Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

APRIL 2023

Coming Apart?

The future of democracy in America

James T. Kloppenberg

PLUS

Paul Lauritzen on
end-of-life dreams

Naomi Fisher on
the first Romantics

Paul J. Griffiths on
Jon Fosse's 'Septology'

$6.95 US/$7.50 CAN
COMMONWEALMAGAZINE.ORG

04
0 74470 81397 2

Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

APRIL 2023 • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 4

Commonweal
FOUNDED IN 1924

Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of religion, politics, and culture, is published monthly, except for a single July-August issue, by the Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 244, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. Email: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 348, Congers, NY 10920-0348.

LETTERS

Reconsidering merit and inequality

MERITED CRITICISM

George Scialabba, in his January article "What Were We Thinking?" suggests at one point that anyone who thinks the idea of "merit" has any rational grounding is not sufficiently familiar with the latest revelations from "modern genetics, neurobiology, and psychiatry." But this is simply not true. There is a long and rich academic debate about the relationship between our physical biological selves as revealed by the various scientific disciplines and our felt subjective experience. I suspect that most people of religious faith are not willing to relinquish the subjective in human experience as a source of profound truth.

The author also implies that simple introspection reveals the bankruptcy of any sense of personal "merit." But this is not true either. My own intuition is that there is a significant ontological difference between talent and nurture on the one hand and personal diligence on the other. Talent and nurture are entirely a matter of "luck" and therefore perhaps "morally arbitrary." But diligence is of a different ontological category. It seems to me simple common sense that people deserve some degree of credit or recognition for the work they put into developing whatever abilities they have been given. The sin of pride is a risk here, but not a necessary outcome. I also acknowledge that the luck of circumstance plays a huge role and that all production broadly understood is social. It is impossible to objectively disentangle all this and quantify what any individual deserves for their efforts, but to completely discard any sense of personal merit is also to discard any sense of individual agency and personal responsibility. And that strikes me as profoundly misguided. Perhaps my intuitions are wrong, but I don't think they are so blatantly and obviously wrong as the author implies.

Alan Windle
Philadelphia, Pa.

GEORGE SCIALABBA REPLIES:

The meaning of a word depends on its function in what philosophers call a "language game": the history of its uses; the purposes, expectations, and presuppositions of speakers; the context of the conversation or text. When we say, "It's no merit of his that he got the job. It's his father's company" or "Not the least of her merits is her extraordinary tact," we are playing the language game of discussing job qualifications. We don't normally care how someone came by those qualifications—whether they deserve full credit for them, or *any* credit for them—because who gets which job is of limited importance, philosophically speaking; all that matters is that the job go to whoever will do it best. In this limited context, "personal merit" is an unobjectionable expression.

When we say, "People deserve whatever they are paid in a minimally regulated market society," we are playing a different language game, of far greater importance. In the latter case, given the vast inequalities and enormous suffering resulting from that principle, we are naturally less willing to give the notions on which it rests—"desert" and "merit"—a free pass. The everyday, unproblematic sense of "merit"—excellence, worthiness, virtue—has long been used to trump another everyday intuition: that the coexistence of widespread poverty and fantastic wealth is morally unacceptable. Free-market philosophers say they are awfully sorry about the suffering of the poor, but it would be unjust to do anything about it, because the rich *deserve* their riches.

I tried to show in "What Were We Thinking?" that they don't. First, because the social nature of production, and the fact that causation is an infinite regress, mean that it is impossible to identify precisely, or even approximately, anyone's contribution to the social product. And second, because everything we use to produce anything, including our character and

Commonwealth

FOUNDED IN 1924

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ellen Koneck

BUSINESS MANAGER
James Hannan

VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVANCEMENT
Adrianna Melnyk

MISSION & PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR
Claudia Avila Cosnahan

MARKETING & AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
Gabriella Wilke

ADVERTISING
Patrick Shanley
commonwealads@gmail.com
(312) 919-1306

SUBSCRIPTIONS
commonwealmagazine.org/subscribe
(845) 267-3068

Commonweal articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, U.S., $6.95; Canada, $7.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $69; Canada, $74; other parts of the world, $79. Special two-year rate: U.S., $112, Canada, $122, other parts of the world, $132. Add $45 for airmail.

LETTERS

aptitudes, talents and virtues, is inherited or taught.

As Alan Windle points out, these contentions are not uncontroversial. The controversy is very old but still very much alive. I can't rehearse that controversy in detail, but I would note that his (and kindred philosophers') language—"our felt subjective experience," "my own intuition," "it seems to me simple common sense"—suggests a certain softness in their reasoning.

My kindred philosophers on this subject are Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris.

CLASSIFIED

Friends in High Places

During a 2016 Democratic primary debate, Sen. Bernie Sanders argued that "Congress does not regulate Wall Street, Wall Street regulates Congress." Sanders was criticizing Hillary Clinton's relationships with big investment banks and calling for regulations that went beyond the Dodd-Frank Act, which sought to rein in high-risk financial speculation after the 2008 financial crisis and bailouts. The recent bailout of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), despite its much smaller scale, echoes the crisis of 2008 and has rekindled debates about regulation, lobbying, and soft corruption.

Instead of strengthening Dodd-Frank, Donald Trump, the eventual winner of the 2016 election, promised to "do a number" on it shortly after taking office. In 2018, he signed a bill—supported by seventeen Democratic senators in addition to every Republican—that exempted small and medium-sized banks from liquidity requirements and regular "stress tests" performed by the Federal Reserve. Among those lobbying for the exemption was SVB, which catered to venture capital–funded tech start-ups with "white glove" services like low-interest mortgages and business advice. Its niche business model meant SVB was vulnerable to a bank run. Whereas the average bank has about 50 percent of its deposits under the $250,000 limit for FDIC insurance, less than 3 percent of SVB's were under that limit at the end of 2022. The bank's executives heavily invested its largely uninsured deposits in long-term U.S. Treasury bonds—a safe investment in theory but very risky in an environment of fast-rising interest rates. Most banks hedge against such risks, but despite warnings, SVB's executives actually dropped previously held hedges over the course of 2022 in order to juice the bank's profits and stock price.

At the same time, rising interest rates slowed investment in the tech sector, meaning start-ups were withdrawing more of their deposits from SVB to cover costs, forcing the bank to sell its bonds and realize the losses on them. On March 8, the bank sought to address its growing liquidity problems by offering new stock to investors. Its customers—including Peter Thiel and his famous Founders Fund—took this as a sign of trouble, panicked very publicly, and began withdrawing funds and encouraging start-ups to follow suit. The next day—Thursday, March 9—depositors tried to pull out $42 billion, approximately a quarter of the SVB's total deposits. On Friday morning the FDIC shut the bank down.

What followed was a concentrated lobbying effort from the tech industry, bankers and investors, and allied politicians asking the Fed, Treasury, and FDIC to invoke emergency measures and fully guarantee SVB's uninsured deposits and "make depositors whole." Otherwise, advocates warned, the contagion could spread to other small and medium-sized banks and the tech industry could grind to a halt, with firms unable to make payroll. Late the next day, hundreds of tech-industry executives and investors attended a two-and-a-half-hour webinar with Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), who became a leading advocate for emergency action. Well-known Silicon Valley investor Ron Conway had dinner with Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama, spoke with Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo, and brokered calls with Vice President Kamala Harris. California Gov. Gavin Newsom pleaded for the bailout with White House and Treasury officials, without mentioning that he and the wineries he owns have done business with the bank. SVB turned out to be not too big to fail, but, as economic historian Adam Tooze put it, "too well-connected to fail."

President Biden emphasized that the bailout—a term he unconvincingly rejected—would be funded by FDIC fees collected from banks rather than taxpayers. But, as University of Chicago economics professor Anil Kashyap commented, "Saying that the taxpayer won't pay anything ignores the fact that providing insurance to somebody who didn't pay for insurance is a gift." The costs associated with covering SVB's losses may eventually be passed on to consumers in the form of increased fees for banking services and yet more inflation. In the wake of the bailout, the Biden administration also called for tougher banking regulations and tougher penalties for banking executives, like SVB's ex-CEO Gregory Becker, who sold millions in SVB stock in recent weeks and absconded to his $3.1 million house in Hawaii after running his bank into the ground.

These would all be welcome measures, but conspicuously missing from Biden's remarks was any mention of the corrupt cycle of regulation, deregulation, and emergency intervention that rewards rich donors and favored industries. While the bailout may have been justified—especially in view of the banking sector's continued shakiness—the dynamics that made it necessary and brought it to fruition are inexcusable and undemocratic. These dynamics are by no means confined to just the banking sector: lobbying and deregulation in the railroad industry have enabled carriers to boost profits, while the negative externalities—including derailments, laid-off and under-compensated workers, and vulnerable supply chains—are borne by ordinary Americans.

Elizabeth Warren has already introduced legislation to repeal the 2018 rollback of Dodd-Frank. But, without accompanying support for anti-corruption legislation of the kind Warren has twice introduced in the Senate, the Biden administration's actions will likely be viewed warily by an understandably skeptical electorate. As long as liberal leaders remain unwilling to address a corrupt model of economic regulation that privatizes profits while socializing risks, they invite authoritarian fantasies of strong leaders who will come in and "drain the swamp." — *March 23, 2023*

The FBI's 'Anti-Catholic' Memo

It's easy to make fun of the leaked FBI memo that proposed infiltrating radical-traditionalist Catholic organizations to gather intelligence on the violent extremists said to be drawn to them and, supposedly, their celebrations of the Tridentine Mass. It's also easy to be outraged, especially if you misinterpret the FBI memo in the way twenty Republican attorneys general did in a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland: "The memorandum's targeting of Catholics because they prefer to pray in the ancient liturgical language of the Church, and the tactics it proposes for dealing with those Catholics, harkens back to some of the worst chapters of our past."

Kyle Seraphin, a former FBI agent, published the memo on his website in February. In an interview with the far-right website LifesiteNews, Seraphin called the FBI's intelligence unit "very woke" and said it was a "bizarre" notion that there are Catholic white supremacists or anti-Semites. But many of the organizations referred to in the memo carry anti-Semitic statements on their websites. A self-described Christian group called Legio Christi urges: "If you are a Christian, it is your duty, as all the Church Fathers and many more writers have done through the ages, to condemn the jews as a perverse, satanic group, because that is what 'jew' has meant for 2000 years and counting." The group's "standing orders" include a section on "Violence and the Legionary" that urges members to prepare for conflict by training in firearms or hand-to-hand fighting. The memo also mentions the breakaway order Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of St. Benedict Center in Richmond, New Hampshire, which has helped revive the anti-Semitic writings of Fr. Denis Fahey, an Irish theologian who inspired Fr. Charles Coughlin's anti-Semitic radio diatribes in the late 1930s. Their echoes can be heard in the writings of E. Michael Jones, whose magazine *Culture Wars* and publisher Fidelity Press, based in South Bend, Indiana, were also referred to in the memo.

It wasn't unreasonable for an FBI intelligence analyst to suppose that such ideas would be attractive to violent extremists. Nor did the memo target anyone simply because they attend Masses celebrated in Latin, as the Republican attorneys general claimed. The memo drew a distinction: "Radical-traditionalist Catholics compose a small minority of overall Roman Catholic adherents and are separate and distinct from 'traditionalist Catholics' who prefer the Traditional Latin Mass and pre–Vatican II teachings and traditions, but without the more extremist ideological beliefs and violent rhetoric."

Nonetheless, the memo's proposal to gather intelligence on violent extremists by infiltrating churches is a sign that the FBI hasn't absorbed the lessons of past controversies over its broad surveillance of mosques. The practice seems to be embedded in the agency's DNA. Its intrusion on southern California mosques, still the subject of a 2011 lawsuit, is a case study. An informant has admitted that, at the instigation of his FBI handlers, he pretended to convert to Islam. He went on to make secret video recordings inside mosques and the homes and businesses of southern California Muslims, and gave the FBI the phone numbers and email addresses of Muslims he met. As the informant recounted, the FBI agents were looking at Muslim religiosity as an indicator of terrorist leanings.

Federal terrorism investigators face a difficult task, since a misjudgment on their part could have fatal consequences. Any review of how the FBI does its job needs to be fair-minded, not based on partisan feelings about who the agency is investigating. Meanwhile, Catholic leaders can help by making it clear that the reprehensible views spread by many far-right "Catholic" outlets—often mixed in with more traditional piety—are hardly Catholic.

—Paul Moses

A longer version of this article is available online.

Macron's Gamble

"We need to work more," French President Emmanuel Macron said in his New Year's Eve address to the country, "to pass on to our children a fair and durable social model."

Within days of his address, Macron was introducing legislation in the National Assembly to raise the retirement age from sixty-two to sixty-four, a centerpiece of his reelection campaign and a long-sought-after goal of his presidency.

Macron ran for president as a young, non-ideological pragmatist who would dislodge France from its political and economic stasis, but his presidency has been yet another joyless experiment in autocratic neoliberalism. A self-styled moderate, Macron has proven adept at occupying the space left vacant between the country's moribund center-left and center-right parties. Meanwhile, the Far Left and Far Right remain too fractious to mount any significant challenge to his agenda.

His reform of France's pension system is only the most recent example. Macron insists that the age hike is necessary to preserve France's pension system, widely celebrated as "solidarity between the generations." As with the U.S. social-security system, workers contribute payroll taxes, and retirees withdraw their pensions. Overwhelmingly popular, the French public pension system is considered a cornerstone of France's social contract and an essential part of its national identity.

But even its staunchest defenders acknowledge that the system will soon run a deficit as France's population ages and the ratio of workers to retirees decreases. Without changes, the country projects only 1.2 taxpaying workers to support each retiree in 2070, down from 1.7 in 2020. Similar challenges are vexing the rest of Western Europe and the United States. Further complicating the arithmetic are two factors: France's

qualifying age for a state pension is the lowest among Europe's leading economies, while the amount it spends to support the system (nearly 14 percent of its GDP) is the third highest in Europe, behind only Italy and Greece.

Opponents argue that companies and the wealthy should pitch in more to finance the pension system. Spain's left-wing government recently announced a deal with the country's labor unions to do just this.

Macron opted for a different approach, pushing for the age increase to secure an additional 17 billion euros for the fund within the next five years, which he says will free the state to invest in defense, green energy, schools, and technology.

To ensure his victory, he invoked article 48.3 of the French Constitution, ramming the legislation through without an official vote when he didn't have enough support in the National Assembly. This maneuver, while legal, sparked a series of mass protests and disruptions throughout the country and prompted a no-confidence motion against his government.

The motion failed and the law passed, but the public outrage has not waned. Macron is now facing the same type of anti-government protests the Yellow Vest movement employed during his first term. Similar protests forced Jacques Chirac to reverse a similar 1995 law raising the retirement age, though Nicolas Sarkozy was able to withstand weeks of protest fifteen years later to raise it from sixty to the current sixty-two.

After days of silence, Macron finally spoke publicly about his presidential diktat and the ensuing public unrest. "The mob, whatever it is, has no legitimacy."

But he still seems confident that these protests will eventually die down, just as they did when Sarkozy was in office. In his hauteur, Macron is acting like a French head of state from an earlier era, recalling both de Gaulle and Louis XIV.

L'état, c'est lui. Get over it.

—Miles Doyle, March 23, 2023

Paraguay at a Crossroads

The Republic of Paraguay is a small, sparsely populated country nestled between Argentina and Brazil. A mostly agrarian society, its main sources of wealth are soy, beef, and Itaipu, the world's second-largest hydroelectric dam, co-owned with Brazil. Paraguay has been a more-or-less functioning democracy since 1989, when General Alfredo Stroessner, who ran the country as a dictator for more than thirty years, was finally overthrown. But Stroessner's Colorado Party, whose reign preceded him, is still in power all these years later. Since 1989, the party has won every presidential contest except one. It is a clientelist institution that relies on a disciplined base of civil servants and rural and small-town voters. The opposition, an ideologically diverse coalition led by the Liberal Party, blames the country's systemic corruption, lack of social progress, and grotesque inequality on the Colorado Party's almost unassailable dominance. Until last summer, it seemed all but certain that the "Colorados" would win the upcoming presidential election on April 30.

That was before Marc Ostfield, the American ambassador to Paraguay, made a big announcement: two Colorados, Horacio Cartes and Hugo Velázquez, were now officially designated as "significantly corrupt" by the U.S. government. Velázquez is the current vice president of Paraguay. Cartes, one of the most powerful men in Paraguay, is the owner of a conglomerate of twenty-five companies, which includes a tobacco importer, media outlets, and a supermarket chain. President from 2013 to 2018, he is widely believed to be a major influence in the administration of Mario Abdo Benítez, his successor. (Paraguay's constitution forbids presidents from running for reelection.)

In January, the United States raised the stakes. The Treasury Department imposed sanctions on both Velázquez and Cartes "for their involvement in the rampant corruption that undermines democratic institutions in Paraguay." It linked both men to narcotraffickers and Hezbollah. The Lebanon-based terrorist group is suspected of laundering money in the tri-border area of eastern Paraguay. The sanctions have effectively cut Cartes and Velázquez off from international banking and investment and plunged the Colorado Party into crisis. The black mark on Cartes's name means that the party can no longer finance its campaigns. ("I'm on the verge of opening an OnlyFans account," one Colorado lawmaker joked.)

It's a bold move to impose sanctions on the current vice president and former president of a friendly nation right before an election. These sanctions are in keeping with the Biden Administration's policy of promoting democracy, which includes "strengthening anti-corruption ecosystems" abroad. But it's unclear how—or indeed whether—they serve U.S. strategic interests. Efraín Alegre, the opposition candidate, has suggested that he might support opening relations with mainland China and ending Paraguay's recognition of Taiwan, an undesirable outcome for the United States. In fact, China's influence is growing throughout Latin America. Some wonder if the sanctions have something to do with the culture wars. Paraguay is very Catholic and probably the most culturally and morally traditional country in the Southern Cone region. Influential progressives, who have already taken their complaints about Paraguay's abortion laws to the United Nations, may have lobbied for the Biden administration to support Alegre. But why, in that case, did Santiago Peña, the Colorado Party's presidential candidate (and Cartes ally), meet with the U.S. State Department on the same day that Ostfield announced the sanctions?

Whatever its motivation, the U.S. government's decision to impose sanctions just months before the election was political. Few would dispute that Paraguay's political class is corrupt and that the country is in danger of becoming a narco-state. But is the only alternative to become a pawn in the Great Power struggle between the United States and China?

—Santiago Ramos, March 22, 2023

RITA FERRONE

Back to the Font

Baptismal ecclesiology & Vatican II

I recently had occasion to visit the church of the parish where I grew up. My family is deeply associated with it: my parents were married there and buried from there; my siblings and I received our first sacraments there; our faith and sense of belonging was nurtured there, in what was always a lively parish community. The church is a little gem of nineteenth-century Romanesque revival architecture. At times it has been run-down, at other times renovated and refurbished. I hadn't been there in some years, so when I walked through the door, I didn't quite know what to expect. Yet there it all was, a mix of the familiar and the new: some changes to the lighting and devotional niches; the same stained-glass windows, ambo and altar, and the wooden pews that I knew so well. Memories of people and events from years gone by came flooding back. But what affected me most powerfully was seeing the font.

It used to be tucked away in a small chapel at the rear of the church, almost invisible. Now it stands in a central position in the nave, with a direct sightline to the altar. This follows the recommendation of the U.S. bishops' document on church design, "Built of Living Stones," which suggests that placing the font on an axis with the altar is an admirable way to symbolize the journey of a Christian from baptism to Eucharist.

I had seen the font before, in its former setting, but I never really looked at it. To be fair, the baptismal chapel was dark and secluded; small wonder that one took little notice. The font itself was covered by a lid in those days too, as I recall—a practice dating from medieval times, when churches worried about people stealing the baptismal water for purposes of magic. Now here it was, open, fully visible, standing in the light, and filled with water so that the faithful could bless themselves. The elegance of the polished marble; the simple, strong lines of the pedestal and supports; the detail of the scrollwork on the basin, incorporating Trinitarian motifs and the emblem of Christ in Greek (IHS)—all spoke of the dignity of the sacrament and of those who receive it.

"Christian, remember your dignity!" Pope Leo the Great thundered in a fifth-century homily. "Bear in mind who is your head, and of whose body you are a member." In the course of Christian history, alas, this sense of the dignity of the baptized began to fade. Ultimately it dwindled until baptism was considered little more than a way to save infants from original sin. The decline of a robust ecclesial understanding of what takes place at the font undermined the very possibility of conceiving what is called "the baptismal priesthood"—the sharing of all the baptized in the one priesthood of Christ. As the ordained, or ministerial, priesthood began to be explained in the twelfth century by a theology of powers conveyed by Holy Orders, and belonging to the priest alone, the earlier ecclesiology of communion, which was a baptismal ecclesiology, went into eclipse.

Vatican II set out to retrieve this patristic heritage, and it did much to recover the central importance of baptism through the liturgical reform. It led parishes to take their fonts out of the closet, so to speak, and it gave Catholics a series of rites with which to celebrate baptism that were far more communal and robust than they had been for centuries. It restored the catechumenate to its place in the cycle of the liturgical year and called the community of faith to a responsible role in accompanying candidates through all the stages of Christian initiation. Parents as well as godparents were given speaking parts in the baptismal rite for infants; the families are now met at the doors of the church, and ultimately led to the altar, where their children will later share in the Eucharist.

Early English stone baptismal fonts

FALKENSTEINFOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Yet have we fully grasped what it all means? As I stood there, looking past the font to the altar, the words of liturgical historian Aidan Kavanagh came back to me: "We baptize to the priesthood." No, we certainly do not yet understand this truth. The words of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy point to it, however: the liturgy, in which we are to fully and consciously participate, is called by this Vatican II document "an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ" (*SC* 7). The fathers of the council went so far as to say that the people participate by offering the sacrifice at the altar *with*

the priest. They offer *themselves* in that sacrifice too: "By offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves" (SC 48). Without using the words "baptismal priesthood," this is exactly what the document is affirming.

For many years, I thought that the journey from the font to the table was for the purpose of sharing in the Eucharist, to complete Christian initiation by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. This is true as far as it goes, but, in reality, there is much more to it than that. We arise from the waters of baptism as a priestly people, because it is only then that we can go, joyfully, to the altar of God (Psalm 43:4) to offer the sacrifice. We place our own lives on the altar with the bread and the wine, joining our imperfect self-offering to the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

The whole Church is, in a word, priestly. One becomes a Christian—another Christ—so as to bear Christ's light and life to others and, ultimately, to offer the whole world back to God in the Eucharist, transformed by faith, hope, and love. This is what St. Augustine meant when he explained to the newly baptized that the Eucharist on the altar is their own mystery, and why he said, "We call everyone priests because all are members of only one priesthood."

Can all of this be gathered simply by looking at a baptismal font and its placement in a parish church? Of course not. It requires sound initial teaching, homiletic and catechetical unpacking, and a lived faith experience in community to bring these insights home. What a font can do for us—beyond the celebration of baptism itself—is to awaken a memory of these sacred realities and stir up a longing for their fulfillment. It is a place to touch the mystery of who we are, and marvel anew.

RITA FERRONE *is the author of several books about liturgy, including* Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium *(Paulist Press). She is a contributing writer for* Commonweal.

Refugee children from Ukraine arrive in Berlin, March 2022.

WILLIAM COLLINS DONAHUE

Whose War Is It?

Letter from Germany

It was a morning of stark contrasts: giggling ten-year-old school kids filing into the modern chapel built on the site of the old Emperor Wilhelm Memorial Church, which was almost completely destroyed during the Allied bombing of Berlin in 1943. A bit of the old church tower and apse still stand and have been carefully preserved over the years, an icon not only to Berliners but to all Germans. It is known as the "*Gedächtniskirche*," or the "memory church." The memory it preserves is not that of the emperor but of war itself.

Before unification in 1990, it was *the* Berlin landmark, at least for West Berliners. The famed Brandenburg Gate had been incorporated into a portion of the Berlin Wall; the *Reichstagsgebäude* (the Wilhelminian-era parliament building) was still a leaky half-ruin on the very edge of the divided city, housing a history exhibit on German militarism. And the impressive East German TV Tower (*Fernsehturm*) was in any case a latecomer to the cityscape. It debuted in 1969, and was in those days more a fixture of Cold War competition. It was meant not only to look stunningly graceful, a gleaming credit to the still young German Democratic Republic (GDR), but also to jam the anti-communist broadcasts of RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) emanating from West Berlin and until that point making their way without interference into the heart of the GDR.

The school kids, from the nearby Jesuit Canisius-Kolleg, radiated joy as they poured into the chapel that morning at 8:30 precisely. Though not quite a holiday, it was at least free of instruction. Apparently, even an Ash Wednesday prayer service was reason enough for a little giddiness. Their laughter and banter lit up that dreary Berlin morning, less a reminder of our mortality—the Ash Wednesday messaging had blessedly not quite reached them—than a testament to undying Easter joy.

Pater Marco Mohr, SJ, rector of the Jesuit community and president of the school, had his hands full, as anyone would who is charged with preaching an Ash Wednesday sermon to an ebullient school group. On the other hand, these Berlin students are in some ways closer to Lenten suffering than many others. The esplanade they crossed on their approach to the service was the site of the 2016 Christmas market terrorist attack, the reason the area is now ringed by heavy-duty barriers meant to impede another such assault.

After Poland, Germany has taken in more Ukrainian refugees than any other country. As of late February, they number about 1.2 million (figures vary, in part because Ukrainians can enter Germany without registering, and some have returned). Ukrainians are now Germany's largest refugee group, exceeding even the then-historic influx of about one million who came to Germany in 2015–16 in the wake of the Syrian civil war. The anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, prior to that, the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, have understandably been grabbing the headlines lately. Less commented upon is the ongoing challenge of providing for so many refugees.

This is no abstraction to these Berlin students from Canisius-Kolleg, some of

CHRISTOPHE GATEAU/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

whom are refugees themselves. Unlike other schools that either refused to accept refugees in 2015, or did so only under duress, the Canisius-Kolleg opened its doors early in the crisis. The rector at the time, Fr. Tobias Zimmermann, SJ, made it a central mission question: If we don't do this, he asked, why even continue on? Not all parents (or teachers, for that matter) were equally enthusiastic. Some were worried about foreigners diluting the quality and status of this highly respected school. Would the refugees be up to it? Do they really fit the profile of an ambitious *Gymnasium* (college preparatory school)? If they can't speak proper German, how can they possibly keep up with the demanding coursework?

Undaunted, Zimmermann and his successor Mohr petitioned the Berlin school authorities for special licensing and funding that would allow them to retool and formally expand their mission beyond the elite *Gymnasium* curriculum. They succeeded, and several years ago opened an "*Integrierte Sekundarschule*," a more flexible secondary school they've named the Arrupe Zweig, in honor of Pedro Arrupe, the long-serving Superior General of the Society of Jesus (from 1965 to 1983), who placed social justice at the heart of the Jesuit mission. Formally, this new wing is open to foreign students of diverse backgrounds, but it was founded principally to accommodate refugees and that remains its primary mission. The point is not to create an isolated parallel educational stream, but rather to provide for as much crossover as possible, allowing some pupils to integrate into the *Gymnasium* proper and encouraging "traditional" students to interact with the newcomers.

It is not perfect. The school leaders here view it more as a work in progress than a model program, but in some respects they are too modest. School assessment authorities reviewed the program recently and marveled at the acquisition rate of German language among the refugees. But there is also heartbreak whenever a student fails to make the grade. And that happens too, for a variety of reasons.

All of which made me wonder if I had too readily fastened upon the students' joy that morning. I am after all an outsider, seeing perhaps what I most want to see. Savoring their jocular, teasing exchanges, I of course don't hear those other stories of discrimination, deportation, and despair.

Pater Mohr is more attuned to the darker side, and he invokes that, oh so gently, in his sermon. Somehow finding the right words, he addresses the war in Ukraine, the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, and the climate crisis. It breaks my heart that kids this age need to be concerned with these heavy issues. Mohr is wiser: he knows that these are not elective "issues" to them, but rather unavoidable realities.

Even to fairly well-off Berliners, the energy crisis was brought home by the sudden interruption in the flow of Russian gas and oil earlier in the year. And even those without relatives shivering in the cold Ukrainian winter will have some inkling of the changed situation. Churches are no longer heated here (and attendance is even lower than usual), and when you go to the public pools, you are now asked not to let the shower run on the automatic timer, but to turn it off manually. Every little bit helps keep Germans independent of Russian gas.

Germans were in the news recently for their "failure" to provide Leopard-2 tanks in a timely fashion. The eminent historian of Germany Timothy Garton Ash invented a new German verb to pillory Chancellor Olaf Scholz's trademark hesitation and delay before finally giving in to what political observers thought inevitable from the outset. The verb, appropriately, is "*scholzen*."

But in Germany, Scholz's hesitation resonates, and is far more widespread than Ash's neologism implies. While there is substantial support for Ukraine in general, when it comes to providing attack tanks, that support drops to just over 40 percent.

That figure jumped by about 10 points once the chancellor made the announcement, but a widespread sense of threat (almost 50 percent) and hesitation to provide further arms (35 percent) persist, as new data reported by the respected weekly *Die Zeit* documents. The war is simply a lot more real to Germans: Kyiv is about as far from Berlin as are cities like Freiburg in southern Germany. And the concern—as some opposed to further military aid to Ukraine have openly admitted—is that Russia will punish Germany by placing it in its crosshairs.

Which is precisely why others think Germans need to step up and lead in a more decisive manner. It's time to act like the country it is: Europe's richest and most populous.

Yet doing so would defy central tenets of Germany's postwar political culture, one the United States rather insistently fashioned. West Germany was after all a vassal (or, to put it slightly more politely, client) state until it joined NATO in 1955, and even then wasn't officially and fully independent until unification in 1990. The joint entry of East and West Germany into the United Nations in 1973 was meaningful symbolically, but also a bit of window dressing, suggesting to many that both countries were more independent than they actually were.

It is now popular (and my students at the University of Notre Dame eagerly join the chorus) to demand that Germany actually spend the 2 percent of its GDP on defense that it committed to under the George W. Bush administration. Many of these students seem to think this call was new with Donald Trump, and it is their effort, I suspect, to salvage a remnant of that president's persistent tirade against Germany and its then chancellor, Angela Merkel. During the Trump years, Germans feared the United States more than Russia or China by a large margin, and awarded the president the lowest popularity rating—9 percent—ever measured in postwar history.

I had always been quick to urge my students to view "defense" more broadly, to consider, for example, the huge expense entailed in hosting millions of refugees, the first wave of which came to Europe in part due to the failed war

in Iraq and the prolonged and botched occupation of Afghanistan. (Some scholars estimate Germany's refugee hosting, broadly construed, costs in the neighborhood of €30,000 per refugee per year.) And as long as there was a U.S. president in power who openly cast doubt on America's Article 5 obligations under the NATO treaty, why should Germany rush to fulfill its obligation?

But the world has changed since then. It is not just Biden and Blinken at the helm that has reassured our NATO allies. More than anything, it was Putin who caused the sea-change in German thinking. Within just three days of the invasion, Scholz, whose own Social Democrats had notoriously dragged their feet when it came to armaments and defense readiness, announced a €100 billion investment in Germany's embarrassingly outmoded military. This posture is referred to here as a "*Zeitenwende*," a new era in German political culture, a term that echoes the radical rupture in German history constituted by unification (*die Wende*) in 1989–90.

Up until now, Germany had determined never to send military materiel into active war zones; its own troops, such as they are, have been essentially confined to peacekeeping missions in conjunction with the UN or NATO. Yet when we criticize Germany as a defense "freeloader," we should probably keep in mind that this is exactly what the United States wanted and demanded for most of the postwar period. NATO placed nuclear weapons in Germany, but they were never under German control. A condition for permitting German unification—one insisted upon above all by the French and British—was precisely that Germany not flex a military muscle of any kind, indeed that it remain fully subordinate. Helmut Kohl needed to sacrifice the beloved Deutsche Mark and substitute the Euro as a gesture of European integration. The fear then—just a generation ago—was of German strength and self-assertion. Within a fairly short period of time, Germany's posture of subordination would come to be seen as that of a shirker unwilling to pay its fair share of defense or to take the lead in European affairs.

When Scholz hems and haws, then, he is not just *scholzing*. On the contrary, he is responding to a deeply conflicted political culture that frankly does not change course on a dime. Yes, the war in Ukraine has been going on now for more than a year. But even such irrefutable and upsetting evidence of aggression cannot reverse decades of "lessons" that were deeply inculcated in the Germans. Accompanying support for Ukraine, calls for greater diplomacy are on the rise.

The chief lesson of World War II—made famous by the Käthe Kollwitz sketch of the young man screaming "Never again war" ("*Nie wieder Krieg*!")—was of course pacifism, at least for Germans, and for the foreseeable future. Their military history is just too tainted, the thinking goes, ever to allow them to participate again. Abstinence is both a virtue and a requirement (all too convenient, politically and economically, some critics would say), a feeling that fueled a lot of the opposition to providing the Leopard-2 tanks to Ukraine. "Imagine," I've heard a number of Germans say, "a German-made tank once again moving against the Russians!" The sentence is spoken as if it is a self-evident rationale for withholding the tanks.

Now the same sentiment is being marshaled against the proposal to send fighter jets to Ukraine. I find myself growing impatient, wanting to blurt out: What if the Allies had responded with such nonsense during Hitler's wars of aggression? Why can't Germany just finally step up and *lead*?

But then I think of those students at the Ash Wednesday service and feel called to a little more compassion. On the way to the service, one group asked their teacher excitedly: "Are we going to that big bombed-out church? Wow!" These monuments to destruction have indeed left their mark on the German psyche. They represent powerful cautionary tales in the form of dramatic public exhibits. And the invasion of Ukraine, far from making it immediately clear why Germany should provide arms, has in not a few cases stirred deeply disturbing memories among those who came of age in the decades after the war, kids who grew up among mounds of rocks and half-ruined buildings that persisted well into the 1970s (in West Germany) and to the bitter end (in East Germany). No *Zeitenwende* can erase these deeply ingrained scars, certainly not overnight.

Yet the lingering "German doubt" (to quote one of the leading papers here) is not just a Cold War artifact, but something equally attributable to the Trump presidency, when Germans first learned (on a broad scale) to question the U.S. commitment to defend Europe. No one doubts that Biden is a staunch promoter of NATO, but who will succeed him? If it is Trump, or another Trumpian isolationist, that would leave Germany uniquely exposed. Many Germans are watching American politics closely, and they're worried.

Generations of postwar Germans have been socialized to learn that the Second World War meant that they were never again to lay hands on a weapon, or if so, only under NATO leadership, embedded within an American-led alliance in which Germans follow but pointedly do not lead. For decades, we've expected Germans to show repentance, remorse, and reticence—and understandably so. The Kaiser Wilhelm "memory church" that we gathered in to celebrate the beginning of the Lenten season of renewal merges with the larger "memory culture" (*Erinnerungskultur*) carefully cultivated over decades to confront the Holocaust. Yet how does one combine that required lesson, indelibly imposed on generations, with this new expectation to arm, intervene, and orchestrate military action? Scholz, for all his infelicities, may have it right after all. In all of his *scholzing*, he's honoring both the demands of the present and the calls of the past. He may even be the man of the moment for contemporary Germany.

WILLIAM COLLINS DONAHUE *is Cavanaugh Professor of the Humanities at the University of Notre Dame, where he serves as director of the Initiative for Global Europe in the Keough School of Global Affairs.*

THOMAS ALBERT HOWARD

Islam's Future in Kathmandu

How a new initiative seeks to modernize madrasa education

Islam isn't the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of Kathmandu. Seated in a predominantly Hindu and Buddhist country, the fabled city is ablaze with gods and piety, just not those of the Muslim or even Abrahamic sort. And yet late July of last year I found myself in Nagarkot, a village outside Kathmandu in the Himalayan foothills, to participate in a multi-day conference on "The Future of Islamic Thought: Engaging History, Tradition, and Science." I was scheduled to deliver several lectures on Christianity, tradition, and modernity. My remit was to provide insight into aspects of Western religious history that might foster conversation about Islam's own attitude toward, and struggles with, modernity. Though invited as an instructor, I gathered quickly that I had a lot to learn.

For starters, this was no typical academic conference. Its participants were not mainly disinterested academic experts, but young men—and several women—who had studied in one of the thousands of madrasas scattered across Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Faith commitments were palpable, as were religious vocations. The conference represented one element of the Madrasa Discourses initiative, itself a component of the Contending Modernities project based at the University of Notre Dame and generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Ebrahim Moosa, a practicing Muslim with an impressive résumé spanning East and West, ably directs the project with the help of the scholar of religion Josh Lupo.

The Madrasa Discourses project, launched in 2015, operates with the working assumption that today's South Asian madrasa education has become too static, indifferent to history and basic scientific literacy. The project's organizers hope that this tendency can be corrected if madrasa graduates are exposed to a broader range of voices from their own Islamic intellectual tradition and brought into conversation

A photo from the conference "The Future of Islamic Thought," Kathmandu, Nepal

TAL HOWARD

The project largely depends on its ability to defend *tradition* against *traditionalism*.

with "modern knowledge," the intellectual formations and debates of the Western or at least Western-shaped academy. The project web page describes its aims thus: "To bring the classical intellectual heritage of Islam into conversation with contemporary academic perspectives on science, history, and theology."

A Muslim with South Asian parents who grew up in South Africa, Ebrahim Moosa decided after a crisis of faith in his teens to travel to India to pursue madrasa education himself. Overcoming parental objections, he eventually spent six years in madrasas, learning Urdu, Arabic, the Qur'an, and theology. He graduated from the prestigious Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, India, but also spent two years at the famous Darul Uloom Deoband, also in India, normally viewed as the mother of all Sunni madrasas in South Asia. He then decamped first to journalism in the United Kingdom and South Africa and then to the Western academy, obtaining further degrees and teaching posts that took him to the University of Cape Town, Stanford, Duke, and now Notre Dame. Moosa is now what sociologists call an insider-outsider. He has written movingly about his experiences in *What Is a Madrasa?* (2015), a gem of a book that provides Western readers with a close-up look at "the most common type of school for religious instruction in the Islamic world." Though critical of its contemporary limitations, Moosa still esteems madrasa education, recognizing it as a time-tested institution, a transmitter of Islamic culture, and often the only source of education for Muslims with limited means. "I remain a friendly critic of madrasa education," as he puts it in the book. "Properly harnessed, [madrasas] are repositories of classical learning and seeds for intellectual sophistication that might challenge the shallow discourses of fundamentalism and revivalism that often pass for Islam today." Moosa's book is an excellent antidote to the post-9/11 caricature of madrasas as mass hatcheries of terrorists. So, for that matter, was the conference in Nepal. Most of the people I met there were warm, humble, fluent in multiple languages, and deeply curious about the world. Many had a good sense of humor.

Still, there are serious lacunae in madrasa education. As Moosa puts it: "An unhealthy skepticism of modern knowledge produced in the minds of madrasa authorities the idea that a modern Muslim subject was at best questionable." Moosa believes that, with greater exposure to both contemporary academic knowledge and classical Islamic works and schools of thought, it is possible to arrive at "an intelligible and enlightened orthodoxy for Muslims today."

Toward this end, participants at our conference—or "intensive," as they called it—heard presentations with titles such as "Muslims' Opinions on Evolution," "Post-Islamism in South Asia," "The Role of Women in the Madrasa Today," and "Hindu Nationalism and Minority Rights in India." The conference also addressed the topics of religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and the nature of tradition. After each presentation, there were trenchant questions and lively, often heated conversation—in English and Urdu with a sprinkling of words in Arabic as well. (Translations were available for non-Urdu speakers.)

Postponed during the first years of the pandemic, in-person gatherings like the one in Kathmandu constitute only one aspect of the Madrasa Discourses project. There is also an online component of four semesters of weekly seminars, offering program syllabi and content to any Muslim graduate of a seminary who cares to participate. Admission to the "intensive" involves a competitive application process. Plans are afoot to expand the project so that it can reach more people.

How have participants reacted? The ones with whom I spoke indicated that Madrasa Discourses fills an important gap, permitting conversation on topics considered taboo in their home communities. And it does succeed in helping them engage with the modern academy, broadly understood. As one former participant explained,

> As someone who…is from a madrasa background, I can attest to the need for closer engagement with sciences and the challenges that modernity brings to Islamic philosophy and theology. Madrasa Discourses both deepened and broadened my understanding of the complexities associated with the modern scientific worldview and modernity from a religious perspective. Most madrasa graduates have only a very siloed Islamic framework for interpreting these matters.

Others echoed these sentiments in my conversations with them. Only once—when a participant from Pakistan asked me, "What does this program actually want from us?"—did I detect any hint of resistance.

Madrasa Discourses also gives Muslims from all across South Asia a rare opportunity to meet one another and exchange ideas. For political reasons tied to the Partition of India in 1947, it is practically impossible for Muslims from Pakistan to travel to India and vice-versa. Hence the decision to meet in Kathmandu, a neutral location where all travelers are welcome—though not without a visit from Nepali security forces, who were mildly alarmed at the sudden appearance of forty-plus Muslim men, many of them wearing religious skull caps and beards.

Not surprisingly, Madrasa Discourses has received some criticism from some traditionalist voices in South Asia, where it has been the target of an aggressive media campaign, including a front-page denunciation in one of Pakistan's leading Urdu dailies. The project has been accused of disrespecting traditional modes of learning and of serving as a conduit for dangerous Western ideas.

The fact that a Catholic university in the United States sponsors the project and that it is funded by American philanthropy does not help matters. But Moosa gives as good as he gets. His knowledge of Islamic theology and history, as well as his familiarity with the curricula of madrasas, permits him to go toe to toe with the project's critics.

As a one-time visitor to an event organized by Madrasa Discourses, I am in no position to pronounce on its success or failure. But I will hazard a few preliminary observations.

As I participated in discussions, I was often struck by the similarities between what Muslims face now and what Christian communities faced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and in some quarters still face). Questions about human origins, the permissibility of historical criticism of the Bible, and the role of women in church and society—all have their analogues in contemporary Muslim debates. Darwinian evolution appeared to raise considerable difficulties and sensitivities at the conference, despite a lucid presentation on it by Dr. Shoaib Malik, a professor at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates and author of *Al-Ghazali and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm* (2012).

The project largely depends on its ability to defend *tradition* against *traditionalism*, to invoke Jaroslav Pelikan's famous distinction. The problem with a lot of madrasa education today, Moosa and his allies claim, is that it mistakes the latter for the former. Too often it seeks to ignore or shut down debate instead of subjecting contested ideas to criticism and debate informed by multiple perspectives. In short, it reduces tradition to hidebound preservation, enjoining obedience and rote memorization, discouraging creativity and thoughtful development in light of new information or new circumstances. But genuine "tradition," as Mahan Mirza—who worked with Moosa on the project until 2019—argues, "is not the mere repetition of the creativity of past scholars. Tradition is active participation in ongoing creative syntheses, keeping in mind shifts in human understanding." Doing precisely this was the goal of the Kathmandu gathering.

The success of the project hinges on what the Madrasa Discourses team refers to as an "elicitive" approach. Their aim is not simply to deliver an "information dump" on unsuspecting madrasa graduates, rupturing their intellectual worlds. Rather, it seeks to "meet them where they are," showing participants how Islamic traditions of learning are better prepared to engage the intellectual challenges presented by modernity than many might assume. For example, participants regularly encounter the thought of the great Persian polymath Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) and the Arabic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1392–1406), among the greatest minds, East or West, of the Middle Ages. These two premodern figures still provide a model for how Muslim scholars can engage difficult challenges and make tradition a living, breathing reality, not a dead letter or a perfumed corpse. By exposing madrasa graduates to an international cast of speakers, Madrasa Discourses works against provincialism and knee-jerk anti-Western sentiment and encourages cross-culture conversation. "A progressive, cosmopolitan, knowledge-friendly movement within the madrasa-sphere is the best hope in order to effectively transform and rejuvenate Islamic thought," Moosa writes.

Madrasa Discourses highlights the need for a robust comparative theology in our globalized, pluralistic world. Neither the kumbaya shallowness of so much that passes as interfaith dialogue nor the impossible neutrality of a comparative approach to religious studies, comparative theology calls for theologians to remain faithful to their own tradition while also drawing wisdom and insight from other religious traditions. Thomas Aquinas, who drew from Muslim, Jewish, and pagan sources of learning, might serve as a Christian exemplar. During my time in Kathmandu, it became apparent that not only do Muslims and Christians share common lines of inquiry and points of concern in wrestling with modernity, but the age-old theological issues—theodicy, free will, the nature of belief, God's mercy—have drawn out the ablest minds in both traditions. One can enrich the other, sometimes by offering new resources, sometimes by providing a productive contrast.

Finally, I think the project would do well to encourage its participants not only to learn from the modern academy, but to submit it to thoughtful, faith-informed critique—a response quite different from reactionary dismissal. While it has much to offer religious traditions, few would deny that the modern academy has also served as the site of dogmatic scientism, anti-religious zealotry, progressivist groupthink, an overly instrumentalist conception of reason, blinkered specialization, and impenetrable jargon, to say nothing of the age-old sins of professional vanity, nepotism, and the like. The deep wells of Islamic thought and theology must have important things to say about these shortcomings—and others. One participant in Kathmandu confided to me that he had hoped for an academic career, but it soon became clear to him that this would mean checking his "thick" faith commitments at the door—something he was not prepared to do. I don't know the details of his story, but one wishes that he had pressed on, for the presence of such people might expand the boundaries of academic discourse even as it widens their own intellectual horizons. Yes, Athens can instruct Jerusalem, but Jerusalem can also fructify Athens, to steal a line from Tertullian.

Exactly what will grow from the seeds planted in Kathmandu I don't know. Uncertainty with respect to results is a normal feature of intellectual exchange. But as for me, I'll forever associate the city with newfound "Abrahamic" friends grappling with their future, openly and honestly. I wonder if the whole affair piqued the curiosity of the local Hindu and Buddhist deities. Maybe they're still talking about it now.

THOMAS ALBERT HOWARD *is professor of humanities and history and serves as the Duesenberg Chair in Christian Ethics at Valparaiso University.*

Coming Apart?

James T. Kloppenberg

The future of democracy in America.

Respect. Dignity. Recognition. Non-domination. These words pepper the writings of Americans on the Left when they identify what our nation needs. Disrespect, disgrace, invisibility, and subordination have marked the experience of far too many Americans for far too long. Only dramatic systemic change will enable us to move toward liberty and justice for all. Women, African Americans, recent immigrants from America's southern borders, and members of the LGBTQ community have mobilized to fight oppression by white men. The surprise, at least to many Americans on the Left, is that many white men now hold an equally firm conviction that it is they who are now disrespected, disgraced, invisible, and subordinated. In a nation they once dominated so completely that their power went uncontested, many white men now insist they have been robbed of their freedom.

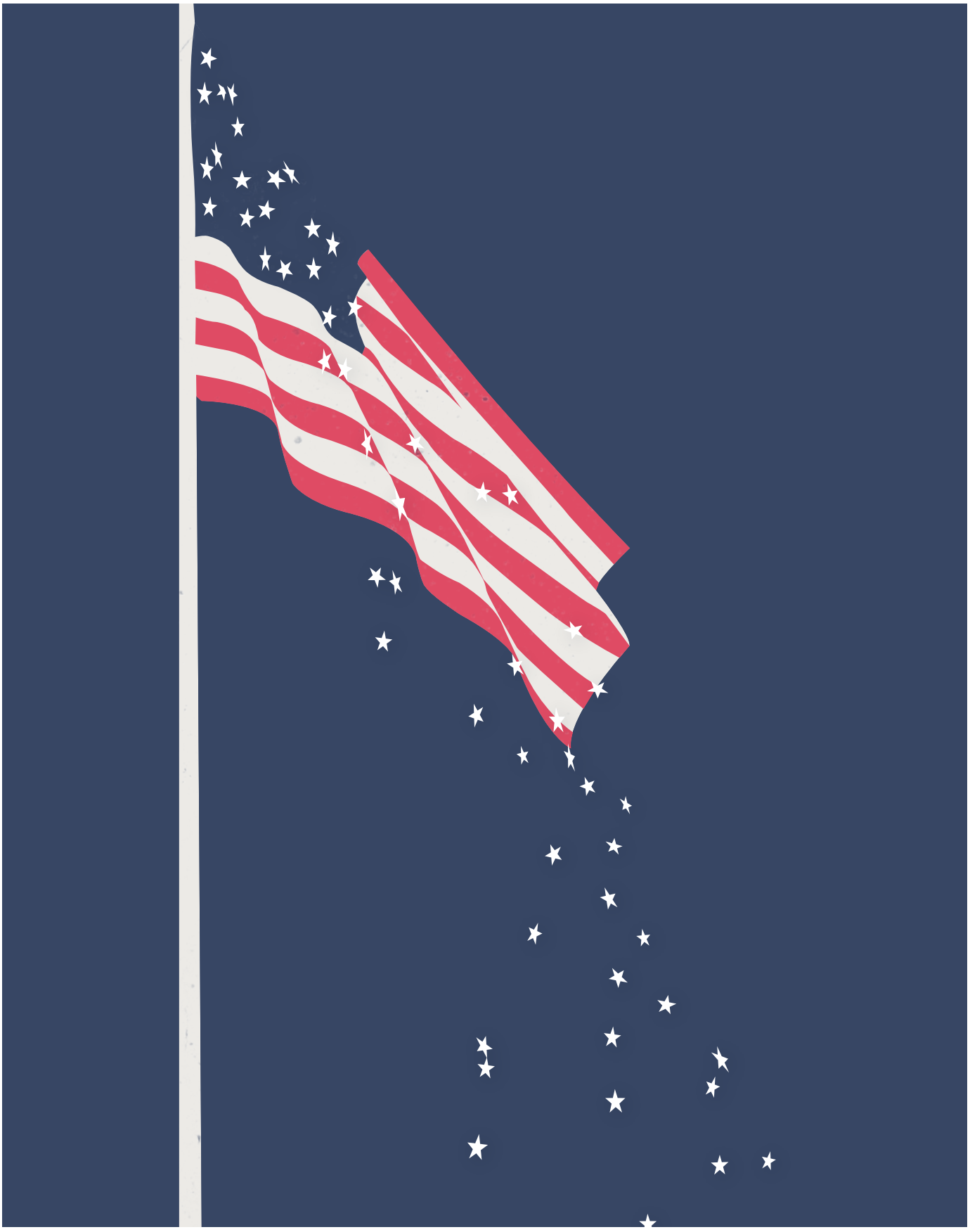


Illustration by David Sankey

Political polarization in the United States did not begin in recent decades. Struggles over how to understand American history date from the birth of our nation.

Understanding the lines of combat today requires confronting both sides of that divide. Those of us committed to what we consider social justice too seldom acknowledge the anger and resentment felt by those opposed to our efforts, for reasons they consider legitimate, or those left behind economically. Corporate offshoring of jobs and deskilling due to technology have undermined the self-respect of those who suffer from such developments. Our own self-righteousness can blind us to the perspectives of those who have dug in their heels to protect values they cherish. Their grievances, unintelligible to many on the Left, shape our contemporary political landscape. Only if we understand their perspective and its sources can we do anything about the bitterness that marks our moment. Much of the white working class, once central to the New Deal coalition, now enthusiastically, even angrily, identifies with Republicans. What happened?

Political polarization in the United States did not begin in recent decades. Struggles over how to understand American history date from the birth of our nation. Disagreements over slavery were so fierce that Georgia's and South Carolina's delegates to the Constitutional Convention threatened to bolt if the issue even came to the floor. Although the founders deprecated political parties as factions sapping commitment to the common good, hyperbolic attacks on domestic enemies nevertheless began soon after the Constitution was ratified. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson produced some of the most influential documents of the American Revolution and served together in George Washington's administration, yet as early as 1793 they were at each other's throats. The parties that formed around them were as bitterly critical of each other as Republicans and Democrats are today. Familiar images of dignified and bewigged American statesmen blur reality: fisticuffs sometimes broke out on the floor of Congress in the nation's early years. Newspapers were openly and viciously partisan. New Englanders and Southerners routinely derided each other as threats to the nation and pawns of foreign powers. Some doubted the new United States could survive.

Timothy Shenk, in his wide-ranging *Realigners: Partisan Hacks, Political Visionaries, and the Struggle to Rule American Democracy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $30, 464 pp.), locates the origins of the American party system in two rival strategies for maintaining white supremacy. As the Slave Power Conspiracy maneuvered to extend the reign of bondage across the nation, countless Black lives were sacrificed to perpetuate the power of pitiless Southern planters and their Northern merchant accomplices. As Michael Kazin makes clear in his outstanding book *What It Took to Win: A History of the Democratic Party* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $35, 416 pp.), defending the privileges of Americans "whose roots lay in European soil" became Democrats' principal concern decades before the new Republican Party named Abraham Lincoln its standard bearer. Excising the malignant cancer of slavery cost more than 600,000 lives before the nation could be reconstructed on what anti-slavery activists envisioned as a new foundation established by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Charles Sumner, among the few Northern politicians consistently committed to comprehensive civil-rights legislation and the focus of Shenk's chapter on anti-slavery activists, struggled heroically and lost repeatedly.

Even before the Civil War amendments could take effect, anti-racist "abolition democracy," to use the apt phrase of W.E.B. Du Bois, was stymied by terror. Black Codes, enforced by the Ku Klux Klan and lynch mobs, circumscribed the freedom of freedmen. Eventually, legalized forms of white supremacy almost as vicious and unrelenting as chattel slavery reappeared throughout the former Confederacy. Reuniting the nation on the backs of formally freed yet effectively subjugated Black people was a project shared by Northerners and Southerners of both parties. White Americans invented a "magnolia myth" of paternalist slave owners and their supposedly contented slaves, a fiction consecrated by professional historians who portrayed the Civil War as unnecessary, Reconstruction as ill-conceived, and strict racial segregation as a necessary accommodation for what they deemed Black inferiority. Not until the late 1950s and the 1960s did many whites join Blacks' century-long struggle to challenge laws enshrining institutionalized racism. It is a fantasy to think those efforts have succeeded in eradicating the assumptions that undergird practices of white supremacy.

The strident polarization of our own moment, then, is nothing new. Ever since the first Europeans dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land and called it God's will, conflicts over race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and the distribution of wealth and power—not calm consensus or decorous debate—have marked American history. The exercise of white men's American freedom has meant murder, enslavement, theft, and the destruction of the natural environment, measures deemed necessary to fulfill our sacred destiny.

Democracy means struggle. Yet we ask ourselves why compromise has become a dirty word, why elected officials resist bipartisanship, and why so many Americans now don't want their children marrying a member of the wrong party. Explaining our condition requires looking at the multiple dimensions of American political, economic, social, and intellectual history since the mid-twentieth century, when partisanship was less pronounced. First, our parties have become more ideologically coherent. Second, our economy is more deeply enmeshed with global flows of capital and labor, which are accepted as inevitable according to the ideology known as neoliberalism. Third, the explosion of college education has blessed new winners and left out, both economically and culturally, many more. Fourth, our media landscape has been transformed by economic and technological changes. Fifth, our practices of active civic engagement, which have intrigued students of American culture since Alexis de Tocqueville visited in 1831, have withered into a craving for entertainment. Sixth and finally, our long-held national conviction that the future is brighter than the present has given way to anxiety, even dread, that our children will inherit environmental disasters and an economy that rewards only a lucky handful at the top.

In the mid-twentieth century, prominent commentators lamented the ideological incoherence of American politics. The Republican Party included cultural conservatives and innovative businessmen committed to free-market economics yet troubled by the oppression of Black people, immigrants, women, and the poor. Although the Democratic Party included New Dealers committed to using government authority and revenues to address inequality, its electoral base of white voters in the "solid South" kept Democratic presidential administrations from including Black people in programs designed to alleviate poverty. The party's rhetoric was egalitarian, but its policies ignored race and gender.

Sam Rosenfeld, in his fine book *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era* (Chicago, $30, 336 pp.), traces the efforts of activists within both parties to address this incoherence as early as the end of World War II. In 1944, FDR wrote that "we should have two real parties—one liberal, and the other conservative." In the same year, FDR proposed, and was reelected on, plans to create a comprehensive American welfare state. Because such universal programs threatened racial segregation in the South, however, neither FDR's "Second Bill of Rights" nor Truman's "Fair Deal" became law. While European Social Democrats and Christian Democrats allied to establish programs of social provision that underlay the postwar economic boom, both U.S. parties remained hodgepodges. In 1950, the American Political Science Association issued a report urging greater ideological coherence within the parties. Yet pluralists praised what activists condemned: mixing within the parties reflected what Daniel Bell called "the end of ideology" and ensured the moderation that Daniel J. Boorstin called "the genius of American politics." Americans from Robert F. Kennedy to Richard Nixon thought non-ideological parties inoculated the United States against the pathogens of fascism and communism that poisoned European politics. Pervasive fears of totalitarianism, as Dorothy Ross has shown, led influential liberal intellectuals to abandon FDR's "mutualism" and celebrate "personal authenticity." Activists such as Walter Reuther and Michael Harrington nevertheless worked tirelessly to transform the Democratic Party into a liberal-labor coalition.

The story of the right-wing takeover of the Republican Party is familiar. While 1948 Republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey and President Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted the New Deal as a fait accompli, conservatives fumed and plotted. Barry Goldwater lost his bid for the presidency in 1964, but his partisans won the war to control the GOP. During the 1960s and '70s, when the civil-rights movement finally propelled segregationist Democrats to leave the party, conservatives' crusade to protect "freedom" from "collectivism" finally succeeded.

Movement conservatives rejected Nixon and Gerald Ford, moderates who sought bipartisan solutions. They pinned their hopes on a washed-up but charismatic actor, California Gov. Ronald Reagan. Embracing "supply-side" or "trickle-down" economics, donors including Joseph Coors and the Koch brothers worked quietly to create a Republican Party allying free-marketeers with Evangelicals and other social conservatives. Shrewdly declining to put all their eggs in the Reagan basket, they also poured money into state and local elections.

In *Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich, the Fall of a Speaker, and the Rise of the New Republican Party* (Penguin, $18, 368 pp.), Julian E. Zelizer shows how Gingrich, first elected to Congress in 1978, became the most transformative figure in congressional politics by demanding a no-holds-barred oppositional strategy and strict party discipline. Historians Rosenfeld, Zelizer, Bruce Schulman, and Kevin M. Kruse maintain that American politics changed in the 1970s, before the presidencies of Reagan and the two Bushes, when moderate Republicans were purged and naked partisanship embraced.

We still live with the long-term consequences of Ronald Reagan's tax-cutting, anti-union, and anti-government ideology—the bundle of ideas that Gary Gerstle examines in his spirited book *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order* (Oxford, $27.95, 432 pp.). FDR succeeded in consolidating support for the New Deal order so thoroughly that by the fifties it set the terms of debate. When that order collapsed in the late seventies, from causes including exhaustion from the multiple crises of the sixties, the deindustrialization of America's heartland, the stagflation coinciding with the oil crisis, and partisan realignment, it opened the door for the neoliberal order. The so-called Reagan Revolution meant a shift from Keynes to Milton Friedman. It demonized government and sanctified the hardy individualism that Coors, the Kochs, and their allies had celebrated since the 1950s. Neoliberals exchanged earlier conservatives' reverence for tradition with the "creative destruction" of unchained market capitalism.

An equally long campaign transformed the Democratic Party. Most post–World War II Democrats in Congress resisted the Left's demands for change, agreeing with John and Robert F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson that a clean ideological divide would threaten bipartisan deals. Post-war Democratic Party leaders backed away from labor radicalism. The 1950 Treaty of Detroit secured impressive benefits for members of the auto workers union, but it sapped support for the universal programs FDR proposed.

Bipartisanship had its virtues. Liberal Republicans made possible LBJ's landmark achievements, including the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the Equal Opportunity Act, and the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act. The New Deal alliance of white ethnics and Blacks, however, began fraying even before the Democrats finally endorsed the moderate wing of the civil-rights movement. The electoral landslide of 1964—even bigger than the one FDR achieved in 1936 when he defiantly welcomed the business community's hatred—seemed to ensure that Democrats at last would tackle not only racial but economic injustice. In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. endorsed Bayard Rustin's Freedom Budget, another call for universal programs to eliminate slums, unemployment, and poor schools not just for Blacks but "for *all*."

Various kinds of unrest, including urban riots, antiwar protests, and second-wave feminism, all opened cracks in the Democratic coalition. White Southerners and many rural Americans fled first to the segregationist George Wallace, then to the Republican Party. So did many union members, who shelved earlier notions of solidarity with the poor and adopted instead "law and order," a slogan that signaled resistance to demands for racial justice. Hubert Humphrey ran in 1968 on a platform that was consistent with the most radical proposals of the late New Deal, the Freedom Budget, and the programs adopted by postwar European social-democratic governments. But Humphrey's party was coming apart over the issues of war, race, and federal authority. In his study of Wallace's home county, *Freedom's Dominion: A Saga of White Resistance to Federal Power* (Basic, $19.99, 512 pp.), Jefferson Cowie illuminates a crucial dynamic: for many white Americans, liberty means opposing all challenges to white supremacy. No Democratic presidential candidate since Humphrey has won a majority of white voters, and the party has never again challenged the prerogatives of organized capital as boldly as Humphrey did. After Watergate delivered another solid Democratic congressional majority in 1976, President Jimmy Carter veered

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The ideals of solidarity and obligation were collateral damage in the campaigns waged by the counterculture and neoliberals against stodgy neo-Victorian morality. Consecrating liberty empowered the powerful and tightened the screws on almost everyone else.

away from universal health care and full employment bills and instead deregulated the trucking and airline industries.

Progressives within the Democratic Party had been struggling for decades to seize control of it. Jesse Jackson and other veterans of the civil-rights movement, former student radicals and antiwar activists who had rallied behind Robert F. Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy, and George McGovern, women fed up with second-class status, and consumer activists led by Ralph Nader all battled against what they considered the Democratic establishment. To use Rosenfeld's terms, "moral insurgents" with "an expansive social democratic vision" propelled a range of sixties social movements. These reformers finally ripped control from insiders and empowered a new generation of activists committed to racial equality, democratic deliberation, women's rights, environmentalism, and economic reform. Like Goldwater in '64, McGovern lost the presidency in Nixon's '72 landslide yet won the war for the party apparatus. Progressives would remake the party as thoroughly as movement conservatives had remade the Republican Party. The difference, however, was that whereas Republicans such as Gingrich insisted on, and were able to enforce, party discipline, the new Democratic Party remained only a constellation of disparate interest groups with too little in common to form a united front.

Radicals' efforts, moreover, had a paradoxical effect. Activists on the Left fueled changes within the Democratic Party while at the same time intensifying many young radicals' disenchantment with government and alienation from public life. Paul Sabin, in *Public Citizens: The Attack on Big Government and the Remaking of American Liberalism* (Norton, $26.95, 272 pp.), points to the ironic consequences of many leftists' disillusionment with the New Deal order. Outrage drove Ralph Nader's consumer-rights crusade, and personal emancipation was the promise of NOW feminists and disparate radicals such as Paul Goodman, Allen Ginsberg, Mario Savio, and Stewart Brand. But emancipation was also the promise of the jocular, grandfatherly Reagan. Since many sixties radicals shared neoliberals' interest in breaking free from constraints, lines stretched not only from the New Left to Reuther's social-democratic labor movement but also to Ayn Rand's libertarianism. "If it feels good, do it" could authorize free love, blue jeans, and rock music. It could also authorize the offshoring, job cutting, union bashing, and deregulation preferred by freewheeling financial-services firms, automakers, and new-economy entrepreneurs and enterprises such as Apple, Google, Amazon, and Facebook. The ideals of solidarity and obligation were collateral damage in the campaigns waged by the counterculture and neoliberals against stodgy neo-Victorian morality. Consecrating liberty empowered the powerful and tightened the screws on almost everyone else.

Bill Clinton came to embody both the promise and the perils of the new Democratic Party. He and his wife, Hillary, proudly endorsed their generation's rejection of what preceded them; his presidency promised renewal. The legacy of Clinton's two terms, however, boils down to three notorious proclamations: "The era of big government is over"; "End welfare as we know it"; and "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." Defeated in his attempt to overhaul health care and chastened by the '94 election, when Republicans took control of the House for the first time since 1952, Clinton changed course. Kazin and Gerstle note that the Democratic Leadership Council had been advising the party to get over its New Deal obsession and adopt neoliberal policies. Government, which Reagan famously labeled the problem rather than the solution, should shrink. Welfare should be "reformed" and the budget balanced. Banking and communications should be deregulated and NAFTA ratified, freeing global flows of capital, information, and people. Together with European social democrats such as Britain's Tony Blair and Germany's Gerhard Schröder, Clinton Democrats embraced the "third way," or "triangulation" between conservatives and their own party's left wing. Economic reshaping through downsizing and offshoring was inevitable. Echoing Margaret Thatcher's acronym "TINA" (there is no alternative), Clinton called globalization "the economic equivalent of a force of nature, like wind or water."

Craig Calhoun, in *Degenerations of Democracy* (Harvard, $29.95, 368 pp.), a brilliant book co-authored with Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Charles Taylor, offers incisive analysis of the neoliberal turn. Unleashing the economy from government oversight and taxation meant more capital for investment bankers, increased pay for corporate executives, and fewer jobs, with reduced benefits, for everyone else. Although government-funded research made possible the high-tech revolution, those it enriched offered neither acknowledgment nor payback. Clinton celebrated diversity and tried to persuade white Americans to do the same. His endorsement of multiculturalism and other controversial changes, though, together with his private behavior and public lies about it, so outraged Republicans that their ceaseless charges of corruption still clung to Hillary Clinton years later.

CECIL STOUGHTON, WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

President Clinton embraced the neoliberal strategies of deregulation and free trade, which antagonized Democratic progressives such as his own Treasury Secretary Robert Reich but won him reelection. By the end of George W. Bush's presidency, however, the costs of Clinton's initiatives had become apparent. The financial crisis of 2008 resulted from financial chicanery made possible by repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, which had regulated the banking industry. Clinton's crime bill accelerated mass incarceration and devastated Black communities. Even though Clinton instituted an earned-income tax credit and raised the minimum wage, most blue-collar workers found themselves falling further behind the ever-rising incomes of the elite.

The salaries of CEOs in the 1960s were, on average, twenty-five times those of their employees. They are now more than three hundred times as large, a bountiful harvest of the neoliberal seeds planted in the 1970s. State legislatures as well as the federal government cut taxes on the wealthy and cut programs designed to help everyone else. As "austerity" became the norm, "lean" strategies, sold as liberation from costly regulations, benefitted those at the top. Although I agree with Jedediah Purdy when, in his jeremiad *Two Cheers for Politics: Why Democracy is Flawed, Frightening—and Our Best Hope* (Basic, $17.95, 304 pp.), he calls neoliberalism "perhaps the shallowest worldview ever held by a modern elite," this ideology somehow penetrated both parties, hollowing out public services while enriching slivers of the private sector. The super-rich now funded Democratic as well as Republican campaigns, earning elected officials' gratitude, securing their preferred policies, and removing economic inequality from legislative agendas.

The gulf in wealth and income has continued to grow under the Democratic administrations of Barack Obama and Joe Biden, just as it did under every Republican president since Reagan. Charting the top marginal income-tax rate in the United States tells the tale. For families filing jointly, in 1920 it was 73 percent for income over $1 million. During the roaring twenties, the top rate dipped to 20 percent. Under FDR, it rose from 63 percent to 94 percent and remained there until 1964, when it dropped to 70 percent for incomes over $200,000. Reagan Republicans lowered the top marginal rate to 50 percent, then to 38.5 percent, where it has hovered ever since. The top marginal rate today for joint filers making under $329,000—all but the top 4 percent of Americans—is 24 percent, less than a third of what the wealthiest paid from the 1940s to the 1970s, the years of the "Great Compression." These were also the years of the fastest economic growth in U.S. history.

The gap separating the economic status of Black and white Americans—the wealth gap even more than the income gap—has likewise changed little in recent decades despite the emergence of a new elite of highly educated Black professionals and highly visible Black athletes and artists. The murder of George Floyd prompted a nationwide outpouring of anger and activism from white as well as Black Americans. In some quarters that outrage persists. Most of the recent changes, though, have been cosmetic. More attention paid to books, articles, films, and performances focusing on race, valuable and overdue as it is, has not lowered the social and economic obstacles facing most Black Americans. Like Obama's presidency, our current insistence on more inclusive terminology has had a negligible impact on race relations.

Why has so little been done about social and economic inequality? There are multiple hypotheses. The commitment to freedom, after all, means that within the capacious boundaries of the law, no one should prevent anyone else from thinking, saying, or doing whatever they like. That sensibility helps explain not only skyrocketing salaries and lower taxes but also how a mendacious serial swindler could become president of the United States, incite a mob to sack the nation's Capitol, and (at least so far) pay no price for it. If freedom now trumps every other value, then solidarity and social obligation are for suckers. If only a lucky few can feast in our less regulated economic environment today, so much the better for them. If others are starving, say neoliberals, they should become entrepreneurs and get rich.

The problem, of course, is that the ideology of self-help is no more tied to reality now than it was during the first Gilded Age. Millions of Americans work more than one minimum-wage job or try to stay afloat as "independent contractors" in the gig economy, while others cruise ahead. False as its promise has proved for most Americans, neoliberal ideology has seeped into every part of our culture. The top 1 percent, those at the pinnacle of our economic pyramid, attract so much attention and criticism from progressives that less has been said about the top 10 percent, the segment of professionals and denizens of the new "knowledge economy" whose household income is more than $212,110 a year. Such upper-class Americans (who often consider themselves merely upper-middle-class) once voted Republican. Recently they have become, along with nonwhite voters, the backbone of the Democratic Party. Since the New Deal coalition fractured during the 1970s, the party now depends on a different set of voters.

This is a global phenomenon. Thomas Piketty, Amory Gethin, and Clara Martínez-Toledano at the World Inequality Lab (WIL) in Paris have studied voting across fifty democracies since 1948. The evidence in *Political Cleavages and Social Inequalities* (Harvard, $39.95, 656 pp.) shows that, whereas less well-educated voters in blue-collar and low-skilled service jobs voted consistently for social-democratic parties in the postwar period, they have now gravitated to conservative parties. Parties on the Left now rely on a core of highly educated voters who work in the knowledge economy. The standard explanation for that phenomenon in the United States has stressed cultural backlash against racial unrest, the counterculture, and feminism. But the shift of less-educat-

Those who provide service work and "care work" for the young, the old, the sick, and wealthy midlife professionals are understandably tired of elites' condescension. Unctuous expressions of gratitude do not make up for long hours and lousy pay.

ed voters toward conservative parties in Europe predates by decades the mass immigration of non-Europeans often cited as its cause. The class-based party cleavages of the twentieth century, in short, have been replaced by "multi-elite party systems." Conservative parties represent high-income and low-educated voters; liberal parties "have become the parties of higher-educated voters."

In the spring of 1787, Madison argued in "Vices of the Political System of the United States" that democracies can fracture along multiple lines, of which class is only one. Among other factors, Madison also identified religion, region, occupation, culture, and the irrational attachment of some voters to individual leaders. The WIL group's evidence confirms Madison's analysis. Class is now one among other divisions, including "collective beliefs" concerning tradition, cosmopolitanism, authoritarianism, and the adequacy of neoliberal reliance on market mechanisms. In a recent working paper, "Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right," Piketty argues that left parties have abandoned redistributionist programs thanks to near unanimity on the adequacy of capitalism. Moderate left parties' acceptance of neoliberal ideas has made cultural conflicts more prominent, especially the resentment felt by the less educated toward the more educated.

By adopting the cosmopolitan worldview that, thanks to our education, seems to us self-evidently correct, we members of the college-educated elite have distanced ourselves from the cultures of those who lack not only tertiary education but also the privileges such education brings. Forgetting the advantages that the well-educated usually enjoy growing up, including intact families that prioritize schooling and instill self-discipline, we have consciously or unconsciously embraced the idea of meritocracy. Our preferred politicians, from schoolteacher McGovern and engineer Carter to technocrats Michael Dukakis, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, and Obama, hold not only bachelor's but also graduate degrees from the nation's most selective universities. Culturally, these people inhabit a different world from the rough-and-ready cowboys Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush—even if they were only fake cowboys—and the celebrity wheeler-dealer Donald Trump, even though he was only a bankrupt con man. Political scientist Walter Dean Burnham noted evidence of increasingly "polarized cultural conflict" in the United States as early as 1970. The battle lines have since become much more deeply entrenched. As Carlos Lozada showed in his exhaustive study of the books published during Trump's presidency, *What Were We Thinking* (Simon & Schuster, $17, 272 pp.), four years of listening to the president's unhinged harangues only intensified progressives' bewilderment over his election. Four years of listening to Trump's critics belittle his voters as ignorant dupes or racists only intensified their resentment.

Democratic presidents, while in office if not before or after, have shown no greater interest in the economic condition of struggling Americans than have Republicans. Millions, especially but not exclusively in the heartland, have watched their middle-class lives—and those they envisioned for their families—vanish along with the well-paying jobs that, between the Depression and the oil crisis, secured that status. Republicans tell voters that cultural elites are to blame for their situation; Democrats give them little reason to disagree. If an unstoppable "force of nature" reshaped our economy, as neoliberals have claimed for half a century, and if one party loudly endorses American traditions of patriotism, self-reliance, Evangelical Christianity, and white male supremacy while the other party makes fun of all that, then the choice for many voters will be clear.

Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor borrow terminology from David Goodhart, who contrasts "somewheres," whose lives are rooted in particular—and often decaying—places, with "anywheres," whose cosmopolitan experiences and preferences shape their very different sensibilities. Joan C. Williams has been pointing out for decades, most recently in *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America* (Harvard Business Review Press, $22.99, 192 pp.), that those who provide service work and "care work" for the young, the old, the sick, and wealthy midlife professionals are understandably tired of elites' condescension. Unctuous expressions of gratitude do not make up for long hours and lousy pay. Preserving your self-respect is hard when the entire culture undervalues your work while overvaluing those who, as John Adams put it, do nothing but push money around.

Wealthy Americans once voted Republican because they preferred low taxes and an unregulated economy. Evidently, despite their redistributionist rhetoric, so do most Democrats, whose tepid reforms offer "somewheres" little of economic value while supplying them with a steady stream of scorn. For that reason, Alan Abramowitz has argued, promises of economic redistribution might not persuade less skilled manual workers and service workers to return to the Democratic Party. We won't know unless the party at last delivers FDR's Second Bill of Rights or Rustin's Freedom Budget. Even before Trump was elected, Larry M. Bartels and Christopher H. Achen provided evidence in *Democracy for Realists* (Princ-

eton, $29.95, 408 pp.) that most people vote not on "issues" but on their personal situations, which have not improved for decades, and on their social identities, defined for millions of Americans by educational elites' disdain.

Few Americans at the lowest rungs of the economic ladder even bother to vote, as Jan-Werner Müller points out in *Democracy Rules* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27, 256 pp.). We are witnessing what Müller terms a "double secession" of the rich, who have escaped the world of public services for private enclaves, and the poor, who understandably feel excluded and ignored. The failure of Democrats and Republicans to take seriously the problem of intergenerational poverty helps explain why. Perhaps the answer, as E. J. Dionne Jr. and Miles Rapoport argue in *100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting* (The New Press, $23.24, 224 pp.), is to follow the two dozen nations where citizens are required to vote, or to follow states such as Oregon, which have instituted citizen-led initiatives to foster participation. Sadly, neither party seems interested in reforms to address the disengagement that plagues U.S. politics.

Beyond neoliberals' upward channeling of profits from labor to capital and the role of tertiary education in distancing a new elite of cosmopolitans from other Americans, two more factors help explain our current condition.

The media landscape has been transformed by technology, by the blurring of reality through disinformation, and by the paradoxical consolidation of the sources providing information. Everyone understands how the internet has created echo chambers in which Americans find their own perspectives confirmed, amplified by passion, and intensified by endless repetition. When the "primary criterion of truth" is what "those on my side believe," Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor write, partisanship becomes "almost epistemological." Trump's lies were central to his presidency, delighting his loyalists while outraging everyone else. The 24/7 news cycle of our political entertainment complex requires ever more sensational stories, or at least ever-renewed outrage at the other side's perfidy. Before the 1949 Fairness Doctrine was killed by Reagan in 1987 and the libertarians at *WIRED* magazine succeeded in making the digital world a new Wild West, nearly every community had its own local newspaper focused on local concerns. Most mid-century big-city newspapers either aspired to "objective" news coverage or had a competing newspaper to balance their perspective. Because most local papers have shrunk or vanished, many Americans now know less about community issues that really matter to their lives. Filling that vacuum, Müller argues, are obsessions with the largely symbolic, highly charged issues of the culture wars.

The presentation of competing points of view, which the Fairness Doctrine codified at least as an ideal, has been replaced by hyperbolic denunciations of the other side's idiocy or wickedness in outlets on both the Left and Right. With fewer newspapers and radio and television stations aspiring to neutrality, and more owned by conglomerates concerned with increasing "shareholder value" rather than citizens' understanding, sensationalism and polarization are unsurprising. In *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (Basic, $19.99, 688 pp.), Darren Dochuk shows that our hyper-partisan mediascape originated in mushrooming independent AM radio stations funded by southwestern wildcatters who gave thanks for their instant wealth by broadcasting the gospels of Evangelical Christianity and free-market capitalism. Even more dispiriting than the partisanship of our media is the decline of civil debate among people who disagree with each other. Because democracy is by nature conflictual, providing opportunities to persuade—and to be persuaded by—other citizens is not a luxury but a requirement for a healthy civic sphere.

"A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it," Madison wrote to a friend in 1822, "is a prologue to a Farce, or a Tragedy; or perhaps both." When Tocqueville visited the United States, he traced Americans' remarkable political engagement to their newspapers almost as much as to their proliferating voluntary associations and their service on juries. Alert to warnings about the dangers of an uninformed public, New Dealers created the Federal Communications Commission to regulate the airwaves, preserve the autonomy of local stations, and prevent the consolidation of power in a few media monopolies. By contrast, when the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was debated, Gerstle points out that neither Republicans nor Democrats "dared suggest that the broadcast/cable/satellite spectrum was a public good owned by the American people." Cassandras such as *Newsday*'s Marvin Kitman predicted that monopolies, not Naderite consumer sovereignty, would result, but such warnings went unheeded.

Although U.S. news media have always been profit driven, technological advances have made things worse. A century has passed since Walter Lippmann worried that the mass media's filtering of complex information through easily digested "stereotypes" would facilitate the manipulation of public opinion, which he had learned to do during World War I. Sophisticated and cynical commentators now use simple slogans and images to gin up audience anger, then perform that anger on air, not to educate the public but to boost ratings and sell advertising. Demagogues perform the same trick in exchange for votes. Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (PublicAffairs, $38, 704 pp.) shows how online platforms use ever more sophisticated algorithms to manipulate their users. As bots improve, AI rather than charismatic talk-show hosts might one day tell us what to think. Meanwhile, the pieces of our already segmented democratic populace drift further apart from each other. Citizens might know even less about complex issues but, thanks to our media entertainment complex, many are furious much of the time.

Rioters at the Capitol, January 6, 2021

LEV RADIN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Oddly, one of the casualties of this transformed media landscape is public engagement. Feeding our partisan passions nonstop offers the illusion of involvement in civic life, and participation is so much easier on the screen, from the comfort of one's living room, than in the messy endlessness of town meetings or party caucuses. Paolo Gerbaudo, in *The Digital Party: Political Organisation and Online Democracy* (Pluto Press, $24.95, 240 pp.), contends that parties in the United States and Europe have exchanged the time-consuming legwork of organizing for the more predictable results of focus-group-tested media blitzes. Paul Pierson and Jacob S. Hacker have aptly termed the elite manipulation of manufactured popular passions "plutocratic populism." Party membership has shrunk to the use of checkbooks and credit cards rather than human interaction.

My book *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought* (2016) traces the arduous, millennia-long developments that made possible the consolidation of self-government in the North Atlantic world. Besides institutions such as the rule of law, free and fair elections, and constitutional government, and beyond sustained commitments to the values of autonomy, equality, and popular sovereignty, I argue that democracy rests on cultural predispositions, the premises of deliberation, pluralism, and an ethic of reciprocity. Without those hidden pillars, which have taken centuries to establish, democracy can, as the ancients feared, devolve into anarchy or oligarchy. Only if citizens are willing to engage with each other, tolerate differences, and lose to their worst enemies in an election can the institutions of democracy and the commitment to equality survive. Mine was the argument of a historian studying change over a very long time, but it dovetails with the arguments of social scientists analyzing our current predicament.

Robert D. Putnam has devoted his career to tracing the ways in which cultures nurture democratic sensibilities and practices of civic engagement, as in early modern northern Italian city-states, or allow them to atrophy, as in the United States since World War II. In a seminal article of 1995 and his 2000 book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, $17.12, 544 pp.), Putnam examined the bonds that once connected Americans in civic life, worship, and recreation. He showed that those bonds were fraying as Americans became increasingly isolated from each other and inclined to value their personal preferences over solidarity or

When all goods are seen as individual goods, the idea of a public good disappears—the worst consequence of neoliberalism.

obligation. The German social theorist Jürgen Habermas has long warned against what he calls "the colonization of the lifeworld," the tendency of market strategies and economistic values to intrude into interpersonal relations, where ethical considerations should outweigh self-interest and efficiency.

In *Degenerations of Democracy*, Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor focus on exactly those issues. Democracy, they insist, is more than institutions. It "is guided by ideals" and involves "commitments and aspirations; it is defined by purposes even if they are never perfectly met." Democracy "degenerates when citizens no longer treat each other with basic respect and recognition and when citizens refuse to accept that they really belong together." When all goods are seen as individual goods, the idea of a public good disappears—the worst consequence of neoliberalism. In the book's concluding pages, they summarize the problems we face: "Declining citizen efficacy, weakening local communities, fraying intergenerational bonds, evaporating small-scale economic opportunity, and eroding social ties that had once knit citizens together across lines of difference and fostered solidarity."

Is democracy failing? Self-rule is certainly under siege in many places, particularly where it has shallow roots, but hyperbolic predictions of democracy's global demise do no good. More than nine hundred of the January 6 rioters are in jail or on trial. Although too few Republican officials have repudiated the insurrection, polls have found that most Americans were and remain disgusted by it. Remember that Trump won the 2016 Republican nomination with votes from 6 percent of the electorate and the presidency with the votes of only 28 percent. His victory hardly constituted an authoritarian wave. It is a mistake to inflate his narcissism into a political program. Müller quotes Trump's strategist Steve Bannon admitting, when asked about a philosophy of traditionalism, that he was "just making it up as I go along." So was Trump.

Yet anxieties about the future persist. The undeniable evidence of climate change sparks worries about the earth's future habitability. Equally undeniable evidence of narrowing economic prospects for young Americans fosters a different fear. Upward mobility, like economic growth, has slowed since the mid-seventies. For the first time in U.S. history, Raj Chetty has found, young Americans can no longer expect to live as well as their parents. If the three decades of unusual quiet from '45 to '75 were made possible only by the sacrifices required by a world war, the unprecedented economic explosion that followed, and the subordination of women and minorities, then it would be folly to expect or even want an echo of that era. Americans tempted by the Far Right, although far fewer than some hysterical accounts suggest, are being egged on by cynical, irresponsible Republican officials. So, should we despair?

Perhaps against the odds, almost all the authors I've discussed, as well as some of the most important Black scholars writing today, agree that the renewal of democracy is within reach. In his most recent book, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (Simon & Schuster, $19.99, 480 pp.), Putnam traces the rise of communitarian reform energies from the Progressive Era though the New Deal until the 1960s. Americans then "took their foot off the gas," and progress toward racial justice and women's rights ground to a halt. Individualism and laissez faire emerged as alternatives to the progressive strategies that had made Americans more equal and American culture more inclusive. If Americans now want renewed commitment to progressive reforms, they must forge coalitions for change. That strategy comes at a price: we must surrender our self-righteous insistence that others share our views and cooperate to achieve piecemeal, moderate reform, which requires humility and patience as well as tolerance. Dogmatism and purity tests obstruct Americans' ability to work together across lines of difference.

Purdy, notwithstanding his sharp critiques of the un- or anti-democratic aspects of the U.S. Constitution, cautions against nihilism with the same buoyancy he showed in his first book, *For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today* (1999). No source of power exists in our political system except the people, just as James Madison and James Wilson insisted in 1787. Americans need only to marshal our energies on behalf of social democracy. Purdy calls for a new "patriotism of responsibility" that firmly restores equality alongside freedom in the American pantheon.

Gerstle's title announces the *fall* as well as the earlier *rise* of the neoliberal order. He is as frustrated as many on the Left by Obama's presidency. He is heartened, though, by Biden's election and by the breadth of resistance to Trump. He interprets the incoherence of Trump's policies as evidence that neoliberal orthodoxy is coming apart. Americans can now decide whether what comes next is even more authoritarianism or a renewed democracy. Shenk's acerbic history of the deal-making centrists who have shaped party politics might suggest cynicism about the future. In the end, though, he

describes coalition building, repeatedly criticized in the book, as "a practical necessity and a moral obligation." If Kazin still sees the future through the lenses of particular interest groups rather than a shared common purpose, he does find signs of democratic renewal in widening support for racial and gender justice and a rejuvenated labor movement. Gerbaudo argues, in *The Great Recoil: Politics after Populism and Pandemic* (Verso, $21.56, 288 pp.), that we already have the template of "long-abandoned social democratic ideas" such as social care and solidarity, meaning the equal sharing of benefits as well as costs up and down the economic pyramid.

Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor likewise call for a "new solidarity." We must work to establish alliances, not deepen animosities. If we are to reverse degenerations of democracy, they argue, those experiments must include small-scale private enterprise. Some on the Left treat all business, whatever the scale, as the moral equivalent of rapacious monopoly capitalism, a "specious" as well as counterproductive equation. Many forms of life can contribute to democracy. Only when all goods are seen as individual consumer goods do we lose sight of the public good, the ideal that animated Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Wilson. The "expressive individualism" sometimes extolled by the Left as well as the Right encourages selfishness and undercuts commitments to rebuild democracy, a never-finished "telic project" that, like a horizon, we can approach but never reach.

We need local experiments that nurture interaction, in civil society as much as in politics, just as John Dewey argued in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), his spirited and still-convincing reply to Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922). Only if we encourage inquiry, experimentation, and cooperation from early childhood onward, Dewey counseled, can citizens learn to internalize the practices as well as the ethic of democracy. Central to Müller's *Democracy Rules*, as it was to his earlier book *Contesting Democracy* (2011), is Dewey's conviction that uncertainty, open-endedness, tolerance, and community are the heart of democracy, an argument Müller bolsters by citing many anti-dogmatic European political theorists. Müller adds two nonnegotiable rules, still sadly denied by many Americans: people cannot have their own facts, and no citizens can be denied equal standing.

Having long been denied just that equal standing, Black Americans could be forgiven for despairing about racial justice. Many Black writers and artists have expressed doubts that white Americans will ever surrender their inherited racism. But not everybody. The distinguished philosopher Danielle Allen argues, in Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry's fine collection *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Harvard, $35, 464 pp.), that King called for integration rather than desegregation because he wanted not simply legal rights for Black Americans but ethical regeneration for all Americans. If members of all races and ethnicities were to adopt the principle of "non-domination" and see each other as ends rather than means, as Jesus (and later Kant) urged, the neoliberal me-first ethic might no longer poison interpersonal relations.

If Americans were to understand the "non-sacrificeability" of positive as well as negative freedom, the freedom *to* rather than merely the freedom *from*—a distinction Dewey inherited from Aristotle and that King employed in his most important speeches—they might see the need for solidarity as well as liberty. King had in mind legally unenforceable duties "to recognize and enable," in Allen's words, "the equal capacities of all to deliberate, decide, and take responsibility." King realized that the United States could approach its ideals only if all citizens internalized such ethical imperatives. As a Baptist preacher powerfully influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, King appreciated the difficulty of that challenge. Yet as King understood, legal, social, and even economic equality remain necessary but not sufficient conditions for both a culture of integration and Dewey's ethic of democracy.

In his new book, *The Third Reconstruction: America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century* (Basic, $27, 288 pp.), Peniel E. Joseph contends that we have now entered a new stage of American history. The first Reconstruction followed the Civil War, *Brown v. Board of Education* inaugurated the second, and the third began with Obama's presidency. Despite the disappointment felt by those who imagined, naïvely, that Obama's election would usher in a post-racial America, and despite the continuing nightmares of intergenerational poverty, police murders, and mass incarceration, Joseph sees encouraging signs. The swearing in of Obama, Kamala Harris, Raphael Warnock, and Ketanji Brown Jackson and the dismantling of "ancient memorials to racism" across the nation signal a long-overdue reckoning with Lost Cause mythology and racial injustice.

Both earlier Reconstructions ended prematurely. Americans today, Joseph concludes, can complete the Third Reconstruction by choosing "love over fear, community building over anxiety," and "equity over racial privilege," thereby nurturing the culture of encounter envisioned by Pope Francis. Despite the obstacles identified in the works discussed in this article, I share the determination expressed in Joseph's closing words: "We have a grave political and moral choice to make. I choose hope."

On Sundays during this liturgical year, Catholics will read the Gospel of St. Matthew. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers the wisdom we need. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed too are the merciful and the peacemakers. Those who would follow him, Jesus instructs his disciples, must love their enemies. Those words, too often defanged by familiarity, issue a challenge for all Americans interested in redeeming the promise of democracy.

JAMES T. KLOPPENBERG, *Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard, is author of* Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition *(Princeton) and* Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought *(Oxford)*.

Want to discuss this article in your classroom, reading group, or Commonweal Local Community? A free discussion guide is available at **cwlmag.org/discuss**

Elegy for My People

Mark Phillips

How did the white working class fall for a suit whose catchphrase was "You're fired"?

The hands of my male kin were calloused and grimed. One of my uncles was missing two fingers. These men woke at night to cough up coal dust and fly ash and tobacco tar, and they treated their joint and back pain with a home remedy of beer and whiskey. They refused to use hearing protection and wore hardhats solely because of employer and government mandates, and by age sixty were prone to ask, "What? Why are you mumbling?" Of course, they refused to wear hearing aids. Many of them were also deaf to the voices of people who had a different skin color or religion. They denied that women should have the same rights as men. And yet, to pay for the higher education of sons and daughters alike, they worked overtime in the mill or factory, which they referred to as "the plant."

The shared identity of these men remained partially mine even while I was teaching at colleges. I kept close my heritage of pride and stubbornness, loyalty to family and charitable duty to neighbors and friends. Yet well before the working class shed me, I tried to distance myself from it. Like most of my peers in the late 1960s and early '70s, as a teenager I believed I had outgrown home. I danced in stylish rebellion to musicians selected and promoted by record companies and radio stations, to the Rolling Stones and Beatles and Doors, to the beat of millionaires. In John Lennon's balladic "Working Class Hero," the darkest of his songs, the former working-class boy sings with concurrent sympathy and rage of a laboring class kept "doped by religion, sex, and TV"—so it can suppose it is "classless and free." My friends and I sang along, some of us doped by dope, and all of us half deaf and blind to our family and neighbors.

Most of the women in my family and neighborhood were indeed religious, but they were not drugged by their faith. From church sermons and the Bible they drew some of the strength they needed. The men tended to practice their religion perfunctorily or stayed home while their wives and children attended worship services. As for TV, it was consumed soporifically, the way alcohol was consumed—to relax a sore man as he kicked back in an easy chair in his parlor, still haunted by the racket of industrial machinery or the rattling of coal falling through chutes.

Despite their pride, I never knew anyone in my working-class neighborhood who seemed to believe he or she was "classless and free." One evening when my father and I were in a town, we crossed paths with a man who was wearing a fine suit and expensive shoes. Dad didn't know the man, but he spat on the concrete and muttered, "You son of a bitch."

I thought my elders were insensitive to the suffering of people subject to poverty, oppression, and war, and many of them were, but I now cringe when I recall asking my father whether he would change anything if he could live his life over. He replied firmly, "No." A welder in a coal-fired power plant near the city of Buffalo, he was in his early forties and had been diagnosed with prostate cancer, which had spread incurably into his pelvis and spine. He was in constant pain and still working at the plant with no intention of stopping while he had a family to support. I asked yet another insensitive question: Suppose the fumes, ash, and dust in the plant had caused his cancer, wouldn't he go to college and try for a better job if he had it to do over again? "No," he said again. "My friends work at the plant." The same plant provided me

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

with summer employment. I shoveled coal spilled from conveyors, vacuumed ankle-deep fly ash from the tops of boilers, and swept black dust and grit from concrete floors. I knew that on the days when my father was in too much pain to work, I could find him in one of the maintenance department storage rooms, where his friends had hidden him as they finished his tasks to keep the plant bosses from discovering that an employee was dying on company time and thus failing to generate profit for the men in fine suits and expensive shoes.

One morning, my foreman instructed me to spend the day intercepting coal trucks from Pennsylvania as they approached the gatehouse and to weigh them at a trucking company up the road. Some of the drivers had been selling portions of their loads before reaching the plant. One I caught promised he would never again cheat the power company and asked me to misreport the weight of his load. He told me he had a family to support and would be fired if the coal company learned of his dishonesty. When I later told my father that I had refused to lie, he looked at me as if I might be a changeling. Then he grimaced and stood up from his easy chair—a bottle of Darvon within reach on the end table—changed the television channel, and said, as he turned to study me a bit more, "I didn't care for that show."

To most of the men in my family, "working class" meant "white working class." Black Americans employed in industry, even if they labored side by side with whites on an assembly line or tended the furnaces of a foundry, were not considered the real working class; instead, all Black people were thought to constitute a class of their own, regardless of their jobs, income, or education. Another assumption—in this case correct—was that most labor unions existed for the benefit of white men.

Bigotry was a kind of family tradition. My father's grandfather was a Welsh-Irish Protestant who settled briefly in Canada and then in Buffalo for the remainder of his life. He was killed in a construction accident, as were two of his adult sons later on, but lived long enough to pass down an ancient distrust and hatred of Catholics.

Both sides of my family attempted to preserve their racial isolation within walls of prejudice, though not always with complete success. My maternal grandparents, who owned a small farm in western New York, were displeased when one of their daughters married a Seneca man who lived on the nearby territory of the Tonawanda Seneca Nation. They loved their German-Seneca grandchildren, and yet, whenever an object was missing from the farm, they lazily assumed that

A New Deal–era mural by Charles Ward celebrating U.S. industry, Trenton, New Jersey

"some lazy Indian" had filched it. My grandmother had a Seneca friend who lived in the Nation, and after her friend's brother committed suicide, she and my grandfather cleaned the room where it happened. I was spending that weekend on the farm and saw Grandmother out on the lawn, her hands plunged in a pail of sudsy water. I asked her what she was doing. "Cleaning curtains," she replied, and lifted cloth coated with hair and grey matter. She asked, "Now whoever would have thought Charlie Moses had so much brains?"

Such white working-class bigotry was of course not confined to my family. From schoolmates and neighborhood friends, I learned various slurs against people of other races and ethnicities. My high school football coach—his name today memorialized in the school on its Sports Wall of Fame—never sounded hesitant when he used racial epithets in the presence of his white players. Many in the white working class fell, and still fall, for the dog whistles of politicians who benefit from a divided working class. Back before the permanent closing of factories became routine in the Northeast and Midwest, white workers also fell for the comforting fantasy that any American could get and stay ahead with hard work and that only the lazy were left behind. By believing that myth to be true, the white working class did its part—knowingly or not—to leave behind people who were anything but lazy.

One day my father and I were walking from his car to War Memorial Stadium in a largely Black section of Buffalo to see an NFL game. The sidewalk on both sides of Jefferson Avenue was crowded with white ticket-holders hurrying to the game, some of whom looked unmistakably afraid. One man in a Buffalo Bills sweatshirt kept checking his back pocket to make sure his wallet was still there, so I started keeping an eye on my father's back pocket. He took me into a fast-food place and bought us hamburgers to eat before we reached the stadium, where the food was too expensive. After we left, he discovered that the Black cashier had accidentally given him too much change. He turned back and returned the money to her. Later he explained to me that "they would have taken it out of her pay." I knew that by "they" he meant people who lived somewhere else and wore fine suits and expensive shoes. And these days, whenever I think about that moment of decency on Jefferson Avenue, I wonder how much better off this country's working class would be if class always trumped racial prejudice.

But it is supercilious to confess the sins of others, or to generalize about an entire class of people. Such generalizations too often warrant another kind of bigotry. In any case, the unignorable fact—troubling or comforting, depending on one's point of view—is that bigotry, an ugly vice, can coexist with virtue. As he was dying, my sometimes-bigoted father limped in and out of the power plant until he could no longer climb the stairs to punch in at the mechanical time clock near the employee locker room. That device must have reminded him twice a day of how little time he had left to live. And my sometimes-bigoted, exhausted mother took good care of him when he was bedridden, injecting him with morphine, giving him sponge baths, rubbing salve on his bed sores, holding his hand as he moaned, emptying the bedpan—all while continuing to cook meals, clean the house, and raise the children.

Nor should I forget that my bigoted high-school football coach was always kind to me and was the only one of my teachers or coaches who paid a visit to my family to express sympathy after notice of my father's death appeared in the local newspaper. My uncle Al, a steamfitter and the most bigoted of my kin, loaned me money to build an addition and put in utilities when my wife and I were living in a small cabin without electricity or running water. After I made a few monthly payments, he refused to accept more. Then there was my grandfather Phillips, who loved and married a Catholic despite his anti-Catholic bigotry.

By condemning the white working class generally, I would also condemn my neighbor, a retired phone-company linesmen who is not a bigot, and who has a damaged back and worn-out shoulders, knees, and hips and had to cash in his 401k and sell the timber on his property to a logging company to pay off his medical bills. He has made no profit from his small, part-time sawmill because he so frequently mills for people he knows, and says, when they try to pay him, "I don't take money from friends and neighbors."

By discounting the sacrifices made by flawed members of my family, I would fail to acknowledge that, while all humans are fallen and some much farther than others, most are also open to love. How can I not forgive my kin for their bigotry? One good answer would be that such forgiveness is not mine to give. So perhaps my question should be: How can I not love them?

In his essay "The Disadvantages of an Elite Education," published in the *American Scholar*, William Deresiewicz, who had studied and taught in the Ivy League, wrote, "It didn't dawn on me that there might be a few holes in my education until I was about 35. I'd just bought a house, the pipes needed fixing, and the plumber was standing in my kitchen. There he was, a short, beefy guy with a goatee and a Red Sox cap and a thick Boston accent, and I suddenly learned that I didn't have the slightest idea what to say to someone like him."

I've never had Deresiewicz's problem. My wife complains that whenever a plumber or electrician is called to our home, I waste too much of his time by—as she once put it—"bullshitting with him." She likes to remind me, "These guys charge by the hour." I can't help myself. It's a little like talking with the ghost of my father or one of my uncles.

I suppose I have avoided Deresiewicz's problem in part because my only experience with elite education came when I was somehow accepted into the Radcliffe Publishing Course,

which has since relocated to Columbia University. I had my own kind of communication problem that summer at Harvard. I soon discovered that I didn't have the slightest idea of what to say to most of my fellow students, few of whom had grown up in working-class families or attended public colleges. I kept to myself and stayed in my room as much as possible. When venturing out to lectures and workshops, I carried a large working-class chip on my shoulder.

One evening I did join several fellow students to share a joint—a social activity that, I assumed, would require no cultured conversation. After the joint had gone round the room twice, one of our group began to hum bars from a symphony by Beethoven. He was soon joined by a second person, who of course was not me. It would not have been me even if I had been familiar with the symphony. It was both hilarious and humiliating to hear these stoned Brahmins humming classical music together. Years would pass before I learned what symphony they were badly imitating.

Later, when I taught at colleges, I got to know several professors who had grown up in the working class. What discreet language of mannerisms and attitudes initially drew us to one another in our Pygmalion roles? At a party thrown by a professor and attended for the most part by other professors, most of the guests were standing and conversing in small groups in the kitchen and Victorian dining room. I settled into a parlor chair to talk with a married couple who were seated on the couch, working-class neighbors of the host. Soon we were joined by another professor, who had grown up in the working class and probably on some level recalled that her kin avoided standing at social gatherings because they were tired and their feet ached.

If you were to accuse me of impoverishing my social and emotional life by identifying so stubbornly with my working-class background, you would have a point. Still, I have my people.

Or do I? In recent years it has been difficult for me to converse with some of my working-class relatives and neighbors without their thrusting their diehard support of our former president between us. There was a time when we rarely talked about politics, but now I feel as though I am always being tested: Are you one of us? And I want to ask them: Who have you become? Why so many in the working class support the man in the big suit and dress shoes—a man whose catchline was "You're fired!"—is a question the media have tried to answer by sending reporters on cultural safaris into working-class diners and homes or by harvesting tidbits from the research of sociologists and political scientists. The various theories often contradict one another, but most of them imply the same condescending question: Why would these people support a political candidate who will surely work against their material interests? The journalists don't actually say or write, "How can anyone be so stupid?"—but they don't need to; it's in their tone.

I don't pretend to have a fully formed explanation for the working class's flight from some of its old values and from the Democratic Party, but I am sure that stupidity has little to do with it. If you draw a line from Bill Clinton's support for NAFTA to Hillary Clinton's remark about "deplorables," that line will run through a lot of other betrayals and slights by Democratic politicians. You can begin to see why, for some of those working-class voters who feel they have lost everything, revenge might taste sweet even when it involves self-harm.

My father built a small off-grid hunting cabin on land he had purchased in the hills seventy miles south of Buffalo, spending weekends and vacations digging the foundation, pouring the footer, sawing lumber, pounding nails, giving materiality to a dream he'd had for years. One weekend we found that someone had broken in, had emptied a bottle of whiskey, and had trashed the place. "If I ever find out who did it," my father said, "I'll do the same to his house. If he doesn't own a house, I'll do it to his car." I pointed out what my father already knew: the police would most likely never catch the vandal, but my father might be arrested and go to jail. He smiled and nodded, and then said, "It'll be worth it." I said nothing, but thought, "Not to me."

So here I am: someone neither rich nor poor who feels alienated from the American middle class, whatever that now means. Someone who identifies with more of the dead than the living. Maybe I'm now what John Lennon seemed to think was impossible—classless and free—but if I am, my freedom is disturbing. The working class I knew is mostly gone. I feel like I did two autumns ago when I undertook a bushwhack through thick forest in the region where I live and was enchanted by the sights and sounds around me until suddenly I realized I had lost my way back home.

MARK PHILLIPS *is the author of* My Father's Cabin *and* Love and Hate in the Heartland.

There was a time when we rarely talked about politics, but now I feel as though I am always being tested: Are you one of us? And I want to ask them: Who have you become?

Blinding Injustice

Half a million Iranian protesters have suffered serious eye injuries after police fired on them with birdshot. Here are eight faces of courage.

On September 16 of last year, a twenty-two-year-old student named Mahsa Amini died in a hospital in Tehran after being arrested by Iran's morality police for having failed to wear her hijab correctly. Witnesses said the police had beaten her severely. Amini's death set off mass demonstrations throughout Iran. There had been similar protests in the years since 2009, but none as large or widespread as these: tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in more than 130 cities and towns. According to the Human Rights Activists News Agency, the Iranian government has arrested almost 20,000 Iranians and killed at least 527 (including 71 children) since the protests began.

More than five hundred protesters have suffered serious eye injuries after security forces fired "birdshot"—rubber bullets or metal pellets—at their heads. Medical records from several hospitals and clinics show that the range of injuries includes mutilated retinas, severed optic nerves, and punctured irises. Many protesters have no choice but to seek treatment in government-run health-care facilities, which are often patrolled by security forces. Some of the wounded have been denied treatment, and others have been arrested after surgery, according to lawyers and doctors.

Many of the young Iranians who have lost an eye say they do not regret participating in the protests. Kowsar (Mahbanou) Khoshnoudi-Kia, a member of the women's national archery team whose left eye was blinded during a protest in Kermanshah in December, said in a video post, "I don't feel miserable because of what happened. I lost some things but gained many others." On her Instagram feed, Ghazal Ranjkesh, a law student from the southern city of Bandar Abbas, posted a photo of her face with dozens of wounds caused by birdshot pellets. The photo is captioned, "Why did you hit me? Why were you smiling when you shot at me? I had very beautiful eyes, everyone was telling me that." So far, the government has done nothing to prevent such injuries; the security forces continue to fire "birdshot" at protesters. Meanwhile, doctors who have spoken out against this barbaric crowd-control method have been threatened, dismissed, or even arrested.

These photographs were taken by an Iran-based photojournalist who must remain anonymous for his own safety.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Kimia is twenty-seven years old and lives in Tehran. She earned a bachelor's degree in physical education. On October 12, she lost sight in one eye due to paintball bullets fired by Iranian security forces in Tehran.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Zoha, a tattoo artist, is twenty-five years old and lives in Isfahan, Iran. On October 1, she was shot in the left eye during the anti-regime protests in Isfahan, permanently losing her vision in that eye.

Yaser is thirty-six and lives in Hamedan, Iran. He is a plasterer by trade. He lost his eye during a protest in Hamedan on September 20.

Kowsar is a twenty-three-year-old actor who lives in Tehran. On October 12, she lost sight in one eye after being hit by pellets fired by Iranian security forces in Tehran.

Mohsen is thirty-one years old and lives in Amol, Iran. He sells tombstones for a living. On October 26 of last year, Iranian security forces shot him in the left eye at an anti-regime protest in Amol.

LEFT:
Behzad is forty-three years old and lives in Karaj, Iran. He is an accountant in a private corporation. On November 15, he lost his left eye after being shot at close range by a member of the security forces in Tehran.

Heresh is a thirty-nine-year-old actor and director who lives in Sanandaj, where security forces shot him in the left eye on September 22. He lost the eye.

Mersedeh, a thirty-eight-year-old physical-education teacher living in Tehran, lost her right eye while protesting in October 2022.

Dr. Christopher Kerr speaks to a patient in a still from the documentary *Death Is But a Dream*.

Final Visions

Paul Lauritzen

A hospice doctor makes sense of end-of-life dreams.

In April 2018, my wife of thirty-eight years died from complications of ovarian cancer. During her three-year ordeal, it seemed that every twist and turn of the disease could be predicted by a lab value or framed in terms of a statistical probability. Right up until the end. In her last days, it was not blood work or vital signs that foretold her death. It was a dream. If that sounds strange, it is because our society mostly shuns death and consequently knows little about dying.

At the time, I certainly knew little about the process of dying. Of course, I knew that the treatments Lisa was receiving were not working, but her doctors never spoke of how she would die or how close to the end she was. Only when she entered hospice were we told that she probably had weeks to live, not months. Even then, however, there was no discussion of how she would likely die or how we would know that death was very near. Thus, when she was admitted overnight to an in-patient facility to get control of symptoms we were not able to address at home, I was unprepared for the conversation I had with the hospice physician the next morning.

MICHAEL PUGLIA

"Medically," Dr. D said, "Lisa is much better. Her vital signs are strong, and she is not experiencing any nausea. This is the good news. The bad news," he continued, "is that your wife called the nurses in the middle of the night to say that she saw her parents on a boat outside the window beckoning her to come. I know this may not make sense," he went on, "but we see this repeatedly in our patients. When patients report a vision like this, they almost always die within a day or two. I'm so sorry." My wife died a little more than twenty-four hours later.

I have spent a lot of time since my wife's death trying to make sense of this paradox. In the high-tech, evidence-driven world of contemporary medicine, it was a dream that led a physician to conclude that my wife was dying. How was that possible?

To try to answer that question I researched end-of-life experiences among hospice patients, but initially found little scholarly literature. I talked to friends and family about Lisa's experiences and heard plenty of anecdotes about near-death experiences but not much about end-of-life dreams. Then I discovered the work of Christopher Kerr, MD, PhD. Although the experience of pre-death dreams and visions predicting death is well known in hospice circles, Kerr is one of the only physicians in the country who has studied this phenomenon in depth. He undertook the study of end-of-life dreams and visions (ELDVs) because he repeatedly encountered patients whose dreams and visions were important to them and were frequently predictive of death. Yet, without research findings that validated the importance of such dreams, Kerr could not get physicians to take them seriously.

Ask hospice nurses about this phenomenon and they will likely tell you about the many, many patients for whom they have cared who were comforted by end-of-life experiences. Yet the phenomenon is not well known outside hospice circles, and even in hospices many physicians treat such experiences as forms of delirium and medicate patients when they report them.

Kerr is not surprised when physicians do not take ELDVs seriously, for he was once such a physician. He tells the story of caring for a patient early in his career. He believed the patient was not about to die and had instructed a nurse to start a course of IV fluids and antibiotics. The nurse responded skeptically about the need for fluids and antibiotics because, she said, the patient was dying. When Kerr asked her how she knew, she responded that the patient was seeing his deceased mother.

Kerr eventually decided to study the end-of-life experiences of his patients to see if he could empirically document the role of dreams and visions in the dying. In a series of research studies conducted over the past ten years, Kerr has generated a substantial body of evidence that ELDVs are common, therapeutically important, and frequently predictive of imminent death. Yet, despite the rigor of the research, it has been an uphill battle to get clinicians to take end-of-life experiences seriously. I asked Kerry Egan, a former hospice chaplain who has also written on her experiences with dying patients, about the reception Kerr's work has received among physicians, and she was very direct: most of them remain skeptical if not dismissive. "It breaks my heart," she said, "but it is not surprising." The account in her own book, *On Living*, of the role of the hospice chaplain may explain why physicians resist Kerr's findings. The role of the chaplain is not to preach or teach; it is instead to "create a space—a sacred time and place—in which people can look at the lives they've led and try to figure out what it all means to them." End-of-life dreams, she told me, help patients do that; physicians typically do not.

Given how generally irreverent Kerr is, he would probably not use the language of sacred time and space, but Kerr knows from both his experience and his research that end-of-life dreams help the dying find meaning. He came to believe that even if physicians resisted this critical knowledge, patients would welcome it, and so he began to see his primary audience as patients and their families and not just his fellow physicians. For that reason, to get his message out, he turned from academic writing to storytelling. His first effort in this direction was a TEDx talk on the topic of whether death can be illuminating. The talk was wildly successful, and the media coverage of the talk led to a book contract for *Death Is But a Dream*. Because he is a clinician and not a writer, the publisher wanted him to work with a ghostwriter to produce a manuscript. By all accounts, the collaboration did not go well, and Kerr turned to a friend and literary scholar Carine M. Mardorossian for help. Mardorossian is a professor of English and global gender and sexuality studies at the University of Buffalo. Though she had not written creative nonfiction before collaborating with Kerr, she knew from her academic work the power of listening to the marginalized.

It was a commitment to telling Kerr's patients' stories that made the collaboration work. The previous ghostwriter who worked with Kerr wanted to highlight themes in the research and not the stories

In my wife's last days, it was not blood work or vital signs that foretold her death. It was a dream.

of the patients. Mardorossian understood that, like medicine, the humanities are often death-denying. Scholars write with ease about illness and its treatment, but they are not comfortable writing about death itself. She knew that in listening carefully to his patients and their experiences at the end of life, Kerr was rejecting the strict binary of life versus death. Dying, he seemed to say, was a way of living. To listen to the dying was to attend to a form of living that is frequently ignored.

When I asked Mardorossian what it was like to collaborate with Kerr, her admiration and respect for him were palpable. "Chris constantly changed anything I wrote for him in the first person from 'I' to 'we.' I had to fight for the first person, because Chris always wanted to give credit to others." This makes it seem like Mardorossian wrote and Kerr revised, but Mardorossian is clear that this was not the case. She learned as much about writing from Kerr as he did from her. "It was like he had a (narrative) chessboard in his head," Mardorossian said. "I would see the next move in the section we were working on, and Chris would see the next five moves almost immediately."

Mardorossian is particularly fond of a chapter about love in *Death Is But a Dream*. It tells the stories of some of Kerr's elderly patients whose love confounds our culture's focus on romantic love as only for the young. One of Kerr's patients, Benny, suffered from what is commonly referred to as broken-heart syndrome, or in technical terms, stress-induced takotsubo cardiomyopathy. Eighty-seven years old and in good health when his wife, Gloria, died suddenly from an infection, Benny was inconsolable and visited his wife's grave every day, sometimes several times a day. On Valentine's Day, two months after Gloria died, Benny's daughter found her father at the cemetery in subzero weather tracing an outline of a heart in the snow around Gloria's tombstone. Benny's health declined dramatically after his wife's death, and this ill-advised trip to the cemetery accelerated the decline. Yet when he was admitted to hospice, Benny found a kind of peace, because almost immediately he began dreaming of Gloria. He could no longer visit his wife at the cemetery, but it was as if he visited her in his dreams, or so he insisted. Benny made it clear that when he dreamed, he was in his wife's presence.

Kerr's comment on this case helps explain why he is passionate about listening to the dreams and stories of his patients: there is wisdom at the end of life that is missed if one thinks dying is only about death and not also about life. "Old couples," Kerr writes, "have much to teach us about true love. Their bond requires no big declarations, loyalty tests, or dramatic endings.… They continue to feel and believe in it even when the person through whom that love originated leaves them. For elderly patients especially, their love for their other half is who they are. Jobs, ambitions, hobbies, mortgages, and plans have come and gone. What is left and what matters is the relationships they have maintained, cherished, and tended to through a lifetime of small gestures and greetings, loving glances and humorous words, shared stories and forgiven faults."

If Kerr's academic research has not gotten much traction among clinicians, the more popular presentation of his work has struck a chord. The TEDx talk has had nearly five million views. The book that followed has sold extremely well and has been translated and distributed in ten other countries. A documentary based on the book has aired nationally on more than thirty PBS-affiliated television stations.

The more I read about Kerr's work and watched videotapes of his interaction with patients, the more I wanted to meet the person himself. So I wrote to ask if we could meet via Zoom to discuss his work. During that meeting, I asked if I might come to Buffalo to interview him and some of his colleagues. Without hesitation, he agreed, and the next day sent me a list of seven colleagues who had also agreed to meet with me.

Although the stereotype of a hospice physician is that of a kindly grandfather, Kerr is sixty years old and radiates a kind of barely contained kinetic energy. In fact, knowing that he was originally from Canada, I couldn't help but wonder if he was a former hockey player. When I asked, his characteristically self-deprecating response was: "No, but I guess my face does look like it has seen some pucks." Except when he is at home on his working horse farm, you are likely to see him in an open-collar dress shirt and sport coat, with a stethoscope around his neck and his glasses pushed up on his head. But you get the sense that he wishes he could wear jeans, a t-shirt, and a baseball cap to work. His colleagues describe him as gruff, rebellious, someone who paints outside the lines, passionate, a fierce advocate for his patients, and a person with no tolerance for injustice.

Kerr's mentor Robert Milch—a legendary figure in the history of Hospice and Palliative Care of Buffalo—used to tell the story that his father believed that a good surgeon needed three things: a sense of humility, a sense of humor, and an incision. The story might be adapted to say that a hospice physician needs three things as well: humility, humor, and a significant encounter with death. Kerr has the first two in abundance, and he traces his career trajectory to losing his father at the age of twelve.

Kerr is affable and engaging, and if you talk to one of his colleagues or friends, it won't be long before you hear a favorite Chris Kerr story. One particular story I heard seemed to provide a measure of the man. It has to do with a patient named Ann Gadanyi, a devout Catholic who was dying after a twelve-year battle with breast cancer. Gadanyi was fifty-six years old when she entered in-patient hospice care around Thanksgiving. Her daughters, Juliana (seventeen) and Emily (twenty-five), pretty much took up residence with their mother in her room at Hospice Buffalo. As Christmas approached, Ann told Kerr that she wanted to spend Christmas Eve at home, go to Christmas Eve Mass to hear her daughter sing in the choir, and wake on Christmas morning at home.

Kerr explained that this plan would be difficult because Ann was receiving medication through IV lines to which she was tethered and without the IVs, pain and bleeding could be serious problems. However, he told her, if she had her heart set on this plan, they could probably make it happen. Kerr, who is neither Catholic nor particularly religious, concocted a plan that involved his drawing up syringes full of medications to take to church and home, accompanying Ann and her daughters to Mass, returning to their home afterward to give Ann the injections, and then returning later that day to get his patient back to hospice. Ann was so grateful for Kerr's help that she called a reporter at the *Buffalo News* to ask if the reporter would do a story on Kerr. When the reporter asked Kerr why he had gone to such lengths to help, Kerr replied simply: "Sometimes the best medicine is not medicine."

I like this way of putting the point, but it may be more accurate to say that sometimes the best medicine is not medicine *as it has come to be practiced outside hospice*. John Tangeman, the administrative medical director of Hospice Buffalo, believes that being a hospice physician is distinctive. "Being a hospice doctor is doctoring in its purest form. It is old-style doctoring, which involves listening both to the patient and to his or her body." Hospice physicians rarely need to rely on technology; they can focus on the person before them. Listening and touching, Tangeman insists, are more important than technology.

Perhaps this is why Hospice and Palliative Care of Buffalo has such an extensive array of services that might initially strike some as non-medical. I spoke to Abby Unger, the director of expressive therapies at Hospice Buffalo, about her team's work, which includes music, art, massage, and dance therapy. Prior to the pandemic, there was a twelve-member team that delivered a variety of techniques for engaging the bodies of patients. Unger told me that when these interventions are structured so that family members are present, everyone seems to benefit. As Unger puts it, when patients get a massage, family members seem to relax as if they, too, were getting a massage.

Unger makes another point that echoes what Tangeman and Kerr say about caring for hospice patients. "When people come to us," she says, "their whole lives come." This may be why home care is so important; home is often where patients' families are, and caring for patients in their homes may, as Kerr puts it, be the best medicine. It is striking that Hospice Buffalo has twelve physicians who see patients in their homes.

I had come to Hospice Buffalo to better understand the phenomenon of pre-death dreams and visions and how they might be predictive of imminent death. What I discovered is that pre-death dreams and visions are so much more than predictors of death. I'm certain Kerr's research group was glad to document that ELDVs foretell death, but that is not why they studied ELDVs. Instead, they were interested in these experiences for the same reason they were interested in the role of new medications for treating pain, fatigue, and depression. It is why they examined cost-saving measures with at-home hospice care or how music could help patients tell life stories or how different delivery systems for end-of-life medications might be more efficacious. In every case, the research was designed to demonstrate how a novel approach to dying patients could be shown to have better outcomes for patients and families. It is certainly what they found in studying pre-death dreams and visions.

Consider just some of the findings from the small mountain of data on end-of-life experiences Kerr's research team has accumulated. In his studies, Kerr found that close to 90 percent of patients report having at least one dream or vision that could be classified as an end-of-life experience. These dreams are distinguished from regular dreams by being especially vivid. When asked to rate the degree of realism of such dreams, most rate them ten out of ten—the highest degree of realism. Patients often report that they are "more real than real." They occur both during periods of sleep and periods of wakefulness, and they are easily distinguished from hallucinations or bouts of delirium.

Kerr has also tracked the content of the dreams, their frequency, their relationship to time of death, and the subjective significance that patients and their families placed in them. Here, too, the results were striking. Because Kerr began studying end-of-life dreams when patients first entered hospice and were not all imminently dying, he could monitor the dreams over many months. He found a predictable pattern. As patients approached death, their dreams increased in frequency and their content changed. Earlier in their time in hospice, patients reported dreams about living friends and relatives; as the patients approached death, the dreams were mostly filled with deceased family and friends. It was also clear that the dreams involving family members who had already died provided the most comfort. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being

Earlier in their time in hospice, patients reported dreams about living friends and relatives; as the patients approached death, the dreams were mostly filled with deceased family and friends.

There is one finding of Kerr's research that is somewhat surprising. Almost none of his patients had a dream or vision that was explicitly religious.

the highest level of comfort, dreams with dead relatives and friends scored 4.08. Dreams with living friends and family provided much less comfort, scoring only 2.86.

Although Kerr's research has focused primarily on the effects end-of-life dreams have on his patients' acceptance of death, his research team has also examined whether these experiences affected the process of bereavement for loved ones. Here, too, he found a positive correlation between pre-death dreams and the ability to accept death and loss. Not surprisingly, the more at peace someone is with his or her own dying, the easier bereavement is for those left behind. Because end-of-life experiences often bring peace to those who are facing death, encouraging dying patients to talk about these experiences with their families is a way to care for those families and help facilitate the grieving process.

Kerr's team is working on a "toolkit" on dreams and visions to give to patients and family members when a dying person enters hospice. The toolkit provides about as clear a statement of why such work is important as I have seen. "End-of-life Dreams and Visions (ELDVs)," the toolkit reads, "show that the experiences at the end of life can be full of dignity, strength, and grace. While many envision dying as a bleak or hopeless time, ELDVs reveal the heart of the human experience and re-contextualize death by emphasizing the connections between end-of-life experiences and the living."

The evidence that Kerr and the research team at Hospice Buffalo has documented about the role ELDVs can play in providing meaning and comfort for individuals at the end of life is important and should be better known. But it is also important to note that not everyone has an end-of-life dream and not all such dreams are in fact comforting. Kerr's team also emphasizes that their research does not seek to explain pre-death visions. They make it clear that their research focuses only on the experiences of patients and families in the face of the vivid dreams and visions they have documented. And most patients are not particularly concerned about explanations; it is enough that the experiences provide meaning and comfort.

In this regard, there is one finding of Kerr's research that is somewhat surprising. Almost none of his patients had a dream or vision that was explicitly religious. I asked Kerry Egan whether that was true in her experience working with dying patients. She emphatically agreed with Kerr on this. "In all my years of listening to the dreams of my patients," she said, "I never once heard a patient talk of seeing Jesus in a dream." Yet, Egan believes that the dreams are nevertheless often profoundly spiritual. Although religious figures rarely appear in end-of-life dreams, deceased family members, particularly parents, are pervasive. And as Egan makes clear in *On Living*, when hospice chaplains spend time talking to patients about their families, they are having religious conversations. Talking about families, she writes, "is how we talk about God. This is how we talk about the meaning of our lives. That is how we talk about the big spiritual questions of human existence."

I think this is why Egan says that the role of a hospice chaplain is to create a kind of sacred space in which people can examine their lives and try to make sense of them at the end. It seems to me that this is precisely what Kerr and his team are attempting to do when they ask patients to talk about their end-of-life dreams and visions and to share them with their families. To be sure, creating such a space requires treating the medical problems that may prevent patients from trying to make sense of their lives as they die, but it requires much more than that.

For this reason, I came to see the stethoscope that was always around Kerr's neck less as a diagnostic tool than as a symbol of how he sees his role as a physician caring for the dying. He is at the bedside to listen to his patients—and not just to their heart and lungs. He is there to listen to the story of their lives. This is essentially what Egan said of hospice chaplains. They are with patients, she said, not as storytellers but as "story holders." That's not a bad way to think of the work of Christopher Kerr and his colleagues. They are a remarkable group of "story holders" who have discovered the power of end-of-life dreams to help the dying find meaning.

Learning about the therapeutic power of pre-death dreams has not answered my original question about how such dreams can predict death, but knowing that such dreams provide comfort to the dying is itself comforting. I like to think that my wife found joy in the vision she had of her parents shortly before she died. I also can't help wondering whether, when the time comes, I will find myself in Lisa's presence again. If the research of Kerr and his colleagues is any guide, the answer is likely yes.

PAUL LAURITZEN, *a longtime contributor to* Commonweal, *is emeritus professor of theology and religious studies at John Carroll University. He is currently working on a memoir tentatively titled* Looking Backward, Living Forward: Reflections on Love, Loss, and Renewal.

DEAR OTHER

Jerry Harp

If I stopped believing in you,
would the lights shine more brightly,
the elder trees turn more feathery,
everything thingier in the sun?
Would you seize my freedom out of reach?
Either way, there's no escape—
I'm the lack
breathing nothing all the way down.
This fig from a neighbor's tree
has less taste for me
than my fear's taste, the knotted nothing
clutched in my gut remaining
my reassurance and friend,
and you remain my always there,
quietest of quiets, most other and out of reach.

JERRY HARP *has published four collections of poems, the most recent of which is* Spirit Under Construction *(2017). His poems recently appeared or are forthcoming in* Boulevard, december, Cincinnati Review, Hubbub, Kenyon Review, Image, the Iowa Review, Pleiades, *and elsewhere. Among his other work is the prose study* For Us, What Music? The Life and Poetry of Donald Justice *(2010). He teaches at Lewis and Clark College.*

KATHERINE LUCKY

No Words Needed

'To Survive I Need You to Survive'

Last year, I attended two funerals: one for a family member, another for the family member of a close friend. Guests coughed and cried. We looked at photographs and listened to speeches. Afterwards, we told stories and splashed water on our faces at bathroom sinks. We were together in our grief.

But also, we were not. I was not having the same experience as other relatives of the deceased: his sister, or his college roommate, or her childhood playmate, or even her other grandniece. Each was thinking of traits that had existed only in their presence, a style of humor or cadence. Each was running through memories only they had managed to store, although others in the room might have been there, too. "I don't remember that." "Really? When did that happen?"

Grief is lonely. Every instance can feel so unique as to be untranslatable, and in our desperation to be understood, we often fall back on clichés. We talk of the five stages; we describe *emptiness* and *numbness*; we say "sorry for your loss." And still, nobody understands. Maybe the solution is to give up on language and create something physical instead: a common reference point that allows each mourner to cast their own interpretations, to share something without having to articulate anything.

That's one premise at the heart of *To Survive I Need You to Survive*, an exhibition by sculptor and "social practice artist" Cara Levine currently on display at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. Visualized, quantified expressions of grief, read the show notes, might "offer opportunities for interconnectedness rather than isolation."

"Grief to Fill a Room With" is one such visual expression, a scene staged in a section of the white-walled gallery. Everyday objects—a table, chairs, pants hanging in an armoire, a fiddle-leaf fig plant dropping its discolored leaves—are sealed in an inflated plastic dome. In this rendering, grief is odorless, colorless, filling an entire room, imperceptible to anyone but the bereaved. *I've felt that, exactly*, I thought, standing outside the bubble. By rendering isolation, Levine made me less isolated.

The same principle—communion through art—underlies the exhibit's two performance pieces. In "DIG: A Hole to Put Your Grief In," a group gathers in the Santa Monica Mountains to dig a hole; participants then refill it over a period of seven days. A video documents the process: shovels striking dirt, workers pouring water over their dusty hands, the sky changing colors. This project has concluded, but another one, "Carve; The Mystic is Nourished From This Sphere," is ongoing. Museum-goers are provided pencils and paper and asked to deposit their responses to the prompt "Today, I'm grieving…" in a box nearby. Levine selects submissions to carve into a concave wooden structure mounted on the wall. When I visited, some inscriptions had already been made: "Two sons I lost." "Dad's voice."

Both of these works are acts of ritual, "DIG" explicitly so. Taking place over seven days to represent sitting shiva, it incorporates bundles of sage, a service from a cantor, and a ceremony by a Chumash tribal leader; the artist wears all white as she reads the words of Kabbalist rabbi Moses de León. "Carve" takes the latter part of its title from the description of *chokmah* (wisdom) found in the Zohar, a sacred Kabbalah text that de León is believed to have authored. In the repetitive motions of shoveling and carving, "DIG" and "Carve" excavate literal spaces for grief.

But in both instances, the power of these symbols is diminished by language. An eleven-minute documentary film recounting the making of "DIG" features not just haunting aerial shots of turned-over earth, but reflections from the diggers themselves, many of whom are artists. They use words like "systemic" and "parse" and "energy." They are grieving the pandemic and violence against migrants and environmental devastation.

It's not that these aren't worthy griefs; of course they are. But stating them out loud over-interprets the hole in the ground, makes it an intellectual statement rather than a visceral experience. Any viewer might have read these tragedies into the piece implicitly; the explanations aren't necessary. As it is, "DIG" is mediated by others' words before we have a chance to interpret it ourselves.

The same is true of "Carve." Scratching down my entry and slipping it into the box, I thought about which formulation the artist would be most likely to choose when she returned to her ladder and chisels. So far, she'd selected for timeliness ("Monterey Park, Lunar New Year") and referentiality ("dancing in crowded spaces") and variety ("fat orange cat"). Other entries were visible through the clear walls of the box. "Innocence" and "the road not taken" were good candidates, I thought; they'd work well on the wall. But that was precisely the problem. In writing for an audience, at least some of us were editing in the hope of inclusion. Gashes in the wood, one gouged tally for every sorrow, might have conveyed our pain better than words ever could.

"To survive I need you to survive," reads the text that lends its name to the exhibit. Carved in capital letters along the circumference of a birch-and-oak wheel, they run together like a mantra: *TO SURVIVE I NEED YOU TO SURVIVE TO SURVIVE I NEED YOU TO SURVIVE.* A timelapse video shows the wheel positioned on a roof. Over the course of a day, light runs through it, casting shadows on the ground. From sunrise to sunset, its message holds true.

Cara Levine, *DIG: A Hole To Put Your Grief In*, 2021, Shalom Institute, Malibu, California

NIR YANIV/COURTESY THE ARTIST

Levine adapted the phrase from a gospel song she heard at an interfaith service in the aftermath of the 2018 shooting at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue. It's an expression of mutual dependency, total solidarity, the ethic at the heart of her faith tradition and mine.

But the exhibit's most powerful work, "This Is Not A Gun," demonstrates how challenging that solidarity can be. Working from a list of things mistaken for guns during shootings of civilians (many of them Black men) by police, Levine has carved a pill bottle and a hairbrush and sunglasses from wood. In workshops, she invited others to submit their renderings of items from the list in clay. The resulting objects fill a platform in the center of the gallery, a collection of sandwiches (some with tomato, some with seeded bread) and beer bottles (one etched with "Corona") and candy bars (various interpretations of Skittles and Snickers) and phones (smart, flip) and Bibles (large, pocket-sized, English, Spanish). The objects are profound in their everydayness.

This portion of the exhibit contains supplementary educational materials—copies of *Caste* and *Just Mercy* (meant to be read while in the gallery?) and "workshop ephemera," note cards with questions like "What effect does the criminalization of people of color have on society?" tacked to the walls. The materials feel redundant; nothing is so powerful as the display itself. And for all of its encouragement toward advocacy, the work asserts another truth, too: *You can't understand.*

In my hands, a sandwich, or a bottle of cologne, even a gun-shaped object like a hose nozzle or a drill, is perfectly safe. In other hands, not so much. Levine lists the time it took her to carve each sculpture, hours in comparison to the split seconds in which an officer made a judgment. There's a fundamental disconnect, for her and for me, and for many others who will see the exhibit. We can empathize, but we can't *entirely* understand. We can acknowledge that we're essential to each other's survival while also recognizing that for some of us, it's easier to stay alive.

In grief, as in love and joy and anger, particularity always persists. The paper replications Levine makes of two objects inherited from her now-dead grandmothers—an amber pendant necklace containing the first line of the *Shema* ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one…") and a watercolor painting of the Hebrew letter *kaf*—demonstrate just how insular our sorrow can be. It's a small, private, humble act, to make copies of two treasured objects only because you loved their owners. It's also a kind of prayer, directed to the One who alone knows the fullness of our grief. The best kind of ritual attempts not to explain our sadness but to retain its fundamental mystery, trusting that God can elucidate the rest. We sit side by side in the funeral hall, together and also alone, beside and also before.

KATHERINE LUCKY *is an editor at* Christianity Today.

Where Will They Go?

An interview with Jake Bittle

Jake Bittle is a staff writer at Grist *who covers climate change. His new book is* The Great Displacement: Climate Change and the Next American Migration, *which uses stories of individual families and neighborhoods across the country to explain how homeowners, insurers, and the federal government are responding to the country's growing number of climate-induced disasters. Bittle spoke about the book with Managing Editor Isabella Simon on the* Commonweal Podcast. *Their interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

ISABELLA SIMON: You wrote about communities all around the United States, from Louisiana to California to Virginia, and met all kinds of people. What are some of the stories that most affected you?

JAKE BITTLE: This book was an attempt to create a snapshot of America's domestic climate migration. I went to a half-dozen places that had recently seen large hurricanes, wildfires, were experiencing extreme drought, or where sea-level rise was advancing quickly, and then I looked at what happened in the long run after these disasters struck.

Where did people end up after they lost their homes? And how did these disasters affect the housing and insurance markets in these places? What I found was a chaotic, churning process of displacement, relocation, and re-displacement, concentrated in the most vulnerable parts of the country.

I was struck by the story of Lincoln City, North Carolina, a generations-old African American neighborhood that was perennially prone to flooding. After two major hurricanes, the federal government paid for the community to be razed and gave everyone money to move somewhere else. To this day, the community still has a robust reunion of thousands of people, even twenty years after it was destroyed. People who never lived there themselves, but whose parents did, still come back to celebrate what the neighborhood used to be. The unprecedented coordination involved in the relocation bound together people who otherwise might have drifted apart. I was also surprised to learn how poorly many people fared after they received their stipend to move. Many ended up living pretty close to where they had been before, but in more expensive houses with higher utility bills and mortgages. By the time the recession hit in 2008, many of them couldn't keep up with the mortgages, and their houses were foreclosed.

We know that we need to adapt to climate change. We know that there are people in harm's way, but the process of fixing it is much more complicated and painful than many people assume.

IS: One alternative to buyouts, though it wouldn't work in every community, is climate adaptation. Can you explain how this program worked in the Chesterfield Heights neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia?

JB: Climate adaptation is comparatively new. It began during the Obama administration. The program in Chesterfield Heights is a set of design projects in a riverside neighborhood that's experiencing significant sea-level rise. At high tide, the river floods, so they built a giant berm at the front of the neighborhood that stops water from sloshing over. They also

A flooded block in Bonita Springs, Florida, after Hurricane Irma in 2017

JEFFREY ISAAC GREENBERG/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

expanded and remodeled the storm drain system, created artificial tidal estuaries and wetlands that can soak up water (unlike concrete, which is impervious), and designed a large area that can flood and serve as a natural bowl for collecting water.

They've done basically everything they could with a hundred million dollars to make it seriously resilient for the next thirty years. It required retrofitting almost every part of the neighborhood's infrastructure. This is a neighborhood where property values were falling or about to fall because the flooding was so significant, but this has bought them about fifty years.

IS: You describe the housing market in coastal communities as a stick of dynamite with a long fuse. Expensive adaptation extended the fuse in Chesterfield Heights, but it's burning down as sea-level rise continues.

JB: Today I can buy a home in Norfolk for $400,000 and probably sell it for just as much, if not more, in three years. But in thirty years that home, and other homes around it, will be flooded almost constantly. It could even get blown away entirely by a huge storm. But the market hasn't yet absorbed the fact that one day these homes will be much less valuable than they are now.

Besides the properties that will be destroyed by climate disasters, even more will simply lose value because their location becomes so flood-prone that the market will start to shy away. So the stick of dynamite is the value of the home. When the dynamite blows up, the home value will fall, independent of whether or not a flood actually touches the home. If thousands of people lose their homes to disasters every year, many thousands more will be left holding the bag for a mortgage that is, figuratively speaking, underwater.

It's complicated, because you can't simply force people to move. There's also a question of self-determination that you can't paper over. What we can do is make it easier for people who want to leave to do so, and we can try to help the people who are stuck. We should also work to protect, for as long as we can, as many places as we think we can afford to. But in this country, telling people they *have* to go always leads to awful outcomes.

IS: This heartbreaking tension plays out in other places, too. For example, in Pointe-au-Chien, Louisiana, you described the unique history of the land and culture, and then the fact that the bayous are literally washing away. How did you balance that tension while working on the book?

JB: It was hard to write those narratives without including why people loved and treasured these places. People were very optimistic; many are dead set on staying. I drank that Kool-Aid a little bit while I was reporting, which is necessary to tell the story. But when I came back and finished writing the book, I had to buttress the stories with facts. I had to make it clear that no amount of optimism would be sufficient to stop people from losing their homes.

In Pointe-au-Chien, because of erosion, people have steadily been less and less able to do what their parents did to sustain themselves. I wrote about a family that lives in a very isolated community. Five generations ago, they were self-sufficient. They raised oysters and caught shrimp in nets just outside their house windows, and trapped nutria to sell the pelts. That became impossible. So they switched to in-shore shrimping on small motorboats. And that became impossible. So they had to switch to offshore shrimping on big boats that required a lot more up-front capital. And that became impossible. The next generation mostly worked in oil and gas, which is very volatile work. In the last and the most recent generation, the youngest son moved to Tucson to start a video-game company. There are now no jobs in Pointe-au-Chien for the younger generation to take.

IS: Some of the places where there *are* jobs, and where there have been huge construction and population booms, are also very vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Cities like Phoenix, Miami, and Dallas will all experience increasing heat, which you argue will become "the largest driver of voluntary migration in the coming decades." And Phoenix and other desert Southwest cities will face serious water scarcity problems. Why haven't developers and homebuyers taken these issues into account?

JB: The problem of extreme heat is different from other kinds of natural disasters. Take hurricanes: in a given year, the probability that any particular town gets hit by a storm is low. But heat is virtually certain. There are defined thresholds above which it is difficult for the human body to tolerate heat. Fifty years from now, assuming the current pace of global warming continues, places like Tucson will see nigh-lethal heat every summer. That's why it will drive voluntary migration—people will make the choice to leave, even though there's no definite economic driver the way there is with other kinds of disasters.

We don't really see the impacts yet, because while the heat is pretty bad, it's not *that* bad *that* often right now. But that threshold could be crossed in many of these places over the next thirty years. At that point, we'll see a definitive shift in people's attitudes. We're not there yet, but looking at a map, looking at a thermometer, and looking at a calendar, you can see that eventually those cities can't stay at their current size, and at the very least can't continue to grow.

The other thing that could slow growth is water scarcity. Over the next ten to twenty years, many of the fastest-growing cities in the West will not have the water to continue growing. Future property-value increases and profits for home builders and developers are contingent on continued growth, so once you say you can't build any more, you're setting a domino effect in motion. When property values waver or fall, it changes the long-term trajectory of the cities.

IS: Is there anything that the government or the private market should do to try to discourage these places from growing any further?

JB: It's hard to know what mechanism the government could use to stop someone from making a voluntary movement from, say, Buffalo to Phoenix. However, the problems with inducing people to move elsewhere are much less intractable. If you want a national climate-adaptation strategy, there's no sense in trying to induce people to move to Phoenix. But you could make a strong argument for moving to Cincinnati, which is built to house about twice the number of people that currently live there, and is incredibly resilient to climate change compared with some other cities. Discouraging people is hard. But encouraging them—though it would be controversial—is worth thinking about.

IS: One thing the government could certainly do is to tighten existing regulations and introduce new ones. There are places, for example, where sellers aren't required to disclose a home's flood history, or where developers aren't required to rebuild burned-down homes with more stringent fire-prevention standards.

JB: Definitely. The question is, can we pass these costs on to homeowners, builders, and developers without burdening them extensively? After Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Florida overhauled its building codes. Now, if you want to build a house in South Florida, you have to make sure it can withstand a category-five hurricane. Most of the homes that were built after the new code took effect in 2000 withstood the 150-mile-an-hour winds of Hurricane Ian last October.

The higher construction costs of those homes were passed onto the homeowners, who were willing to pay them because they wanted to live in Florida. Yes, homes cost more, but not to an extent that bankrupted millions of people. The same thing is true with flood disclosures. We can pass a law that requires sellers to inform potential buyers about a home's flood history and risk. Many people will take a cut on the amount that their homes sell for, but that's a cost you could argue people are capable of—and should be—bearing.

But it's a matter of making sure you understand who holds the bag for any given policy or lack of intervention. I'm far from convinced that I know all those answers, but even acknowledging that we're playing the game would be valuable.

IS: You propose an ideal at the end of the book: everyone deserves safe housing before and after natural disasters, whether or not they own property or have insurance. You say this is radical because it "undermines the belief in individual responsibility" held by so many Americans. Why is individual responsibility so insufficient in the face of the climate crisis?

JB: It sounds like a political or philosophical argument, but it was also brought home for me in an emotional way when I spoke to people who were the image of middle-class upward mobility in the United States. They saved up to buy a home in a place like Houston. They bought it, paid their mortgage, worked, raised their kids—and then, all of a sudden, lost everything in a big flood. It turned out the developer had ignored some flood maps fifty years earlier when they had built in that area. There's no way the family could have known, and perhaps even the developer didn't realize the extent of the flood risk brought on by increased precipitation. Unless you're going to consider it an act of God, or a test, like what Job endured, you have to think that surely this is where we need the state to come in and help families like this get back on their feet. Once you say that, you open yourself up to a whole world of policy, spending, charity, and largesse by the government, which has an enormous amount of money and enormous latitude to spend it.

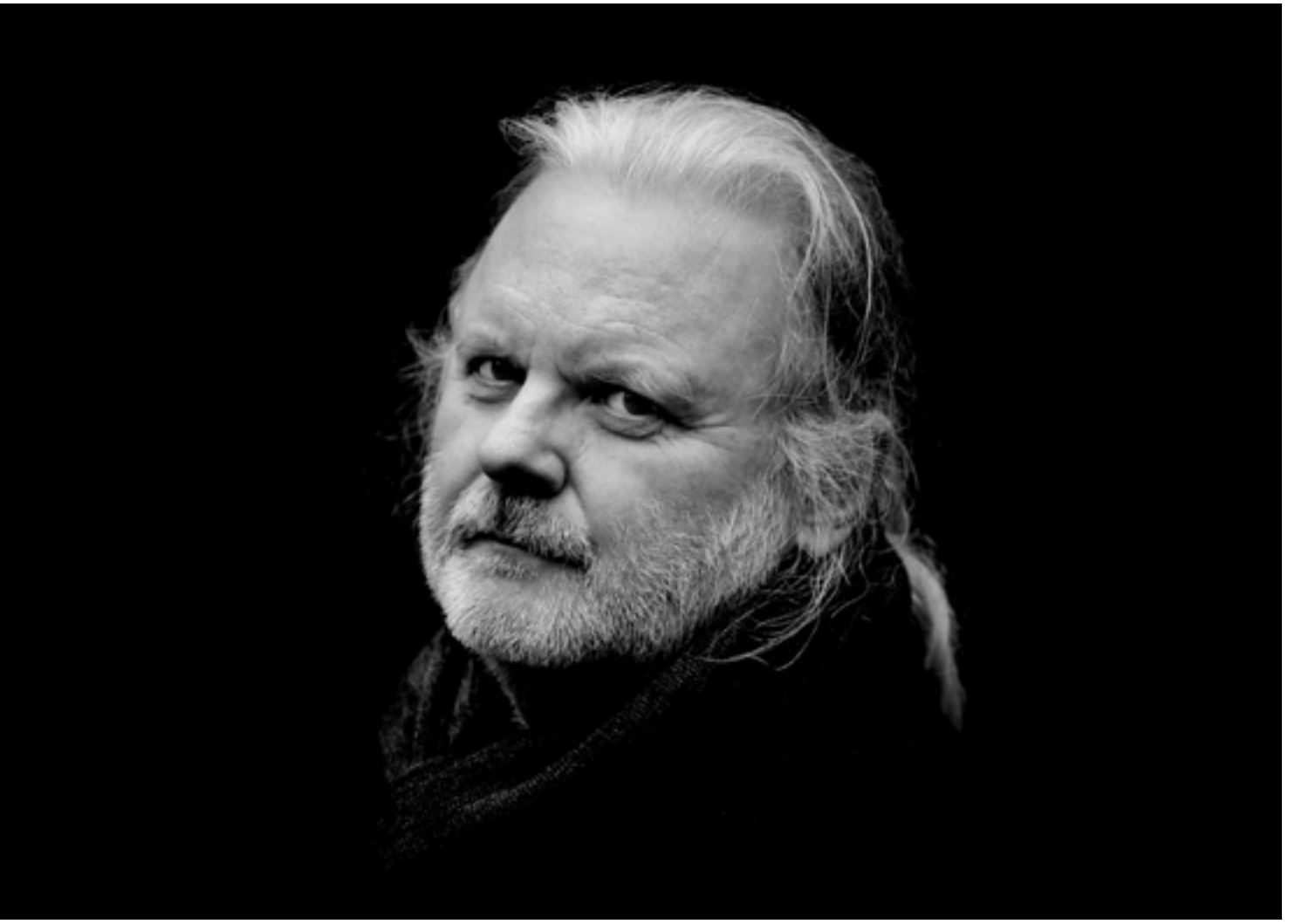
The stories of people who've experienced disasters point to the need to look at housing not just as something you afford through your own fiscal rectitude, financial integrity, and good decisions. That's not what it will be over the next hundred years as disasters get more intense and more people are caught in them.

IS: To make it even more complicated, there are other parts of the world where people are experiencing these disasters without any relief from their governments. We know that the United States is already dealing with an influx of refugees, many of them displaced by climate change. What else is happening internationally?

JB: Most migration is internal. In many countries around the world, it's advancing at a much faster pace than in the United States. A third of Pakistan was underwater last year. But in certain cases, like in Guatemala and the Northern Triangle, people don't have any other option except to try to come to the United States. Unfortunately, there's the potential for international climate migrants to become a bogeyman for the xenophobic Right. But the richer countries of the world, which are responsible for climate change, bear an enormous amount of responsibility for people who are displaced by drought or famine in other parts of the world. The issue is, our politics are so far away from being able to grapple with this. It's hard to imagine how the fact of climate change, as devastating as it is, would break the logjam in immigration politics.

At the same time, it's important to think of people in Houston who lose their homes as being on a continuum with people from Guatemala who traveled hundreds and hundreds of miles to come to the United States. The processes of destabilization are not that different. The solutions might not be all that different, either. The idea of what constitutes a happy ending looks basically the same in both cases: somewhere that's safe from disasters, sheltered, and affordable. Once you say that's what we want, you can tell the rest of the story.

LISTEN Hear the full interview with Jake Bittle on Episode 99 of the *Commonweal Podcast*. **commonwealmagazine.org/podcast**



Jon Fosse

TOM A. KOLSTAD/DET NORSKE SAMLAGET/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS

An I Brought to Rest

The theology of Jon Fosse's 'Septology'

There's an old debate among Christian theologians about the life of the world to come. Is it a life in which there's no more to be had, no more to want, no progress to be made, nothing new to come? In which you've finally and fully become, without possibility of further growth, what you always already were? Or is it a life in which there's always more—more understanding, more delight, more intensity, more intimacy with God?

There are eminent voices on both sides of the question, and no magisterial teaching that gets close to resolving it. Augustine is an advocate of the first; he's a poet of quietus, persuaded to that position, I think, by the depth of his understanding of the disquiet that mars all our lives here below, and by his sense that this disquiet is the thing about us that most needs to be remedied. Gregory of Nyssa is perhaps an advocate of the second, persuaded that the inexhaustibility

What we fell from when we fell was precisely the ability to rest in peace.

of God's goodness requires that our capacity to see and to relate to that goodness should also be inexhaustible, and that we will, therefore, always progress in understanding and love, even in the world to come.

Since I first came to think about this issue about thirty years ago, it's always seemed to me that of course Augustine is right: when we say of the dead "*requiescat in pace*," we're expressing the hope that they'll find their rest in peace, as well as our intuition that their peace is only to be had in rest. The other view seems confused about the difference between the order of being, in which God's goodness is inexhaustible, and the order of knowing, in which we, being finite, are neither capable of endless growth in apprehension of that goodness nor in need of such growth.

The endless-progress view also seems tiring, at least to me. I think I know what disquiet is from having been a human creature in a fallen world for almost seven decades. I don't need more of it, and to think of the life of the world to come as one new vista after another feels like an exhausting extension of the life I already know. I'd like to be a clear glass filled with God's light. To be told that, no, I'll never be filled (or fulfilled) engenders in me a heavy weight of gloom. It would be purgatory without end.

The life of the world to come, I'd prefer to think, is not the provision of ever more goods. Rather, it's the definitive removal of *lacks*. Death is a lack that the life of the world to come removes and replaces, finally and fully, with life. So ignorance, another lack, will be replaced by knowledge; desire by fulfillment; pain by delight; and so on. All these absences will be replaced by a presence. We will then be able to live quietly and fully, with nothing more to want. That is, so far as I can see, the content of the Christian hope.

Some, perhaps most, Christians will disagree with me. Some will think that there's never an end to increase, and that there shouldn't be. This disagreement persists because Scripture and tradition contain threads that support both views, but also because there are very different understandings of what's wrong with us. My own sense is that the most fundamental evidence of our condition as fallen is unrest. What we fell from when we fell was precisely the ability to rest in peace. Simone Weil writes somewhere that we have a regrettable tendency to try to eat what we should instead look at—that is an elegant and suggestive summary of the nature of our disquieting desires, and of the way they can never be satisfied. *Consuming* beauty won't work, and also won't end: there's always more of it to put in your mouth. Repose, by contrast, permits contemplation of what's there to be seen and calms the desire to consume it.

There are those who think that our problem is not the disquiet of desire but rather being disquieted by the wrong things, and that when we turn our eyes and minds to God we'll find that we do want—and can have—ever more of the one we love. It's tempting to depict this view as a half-Christianized version of the American dream, according to which it's never possible to have enough of a good thing: more is always better. But that analogy isn't quite fair. Better simply to say that this disagreement about the world to come is one of some moment for Christians, and that we've not yet learned how to resolve it.

Instead of such a resolution, I present that rarest of literary rarities: a book that attempts to show what it's like to come to rest by receiving the gift of Jesus, and offers readers a hint of that rest in the form of its prose. I am referring to Jon Fosse's *Septology*.

This is a prose poem in three volumes and seven parts, published in Norwegian between 2019 and 2021. In 2022, Transit Books published an English translation by Damion Searls as a handsome single-volume hardcover. *Septology* is almost seven hundred pages long, amounting to perhaps a quarter of a million words, and it's written in rhythmic, systolic-diastolic prose, a repeated inhale and exhale. The entire work is devoid of periods, those signs of a stop, and so the only occasions for a long pause are at the end of each of the seven parts—and even here, the sentences don't end; they simply break off, as though someone had stopped speaking the words of the rosary in mid-phrase. The example is apt: of *Septology*'s seven parts, two—the first and last—end with the *Ave Maria* in Latin, once complete and once, at the very end, broken before the final phrase, "*mortis nostrae*." The prayer is broken there because the protagonist has died. Each of the book's other five parts ends with a slightly different depiction of prayer. For example:

> I hold the brown wooden cross between my thumb and my finger and then I say, again and again, inside myself, as I breathe in deeply Lord and as I breathe out slowly Jesus and as I breathe in deeply Christ and as I breathe out slowly Have mercy and as I breathe in deeply On me

The paucity of punctuation here slows the reader and begins to assimilate the act of reading to what Fosse is depicting, a prayer. Here Fosse's prose approaches the condition of a verbal icon. You might be reading Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, without the pyrotechnics. You don't read it; it reads you, if you let it. Of course, if you're distracted or disquieted, you might not let it. I found it impossible to give the book more than an hour or so at a time: by the end of an hour I was partly dissolved, partly praying, and partly absent.

Septology is not a treatise on prayer, however. Nor is it just a representation of it. It's also a story, told aslant, of the

life of a Norwegian man named Asle, a painter at the edge of old age as the book opens. Asle has been married, but his wife is dead. He learned to paint almost accidentally as a young man and has found painting essential for most of his life, but is now, perhaps, about to give it up. He has a friend (it seems only one), with whom he spends occasional holidays and whose visits he resents as often as welcomes. He has an art dealer, who is almost but not quite a friend. And he has an alter ego of the same name who is, perhaps, himself as he might have been, an aspect of himself. This other Asle is also a painter, though unsuccessful, and in the last, fatal stages of alcoholism. The presentation of the two Asles by Fosse rapidly turns what at first seems an exercise in Kafkaesque parabolic surrealism into bog-standard realism: *Of course* there's more than one Asle; how many of you are there, and don't you meet the others all the time? There's high literary art in making that seem clearly so. By the end of *Septology*, prayer allows the protagonist-Asle to stop painting and die.

So *Septology* has a story, of a sort. But at its heart is the quietus, and Fosse shows this not only by showing readers Asle's prayer—and making them pray with him—but also by softening the barriers of time. Asle sees, from the perspective of a man with most of his life behind him, events and people from his past. He stops his car, for example, by the side of the road from time to time and watches a young man and a young woman converse and play and argue and love—the kinds of things lovers and spouses do. Is he imagining these scenes, rerunning his past for delight or pain? Fosse shows Asle considering and dismissing this thought. The effect, as with the depiction of the alter ego, is at first surprising, and then not. The boundaries between past and present are soft for Asle. The degree of his identification with a past-him pushing the girl on a swing becomes, as *Septology* progresses, both as loose and as tight as his identification with the present-him doing the watching. And if a principal source of disquiet is hard identitarianism with respect to oneself—*here's me, there's all the rest of you*—then the softening of the boundary between past-self and present-self is central to the arrival of quietus. The hard-bounded, lovingly polished, carefully protected present selves we've enshrined begin to melt, first into their own pasts and futures, and then into those of others.

Then there is painting. Asle is a painter whose discovery of what it is to paint, and whose increase of skill in doing it, is shown sidelong in the book to great effect. He paints not as a means of representing the world (though his paintings are, mostly, of scenes in the world) and not as a means of making a living (though he sells his paintings easily and lives on the income from them), but rather "in a way that dissolves the picture lodged inside me and makes it go away, so that it becomes an invisible forgotten part of myself, of my own innermost picture, the picture I am and have." Painting, for Asle, is a kind of exorcism by way of transfigurative removal, and what it removes are the shadows of an inner life. In this, it is like prayer. Painting brings peace by removing the disquiet of memories that identify Asle as such-and-so, as having done this or that. Putting those pictures on canvas takes them out of his inner theater, where they have a little life of their own, the kind of life that produces disquiet. Painting thereby permits the true picture to begin to show itself. As a depiction of what it is to make art, this is as far as can be from the clichés dominant in today's identitarian America, which all suggest that the art we make shows the world who we really are. Fosse's depiction of Asle's art suggests that art may instead be a means of jettisoning who we really *aren't*—and in that way making us ready to receive Jesus. Once Asle's paintings have been painted, they no longer matter. Their purpose is exhausted in the painting of them.

Among Asle's last paintings is a diagonal cross, one arm in purple and the other in green. Asle isn't sure whether it's finished. For him, it's connected with a changed attitude toward painting:

> I realize that I don't have any desire to paint, and it's been a long time since I haven't wanted to paint, and then there's the picture with those two lines that cross, I don't want to see that picture again, I have to get rid of it, I have to paint over it, because it's a destructive picture, or maybe it's a good picture?

But he does finish it—or at least recognizes that it's finished. He gives it a title (*St. Andrew's Cross*), which is, for him, the ordinary mark of a painting's completion. Should he keep it? Give it to his dealer? Paint it over? The picture appears a dozen times in *Septology*, and eventually Asle sees not only that it's finished but that it isn't like his other pictures. It's the closest thing to a picture of God, "the picture that's kind of innermost inside me…God's shining darkness inside me." The seeming incompleteness of the picture is its completion, and it's a cross that completes him. Once Asle comes to see this, he has little left to do but die.

Fosse writes as an evangelist, not by demanding conversion or advocating baptism, but by showing in prose the face of Jesus as the one who brings repose—the one who *is* repose. To read *Septology* attentively is to be stilled, to be shown, as Fosse writes, "that I, what's I in me, can never die because it was never born—nach der Weise meiner Ungeborenheit kann ich niemals sterben." Fosse here quotes Eckhart, and the whole of this long and beautiful prose poem shows us what it's like to be an I brought to rest, thus moving us toward the same condition.

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS *is a longtime contributor to* Commonweal *and the author of many books, most recently* Regret: A Theology *(University of Notre Dame Press) and* Why Read Pascal? *(Catholic University of America Press).*

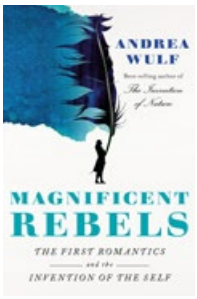
Freedom, True and False

NAOMI FISHER

A small German university town may seem an unlikely site for the emergence of the modern self. But, at the end of the eighteenth century, a fiery group of intellectuals—dubbed the "Jena Set" by Andrea Wulf in *Magnificent Rebels*—came to influential new answers to age-old questions about freedom, culture, and individuality. Wulf chronicles their comings and goings from 1794 to 1806, in the wake of the radical intellectual changes brought on by Kant's philosophy and during the seismic political events of the French Revolution and subsequent French Revolutionary Wars. The book ends with the Battle of Jena in 1806, when Hegel rushed through the chaotic streets to send off the only copy of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, his ambitious account of the development of consciousness, as Napoleon's army was looting the town.

Such drama is typical for Wulf's book—it maintains a fever pitch, detailing rocky relationships and petty academic rivalries, extramarital affairs, public betrayals, and private conflicts, including one over a dirty piano. Such stories are entertaining enough in their own right, especially in Wulf's eloquent rendering, but the figures involved here are also incredibly significant drivers of intellectual history: Goethe, Schiller, the brothers Schlegel, the brothers von Humboldt, Novalis, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and the dynamic, brilliant, and charming Caroline Schlegel Schelling, who eventually leaves her marriage of convenience to August Wilhelm Schlegel for the young Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Wulf gives long overdue attention to this brilliant group of scholars.

The most recognizable name in this group is that of the polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who remains known primarily for his literary work, but who also made crucial contributions to botany and other sciences. Wulf captures the beautiful friendship between Goethe and the sullen, sickly Friedrich Schiller, himself one of the most accomplished poets and playwrights of his generation. Goethe so enjoyed Schiller's company and conversation that he spent more time with Schiller in Jena than at "home" in Weimar, just fifteen miles west, where he was a courtier and official.



MAGNIFICENT REBELS
The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self

ANDREA WULF
Knopf
$35 | 512 pp.

Goethe frequently smoothed over various tensions in the testy group. When Friedrich Schlegel criticized Schiller's journal in print and Schiller retaliated by firing Schlegel's elder brother, August Wilhelm, Goethe played mediator. And when the Schlegels contemplated legal action against another journal for failing to review their own publication, Goethe advised a more measured approach. Goethe also helped navigate the various political problems caused by the group's sometimes radical views, though he couldn't always prevent disaster. For instance, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, ground-breaking theorist of freedom and self-consciousness, became embattled in his professorship at the University of Jena because of his purported atheism and, perhaps even more significantly, his early sympathies with the French Revolution. Fichte, hot-headed as ever, acted out in vindictive defensiveness without consulting Goethe, threatening to resign and found his own university. This bluff was taken in earnest and his resignation, which he never intended seriously, was accepted.

Wulf shows how successfully Goethe fostered and cared for the Jena Set, helping it thrive intellectually—at least for a time—but his own intellectual influence receives short shrift. For example, Schelling's philosophy of nature benefited immensely from Goethe's tutelage, as scholars like Dalia Nassar have shown, but Wulf tends to focus more on Goethe's personal interventions.

The other main caretaker of the group is Caroline, and it is a delight to see this neglected but crucial historical figure brought to life in Wulf's vivid prose. Caroline was loved by many but despised by others, including the Schillers, who called her "Madame Lucifer," and the wife of the poet Ludwig Tieck, who saw her beauty, brilliance, and charm as threats to Tieck's virtue. During the day, Caroline translated Shakespeare and other English and French texts into German with her husband, August Wilhelm; in the evening she acted as muse and hostess, welcoming the group of early Romantics into her home. Her razor-sharp wit shines in quotes from her many letters, and one imagines that her conversations were just as delightfully wicked. She pokes fun at August Wilhelm for being overly meticulous in his dress,

ridicules the wives of academics for their pettiness, and jests that her brother-in-law Friedrich Schlegel entertains them with "his head, which is frizzy both inside and out." But when Caroline became romantically involved with the taciturn Schelling in 1799, everyone was angry and jealous except her husband, who remained happy for her friendship and scholarly collaboration while he engaged in several affairs of his own. The Schlegel-Schelling affair was one of many events that eventually led to the dissolution of the group.

Wulf takes inspiration from Caroline as a sort of Romantic heroine. "Unlike most women, she lived *her* life" and was the "conductor of the great symphony" of the Jena set's intellectual activities. Caroline thrived by throwing off the social and moral conventions of her age. When she became involved with Schelling, what rankled everyone was not the affair itself but that it was conducted openly. Although the gossip and subsequent isolation bothered Caroline, she never let it alter her path in life. Wulf presents her willful determination as indicative of the new philosophy of freedom, the "*Ich*-philosophy" of Fichte, which begins with the posit of an absolute self, and its expression in the fragments and poems of the early Romantics.

This is one of many instances in which Wulf pits the freedom of the subject against cultural, moral, or political strictures. The dichotomy arises repeatedly in the book: the freedom of the subject *against* objective truth, the self-determination expressed in the democratic ideals of the French Revolution *against* the control exerted by emperors and dukes of the German-speaking world, the self *versus* culture, religion, or morality. On Wulf's telling, the "magnificent rebels" are rebelling against these strictures, championing the self over and against all that would seek to limit or constrain it. Freedom, on this story, is freedom of the self from any claimed authority—whether it be moral, religious, or political. On Wulf's telling, these scholars "liberated people's minds from the corsets of doctrines, rules, and expectations." Occasionally, Wulf even pits the freedom of the self, and the Jena Set as well, against reason and absolute or objective truth: "It was the very absence of rules they celebrated. They were not interested in an absolute truth."

For the early Romantics, ideas are as significant—indeed, more significant—than the cannonballs fired by the French that marked the fall of their glorious Jena. Accordingly, the characterization of those ideas is no small matter. On their view, the self or *Ich* (the "I") cannot be completely self-determined. These scholars recognized the incoherence of a self that is created out of nothing. To strip the self of all internal or external authority or guidance is to render it completely arbitrary, akin to an arrow that points randomly, that

The Goethe-Schiller Monument in Germany

WESTEND61 GMBH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

We can come to know the natural world because there are affinities between the human mind and nature; our own freedom is prefigured in nature's lawfulness.

wills what it wills for no reason at all. This subjectivist or existentialist inflection of these ideas is present throughout Wulf's book in a way that distorts the overarching orientation and intentions of these figures.

The starting point for the idea of freedom operative in this period is found in the works of Immanuel Kant. For Kant, the will is autonomous or free to the degree that it determines itself in accordance with the moral law. The moral law is the law of the practical will, and so we are most ourselves when acting morally. Now, these thinkers are not strict Kantians, but they take a cue from Kant in seeing freedom as *lawful*. To be free, says Schelling, the most romantic of the idealists, is to "act in accord with the laws of one's own essence." What makes this freedom rather than slavish obedience is that these laws are internal to the self; they are not imposed by some external authority. Crucially for the Romantics, these laws are *universal*, but still expressed creatively through the individual.

Wulf's emphasis on freedom as a kind of freedom *from* rules leads to various tensions in the book. For example, she puzzles at the early Romantics' fascination with the medieval church, calling it "ironic" that they would turn to the "dark ages" for enlightenment. She attributes their fascination to a lack of good contemporaneous options for creative, self-oriented spirituality. If Wulf is correct that the main goals of the Jena Set were to free the self from all rules and limitations, then a turn to medieval Christianity does seem odd. But if the goal is rather to discover and create a culture in which the self finds its deepest universal expression, articulated through art, poetry, and philosophy, then medieval Christianity, with its deep artistic and philosophical traditions, is a natural starting point.

Similarly, she claims that Kant turns to the subject "instead of searching for absolute truth or objective knowledge," and that Hegel's "'absolute knowing' had nothing to do with an objective truth" but was rather the mind's knowledge of itself. While Wulf adopts a subjective *rather than* objective framing, in both of these cases the major innovative idea involves transcending the dichotomy. Kant makes his way to objective knowledge by taking account of the contributions of the subject. Hegel's absolute knowing is not a turn to reflexive subjectivity but a reconciliation of subjective and objective spirit—if his absolute knowing has "nothing to do" with objective truth, then it has nothing to do with subjective truth either.

In general, rather than adopting one side of the various divisions—the freedom of the subject versus objective truth, and so on—these scholars proposed a new synthesis of these divisions. One arrives at objective truth *through* the subject; just political rule *in and through* an account of the interests of the individual and its expression in various institutions; the freedom of the self *through* the dictates of the moral law; and finally, absolute, universal truth *through* individual expression.

Wulf's philosophizing is at its best when she turns to Schelling's philosophy of nature. For the most part, her interpretation of Schelling avoids the one-sided subjectivism found elsewhere in the book. Like the other Romantics and idealists, Schelling seeks a synthesis or reconciliation of subject and object, mind and nature. According to Schelling, there is a kind of primordial, coequal unity between mind and nature, such that when we turn to the natural world, we find our own subjectivity and freedom expressed in it. Schelling's philosophy of nature is a reaction against the mechanistic philosophy of the modern era—the detached subject and descriptive, third-person knowledge that had become the norm in the physical and chemical sciences. We can come to know the natural world because there are affinities between the human mind and nature; our own freedom is prefigured in nature's lawfulness. Freedom is a kind of knowing or conscious lawfulness that grows out of the particular lawfulness of our own organic nature. Here, Schelling is reacting against two popular strands of thought: first, that mind is the mere mechanistic consequence of lawful nature, and second, that nature is an arbitrary result of a free mind. Only once we see that "mind is invisible nature and nature visible mind" can we recognize the true reconciliation of freedom and lawfulness in both mind and nature, and justify the claim that nature is knowable by mind.

Where does this leave the self? The mind is at home in nature through an original affinity and so can be reconciled to it, so long as it eschews the false assumptions of early modern science and the Enlightenment. The mind does not *escape from* nature but finds itself expressed *in it*. This is true freedom. We can view culture and religion in the same way: the self should not strive to escape them, but rather to find expression in them. Freedom in its fullest sense requires expression of the self in culture, and thus we see universal truths expressed in and through individuals, in art, poetry, and so on. The idea that people can realize themselves in a satisfying way in isolation from culture and religion is a strange, recent mistake. To find this error scattered throughout these pages was a slight disappointment in an otherwise dazzling book.

NAOMI FISHER *is an assistant professor of philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. Her research focuses on Kant and post-Kantian philosophy.*

Richard Reeves

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

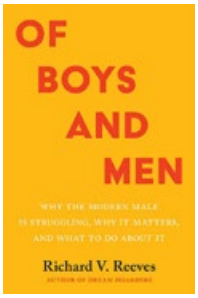
Culturally Redundant?

BRENDAN RUBERRY

Until a recent moment in human history, writes Martin Amis, "there was, simply, the Man." The Man's chief characteristic "was that he got away with everything." But today, around the industrialized world, men seem to have lost their groove. By almost any statistical measure, the average man is worse off than he was forty years ago: men account for two out of three "deaths of despair." Suicide is now the number one cause of death among British men under forty-five. In the United States, one in three men with only a high school diploma are currently out of the labor force, while 15 percent of American men report having no close friends (up from just 3 percent in 1990). The wages of most men are lower today than in 1979, while women's wages are higher across the board. Japan frets over its many male shut-ins, known as the *hikikomori*, while Sweden has declared in its schools a *pojkkrisen*, or "boy crisis."

The first glimmerings of this crisis appeared in the late 1980s. The mythopoetic Men's Movement attempted to treat this incipient sense of dislocation, which kicked off an apparently fruitless talk about the "inner male" served up on a platter of atavism, Jungian archetypes, and spuriously Native American practices like sweating in lodges, chanting, and running around bare-chested. Our own moment is a familiar jumble: you hear the same carping about real men, weak men, feminized men, soft men, soy men, men's retreats, Men's Day, bug men, lizard men, etc. Around and around goes the discourse, and yet we seem no closer to creating—or excavating—the Brave New Male. The chief difference between then and now is that the statistical outlook for men was merely drooping in the eighties; now it has fallen off a cliff.

The proposed cultural solutions may float around without landing anywhere in particular, but the problem itself is grounded in hard facts. In his new book, *Of Boys and Men*, Richard Reeves argues that the problem is structural. Society has undergone profound cultural and economic changes in the past few decades and many of them have left men—especially working-class men—disoriented and demoralized. As certain structural barriers that used to hinder women have been removed, women have proven their "natural advantage" in several areas, including in our colleges and universities. The structural disadvantages faced by men, meanwhile, have only become more entrenched during the same period. Several rounds of globalization, more



OF BOYS AND MEN
Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do about It

RICHARD V. REEVES
Brookings
$28.99 | 256 pp.

outsourcing of traditionally "male" sectors like heavy industry, increasing automation, and greater workplace competition from women meant that, for many men, the economic picture has been getting bleaker by the year.

As a result, many men are struggling to fulfill their own outmoded expectations of what a man should be. "The problem with feminism, as a liberation movement, is not that it has 'gone too far,'" Reeves writes. "It is that it has not gone far enough"—that is, it has not succeeded in replacing traditional models of masculinity with something more adequate to our current circumstances. The Western male is stuck in a culture of masculinity that is now desperately mismatched with his material reality. "Women's lives have been recast," Reeves writes. "Men's lives have not." Men have been consigned to "cultural redundancy."

Men in their twenties now earn slightly less on average than women of the same age. While women are still catching up to men in the labor market, men are now falling further behind in education. The gender gap in the awarding of undergraduate degrees is actually wider than it was in 1973, when Title IX was passed—but this time in women's favor. Reeves points out that elite men are actually doing just fine. He believes it's impossible to discuss the plight of men without discussing economic inequality, and the largest gap between men and women is inevitably at the bottom of the wealth, income, and academic performance distributions.

Reeves is dissatisfied with the usual responses to this set of problems on both the Left and the Right. On the Right, one hears a kind of response associated with the Left on other issues, one having to do with societal norms and structural disadvantage ("It's not your fault; society has made you sick"). The Left is more likely to dismiss the whole phenomenon, or to hold men responsible for their own problems and advise them to purge themselves of their "toxic masculinity."

The Right's lamentations about male alienation too often serve as a pretext for—or gateway to—celebrations of the old patriarchy or even brazen misogyny. One day a lost young man finds himself reading Jordan Peterson's *12 Rules for Life*; the next day he may be watching the former kickboxer and lifestyle influencer Andrew Tate ranting on YouTube or TikTok about how women "bear some responsibility" for sexual assault. There is a lot of money to be made from exploiting the insecurities and fomenting the rage of frustrated male adolescents.

A less alarming but no less delusional example of this cultural mode is the cult of D-Day, or an unerring belief in the salutary, masculinizing effects of combat. This idea is helpfully distilled in the following pablum, usually stamped over an image of Marcus Aurelius or a crowded Higgins boat: "Hard times create strong men / Strong men create good times / Good times create weak men / Weak men create hard times." Apparently, today's strong men actually create history memes, while the longed-for test of manhood usually has the advantage of happening somewhere else at some other time.

In any case, this is not what Reeves is about in this book. He doesn't want to turn back the clock. Nor is he proposing that we subtract from the gains women have made in the past fifty years in order to compensate the men who have lost out during the same period. To voice concern about men and boys, Reeves insists, is not zero-sum. There are, for example, large labor shortfalls in teaching and health care that could be made up by enticing more men to consider these jobs. If one's aim is to promote gender equality, one must consider that a society that serves men better—helping them be better fathers, brothers, and sons—will also serve women better. And for society to serve men better, we have to start by asking what exactly our society needs men to be.

Reeves presents a cocktail of public policies that include longer and more generous paid leave for new dads, a reformed child-support system that no longer makes excessive demands of mothers, and more father-friendly employment opportunities (working from home, working part-time, or working flexible hours). This would help alleviate the gender-wage gap while also promoting a healthier model of fatherhood—more "co-parenting," less "distant benefactor"—that reflects the demands of economic conditions not as they once were, but as they are now. Men have ceded territory in the workforce; now it's time they picked up the slack at home. And, as Reeves points out, in a nation where one in four children are without a father, it's difficult to imagine any successful new model of masculinity that isn't rooted in a new model of family and fatherhood.

The structural disadvantages faced by men and boys in education start early. Almost one in four boys is diagnosed as having a "developmental disability," which Reeves attributes to the later development of the male prefrontal cortex. The developmental gap is widest in the exam-heavy years of adolescence. Boys are set up to fail academically in their youth, and that failure compounds over time. He proposes that boys should receive an extra year of pre-K instruction before starting school to offset their delayed cognitive development.

Notwithstanding Reeves's various schemes for persuading young men to consider new kinds of work, some disaffected men will still prefer to nurse grievances about being deprived of the world their fathers and grandfathers could take for granted. They will prefer the antisocial consolations of callow idols like Tate to the practical advice of policy wonks like Reeves himself. It is worth noting that plenty of seats in federally funded retraining programs for displaced coal workers have gone unfilled. Cultural norms and prejudices can be sticky. They often survive long after the world in which they made sense has disappeared. And while no one is quite sure why, male pupils tend to perform better under male instructors, while the girls are

unaffected by the difference. A D.C. kindergarten teacher tells Reeves, however, that "some people assume if you're a man teaching young kids that you're somehow a pedophile or weirdo pervert or something." Where *could* they have gotten that idea? But a future of more male nurses does seem within reach. The "murse" used to be a punchline. Now, unlike many men working in factory jobs, the male nurse is solidly middle-class.

Reeves's concerns about the prospects of men and boys in contemporary American society come across as genuine. Despite his wonkish credentials and methods, the tone of this book is unabashedly empathetic. Of the opioid crisis, Reeves writes:

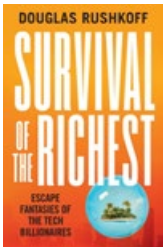
> Opioids are not like other drugs, which might be taken to artificially boost confidence, energy, or illumination.... Opioids are taken simply to numb pain—perhaps physical pain at first, then existential pain. They are not drugs of inspiration or rebellion, but of isolation and retreat. One reason that so many people die from opioid overdoses is that users are typically indoors, and very often alone.

Reeves also notes that social dislocation leaves men "vulnerable to the attentions of a demagogue." Donald Trump enjoyed the widest gender vote gap since exit polling began, and the counties with the most deaths of despair were the ones that swung most decisively to Trump in 2016. This fact underscores Reeves's argument that the problems facing men and boys in America are really problems facing everyone, weighing heavily on our economy, our schools, our health-care system, and our democracy.

Addressing the kind of male disadvantages that Reeves catalogs does not mean ignoring or excusing inequalities that favor men over women. It's possible, Reeves writes, to "hold two thoughts in our head at once." Indeed, it's urgent that we do so.

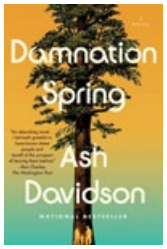
BRENDAN RUBERRY *is a writer and editorial assistant living in New York City.*

BOOKS IN BRIEF



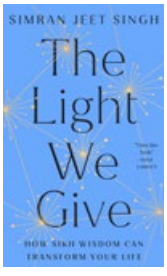
SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST
Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires
DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF
W. W. Norton
$17.95 | 224 pp.

The opening vignette of *Survival of the Richest* sees the author, media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, invited to a secluded luxury resort for what turns out to be a conversation with mega-rich tech investors who want to learn how to survive the coming apocalypse. This bizarre meeting—which centers in large part on how the mega-rich will defend their bunkers from desperate hordes—sparks Rushkoff's reflections on tech elites' fantastical attempts to escape the consequences of their own rapacious greed and addictive, socially destructive products. He covers, among other topics, the industry's dependence on financial abstraction, its propagandistic manipulation, and its scientistic "technosolutionism." Against this worldview, which he dubs "the Mindset," Rushkoff poses a "bounded economics" centered around local investment and a rededication to reality.



DAMNATION SPRING
A Novel
ASH DAVIDSON
Scribner
$17.99 | 464 pp.

In her magisterial debut novel, Ash Davidson invites readers to explore Northern California's redwood territory, a rugged part of the country unfamiliar to most Americans and largely ignored by writers more concerned with more trodden parts of the country. At the center of her story are Rich Gunderson, a fourth-generation logger, and his wife, Colleen, who are raising their young son near Damnation Spring, a resource-rich grove where redwoods "taller than the Statue of Liberty" sprang to life before Columbus first set foot in the New World. Determined to leave his family a legacy of their own, Rich purchases a ridge in the late 1970s, just as the once-mighty logging industry begins to wobble and the health effects of its decades-long herbicidal treatment start sprouting throughout the small community. Davidson's prose sings, and her story lingers well after readers step away.



THE LIGHT WE GIVE
How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life
SIMRAN JEET SINGH
Riverhead Books
$28 | 320 pp.

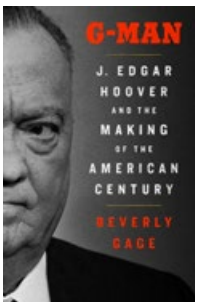
How do we see humanity in our tormentors? In his new book, *The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life*, Simran Jeet Singh reflects on how his spiritual awakening, inspired by the teachings of Guru Arjan, liberated him from the cycle of hate and pain. Growing up as a Sikh in San Antonio, Texas, Singh faced racism daily, from slurs on the basketball court to accusations of terrorism on the street. As he highlights in his book, Sikh teachings like *chardi kala* (everlasting optimism) taught him to see humanity in everyone, including the perpetrators of hate crimes against the Sikh community. He charts a path to finding "oneness through our differences," allowing us to break the colonial cycle of hatred and discover God's presence in everything around us.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in his office, April 1940

Circle in the Public Square

TOM DEIGNAN

In the final season of the British crime drama *Peaky Blinders*, a gangster-turned-MP explains why he is able to work with socialists as well as fascists. "I've learned that the line doesn't go…to the left and the right. It goes in a circle.…You go far enough left, eventually you'll meet someone who has gone far enough right to get to the same place."



G-MAN
J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century

BEVERLY GAGE
Viking Books
$45 | 864 pp.

This is as good a starting "place" as any to try and make sense of "weird and historically discordant moments," as historian Garrett M. Graff put it, such as when "former president [Trump] and his allies demonized the F.B.I. as some sort of rogue…deep state mob." What happened to the good old days, when conservatives reliably—even maniacally—defended law enforcement?

Things were never so simple, of course. In the 1950s, far-right John Birchers and McCarthyites reserved some of their most venomous rhetoric for conservative icons like Eisenhower and the U.S. Army. And in the wake of the Mar-a-Lago raids, the FBI's strange-bedfellow defenders included Joe Biden and Mike Pence.

Such complicated coalitions arise again and again in *G-Man*, Beverly Gage's provocative biography of J. Edgar Hoover. The book is touted as the first "major" Hoover bio in nearly three decades, which seems odd since the flow of salacious material about the former FBI director never seems to stop. (Consider the damning 2020 documentary *MLK* /

FBI.) Gage's previous book, *The Day Wall Street Exploded*, surveyed a spectacular, largely forgotten crime from early in Hoover's career: a 1920 terrorist bombing in Manhattan that killed nearly forty people and contributed to the passage of severe immigration restrictions four years later. This time around, Gage is working on a much bigger canvas, chronicling the intimate influences and vast cultural impact of a twentieth-century giant.

Since Hoover's death in 1972—and the beginning of his colorful afterlife—revelations have emerged of blackmail and mob ties, wiretaps and women's clothing. (About these, Gage simply says, "It is difficult to imagine Hoover taking that sort of risk, whatever his personal desires may have been.")

Hoover has become a cloak-and-dagger Forrest Gump, omnipresent in the shadows of American history, the personification of Hofstadter's paranoid style. He looms large over the American imagination and pop culture, chatting up JFK's assassins in James Ellroy's gonzo thriller *American Tabloid*. He's at the polo grounds with Jackie Gleason and Frank Sinatra in Don DeLillo's Cold War masterpiece *Underworld*. And Leonardo DiCaprio dons a bald cap and pearl necklace to depict Hoover in Clint Eastwood's semi-sympathetic 2011 biopic. More recent Hooverian allusions range from scary to surreal—from Edward Snowden's snooping revelations to Trump's dismissal of one FBI official as "a poor man's J. Edgar Hoover."

Whether this was a compliment or an insult depends—as many things do these days—on how far you're willing to venture around the ideological circle.

Gage herself calls Hoover "perhaps the most universally reviled American political figure of the twentieth century." Yet *G-Man* is not another eight-hundred pages of skullduggery and hypocrisy. Many of its assessments are even-handed, measured—perhaps, for some readers, unsettlingly so. This approach complements Gage's broader exploration of the twentieth century's political and cultural landscape, over which Hoover loomed as a "conservative state-builder [in] the heyday of American liberalism."

By the late 1950s, Hoover was on top of the world—hawking a best-seller, prominently featured in a fawning Jimmy Stewart movie, and waiting for like-minded ally Richard Nixon to assume the presidency. An astonishing thirty-nine out of forty Americans "either liked or accepted" the job Hoover was doing, according to one poll Gage cites. "Many people," she adds, "would later profess to be outraged about what the FBI was doing, [but] nobody in Congress or the Justice Department seemed inclined to interfere."

A deft iron fist–velvet glove combination elevated Hoover to this pinnacle, Gage suggests. For all of his norm-shattering machinations, Hoover was also a brilliant manager, grasping the importance of decidedly unsensational innovations, from fingerprinting to filing systems.

Gage also links Hoover's rise to a powerful, if vague, cultural Christianity. This yields frustratingly hazy insights—partly because America's broader relationship to Christianity is, well, frustratingly hazy, at once urgently existential and conspicuously un-Christian. More plainly disappointing is *G-Man*'s meager analysis of the Catholic Left, from Dorothy Day to the Berrigans and the so-called "Harrisburg 7," none of whom are mentioned. Gage does present the notorious 1971 theft of FBI files at Media, Pennsylvania, as a watershed moment. Yet as historian Betty Medsger has noted, "there would have been no [Media] burglary," without "the Catholic peace movement." This is particularly relevant since Catholics—still suspect in the eyes of the 1920s Justice Department—were later recruited heavily by the FBI, especially out of universities such as Georgetown.

By then, of course, the country had evolved profoundly, even if Hoover had not. His grossest excesses came amidst the rising civil-rights movement. But *G-Man* emphasizes that Hoover was not alone in his opinions; he had powerful accomplices and enablers along the way. It was only weeks after Hoover's death that Nixon's "plumbers" broke into the Watergate hotel to install—what else?—wiretaps.

Ultimately, Beverly Gage asks readers to reconsider the role J. Edgar Hoover played in America's "long national nightmare," the one from which we've perhaps not yet woken. Was he simplistically made into an "icon of oppression," to use the outraged words of former Hoover aide Deke DeLoach? Have we, as Gage hints, used Hoover as a "too-easy scapegoat" to avoid confronting broader, messier complicities at the heart of "the American century"?

John Edgar Hoover was born—fittingly—in the nation's capital, in 1895. His was a "loving family," Gage writes, but one with a volatile history, leaving Hoover with a "merciless anxiety" and "desire to control what happened around him."

During an era of urgent debates about religion and masculinity, Hoover followed his older brother into an active Lutheran church community. For nearly two decades after his father's death in 1921, Hoover lived with his mother, fueling lifelong rumors about his sexuality.

As classmates went off to college, Hoover remained in Washington, where a modest level of racial integration was giving way to Jim Crow's far stricter codes. These were further reinforced, Gage suggests, by Hoover's lifelong devotion to a George Washington University fraternity with powerful white-supremacist ties.

Throughout the 1910s, as Gage made clear in *The Day Wall Street Exploded*, many Americans of Hoover's background feared that the United States was collapsing under the weight of urban crowds and crime, of Catholic and Jewish disloyalty and radicalism. After joining the Justice Department in 1917, Hoover initiated "the first systematic peacetime attempt to track the political opinions of noncitizens

and to deport them," Gage writes, while also "collect[ing] information on native-born and naturalized citizens." At the same time, Hoover targeted the racist, anti-immigrant KKK—not the last time a nation riddled with crackpots left Hoover looking comparatively moderate. Still, Hoover's career could have ended after the reckless, anti-radical Palmer raids, and when Hoover backed a post–World War I "sedition law," Gage notes, Congress "adamantly refused."

But reservations about an abusive, excessively powerful "national police" force coexisted with a fledgling, progressive faith in government problem-solving. And so maybe we shouldn't be surprised that the "presidents who did the most to empower Hoover were the two great liberal titans of the twentieth century": FDR and LBJ.

Roosevelt told Hoover to combat the rise of 1930s extremists on the Left and Right, though there's a book's worth of questions to be asked about why Hoover—like many Americans—seemed far less worried about the latter.

Ultimately, Gage says, it was FDR who "secretly overturned the Supreme Court's ban on wiretapping," in part to help "men like Hoover…sell their work to the public to show how the federal government could play an active and forward-thinking role." Japanese Americans were surely among those who believed the feds were already "active" enough. Hoover apparently agreed; he opposed internment after Pearl Harbor. He did nothing, though, to challenge the government's "lavender scare" targeting gays, an episode of particular import for "Washington's best-known bachelor and most confirmed woman dodger," in Gage's words. A series of lynchings and other racial violence in the 1940s foreshadowed what would become Hoover's most urgent challenges—Emmett Till, Freedom Summer, "four little girls" in Birmingham. At the end of World War II, though, Hoover was a "darling of the New Deal establishment," and the FBI grew "four times larger," according to Gage. This seemed more than justified amidst Soviet-spy hysteria and A-bomb anxiety.

The rise of Joe McCarthy was yet another opportunity for Hoover to distinguish himself from the crazies, a member of the more responsible—increasingly Catholic—anti-Communist camp. Some thought Hoover himself was Catholic, as he hobnobbed with Fulton Sheen and Cardinal Spellman, and "received an honorary degree or delivered a graduation speech at nearly every major Catholic university." For many, Gage writes, reaching such cultural preeminence "might have inspired thoughts of retirement." Instead, ironically, the Catholic candidate won the presidency in 1960, and appointed his cocksure brother attorney general—Hoover's boss.

For all the animosity that followed, it was "with the approval of both Hoover and Bobby Kennedy" that "the FBI installed wiretaps at [Martin Luther] King's home and offices," citing concerns about Communist infiltration of the civil-rights movement.

Clearly—tragically—Hoover's treatment of King was at least as appalling as the legal establishment's broader response to the civil-rights movement, and, to a degree, to the New Left in general.

A far more complex problem with the conflicts of Hoover's era—not to mention our own—is that they are rooted not only in simmering issues like race or radicalism or whether the Kennedys whacked Marilyn. Just as important are nuts-and-bolts questions about when the federal government should intervene to solve a given problem. And what should happen when they try and fail? Deep into the 1960s, Hoover was arguing that the FBI had no jurisdiction over various pressing matters. Almost always, G-Men were sent in anyway.

James Baldwin had already called out Hoover by name in 1963, after the notorious Birmingham church bombing. By the time JFK was killed months later, liberals already felt a broad "distrust of [Hoover's] agency," in Robert Caro's words.

And who else felt the same way? Neo-Confederates in the Jim Crow South, who strung up effigies of Hoover as well as Bobby Kennedy. Talk about strange bedfellows.

In 1967, Richard Nixon wrote an article for *Reader's Digest*, asking: "What happened to America?" In the national debates that followed, it was a lot more interesting to shout about the polarizing extremes—hippies, conspiracies, and the counterculture. That's why, to this day, spectacular tragedies, like those of Emmet Till or Marilyn Monroe are turned into high-profile, buzzworthy prestige films.

But unresolved conflicts over seemingly bland technical matters of local and national jurisdiction also exacerbated the Till family's suffering and fueled some of the more outlandish theorizing surrounding Marilyn Monroe's death. This leaves us with the *de rigueur* dark web of Don DeLillo, Oliver Stone, and *The X-Files*, as well as QAnon and the "deep state."

This is the final, ultimate irony of Hoover's career. In the harsh light of bipartisan criticisms, it becomes harder and harder to explain why the federal government should ever be in the business of trying to solve any problems at all, leaving us with only a scathing critique of "the very idea of government service…still a major feature of the modern right," Gage notes.

Ultimately, *G-Man* offers a cerebral and engaging review of these complicated but important issues—some of which have been two centuries in the making and may well take as long to untangle.

For now, J. Edgar Hoover's colorful afterlife continues: Netflix has announced it is turning Don DeLillo's *Underworld* into a movie.

TOM DEIGNAN, *a regular* Commonweal *contributor, has written about books for the* New York Times *and* National Catholic Reporter. *He teaches English and Humanities at CUNY and is working on a book about immigration.*

FROM THE BENCH

upon reading the prologue
to Philip Roth's The Great American Novel

Stephen Kampa

One sees, from the beginning,
    where this book
is going: life's a game
    and nothing but,
so grab your (corked) bat

and swing for the fences,
    round the bases
while waving at the round-mouthed
    faces, touch home
and know, no matter what,

your score won't matter more
    than the post-game
party's post-party lull, the boring
    stars not half
so engrossing as the last

tumbler of rum. The real
    flub when you
claim none of this is
    fair is thinking
fair is something to think:

that benchmark was never there—
    no league rules,
no umpire: only palace intrigue
    during the final
years of a pointless empire.

STEPHEN KAMPA *is the author of three collections of poetry:* Cracks in the Invisible *(2011),* Bachelor Pad *(2014), and* Articulate as Rain *(2018). His work has appeared in the* Christian Century, Yale Review, Cincinnati Review, Southwest Review, Hopkins Review, Poetry Northwest, Subtropics, *and* Smartish Pace. *He was also included in* Best American Poetry 2018 *and* Together in a Sudden Strangeness: America's Poets Respond to the Pandemic *(2020). During the spring of 2021, he was the writer in residence at the Amy Clampitt House. He teaches at Flagler College.*

A volunteer at Casa Alitas talks to newly arrived asylum seekers, Tucson, Arizona, February 2020.

AP PHOTO/DARIO LOPEZ-MILLS

Sacred Duties

ALEJANDRO NAVA

"Do you not see how necessary," John Keats once wrote, "a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" These words have been ringing in my ears lately, reminding me that education happens in a variety of ways, that it exceeds what can be discovered in the pages of a book or within the walls of a classroom or laboratory.

I'm a professor of religious studies, so it should come as no surprise that books have meant a lot to me. They have opened doors to new regions of mind and spirit. I have looked to books for guidance and revelation, and for the exhilarating delight—the *aha!* moment— that accompanies all discoveries. But books have their limits: they can't, by themselves, provide a "place where the heart must feel and suffer," which is why Casa Alitas, a shelter for migrants and refugees in Tucson, has become a place where I receive an alternative education.

The work of Casa Alitas, providing hospitality and humanitarian aid to migrant families and individuals fleeing violence and poverty, builds on an old legacy in Tucson, going all the way back to the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. That movement arose to meet the needs of Central American refugees fleeing the repression and violence of their homelands. In the wake of the 1980 Refugee Act, churches and synagogues in Tucson banded together to protect the rights of any refugee who could demonstrate a "well-founded fear of persecution," shepherding them, via an underground railroad of sorts, to religious communities around the country. Though the Sanctuary Movement would decline in the 1990s, the example of its founding figures—the Rev. John Fife, John Corbett, Sr. Darlene Nicgorski, Fr. Ramón Dagoberto Quiñones, and many others—would become the seed of many new organizations in Southern Arizona: the Kino Border Institute, No More Deaths, the Samaritans, Borderlinks, Humane Borders, Derechos Humanos, the Florence Project, and Casa Alitas, among others.

Most of these groups have their origins—if not a current affiliation—with religious communities. They all draw from the deep well of the Bible, which is clearly marked by the

experience of migration, diaspora, and exile. The command to protect the stranger is a fundamental biblical theme. "The stranger who sojourns with you," decrees Leviticus 19:34, "shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all refugees themselves, uprooted because of famine; and Joseph and Mary, with the infant Jesus, were no different—forced to steal away to Egypt like their displaced ancestors. Wherever one turns in the Bible, the realities of exodus and diaspora loom as large as a dust storm in the desert, threatening the stability of temple and town, unnerving every conscience. The biblical prophets made it their mission to rebuke the Israelites whenever they became callous toward the victims of war and poverty. Their furious words would shift tone and tempo on a dime, sometimes sounding like the peal of a trumpet or shofar, blaring their demand for repentance, sometimes muted to comfort and soothe. Our sacred duties to the hungry, the homeless, and the stranger in our midst were, through it all, a constant refrain.

Casa Alitas, an offshoot of Catholic Community Services, stands in this ancient tradition. It exists to welcome and assist the wandering Arameans of today, to give "wings"—as the word *alitas* suggests—to those who come to us from distant lands. Practically speaking, we provide temporary shelter, food services, Covid testing, and travel arrangements to our guests. Every day, between two hundred and seven hundred people are brought to our doorstep by Border Patrol and ICE. They come from all over the world. Before the pandemic, we received a significant number of Central Americans. But with the Remain in Mexico and Title 42 programs enacted during the Trump administration, Central Americans have been largely prohibited from crossing the border to apply for asylum, and the population we serve has shifted to a preponderance of Cubans, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, Columbians, Peruvians, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Haitians, Brazilians, Mexicans, Georgians, Russians, and Indians. Tucson has become a major hub for asylum-seekers. In most cases, they stay with us for a matter of days, just long enough for their sponsors to pay for their plane or bus tickets. They come and go quickly, passing through our doors into a brave new world.

If you add up these migrating populations, I suppose it's true to say, as the xenophobes do, that there is a crisis at the border. Our shelter and satellite shelters are frequently at capacity, bustling with energy and motion. Instead of alarm and apprehension, however, most of us who work with these groups see optimism and possibility in their arrival, a reclamation of the promise of America. When Casa Alitas fills up this way, the entire shelter gives the impression of something fully alive, pulsing with vitality and hope. Besides, ask any volunteer or staff member and they will tell you that if there is a crisis, it's of a moral and spiritual nature, a demand to prioritize the least of our brothers and sisters, to stand against the rising tides of nativism and bigotry in our day. We can draw a lesson, perhaps, from how the so-called "theologians of crisis" (Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, et al.) responded to an earlier wave of dislocation, when Jewish refugees fled the Germans; their work reminds us that all Christians must sooner or later decide whether they have the heart, soul, and courage required to love their most vulnerable neighbors, whether they will make room in the inn for the fugitive Christ child.

I work in the transportation branch of Casa Alitas, spending a lot of time at the Tucson airport—helping with travel arrangements, assisting with boarding passes, processing guests through TSA, and returning those who are unable to fly back to our hotels. Almost every volunteer, across a wide spectrum of ages and religious backgrounds, speaks of the profound impact that this work has on his or her life. In my experience, this sort of volunteer work offers the rarest gift, a joy that surpasses all understanding: the joy of service. I come away feeling a bond and kinship with these sojourners, their lives now intertwined with mine. Thomas Merton wrote about an epiphany he had one day while on the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville—he described it as waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation. That is how I feel after I've been at Casa Alitas.

Though I'm from a working-class Mexican-American family in Tucson, and the first to graduate from college, I suddenly find myself in a privileged career and setting, a tenured college professor who has the rare opportunity to pursue knowledge for its own sake, debating ideas and beliefs with my students in the comfortable and rarified bubble of a campus. I am grateful for all of it, of course. And yet, coming face to face with thousands of migrants and refugees who own little but the clothes on their backs, I am suddenly jerked out of this charmed academic life and drawn into the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable and deprived people.

The effect has been revelatory. The stories of adversity that I hear at Casa Alitas—the desperate flights from famine and political repression, the slog through the jungles of the Darién Gap, the assaults by police and cartels—make me feel grateful for my life here in the United States, it's true. But the greater lesson is that God really does appear to us in strange and unexpected guises, as an outsider or stranger. It's all too easy to miss him.

In 2012, Tucson's city council declared us an "Immigrant Welcoming City," and the city has a record to back that designation up. Many people here have made it their calling, collectively or individually, to shelter today's sojourners, wherever they come from. Such people have helped me realize that the study of religion should be about more than contemplating divine transcendence or the properties of the world to come. True soul-making happens when contemplation takes root in action, when we look up from our books and see the Word of God presented to us in the face of a stranger who needs our help.

ALEJANDRO NAVA *is a professor of religious studies at the University of Arizona and the author of* Street Scriptures: Between God and Hip-Hop *(University of Chicago Press).*

BAPTISM

Valerie Wohlfeld

You enter through the door of roses
and trefoil, held in your mother's hands
that seem as holy as the Madonna's
hands; the alcove Madonna who never sighs
in the hairline cracks of her imperfect wood, watching
you even as the forced grotesque limestone eye
of the gargoyle watches you; and the priest
who has known the saved and the drowned
between front and fist, grasps the span
and lunge and cry of you—
yet even as you are newly born you are dying,
and the gatekeeper, gravedigger, and mourner
will choreograph your end in this same place—
can you see, outside the church window,
the small corner of opened earth,
where land mixes with violets and old bones?

VALERIE WOHLFELD *has published poetry in* Commonweal, First Things, *the* Sewanee Theological Review, *the* Christian Century, Christianity and Literature, *the* New Yorker, Poetry, *the* New Criterion, Prairie Schooner, *and elsewhere. Her books are* Thinking the World Visible, *winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, and* Woman with Wing Removed *(Truman State University Press).*

The Joan & Bill

Hank Center

FOR THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

2023 ANNUAL CARDINAL BERNARDIN COMMON CAUSE LECTURE

BISHOP JOHN STOWE, O.F.M. CONV.

Tuesday, April 11, 2023
7 - 8:30 p.m.

The Cardinal Bernardin Common Cause lecture series provides Catholic prelates a platform to engage people of good will in common cause with the Church on important issues facing us today. The Hank Center welcomes our 2023 Bernardin Lecturer— the Most Rev. John Stowe, O.F.M. Conv., Bishop of Lexington, Kentucky. Rev. Stowe's lecture, "The Common Good and Synodality: The Vision of Pope Francis", will be followed by a Q&A session. This event is co-sponsored by Commonweal.

This event is free, open to the public, and all are welcome. A zoom option available for livestream. Scan the QR code or visit www.luc.edu/ccih to register for livestream. Registration is not necessary for those attending in person.

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO
1870
AD · MAJOREM · DEI · GLORIAM

Event will be held in McCormick Lounge, Coffey Hall, LSC
1000 W. Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL, 60660

P 773.508.3820 **E** HankCenter@LUC.edu

Commonweal