

**SECOND THOUGHTS  
ABOUT #METOO**  
MARY EBERSTADT

the weekly

Standard

JUNE 25, 2018

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# THE NEW VIRTUE POLICE

- **KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON**  
on Heretics & Etiquette
- **JAMES CAMPBELL**  
meets Lionel Shriver



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COVER BY DAVE CLEGG

# Anthony Bourdain, 1956-2018

Any assessment of Anthony Bourdain's life, his suicide notwithstanding, is likely to be tinged with jealousy. We suppose someone had to get paid to be a world traveler and bon vivant, but did Bourdain have to be so good at it? At a minimum, few people have a constitution that can alternately subsist on gallons of rich bone marrow and spicy Asian street food cooked in hygienically mysterious circumstances.

America's favorite food writer was brusque and opinionated and, perhaps too often, offensive. But there was much to admire in a man who refused to abide mediocrity or bow to the dictates of cultural fashion. The 1999 *New Yorker* essay that made him famous declared of vegetarians that "serious



cooks regard these members of the dining public—and their Hezbollah-like splinter faction, the vegans—as enemies of everything that's good and decent in the human spirit."

Bourdain was not unaware of America's shortcomings, but he loved

the country that made him famous and wealthy and he never engaged in the sort of anti-patriotic tut-tutting one sees from many famous Americans abroad. The writer James Gleick reports that he appeared on a panel discussion with Bourdain in Australia where an audience member asked whether the 9/11 attacks weren't America's own fault. While Gleick was mulling over what to say, Bourdain immediately responded with string of profanities directed at the questioner ending with "and the horse you rode in on."

Imaginative, ferociously curious, humane in the widest sense, cool but never pretentious—Anthony Bourdain was one of those rare celebrities who was justly celebrated. ♦

## The (Unruly) Streets of San Francisco



Awaiting their *Hizzoner*

Things have gotten bad in California. So bad, in fact, as the *New York Times* recently reported, that some not insignificant number of San Franciscans are actually thinking of . . . voting Republican. The streets are filthy, crime is on the uptick, and government services are in decline. Add to that the city's burgeoning homeless population—an excess generated at least in part by California's generous welfare programs and the state's year-round beautiful weather—and you begin to think of New York City in the early 1990s.

"People are starting to ask, 'Maybe we need a Rudy Giuliani?'" one resident tells the *Times*. Giuliani, readers will remember, saved New York by bucking the doctrinaire liberalism of the city's political and cultural elite and directing its police force to, you know, arrest people for breaking the law.

The primary reason more of San Francisco's concerned citizens don't simply plump for the GOP—such is the impression of the *Times* reporter, anyway—is Donald Trump. Nobody wants to be associated with *that* guy. "It's hard," says one resident, "because people don't want to identify as Republican, per se. But then they look around."

Irving Kristol famously quipped that a neoconservative is a liberal who got mugged by reality. Maybe a San Francisco Republican is just a Democrat who got mugged. ♦

## #MeThree

We've read some dumb and substandard political pieces in our day—we may even have generated some—but a June 10 piece in the

*Washington Post* is a strong contender for Dumbest Op-Ed Ever Written. The article, by Suzanna Danuta Walters—according to her byline a "professor of sociology and director of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at Northeastern University" and "editor of the gender studies journal *Signs*"—is headlined "Why Can't We Hate Men?"

The question is rhetorical. She can and does hate men, judging from her contribution to the *Post*. Walters's reasoning goes something like this: Although it's true that not every male on earth is a bad person, she doesn't like to hear feminists qualify their arguments with the statement that all men aren't bad. Why? Because most men are really really terrible.

Or something like that. Anyway, we'll spare readers the trouble and skip to the end:

So men, if you really are #WithUs and would like us to not hate you for all the millennia of woe you have produced and benefited from, start with this: Lean out so we can actually just stand up without being beaten down. Pledge to vote for feminist women only. Don't

TOP: DAVID PAUL MORRIS / BLOOMBERG / GETTY; BOTTOM: JOSH EDELSON / AFP / GETTY

run for office. Don't be in charge of anything. Step away from the power. We got this. And please know that your crocodile tears won't be wiped away by us anymore. We have every right to hate you. You have done us wrong. #BecausePatriarchy. It is long past time to play hard for Team Feminism. And win.



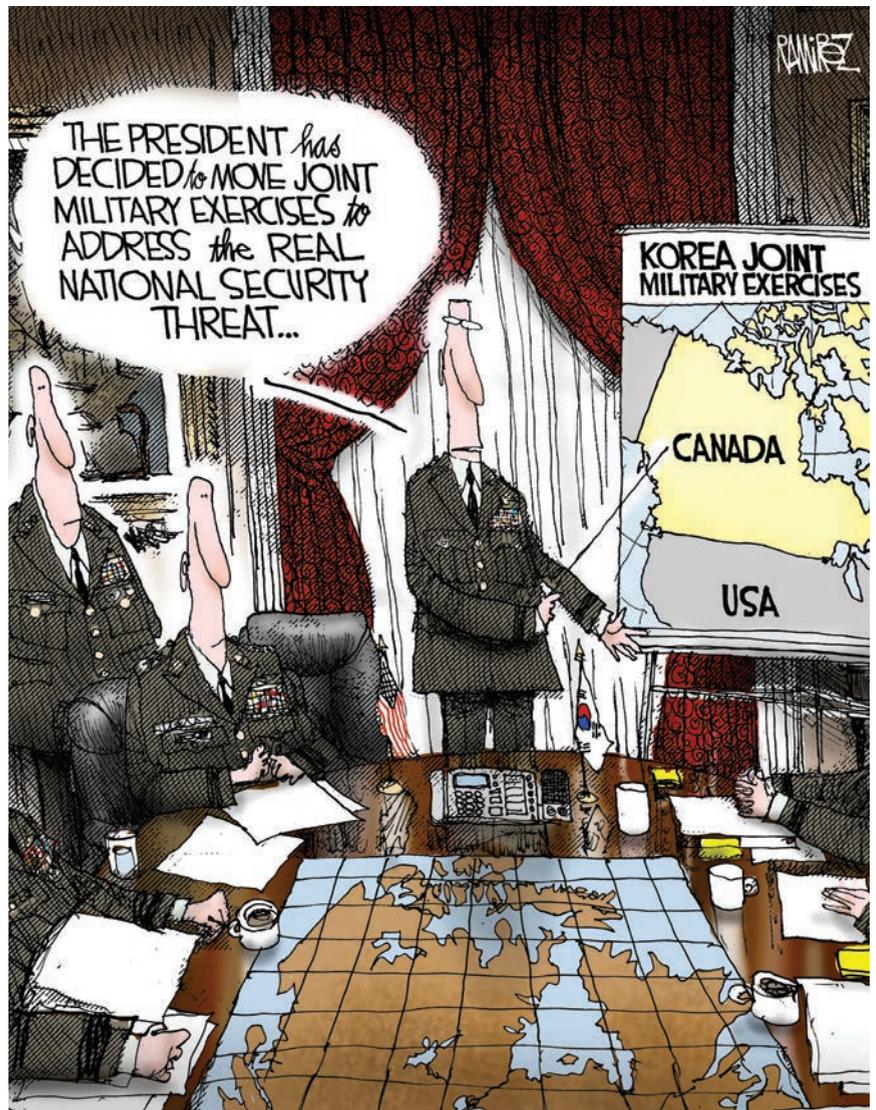
The illustrious Professor Walters

You may wonder how the professor's demand that men step aside and let women win—a demand premised, isn't it, on the surely anathema supposition that men are stronger?—is supposed to further the cause of feminism. If so, that's because you're not a tenured academic and director of a Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. ♦

## For Sale: Local Journalism, Like New

Far be it from THE SCRAPBOOK to judge the philanthropic impulses of the extremely wealthy, but the recent announcement of a \$20 million gift to the City University of New York struck us as a bit rich. The money, which will fund the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, was the gift of Craig Newmark, described by the *New York Times* as “the Craigslist entrepreneur who arguably forced the newspaper industry to change its business model after his website put a dent in the lucrative classified ads business.”

Well, everything is “arguable,” we suppose. But Craigslist's free ad listings did far more than “put a dent” in the “lucrative” business of classified ads. Newmark's website, launched in 1996, was the first horseman of the Internet apocalypse that gutted the newspaper industry. It extinguished many small, local newspapers that relied on classified ad revenue to stay afloat. The company's trademark hippie purple peace sign notwithstanding, a Harvard Business School study found that Craigslist led to “an increase in subscription



prices, a decrease in circulation, and . . . a decrease in display-ad rates.” Newmark's network of free sites, the *Economist* noted, “has probably done more than anything to destroy newspapers' income.”

Yet suddenly he views himself as journalism's savior. “In this time,” he told the *Times*, “when trustworthy news is under attack, somebody has to stand up.” Newmark claims he “developed a serious interest in journalism about 10 years ago, when he started attending journalism conferences,” which, if you've ever attended a journalism

conference, seems unlikely. But he's clearly developed the philanthropist's taste for seeing his name attached prominently to his acts of generosity: The newly endowed CUNY program will now be known as the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism.

“The way you stand up these days is by putting your money where your mouth is, and that's what I've done,” he remarked humbly. That's great for the non-journalist academics who'll get sleek new offices at CUNY. But we would have preferred to see some



Craig Newmark

TOP: VIA YOUTUBE; BOTTOM: J.D. LASICA

of that dough channeled to the many small-market newspapers that are on life-support. Or, failing that, perhaps a fund for out-of-work reporters. He could put his name on that, too: Call it “Craig’s Kids.” ♦

## Sources Close to the Reporter

There was gnashing of teeth last week when it emerged that the Trump administration had seized the emails and phone records of *New York Times* national security reporter Ali Watkins in an investigation of former Senate Intelligence Committee



Ali Watkins

aide James A. Wolfe. Wolfe had been leaking like a busted gasket to Watkins and is accused of lying about it to Justice Department investigators.

The initial outrage, however, was muted when it emerged that the wunderkind reporter had had a three-year affair with the 57-year-old Wolfe, who is three decades older. The incident calls to mind a legendary episode involving the late *New York Times* editor Abe Rosenthal, who found out that a reporter had been sleeping with a Philadelphia politician she was supposed to be covering. He fired her on the spot and silenced the newsroom by declaring, “I don’t care if you [expletive] an elephant, just so long as you don’t cover the circus” for the paper.

The Trump administration’s seizure of Watkins’s records is nonetheless troubling. And it seems to be following in the footsteps of the Obama administration in this regard, though far less aggressively, to be sure. The Obama administration’s ardent leak-hunting led to its seizing phone records from a number of AP bureaus in 2012. As the AP reported at the time, “The exact number of journalists who used the phone lines during that period is unknown but more than 100 journalists work in the offices whose phone records were targeted.” That wasn’t the worst of it: Obama’s DoJ broke with

decades of precedent and named Fox News’s James Rosen a “co-conspirator” in an espionage case.

Unlike Watkins, the journalists in these cases were doing their jobs with consummate professionalism. Pulitzer-winner and former *Times* reporter James Risen, who himself successfully fought a court battle to avoid being forced to testify in an espionage case, wrote an op-ed in the paper about the Watkins incident. The headline: “If Donald Trump Targets Journalists, Thank Obama.” ♦

## Only in 'Merica

While much of America learned this week that Washington, D.C., has a professional hockey team, THE SCRAPBOOK was reminded that San Diego still has a Major League Baseball team. At the Braves-Padres game at Petco Park, caught on video that quickly became social-media famous, Braves outfielder Ender Inciarte popped a foul ball into the stands. The



Gabby DiMarco gives Padres fans their most memorable moment of the season.



ball was caught by Padres fan Gabby DiMarco—in her beer cup. Somehow most of the beer stayed in the cup even after the ball landed in it, so DiMarco did the only rational thing she could do: She drank it.

And for that brief moment, we were absolutely certain that America is not in decline. ♦

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## Wonder Years

**A**round the corner from my house the sequel to the hit movie *Wonder Woman* is being filmed. This is a bigger deal than you might think given that I live in Washington, D.C., which countless times (and appropriately) has been called Hollywood for ugly people. When celebrities come through town to promote their pet causes on Capitol Hill, it's newsworthy, and you would be surprised how often jaded policy wonks turn into sycophantic fan-girls around even the hoariest reality TV star.

It's no wonder, then, that sightings of *Wonder Woman* (the actress Gal Gadot) have been breathlessly reported on my neighborhood list-serv, and nearby restaurants boast of serving her dinner. Gadot's costars Kristen Wiig and Chris Pine have supposedly been spotted at the nearby organic taqueria. Neighborhood busybodies might bicker about parking restrictions and traffic disruptions from the shoot, but every last one of them would start grinning like an idiot if they happened to bump into one of the stars.

The movie, titled *Magic Hour*, is to be set in the 1980s (the last decade during which my neighborhood could be considered even remotely hip), and the producers have made the shoot as authentic as possible by re-creating some of the 1980s storefronts.

Which is how I found myself once again standing in front of the Commander Salamander store.

Founded by a flame-haired proprietress named Wendy Ezrailson in the 1970s, Commander Salamander was for a time the locus of the punk scene in Washington. Ezrailson hosted a party for Andy Warhol to celebrate the launch of *Interview* magazine, and celebrities like Cher were known to shop there when they were in town.

I was 11 years old and passing through Washington on my way to

summer camp when I first stumbled into Commander Salamander. After a day and a half stuffed into an overheated van with my fellow campers, I wanted some time to myself, so I told the rest of my group I would meet them at the nearby public library in an hour. Wandering down Wisconsin Avenue looking for something to eat, I heard the unmistakable sound of the Dead Kennedys. It was coming from a shop whose cluttered windows and funky signage differed markedly from



the bistros and boring clothing stores that dominated the rest of the block.

To a kid from Florida who attended a strict Christian fundamentalist school, walking into Commander Salamander was akin to entering an alternative universe. I tried not to look shocked by the "Satan is my home-boy" T-shirts and the vinyl bras and hot pink go-go boots. I attempted to act nonchalant while examining pins that said things like "Too fast to live. Too young to die." I had only recently found one or two likeminded friends at school with whom I passed around like samizdat cassette tapes filled with alternative music. Meanwhile, the adults in my life still thought I listened to Amy Grant.

The young man and woman working that day had just the right amount of new wave insouciance to make me

believe they were the coolest people I'd ever meet. She had lots of heavy black eyeliner and dyed purple hair and wore scuffed Doc Martens. I can't remember what he looked like because I couldn't stop staring at his Circle Jerks T-shirt and feeling a vague embarrassment. They were real-life versions of something I could only dream of becoming myself: They were punk.

I lost track of time as I looked at the weird hats and racks of jewelry, the dark glittery makeup and Manic Panic hair dye, the leopard print bags and endless rows of T-shirts. I wanted it all, and for the first time in my young life I understood what it meant to covet. Alas, the only thing I could afford was a small Commander Salamander pin—neon orange with the store logo and a smattering of little black salamanders—which I immediately pinned to my backpack. Within a year I had shaved off half my hair, thinking my asymmetrical style looked new wave when in fact I resembled a confused escapee from *A Flock of Seagulls*. I was sternly rebuked by school officials for my "unladylike" appearance.

Eventually I outgrew the weird hair and my punk phase (although I still own a pair of motorcycle boots reminiscent of that shopgirl's Doc Martens). Commander Salamander closed in 2010, and the space it once occupied is now a bank.

I could only peer through the window of the re-created store, but what I saw—lots of bad track-lighting and aggressively primary colors—screamed 1980s. When it's completed, the set will no doubt provide a suitable backdrop for the lissome *Wonder Woman* and her costars, but it will lack the edgy weirdness of the original. Perhaps that's why seeing the Commander Salamander logo again after all these years prompted more melancholy than Manic Panic.

That's the thing about nostalgia. Like an ill-considered haircut, it's best experienced from a distance.

CHRISTINE ROSEN

# The Summit of Our Fears

The June 12 meeting in Singapore between Donald Trump and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un has generated a bewildering array of responses from observers around the world. These responses do not fall along predictable ideological lines. Back and forth across the ideological span, we find everything from cautious optimism to outrage.

That alone warns against confident pronouncements about what the dialogue between Trump and Kim may produce. We're reminded, too, that this is far from the first time an American president has engaged with a dictator and his regime, often in the face of sharp criticism. Dwight Eisenhower hosted Joseph Stalin's loyal subordinate Nikita Khrushchev at Camp David. Ronald Reagan received Mikhail Gorbachev at the White House when the Soviet Union's gulags were very much operational. Richard Nixon visited Mao Zedong, a man responsible for the deaths of 60 million people.

None of this justifies Trump's sitting alongside Kim Jong-un as though the latter were a legitimate leader rather than an international hoodlum and a murderer. Nor is it beyond dispute that these earlier American presidents were right to treat the leaders of evil regimes with outward deference. But it does suggest that presidents are sometimes called upon to glad-hand men whom they know to be guilty of grave crimes.

In sharp contrast to previous presidents, however, Trump has gone out of his way to exacerbate the already deeply vexed symbolism of the meeting. Earlier presidents were aware of the need to speak carefully, knowing that their adversaries would scrutinize their every word in search of weaknesses to exploit. Trump blathered about Kim as though he were holding a campaign rally. "Great personality and very smart," the president said about a man who murdered his uncle and half-brother, a man whose

regime imprisons entire families when even one member is suspected of a thought-crime. "I learned he's a very talented man," announced Trump.

The verbal follies have only continued in the days since the meeting. After he landed at Andrews Air Force Base, he tweeted: "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea." And went on: "President Obama said that North Korea was our biggest and most dangerous problem. No longer—sleep well tonight!" As if a single sit-down were all it took to tame a totalitarian regime that worships its twisted leader as a god.

There were substantive follies, too. The administration had insisted that there would be no negotiations until Pyongyang took—as Vice President Mike Pence put it—"credible, verifiable, and concrete steps toward denuclearization." The Kim regime has taken no such steps. The North does claim it destroyed its main nuclear facility, the one at Punggyeri, but the site may well have fallen into disuse. Journalists were allowed to film an explosion, but that is all the verification Trump got.

The United States, meanwhile, made a significant concession: the cessation of joint military exercises with South Korea. Trump, using Pyongyang's own propagandistic language by calling the drills "very provocative," surprised both South Korea and the Pentagon with this concession—admittedly a nonbinding announcement. He dismissed the importance of these exercises by calling them "tremendously expensive," but that is one reason Kim wants them to stop. Every time we run a ground drill, every time a U.S. or South Korean jet flies a sortie, the North runs a reciprocal operation. These are painfully expensive for a government that has no money. These war games are in essence another sanction on North Korea, there as part of the maximum-pressure policy. Lifting them eases the pressure.



*Kim Jong-un in Singapore, June 12*

Trump made a similar case regarding the U.S. troop presence in South Korea. The troops will not be coming home now, he said, in an interview with Fox News's Bret Baier on Air Force One after the talks. But, he added: "I would love to get the military out as soon as we can because it costs a lot of money and a lot of money for us. We don't get paid fully for that military which—you know—I'll be talking to South Korea about. But we have 32,000 soldiers in South Korea. I would like to get them home."

The United States is the leader of the free world. We created a global, rules-based order that redounds to the benefit of no one so much as ourselves. The presence of U.S. troops in South Korea has been crucial to maintaining the uneasy peace on the peninsula. It has allowed us to extend America's benevolent sphere of influence in East Asia and protect important allies and our access to their markets. Whatever money we'd save by withdrawing our troops tomorrow would be spent many times over in the long term, with an unstable North Korean regime and an expansionist China.

The agreement that came out of the summit is, as such joint statements often are, bereft of substance. It doesn't even define "denuclearization." For the United States, the term means North Korea getting rid of its nuclear weapons program in toto; for North Korea, it almost certainly means the peninsula being rid of the U.S. presence.

But the agreement is not for that reason meaningless. The agreement will have results—destructive ones. China and Russia will almost certainly use the U.S.-North

Korean rapprochement as an excuse to circumvent sanctions on Pyongyang even more flagrantly than they already do. Other rogue states will conclude they, too, should acquire nuclear weapons so that they, too, can demand meetings with the American president. Kim, if the history of engaging with thug regimes is any guide, will interpret his newfound parity with the American president as license to engage in greater criminality—especially since few words were said in Singapore about the human-rights abuses in the North.

In the interview with Bret Baier, Trump turned a question about these horrific abuses into an excuse to *praise* Kim Jong-un. "He's a tough guy. Hey, when you take over a country, tough country, with tough people and you take it over from your father—I don't care who you are, what you are, how much of an advantage you have. If you can do that at 27 years old, you—I mean that's 1 in 10,000 that could do that. . . . So he is a very smart guy."

We strongly suspect Kim Jong-un will do exactly what his father and grandfather did. Talks with the United States will begin with sunshiney rhetoric. Once there are obligations for the North Koreans, they will not meet them and instead will accuse the United States of duplicity. And eventually, whatever agreement our diplomats fashion with their North Korean counterparts will fall apart, with the Kim regime stronger as a consequence of sanctions abeyance and further along in its quest for a workable nuclear-warhead delivery system. Time is on Kim's side whenever we ease the financial pressures on the North.



Yet, leaving aside its risible implementation, Trump's approach of meeting first with Kim and working out the details later is not obviously worse than what this country has tried for 30 years: working out the details first and watching the various Kims flout them. It's unlikely that Kim will denuclearize and decide he wants prosperity more than he wants global conflict and absolute control over his population. Unlikely but not impossible. For the moment, North Korea remains this nation's biggest and most dangerous problem. We will not sleep well. ♦

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# The Pimp and the Primary

**A**mong the hundreds of primary election results from around the country, this one didn't even make the topline news: Dennis Hof, the owner of half a dozen brothels in Nevada, won a GOP primary, ousting an incumbent, for a seat in the state legislature. The district leans Republican, so it's very likely that a pimp will win the general election.

Hof is an outspoken and colorful man, famous in part for a tawdry HBO reality show set in his brothels. He seems to possess considerable talent as a showman, and it should be noted that there's nothing illegal about Hof's businesses; his brothels operate in the only area in the country—a few remote counties in Nevada—where prostitution is legal. Had Hof achieved as much success in some other field, his candidacy wouldn't raise an eyebrow.

But prostitution, legal or not, will never be right. We're open to various ideas about how the criminal-justice system should penalize it, but the oldest profession is always and everywhere morally wrong. A society that normalizes it normalizes the exploitation of women for monetary gain.

"It's all because Donald Trump was the Christopher Columbus for me," Hof told the Associated Press. "He found the way and I jumped on it." Hof campaigned calling himself the "The Trump of Pahrump" (a town in Nevada). He even campaigned with sometime Trump adviser Roger Stone, himself not unknown for sexual misadventures.

No one is unaware of the president's moral failings, and

some of those who chose him over Hillary Clinton in 2016 correctly insist that the choice was no easy one: Clinton was a determined foe of social conservatism on every point; she was a case study in corruption and mendacity; and she was ready to drag her besmirched husband back into the White House.

But there were crucial differences between Clinton and Trump on the question of character. Whereas Clinton's personal failings were mostly ethical, Trump's were mostly moral. Whereas she took morally abominable views on social questions but did not live by them, Trump took mostly traditional views but lived as a libertine. And whereas Clinton labored to pretend she had no moral shortcomings—her vice paying tribute to virtue—Trump flaunted his flaws, or at least hardly bothered to hide them.

Republicans, and in turn the American electorate, chose Trump over Clinton. The question is whether that choice will lead Republicans and conservatives to soften or abandon their belief that the bearers of public office should live morally circumspect lives. That's why this otherwise insignificant primary election in Nevada should trigger klaxons among elected Republicans, conservative activists, and—especially—the leaders of religious organizations who have embraced the Trump presidency as their own.

It was one thing to argue in 2016 that Trump was bet-

ter than the alternative, or even that, for all his flaws, he would secure some worthy policy victories. The election of Hof offers no such mitigating arguments. Voters chose him over a perfectly acceptable incumbent Republican. And while it would be nice to dismiss Hof's victory as a manifestation of weirdness from a remote region of the West long inured to legal prostitution, Hof campaigned explicitly on national issues and emphasized his (and Republican voters') affinity for Trump.

This suggests that Hof aims to go beyond state politics. If he decides to use the statehouse as a springboard to national office, the Democrats and the media can be counted on to use his campaign as a constant reminder of Republican hypocrisy on moral issues. We hope that won't happen, but if Hof doesn't follow his Columbus into this strange New World, other unprincipled men surely will.

The sacredness of the traditional family, the reality of fixed moral standards, the virtues of sincere religious observance, and the importance of personal character—these are what an earlier generation perhaps mawkishly called "family values." But they are worth preserving all the same, and conservatives who hide them under a bushel to win a few elections will lose far more than they gain. ♦



*Dennis Hof at the Playboy Mansion in 2012*

FRED BARNES

# Trump Does It His Way

In February, then-secretary of state Rex Tillerson was informed by a North Korean envoy that Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un wanted to meet with President Trump. Tillerson favored accepting the invitation quickly. Trump didn't.

The president had been talking privately for months about a one-on-one session with Kim, a former administration official said. "North Korea is what he wanted to do." But the president preferred to wait and make preparations, while not engaging the State Department and White House staffs.

He secretly assigned Mike Pompeo, then CIA director, to handle the response to North Korea. It led to three results: Tillerson's ouster, Pompeo's elevation to secretary of state, and Trump's historic meeting in Singapore last week with Kim.

The whole affair also shed light on the president's style after 17 months in office. The first event with Kim in Singapore was a face-to-face meeting with interpreters in the room but no staff. "It was parallel to Reagan when he met Mikhail Gorbachev at a lake house in Geneva" in 1985, says Trump's friend Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker.

That setting was conducive to friendly dialogue. So the Reagan-Gorby chit-chat was deemed a success. Trump wanted something like that to emerge between him and Kim and it came close to happening. Now he's bent on working again outside the smothering formalities of establishment Washington. That's establishment, Never Trump D.C.—enemy territory.

Some things have changed. His learning curve has picked up. He's on the verge of becoming a foreign policy president. But he's still an outsider, which means he doesn't fit the White House mold and is stuck inside a system that limits his political creativity. His staff isn't much help. They're Republicans, after all.



**President Trump 'now dictates to aides what he would like to see happen, as opposed to seeking a range of views,' according to the *New York Times*. Telling his underlings what to do is hardly worrisome.**

But think for a moment about the end run with Pompeo, leaving Tillerson and the foreign service slugs in the dark. It was inspired. He assigned one of the few people in Washington he trusts to line up things for the lovefest with Kim. The Trump-haters were stunned.

Remember how efficiently Trump got rid of the Paris climate accord, one of many decisions other presidents would have been afraid to make? The president recruited Scott Pruitt, the EPA administrator, who knows the downside of the treaty by heart. When Trump announced his decision to pull out, he was persuasive. A press secretary couldn't have handled this job as well.

Another risky act only Trump was brave enough to commit was moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He wisely did it on short notice. The Palestinians exploded, but got over it quickly.

Whoever introduced Trump to tweeting—perhaps it was his own doing—was a genius. As a method of communication, it fits Trump's personality. I can't prove it, but I believe his saber-rattling tweets must have pushed Kim toward the tête-à-tête with Trump.

"Trump is primarily not staffed," Gingrich says. The *New York Times* is horrified. He likes to begin every visit with a foreign leader with a personal meeting, just two leaders swapping tales. That, rather than relying on White House aides or Washington "experts," is where he develops what Gingrich calls "his higher quality of knowledge."

Had the State Department been running the show, the meeting with Kim would likely have been a formal diplomatic production. Trump would have had less chance of stirring any rapport with Kim than Elizabeth Warren does of convincing Cherokees she's one of them.

Meanwhile, Trump has learned from the real experts how to function in the world. Before the Kim meeting, Trump conferred at the White House with South Korean president Moon Jae-in in May and Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe last week. His last meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping was in November 2017. After Xi met with Kim in May, he sent a message to Trump that Kim was looking forward to getting together with the president in Singapore.

Lots of presidents have complained about being tied down by the White House system and try to break outside

it. That causes leakers to step up to the challenge. In Trump's case they've unloaded their worries to the *New York Times*. "Rather than trusting the people around him, Mr. Trump has taken to working the phones more aggressively to seek counsel from outside voices," the *Times* reported two days before Trump met with Kim.

Trump "now dictates to aides what he would like to see happen, as opposed to seeking a range of views,

as predecessors may have done, people close to him say," according to the *Times*.

Telling his underlings what to do is hardly worrisome. But Washington is a liberal town and the media rush to defend the status quo when it's threatened by an interloper. When outsiders intervene, their influence declines. It's a binary proposition. On this front, Trump has made the right choice. ♦

COMMENT ♦ CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

## France learns a hard lesson about immigration

Last week, France's youthful and dapper president Emmanuel Macron swaggered into a battle of wits with the inexperienced and much-mocked lugnuts who run Italy's new populist government. Macron was humiliated.

That very same Italian populist government, meanwhile, threw down a gauntlet before half a dozen of its European neighbors and won.

While everyone was paying attention to refugees from Syria tramping into Europe across Turkey and Greece, sub-Saharan Africans started crossing the Mediterranean from Libya and Tunisia into Italy on fast motorboats at the rate of 150,000 a year.

There are more than 600,000 of them now in Italy's cities and villages, and they are costing the Italian government, which is already dead broke, \$5 or \$6 billion a year in lodging and welfare. Negotiations are ongoing in Luxembourg over how other countries in the 28-member European Union might share the costs with Italy, but since this would likely mean sharing the actual refugees, the talks never go anywhere. Under the E.U.'s "Dublin accords," the first country

immigrants come in contact with is responsible for them. This is to keep migrants from flocking to the northern European countries that have the most generous welfare states.



**Years ago, Italy would have wrung its hands, explaining why its decision did not constitute racism or xenophobia. The Italians would have apologized. Now they told France to take a hike.**

Both of Italy's new ruling parties, the anti-corruption Five Star Movement and the nationalistic League, got elected on anti-immigrant platforms. The League's leader Matteo Salvini, now the interior minister, campaigned on a promise to halt the flow. He is leaving no doubt he will try to make good on it. In early June, he refused landing permission to the giant rescue ship *Aquarius*, run by an activist charity in Berlin and loaded with 629 travelers, arguing that the

responsibility for the ship under the Dublin rules lay with the tiny island nation of Malta, also a member of the E.U.

Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat accused Italy of breaking international rules. Spain's justice minister Dolores Delgado warned that Italy could be prosecuted under international law, and the new Spanish premier, Pedro Sánchez, offered to welcome the migrants in Valencia as a goodwill gesture. But it was France's politicians who really hit the roof. Gabriel Attal, spokesman for Macron's presidential movement, called for more sensitive language on such matters—"migrant" was a dehumanizing term and it would be far better to describe those on board the *Aquarius* as "people"—before adding: "The line of the Italian government makes me want to puke." Macron himself then accused Italy of "cynicism and irresponsibility" and called Salvini a provocateur.

Years ago, Italy would have wrung its hands, explaining why its decision did not constitute racism or xenophobia. The Italians would have apologized. Now they told France to take a hike. Economics minister Giovanni Tria, one of the "moderates" imposed on the new government by Italy's president, canceled a meeting with his French counterpart. In Rome the foreign ministry summoned France's ambassador. Five Star leader Luigi Di Maio said of Macron's accusation of hypocrisy: "He should talk." Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte appeared likely to skip a meeting with Macron planned for June 15. But Macron backed down. Conte announced that the meeting was back on and that his priority was to fix the Dublin rules that had been so unfair to Italy.

Italy won for three reasons. First, it was unified. Journalists and politicians have been slow to understand or admit that Italy's government is something new in Western Europe. It represents a big anti-E.U. majority. It is considerably more skeptical about European institutions than Britain was at the time it voted to

exit. Euroskepticism in Italy is of almost Hungarian intensity.

Second, Italy was right. For years, it is France that has been cynical. According to Salvini's numbers (the European Union's are similar), France promised in 2015 to share a small fraction of Italy's refugee burden: It would take in 9,610 of the more than half-million Italy is now caring for. France has taken 640, well under 10 percent of its commitment.

Third and finally, the dynamic of political opinion is changing—all across the continent, and not just on the “right wing.” Marco Minniti, Salvini's decidedly progressive predecessor at the interior ministry, himself considered closing Italy's ports to migrants. In Austria, the new chancellor Sebastian Kurz closed a half-dozen radical mosques. In Germany, interior minister Horst Seehofer, a conservative ally of Angela Merkel, has threatened to blow up the German coalition government if harder rules on political asylum are not agreed on. Merkel herself has urged fellow European leaders not to leave Italy to shoulder its responsibilities alone.

Even the new and fragile Socialist government in Spain, which surely intended its welcome of migrants as a rebuke to Italy, has since moderated its tone. This is partly a tribute to the Italian government's discipline. When Spain accepted the *Aquarius*, Salvini let the ambient insults pass and merely thanked Sánchez for having a “big heart.” But it is also a reflection of Spain's vulnerability. Valencia can accept a boat with 629 migrants today. But there are 50,000 more migrants in Tripoli right now ready to cross the Mediterranean. There will be another boat tomorrow, and another the next day, and another the day after that. Sánchez and his aides were quick to insist that this generosity should not be taken as a precedent. It has not been lost on them that a la-di-da attitude on migration has become a reliable way to lose elections. In recent days it has finally dawned on Emmanuel Macron, too. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

## The assassination conspiracy theories that just won't die

One of the pleasant surprises of this movie season has been *Chappaquiddick*, an account of the famous episode from 1969 in which Mary Jo Kopechne was left to drown in a car driven into a pond, and abandoned, by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. It's not a perfect film by any means; but Kennedy is treated not as the Lion of the Senate or sad inheritor of a famous legacy but as an empty suit surrounded by an abundance of prominent yes men. As I say, a pleasant surprise.

Less surprising, perhaps, is the news that Edward Kennedy's nephew—Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the 64-year-old third-oldest child of Ted's older brother Bobby—recently visited his father's assassin, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, in his California prison not because Sirhan is seeking redemption but because Kennedy has concluded that Sirhan was wrongly convicted.

“I went there because I was curious and disturbed by what I had seen in the evidence,” he told the *Washington Post*, which heralded the tidings on its front page. “I was disturbed that the wrong person might have been convicted of killing my father.”

This is not the place to repeat the assertions that have proved so persuasive to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Suffice it to say that the younger RFK—a stalwart of the second generation of Kennedys in politics from which much was expected—has been best known in recent years for his crackpot views on vaccines and autism, as well as his dogged belief in a cousin's innocence in a separate murder case. Accordingly, his theories about Sirhan are equally dubious.

What intrigues me is Kennedy's

awakening about the facts of his father's murder, which occurred exactly a half-century ago and are scarcely in dispute. Why now? It brings to mind the spectacle, two decades ago, of the widow and children of Martin Luther King Jr. embracing the innocence of James Earl Ray in King's assassination two



**The lurid contrast between victims and perpetrators—the sainted King and the debonair Kennedys, brought to grief by nobodies—offends our contemporary sense of cosmic justice.**

months before Robert Kennedy's.

To his credit, Kennedy junior has said little beyond endorsing the possibility that a proverbial “second gunman” might have been involved in his father's death. No such restraint was exercised by the King survivors. In 1999, after her son Dexter had visited Ray in his Tennessee prison and asked him if he had killed his father (“No, I didn't,” replied Ray), Coretta Scott King announced her belief that her husband had been the victim of “a major, high-level conspiracy” involving organized crime and the Lyndon Johnson administration.

The assertion was preposterous—poor LBJ was, if anything, King's greatest benefactor—but sufficiently sensational at the time that the Clinton White House felt constrained to undertake its own inquiry into the case against Ray. The conclusion was

that Ray, who had confessed to the crime and offered no contradictory evidence, was guilty as charged.

We like to think that we moderns are relatively sophisticated people, with cutting-edge views on social issues and impressive knowledge of science and emotional life. But the human brain is not quite as evolved as we like to believe and, when it comes to the violent disruption of the political order, astonishingly retrograde. Social media, which function as a kind of unbuttoned national id, surely make things worse.

According to polls, a majority of our fellow citizens believe that John F. Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy that has held tight for the past 55 years. And the King family's benevolent attitude toward James Earl Ray and suspicion of the government is shared to some extent by such well-known associates of Dr. King in the civil-rights movement as Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and former U.N. ambassador Andrew Young. The same primeval instinct that impels Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to question the validity of vaccines seems to have affected his judgment about family tragedy.

Yet the curious fact is that 19th-century Americans, for all their benighted attitudes about other matters, were considerably less superstitious than we are about national calamities. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln (1865), who really was the victim of a political conspiracy, did not obsess his countrymen while the event lived on in common memory. It was Lincoln's life, not his death, that mattered to the Gilded Age. And the assassination of William McKinley (1901), who was shot and killed by an anarchist at a time when anarchy was regarded as the terrorism of its day, did not inspire conspiracy theories into the next half-century.

One difference, I suppose, is that people with more literal religious beliefs might have been inclined to accept such heinous acts as beyond their control—God's will, as it were. By contrast, we have an implicit

faith in the perfectibility of man and the efficiency of police agencies. Moreover, the lurid contrast between victims and perpetrators—the sainted King and the debonair Kennedys, brought to grief by slovenly nobodies—offends our contemporary sense of cosmic justice. Irony plays a part, too: Advances in forensic science and technical expertise have not so much laid rumors to rest as kept them alive indefinitely.

Which is what makes a movie like

*Chappaquiddick*, which can hardly be welcome to the custodians of the Kennedy family mythology, so compelling. The particulars of the incident are not beyond comprehension but quite easy to believe and accept. The only conspiracy surrounding the death of Mary Jo Kopechne involved not the facts of her case but the all-too-human effort to conceal its details and make Edward Kennedy appear to be something he was not. ♦

COMMENT ♦ JAY COST

## The struggle to drain the swamp will never cease

President Donald Trump was elected in 2016 in part on a pledge to “drain the swamp,” to eliminate the corruption that many Americans have come to believe dominates our politics. Here, Hillary Clinton served as a perfect foil, a stand-in for all the politicians who have gone to Washington to do good and ended up instead doing very, very well.

Anxiety about political corruption is nothing new. In making his pitch, Trump was drawing upon themes in republican political theory that stretch back to ancient Greece and Rome, run through the Italian city-states of the Renaissance and the English commonwealth ideology of *Cato's Letters*, and resonate through the founding era of our nation—the notion that a government that serves the public interest is very fragile and easily lost.

Many ancient thinkers believed that corruption was an endemic feature of any “unmixed” commonwealth. According to Cicero, each type of good government (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy) “has a path—a sheer and slippery one—to a kindred evil” (tyranny, oligarchy, or mob rule).

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*This essay is adapted from contributing editor Jay Cost's new book, The Price of Greatness: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and the Creation of American Oligarchy (Basic).*

The Roman historian Polybius expanded on this idea to develop a cycle through which he believed all governments pass: from monarchy to tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and finally mob rule, in a perpetual process of “growth, zenith, and decadence.” As a consequence, Machiavelli advised “prudent legislators” to refrain “from adopting any one of those forms” and to create instead a system that included the rule of the one, the few, and the many; “such a government would be stronger and more stable,” for the defects of each form would be countered by the virtues of the others. The republican revolution brought about by the Founders was to dispense with such mixed estates and found a government solely on the authority of the people at large.

How can corruption be arrested or reversed once it has begun to set in? Machiavelli analogized the corruption of a republic to the physical decay of the body due to age, and he suggested that the way to reverse civic degeneration was “to return to its original principles,” thereby “restor[ing] the prestige that it had at the outset.” In James Madison's view, “no government is perhaps reducible to a sole principle of operation”; rather, “different and often heterogeneous principles mingle their influence in the administration.”

In a suggested preamble to the Constitution, Madison offered a comprehensive view of the principles upon which the United States was founded:

That all power is originally vested in, and consequently derived from the people.

That government is instituted, and ought to be exercised for the benefit of the people; which consists in the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the right of acquiring and using property, and generally of pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

That the people have an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform or change their government, whenever it be found adverse or inadequate to the purposes of its institution.

In this proposal, Madison made explicit the three principles that combine to form the spirit of the laws in the United States: nationalism, liberalism, and republicanism. The people of the United States—bound together in a single nation—are free because the government respects their rights and because they participate in the creation of the laws that govern them.

The political battles that ensued after ratification revolved around conflicts among these principles. Our nationalist ambitions clashed with our republican principles in a way that offered no clear resolution. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton had implemented an ingenious system of finance, but it also enabled political insiders to enrich themselves based on their foreknowledge of his system. Many members of Congress stood to gain financially if his plan was enacted, a conflict of interest that likely made the difference on key votes. Worst of all, Hamilton's friends in the financial community formed a banking syndicate that tried to corner the domestic market for government debt—and their failure precipitated the first financial crisis of the new nation.

If all of this sounds familiar, it only goes to show that the ancients understood politics very well. Governments

are to be instituted by individuals for the benefit of all—there is an inherent tension there that lends itself to corruption, in the days of Cicero, Madison, and Hamilton as in our own.

Purging government of corruption is probably impossible. But if we wish to deal with it in an effective manner, we need to return to the principles embodied in our founding creed—not in some vague, anodyne sense of gratitude. Instead, we have to reengage with them and relearn critical lessons that seem to have been forgotten. To start,



**Hamilton had implemented an ingenious system of finance, but it also enabled political insiders to enrich themselves based on their foreknowledge of his system.**

we must appreciate that the Constitution did not settle the relationship among liberalism, republicanism, and nationalism for all time. Public policy in all forms necessarily advances or hinders each principle. Though we typically do not think of contemporary political questions in these foundational terms, Madison understood that this was always the case, and we should follow his example.

We must also remember that these values are often in tension with one another. Republicanism and liberalism come from different traditions of political thought. They overlap in some ways but conflict in others. And nationalism is different altogether; a strong nation need not be either republican or liberal. Thus, holding these values in their proper balance has to be a constant struggle. Neither Madison nor Hamilton “solved” the problem, for it is a paradox that admits of no final answer. But both are to be credited for trying to solve it, for in so doing they helped

bring about a better understanding of how government functions in practice. We the people must endeavor to do likewise.

We should further appreciate that the republican quality of government has proven itself to be the most difficult to maintain over the generations. Our government vigorously pursues all sorts of national endeavors, and individual rights—both negative and positive—are more respected than ever before, but it feels as though our government has been hijacked from the people. It is easy to assume that our country is a republic because elections are free and open to all adult citizens, but this is a mistake. As Madison noted in the *National Gazette*, it is possible for a government to “support a real domination of the few, under an apparent liberty of the many. Such a government, wherever to be found, is an imposter.”

Madison appreciated that the policies that Hamilton was promoting were undermining the principle of popular sovereignty, even though they had no effect on the form of government. We must remain mindful of this and appreciate that policies that advance the national project or the liberal project must also remain consistent with the republican principles that are just as essential to the American creed.

Above all, we should remember that sovereignty ultimately belongs to the people, and if we wish the government to become more republican, we ourselves must rediscover that lost tradition. As Madison put it, “the force of public opinion” is what maintains government in practice. “If the nation were in favor of absolute monarchy, the public liberty would soon be surrendered by their representatives. If a republican form of government were preferred, how could the monarch resist the national will?” We get the government we deserve, in other words. So when the American people demand a return to republican propriety, the government will acquiesce, for “public opinion sets bounds to every government, and is the real sovereign in every free one.” ♦

# A Time of Reckoning

Second thoughts about the sexual revolution.

BY MARY EBERSTADT

Hegel famously wrote that the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk, meaning that history's unfolding is most plainly seen in retrospect. With all due respect to Herr Doktor, some moments are so transparently situated at a cultural crossroad that they illuminate history even in real time. Improbably enough, the MeToo movement seems to be one.

As anyone following events can see, the ongoing sex scandals that gave rise to MeToo are more than just placeholders in the news cycle. They reveal a shift in the cultural plates of the last half-century and demonstrate the many ways in which that shift has changed American families, workplaces, romances (and lack thereof), politics, and culture. Unlike our fore-runners in 1968, those of us living today have access to something they didn't: 50 years of sociological, psychological, medical, and other evidence about the sexual revolution and its fallout. Thanks to the MeToo movement, the time has come to examine some of that evidence.

Such an examination is not theological or religious or even necessarily philosophical. It is *empirical*, based on objectively derived evidence and data. Over a hundred years ago, a Russian writer was sent to report on the facts of what transpired inside a slaughterhouse. After setting them down in detail, he added this immortal line: "We cannot pretend that we do not know this." The meaning of what Leo

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Tolstoy wrote then is plain. Once the facts of any event are admitted to the record, to pretend we do not see them is to sin by omission and, figuratively speaking, against truth itself.

And so it is with the sexual revolution. Following are five facts about the revolution's impact that are by now empirically incontestable—five truths



Mothers and children in the cafeteria at the Laurence G. Paquin School for Pregnant Teenagers in Baltimore, 1994

that the record of the past half-century has established beyond reasonable doubt.

First, the destigmatization and mass adoption of artificial contraception, beginning in the 1960s, followed by widespread legalization of abortion, has radically changed the world in which we now find ourselves.

This is an important countercultural point. Over the years, a great many people have claimed that sex is merely a private act between individuals. They've been wrong. We know now that private acts have cumulative public effects. Individual choices, such as having children out of wedlock, have ended up expanding the modern welfare state, for example, as the government has stepped in to support children who lack fathers. The explosion

of sexual activity thanks to contraception has been accompanied by levels of divorce, cohabitation, and abortion never before seen in history. And as the MeToo movement shows, the same shift has contributed to a world in which on-demand sex is assumed to be the norm, to the detriment of those who resist any advance, for any reason.

Second, the revolution is having deleterious consequences—and not only on the young—in the form of broken families and the attendant disadvantages conferred by fatherless homes, as has been excruciatingly well-documented by social scientists for many decades. Over half a century into the sexual revolution, the human damages

at the end of life's telescope are now also visible. Today, for example, one of the most pressing, and growing, issues for researchers is the plight of the elderly, who face the challenges of aging amid shrunken, broken, and truncated families.

Google "loneliness studies" and you will find a sociological cottage industry in every supposedly advanced country in the world—France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Portugal. Many social scientists now call this phenomenon an "epidemic." To mention just one example, toward the end of last year, the *New York Times* published a harrowing story about what the so-called "birth dearth" looks like in old age: "4,000 lonely deaths a week. . . . Each year, some of [Japan's elderly] died without anyone knowing, only to be discovered after their neighbors caught the smell."

It is critical that we not avert our eyes from this tragic picture and what it tells us about the impact of the sexual revolution. Fifty years after the embrace of that revolution's principles—undeniably because of that embrace—atomization and severely reduced human contact is spreading across the planet.

MARK PETERSON / CORBIS / GETTY

Third, the libertarian conceit often embraced by the sexual revolution's supporters, that pornography is a harmless activity, is no longer viable. The damages caused by pornography are legion: Pornography use is frequently cited as a factor in divorce cases; therapists report increased demand for treatment for pornography addiction, including for children. Is it any surprise that many of the stories to emerge from the MeToo moment seem drawn directly from the narratives of pornography?

After all, at the root of all these stories of harassment and abuse is this: men forcing themselves in various ways upon women who did not want their attentions; men who have insisted, sometimes plaintively in their public apologies, that in their own minds, the acts were consensual. As one public figure caught up early on in the scandals put it, "I always felt I was pursuing shared feelings." Here was Charlie Rose, one of the most prominent television journalists of his generation, a CBS co-anchor with an eponymous show, accused by many women of acts that, if true, are manifestly awful and clearly violated the women's consent. And his self-defense is the one offered by many other figures lately disgraced who insisted they thought their behavior was welcome. Even former president Bill Clinton had the temerity to tell PBS *NewsHour* in early June, "I think the norms have really changed in terms of what you can do to somebody against their will."

Where do otherwise sophisticated and knowledgeable men learn such obtuseness, such emotional unintelligence? Surely the credit belongs in part to pornography, which, like the revolution of which it is a bastard child, has become ubiquitous. Pornography deforms individual relationships and works its way like invisible ink into the scripts and expectations of our time.

Fourth, we can no longer pretend that the sexual revolution operates in any other way but as the world imagined by Socrates' interlocutor Thrasymachus: It empowers the

already strong and makes the already weak even more vulnerable.

This is true, for example, of the young women recruited for so-called egg harvesting, who put their own fertility and health at risk either to keep their own future childbearing options open or to earn money for selling their eggs. It is true of the women and children exploited, drugged, beaten, and otherwise abused who are now victimized once more by the frightening effort to normalize prostitution as "sex work." And it is true of the young women damaged by the diseases acquired from buying into the promise of sex without consequences. Although teen pregnancy rates have declined in recent years, rates of sexually transmitted disease continue to rise.

This same empowering of the already-empowered is also behind gendercide, the killing of millions of unborn female babies around the world precisely because they are girls. To defend abortion on demand, without restrictions, is effectively to defend gendercide, since abortion is the means for enabling this pernicious practice.

Finally, the MeToo movement offers an opportunity to bridge ideological divides as the traditional cheerleaders of the sexual revolution reckon with the empirical record. The recent scandals have produced powerful new evidence for everyone to weigh. What are the two common denominators among the alleged offenses? One was the assumption that all women are sexually available at all times—what might be called the sexual revolution's first commandment. The other is that many exploitative men have taken cover in venues closely identified with pro-revolutionary politics: Hollywood, mainstream print, radio, and television journalism, Silicon Valley—and even the New York attorney general's office.

Yes, cads and brutes have always been with us; yes, accusations shouldn't be lodged cavalierly and need to be assessed carefully; and yes, as the examples of Fox News and other workplaces have revealed, harassment and accusations of

harassment aren't just a progressive thing. Even so, it is undeniable that a disproportionate number of the prominent men brought down by these scandals have been identified with—and sometimes indistinguishable from—a political worldview that enthusiastically embraces the tenets of the sexual revolution. Indeed, many proudly wore their feminist credentials on their sleeves.

These men infiltrated important cultural precincts under the false flag of being "pro-woman" and succeeded because they were seen to be on "the right side" of the abortion debate. Wolves in Planned Parenthood clothing, they used pro-abortion politics as protective cover for harassment and exploitation, just as *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner, who advocated for legal abortion many years before *Roe v. Wade*, also did in his lifetime. As feminist Susan Brownmiller put it in the *New York Times* after Hefner's death, dissenting from the fawning eulogies about his purported feminism, "The reason Mr. Hefner supported abortion was not from any feminist feeling; it was purely strategic." And so, it would seem, is the enthusiastic support for abortion exhibited in the public lives of many of the men accused in today's scandals. Whatever their personal political views, women need to be aware of a pattern the MeToo movement has confirmed: Being pro-abortion and being pro-woman aren't the same thing.

What the MeToo moment proves above all is that the time for magical thinking about the sexual revolution is over. Until now, many people simply accepted the realities of the post-Pill world as non-negotiable facts. It's time to challenge that worldview as one that lacks moral and intellectual maturity. One of the first prominent men to fall from grace, a former editor at the *New Republic*, exited public life with the line "I will not waste this reckoning." Nor should people along all points of the political spectrum waste the opportunity to reckon with the massive experiment in chaos and confusion that made these scandals possible in the first place. ♦

# The IT Guy and Wasserman Schultz

Allegations of fraud, theft, bigamy, and violence surround Imran Awan. BY JENNA LIFHITS

It's a story reminiscent of a spy novel. But the scandal surrounding Imran Awan has plenty of elements of the surreal and the farcical, too.

Awan was a congressional IT staffer. Numerous members of his family joined him on the congressional payroll. Now he is awaiting trial for bank fraud. What started in 2016 as an investigation into equipment and data theft has evolved into a case about falsely obtaining home equity loans and sending money to Pakistan.

As the probe evolves, there have been dozens of shocking reports about the family's activities and access. The plot twists have spawned numerous conspiracy theories. Awan's lawyer Christopher Gowen says that all these reports are complicating the trial. "Every time we think it's done, Johnny-on-the-spot over there at the *Daily Caller* writes something and we have to start back into this investigation," he says of Luke Rosiak, the investigative reporter at the Daily Caller News Foundation who has done the most work on the case. "Every single thing that has been alleged, hypothetically, by the *Daily Caller* has been investigated thoroughly."

Imran Awan, born in Pakistan in 1980 but a naturalized U.S. citizen, started working on the Hill in 2004. His brother, Abid, soon joined him. Awan's wife, Hina Alvi, came on board in 2007, and his younger brother, Jamal, began in 2014. Abid's friend Rao Abbas was also added to the congressional payroll in 2012. The five were "shared" employees and worked for dozens of House Democrats. Over

the course of several years, the group earned millions of dollars.

Abid ran a car dealership (named Cars International A, or CIA) on the side. "It's not clear where the dealership's money was going," wrote Rosiak, "because it was sued by at least five different people on all ends of a typical car business who said they were stiffed.



Debbie Wasserman Schultz

CIA didn't pay the security deposit, rent or taxes for its building, it didn't pay wholesalers who provided cars." In 2012, Abid filed for bankruptcy.

In 2016, the Awans caught the eye of congressional investigators. The initial allegations, contained in presentations by the House inspector general, did not look good. Rosiak, who obtained a PowerPoint summary of the presentations, reported that the Awans "made unauthorized access to congressional servers in 2016, allegedly accessing the data of members for whom they did not work, logging in as members of Congress themselves, and covering their tracks." "Excessive logons are an indication that the server is being used for nefarious purposes," the IG presentation said, "and elevated the risk that individuals could be reading and/or removing information." Investigators

also discovered that the Awan group had logged on to one Democratic Caucus server 5,735 times over the course of seven months. The networks that the Awans were accessing don't hold classified information, but they do hold lawmakers' password-protected email, according to the *Washington Post*.

The House's chief administrative officer told lawmakers this April that the IG had also uncovered "evidence of procurement fraud." The Awans had manipulated invoices for expensive equipment into incremental payments of less than \$500. This allowed the purchases to be "left off the official House inventory," according to the *Post*, which also reported that this equipment was sometimes delivered to the Awans' homes.

The matter was passed on to Capitol Police and the FBI in October 2016 and is ongoing. Gowen rejects the basis for the investigation, which he says is politically motivated and grew out of the IG report on shared employees. "The right-wing media and a few members of Congress blew this up and got the FBI's attention, got the U.S. attorney's attention," he says. "They started this giant investigation that's probably the most thorough, exhaustive investigation in the history of this country probably. Or close to it." The available clips of the IG report, he added, have been "taken out of context." "There's multiple logins because they shared a workstation," he notes. "They worked for separate offices so you have to log in to one office, then when you switch to do a different assignment for the other office, you log in to that office."

The five workers were banned from the House network in February 2017. Most congressional offices quickly fired them, though one kept Imran Awan on despite the mounting allegations: the office of Florida congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who had been chair of the Democratic National Committee from 2011 to 2016. Awan's potential access to Wasserman Schultz's emails, combined with allegations of data theft, have spawned conspiracy theories about whether the family was responsible for

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ANDREW BURTON / GETTY

the infamous 2016 leak of DNC emails.

Wasserman Schultz drew criticism for refusing to fire Awan. “He didn’t have access to the network, but he was able to give us guidance and advice and troubleshoot on a wide variety of other technological issues,” she told the *Sun-Sentinel* and suggested that Awan was being targeted because he is Muslim.

Gowen thinks that Republicans in Congress concocted the Awan scandal to target Wasserman Schultz. “They worked for a female Democrat who is one of the targets of the Republican party,” he said. “And so they said, ‘Whoa, we got Pakistan, we got female, we got Democrat. Let’s roll.’”

In the months between the Awans being barred from the House network and Imran Awan’s arrest in July 2017, Capitol Police found

an “unattended bag” in a small room on Capitol Hill. The bag contained a laptop with the username “Rep-DWS,” copies of Awan’s driver license and congressional ID, a Pakistani ID card, “composition notebooks with notes handwritten saying ‘attorney client privilege,’” and letters addressed to prosecutors, according to a police report obtained by Luke Rosiak and the Daily Caller News Foundation.

Wasserman Schultz sought to stop law enforcement from accessing the contents of the laptop and at a May 2017 hearing went after the Capitol Police chief about the protocol for handling a member of congress’s equipment when the member is not under investigation. The chief suggested that an ongoing criminal investigation changes the traditional protocol. “I think you’re violating the rules when you conduct your business that way and you should expect that there will be consequences,” Wasserman Schultz said.

Months later she said that Awan had “accidentally left” the laptop, which belonged to her office, somewhere, and that the loss had been reported. “This was not my laptop. I have never seen that laptop. I don’t know what’s on the laptop,” she said.

Wasserman Schultz finally fired

Awan after he was charged with bank fraud. According to the affidavit, Imran and his wife Alvi listed a rental property as a primary residence when applying for a \$165,000 home equity line of credit in December 2016. That money was then wired to Pakistan in January 2017 as part of a \$283,000 transfer. The Awans had also applied for a second line of credit for \$120,000. Prosecutors said in court documents that “based on the suspicious timing of that transaction,” the pair “likely knew they were under investigation at that time.”

When a Congressional Federal Credit Union wire-transfer specialist called Alvi about the request, Awan answered and pretended to be her, according to court documents. Asked about the reason for the wire, Awan said “funeral arrangements.” The specialist questioned whether that was a “sufficient reason for such a large transfer.” Awan then changed his reason to “purchasing property.”

Awan was arrested in July 2017 at Dulles airport on his way to Pakistan, a scene that inspired reports of his fleeing the country. Wasserman Schultz rejects the notion that Awan was fleeing. She told the *Sun-Sentinel*, “When you’re trying to flee, you don’t fill out a form with your employer and go on unpaid leave.” Awan’s lawyer says that he was traveling on a “round-trip ticket with an extended return date.” Prosecutors said in court documents that they believe Awan “deleted the contents of his phones hours before his arrest.” He had \$9,000 on him.

Months earlier, Alvi had also been stopped at Dulles by the FBI, also on her way to Pakistan. She had “abruptly” taken her three children out of school, according to an affidavit, and was traveling with “numerous pieces of luggage,” including cardboard boxes containing household goods and food items. Customs agents searched her bags and found \$12,400 in cash. Alvi, who booked a return flight for September, was permitted to board her flight. The Awans’ lawyers said in court documents that Alvi and the children went

to Pakistan so that they could “rent out their home to be able to satisfy mortgage obligations” and to “temporarily escape the media frenzy.”

The Daily Caller News Foundation has published scores of other reports alleging wrongdoing by the Awans. A recent one said that Awan was married to two women, one of whom told Virginia police that he “kept her ‘like a slave.’” Weeks after her statement to police, gunmen in Pakistan “shot into her family home,” Luke Rosiak further wrote. Hina Alvi has also alleged polygamy and fraud by her husband.

After news of the criminal probe broke, Imran put his house up for rent and a Marine Corps veteran moved in. The tenant told Rosiak that he found “wireless routers, hard drives that look like they tried to destroy, laptops, [and] a lot of brand new expensive toner” in the house. He called investigators, who reportedly seized the equipment. Awan then threatened “to sue the renter for stealing” the hard drives.

“That man is a criminal,” Gowen says of the Marine, who he says also failed to pay his rent. “He’s the one that has reported that there are these damaged hard drives. When they finally got to looking at all of what they found, it was one damaged, old BMW radio.”

President Trump has tweeted about the case a number of times. This month he wrote, “Our Justice Department must not let Awan & Debbie Wasserman Schultz off the hook. The Democrat I.T. scandal is a key to much of the corruption we see today. They want to make a ‘plea deal’ to hide what is on their Server. Where is Server? Really bad!”

Gowen thinks that the tweets are giving the defense ammunition. “We thought there’s nothing we can do about this bank-fraud issue, until President Twitter got on the Twitter last week and just blatantly lied on behalf of the Justice Department,” he says. “Now we may have something to work with here because of that idiot.” He told CNN that the latest tweet violated his client’s due-process rights.

It’s just the latest twist in Capitol Hill’s most mysterious bank fraud case.



Imran Awan

# Deferring to Trump on Trade

Congress could in theory have a greater say on tariffs. Don't hold your breath. **BY HALEY BYRD**

When President Donald Trump first announced in March that he would impose far-reaching tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum without congressional approval, South Carolina Republican Mark Sanford was the first lawmaker to tell me that Congress should step in to prevent it. “The nature of the party in power is that everybody wants to be deferential to the executive branch, but that’s not what the Founding Fathers intended,” Sanford said at the time. “Doing anything less than robustly pushing back against a stupid and destructive and dangerous idea ... would come back to haunt all of us,” he predicted.

On June 12, Sanford lost reelection to a primary challenger, Katie Arrington, who is more eager to support the president. The congressman—always one to call it like he sees it—had provoked Trump’s rage by criticizing him, seemingly without fear of the political repercussions. Most of Sanford’s colleagues in the House have not exhibited similar carelessness. And when it comes to trade, the South Carolinian’s loss serves as another example to congressional Republicans of what could go wrong if they oppose Trump’s protectionist impulses and support free trade, a tenet many of them have faithfully espoused for years.

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Indeed, Trump’s aggressive use of Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act—a provision intended to be employed in cases of national security—presents a political conundrum for Republicans. Opposing Trump’s tariffs by passing legislation to cur-



tail his trade powers would spark a backlash among the president’s loyalists at the polls. But American consumers and industries might become collateral damage in the trade war launched by Trump’s 25 percent tariffs on steel imports and 10 percent tariffs on foreign aluminum, both of which threaten to undermine the Republican party’s midterm election message of economic growth. Republican leaders weighed their options and have come up with an admittedly insufficient solution: Remain deferential to the president while airing half-hearted complaints about his trade policies. In other words, GOP lawmakers are all bark and no bite.

After Trump announced the tariffs,

Republicans were quick to urge the White House to tailor them to affect China rather. And their strategy of pleading and hoping for the best worked—at first. Trump included indefinite exemptions for close trading partners when the tariffs went into effect.

But the Republicans’ objections weren’t strong enough to stop Trump from scrapping the exemptions held by countries such as Canada, Mexico, and members of the European Union at the end of May. The move, which alienated allies and resulted in retaliatory tariffs being slapped on a number of American products, came just days after the president announced his plan to impose tariffs of 25 percent

on foreign automobiles under the same national security justification used for tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum.

That announcement appears to have been a breaking point for some Republicans on Capitol Hill. At the time, Tennessee Republican Bob Corker was incredulous at the administration’s increasingly bold use of Section 232 authority, telling

reporters there is “no rational person that could think we have a national security issue with auto manufacturing.” “It’s an abuse of that authority. It’s very blatant,” he said.

A short time later, Corker introduced a bill that would claw back some of Congress’s Article I trade powers. The measure would subject Section 232 tariffs to congressional approval. It would apply retroactively for two years, meaning Trump’s steel and aluminum tariffs could be re-evaluated by the legislative branch. Corker’s bill has a bipartisan roster of cosponsors, including Democrats Heidi Heitkamp, Mark Warner, Brian Schatz, Chris Van Hollen, and Jeanne Shaheen, alongside Republicans Pat Toomey, Lamar

GARY LOCKE

Alexander, Ron Johnson, Mike Lee, Jeff Flake, Jerry Moran, Johnny Isakson, and Ben Sasse.

Trump allies, such as South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham, argue that passing legislation to limit the president's trade powers would weaken Trump's hand in ongoing trade negotiations. And Republican leaders have been unwavering in their opposition to the bill. House speaker Paul Ryan noted that such a bill would have to secure a veto-proof majority in order to become law. "You would have to pass a law that he would want to sign into law," Ryan told reporters. "You can do the math on that."

Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell said during a press conference that he would not call up the bill for a standalone vote. Corker hoped to include the bill in an annual defense authorization measure that was up for consideration in the Senate the week of June 11, but leadership blocked his amendment from receiving a vote.

In a fiery floor speech on June 12, Corker lambasted Senate Republicans for their reluctance to "poke the bear" by holding the vote. "Well, gosh, we might upset the president. We might upset the president of the United States before the midterms. So gosh, we can't vote on the Corker amendment because we're taking, rightly so, the responsibilities that we have to deal with tariffs and revenues. We can't do that because we'd be upsetting the president," Corker yelled, mocking his colleagues. "I can't believe it," he added. "I would bet that 95 percent of the people on this side of the aisle support intellectually this amendment."

During a conversation with reporters following a GOP Senate lunch meeting the same day, retiring senator Jeff Flake echoed Corker's complaints, telling reporters it shouldn't be so unthinkable for the Republican party to stand up for something its members have supported for decades. "This is a big part of what we stand for," Flake said of free trade. "If Republicans can't stand up against tariffs and for free trade, I mean, what are we here for?"

Flake, along with Corker, is set to retire after the November midterms. That gives him more leeway to challenge Trump than Republicans who have to worry about upcoming elections. But what does it say about the state of the party that the most outspoken opponents of protectionism have been effectively driven from its ranks? Flake acknowledges the trend, but points to senators who cosponsored Corker's bill and are still running for office. "You have Pat Toomey standing firm," he says. "There are some, obviously, who don't want to poke the bear," Flake admits. "To just give [Section 232] to the president and let him use national security as a reason to block free trade? We ought to stand up. We need to stand up."

Flake tells me he hasn't worked to promote Corker's bill with any GOP members in the House, but interviews with Republicans on that side of the Capitol show support among rank-and-file members for the idea. Republican Study Committee chairman Mark Walker tells me he thinks "the more that we exercise our Article I powers, the better." He is joined by members all along the ideological spectrum, such as Florida moderate Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who says she's in favor of anything that keeps Trump in check. And Oklahoma Republican Tom Cole, a member of the Republican whip team, tells me the Constitution is clear on matters of trade. "That's our power," he says.

But the fact that some members say they are willing to exercise a greater role in trade policy doesn't mean Corker's bill—or any similar measures—are becoming law anytime soon.

Consider the fate of Utah senator Mike Lee's Global Trade Accountability Act. Lee was early to the issue, introducing his bill to roll back the president's trade powers on the very first day of Trump's presidency, January 20, 2017. Lee's legislation is more comprehensive than Corker's, addressing not only Section 232 but also requiring congressional approval for all unilateral trade actions, including the imposition of tariffs, new restrictions, and suspensions of or withdrawals

from trade agreements. The measure has stalled since it was introduced, and it has just five cosponsors.

Lee says that getting his colleagues to support a bill like his is a challenge because members of Congress serving today are accustomed to outsourcing Article I powers to the executive and believe it is the norm. "It takes some time to get people thinking about the fact that it wasn't always that way and that constitutionally, it's not supposed to be that way," Lee tells me. Asked whether Congress would take up legislation to limit Trump's trade powers if the president were to try to proceed with something like automobile tariffs, Lee says predicting a response is difficult, but such a move would "compound the concerns that have already been expressed."

Warren Davidson, a freshman Republican from Ohio's Eighth District, has introduced the House companion bill to Senator Lee's Global Trade Accountability Act. During an impromptu hallway interview, he ponders why more of his colleagues have not rallied behind the idea. Davidson recalls a March poll of Republican Study Committee members that showed that more than 87 percent of the group of nearly 160 members answered in the affirmative when asked whether Congress should be able to review and reconsider the president's proposed tariffs. He says he was encouraged by the results of that poll and decided afterward that it would be a good time to introduce Lee's legislation in the House. He expected to have 100 cosponsors on the bill within the first few days. Instead, the current count sits at 13. That disparity, he says, highlights the gap between policy and politics within the Republican conference.

"No one wants to be seen as opposite of the president," Davidson says. "It's not meant to be an adversarial bill, but it is ideologically different." Still, he doesn't think that should stop Republicans—or even President Trump, for that matter—from supporting his bill. "It's not a pro-Trump or anti-Trump thing," he tells me. "It's more pro-Constitution." ♦

# Commodification, Where Is Thy Sting?

The world needs more of it, not less.

BY STEPHEN MILLER

Commodification has always been deplored in leftist journals, but now attacks are appearing in the mainstream press. Elizabeth Bruenig, a *Washington Post* columnist, recently called for “decommodifying labor.” In a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, Lesley Chamberlain, a British historian and biographer, upped the ante, deploring “the commodification of everything.”

What is commodification? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is “the action or process of treating a person or thing as property which can be traded or whose value is purely monetary; the treatment of a person or thing as a commodity; commercialization.” Marx spoke of “commodity fetishism,” but commodification is a relatively new word; the *OED*’s first citation is 1975. Its usage (Google says) has soared in the last two decades.

Commodification is the fuel that makes market economies run, so writers who attack commodification are attacking capitalism. Bruenig says “capitalism . . . turns every relationship into a calculable exchange.”

Really? Most people in democratic capitalist countries have many non-commodified relationships. My wife and I take care of two grandchildren after school several days a week. When my young neighbor shoveled the snow

*Stephen Miller’s latest book is* Walking New York: Reflections of American Writers from Walt Whitman to Teju Cole.

off the path to my townhouse this past winter, he did not send me a bill. The wife of a friend of mine volunteers as a lawyer for a shelter for abused women. Another friend delivers meals to the elderly. A dentist I know—the daughter of a friend—works a few days a month at a free clinic for people who cannot afford dental care.

Capitalism makes volunteerism possible. Volunteers generally have the



Empty shelves in a Caracas supermarket

wherewithal to do unpaid work because in the commodified world they get paid well for their skills. Volunteerism doesn’t flourish in socialist countries.

It should go without saying that it would be wrong to commodify certain things, which is why we have laws against child labor, sexual trafficking, and the buying and selling of human organs. But in many parts of the world there is an urgent need for more commodification, not less. The business writer Rachel Botsman notes that “an estimated 5 billion people, mostly in the developing world, have difficulty proving that they own land, businesses, or cars.” Because they lack

proof of ownership, they cannot commodify their assets.

Leftists usually wring their hands over the commodification of health care and culture. Health care in the United States has never been a totally commodified service. It is a highly regulated industry. What are arguably the best health care systems—e.g., in Switzerland and the Netherlands—have a mix of market and nonmarket mechanisms.

What about culture? People who lament that poets don’t make as much money as advertising copywriters often clamor for more government support for the arts, but why should Americans underwrite fellowships for writers or painters? Please don’t tell me that we need more “creative people.” If you want to embark on a career in the arts, be prepared to be poor. Samuel Johnson said that “no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.” Since he wrote poems and essays—stuff that pays poorly—he too was a blockhead.

Leftists are hazy about how to decommodify labor. Do they want a government agency to assign a financial value to the skills people have? Whatever decisions a government-appointed board made inevitably would be called unfair by many people.

Decommodifying labor means politicizing labor. It makes much more sense to let the impersonal market put a price tag on one’s skills and assets.

There will always be disagreements about the extent to which the government should interfere in the market, but attempts to severely curtail market forces have always ended in disaster. Look at Venezuela—a formerly prosperous country that now has severe, life-threatening shortages of food and medicine. Venezuela needs more commodification, not less. As the joke goes, if socialists took over the Sahara, there soon would be a shortage of sand. ♦

ROMAN GAMACHO / SOPA IMAGES / LIGHTROCKET / GETTY

# Heretics & Etiquette

*The generation that reached what passes for maturity in the age of social media is the most status-obsessed since the ancien régime*

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

About a year ago, I was at one of those elitist dinner parties that the talk-radio guys are always going on about, albeit in the Swiss Alps rather than inside the Beltway—how’s that for one-upmanship? It was a very agreeable gathering at the end of a practically unimprovable week, but toward the end of the evening, an unexpected (by me, anyway) guest appeared: Roman Polanski.

That presented a dilemma both ethical and etiquettical. Does one meet Roman Polanski? Shake hands? Exchange pleasantries? Put on my critic’s hat and engage in a little friendly commentary? “I really enjoyed *Chinatown*, but I didn’t think *Carnage* quite lived up to the play. I’m not saying it was as bad as being drugged and forcibly sodomized, but, you know, John C. Reilly is no James Gandolfini.”

Tricky.

I wish I could say that my most immediate concern was transcendently moral, but apparently I am more a willow than an oak, and the first thing that crossed my mind was how to avoid embarrassing my hosts. And I confess that I did spend a second or two considering all the malicious uses to which a picture of me shaking hands with Roman Polanski might be put.

In fact, the dilemma proved easy to avoid. I stayed in my corner, and Polanski didn’t exactly work the room. He must realize that introducing himself potentially puts people on the spot. There is an etiquette for pariahs, and Polanski has had time to master its complexities.

But it took him a long time to become a pariah. He was a high-toned exile for years, having pleaded guilty to having sex with a minor in 1977 and then fleeing when he suspected he might get real prison time. The original charges had been worse than what he was convicted of: rape by use of drugs, lewd act upon a child under the age of 14, etc. It

was only in 2009 that he was detained by Swiss police at American request and then held in Gstaad under house arrest until Swiss authorities rejected the U.S. extradition request, citing incomplete documentation. When Polanski wasn’t making sorties into high society, he was making films. No less a Hollywood social-justice warrior than Jodie Foster was happy to work with him as recently as 2011, along with the rest of the cast of *Carnage*: Kate Winslet, John C. Reilly, and Christoph Waltz. The Iranian-French playwright Yasmina Reza, who wrote the play on which *Carnage* was based, apparently had no qualms about collaborating on the screenplay with the great malefactor.

Whoopi Goldberg was a public Polanski apologist with her unfortunate and illiterate “rape,” but not “rape-rape” defense. Tilda Swinton, Monica Bellucci, David Lynch, Martin Scorsese, Michael Mann, Wim Wenders, Pedro Almodóvar, Darren Aronofsky, Terry Gilliam, and many others put their names on a petition calling for Polanski’s liberation during his relatively brief detention by Swiss authorities.

Woody Allen and Harvey Weinstein, too—inevitably. That was 2009, when *The Pianist* producer Henning Molfenter

announced that he would boycott the Zurich film festival in protest, telling the *Hollywood Reporter*: “There is no way I’d go to Switzerland now. You can’t watch films knowing Roman Polanski is sitting in a cell five kilometers away.” Bernard-Henri Lévy, one of the world’s most celebrated liberal intellectuals, wrote a 2010 essay titled “Why I Defend Polanski, More Than Ever,” and the *Huffington Post* was happy to publish it.

Polanski is hardly the only famous man to have exhibited a sexual interest in young girls. Iggy Pop, long an ornament of high society, boasted of his sexual relationship with a 13-year-old girl; Fox News regular Ted Nugent, who used to be a rock-’n’-roll singer, wasn’t making it all up with “Jailbait”; Jerry Lee Lewis married a 13-year-old cousin; David Bowie and Jimmy Page both had relationships with a 14-year-old girl—the same 14-year-old girl, in fact—and the former died a beloved cultural icon while



Roman Polanski in 2015

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the latter is an officer of the Order of the British Empire. Chuck Berry was a genuine creep, but you wouldn't know it from the eulogies offered on his behalf by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama.

Why Polanski? And, probably more relevant at the moment, why Harvey Weinstein, who now has been charged with rape? Polanski's crimes were horrible and obvious, and he remains utterly impenitent. Weinstein's worst transgressions remain to be adjudicated, but the known and uncontested facts of his case are horrifying enough. Maybe a better question is: Why *not* Iggy Pop, who just released a new record with electronic act Underworld? Why not Jimmy Page? Why not Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, who went so far as to become the legal guardian of the underage girl he was sleeping with? Why not the ghost of Charles Dickens, who left his wife for an 18-year-old actress, or Norman Mailer, who thought that "A little bit of rape is good for a man's soul"? Why not a few of the celebrities who have been hauled in on domestic violence charges: Sean Penn, Emma Roberts, Nicolas Cage, Carmen Electra, Michael Lohan, Mickey Rourke, Josh Brolin, Terrence Howard, Stormy Daniels, etc.? True, many of them never have been convicted of any serious crime. Neither has Harvey Weinstein. Not yet, anyway.

Part of the answer is found in what Iggy Pop had in common with Pat Buckley, his sometime dinner-party hostess in Gstaad: *fashion*. Weinstein is out of fashion. Weinstein may have been a fearsome figure in Hollywood, but he also has long been a figure of fun. Tom Cruise gave the second-best performance of his storied dancing career as the Weinstein-inspired Les Grossman in the closing credits of *Tropic Thunder*. It was not a loving parody. It's been a long time since Polanski's was a name to conjure with, and his *épater la bourgeoisie* sexual-outlaw shtick is out of fashion in a Hollywood that as a matter of social norms might be characterized the way Gilbert Osmond described himself in *Portrait of a Lady*: not conventional, but convention itself. The *soi-disant* radicals of Hollywood Anno Domini 2018 remind me of the ladies

in "Nasty Woman" T-shirts I see shopping at my local Whole Foods, checking out the \$59.99/pound wild-caught river salmon while Linda Perry of 4 Non Blondes is on the gently modulated in-store sound system singing: "I pray every single day for a revolution," as if the Hollywood multimillionaire who went on to produce Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful" and P!nk's "Get the Party Started"—and the crowd at Whole Foods—wouldn't be the first one up against the wall come the revolution. I've got some bad news for you, Sunshine: You aren't fighting the Establishment. You are the Establishment.

One could spend a few entertaining hours listing the beloved celebrities who would be shunned by polite society—here meaning polite Hollywood society and polite leftist society more generally—if they were trying to get started today. Eddie Murphy's *Delirious* made him a superstar, and it made HBO a ton of money. Anybody want to talk about how many times the word "faggot" is used in that act or about how the entire first section is one long rant about buggery and AIDS? Anybody want to revisit the personal life of Errol Flynn? And consider the question of which big publisher would bring out Philip Roth's first few novels *today* without trigger warnings—and without subsequently firing whomever acquired them in the first place. The original opening number

from Disney's *Aladdin* is practically *samizdat* today, and poor old Howard Ashman would be un-personed if he had penned those purportedly anti-Arab lyrics in 1988.

Middle Eastern sensibilities are, in a sense, what's actually in play in all this.

The word *takfiri*, familiar to those who follow the religious and intellectual currents sustaining Islamic extremism, is useful in other contexts as well. A *takfiri* is a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy—of being *impure*. That's a big deal in the Muslim world, because some of your more energetically orthodox Muslims believe that it is religiously acceptable—or mandatory—to massacre infidels wherever they are found (and an "impure" Muslim is an "infidel"). Some Sunnis argue that all Shia are infidels



Harvey Weinstein arrested in New York on May 25, above, and parodied by Tom Cruise, below, in the closing credits of 2008's *Tropic Thunder*



TOP: KEVIN HAGEN / GETTY; BOTTOM: DREAMWORKS

and that killing them is therefore in accordance with Islamic law. As with everything related to Islamic sectarianism, it gets more complicated: *Takfiri* itself is used as a sectarian slur by Shia jihadists to denote a Sunni tendency that apparently is to be regarded as just too bonkers for the people who run Iran.

The same tendency can be found less violently expressed outside the Islamic world: for example, in the exasperating tendency of Anglo-American Protestant sects to divide and subdivide over what would appear to the outsider to be incredibly trivial questions of doctrine and practice (cf., the curious case of the Methodists vs. the Anglicans), breaking off into new congregations inevitably describing themselves as practicing mere biblical Christianity while casting their former co-factionalists into the outer dark. The Brethren Church, a Christian congregation with radical pietist roots, is one example of “non-creedal” Protestantism, i.e., a church that claims to have no creed but the

New Testament. Any number of more conventional evangelical storefront churches make the same claim and come to radically different theological and social conclusions.

Political movements work the exact same way. I am sure that more than a few readers of THE WEEKLY STANDARD (and probably all the people who work there) have been told from time to time that they are not “real conservatives,” often by the same people who the day before yesterday mocked them for opposing Donald Trump on the grounds that he is not a conservative. As a matter of both logic and rhetoric, that sort of thing is inevitable: If the words “conservative” and “Christian” and “Muslim” and “civilized” mean anything at all, then there must be some people or institutions that are *not* conservative, *not* Christian, *not* Muslim, *not* civilized, etc. And people will disagree about where those borders are, partly for good-faith reasons and partly because there’s generally some juice in it. Those “Call Now If You Have IRS Problems” radio ads aren’t going to sell themselves.

But where religious and political organizations inevitably police creedal issues, the social-justice mobs on Twitter and Facebook do that only incidentally because they are not actually very much interested in politics or ideology. Their animating concern is *etiquette*.

Consider, for example, the bubbling *kulturkampf* over transgender issues. To believe, as many radical feminists do, that Chelsea Manning is not a woman in the same

sense that Chelsea Clinton is—or that Bradley Manning is no more a woman in that sense than Bradley Cooper is—may be controversial, but that belief alone does not place one among the infidels. What does bring out the *takfiri* tendency is “misgendering,” refusing to—or simply failing to—conform to the orthodox court etiquette touching these issues. The gentlemen at National Public Radio found that out the hard way when in the interest of journalistic clarity they used the name Bradley Manning in a story about Bradley Manning deciding to adopt a new name and to begin living as though he were a woman—which is to say, they

used the name Bradley Manning at a time when everybody who followed the news knew who Bradley Manning was but nobody had ever heard of Chelsea Manning.

No one seriously believes that the people who manage editorial practices at NPR have the sexual politics of Rick Santorum or Mike Huckabee. And if hooked up to a polygraph machine by electrodes attached to the genitals associ-

ated with the sex assigned to them at birth, not many people would take seriously the insistence that a biologically male human being who entered this vale of tears capable of fathering children becomes a woman in the same sense as a biologically female person who walks this Earth capable of bearing and nursing children simply because we monkey around with a few pronouns and call the result a “trans woman.” Much of the social tension associated with gender dysphoria could be managed with such old-fashioned bourgeois values as kindness and liberality rather than the carefully cultivated group psychosis currently prescribed. But bourgeois values are unfashionable to speak about, especially among those who profit most handsomely by living in accord with them. Some of that is homeopathic magic straight out of *The Golden Bough*, but more of it is etiquette obsession straight out of Versailles.

Watch what you say: *Someone* is.

The question at the center of social life at Versailles was: Who belongs where? Who belongs at court, and who does not? Who stands where—literally and figuratively, though there was scarcely any difference in many contexts—in relation to the king? Proving that one belonged in one’s place—and avoiding gauchely giving any impression that one did not belong—governed practically every aspect of court life: how to sit, how to stand, how to walk, how to speak, how to knock on a door (the correct method was to scratch at it gently with a fingernail until noticed),



*The takfiri tendency at work*

how to button a coat, pursue a romance, make money. The word “status” literally means *standing*.

The generation that reached what passes for maturity in the age of social media is the most status-obsessed—and hence etiquette-obsessed—since the ancien régime. They are all miniaturists: There hasn’t been an important and original book of political ideas written by an American millennial, and very few of them have read one, either. But they are very interested in individual pronouns and 280-character tweets. It is extraordinarily difficult for any one of them to raise his own status through doing interesting and imaginative intellectual work, because there is practically no audience for such work among his peers. Worse, the generation ahead of him stopped paying attention to millennials years ago, and the generation behind him never started.

What that leaves is the *takfiri* tendency, scalp-hunting or engineering a court scandal at Versailles. Concurrent with that belief is the superstition that people such as Harvey Weinstein or Bret Stephens take up cultural space that might otherwise be filled by some more worthy person if only the infidel were removed, as though society were an inverted game of Tetris, with each little disintegration helping to enable everybody else to move up one slot at a

time. Status obsession does funny things to one’s map of social reality. It leads to all manner of bizarre thinking.

A second party scene: Some years ago, I was at a cook-out at a friend’s in the suburbs of Philadelphia. One of the guests was a well-meaning young Democratic state legislator of the familiar modern type: doggedly and dully progressive, rich, suburban, Osmondite in his regard for convention, overly self-assured, and—this was before it became a red flag in and of itself—dating a pretty young woman about half his age. He wanted to talk about abortion, because that’s what people like him do at parties. It was a cordial enough conversation, and he—being insufficiently schooled in the new etiquette—used the descriptors “pro-life” and “pro-choice.” And every time he uttered the words “pro-life,” his hall-monitor of a girlfriend (I do hope they got married; it would serve the both of them right) snapped at him: “*anti-choice*.” Like an angry little weasel, making whatever noise it is that angry little weasels make when they’re laying down the mustelid law. Kind of a chirp, really. Neither one of us was exactly wobbly in our respective views on abortion, and neither one of us was likely to change his own mind or the other’s. That wasn’t the point.

I wonder if he knew that. I wonder if she did. ♦

## Entitlements: A Slow Motion Crisis

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The U.S. is barreling toward one of the most predictable economic and social crises in our history: the collapse of our entitlement programs. Social Security and Medicare represent our nation’s compassionate commitment to the elderly and the sick. While our government has a responsibility to protect these programs for future generations, it is currently failing to meet that responsibility—and two recent reports show the situation to be more dire than previously thought.

The *2018 Social Security Trustees Report*, released earlier this month, reveals that Social Security’s costs will exceed its income this year for the first time since 1982, forcing the program to dip into its trust fund to cover benefits. This is happening three years sooner

than expected, and the trust fund is now expected to be entirely depleted by 2034. Meanwhile, the *2018 Medicare Trustees Report* shows that Medicare’s hospital insurance fund will be depleted in 2026, three years earlier than anticipated.

The lack of sustainability in these programs has many causes including lower rates of economic growth, rising medical costs, and a massive influx of retirees who are living longer than ever. At current spending levels, entitlement programs and net interest will consume 98% of federal revenue by 2028. This means our federal government will have to borrow to pay for almost everything else—education, defense, infrastructure, research and development, and more.

Without some changes, our leaders will face stark choices in the not too distant future: stop investing in priorities that are crucial to our society,

allow our entitlement programs to collapse, or run up the federal credit card until lenders cut us off. This is why we must act now to reform Social Security and Medicare and save them for future generations. That doesn’t mean cutting them—it simply means slowing the rate of growth in the programs and making other strategic reforms.

Congress has known about this looming crisis for decades, and it has ignored it for just as long. The situation is quickly growing too serious to ignore. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is blowing the whistle, and we’re ready to work with lawmakers on sensible reforms. The well-being of our most vulnerable citizens, the basic functioning of our government, and the economic vitality of our country depend on finding a solution before the clock runs out.



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# The Lion of South London

*Lionel Shriver does not want to write books in which people only say the right thing. She is pushing back against prudence.*

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BY JAMES CAMPBELL

In a speech delivered at the Brisbane Writers Festival in September 2016, Lionel Shriver confessed to being “much more anxious about depicting characters of different races” than she used to be. Even accents, she said, “make me nervous.” When starting out as a writer, Shriver had scarcely hesitated to draw African-American characters in her fiction or to conjure the sound of “black dialects, for which, having grown up in the American South, I had a pretty good ear.” Her first novel, *The Female of the Species* (1987), contains not only rounded and recognizable black characters, such as Leonia Harris of the South Bronx—“Out there on the street Ray Harris get treated no better than a wad of gum stuck on somebody shoe”—but also an obscure Kenyan tribe of her own invention, Il-Ororen.

In the decades since, the law of trespass governing literary territory has become noticeably less liberal, but Shriver remains resolute in the conviction that she is as entitled to describe the speech, look, and attitudes of fellow creatures of whatever race or class as anybody else is to describe her. “All boundaries between cultures are fluid,” she told me recently. “We are living in a big hash. It’s fun ... and interesting ... and it’s complicated.” In her pacing, and not least in her impressive articulacy, Shriver sometimes talks as if addressing a lecture room. As it happens, she has done so on this topic, “cultural appropriation,” more than once. Her thoughts emerge in clear outlines. “But the solution is not to place a fence around everybody. We are putting together a version of the world that is false: Not only do you not *own* your culture, whose boundaries you are therefore not allowed to police, but you don’t even own *your self*. Which is to say, you are unavoidably a part of other people’s lives.”

At the Brisbane event, Shriver recounted one of the pettiest examples of this thoroughly modern offense-taking: the prosecution by university authorities of a group

of students at Bowdoin College in Maine for organizing a Mexican-themed party. “The hosts,” she noted, “provided attendees with miniature sombreros, which—the horror—numerous partygoers wore.” Some were placed on probation. The student government issued a “statement of solidarity” with those adversely affected by the antics of their fellow students. Safe spaces were marked out. Shriver wound up her talk by placing a sombrero on her head.

Her defense of the right to dress up provoked a response from a Sudanese-Australian woman, Yassmin Abdel-Magied, known for video broadcasts with titles such as “What Does My Headscarf Mean to You?” and for her advocacy of *sharia* law (“it’s about mercy, it’s about kindness”). Abdel-Magied heard Shriver’s speech as a privileged Western woman “*mocking* those who ask people to seek permission to use their stories.” Her reaction was published by the *Guardian*: “I breathed in deeply, trying to make sense of what I was hearing. ... I was reminded of my ‘place’ in the world.”

How to be serious in a time of absurdity? Shriver is not untouched by this and other incidents that have led to a flurry of accusations, including that of “racist provocateur.” The medium for that particular message was Twitter, and the messenger was pseudonymous. In March, in one of her regular columns in the *London Spectator*, Shriver wrote, “Try this exercise: prove you’re not a racist. ... The more you go on about your laudable color-blindness, the dodgier you’ll sound.”

While not lacking in confidence, she nonetheless admits that the public criticism has nibbled deleteriously at her sense of duty as a novelist and led to inner confusion on the question of self-censorship. “She has become embattled over the years,” says Fraser Nelson, editor of the *Spectator*. Nelson invited her to step in last year when a previous columnist left. “It was a moonshot name on our list. I was delighted when she accepted.” He cannot think of any other contemporary novelist who could fulfill the role of pugnacious columnist, jabbing at liberal pieties, as successfully as she does. “She is very topical. Her latest novel, *The Mandibles*, for example, tackles issues like cryptocurrency and has an astonishing grasp of economics. It’s also hilarious. In addition to her intellectual qualities,

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*James Campbell writes a weekly column for the Times Literary Supplement. His books include This Is the Beat Generation and, most recently, Syncopations, a collection of essays.*

she brought to the *Spectator* an elegance of expression.”

Nelson reaches for the pleasing phrase “a gentle fearlessness” to describe Shriver’s public stances, but she herself occasionally wonders if she ought to be watching her step. Will her career as a novelist suffer if she steps across one newly drawn line too many? “Unless I push back against my own prudence,” she wrote in an essay on the subject of cultural appropriation in the British magazine *Prospect* in March, “my fictional worlds will fail to reflect the world I live in. My literary palate will pale.” Shriver’s editor in New York, Gail Winston of HarperCollins, admires her for holding her ground. “We are mired in a historical moment that is obsessed with cultural appropriation, microaggressions, safe spaces—for better and for worse—so anyone who takes a firm position on these matters leaves themselves open to criticism. Lionel has to stay true to herself.”

Rising to the call to do what she believes she does best, Shriver wrote a story called “Domestic Terrorism” in 2016. The locale is Atlanta. The cast includes Harriet, “on the threshold of sixty,” her “socially awkward” son Liam, and Liam’s African-American girlfriend Jocanda, one of Shriver’s many skillfully drawn youthful creations. Jocanda has “mighty powers,” not only in Liam’s bedroom but even while reclining on Harriet’s sofa, “eyeing her hostess through the roseate glow of her Negroni—a cocktail whose name made Harriet anxious.”

It is a comic touch in keeping with the tone of the story, which is transmitted through Harriet’s concerned and caring mind. To any goodwill reader, it is evident that the author feels as attached to Jocanda as Harriet does. But goodwill is the primary instinct of fewer readers than was once the case. When Shriver sent “Domestic Terrorism” to her agent, with the aim of having it submitted to a magazine “that had published me in the past,” the response she



Lionel Shriver

got was that “maybe I’d like to make Jocanda white.” It is the kind of literary advice last heard by authors in the 1950s, when James Baldwin was earnestly advised by his New York publisher to make the gay hero of *Giovanni’s Room* a woman.

Seated in the kitchen of her tidy house on a busy street in a not yet up-and-coming quarter of South London, Shriver is defensive of a position that has only recently seemed in need of being defended in liberal Western countries: what Gail Winston calls “the right of authors to create the characters they believe best serve the story.” Shriver insists that she acted on good artistic instinct in making Jocanda who she is. “First, it’s Atlanta, which has a very large black population—also a large middle- and upper-middle-class population. It’s perhaps the biggest wealthy black community in the country. So I liked that flipping of economic conventions. She’s from a better part of town than the main character. I know now that any ethnic characters I use are going to be hyperexamined for sins. And people who are looking for sins always find them. It doesn’t matter how innocuous that character is, the *very existence* of him or her will attract criticism.”

The story was declined by the magazine in which Shriver had hoped to see it published. “We’ll never know,” her agent concluded. “Domestic Terrorism” is, however, included in *Property*, the new collection of her shorter fiction.

A reviewer in the *Financial Times*, Luke Brown, echoed the anxious opinion of her agent. He depicted Shriver as an author who has “not had an easy time over the past two years” for insisting on being “allowed to represent the lives of those from different races and backgrounds from her own.” Shriver herself feels she’s been having a hard time, but any rapport between author and reviewer ended there. Brown singled out “Domestic Terrorism” as an example of Shriver “spoiling for a fight,” blundering into caricatures and “lapses in taste,” determined to assert “her right to write black

characters.” To which Shriver, blending weariness and irritation, responds: “I can either hide in a lily-white past or I can be defiant.”

Margaret Ann Shriver was born—in 1957 in Gastonia, North Carolina—under a defiant star. Her father, Donald, is a Presbyterian minister who later became president of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and her mother, Peggy, worked for the National Council of Churches. “I’m afraid all this church created an allergic reaction,” Shriver says. “Now I can’t stand church.” Nevertheless, she describes herself as “classically Protestant ... hardworking, self-righteous, and cheap”—by which she means “frugal,” a word she reaches for more than once. Shriver doesn’t own a car, preferring to walk or cycle to reach most places in London. She rifles through the clothes racks in thrift shops. The idea of home improvements fails to move her. “The thought of looking it all up online and then choosing. ... And the disruption!” A night owl, she works till dawn and declines friendly lunches. “It breaks up the working day. Anyway, in my case it’s more like breakfast.” In “My Old Man,” a mostly affectionate portrait of her father written a decade ago (both parents are still alive), Shriver admitted that for him, as for her, “compliments have a shelf life of five seconds, but criticisms fester.”

Her father wanted her to study nursing, a suggestion she sees as emanating from old-style patriarchal parenting. “I was suited [for it] by neither temperament nor inclination, only by dint of being female,” she wrote. In a tomboyish twist, she changed her name to Lionel at the age of 15. Not even her father calls her Margaret now. In the article, she described him as having a face “drawn along strong, square Kennedy lines,” and her face is similarly strong, occasionally tilting towards strictness. Her father could boast a “tawny, leonine thatch” and so can Lionel, drawn into a long ponytail. When she smiles, as she often does with a touch of drollery, everything lightens. “She’s a force,” Gail Winston says. “Anyone meeting her for the first time is struck by her blunt honesty and arresting opinions. An encounter with Lionel, in person or on the page, is stimulating.”

Donald Shriver has written books on religious topics, in some cases mixed with current events: *An Ethic for Enemies*, one of his incursions into civil rights, bears the subtitle “Forgiveness in Politics.” Another is *The Unsilent South*. Peggy Shriver’s publications have included *Pinches of Salt: Spiritual Seasonings*, a collection of poems written to show that “grace can be found in daily life.”

Growing up in a house already occupied by authors,

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**‘She’s a force,’ Gail Winston says. ‘Anyone meeting her for the first time is struck by her blunt honesty and arresting opinions. An encounter with Lionel, in person or on the page, is stimulating.’**

Margaret-turned-Lionel was emboldened. “I decided I wanted to be a writer when I was seven, shortly after I learned to read. On the one hand, how can you decide what you want to do when you’re seven? On the other hand, I never changed my mind.” She describes herself as having been “a natural contrarian” in youth. “I didn’t like being told what to do. In that sense I didn’t especially enjoy being a child. I liked the play aspect of childhood, but I really didn’t like the powerlessness of it. I couldn’t wait to get out from under.” She has said that there was “a very thin line in my family between God and my father.” Her most recent novel but one, *Big Brother* (2013), was inspired by the plight of her elder brother, Greg, about whom she wrote in 2009: “He’s topping 330 pounds: 24 stone. He was once 5ft 7in tall, but his vertebrae have compressed, and at 5ft 3in I now look him straight in the eye. I used to look up to him in every sense. I ended our last two visits in tears.” She added: “I doubt if he’ll see 60.” Hours after she filed the piece, Greg was admitted to hospital and died two days later, aged 55.

In *Big Brother*, the narrator Pandora’s account of meeting Greg’s fictional avatar, Edison, at the Cedar Rapids airport is pungent with shock and disgust and love. A “very large gentleman” is rolled into baggage claim “in an extrawide wheelchair”:

I peered into the round face, its features stretched as if painted on a balloon. Searching the brown eyes, nearly black now so hooded, I think I was trying *not* to recognize him. The longish hair was lank, too dull. But the keyboard grin was unmistakable—if sulphurous from tobacco, and tinged with a hint of melancholy along with the old mischief. “Sorry, but I didn’t see you.”

“Find that hard to believe.” Somewhere under all that fat was my brother’s sense of humor. “Don’t I get a hug?”

“Of course!” My hands nowhere near met on his curved back.

In Bermondsey, Shriver lives with Jeff Williams, an American jazz drummer who has worked with Stan Getz, Joe Lovano, Paul Bley, and others. (Edison in *Big Brother* is a jazz pianist.) They have no children, but family matters show up in her fiction all the time. Williams is her second husband—she had what she calls a “starter marriage,” under pressure from her parents. And he was previously married to a literary agent who once acted for Shriver.

Success was in no hurry to catch Shriver. *The Female of the Species* came out in 1987. The six novels that followed in the next nine years were mostly well received, while creating no firm impression. *A Perfectly Good Family* (1996)

made a dent in relations back home, however, causing a rift that took several years to heal. “The problem was that that novel dispelled the notion that I held my parents in a kind of awed esteem, which is what they expected. I represented them as mortal, with foibles and hypocrisies, like everyone else.” Funnily enough, she adds, “they took exception to all kinds of things that weren’t actually in the book. I never heard anything about the parts that were indeed precisely about them.” She has stated that “one line” in her fifth novel, *Game Control* (1994), hurt her father’s feelings: He “misconstrued it to mean that his daughter did not think him handsome.” Now that her father is in his 90s and her mother is in ill health, “I probably won’t write about them again until they’re dead.”

Shriver’s conversation, like her journalism, is seldom lit up by the name of a favorite prose writer or poet. She is a natural storyteller, with a direct narrative force, but her sentences do not in general draw attention to themselves. Toby Lichtig, fiction editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, regards her as “notably wide-ranging in her subjects, applying a journalist’s restlessness to her authorial craft. I like this about her. Authors, as Hilary Mantel has said, are there to ‘bring us news’—and this is something Shriver has done very effectively over the course of her career. She’s a serious ideas novelist, but she doesn’t let the ideas get in the way of a good story.”

It was the slow-burning success of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* that bent the shape of her career into an upward-looking position. Published in 2003 by small houses in both the United States (Counterpoint) and Britain (Serpent’s Tail), it won the Orange Prize, at that time a prestigious award. When a sanguinary film directed by Lynne Ramsay was released in 2011, with Tilda Swinton in the role of Eva Khatchadourian—Kevin’s mother, who narrates the tale of a high-school massacre carried out by her son in a series of letters—success happened all over again. The latest Serpent’s Tail edition boasts, “One million copies sold.”

“*We Need to Talk About Kevin* was a sensation and the book that put her on the map,” Gail Winston says. “So of course people make the assumption that it was her first novel. It’s not unusual—authors are known for their most

commercially successful book no matter where it falls in their writing career—but Lionel had written standout fiction before *Kevin*.” Shriver’s back catalogue returned to print, and she has written another five novels since *Kevin*. *Property* is her first collection of short fiction.

In her *Spectator* columns, written in a straight-from-the-shoulder style, Shriver tries to interrupt a conversation she sees as being controlled by the left. Unregulated immigration is a recurring topic. Official figures ought to be taken with a pinch of salt, she said in a recent piece headlined “Why Mass Immigration Explains the Housing Crisis.” The government, Shriver declared bluntly, “has a) no idea how to track people with every motivation to keep off the radar, and b) every motivation itself to underestimate an unpopular social phenomenon, with a range of adverse consequences, that it cannot seem to control. Do I sound bigoted?” Reduced to a single sentence, her view is “Current global demographics make open-border policies in the West untenable.” Fraser Nelson feels that while “there is a strong left-leaning consensus among the cultural elite in Britain, the public is different. The readership of the *Spectator*, neither broadly left nor right, responds



Shriver dons her sombrero in Brisbane in 2016.

positively to Lionel’s columns. She swims against the current, and readers like that.”

Shriver’s voice gathers heat as she steers the kitchen-table talk away from routine facts about her background—she spent 12 years in Belfast before moving to London—to what it means, in terms of her career, to be an outspoken public intellectual. “The left does more or less shape the literary sphere in the U.K. and in the U.S. So the people who make judgments about my books, and even determine whether or not they’re published, are left-wing. And if I’ve become too identified with the non-left, then my goose is cooked. I’m not even on the right—that’s the irony! And if my goose is cooked, then it’s just going to encourage all my colleagues to be paranoid and careful and to shut up.” Lichtig disagrees that any particular group “controls” the literary sphere in Britain or America. “This statement seems to me a classic example of Shriver’s tendency towards hyperbole—the sort of tendency that makes her an appealing columnist, particularly for right-wing outlets such as the *Spectator*.”

On June 12, Shriver was sacked as the sole judge for a short story competition organized by the British feminist quarterly *Msllexia*, after the journal's editors voiced their dissatisfaction with comments made in Shriver's *Spectator* column about the new "Inclusion Tracker" devised to measure the ethnic diversity of authors at Penguin Random House UK. *Msllexia*'s editor, Debbie Taylor, spoke of providing "a safe space for all women writers" and of welcoming "open debate" at the same time as announcing the removal of the woman writer with opposing views.

Another way to cook a goose was demonstrated by the novelist Ken Kalfus in a review of *The Mandibles* in the *Washington Post* in July 2016. A character in the dystopian tale—"a secondary character," Shriver stresses—is suffering from advanced early-onset dementia and is apt to wander off into the labyrinthine city, placing herself and others in danger. Luella has married into the Mandible family, and as Shriver put it in the "prove you're not a racist" *Spectator* column, she "happens to be black." In order to curb her erratic behavior, family members guide her through the streets on a leash. Kalfus was dismissive of Shriver's adventitious "happens to be." The Mandibles are white, he stated pointedly; Luella, "the single African American in the family," is physically restrained and led through the streets of lawless New York at the end of a cord. "If *The Mandibles* is ever made into a film, my suggestion is that this image not be employed for the movie poster." In a follow-up article on the subject, Kalfus added that he was "thinking of ads in bus shelters and, honestly, I imagined they'd be wrecked."

*The Mandibles* is not so far in film production. "I think it'd be fine," Shriver replies when asked how she thinks any future adaptation would deal with the Luella question. "The action as described makes perfect sense. That reviewer"—whose name she claims to have forgotten, as she does the critic of *Property* in the *Financial Times*—"also said that you go for hundreds of pages in the book without a joke. I was far more offended by that than I was about the charge of racism, which I felt was so stupid that I couldn't take it seriously. I want to have characters who are able to say whatever they want—things that maybe are offensive to certain people. I do not want to read books in which people only say the right thing! It would put me to sleep."

Saying the "right thing" often means saying what

everybody else is saying, following the happy liberal line, which, Shriver says, signals the virtue of the person pursuing it. "Isn't it interesting how quickly that term 'virtue-signaling' caught on? There must have been a need for it." For that reason, she has avoided writing about the current U.S. president in her fiction, including the novel she is working on now. "I tend to be topical as a novelist, but one of the pitfalls of topicality is that you run the risk of your books aging badly. I suspect that, post-Trump, nobody's going to want to read about him." Anyway, she says, Trump is "too broad" to make a good fictional character.

"He's crude and crudely self-drawn. There's no art to him—no depth or irony. He would be implausible on the page." The novel does, however, contain scenes with non-white characters. "We'll see what happens with that."

Before departing, I offer some remarks from an interview with Toni Morrison that appeared in the *Paris Review* 25 years ago. They concern one of the first battles fought on the field of cultural appropriation, though it was not called that then, over William Styron's 1967 novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. A year later, a group of authors banded together and issued *William Styron's "Nat Turner": Ten Black Writers Respond*, in protest against a white Southerner's depiction of the man who led a murderous slave revolt

in 1831. Styron's version was necessarily an invention. A thin pamphlet of "confessions" issued after Turner's grisly execution gave him the title for his novel and generated more than 400 pages of lyrical first-person narrative. James Baldwin's defense of Styron is well known: "He has begun the common history—ours." Morrison's much less so. The *Paris Review* interviewer ventured "a lot of people felt that Styron didn't have a right to write about Nat Turner," to which she replied: "He has a right to write about whatever he wants. To suggest otherwise is outrageous."

Shriver appears vague about Styron's novel, its date of appearance, and its historical inspiration, but is openly delighted by the Toni Morrison quote. "Good for her! Nobody's saying that. Only I'm saying that. I don't understand why *everyone* isn't saying that. I'm not quite sure why it seems only to fall to me. I wish I had had that quote a long time ago." ♦

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# As the E.U. Weakens

*The nation-state reconsidered*

By DOMINIC GREEN

Michael Novak’s ideal of “democratic capitalism” sounds like it has two elements, but it really has three. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982), Novak defined the American system as a triple alliance of free markets, a democratic polity, and a classically liberal system of values. In Novak’s American and Catholic application of Max Weber’s German and Protestant theories, the spirit of a culture shapes the matter of its governance and the materials of its capitalism.

Two’s company; three’s a crowd. At the end of the Cold War, democratic capitalism inherited the earth. The years until the Great Recession were a global victory tour. Those of us who enjoyed its progress must now admit that the Western-sponsored market system and Western politicians alike frequently treated values, the ethical foundation of society, as a silent partner. In the United States and Europe, politicians like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair even persuaded centrist voters to let them push values out of bed entirely, the better to enjoy their intimacy with the free market. But across the West, that silent partner has come to life in various “shock” election results in recent years.

Throughout the 1990s, and even after the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, Western governments pulled towards capital and market values and away from people and social values—towards transnational systems, and away from local traditions. This uncoupling of democracy and capitalism, or at least capitalism as we have known it since 1990, led to a revolt of democracy and values against capital and a governing class that has taken on the aspect of aristocracy: self-perpetuating, self-serving, and contemptuous of the governed when they persist in adhering to the wrong kind of values.

In the United States, early signs of this revolt appeared on the fringes of both major parties, with the Tea Party in 2009 and Occupy Wall Street in 2011. But the cracks showed first in the European Union. In 2005, 55 percent of French voters rejected a proposed constitution for Europe. The alliance of France and Germany is the foundation of the E.U.’s

economy and crucial to the political drive towards “convergence” into a single European state. But voters in France preferred not to cede their rights and laws to a supranational entity. Across Europe, resistance to the E.U. has risen sharply since then. The nation-state has become an impassable obstacle on the E.U.’s road to convergence.

The modern nation-state was born in Europe. It was declared dead in Europe, too, in the years after 1945, although reports of its death now seem exaggerated, if not utopian. Still, the nation-state’s reputation remains poor in Europe. To many postwar Europeans, raised on the mood music of the European Union and the memory of two world wars, defense of the nation-state was deemed heretical, a rejection of the dogma of peace and progress. Indeed, too ardent a defense carried undertones of racism, imperial nostalgia, and even sympathy for fascism.

Now, however, the memory of World War II is fading. The E.U.’s political development has been stalled for more than a decade. Europe’s social peace and its welfare systems are threatened by mass immigration, terrorism, and the unending “migrant crisis.” Some voters are turning to the nation-state for the protection that the bureaucrats in Brussels seem unwilling or unable to provide, just as their medieval forebears might have sought the safety of a castle. But others never stopped experiencing nationhood as an inescapable reality. Today, Europeans and Americans too are shedding the ideal of a borderless world, some with regret, others with glee. A working alternative, and the political forms of a democratic future, need to be defined.

‘Whether it’s happened deliberately or not, it’s the results that interest me,’ says Gil Delannoi. It is a precociously warm spring afternoon in Paris, and we are sitting beneath a tree in the garden of an old house on the Left Bank. Delannoi, a political scientist at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, or “Sciences Po,” has just published a thoughtful book on the mixed legacies and potential uses of democratic national identity, *La nation contre le nationalisme*, or *The Nation Against Nationalism*.

In France, the nation has been historically identified with the state, and the state with the universalism of the French Revolution, as well as the errors of imperialism and Vichy. France’s national institutions are unanimously

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*Dominic Green is culture editor of Spectator USA and a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

Europhile; it is as though the nation-state has recognized the inevitability and desirability of its Hegelian absorption into the higher universal form of the European Union. Meanwhile on the lower slopes of history, the traditional political parties have either collapsed into the center or scattered to the fanatic fringes, and the loudest defenders of national particularity are the Le Pen family. As these are fractious times in Europe, *La nation contre le nationalisme* has attracted intense and often hostile interest.

“Whether we like it or not, national consciousness exists,” Delannoi writes. “It is urgent that, instead of exalting or condemning it, we know and understand it.” In the decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, the idea of the nation was “denigrated,” and its historical demise seen as “ineluctable, irreversible and sometimes even destined.” Yet while transnational institutions and the American-led order spread across the globe, the European nation-state revived with the reunification of Germany and the restoration of sovereignty to the ex-Soviet states.

“In all nationalisms, you find the idea that political identity corresponds to cultural identity,” Delannoi says. For all the E.U.’s successes, European democracy failed to develop at the supranational level. This produced what the Brexit-minded British call the E.U.’s “democratic deficit.” A fatal lack of accountability severs Europe’s collective political identity from its constituent cultural identities.

“The E.U. and the global commercial institutions may not practice war or violence,” Delannoi concedes. “However, they don’t practice what I believe is the most elementary of democratic characteristics. That isn’t even universal suffrage so much as offering political options and alternatives. If there’s a basic definition of democracy, it’s the possibility of legally protected political change. People should be able to choose between multiple possibilities.”

The European Union and its precursor institutions were founded against nationalism—or rather, Delannoi argues, against a false image of nationalism raised by the two world wars. This has caused what Delannoi calls a case of *natiophobie*, “nation-phobia.” Europe’s political managers are suspicious of particularism and of democracy in general.

“Technically speaking, the E.U. is a democracy of delegates. To belong to the E.U., you have to satisfy certain democratic criteria. And elected politicians nominate the leaders on the European Commission. So the E.U. seems to defend certain democratic principles. But when I go to any country in the world, the question that I ask, especially if I don’t know the country, isn’t, ‘Do you have an elected president or parliament?’ nor even ‘Is the press entirely free?’ Instead, I have two principal questions. ‘If you’re in opposition, do you risk imprisonment without reason?’

And secondly, ‘Can you peacefully change policy and government?’” He laughs. “At least the European Union fulfills the first condition—but not the second!”

“Not that I’m a Euroskeptic,” Delannoi clarifies. “My critique of the E.U. is all about this deficit. In a democracy, there is Politics A and Politics B. If A doesn’t work, you can go for B. The E.U. functions only in a nondemocratic mode. Even if it has human rights and a parliament, it still has only one policy. So if you criticize the policy, you’re not favoring an alternative. You’re against the union’s existence.”

Delannoi, an expert on Isaiah Berlin, sees Europe’s liberal democracy squeezed between two globalizing forces. One is “the world market” into whose open-bordered system the European Union has integrated itself, regardless of its subjects’ political desires. The other is the imperialism of values represented by fundamentalist Islamism. Both have their extremists, their servants, and their useful idiots. Both sense their power of conquest and, like all conquerors, believe their conquests to be irreversible.

Recent events have forced us to consider once more the passions of religion and how politically to constrain them. We have not, Delannoi believes, accepted history’s suggestion that the contemporary passion for “openness”

may also require limits. “What does this passion signify?” he asks. What is “the hidden object of institutionalized multiculturalism? Is it hiding a desire for empire? And why is it hiding it?”

The answer, he implies, is an unstated complicity between Europe’s national publics and their unaccountable supranational rulers in Brussels. Both wanted the profits and pleasures of a borderless world without the economic and social costs. After nearly three decades of mass immigration and a decade of economic stagnation, the national electorates now find those costs have grown too high to pay.

“The public resists two different aspects of globalization,” Delannoi says. “Firstly, there’s the deindustrialization of wealthy states, a new phenomenon. The problem that demands our attention is that it’s going to be difficult to go all the way, to the absolute extinction of industry in the richest countries. Maybe the other, emerging industrial states can become rich too. But if it’s completely to the detriment of the older rich states, it’s evident that the population will say, ‘Stop!’ at some point. And that’s what’s beginning to happen.”

The second stumbling block is “cultural membership,” without which a nation cannot have common values. And that means confronting immigration, Islam, and terrorism. “We have to be very precise here,” Delannoi warns. He is a classical liberal, a species rarer in France than among the Anglo-Saxons, and does not wish to give intellectual



Gil Delannoi

DOMINIC GREEN

ammunition to the National Front. He manages to discuss the French state's crisis of relations with French Muslims without mentioning Islam.

"We used to have a great divergence between nations in Europe, but we also had a number of circumstances favoring multiethnic integration around common political principles. We're going to have problems, because that model no longer works. These populations want to live in Britain or France but no longer want to say 'We're British' and 'We're French.'"

In truth, Europeans were never enthusiastic about integrating their immigrants. The British left them to their own devices, often in their own slums, in the name of multiculturalism. The French installed them in purpose-built slums, then lectured them on the virtues of French republicanism, which, though theoretically universal, are in reality highly particular. The Germans created a mostly Turkish underclass, denying citizenship even to the grandchildren of Turkish guestworkers until the European Union, performing one of its better deeds, made that sort of discrimination illegal.

The European Union has complicated integration, Delannoi thinks, and has "wavered between two strategies." In order to build a "post-national" state, the E.U. sought to weaken its nation-states. But while it has drawn executive powers upwards to Brussels, it has also sought to lessen nationalist resistance by encouraging "sub-national" and regional identities. The result is that the Scots feel more Scottish than British, and the Catalans more Catalan than Spanish. And that leads to local revolts against the established nation-states.

"The policy can be justified economically, as in the case of Alsace and other regions that straddle national borders," Delannoi allows. "But it was a bad policy. It consisted in simultaneously encouraging national identity while also expecting it to disappear." The logical consequence was the Catalan referendum on secession from Spain—and the imprisonment and extradition of the Catalan premier from Germany on an E.U. arrest warrant: a perfect example of what Delannoi calls the E.U.'s "negation of politics."

The E.U.'s double policy towards nationalism has also complicated the integration of immigrants. "It's much harder to integrate someone who comes from another continent—maybe it's different if you come from another European country—if you're also saying, 'We're asking you to make an effort to integrate into something that our elites say should disappear.'"

While Americans argue over whether culture is upstream from politics, Delannoi locates Europe's crisis of legitimacy in the weakening of the nation-state, which is where culture and politics meet. In the boom years after 1990, liberal nation-states

experimented with abandoning their "almost perennial political mission," the democratic expression of their peoples' culture and values. In the lean years since, the authoritarian democracies of Russia and Turkey have encroached on Europe like their empires of old.

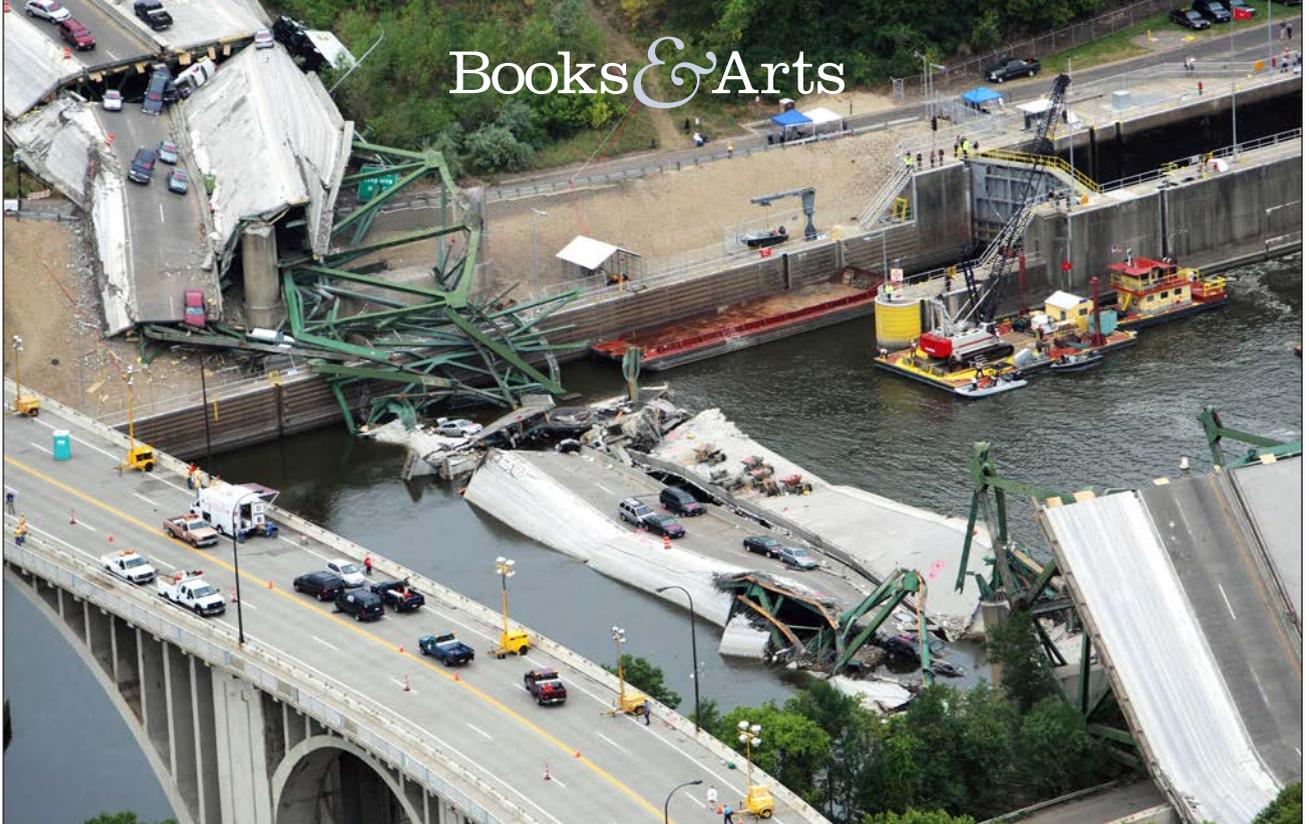
"The issue today isn't whether we can keep things as they were. That's not possible," Delannoi concludes. "It's if we're going to have a more globalized world, who is in control of it? If it's going to be controlled by international companies and institutions, can we trust them and their sense of responsibility? If it's not controlled at all, that'll be very difficult. Some of my colleagues want to suppress the state. I tell them, 'Go live for a year in a country which is considered to have no state, and then come and see me.'"

The Hobbesian reality, Delannoi insists, is that we need the state for security if not for the luxury of democratic expression. "Just to collect taxes and to ensure a minimum of police and social protection. You can't organize those things on a global scale. Therefore, the system cannot be post-national. It can only be international. It can only work internationally with relatively strong nations."

The current crisis of democratic legitimacy in the West has developed because the pursuit of free markets has uncoupled democratic polities from their value systems. Pluralities, and sometimes majorities, of voters have revolted because they feel that democratic capitalism has betrayed its own spirit and then failed to deliver the material goods. The vocabulary of denigration—populist, nativist, extremist, ultranationalist—suggests that populism is a protest from the fringe. In fact, populism is a distorted centrism, a consensus run amok. It arises from the level of values and emotions but is displaced to the margins by the weaknesses of the institutions that are at the center of political life.

Anyone who thinks that we have passed peak populism is probably deluding himself. The stakes are high, for we have enough problems already. A socialist revival would very probably turn the current crisis into a disaster. Yet if we do not repair popular democracy, we may well get populist collectivism. This takes familiar economic form in unworkable promises of redistribution from socialists like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn and familiar cultural form in Europe's "new nationalism," with its explicit impulses toward authoritarianism and bigotry.

Better the old nation-state, the liberal nation-state, which was created in order to protect freedom of conscience and local traditions of liberty, but also to contain the excess energies of nationalism. If the state is to regulate nationalism, it must regain the trust of the nation. For though the political seas are heavy, the nation-state remains, as Gil Delannoi says, "the closest democratic horizon." ♦



Steven Brill lists the 2007 collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis as a prime example of American dysfunction.

# Decline ...

*From crumbling infrastructure to broken meritocracy, Steven Brill sees problems everywhere.* BY PHILIP DELVES BROUGHTON

Steven Brill was prompted to write his assault on the “people and forces behind America’s fifty-year fall” while riding in a taxi from JFK into Manhattan. He was struck by the parlous state of the infrastructure. The airport terminal had been dumpy, the traffic was bad, there were potholes along the Van Wyck. Next time, he might want to try the AirTrain to Jamaica and the E train to Midtown; it’s cheaper, faster, and better for the environment. But what’s a French-cuffed baby boomer to do? Brill, by all accounts, has made more than enough money from selling his various publishing ventures to afford a chopper. But maybe seething in a yellow cab is part of the fun.

*Philip Delves Broughton is the author, most recently, of The Art of the Sale: Learning from the Masters About the Business of Life.*

### Tailspin

*The People and Forces Behind America’s Fifty-Year Fall—and Those Fighting to Reverse It*  
by Steven Brill  
Knopf, 441 pp., \$28.95

His new book *Tailspin* begins with an interesting premise:

The most talented, driven Americans chased the American dream—and won it for themselves. Then, in a way unprecedented in history, they were able to consolidate their winnings, outsmart and co-opt the government that might have reined them in, and pull up the ladder so more could not share in their success or challenge their primacy.

Knowing of Brill’s rise from Far Rockaway, Queens, to Deerfield Academy to Yale and Yale Law School to a rewarding career as writer and publisher, all of

which he describes in the book, readers might wonder whether he is atoning for his own success—whether they are about to witness a spectacular act of journalistic seppuku.

Alas not. Brill walks us briskly up to his founding of *American Lawyer* magazine, and then ... no more autobiography. He himself is one of the talented, driven Americans he describes. He got there by merit. And then what did he do? How did he educate his children? What benefits did he provide his staff at his various companies? After his long wind-up on how meritocracy, while well-intended, has in practice become a kind of aristocracy, Brill goes all quiet. He cites numbers rather than names. What I’d like to know is what he thinks of the Clintons and Obamas arriving in Washington and promptly bypassing the public-school system to install their daughters in an elite private school, Sidwell Friends? What message did that

MANDEL NGANI / AFP / GETTY

send to the rest of the preening equal-opportunists Brill so derides? Evidently, do what we do, not what we say.

So instead of what Brill promises in his opening salvo, what we get is a slog through some of his greatest hits. The desecration of the First Amendment so that corporations get to speak as freely as individuals? Check. The staggering rise in lawyers' incomes? Check. The iniquities of big pharma and the greed of bankers? Check and check. Brill has hit all these themes hard and convincingly in previous books and journalism.

Brill's takedown of Johnson & Johnson for its reprehensible peddling of the antipsychotic drug Risperdal to children is magnificent. But he has done it before and it seems a random example to pick of *all that's wrong with America*. And we really don't need another account of how America's bank executives escaped the financial crisis scot-free, their backs groaning under the weight of bonus money. They were greedy and self-interested. Got it. Look at the profession they chose.

Brill's views sometimes reek of old-school hair tonic. He laments the fact that truck-driving jobs are "no longer a bedrock of the middle class," since anti-corruption measures reduced membership in trucking unions, resulting in reduced wages and pensions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Teamsters Union was an engine of economic security and mobility. True, top leaders overpaid themselves and gave mob-connected trucking companies sweetheart wage deals, while siphoning off pension funds to finance the building of mob-run Las Vegas casinos. They left enough on the table, though, to boost their members into the middle class.

Ah yes, those golden days of Jimmy Hoffa and cement boots. When all it took to be a member of the middle class was an iron rear and a CB radio. It scarcely bears mentioning that truck driving wasn't all Clint Eastwood and his orangutan, Clyde. It required—still requires—weeks away from family and nights in an uncomfortable cab.

SEE DELVES BROUGHTON, PAGE 36

B&A

## ... and Division

*The decisions that led to today's heightened partisanship.* BY JAMES BOWMAN

In the first and only political science course I ever took, just over 50 years ago, the first and almost only thing I remember learning was that the United States was different from most representative democracies in having "broker" political parties rather than the "missionary" parties that were more typical in, for example, European countries. For historical reasons, both major parties in this country had coalesced around regional, ethnic, racial, religious, class, and cultural loyalties and only sporadically and secondarily around ideological ones. Liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats were both forces to be reckoned with in their respective parties and had to be conciliated—often by what was called "balancing the ticket"—when it came to choosing candidates for national office.

Even as I sat in that classroom, however, the parties were beginning what Bill Bishop has dubbed "the Big Sort." The Democrats were to take the lead, after the upheavals of 1968 and Hubert Humphrey's loss to Richard Nixon, in purging their (mainly Southern) conservative bloc—which Nixon's "Southern Strategy" had been designed to welcome into the Republican party.

Yet, as Sam Rosenfeld shows in *The Polarizers*, the work of ideological homogenization performed by George McGovern and liberal congressman Don Fraser of Minnesota with the Democrats' Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection (better known as

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### The Polarizers

*Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era*  
by Sam Rosenfeld  
Chicago, 399 pp., \$30

the McGovern-Fraser Commission) in the runup to the 1972 campaign was not entirely original to them. It had been anticipated by Paul Butler's chairmanship of the DNC in the 1950s—and, before him, by the Progressives of the Woodrow Wilson era, for whom, Rosenfeld writes, "making the parties more cohesive and programmatic was bound up in a broader reform project aimed at adapting America's cumbersome and antiquated constitutional structure to the needs of a modern industrial and military state."

Butler's efforts on behalf of what he called "party government" or "party responsibility" and what James Q. Wilson called "amateur Democrats" had been successfully opposed by the party's professionals of the period, especially by the bosses of big-city political machines (referred to euphemistically by Rosenfeld at one point as "nonideological patronage-based organizations"), as well as by Southern Democratic leaders in Congress—Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson in particular. Such men were far from alone at the time in seeing the old, nonideological party system as the route to a peculiarly American kind of consensus politics.

"The parties have been the peacemakers of the American community," wrote Clinton Rossiter in

SEE BOWMAN, PAGE 36

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**DELVES BROUGHTON,***CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35*

Curiously for a man who has set up a number of media and technology businesses, Brill has little to say on the impact of technology on work. This is a live issue as artificial intelligence eats away at existing jobs (including, perhaps soon, trucking jobs). This complicated, rapidly evolving subject could use someone with Brill's insight and journalistic experience slashing through the regulatory and legal undergrowth to figure out what happens next.

**B**rill ends each chapter with an example of people doing things right. After arguing that American universities are unintentionally creating a less economically mobile society he describes the wonder that is Baruch College. Baruch educates 18,000 students at a time from all over New York in its bustling Lexington Avenue "vertical campus." The average income of a Baruch student's family is \$40,000; tuition for New York state residents is \$6,600 a year. While more vaunted schools charge 10 times that and tie themselves in knots of political correctness, Baruch is getting on with giving its charges the tools to get well-paid jobs. The head of its admissions

and financial aid programs tells Brill that the school's job is "moving people into the middle class or higher." Eat your heart out, Ivy League barista.

Brill's examples are all sound and worthy. But he's stingy with his credit. His view of America's cycle of rebirth and renewal is limited. There are no New England hipsters making cheese to rival any in France. No Iowa technologists reinventing the global payments system. There is no Larry Page or Jeff Bezos. There is no yogalates.

It is a sign of how quickly President Trump has moved on many of the issues confronted by Brill that much in his book already feels out of date. Although he decries the effects of free trade, he offers us nothing on the Trump administration's determination to tear up America's major trade deals in the name of protecting America's jobs. When Brill was writing, the Volcker Rule, which limits the range of trading activities banks can undertake, was merely under siege. Since then, it has come under full-blown attack.

Brill does, though, offer a splendid insight from Dennis Kelleher, a former corporate lawyer turned anti-lobbyist. Kelleher runs Better Markets, a pack of legal terriers who harry and expose lobbyists as they press their cases in obscure Washington hearing rooms.

"Because of Trump's tweets, the crazy things he does, and the crises he ignites, we're not paying attention to what he's doing to the day-to-day functions of the country," Kelleher says. "He has spread all these termites throughout the departments and agencies who are eating away at all aspects of our government, day and night. They don't believe in the laws they have sworn an oath to enforce."

Bankers are scaling back regulations put in place after the 2008 financial crisis. Energy executives are running the Environmental Protection Agency. Health care executives are running the Department of Health and Human Services. The foxes aren't just in the henhouse. They've killed the chickens, cleaned up the blood, and turned Washington into a most accommodating fox house.

Brill's solutions are dull but necessary. More bipartisanship. More engagement with the political system. A demand for better leaders. "That can only happen if Americans borrow some of Trump's bravado. The obstacles and all of their side effects must become energizing challenges, rather than excuses not to try." This is a book that pulses with dry intelligence and righteous anger. Some gutsier return fire would have livened it up. ♦

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**BOWMAN,** *CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35*

*Parties and Politics in America* (1960), "the unwitting but forceful suppressors of the 'civil-war potential' we carry always in the bowels of our diverse nation. Blessed are the peacemakers, I am tempted to conclude." As late as 1968,

as one analyst [Charles Ogden Jr.] put it, Butler's commitment to implementing responsible party principles betrayed a disastrous misunderstanding of the American system, where federalism and the separation of powers demanded that parties serve as "arenas of compromise"—decentralized "multi-group associations with liberal and conservative wings." To those skeptical of the responsible party vision ... the very "irresponsibility" of

American parties was a feature rather than a bug.

Today it is easy to forget the extent to which Johnson had governed by consensus before his presidency foundered on the rock of Vietnam. "Of all the major Great Society laws passed between 1964 and 1967," writes Rosenfeld, "only one, the Economic Opportunity Act encompassing several War on Poverty programs, failed to garner at least 25 percent of Republican votes in both chambers. Most enjoyed significantly larger percentages than that."

Various events and trends—Johnson's decision not to run again in 1968, demographic shifts away from the cities (and thus machine politics), and a gradual erosion of the power of the

Democratic party's conservative congressional leadership—all conspired to provide McGovern, Fraser, and their progressive allies in the party with a window of opportunity that had been denied Butler.

Meanwhile, across the aisle, the shakeout of liberal Republicans that had come with the Goldwater candidacy in 1964 proved to be less than permanent after he lost—but the ruin of the Nixon presidency and the electoral losses of 1974 and 1976 gave new heart and ultimate success to the conservative insurgency represented by Ronald Reagan's primary campaigns of 1976 and 1980. Conservative dominance of the party was solidified with Reagan's victory in the latter year's general election, although it took a bit longer for the last

liberal Republicans to be made to feel unwelcome in their party.

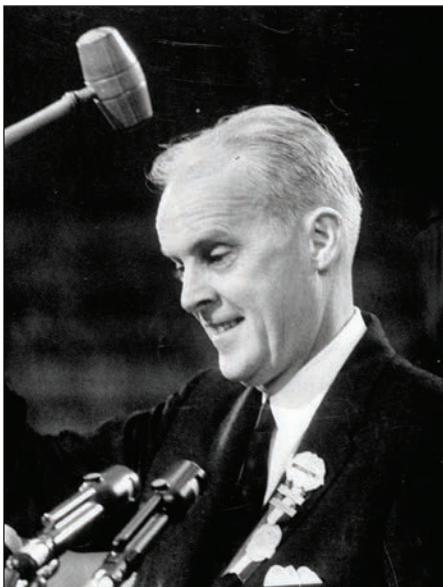
To some political junkies, reading Sam Rosenfeld's book will be an exercise in almost unbearable nostalgia for that world of political stability and comity and the kind of genuine debate that can only come with mutual respect between those of differing political points of view—as we can see now that both genuine debate and mutual respect appear to have vanished from our politics. Such things are themselves anathematized by the culturally dominant left as part of the institutionalization of all that they most hate about the American past—that is, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. at home and quasi-imperialism abroad. Even to wish for a return of what was good in the past is to make oneself complicit in what the rising generation is being taught to regard as its crimes.

This must be part of what accounts for the acrimonious “polarization” of today's political culture, though that seems too mild a word to describe what we see routinely hurled by each side against the other on Twitter. Back in Paul Butler's day, says Rosenfeld, “consistent majorities of Americans” did not want ideological parties. To the extent that that changed during the 1960s it was largely as a result of “the explosion of the long civil rights struggle into a mass movement of direct action and moral reckoning”—which, accordingly, introduced an element of moralizing into the rest of our politics that has since become a habit, exacerbating what Rossiter called (borrowing from Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall) the “civil-war potential” that has lately come to seem so much closer to actual.

Lyndon Johnson may have put it best when he said that “what the man on the street wants is not a big debate on fundamental issues; he wants a little medical care, a rug on the floor, a picture on the wall” and “the biggest threat to American stability is the politics of principle.” Or, in the Rosenfeld summation, “he implied that Americans shared core premises and sought from politics only incremental improvements.” But Johnson had the misfor-

ture of coming to the presidency in a time when both the New Left of the Students for a Democratic Society and the New Right, as represented by William F. Buckley's *National Review*, were united in their celebration of a new politics of principle—something to which we have by now grown so accustomed that it seems strange even to question it.

In reading the book, there are moments when one is inclined to suspect that Rosenfeld is trying to demonstrate his own version of that time-honored tactic of the left, which



*Paul Butler, DNC chairman from 1955 to 1960, pushed his party leftward.*

is to bog down committee meetings in such boring detail that all those with a less herculean tolerance for tedium than the zealots themselves—like some of those on the McGovern-Fraser committee—go home, leaving the latter in possession of the field and the committee. This may sound like a backhanded compliment, but it is also a tribute to the meticulousness of his scholarship in reconstructing such a difficult and complicated history, one that was complicated, at least in part, deliberately: in order to disguise its aims from the observation of the less left-wing and the less dedicated.

Unfortunately, Rosenfeld's scholarly energy appears to flag toward the end of the book. The 1990s are treated only cursorily and the 2000s hardly at all,

even though they have seen the election of the most polarizing president since the Civil War. Surely the 2016 election and its aftermath deserve more examination and explanation than Rosenfeld gives them here. His notion of the “rightward movement of both major parties” seems badly out of date, and his argument that Democratic liberalism did not die out under the “New Democrats” of the 1990s is as redundant as the New Democrats themselves in the era of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders.

Bill Clinton's attempts in the 1990s at “triangulation” were designed to mitigate partisan animosities but only succeeded in increasing them. This happened, I think, because of a gratuitous moralization of politics that, indeed, built upon the “principled” politics of the 1970s and 1980s but that, as government has been increasingly taken out of the hands of elected officials and put into those of judges and unelected bureaucrats, has taken a side-turn into virtue signaling. Nor should we neglect the role of the media and their incessant hunt for scandal, in which they have now been joined by politicians themselves, who don't seem to have anything better to do.

All this has made polarization into at least as much a social as it is a political phenomenon, and it has enabled Donald Trump to appeal over the heads of both parties to popular (and populist) resentment against what he calls “the swamp”—widely understood to comprise both an unelected but governing elite and a broad bipartisan consensus among elected officials that belies all their fierce and allegedly polarizing rhetoric. In response, the scandalmongering has become so routine that even if Trump were, as he is so often said to be, the most scandalous president in our history, no one not committed to one side or another in the political wars could ever know it, since that kind of claim and counterclaim is just how we do our political business nowadays. If this is where “party responsibility” and “principle” have led us, maybe it's time for a rethink. ♦



The Murakami characters Kaikai (left) and Kiki in a 2010-11 Versailles exhibition

BCA

# From Ironic to Iconic

How Takashi Murakami unites kitsch, mockery, and tradition. BY CHRISTOPHER ATAMIAN

To those unfamiliar with Takashi Murakami, his art can seem almost psychedelic, bursting with color and manga-inspired designs. The 56-year-old is sometimes called the “Warhol of Japan” and his work, like Andy Warhol’s, is characterized by a postmodern project of uniting kitschy, mass-produced pop culture with high art. He is perhaps best known for his trademark “superflat” drawings and paintings; the name refers to the tradition of two-dimensionality that Murakami detects in traditional Japanese art as well as to the shallowness of Japanese consumer culture, which he playfully critiques. A couple of years ago, a pop-up café in Tokyo was dedicated entirely to his work, with even the hamburger buns imprinted with his signature smiling flower faces. A few years before that, Murakami’s work graced—or disgraced, depending on your view—the royal apartments at Versailles.

Christopher Atamian is a writer and critic in New York.

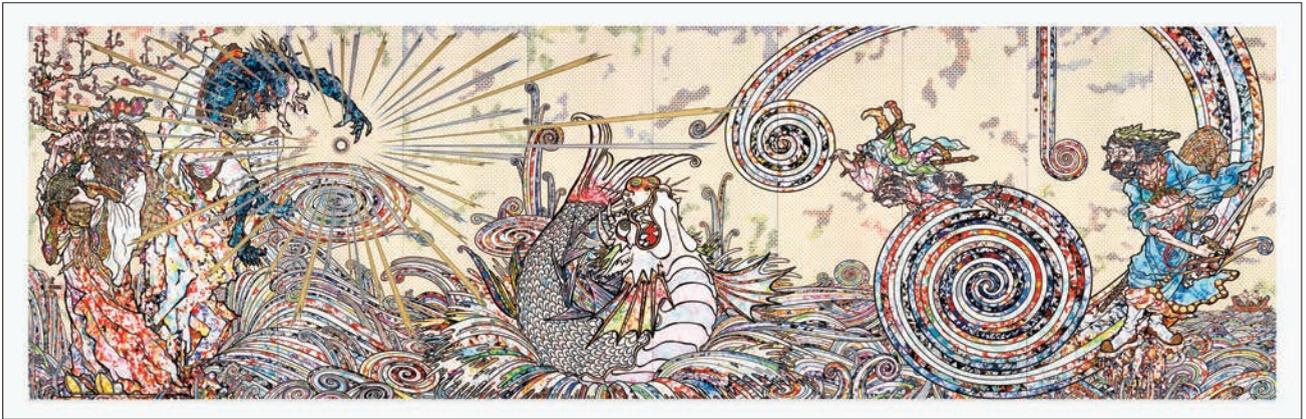
Murakami’s company, Kaikai Kiki—part art studio, part promotional and merchandising business—has offices in both Tokyo and New York. As the *New York Times* noted in 2005, Kaikai Kiki is run much like a factory, with long hours, timecards, and training manuals. With dozens of artists following his lead, Murakami creates large, fantastical paintings as well as sculptures of acrylic and fiberglass that meld manga (comics) and anime (cartoons) with traditional Japanese styles. He has risen to the level of contemporary art superstar by dint of hard work, originality, and a deep understanding of both historical and contemporary art traditions, Japanese and Western. Unlike Warhol, whose art largely commented on perception and commodification, or Roy Lichtenstein, whose merging of ad speak and comic-book imagery tried to blur the boundaries between the high and the low, Murakami’s work draws deeply from historical traditions. (In fact, Murakami holds a Ph.D. from Tokyo University in the traditional Japanese painting technique called Nihonga.)

Murakami’s blending of new pop subjects with inherited themes results in projects that are sometimes immediately recognizable, sometimes strange and otherworldly.

Among the pieces in Murakami’s 2010-11 Versailles show were personalized statues of his characters Kaikai and Kiki, perfect embodiments of the Japanese notion of *kaawaii*, which in essence means cute or adorable. A cartoon-like alien character in white clothing, Kaikai sports a pink babyface and bunny ears. At Versailles he stood mischievously on a small multicolored patchwork globe holding a long, thin red staff in his right hand with three human skulls attached at the top. Kiki, similarly shaped and sized, with smaller bunny ears—and with fangs and three eyes—stood on another globe nearby. The incongruity of these brightly colored pieces with the classical statues and busts behind them and the baroque splendor of Versailles enhanced their *kaawaii*-ness. Another piece, *Oval Buddha Gold*, looked down on the Versailles gardens. A huge golden idol of Buddha sitting on a pillar, from one side the statue looks placid and might be mistaken for a cartoonish nod to the lavish statuary of Versailles. But it has a second face on the other side, with big eyes and pointy teeth jutting out like missiles in crude—and humorous—mockery. The most overtly sexual of Murakami’s works at Versailles, *Miss Ko<sup>2</sup>*, is a tall statue of a leggy, busty blonde waitress or maid with a Barbie-doll smile; she greeted exhibition visitors with an outstretched arm. She is clearly parodic, a comment on both Western ideals of beauty and how they have in turn been incorporated into Japanese pop culture. To fully understand the layers of tribute and parody in this statue—and indeed in much of Murakami’s work—would require the knowledge and mindset of an *otaku*, a hardcore fan of manga or anime.

Murakami’s most notorious manga-inspired works are *Hiropon* (1997) and *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1998), jubilantly cartoonish and pornographic statues representative of, yet also mocking, the kinds of extremely sexualized figures in some Japanese comics. *Hiropon* is an

RAPHAEL GAILLARDE / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY



Above, Murakami's *Transcendent Attacking a Whirlwind* (2017); below, Soga Shohaku's work of the same name (circa 1764)

outrageously proportioned and scantily clad young woman. *My Lonesome Cowboy*, perhaps Murakami's most daring and fantastic creation, is a nude young man; the title is a reference to Andy Warhol's satirical Western *Lonesome Cowboys*. In each statue, exploding bodily fluid is comically used as an object (milk as a jump rope, semen as a lasso). The works bring together such diverse elements—from manga aesthetics and Jeff Koons-like sculptural execution to the incorporation of a certain raunchy gay culture—that they become almost visually overdetermined. They are provocative and funny, erotic and disturbing.

Much of Murakami's art draws on recurring characters and faces, like the omnipresent smiling flowers, which can seem not just *kawaii* but downright disturbing: When reproduced by the hundreds on a huge wall, the smiles, friendly at first, eventually seem to mock the viewer. His best-known creation, "Mr. DOB," is complex in a way that is typical of Murakami. Created in 1993 as an alter ego of sorts, its circular head and features—with the letters D and B written on ears that suggest Mickey Mouse—spell out its name, a contraction of the Japanese nonsense sentence *Dobojūte dobojūte* (Why? Why?) and the comic catchphrase *oshamanbe*. With a wide, Cheshire-cat grin, Mr. DOB is patently absurd. Its appearance in Murakami's art ranges from the whimsical to the twisted and demoniacal.

From 2009 to 2011, Murakami engaged in a *Nippon E-awase* (a Japa-



nese picture contest) with the country's highly regarded art historian Nobuo Tsuji. Traditionally *Nippon-e-awase* involved a court dialogue between, say, an emperor and a famous artist who would then undergo a scathing critique. In this contemporary version, Tsuji presented works by famous Japanese artists through the centuries and Murakami returned with ingenious riffs on them. Some of the work to emerge from this project was radically different from the originals. Other responses came back only slightly different but more compelling, like Murakami's take on Hakuin Ekaku's *Half-Length Portrait of Daruma*, an 18th-century depiction of an important Buddhist monk with a pronounced overbite. Murakami's version is shadowed darker and seems like a more textured caricature but is remarkably similar to the source material.

Murakami has often shown his work in American galleries, including in more than a dozen exhibitions at Manhattan's Galerie Perrotin. (Its founder, Emmanuel Perrotin, was the first person to exhibit Murakami outside Japan.) The gallery's latest Murakami show, held this spring, sprawled across three floors. It opened

with a series of *Baka* (*Idiot*) *Paintings*, with Murakami's stylized face at the center of the drawings. The first of the series, *Idiot*, is apparently a sort of artist's manifesto; it contains text bemoaning the lack of dynamism in contemporary Japanese art. The word *Baka* is scrawled at the top of the

painting like a watermark, with the artist's tiny bespectacled visage ironically set off from both the text itself and the piece's title.

The Perrotin show also included an homage-with-a-twist by Murakami. This time, however, instead of responding to some classic from Japan's artistic past Murakami took as his subject the 20th-century English artist Francis Bacon, known for his bloody, raw representations of crucifixions and the twisted, gnarled faces in many of his portraits. The paintings in the exhibition contained many Murakami tropes: eyes, mushrooms, characters, all enshrined in multiple layers of platinum leaf. The results are strange, colorful, manga-inspired creatures, funny and frightening at once. Lovers of Bacon may find it hard to recognize anything in these compositions that reminds them of his work, but that is part of the fun. In the first panel of *Homage to Francis Bacon (Second Version of Triptych (on light ground))*, the main character or monster sits grumpy, menacing, and alight in color, decorated in twirls and waves and other elements taken from classic Japanese art. In the middle of the triptych, the main character, perhaps part chandelier with multiple heads and eyes,

appears stacked low to high; in the third panel, tentacles come out of the many-mouthed, many-visaged character, heads with tongues thrusting out toward a circle—a ball of fuzz? a black hole?—with a small drone-like creature floating to the left. The colors are bubblegum spectrum and manga-inspired; these monstrosities, like so much of Murakami's work, combine the grotesque and the comic.

Another recent Murakami work—the 33-foot-long *Transcendent Attacking a Whirlwind*, made up of 10 wood panels—is simply spectacular. It is painted in acrylic and highlighted in gold and platinum leaf, and is an homage to a famous screen by the same name from about 1764 by the Edo master Soga Shohaku. In Murakami's version, a red dragon caught in a storm is surrounded by characters in traditional dress. The composition is all circles and swirls that emphasize the drama—the dragon's tail merges into the waves as more swirls fall from the sky and leap up from the ocean. Two men, one to the extreme left of the composition and the other to the extreme right, seem to do battle from afar with the dragon, somehow unleashing the swirls of color and aggression onto the monster. They also remind the viewer of Greek gods—the man to the left could well be Zeus. An homage to Japanese scroll paintings, part of the beauty of this work lies in the fact that it can be read on multiple levels: as a response to a long-gone Japanese painter but also as a response to concerns of the here and now—violence, societal conflicts, and other not-at-all-mythical worries.

Murakami repeatedly expressed a sense of debt and obligation to Professor Tsuji in their *Nippon-e-awase* for helping him hone his talents and creativity while recalling hundreds of years of Japanese art history. Even in his latest work, we continue to see a constant back-and-forth between traditional and new. Like some giant manga Shiva, Murakami is a creative force who takes in, processes, and ejects the once familiar, creating a new hybrid. His work is fascinatingly odd, sometimes unsettling, infinitely generative, and in any case unique. ♦

BCA

# Understanding the 'Beautiful Game'

*The logic of the world's most popular sport.*

BY ALAN JACOBS

Laurent Dubois devotes around 10 pages of *The Language of the Game* to describing how soccer's offside rule has changed over the decades. "Negotiating the offside rule is one of the most complex and absorbing features of the game both for strikers and defenders, an intricate dance that involves positioning and timing of the most nuanced kind," he writes. "To appreciate and understand this dance is, on a basic level, to appreciate and understand soccer." If anything, Dubois understates the case. The offside rule is the very heart and soul of what we aficionados, in exalted moods, call "the beautiful game." Please bear with me as I explain this.

At the risk of oversimplification: The offside rule decrees that a player may not pass the ball to a teammate unless, at the moment of the pass, two members of the opposing side are closer to the goal than that teammate. Imagine that you are a soccer player with the ball. You look up and see a teammate all by himself, no defender anywhere around him, 30 yards from the goal. All you have to do is loft the ball in his general direction and he'll be playing one-on-one against the goalkeeper. But you can't. Instead of rejoicing in a scoring opportunity you're

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## The Language of the Game

*How to Understand Soccer*

by Laurent Dubois

Basic, 320 pp., \$26



Brazil vs. Uruguay in the 1970 World Cup semifinals

annoyed with your teammate for being so far out of position.

Almost all of the wonderful patterns and geometries of soccer are generated by this one rule, which also generates something that many non-fans greatly dislike: a paucity of goals. But soccer fans get exasperated when goals flow too freely. Scoring should *not* be easy, and, as with gold and diamonds, there's a link between rarity and value. The true fan delights in players who have not just the physical gifts but also the *imagination* to circumvent the rules that seem designed specifically to prevent scoring.

One of the most famous moments in the history of soccer occurred in the 1970 World Cup, in a semifinal match between Brazil and Uruguay. Brazil's forward Tostão has the ball on the left

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY

side of midfield and looks up to see his teammate Pelé to his right, running full-tilt toward the goal. Tostão has to make his pass quickly, before Pelé gets past the Uruguayan defenders and is therefore offside. He makes it: a beautiful long curling roller. But the Uruguay goalkeeper sees the danger and comes rushing out to clear it. Pelé continues at top speed, which is very fast indeed, and it looks like he may just beat the keeper, but that there will surely be a terrible collision between the two men—and then—a millisecond before the inevitable crash—Pelé alters course slightly to avoid the keeper *and* the ball, which rolls right on diagonally across the pitch. You can't watch the scene without catching your breath, and only then do you ask: How did Pelé even think to do that?

But what happens then? Well: Pelé darts over to the ball, torques his body to take a tightly angled shot at the now-empty goal—and misses.

Again, this is one of the most famous moments in the history of soccer, and it ends in a missed shot. I do not believe that there is another sport in which a play that ends in a failure to score could be so celebrated. But the stroke of mental brilliance that precedes the miss is so remarkable to soccer fans that the former eclipses the latter. (By the way, Brazil went on to win the match and then, in the final against Italy, the World Cup.)

It might be easy to conclude that soccer is the sort of game that you either get or don't get, yet Laurent Dubois takes up the noble and difficult task of trying to make soccer comprehensible and interesting to people who are used to games that follow a different logic. It's a task he handles very well.

The book is organized by position. Dubois begins by describing the task of the goalkeeper, then moves to the defender, the midfielder, the forward—working his way from defense to offense, which is appropriate for reasons noted above—and concluding with the manager, the referee, and the fan. One consequence of this structure is that certain key elements of the game, for instance the various possible formations of players on the pitch, have

no obvious home and might be introduced at any point. (Dubois lays out the basics of formation in the chapter on the defender.) And one consequence of *that* model of organization is that *The Language of the Game* doesn't work well as a reference guide, but rather as a narrative. You need to be willing to read the whole book rather than dip in here and there, though there are many passages that the neophyte will want to mark and return to.

If you want to understand what this most popular of the world's sports is all about, or if you already understand it and want your friends and family to share your interest, *The Language*

*of the Game* is an excellent place to start. Dubois doesn't quite capture the unique fascination of this game, but that's only because it can't be captured in ordinary discursive prose. Like an ant colony or a slime mold, the game of soccer exhibits *emergent complexity*: A mere handful of rules generates an astonishingly wide range of action. That is why Johan Cruyff, one of the greatest of soccer players and thinkers, the closest thing the game had to a philosopher-king, so often spoke in paradoxes. I'll leave you with my favorite one: "Playing football is very simple, but playing simple football is the hardest thing there is." ♦

BCA

## Ragtime to Riches

*A musician's knack for covering recent songs in vintage styles led to a YouTube powerhouse.* BY JOHN CHECK

Scott Bradlee's life was changed by a piece of music. He had been a reluctant piano student who had no use for the minuets and sonatinas his teacher wanted him to learn. Practicing was a chore he found he could dispense with. After two fitful years, he quit taking lessons. But one day he heard a neighbor playing *Rhapsody in Blue*—this lit a fire under him. He returned to the piano, this time on his own, without a teacher. He forced himself to learn pieces that were beyond him, including, eventually, the Gershwin. Soon he was practicing three or four hours a day; then it would be eight. As he gained proficiency, the piano became for him "a portal to another universe."

This sonic universe included early jazz-piano styles from ragtime to stride. Bradlee immersed himself in the rags of Scott Joplin and the recordings of Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, and James P. Johnson. Soon his rep-

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**Outside the Jukebox**  
*How I Turned My Vintage Music Obsession into My Dream Gig*  
by Scott Bradlee  
Hachette, 244 pp., \$23

ertoire expanded to include current music popular among his friends. Hoping to impress them, he once boasted that he could take any song they could name and transform it into a piece of jazz. They challenged him with the Notorious B.I.G. rap song "Big Poppa." Bradlee recalls what happened next:

I played it as jazz by swinging the [synthesizer] line, giving it a Count Basie feel. After finishing, I further demonstrated my ability by playing it with a stride left hand, giving it a turn-of-the-century ragtime feel. Now I was just showing off, but I couldn't help it. ... It took my friends a beat to wrap their heads around the transformed tune, but once they had done so, they were roaring with delight.

Bradlee never forgot the delight he occasioned by mixing styles old and new.

The years that followed saw him graduate from high school, go to college to study music, and launch a career as a pianist in Hartford. Having achieved a degree of success, he decided to try his luck in New York City—but there he faltered. He was new in town, had no connections, and faced stiffer competition than he had expected. In time, through a combination of giving lessons and playing in restaurants and other venues, he was making enough money to pay his bills, but little more than that. It was a living if not exactly a life—or, rather, the life he had imagined.

Frustrated that he wasn't making the progress he craved, Bradlee discovered a new interest, physics, and before long it absorbed him as music once had. In 2009, in his late 20s, he applied to college for a second round of undergraduate studies. He felt liberated, having decided to walk away from a career in music. Still, on a lark, remembering the pleasure he once gave his friends, he made a video of himself that spring playing a medley of pop hits from the 1980s interpreted in ragtime fashion. He posted it to YouTube. "Nothing," he writes, "could have prepared me for what happened next."

Overnight the video received 25,000 views and hundreds of comments. The view count doubled in a week. He recorded and posted more videos, refining his efforts, taking into account the comments he received, dropping what didn't work, giving fans more of what they enjoyed. Soon a future in physics was abandoned as better piano gigs began to come his way. Through one of these he met his agent and was offered a chance to deliver a TEDx talk on music and technology. Success beget success. Quickly he was offered a job producing music for a video game, *BioShock Infinite*. As opportunities arose, he made good on them—and all along he kept grinding away, making and posting videos.

While working on one of his projects, Bradlee conceived the idea of Postmodern Jukebox, a music collective with a rotating cast of singers and instrumentalists that performs current

hits in an array of anachronistic styles. Postmodern Jukebox's breakthrough was a version of "Thrift Shop," the 2012 song by the hip hop duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. A funny and catchy number to begin with, "Thrift Shop" was transformed by Bradlee and company into something straight out of F. Scott Fitzgerald, a hot jazz number with an infectious, swinging beat. Bradlee describes setting up the recording equipment, running through the piece with the musicians,



A Postmodern Jukebox cover of "Welcome to the Jungle" by Guns N' Roses; author Scott Bradlee is on the piano at left.

recording a good take, and celebrating with falafel sandwiches. After everyone left, he sat down to listen to the recording. "It occurred to me that we may have caught lightning in a bottle." They had indeed: Overnight their version of "Thrift Shop" received more than 100,000 views. Before a week was out, it had been viewed a million times.

Many more videos followed, some of which have been watched tens of millions of times. Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" becomes a dramatic 1920s-style number with a tap dancer. Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" gets a hopping treatment with Bradlee's fingers scrambling up and down the keys. Blues singer Miche Braden belts out New Orleans-style renditions of "Sweet Child o' Mine" by Guns N' Roses and "Story of My Life" by One Direction. Even the songs that don't work all that well musically score points for creativity and fun, like the makeover of Aqua's "Barbie Girl" in the style of the Beach Boys,

complete with fake-theremin hijinks.

As Postmodern Jukebox became popular, tours followed—of Europe, Australia, North America, South America. Recording contracts were offered. Musicians clambered to sing or perform for Bradlee, who through it all kept working, kept making videos, devoting up to 80 hours a week to his many projects.

Bradlee is not the most graceful writer, but *Outside the Jukebox* will be of interest to up-and-coming musicians and Internet performers, not least because of his description of the traits and habits that helped him flourish. For example, as a pianist-for-hire in Hartford, he learned to read a room and tailor his set list according to the applause he received. Later, working at Robert, a restaurant in New York, he began streaming his performances over the Internet, gaining new listeners in the process. He was alert to celebrities patronizing the restaurant and would find clever ways of acknowledging them in song. (A visit from Alan Alda prompted Bradlee to play the M\*A\*S\*H theme in no fewer than 14 styles. For this he received a \$20 tip from Hawkeye himself.) As the leader of Postmodern Jukebox, Bradlee has learned how to judge and showcase the strengths of the musicians with whom he works.

He sprinkles advice to aspiring musicians throughout the book. Recalling his early experience with *Rhapsody in Blue*, he writes, "the very first step in learning any discipline is finding a way to get yourself feeling profoundly inspired and invested. ... Unless you're approaching your learning from a place of genuine inspiration, you're probably going to have a hard time staying committed to the process, especially when the going gets tough." Inspiration, though, amounts to little without desire: "Ambitious young people generally start off with a great deal of creative hunger, but as they age and experience tastes of success ... the drive has a way of dissipating." Here's hoping that Bradlee's hunger for success and his love of music keep him producing joyous, winning work for many years to come. ♦

YOUTUBE

# Heist in Heels

All-woman crew boosts bling  
in latest 'Ocean's' caper. BY JOHN PODHORETZ



Debbie Ocean (Sandra Bullock, left) and her gang prep for their heist.

**Y**ou gotta love a heist movie. I saw *The Sting* the day it opened, Christmas 1973, and from that day to this I'm not sure I've ever had a better time in a movie theater. But *The Sting* is to heist pictures what the Bible is to religion. What about other such pictures? Oh, there are so many good ones. *Diggstown*? Fantastic. *Skin Game*? Top-notch. *Rififi*? Wonderful. *Topkapi*? Can't beat it. Even *The Pink Panther* and *The Return of the Pink Panther*, both primarily epics of slapstick, feature some wonderful hyperplanned thief hijinks.

The question posed by the release of *Ocean's 8*—the new distaff heist picture starring Oscar winners Sandra Bullock and Cate Blanchett trying hard to have cool-as-a-cucumber fun in the vein of the George Clooney-Matt Damon *Ocean's* movies—is this: Are you gonna love a heist movie that's only just okay?

Bullock is Debbie, a con artist who's just been released after nearly six years in the clink—so of course she's raring to assemble a crew and pull off a new job. She learned her criminal trade from her (supposedly) late brother Danny, who did the same

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

**Ocean's 8**  
Directed by Gary Ross



for *Ocean's Eleven* and its sequels. So while she was educated in thievery by a man, she doesn't want to work with any men. There's a line of dialogue that explains why, but I forget what it was, so it must not have been clever.

The desideratum is a gigantic diamond necklace that has been sitting in a Cartier vault for half a century because nobody knows what to do with it. Debbie Ocean's plan is to have it brought out of the vault, hung on the neck of a celebrity, and paraded through New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it could be stealthily removed from the celebrity's neck. Now, this seems a little bit of a ripoff since another heist movie, *The Thomas Crown Affair* with Pierce Brosnan, was set there too. But to be fair, Brosnan was trying to steal a painting during business hours while looking like the Magritte guy with the apple in front of his face. The *Ocean's 8* heist takes place during the annual Met Gala, known to one and all as the evening during which every famous woman in the world wears a fancy dress for no

good reason except that Anna Wintour demands it of them.

Bullock's crew features her old teammates Blanchett (who now runs a hip club—yawn) and Sarah Paulson (who is a suburban mother—oh my God she's in hell, I tell you, hell). They recruit a brilliant hacker (Rihanna) whose teenage sister (Nathanya Alexander) is a brilliant metallurgist—don't ask me how that's possible except that the plot needs it. There's a wacky pickpocket (Awkwafina) and a jeweler (Mindy Kaling). And there's a dress designer on her uppers played by Helena Bonham Carter.

The crew needs to get Anne Hathaway, the gala's star, to hire Bonham Carter to make her dress, and get Bonham Carter to persuade Hathaway to ask Cartier for the loan of the giant necklace. The night of the gala finds the crew all over the Met, doing devious and clever things, much of it made possible by the advent of the 3D printer.

And here's the central problem with *Ocean's 8*: The stakes are very low here. Everything just works too smoothly. There's almost no conflict. In both the original 1960 *Ocean's 11* (featuring Sinatra and the Rat Pack) and the Clooney remake, the gang was squaring off against a ruthless Vegas kingpin. In *Ocean's 8* there's no threat whatsoever from anyone to our heroines. Remember in *The Sting* that halfway through the picture, Robert Redford is forced to turn on his fellow con man Paul Newman—adding a layer of potentially tragic drama to the proceedings. Here, everyone in Debbie Ocean's crew is too busy modeling the unlimited joys of close female friendships to plan any kind of double cross.

There's also one gigantic plot hole involving someone in the crew getting an extraordinarily desirable job for no good reason whatever. If she doesn't get the job, the heist can't work. We're told Debbie Ocean was planning the heist for five years. How could she know there would be this key job opening and that her crew member would get it?

*Ocean's 8* is a kind of heist in itself: It steals your money and then runs off before you realize it didn't get the job done. Even so, I gotta admit, you kinda gotta love it. ♦

**“Potty prep: North Korea’s Kim Jong-un brings his own toilet to Singapore summit with Trump”**  
—USA Today headline, June 11, 2018

**PARODY**

JUNE 26, 2018

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

# MAJOR MOVEMENT FOLLOWS SUMMIT IN SINGAPORE

## Trump Introduces Kim to ‘2,000 Flushes’

By TY D. BOLE

SINGAPORE — North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has agreed to the immediate denuclearization of his regime following the summit with President Donald Trump. During their first meeting, Mr. Trump presented the chairman with a gift basket of bathroom-cleaning products. “I heard you bring your own john, so I thought you could use these,” the president was overheard saying. The products included Scrubbing Bubbles, Lysol, and 2,000 Flushes. Twenty-four hours later, a jovial Mr. Kim, who appeared to have a spring in his step, happily announced he would unilaterally shut down North Korea’s nuclear missile program.

“The Dear Leader was greatly moved by the gifts offered by President Trump,” a DPRK translator said. “The last time the Dear Leader witnessed such a thorough cleaning was when he purged the regime of traitors. The Dear Leader is also eager to find out if 2,000 Flushes truly means 2,000 flushes without cleaning. If not, the deal is off.”

“We use this stuff in my hotels, and customers are very satisfied, believe me,” the president reassured the chairman. “Our toilets are so sparkly my guests don’t even want to stand up!” According to reports, Kim was pleased with the Lysol cleaner with its bent nozzle. He was, however, disappointed upon opening the can of Scrubbing Bubbles—based on the pictures, he expected the tiny scrub-



Donald Trump shakes hands with Kim Jong-un in Singapore before presenting him with a gift of American-made cleaning products.

bers with eyes to magically come to life. “We gave him everything,” said Mr. Trump. “I’m talking about cleaning agents, sponges, brushes, you name it. Whoever handles his personal commode is going to be flush with success.” A DPRK spokesperson said that only the most patriot-

ic and loyal citizens are permitted to clean the chairman’s bowl. “Previously, the Dear Leader’s uncle, after he was demoted, had done the job. That is, until a mortar shell unexpectedly landed on his

*Continued on Page A14*

## Clinton Calls Lewinsky, Offers Apology

*‘So, what are you doing Friday night?’*

the weekly  
**Standard**

JUNE 25, 2018