front, bursts through the floor, or otherwise appears and delivers the jolt.

In mid January, my girlfriend visited the hospital for an ordinary illness. She came back on edge about the new disease, which had alarmed the staff. She had to cancel her usual trip home for Chinese New Year, too. She was told that if she visited her family, who lived in a smaller town (by Chinese standards!) near Hubei Province, she would be quarantined for two weeks, as a precautionary measure. The same would be done to anyone who arrived from Wuhan. She advised me to avoid the subway at peak hours.

Ominous signs mounted after that. More and more I saw surgical masks—usually blue, sometimes white—on the faces of people walking on Guangba Street where I lived. These were different from cloth breathing masks, the ones used for filtering out pollution, that had, in a casually dystopian way, been incorporated into fashion. Those I think make people look like characters from the 1990s video game *Mortal Kombat*. The preponderance of these new masks on people's faces was a rough barometer of the intensifying climate of fear.

On Wednesday, January 22, the proportion of people on the streets I saw wearing the masks jumped up precipitously from about 25 percent the day before to about 80 percent. Pharmacies were selling out of them. When I sat down in a coffee shop that evening, someone took my temperature with an electronic thermometer you pointed at the target's ear, to make sure I wasn't running a fever. They were doing this with all of the patrons. Other businesses were, increasingly, doing the same thing. *This is getting weird*, I thought.

The next day, the real shock came.

At 2 A.M. on Thursday, January 23, the government announced that all transportation to and from Wuhan—all trains, auto traffic, and aircraft—would be halted at 10 A.M. Within the city, the public buses, ferries, and subway would also be shut down indefinitely. People rushed to train stations to avoid the lockdown. I didn't wake up and hear the news until around 8 A.M., too late to plan a departure. And so at 10 A.M. the Chinese army surrounding the city sealed it off, trapping me and about 9 million others inside.

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Similar measures were taken throughout Hubei Province, so 50 to 60 million people unexpectedly found themselves in the largest mass quarantine in history. Shortly before the lockdown, the official coronavirus death toll stood at 17. That figure, and the figure of those believed to be infected, has grown every day, lockdown notwithstanding. The next week the death toll hit 100, and as of this writing over 1,770 have died, and over 71,000 people are believed to have been infected. Doubtless the numbers will be higher by the time you read this.

I'm a veteran of both the Iraq and the Afghanistan wars, so I know what it's like to live in a war zone. Living in a peaceful metropolis and then waking up to discover that it had been transformed into a kind of war zone overnight . . . That was a new one for me.

Happy Year of the Rat, indeed.

I ARRIVED in Wuhan on September 17, 2019, to take a position as an international research fellow in the school of philosophy at Wuhan University. I received my Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2018. This was my first academic job outside that nest, and I was very happy to take it. My main responsibilities are to attend the biweekly guest lectures and to publish a few papers, in indexed academic journals, for the glory of Wuhan University. It has no teaching obligations.

Several other Westerners in the Wuhan University school of philosophy have positions like this, though some also teach classes. Most of us share a room on the fourth floor of the building where the school of philosophy has its main office. Our room is marked with a Chinese sign that, roughly translated, reads "office of foreign experts." On an ordinary workday, we'll swap manuscripts and tips for getting around in Wuhan, as well as "your mama" zingers. It's safe to say that we take our jobs seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.

Locals would often ask me, "Why did you choose to live in Wuhan?" and I'd give the disappointing answer that this was the only job offer I had received. Did I mention my degree was in philosophy? I was enjoying my stay, however, and making a bit of progress with the language. I frequented events organized by the dance group Wuhan Swing. I met my current girlfriend at one of them. I've come to think that Wuhan, though intimidating to foreigners at first, has a lot of appealing features.

Wuhan, the capital of Hubei, isn't as congested as you might expect for a city of 11 million people. It has the cleanest subway system of any city I've visited. I especially like how glass walls usually separate the tracks from the platforms; sliding doors open to let commuters on and off. Signs at the metro and elsewhere admonish people to be courteous. My favorite is the one in front of many urinals, which reads in English (alongside Chinese script I can't translate): "A small step forward, one step civilization." Presumably, that's one step *for* civilization.

Also ubiquitous on signs is the sprightly blue cartoon Bingbing, the official mascot of the Seventh Annual Military World Games, which Wuhan hosted October 18–27, 2019. I thought Bingbing was a dragon; apparently, though, he is a Chinese sturgeon, an endangered fish endemic to the Yangtze River, which bisects the city. Clearly, Wuhan took pride in hosting the games. I got the sense that the people of Wuhan care about their city's international reputation.

So it's a pity that so many people first heard of Wuhan through its connection with the coronavirus. That the disease is rumored

to have originated from people eating bat soup, a dish so many find disgusting, doesn't help matters. The World Health Organization now calls the disease COVID-19, but the looser designation "Wuhan coronavirus" is already lodged in people's minds. There are other types of coronaviruses, too, apparently—but the term is now associated with Wuhan. It's hard to believe that anything will soon dislodge the negative association.

THE city seemed eerily quiet from my apartment balcony, 17 floors up, but it had for several days. I was living near the university, and many students had gone home for the holiday before the lockdown. Now it was even quieter than it had been, and dense gray smog hung over the city. At night, lights went on, reassuring me that there were other people around. I often slept with the curtains pulled back, so that I could look out over the cityscape. It seemed dimmer than normal. Like embers in a dying fire, only half-alive.

I had no trouble passing the time inside my apartment. I gave myself the goal of finishing a draft of a new philosophy paper by the end of January and threw myself into writing it. I did household chores, read books on Kindle, stayed in touch with family members on Skype, talked to my girlfriend using the ubiquitous Chinese app WeChat, and kept up with my P90X workout routine. (I wonder what the neighbors below me, if they were home, thought was going on when I did plyometrics.)

Against my better judgment, I couldn't avoid looking at the maelstrom of rumor on Twitter and WeChat, especially in the first few days of the lockdown. Videos purported to show people collapsing in the streets from the virus, nurses screaming during mental breakdowns, and other disturbing scenes. A rumor was circulating that the smog I saw was the product of the government burning corpses in crematoria for 24 hours a day to hide the true number of fatalities. Where else could the smoke be coming from? Nobody was working.

I could believe that the Chinese government (or any government, really) would lie to hide the scope of a crisis like this. I could also believe that people would exaggerate or fabricate things on the Internet for attention, or because they wanted to discredit the government. In a situation as unprecedented and drastic as this, anything seemed believable, yet nothing seemed entirely credible. The uncertainty that had enveloped Wuhan felt heavier than the smog, whatever its true source.

One mitigating circumstance for me was that a colleague in the school of philosophy, Tim Perrine, lived seven floors above me in the same building. During the two weeks I remained in Wuhan under the lockdown, we got together about every couple of days to eat dinner, drink beer, watch movies, and bounce philosophy ideas off each other as in normal times. I once joked: "When this is all over, I'll say 'How come Tim doesn't want to hang out with me anymore? We used to be so close!'"

Both of us were worried about running out of food. On Sunday, January 26, we ventured out to a supermarket. A security guard took our temperatures from our foreheads before we entered, and we were relieved to find it well stocked. Customers were backed up in the produce section, where you had to weigh your vegetables before getting in the main checkout line, but people didn't act like they were worried about the food running out. I didn't see anyone grab one of the large bags of rice lining the shelves.

After that trip, Tim and I each had enough food to comfortably last a month, and we rested a little easier. The sun came out for the next few days. From my window and balcony, I could see people out walking their dogs, which had probably been going stir-crazy. In the evenings, outdoor speakers broadcast messages in Chinese, followed by a few minutes of soothing, Enya-like music. I'm not sure how soothed anyone felt, but it seemed like the fear had subsided a notch.

A FEW days after the lockdown, the United States evacuated workers from its consulate. Other countries, including France, Japan, and India, were evacuating civilians from Hubei, and it seemed likely that I would eventually have a chance to be evacuated to the U.S. Now that I felt relatively secure in my apartment, I was ambivalent about leaving, especially given that I would have to pay for the flight and endure at least two weeks of stateside quarantine. But my family and girlfriend prevailed upon me to leave if I had the chance.

I sent an email to the U.S. embassy in Beijing, notifying them that I wanted to be evacuated, and a few days later I received a phone call. I was promised a spot on a plane but was also told that I would need to arrange a ride to the airport myself. I would need to give them the license-plate number of the car that would take me through the military checkpoint blocking the airport. Ride-share services had suspended operations, but my girlfriend made a few calls and found me a driver.

I was told to be at the airport no later than 6 A.M. on Monday, February 3, and so I arranged for the driver to pick me up outside the apartment building at 5 A.M. But then, at 8 P.M. the night before, I received an email from the U.S. government saying that the flight would depart on a different date and that I would need to provide additional information about the driver. The next day, I received another call from the embassy. The person on the line said I also needed to provide the driver's name and national-ID number.

How was I supposed to guarantee that a specific person I didn't know would take me to the airport before I even knew *when* I needed to be there? What if he (reasonably) refused to give his ID number to me, a stranger? I let the person on the phone know how angry I was about this demand, and I regret probably making her already hard day a little harder. But she insisted that the Chinese government wouldn't give the U.S. authorization to land planes in Wuhan until they had this information from each of the evacuees.

Fortunately, the driver entrusted me with that information. I passed it along and was confirmed on the manifest. At 4 P.M. on Wednesday, February 4, I met him in front of my apartment building with my bags, and he cautiously drove to the airport. The streets weren't completely empty, but the traffic was about 10 percent of what you'd expect (and of course the metro wasn't operating). The military checkpoint gave us no trouble. When the soldier saw I had a U.S. passport, he waved us through without bothering to examine it. I arrived at 5 P.M., one hour early, and paid the driver well.

I entered the terminal and sat with the other Americans, who huddled together with their luggage and waited for further instructions. Then came a surprise. My girlfriend had said that her friend would bring me a gift when I was at the terminal, but she unexpectedly showed up to deliver it herself. She was there



Patients being treated for the coronavirus at a makeshift hospital in Wuhan, February 17

to assist with evacuation. The giftbag included an odd assortment of things that wouldn't have made sense in any other context: surgical masks, sanitizing wet wipes, candy and fruit, and a scarf, which was a gift to my mother.

I was touched. Her gesture cut through the dispiriting circumstances, like a ray of sun through a dark thundercloud. It's emblematic of the many acts of kindness, large and small, that have helped to alleviate the suffering of people in trying times. I wished I could have taken her with me, but that wasn't possible. I wish I could say more about her, too, but there are good reasons for me not to.

Stay healthy, darling. I'll see you again when this is over.

I KNEW that I'd have my temperature checked before being allowed to board the plane. If I ran a fever, would I be able to return to my apartment, I wondered, or would I be sent to an overcrowded Chinese hospital? So I stood in line a bit nervously. The State Department officials wore so much protective gear that they could have been mistaken for the Chernobyl cleanup crew. When it was my turn, one of them pointed the electronic thermometer at my forehead and said it was 35.9. I couldn't convert Celsius to Fahrenheit in my head, but his tone suggested no alarm.

The number of people at the gate was 100 fewer than expected, to the consternation of the State Department officials. I never heard an explanation why, but I suspect the lack of reliable transportation to the airport had something to do with it. Those of us who were present boarded two planes around 5 A.M. These weren't ordinary airliners, but windowless cargo planes refitted to carry passengers. They looked like beluga whales to me. We remained stationary on the tarmac for three hours before being granted permission to take off.

The flight lasted twelve hours. I slept only three. There were no movies for entertainment. On the plus side, the flight was remarkably smooth and free of turbulence. The State Department workers did their best to make us comfortable, carrying

boxes of snacks, as if they were flight attendants in unusual getup. Twice we were called by row, to have our temperatures checked in the back. (And what were they going to do if I ran high here—hand me a parachute?)

When we landed at Travis Air Force Base, near San Francisco, it was earlier on the same date than when we had left, February 5—a counterintuitive effect of crossing the International Date Line that added to my disorientation. It took a long time for the passengers to disembark, since we were called up one at a time by our seat numbers and again had our temperatures checked before we could step out. I was one of the last to step off. When I did, I had been on that plane for something like 17 hours.

I was in a daze when someone from the Department of Health and Human Services (I think) handed me a stapled document and said, "These are your quarantine orders, read them at your leisure," wryly adding, "and you'll have a lot of leisure."

In short, I have to stay at this hotel on the base until February 18 to make sure I don't inadvertently transmit the coronavirus and endanger the public. Being quarantined is like being in prison where everybody knows that you're innocent, feels bad for you, and generally tries to be as nice as possible. If I tried to leave, though, I could end up in real prison for a year. A chain-link fence surrounds the hotel. At night floodlights shine in to expose any would-be escapees.

It's warm and sunny outside the hotel. A girl chalks the sidewalk with pictures of American and Chinese cartoons. Others do tai chi in a circle on the grass. A couple of kids are playing lawn darts. I'm doing the "warrior workout" routine that a medic has organized. What makes this scene surreal is that just about everyone in it is wearing surgical masks, though they aren't required. Look closer and you'll also see bottles of hand sanitizer everywhere.

What a strange place to be, and what a strange sight to behold. And how strangely privileged I feel to have been a witness to this drama. In a few more days, I will, I hope, walk past that fence with a document saying I'm coronavirus-free. When I do, I hope I feel a newfound appreciation for the health and freedom of movement I've so often taken for granted.

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The Long View

BY ROB LONG

From the Fantasy/Horror Bookshelf:

The Hillaryacon: Darkness Gathering

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: "ONE SIP TOO MANY"

It was late. The West Wing was deserted. Tomorrow it would bustle again, but for now everyone was out on the town, enjoying the parties and inaugural balls and the feeling of being on the winning team.

Mike Bloomberg had begged off. As much as he enjoyed parties, the past few weeks had been trying. So much to do and prepare for. And also, he couldn't quite shake this persistent . . . what was it? A cold? The flu? That's what the doctor said. "Get some rest, and it'll go away," the doc told him, just after Election Day.

But it didn't go away. Nor did the headaches. Or the tingly numb feeling that sometimes overtook him. The dizziness. The sudden tightness in his chest. I'm just tired, he said to himself.

Mike sat alone in the darkened Oval Office. He took a deep breath and looked around. It had been quite a ride. The campaign seemed like a distant memory—the stump speeches, the debates, all of it. And it had cost him! Waiting on the platform to give his inaugural speech, Mike had done something he hadn't done in decades—he'd added up figures on the back of an envelope. Almost \$1 billion! Gone! Spent on Web ads and television commercials and Get Out the Vote initiatives. Vans for old people and churchgoers. Flyers and door-

knockers in swing districts. Even—and here Mike allowed himself some guilty pride—some really nasty oppo on the Trump boys.

But it was all worth it. He was president now.

Mike poured himself a glass of mineral water—a brand he had discovered on the campaign trail—switched on the desk lamp, and gathered up some papers from the inbox on the *HMS Resolute* desk. Tomorrow was going to be a busy day. The headaches were coming back, though—he could feel it—and the pages in front of him were blurry and out of focus.

"Burning the midnight oil, Mr. President?"

Mike sat up with a start. He peered into the dark. "Who's there?"

Vice President Hillary Clinton glided silently to the desk.

"Oh," said Mike. "It's you."

She smiled.

"You're not looking too good, Mike," she said. "Pale. Sweaty. Maybe it's time to get some rest."

Mike looked up, annoyed. He knew months ago that adding Hillary Clinton to the ticket would have drawbacks. She's pushy and arrogant and would feel entitled to barge into his office at any moment. But the campaign was over now. He needed to set some boundaries.

"Hillary, I'd prefer it if you didn't just barge in. If you want to see me . . ." His voice trailed off. He had forgotten what he was going to say.

"Everything okay, Mike? Maybe take another sip of water?"

There was something strange in the way Hillary was talking. Some cheerfulness, like she was almost goading him. Mike reached for the bottle of water and took a long drink. Some of it spilled down his shirtfront. The bottle slipped from his hand. He watched it hit the rug in slow motion. Hillary threw back her head and . . . was she laughing? He couldn't tell. The room was spinning and all he could hear

was the blood rushing in his ears and then his head hit the desk and he could almost see Hillary Clinton replacing the water bottle with another one, and his eyes were open as she dialed her phone.

"Come quickly!" he thought he could hear her say. "Something's happened to the president!"

The last thing President Mike Bloomberg saw was Vice President Hillary Clinton with a satisfied smile on her face.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: "THE PLEASURE OF THE PRESIDENT"

"To be honest, Madam President, I was surprised to get your call."

Bernie Sanders was an infuriating person. Rude, abrasive, arrogant—usually these were things that Hillary Clinton admired. But Bernie, well, she and Bernie had history. Bad history.

"Let me be honest, Bernie. You weren't my first choice. But after Elizabeth Warren's accident—"

"Yes, accident," Bernie said slowly. "A curious kind of accident. It's not often that a dog explodes."

"So true. And yet. To be frank, I wasn't all that excited about having her around. There's such a thing as too many ambitious women, don't you think?"

Hillary swirled her cognac in the snifter. This was going better than she had imagined.

"Now you, on the other hand, seem like a smart operator. You seem to know how to play the game. So I guess my question is, Bernie, how's your heart problem?"

Bernie shifted in his chair.

"The doctors tell me it's under control, Madam President."

"Well, good. How would it look if my second choice for vice president also ended up quite, quite dead?"

Bernie gulped.

Being president was going to be fun.

(continued next page)

Column Calumny

WHEN the Trump administration issued a rule change bringing back the classical style to federal buildings, the pundit class went from zero to Hitler in record time. Pediments and pillars? The gateway to fascism.

You might think fascism had more prominent and worrisome characteristics—say, “take the guns, banish industries the leading class does not like, and herd everyone into state-run programs, and then, after lunch, draw up more sanctions against the only Jewish state on the planet.” No, that’s leftism, and hence it’s progressive! Making buildings look traditional instead of resembling a heap of broken glass covered in tinfoil? Genocide’s around the corner.

Perhaps many architects don’t like the idea because they cannot design in the classical style. They wouldn’t know where to start. It’s like a substitute teacher showing up in poetry class and insisting everyone use meter and rhyme. They won’t admit that, of course, so we get the following arguments against the classical norm.

1. Federal design standards are fascistic! We have no such rules today, only vague guidelines laid down by the sainted Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1962. He wanted to encourage architectural diversity in federal buildings—which, in 1962, was like encouraging a broader color palette in a tuxedo shop. There’s only so much you can do with a featureless box other than put up a sign to tell people whether it’s the Post Office, the Public Health Building, the Federal Courthouse, or the Emperor’s New Clothes Warehouse.

My neighborhood has a post office from 1962, and it has a tidy modern appeal—not for what it is, but for what it represents. It’s a machine with a technocratic ethos. You look at those floating marble stairs with aluminum railings and think, “Those boys at the RAND Corporation are going to put the IBM computers to work and get us out of Vietnam in a year, tops.”

Anyway, the number of classical-style federal buildings that will be designed and built in the next four years is probably quite small, assuming Trump wins reelection. President Klobuchar or President Buttigieg might well make a return to pitiless concrete death-bunkers an action item for the first 100 days, although Bernie Sanders might stay his hand:

“When I was in Russia! Which had problems, nevuhsaid it didn’t! But! The nomenklatura had nice buildings with columns, and chanduhleeuhs! Ornuhment wasn’t just for the rich!”

2. It’s white supremacism. They love classicism because a Renaissance Catholic church shows the tremendous aesthetic and engineering power of the West. Same goes for art. Ergo the National Gallery is basically Klan Central.

3. The appeal to a mythical past is an old dictator trick. They call up a glorious lost history to justify their rule, associating themselves with an architectural vocabulary that appeals to a narrow, exclusionary conception of the culture.

One critic of the proposal noted the parallels between the Senate acquittal of Trump and Rome’s descent into autocracy under Augustus, adding, “Classical architecture helped maintain the masquerade in ancient Rome, and do we want it to happen again here?”

Hmm. Imagine the Chief Roman Architect conferring with Augustus.

“In which style shall I build the temples and basilicas, First Citizen?”

“What do you mean, which style? Roman style, you imbecile.”

And so the architect went to work. A few years later, people gathering in the Forum looked up at the resplendent new buildings, and the wisest among them grumbled: “Those may be the trappings of the republic, but they only seek to mask Augustus’s ongoing erosion of our norms, as we sink deeper and deeper into autocracy.”

“How true you speak,” said another man. “Oh for the days of our glorious republic, before Augustus. Well, before Julius Caesar. Well, before the reign of Pompey, dictator in all but name. Well, before the tyranny of Sulla, who skillfully exploited the anti-republican idea that troops were loyal to their general, not to Rome itself, which one could say paved the way for this day when we have yet another in a series of strongmen who drape themselves in the language of a dead political order, but yes, you’re absolutely right, it’s so much worse now.”

“Except for the end to all the civil strife.”

“There’s that, yes.”

4. If Trump wants to return to the past, why didn’t he drive around the NASCAR circuit in a chariot?

Great point! Really sharp. Have you heard of Twitter? They’d love you there. Anyway, Trump’s taste is all over the map. We suspect his taste in interior design is gaudy arriviste—gilded toilet flush handles, more candelabras than the Liberace Museum—but the buildings themselves are quite modern, whatever modern happened to be at the time. Trump Tower, finished in 1979, has aged better than the plain mirror-glass boxes of the era. His building in Las Vegas is almost an abstraction of wealth: a faceted gold bar stood up on its end. Trump World Tower in New York is the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and I’m still surprised the plaza isn’t full of hooting monkeys brandishing shin bones.

The last time modern American architecture looked even slightly classical was in the Thirties, when WPA Moderne was the rage for post offices. The old motifs were flattened and stylized, and historical references reformed into a new, forward-looking aesthetic that expressed the power of the state. Those buildings looked more like Hitler’s soulless fascist aesthetic than anything the administration has suggested. Imagine if Trump had decreed that federal buildings should be designed in the style of the Thirties, just because he thought it was cool. Even though he was reviving the style of FDR, he’d still be literally Hitler.

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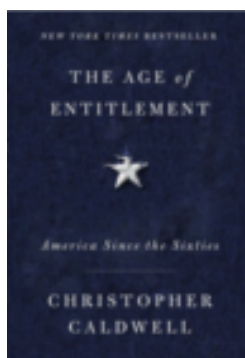
Mr. Lileks blogs at Lileks.com.

Books, Arts & Manners

The Rival Constitution

DAVID AZERRAD

Text



The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties,
by Christopher Caldwell
(Simon & Schuster, 352 pp., \$28)

THERE are many reasons the Right, in spite of the Republican Party's electoral successes, steadily loses ground to the Left with each passing decade. The Left controls all the elite institutions that bestow praise and lay blame in America. It has a clarity of purpose, a resolve, and a ruthlessness that are generally lacking on the right. Most important though, it is the Left's moral framework that is authoritative. Their pieties rule and are enforced by conservatives and liberals alike.

Nearly everyone in America either believes in or defers to the Left's hierarchical politics of victimization. According to the country's official mythology, in the beginning, only straight white men were free. Over time, marginalized members of the rainbow coalition gained more rights. American history, in this retelling, is progressive—yet tragic. Disparities in life outcomes between men and women, blacks and whites, gays and straights prove that sexism, racism, and homophobia remain systemic.

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In the spirit of John Rawls, America is to be judged by how its oppressed identity groups fare. Progressivism leads the charge in demanding more rights for more people, while conservatism is, at best, reduced to playing second fiddle in ministering to women and minorities. A rising tide lifts all boats—especially boats of color! As President Trump never tires of tweeting, the black and Hispanic unemployment rate is at an all-time low.

Non-accommodationist conservative arguments—anchored in the centrality of freedom, family, God, and country—lack a soil in which to take root. They are bound to fail—and fail they do, as the leftward drift of the country and of conservatism itself confirms. Robert Lewis Dabney's biting words have proven prescient: "American conservatism is merely the shadow that follows Radicalism as it moves forward towards perdition."

The Right will not stem its losses and reclaim the country until it upends the Left's narrative. America needs a moral revolution and a different conceptual framework to think about its history. Hence the importance of Christopher Caldwell's marvelously well-written and deliciously impious new counter-history of America since the Sixties, *The Age of Entitlement*.

Caldwell, a senior fellow at the Claremont Institute, paves the way for such a transvaluation of values by calling into question the regime's most sacred cow: civil rights. In his retelling, the civil-rights movement that justly destroyed Jim Crow did not bring equality to America. In a sad irony, it instead re-created the problem it promised to resolve, albeit in a modified form. America today once again has a system of government-backed racial preferences, except that blacks (and other recognized identity groups) are now its beneficiaries, while whites occupy "the bottom rung of an official hierarchy of races."

It should be noted from the outset (not that it will matter to his detractors) that Caldwell is blind neither to the injustices of the past nor to the good that came from civil rights. He calls Jim

Crow "heinous" and "unfair." He praises the civil-rights movement's "extraordinary achievement" and its "collateral blessings." More generally, his is a critique of the Sixties devoid of nostalgia for the Fifties. He describes post-war America as an overly regimented martial era with bland architecture and a "transactional, aggressive, and indelicate" ethos.

Still, he sees in the civil-rights movement a destructive force that fundamentally altered the United States for the worse. The locus of Caldwell's analysis is the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This landmark piece of legislation did not merely ban government discrimination, it also empowered bureaucrats and judges to eradicate *private* discrimination. In so doing, it nullified one of the central pillars of the Founders' liberal order: the freedom of association—which Caldwell calls "the master freedom," without which "political freedom cannot be effectively exercised."

Thereafter, the Constitution of 1788 would still exist on paper, but America would now be governed by a rival de facto constitution whose animating principles were to eradicate discrimination and secure the dignity of the oppressed (both defined in the broadest possible terms). This new Constitution is anchored in bureaucratic orders and overreaching judicial decisions unmoored from the language and intent of the Civil Rights Act. It "lacks the traditional kind of legitimacy" of the older Constitution, but it "commands the near-unanimous endorsement of judicial elites and civic educators and the passionate allegiance of those who received it as a liberation."

The number of liberated beneficiaries, the ensuing years revealed, would only grow. Blacks were followed by women, Hispanics, homosexuals, immigrants, and the disabled in leveraging the new formidable powers of the anti-discrimination state on their behalf, with transsexuals soon set to join them. As Joe Biden recently explained to the nation: "Transgender equality is the civil rights issue of our time." And as Caldwell astutely observes: "Civil rights law became the template for much of

American policy making after the 1960s, including on matters far removed from race.”

Under the new civil-rights regime, the demands of the oppressed would also grow. First, the schools had to be desegregated. Then they had to be forcibly integrated through busing. First, positions in the workplace had to be opened to women. Then the workplace had to be feminized. First, gay marriage had to be recognized by the government. Then every last baker, florist, and photographer in the country had to approve of it too.

Caldwell homes in on the three developments most damaging to the *ancien régime* of limited constitutional government: affirmative action, disparate-impact analysis, and political correctness. Affirmative action gave America “something it had never had at the federal level, something the overwhelming majority of its citizens would never have approved: an explicit system of racial preference.” The legal doctrine of disparate impact redefined discrimination

This illiberal and inegalitarian political system benefits some Americans at the expense of others. The winners gravitate to the Democratic Party, the losers to the Republican Party. The parties now represent “two different constitutions, two different eras of history, even two different technological platforms. And increasingly, two different racial groups.” Polarization might be too quaint a term to describe such divisions.

Caldwell’s book ends somewhat abruptly in 2015. Trump is never mentioned by name, although Caldwell alludes to him a handful of times. He suggests that the 2016 election should be interpreted as a rebellion against the oppressive civil-rights regime. But even the rebels who remain loyal to the original Constitution cannot “acknowledge (or even see) that the only way back to the free country of their ideals [is] through the repeal of the civil rights laws.”

This may be the boldest line in a book that is already sure to vex many sensibilities. According to Caldwell,

and even less conceivable that the Civil Rights Act will get repealed. Civil war or secession appear more likely.

But why couldn’t a Republican Party emboldened by Caldwell’s book set its sights instead on reshaping the judiciary and the bureaucracy to eliminate affirmative action and disparate-impact analysis, while holding the line against efforts to criminalize so-called hate speech? The Civil Rights Act of 1964, after all, is color-blind. The floor debates in Congress at the time of its passage make clear that it was not intended to produce quotas. And racial preferences of all kinds remain unpopular in America. While Caldwell shows that the colorblind road was not taken, he does not prove that it cannot ever be taken.

Caldwell may perhaps be right that such an endeavor would fail, but it would be imprudent to dismiss it from the outset—especially since it has not been pursued with determination. The conservative movement has devoted considerably more resources to promoting school choice and defending the

If Caldwell is right that **civil-rights laws** cannot be moderated and that there is no way forward except through repeal, then the prospects for constitutional government are grim.

to include *non-discriminatory* practices that affect identity groups differently. “It was an opening to arbitrary power,” Caldwell notes. “And once arbitrary power is conferred, it matters little what it was conferred for.” As for political correctness—the “name for the cultural effect of the basic enforcement powers of civil rights law”—it represented “the most comprehensive ideological capture of institutional power in the history of the United States.”

No one had signed up for this—including the well-intentioned Americans who opposed Jim Crow and supported civil rights. But the civil-rights state took on a life of its own. Its vast discretionary powers were unmoored from popular sentiment and electoral politics. Civil rights, in Caldwell’s final and bleakest assessment, “does not temper popular sovereignty, it replaces it.” And so the diversity agenda “advanced when its proponents won elections and when they lost them.”

the promise of civil rights may be equality, but its effect is and *must be* discrimination. He dismisses as a comforting myth the view, widely held by conservatives, that the “good” colorblind and nonviolent civil-rights movement was later hijacked by radicals. For Caldwell, there is only one civil-rights movement, and its logic necessarily points to affirmative action, censorship, and even violence. The race riots of the 1960s, in his view, “were the civil rights movement—not the whole of it, certainly, but an important element of it.”

The conclusion to which his book points will be deeply unsettling to all sympathetic readers. If Caldwell is right that civil-rights laws cannot be moderated and that there is no way forward except through repeal, then the prospects for constitutional government are grim. It is inconceivable, for the foreseeable future at least, that the Republican Party will push for repeal—

unborn, for instance, than it has to fighting the metastasizing civil-rights agenda. It is by no means clear that a concerted effort to eliminate racial preferences *must* fail (though one should not be blind to the considerable obstacles that lie ahead, chief among which are many Americans’ unwillingness to countenance disparate group outcomes and the elites’ religious devotion to diversity, as evidenced, for example, by Californian universities’ refusal to comply with Proposition 209).

The Age of Entitlement is much more than a history of civil rights. Caldwell offers provocative and illuminating analyses of immigration and demographic change, the failures of Reaganism, the rise of Big Tech and the digitization of life, woke capitalism, and politicized philanthropy. Almost every page contains an arresting observation, a telling anecdote, or an interesting fact. This is revisionist conservative history at its best.

NR

Hitler Revisited

ANDREW STUTTAFORD



Hitler: A Biography, by Peter Longerich
(Oxford University Press, 1,344 pp.,
\$39.95)

Hitler: A Global Biography, by Brendan Simms
(Basic Books, 704 pp., \$40)

ADOLF? Not again. My first reaction on learning that not one, but two, substantial new Hitler biographies were up for review was not one of unre-served joy. How much more is there to say? After all, Ian Kershaw's two volumes from the turn of the century have stood the test of time very well. Nevertheless, as Brendan Simms, a professor in the history of international relations at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, demonstrates in the introduction to his *Hitler: A Global Biography*, the research grinds on. In his case, he has used a basic cradle-to-ashes format (Simms does not pretend to depict "the 'whole' Hitler") as a frame on which to hang an intriguing—if not always convincing—reexamination of Hitler's thinking.

Others have been digging elsewhere, and not always in expected places. Simms cites recent studies of Hitler's architectural tastes, reading habits, and movie picks, evidence of the continuing and remarkably detailed scrutiny of someone whom Peter Longerich, a former professor of modern history at Royal Holloway, University of London, describes in *his* new biography of Hitler as a "nobody." That characterization is

consistent with an evident determination to show a disdain (he typically puts the word "Führer" in scare quotes) that can seem forced. His forensic examination of the historical record (and not only when it comes to Hitler's direct culpability for the Holocaust) is surely indictment enough.

To be fair, Longerich's description of Hitler as a "nobody" refers principally to his chaotic early years, but it hovers over what is a curiously impersonal biography. Given the book's length, and the central role in the operation of the regime that Longerich ascribes to Hitler (he has little sympathy for the notion that Hitler was a disengaged, "weak" dictator), there is not as much as might be expected on Hitler the man. Like Simms, Longerich uses what is purportedly a biography to tell a different sort of story, with many of its most interesting passages focused on how the Third Reich was actually run. It is a fascinating and at times brilliantly written read, but, as biography, it falls short. The contrast with Longerich's earlier biography of Goebbels, in which he places a subtle portrayal of Hitler's propaganda minister within a broader historical narrative, is striking.

This is not to say that Longerich takes no account of Hitler's personality. He recognizes that the "personal element not only played a significant role in some important political decisions, but it contributed fundamentally to [Hitler's] political outlook as a whole," however he then goes on to brandish a straw man: Examinations of Hitler's psyche, his lifestyle, and so on "cannot replace analysis of complex historical material." Well, of course not, but it is hard not to think that Longerich is backing away from, nominally at least, his subject. A "chapter called 'Hitler, the private man' would," he writes, be "voyeuristic"—an odd adjective for a biographer to use. Could it be a swipe at the historian and journalist Volker Ullrich, who in the first volume (the second will be out in English later this year) of *his* (so far) excellent Hitler biography has a chapter entitled "Hitler as Human Being" and another, for good measure, on "Hitler and Women"?

Longerich will use personal material, he sniffs, only when it would be "fruitful." There are times when he does so: Hitler's "awkwardness" with women

(an aspect, I imagine, of unease over any form of intimacy) was transformed into the political statement that "Germany was his 'bride,'" one of the elements of the aura—something, incidentally, that Longerich, like many historians, downplays—that contributed to Hitler's appeal. To confront the premodern, millenarian strain running through Nazism and, not coincidentally, other 20th-century totalitarian ideologies would risk getting into territory that many historians prefer to avoid.

But even when Longerich does broach the "personal," he does so (for the most part) to emphasize the idea of Hitler as a nobody—in which he is by no means alone (Kershaw, for one, takes a not-dissimilar tack)—even if his interpretation of that word expands as the public Hitler becomes all too much a somebody. "A private Hitler outside his public role," he maintains, "simply did not exist." According to Longerich, the "real" Hitler had been swallowed up within his political identity, an interpretation helpfully compatible with the case that he was a nonentity. Ullrich takes a more nuanced position: The impression that there was nothing behind the public persona was itself just part of a continuous performance that changed with Hitler's sometimes uncannily acute reading of his audience—and thus his calculation of how to manipulate it. Hitler might, like any good actor, I reckon, have occasionally lost himself within his role, but to suggest that his own personality had been extinguished is to defy common sense.

And while this unbalanced, obsessive autodidact was not, intellectually, a Stalin, a Lenin, or a Mao, he displayed plenty of signs of intelligence, ranging from those manipulative skills to his use of design as propaganda to a near-photographic memory. But there is more of this in Ullrich's book (and when it comes to Hitler's thinking, particularly in the 1920s, in Simms's too) than in Longerich's. As a member of the intelligentsia himself, maybe Longerich did not want to acknowledge the definitive barbarian as an aspiring member of his tribe. As a consequence, readers of his book will arrive at its conclusion with a useful picture of what Hitler did, but with rather less of an idea of who he was.

That said, Longerich does not duck a discussion of Hitler's personality when

looking for the source of the pathological anti-Semitism that came to define his life and ended 6 million others'. "Environmental" considerations are not enough. The answer, argues Longerich, is not to be found in Hitler's vagabond youth in Vienna, a city in which "anti-Semitism was a fixture of everyday life" (and, for that matter, politics), nor is it to be found on the Western Front, even if the latter, in Ullrich's opinion, helped foster, in the most literal fashion, Hitler's perception of existence as a life-and-death struggle. The best explanation, believes Longerich, lies in the shame Hitler felt at Germany's defeat, a shame that could not be softened by a resumption of career, friendship, and family life, of which this eccentric loner had very little.

Unable to accept the real reasons Germany had lost, Hitler, a fantasist since his adolescence, took refuge in a dreamworld of conspiracy theory in which Jews were allocated a uniquely malevolent role. Anti-Semitism is hardly a rarity in European history. It had, in some ways, revived in intensity in the decades before the war. But in the Bavaria of 1919, roiled by revolution as well as defeat, anti-Semitism, writes Longerich, "spread like wildfire." Hitler absorbed it, echoed it, and, aided by his oratorical gifts and the anticipation by some on the far right that a savior was on the way (an image he played up to), amplified it into, eventually, an apocalypse.

A letter from September 1919 is the earliest surviving text in which Hitler sets out his views on the "Jewish question." Central to it is Hitler's argument that Jews were (in Longerich's words) behind "the unscrupulous and amoral greed of finance capital. . . . Anti-Semitism (and not the socialism of the left) was the key to removing this exploitative system." The same letter also attracts Simms's attention. He sees Hitler's anti-Semitism as being "profoundly anti-capitalistic rather than anti-communist in origin," so much so, indeed, that, to Hitler, Bolshevism itself was little more than an instrument of Jewish capital. But such conspiracism reads more like the symptoms of a psychosis than its cause. The same can be said of Hitler's reference to Jews in the letter as the "racial tuberculosis of the peoples," language (cited by Simms and Longerich) that suggests that

Hitler's obsession was already well in place, and already contained the seeds of mass murder: A disease, after all, should be eliminated.

The fact that, as Simms puts it, Hitler "defined the 'Jewish problem' partly as a medical issue" also reflected a nationalism that had slipped from a simple extension of the tribal into the sort of pseudoscientific thinking that was far from unusual at the time. Hitler looked at humanity with a veterinarian's eye, and, as, Simms explains, he was (even putting aside the country's Jewish minority) less than impressed by a Germany that was "no longer based on a unitary ['Nordic'] racial core" thanks to both immigration and, even more, emigration, particularly to America, of the "best . . . for centuries." Drawn across the Atlantic by opportunity and, in particular, open spaces of the type that Germany, in Hitler's view, lacked, they had helped build the nation that, by entering the war in 1917, had finally brought their ancestral homeland down.

Hitler, according to Simms, both admired and dreaded America. He respected America's dynamism, its modernity, and its drive towards widespread prosperity. And he was also taken by the way that, as he saw it, the United States had created a "living space" for its people by crushing the indigenous people who had lived there beforehand, a precedent, in many respects, for the *Lebensraum* he dreamt of creating for Germany in the

east. But he was also preoccupied with the growth of American power. Whatever Hitler's earlier hopes might have been for an alliance with the British, a people he admired, Simms argues that he believed that there would have to be a final showdown between Germany and "Anglo-America," and that this drove much of his strategy in the wartime years. Indeed, "the conviction that there would have to be a confrontation sooner or later" explains Hitler's bewildering decision to declare war on the United States in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor.

The American angle is a proposition (and this is far from the only instance in which he succumbs to this temptation) that Simms pushes too far, but, for all its flaws, this book, which should be read as a contribution to a debate rather than as a definitive text, is a worthwhile reexamination of some long-standing assumptions about the Third Reich, on, additionally, topics such as Hitler's interwar attitudes to Poland and—a perennial favorite—just how socialist National Socialism really was. The result is often thought-provoking, sometimes enlightening, and rarely uninteresting, but to return to Simms's original admission, it is not "the 'whole' Hitler."

For something closer to that, it may well be worth waiting to see if Ullrich's second volume builds on the success of the first.

NR

WINTER CLEARING

The rains are a day past,
and the stream nearly clear;
another freeze is coming,
a winter of wide variation;
looking in the water, three feet down,
into the current, translucent,
transparent, distorting, mesmerizing,
the eye takes it in for a while,
and then it is full.

The rock fades, the stones fade,
the gravel dances, they all but
vanish, and then it is clear,
magnified, perfect, held in
the mind's eye, as the body
turns away, full.
The gravel dances.

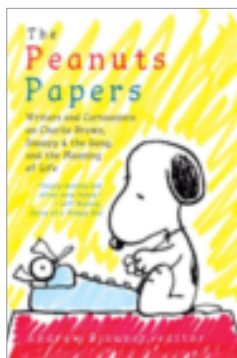
—WILLIAM W. RUNYEON

Text

Charlie Brown's World

JAMES ROSEN

Text



The Peanuts Papers: Writers and Cartoonists on Charlie Brown, Snoopy & the Gang, and the Meaning of Life, edited by Andrew Blauner (Library of America, 352 pp., \$24.95)

IF you obsessed over the comic strip *Peanuts* as a child—I mean: You *lived* and *died* with those characters, devoured the strips retroactively in anthologies and contemporaneously in newspapers, collected the merchandise, watched the cartoons, wondered whether your personality was more Charlie Brown or Linus, mapped the interior of Snoopy's doghouse, yearned to meet, even *be*, their creator, melancholy Minnesotan Charles M. Schulz—hark, the herald angels sing: You are not alone!

The Peanuts Papers, edited by Andrew Blauner, collects three dozen essays by prominent writers and cartoonists—including Maxine Hong Kingston, Gerald Early, Chuck Klosterman, Ann Patchett, Chris Ware, the Canadian cartoonist Seth, and Rick Moody—who are *just like you*: so touched by Schulz's 50-year sprint through art and life, love and loss, religion and music, suburbs and schools, baseball and war, psychiatry and philosophy, that they, too, turned from consumption to contemplation.

Mr. Rosen is a reporter for Sinclair Broadcast Group and the editor of A Torch Kept Lit: Great Lives of the Twentieth Century (2016), an anthology of essays by William F. Buckley Jr.

It is altogether fitting, if belated, that *Peanuts* should be the subject of a rich anthology of top-tier literary criticism, including a few comic strips. Writing from diverse perspectives, demographic profiles, and disciplines, the contributors establish new boundaries for discourse about *Peanuts*, scholarly and popular, while paying tribute to favorite strips and lovingly exploring the most obscure tributaries of Schulziana. (I, for one, had forgotten the politically inconvenient fact that in 1980 a brief romance arose between Peppermint Patty, hailed here and elsewhere as a pioneering, if undeclared, lesbian character, and the unmistakably male Pig-Pen.)

A few entries the hard-core fans will recognize. In this category is Umberto Eco's essay comparing *Peanuts* with the comic strip *Krazy Kat*, first published in *Arriva Charlie Brown!* (an Italian collection) in 1963; then, translated into English, in *The New York Review of Books* in 1985; then again introducing the coffee-table volume *Charles M. Schulz: 40 Years Life and Art* (1990). Likewise Jonathan Franzen's autobiographical "Two Ponies"—with its provocative declaration, "Peanuts wasn't a portal on the Gospel. It was my gospel"—which was originally published, under a different title, in *The New Yorker* in 2004 and then, in abridged form the following year, as the foreword to *The Complete Peanuts: Dailies & Sundays, 1957 to 1958*.

For the many millions around the world who still love *Peanuts*, nearly two decades after the strip, and Charles Schulz, left us, *The Peanuts Papers* brims with fascinating insights into why the genius from St. Paul affected us so deeply. With admirable industry, Blauner, a literary agent and anthologist, commissioned more than two-thirds of the contributions especially for this volume. Only one, a long poem by the novelist Jonathan Lethem patterned after Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"—brandishing the harshest street profanity and intended, presumably, to syncopate Schulz to the Beats—felt out of sync with the strip's spirit (though Garry Trudeau, writing in the *Washington Post* in 1999, is quoted elsewhere in these pages labeling *Peanuts* "the first Beat strip," work that "vibrated with '50s alienation").

Common themes abound: The *Peanuts* gang inhabited what *The New Yorker*'s Adam Gopnik establishes, in the lead essay, was a "uniquely bleak world," its absence of adult figures "credible" because "kids so often were [alone] in the postwar period that Schulz's strip immortalizes." Sarah Boxer, a contributor to *The Atlantic*, notes that despite Schulz's evolutions over the years—as writer, pen-and-ink man, entrepreneur—his "Hobbesian ideas about society" appeared at the outset and never changed. As summarized by Boxer:

People, especially children, are selfish and cruel to one another; social life is perpetual conflict; solitude is the only peaceful harbor; one's deepest wishes will invariably be derailed and one's comforts whisked away; and an unbridgeable gulf yawns between one's fantasies about oneself and what others see.

Leavening Schulz's imbalanced interplay between hope and hopelessness was the artist's gentle humor, patient pacing, and supple line work. Only with such sweeteners could so many legions of people, beset by their own adversities, choose to immerse themselves so regularly and enduringly in Schulz's cuddly dystopia, the setting for what Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, once called the "casual cruelty and offhanded humiliations at the heart of the strip."

One advantage the strip enjoyed, as Joe Queenan contends, was that every reader of *Peanuts* was always, by definition, at least a bit older than the children depicted, making Schulz's audience "nostalgic for childhood . . . the childhood Lucy and Charlie and Linus were having." This raises an important question for future scholars: How old were Schulz's youngest comprehending readers?

If different readers necessarily found different meanings in the strip, several contributors affirm here how passionately they wished literally to *become* a member of the *Peanuts* gang. "The 'Peanuts' world was where I longed to be," Janice Shapiro writes in a charming multi-panel comic recounting her intense bond with the characters in their '60s heyday. "It was like they were my

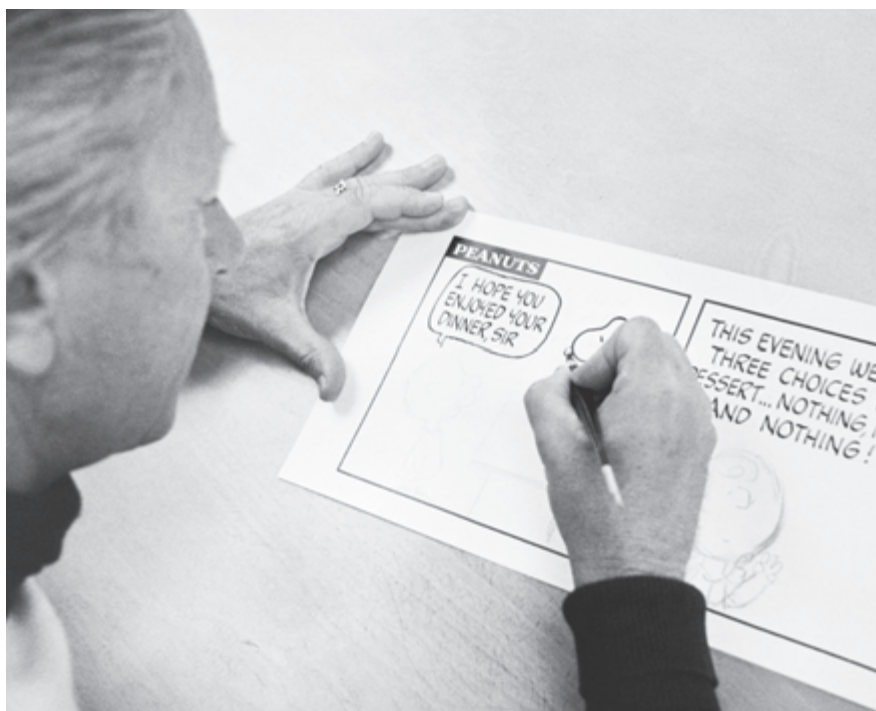
friends. I was just as curious as to what they were going to do . . . as I was about the real kids who lived on my block.”

A decade later, growing up on Staten Island, I felt the same way: *Why can't my friends and I go trick-or-treating by ourselves at night, like the Peanuts gang, safe from the hooliganism of older kids out egging?* It is a short step, and one giant leap, from such a sentiment to *Why can't I go trick-or-treating with Charlie Brown?* And as a cartoonist myself, I recognized intimately the frustration expressed by Hilary Fitzgerald Campbell, a Brooklyn-based artist and filmmaker, who confesses to the quixotic quest for parity with the master: “I was extremely concerned with my ability to draw Snoopy and Charlie Brown *just like Schulz did*. No tracing, I needed to be able to do it myself. Get all the strokes and shapes just right.”

Surprisingly, none of the essayists write, as I would have, about how the animated TV cartoons, while brilliant in their own right and undeniably central to the *Peanuts*–industrial complex, nonetheless seemed, as they did to me, somehow illegitimate, *extra-canonical*. Was no one else bothered by the complete blackening of Snoopy's ears and nose, ignoring the white trimming that lined them during the strip's peak run? It actually disappointed me that the cover of *A Charlie Brown Dictionary* (1973), a cherished reference volume, featured only images taken from the animated cartoons.

In *The Peanuts Papers*, however, essayists treat the TV cartoons reverentially, with paeans to Vince Guaraldi, the jazz virtuoso whose scores are synonymous with *Peanuts*, and excavations of forgotten fare, such as *Mayflower Voyagers* (1988), in which Schulz's animated youngsters and Snoopy, clad as Pilgrims, related the origins of Thanksgiving.

None of the contributors undertake to adjudicate the historiographical disputes between the Schulz family and author David Michaelis. For his monumental *Schulz and Peanuts: A Biography* (2007), Michaelis received unprecedented access to the Schulz archives—and, after publication, a slew of complaints from the artist's survivors, alleging the portrait he had drawn was skewed toward Schulz's darker impulses and factually inaccur-



Charles Schulz works on a strip in his studio.

rate in several details. No comparably ambitious account of Schulz's life has been attempted since.

While Jennifer Finney Boylan writes movingly about her transgender journey, and the inspiration she took from the Zen-like self-acceptance demonstrated by the perennially marginalized Pig-Pen, the politics of inclusivism in *The Peanuts Papers* extends only so far. A number of essayists dutifully note the introduction of the first black character, Franklin, as an overture by Schulz, in 1968, to the African-American community, and that of Woodstock, two years later, as a nod to the counterculture; similarly, the vague sexuality of Peppermint Patty and Marcie is also addressed. But I am still left wondering whether any other Jews, or Muslims, felt excluded by Schulz's excursions into Christian theology—sporadically and then twice a year, without fail, *Easter and Christmas*—in temporary but stinging banishment from a universe they, and I, identified with so strongly, loved so deeply, every other day of the year.

If one element of Schulz's genius was his ability to draw the same thing every day without repeating himself—his own definition of a comic-strip artist—another was his discipline: He never succumbed to the temptation to cut his characters a break. Charlie Brown

never successfully flies a kite; Lucy never seduces Schroeder away from Beethoven; Linus, the best-educated member of the gang, never catches a glimpse of the Great Pumpkin, in whom he alone believes; and Sally never wins the affections of Linus, her thumb-sucking, blankie-toting “sweet baboo.” Even Snoopy, whose flights of imagination vault him into realms terrifying (World War I aerial duels) and soothing (Joe Cool), never escapes his animal dependence on the round-headed kid who feeds him.

Perhaps the chief lesson of *The Peanuts Papers*, not voiced explicitly by any of the essayists but hinted at in their collected wisdom, is that Charles Schulz's final cruelty transcended the boxes inside which he penciled and inked, leapt from the pages of the books and newspapers that reproduced his benign malevolence, to engulf his readers directly. In the end, all of us who pored over *Peanuts*, invested wholly in its cosmology, were the ones from whom the football was constantly being pulled at the last second, a painful reminder, each time we looked up from *Peanuts*—*shouldn't we know better by now, with so many disappointments under our belt?*—that however intense our longing to live in Schulz's world, we never would.

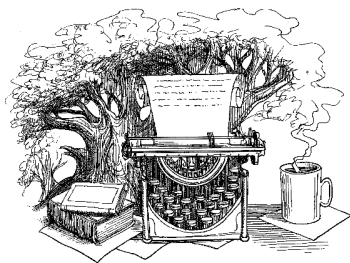
Five cents, please.

NR

Country Life

Squatters

Text



RICHARD BROOKHISER

FROM their point of view, of course, we are. The house was built in 1941. Before then the site was second growth, maybe meadow. Then the Others came, and put down straight stones, dead trees, and the covering. (If they had wanted a burrow, why hadn't they dug one? Or a nest, why had they put it on the ground? Strange are their ways.)

The house has been ours for 20 and a half years. We bargained over the price,

ment atop the housing of the motor of the ceiling fan. It was green, mossy. Had the contractor's workmen—Poles, probably illegal—tried some old-country decorating? No: It was, I found when I climbed a stepstool to remove it, a bird's nest, with a clutch of eggs. Then of course it had to stay until the occupants hatched and fledged. The mother would fly in through still unenclosed gaps in the walls when no one was around. When we had the ill grace to be present, we saw her outside the picture window angrily twitching her tail. But once we settled in and the house's new skin was complete, frogs and birds joined us no more.

We are far from alone, however. Mice are the perennial intruders. They can squeeze through the tiniest holes; there is really no way to keep them out, short of living in a diving bell. So in they come, especially in winter, and so they have to be killed. Build a better mousetrap, said Emerson, and the world will beat a path to your door. Why then have people spent so much energy building inferior mousetraps? The best mousetrap, the old faithful, is the small plywood base, with a metal notch to hold

on two occasions black snakes appeared from below. They were quite small. I mistook one for a shoelace. The other, even smaller, was entangled in a spider web (I freed him). He then reared up, threatening, like some cobra in a Kipling story. But since I was several hundred times larger than he was, he thought better of it, and slipped off whence he had come.

Then there are the guests we never see, and know only by their handiwork. In front of our house stands a pair of hickory trees. One has a single trunk, the other is forked. They are an obvious couple; we understand at a glance the tale of Philemon and Baucis. Some years their nuts are sparse, other years they carpet the lawn. This fall was prolific, and this winter I found 20 hickory nuts carefully stashed under the cushion of a living-room chair, and another 20 in a boot that I keep in a drawer in the bedroom. Hickory nuts are not tiny. They are about the circumference of a quarter. Think of the labor involved in accumulating such a horde—the finding, the carrying, the round trips. And all wasted when the Others find it, and throw it back on the lawn.

There was some confusion when we first took possession, an understandable permeability of boundaries.

we signed papers with a lawyer at the county seat, every month a payment goes to the bank that holds the mortgage. Yet squatters—they might say, legitimate owners—share it with us.

There was some confusion when we first took possession, an understandable permeability of boundaries. The house had stood vacant a year or more while the previous owners had it on the market. Maybe the Others were gone for good, as Communists seemed to be after the Berlin Wall fell. The very first day we began moving in, a frog came through the front door. Sounds of complaint drove him under a sofa. I tried sweeping him out with the handle of a broom, in vain. It was too short, or he was too cunning. My wife, more cunning than the two of us, opened the front door again, and he made a straight line for the outdoors, and relief from such clumsiness and clamor.

The front room came together. Then one day we noticed some kind of orna-

the bait, and the killer bar, spring taut, held back by the lightly poised metal rod. Until you learn the knack of setting one you will catch yourself a few times, but once you do learn, it is the destroying angel. Newer versions replace the notch with yellow plastic squares that look, and I suppose smell, like cheese, to save, what, a few quarters per season on cheap cheddar. Or you can put poison in black plastic bait stations. That works, but you have to wear rubber gloves while doing it, and the bait stations accumulate detritus. The poisoned mice flee back outside looking for water, though sometimes they end up in the toilet. Throwing them out by their tails is sad; they are dainty creatures. If they were disease- and tick-free, they might be welcome.

Twice snakes came up through a crack in the floor. We have no basement, not even a crawl space, but there is some gap down there, or so I assume, because

These reflections were prompted by sighting an intruder in the act. Chipmunks hibernate, but this winter has been so mild they came out early. Coming up the walk to my front door I saw one duck into a crack in the wall. Zip! I approached as he was about to leave, but he saw me and froze, his head filling his doorway. Chipmunks' eyes are relatively large, which makes them look baby-like, endearing. We were quite still for two minutes, until in I went and he did too.

My friend Doug has no patience with indoor chipmunks. He talks of making himself a chipmunk-skin coat. He showed me a picture he found online of half a dozen skins, arranged in two columns of three, stripes aligned in verticals. You wouldn't need very many, he said, showing the size of one with his hands; these would be good for the back. Of course, he added, I would break up the pattern. Make it more interesting.

NR

Aristocracy Menaced

ROSS DOUTHAT

THIS column, appearing as it does only twice a month, is a curated rather than a comprehensive guide to the year in movies. But it's still a trifle embarrassing when the envelope opens for Best Picture and the winner is a film that I had postponed seeing and failed to review.

So let's remedy that failure and talk about *Parasite*, the first foreign-language film to win Best Picture . . . ever, and a movie that's in an interesting sort of dialogue with two of its Oscar rivals, excavating similar themes of class and violence and hilltop real estate.

The director is Bong Joon-ho, who has a knack for making films with left-wing themes and targets—factory farming, the military-industrial complex, the 1 percent—that maintain a slippery strangeness that keeps them from feeling too predictable or didactic. A movie such as *Snowpiercer*, his most famous English-language film, is a case in point: The story of a revolutionary uprising on a train hurtling around a frozen globe, in summary it sounds like a thudding complaint about climate change and the super rich, but in practice it's an act of exotic, gorgeous, mildly insane world-building, rivaling the original *Matrix* as one of the most memorable science fantasies of recent years.

In *Parasite* there is a similar defiant strangeness, but the alchemy is a little less effective in the end. The movie opens with a family of four, the Kims, living in one of Seoul's semibasement apartments, called *banjiha*—sunless spaces built as bunkers during the Cold War and transformed into living spaces by the city's housing shortage. The patriarch, Kim Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho), has fallen on hard times, and he's surviving by stealing Wi-Fi and enlisting his wife and young-adult children to fold pizza boxes.

But survival gives way to opportunity when his son, Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik), gets a chance to take over for a friend as the tutor of a rich couple's daughter, Park Da-hye (Jung Ziso), who lives with



Cho Yeo-jeong in *Parasite*

her parents and younger brother in a sleek modernist palace high above the *banjiha*—a walled hilltop paradise, all clean lines and open spaces, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and lush greenery outside. At which point the lower-class family embarks on an epic grift, engineering a takeover of the rich family's home: Ki-woo gets his sister hired as the little boy's "art therapist," she gets the family's chauffeur fired and her father installed as the driver, and then the family's long-serving housekeeper is pushed out the door (she has a peach allergy, ruthlessly exploited by the Kims) and the mother takes her place. And through all this, none of the clueless, unworldly-seeming Parks realize that the people they're hiring are related.

This is the comic phase of the movie: The Kims are con artists but they just seem to want jobs (though Ki-woo has higher aspirations), and things turn horror-movie dark only when the Parks take a birthday camping trip, the Kims spread out and drink together in their living room overnight, and suddenly the expelled-from-Eden housekeeper returns, revealing a secret in the house's basement that sets in motion a violent denouement.

This sudden spasm of hilltop violence recalls the similarly grisly finale of *Once Upon a Time . . . in Hollywood*, the Tarantino movie that lost to *Parasite* in the Best Picture race. The two movies are both about aristocracy menaced from below, but the contrast is striking: Tarantino's Sharon Tate is portrayed as a natural aristocrat, vulnerable and talented and kind and in some sense deserving of her golden aerie in the Hollywood Hills, while the Parks are portrayed as inviting invasion, to some extent, through the learned helplessness that comes with unmerited riches, the aristocracy's sealed-in-a-bubble naïveté. And there is no interposing force in *Parasite*, no practical middle-class figure like Brad Pitt's vigorous stuntman,

who can stand between the vulnerable nobles and the savage proles.

But the more interesting contrast, in a way, is between *Parasite* and *Joker*, a very different, if similarly violent, class-conflict movie. In a perceptive essay, the eccentric libertarian Robin Hanson has described *Parasite* as "about class conflict from a[n] upper class perspective," whereas *Joker* is "about class conflict from a lower class perspective." This seems right: The action in *Joker* mostly happens in lower-class spaces; the system above its main character, the mix of bureaucracies and social-service providers and rich people, is at once oppressive, indifferent, and opaque; and the turn to violence happens because Arthur Fleck can't talk his way into success, can't navigate an unresponsive world, and decides to burn it down.

Whereas in *Parasite*, despite the *banjiha* scenes, the dominant setting is the upper-class space, and the poorer family feels, at times, like a rich person's fantasy—paranoid, idealized, or both—of what the lower classes are like and what they're capable of doing. The Kims are simultaneously deprived and omniscient, unable to shed their subway stink yet able to master every social cue their new roles require, hapless at folding pizza boxes yet somehow perfectly equipped to exploit the clueless rich.

Parasite is a better film than *Joker*, but in this respect *Joker* is the more realistic movie. A dark joke I saw circulating, that *Parasite* won the Oscar because it resonated with Hollywood royalty who find it hard to find good help, isn't quite a joke. The weakness of Bong's movie is that even as it aims to shake the palaces and expose the basements underneath, it can't help feeling like a nightmare that could be conjured only by someone sleeping comfortably in silk pajamas—a successful ladder-climber who can imagine the poor only as unluckier, more-dangerous versions of himself.

NR

Hasbro Conservatism

THE conservative fusionism forged by people like our beloved founder, William F. Buckley Jr., is arguably the least vital force in American politics today.

Sure, there are six or twelve of us who are still quite fond of it, but as a coherent program that can marshal big numbers, “movement conservatism” is stock-still.

It brings me no pleasure to report this, but I also suspect it isn’t really news to you. The old consensus has been terminal since at least 2015. (Or maybe 2008? Or 1990-whatever? Depends on whom you ask.)

There were the understandable if often embarrassing and desperate measures taken to save the patient (nobody looks good giving mouth-to-mouth to a worldview). Then there was the inquest, and the eulogies, and the respectable period of mourning. But, to agonize the metaphor beyond all decency, we’re now into the matter of settling the estate. Of answering questions such as who gets the stuff—so-and-so policy to the technocrats and the neoliberals, such-and-such dispositions to the libertarians or the traditionalists—and, more vitally, what happens to the kids?

What started as an inchoate mass of essays and op-eds and memes and manifestos on a successor conservatism soon coalesced into books, handsomely bound and impressively blurbed, and then into whole new monthlies and quarterlies with formidable horn-rimmed glasses; symposia and conferences with rakish haircuts; think tanks and centers and programs in tweed and corduroy and seersucker. Every week, it seems, there is a new one.

It’s heady stuff, if you’re geeked by ideas, the whole “present at the creation” vibe these days on the right. The dangerous heresies, once whispered in the safe harbors of friendships with people who knew you were only asking questions, can now be spoken aloud. Shouted on television, even. There’s fresh, unclaimed rhetorical real estate for youngsters on the make, or at least real estate left derelict by long-obscurer thinkers poised for fresh reestimations. And for a generation of heterodox research assistants and legislative aides who fetched coffee while their narrow-minded bosses in the old establishment commanded the loftiest of Marriott conference-room daises, there is the unmistakable taste of victory, and vengeance.

You can taste it in the press releases. In the podcasts and tweets. And in the mini-glut of ethnographies of the bright young things who are supposed to be its vanguard (“Could My Six Friends Be the Future of the Right? The Answer, Which Is ‘Yes,’ May Surprise You”).

I’m a Millennial, strictly speaking, and therefore not so old as to be immune to the appeal of getting in on this new thing while the getting is good. Heck, I experimented in college like anyone else—did enough uncut Bush doctrine

to kill a small horse. But I’m just not fully sold on any of the several flavors of New Conservatism on offer.

I know what you’re thinking. “That’s because you are bought and paid for by the swamp, Foster. You’re not fooling anybody.”

Alas, I don’t much benefit monetarily from the old establishment. But I generally favor monetary benefit wherever I am concerned, and would be open to hearing about ways the new establishment could monetarily benefit me.

No, my skepticism stems from a simple test I’ve come to employ whenever I encounter another breathless mission statement from a visionary who goes by an Internet alias (I crap you not, one of these outfits had a Festschrift for a “theorist” named “Bronze Age Pervert”), or when some impeccably dressed populist throws up a West Coast Straussian gang sign and starts asking every girl in the room if she wants to see his *thumos*.

And the test is this: Could I imagine this person play-acting their basic argument, alone in their bedroom, with muscle-rippled Hasbro action figures from the 1980s?

All too often, the answers are disturbing.

I first performed this thought experiment when I read “The Flight 93 Election”—in that case it was He-Man and Skeletor—and it has rarely steered me wrong since.

Look, I don’t want to be dense or Pollyannaish about what’s going on. Or rather, considering how wrong I’ve been about so many different things these last few years, I don’t want to add further density or Pollyannaishness to my already dubious résumé.

So, for the record, I don’t think the liminal edge of conservative thought is a 1983 version of Reaganism. I do think that the world created by digital ubiquity, liberal cultural predominance, the globalization of capital, Chinese ascendancy, and NFL instant replay has brought about unique and uniquely terrifying political problems and that we should be solicitous, even promiscuous, in our search for answers.

And I know that momentous questions are dramatic ones, and that drama is thrilling, even sublime, and so perhaps the whiff of costumed role-playing in some of these conversations is unavoidable.

It’s just that the frisson, the aesthetic accoutrement, the shiver of transgression that accompanies so much of the talk about the Next Big Thing on the right is antithetical to the stodgy reliability, the comforting dullness, the sheer unrelenting ordinariness that is supposed to be conservatism’s principal political virtue.

And it is clear to me that we could use a more boring politics right now. It would sure beat the hell out of what is increasingly looking like an electoral choice between down-home Peronists and *honest-to-God revolutionary socialists* in the middle of the most prosperous age in the history of man. Even for 2020, that seems a bit melodramatic, no?

NR

Better read this if you are 62 or older and still making mortgage payments.

It's time to reverse your thinking.

More than 1 million seniors have taken advantage of this "retirement secret."

It's a well-known fact that for many senior citizens in the U.S., their home is their single biggest asset, often accounting for more than 50% of their total net worth.

Yet, according to new statistics from the mortgage industry, senior homeowners in the U.S. are now sitting on more than 7.19 trillion dollars* of unused home equity.

With people now living longer than ever before and home prices back up again, ignoring this "hidden wealth" may prove to be short sighted.

All things considered, it's not surprising that more than a million homeowners have already used a government-insured Home Equity Conversion Mortgage or "HECM" loan to turn their home equity into extra cash for retirement.

It's a fact: no monthly mortgage payments are required with a government-insured HECM loan; however the homeowners are still responsible for paying for the maintenance of their home, property taxes, homeowner's insurance and, if required, their HOA fees.

Another fact many are not aware of is that HECM reverse mortgages first took hold when President Reagan signed the FHA Reverse Mortgage Bill into law 32 years ago in order to help senior citizens remain in their homes.

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Today, HECM loans are simply an effective way for homeowners 62 and older to get the extra cash they need to enjoy retirement.

Although today's HECM loans have been improved to provide even greater financial protection for homeowners, there are still many misconceptions.

For example, a lot of people mistakenly believe the home must be paid off in full in order to qualify for a HECM loan, which is not the case. In fact, one key advantage of a HECM is that the proceeds will first be used to pay off any existing liens on the property, which frees

up cash flow, a huge blessing for seniors living on a fixed income. Unfortunately, many senior homeowners who might be better off with a HECM loan don't even bother to get more information because of rumors they've heard.

In fact, a recent survey by American Advisors Group (AAG), the nation's number one HECM lender, found that over 98% of their clients are satisfied with their loans. While these special loans are not for everyone, they can be a real lifesaver for senior homeowners.

The cash from a HECM loan can be used for almost any purpose. Other common uses include making home improvements, paying off medical bills or helping other family members. Some people simply need the extra cash for everyday expenses while others are now using it as a "safety net" for financial emergencies.

If you're a homeowner age 62 or older, you owe it to yourself to learn more so that you can make an informed decision.



Homeowner's who are interested in learning more can request a **FREE Reverse Mortgage Information Kit and DVD** by calling toll-free at **800-963-9648**

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As Featured on:
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*Source: <https://reversemortgagedaily.com/2019/12/17/senior-housing-wealth-reaches-record-high-of-7-19-trillion>

Reverse mortgage loan terms include occupying the home as your primary residence, maintaining the home, paying property taxes and homeowners insurance. Although these costs may be substantial, AAG does not establish an escrow account for these payments. However, a set-aside account can be set up for taxes and insurance, and in some cases may be required. Not all interest on a reverse mortgage is tax-deductible and to the extent that it is, such deduction is not available until the loan is partially or fully repaid.

AAG charges an origination fee, mortgage insurance premium (where required by HUD), closing costs and servicing fees, rolled into the balance of the loan. AAG charges interest on the balance, which grows over time. When the last borrower or eligible non-borrowing spouse dies, sells the home, permanently moves out, or fails to comply with the loan terms, the loan becomes due and payable (and the property may become subject to foreclosure). When this happens, some or all of the equity in the property no longer belongs to the borrowers, who may need to sell the home or otherwise repay the loan balance. V2019.08.30

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