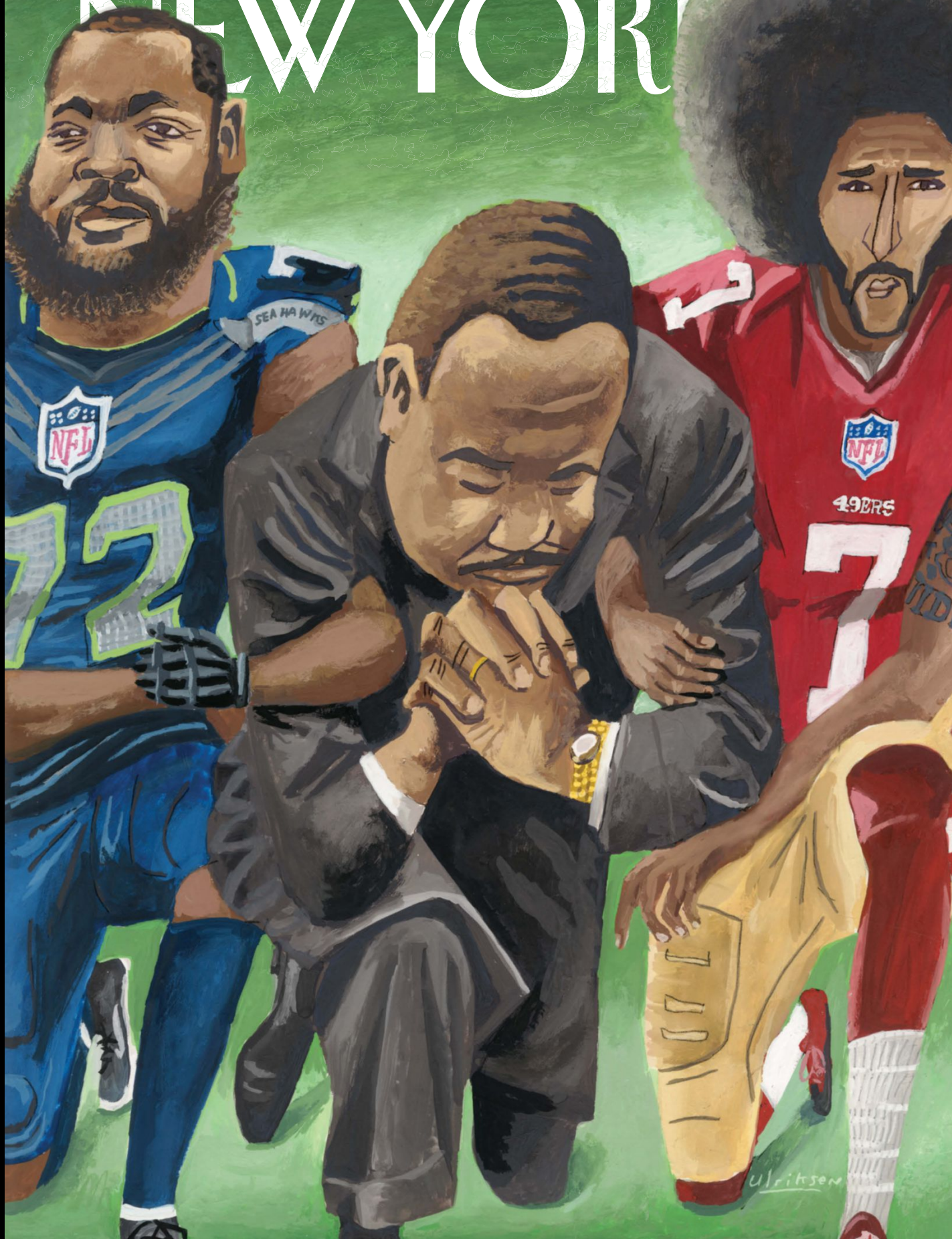


PRICE \$8.99

THE

JAN. 15 2018

# NEW YORK





# Out Here

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN FUN TO BE  
A LITTLE OFF COURSE.

▲ WHITNEY BAY BY PORT ROYAL GOLF COURSE



# THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 15, 2018

## 5 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

### 17 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

*David Remnick on Presidential tweetstorms; style for the indoctrinated; dining au naturel; treasures of Glass Bottle Beach.*

### ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

**Vinson Cunningham** 22 *Quiet Storm*  
*Race and history in the art of Sanford Biggers.*

### SHOUTS & MURMURS

**Jack Handey** 27 *The Mysteries of Humor*

### MODERN TIMES

**Elizabeth Kolbert** 28 *Feeling Low*  
*How do we respond to inequality?*

### A REPORTER AT LARGE

**Sarah Stillman** 32 *No Refuge*  
*The mortal dangers of deportation.*

### ANNALS OF EDUCATION

**Jelani Cobb** 44 *Hard Tests*  
*Howard University enters the Trump era.*

### FICTION

**David Gates** 52 *"Texas"*

### THE CRITICS

#### ON TELEVISION

**Andrew Marantz** 58 *Watching "Fox & Friends."*

#### BOOKS

**Jiayang Fan** 61 *Briefly Noted*  
62 *Han Kang and the question of translation.*

#### A CRITIC AT LARGE

**Alexandra Schwartz** 65 *Navigating the self-improvement zone.*

#### THE CURRENT CINEMA

**Anthony Lane** 70 *"The Insult," "Paddington 2."*

### POEMS

**Clive James** 36 *"Season to Season"*  
**Chana Bloch** 55 *"War and Peace"*

### COVER

**Mark Ulriksen** *"In Creative Battle"*

**DRAWINGS** William Haefeli, Amy Hwang, Jason Adam Katzenstein, P. C. Vey, Kim Warp, John O'Brien, Matthew Diffie, Will McPhail, Seth Fleishman, Roz Chast, Brendan Loper, Julia Suits **SPOTS** Alexandra Pichard

ADVERTISEMENT

THE NEW YORKER



## THE GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN APP

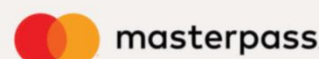
What to do in New York.

From hip-hop to hummus, critics reveal the best in theatre, art, night life, classical music, dance, movies, restaurants, and bars. Search cultural events by location, share them with friends, save them to your calendar, and buy tickets.

Download the free app at [newyorker.com/go/goingsonapp](http://newyorker.com/go/goingsonapp)



SUPPORTED BY





## Iconic Style

From classic cartoons to signature covers, the *New Yorker* archive has memorable images for your walls.

[newyorkerstore.com](http://newyorkerstore.com)



Prints, gifts,  
mugs, and more.

Enter **TNY20**  
for 20% off through  
January 31, 2018.



THE  
NEW YORKER

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Vinson Cunningham** (*"Quiet Storm,"* p. 22) has been a staff writer since 2016.

**Sarah Stillman** (*"No Refuge,"* p. 32) was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2016. This story was produced in collaboration with the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism's Global Migration Project, which she also directs.

**David Gates** (*Fiction*, p. 52) is the author of several books, including, most recently, the story collection *"A Hand Reached Down to Guide Me."*

**Alexandra Schwartz** (*A Critic at Large*, p. 65) is a staff writer.

**Mark Ulriksen** (*Cover*) has contributed more than fifty-five covers to the magazine since 1994.

**Chana Bloch** (*Poem*, p. 55), who died in May, was the author of five poetry collections and a co-translator of *"The Song of Songs,"* *"Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch,"* and *"Yehuda Amichai: The Selected Poetry."*

**Elizabeth Kolbert** (*"Feeling Low,"* p. 28) is a staff writer and the author of *"The Sixth Extinction,"* which won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.

**Jelani Cobb** (*"Hard Tests,"* p. 44) teaches in the journalism program at Columbia University.

**Andrew Marantz** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 19; *On Television*, p. 58) has been a contributor since 2011. He is working on a book about politics and new media.

**Jiayang Fan** (*Books*, p. 62) is a staff writer. Her reporting on China, American politics, and culture has appeared in the magazine and on [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com) since 2010.

**Clive James** (*Poem*, p. 36) lives in Cambridge, England. His latest poetry collection is *"Injury Time."*

**Jack Handey** (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 27) has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 1987. He has written several humor books, including, most recently, *"Please Stop the Deep Thoughts."*

## NEWYORKER.COM

*Everything in the magazine, and more.*



### AUDIO

Listen to Jelani Cobb's *"Hard Tests"* and other pieces from this week's issue.



### VIDEO

Sarah Stillman on the consequences of deportation and what it was like to report her story, *"No Refuge."*

**SUBSCRIBERS:** Get access to our magazine app for tablets and smartphones at the App Store, Amazon.com, or Google Play. (Access varies by location and device.)



# THE MAIL

## WHEN WE START WITH DEATH

Lauren Collins, in her article on the writer Leïla Slimani, picks up on the power of the beginning of Slimani's novel "Chanson Douce": "*Le bébé est mort*" ("The baby is dead") ("The Home Front," January 1st). The book's opening sentence, which frames all that follows, recalls, in structure, story placement, and organizing narrative function, as well as psychological effect, the start of Slimani's fellow French-North African writer Albert Camus's book "L'Étranger": "*Aujourd'hui, maman est morte*" (1942). Though Slimani is not a neo-existentialist, by interrogating motherhood's role in society she calls into question our (supposedly) most natural relations and responses to tragedy, just as Camus did. When children and mothers perish in a story's first line, it's safe to say that life and meaning must be earned, not assumed, in the pages that follow.

S. Alan Ray  
Boxford, Mass.

## THE DIGITAL STATE

I study nationalism in the digital age, focussing on Estonia and Russia, and I found the idea, in Nathan Heller's article, that Estonia's "virtual" and "borderless" governance is a window into a post-national future somewhat simplistic ("The Digital Republic," December 18th & 25th). The logic behind e-Estonia shows how a national state deploys global digital technologies to bolster nationhood and statehood, rather than to realize the long-propagated mythos of a global village. After the ethnic Estonian majority shrank from ninety to sixty per cent of the population, during half a century of successive Nazi and Soviet occupations, the re-independent Estonian state set as its main priority the preservation of Estonian ethno-cultural identity and language. Estonia viewed returning to Europe as the ultimate safeguard against the existential threat of new incursions. The use of digital technology was meant to convey Estonia's readiness to join the Euro-Atlantic community. Since the late nineteen-nineties, when e-Estonia was

in its infancy, political leadership has consistently promoted Estonia's digital innovations as tangible evidence of the country's rightful place in Western high-tech modernity. E-Estonia is an illustration of a digital nationalism whereby nation-states engage with global borderless technologies and language in support of a distinctly sovereign bordered order.

Stanislav Budnitsky  
Moscow, Russia

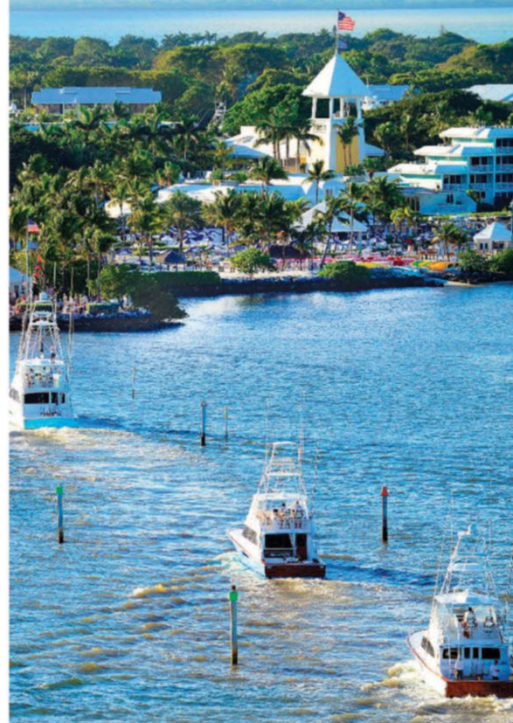
## LAKE CHAD'S WATER CRISIS

Ben Taub, in his article on the decline of Lake Chad, didn't mention the role of upstream dams and diversions ("The Emergency," December 4th). Nigeria's Hadejia-Nguru wetlands, which flow into Lake Chad's catchment area, have shrunk by two-thirds in the past thirty to forty years, because of dams, irrigation developments, and drought. When water sources dry up, hunger, displacement, and radicalization follow. Lake Chad is no exception: the disruption of local livelihoods is exacerbating regional insecurity. Restoring traditional economies through fair and equitable water management is necessary in order to restore peace to the area. Politicians in Nigeria and regional governments could immediately work to restore flows to Lake Chad by replacing water-hungry hydropower plants with wind and solar plants, and by promoting technologies and drip irrigation to reduce diversions of water. As our water supply becomes increasingly unpredictable, governments must collaborate to manage rivers and wetlands across political borders, both for the health of the watersheds and for the well-being of millions of vulnerable people who depend on them.

Kate Horner  
Executive Director, International Rivers  
Berkeley, Calif.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto:themail@newyorker.com). Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

Our members  
return each year  
as faithfully as  
the tides.



Now you too are invited for  
a rare visit to our legendary  
private club through the  
pages of *Living* magazine.

Visit [OceanReefClubMagazine.com](http://OceanReefClubMagazine.com)  
to request your complimentary copy  
or call 305.367.5921 to  
inquire about the possibilities  
of a guest stay.



OCEAN REEF CLUB®

A UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE

KEY LARGO, FLORIDA

PRIVATE • AUTHENTIC • UNIQUE





# Outsmart Burglars The Moment You Plug It In

SimpliSafe is a complete home security arsenal. With motion sensors, glass break sensors, entry sensors, and a high-definition security camera, you'll have everything you need to keep your family safe—and 24/7 professional monitoring is only \$14.99 a month.

---

Protect Your Home  
Today!

---

**[SimpliSafe.com/NewYorker](https://SimpliSafe.com/NewYorker)**







JANUARY 10 – 16, 2018

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



“They say you wait, you wait so long, I thought I had it, but I was wrong,” Rahill Jamalifard riffs, sharp yet detached, on “Detroit Baby,” from **Habibi’s** stunning self-titled LP of surf punk tinged with Motor City soul. The group made a quiet début in 2013, and fans have been patient since: a new EP is due in March, recorded partially in Farsi to blend Jamalifard’s Iranian roots with the band’s tasteful take on the Midwestern pop legacy. Habibi plays at Elsewhere on Jan. 11 as part of a benefit concert for climate refugees.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAIT OPPERMAN



# NIGHT LIFE

## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### Body & SOUL

More than twenty years ago, the d.j.s and night-life veterans Danny Krivit, François Kevorkian, and Joaquin (Joe) Claussell began hosting a Sunday-afternoon party called Body & SOUL. For many revellers, the event became a place of sin and salvation; some likened it to church. The spot where Body & SOUL was born, the downtown Manhattan warehouse Club Vinyl, has since been shuttered. Yet the series lives on, touring around the world with stops in dozens of other refurbished spaces. The crew decamps to Elsewhere for the holiday weekend; each year, the three friends celebrate the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., with a party in his name. (599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. [bodyandsoul-nyc.com](http://bodyandsoul-nyc.com). Jan. 14.)

### Dave East

A curious conflict between two tiers of New York rappers concerns issues of style and substance: major stars perform with quick-tongued cadences but, post-fame, strain for relatable stories, while greener acts skip complex word-play in favor of fluency in the day-to-day life of modern city kids. David Brewster, from Harlem, bridges this divide as Dave East. In his song "Keisha," from the 2016 project "Kairi Chanel," he wakes up after a night spent with a woman he just met to find his money and jewelry missing; it's a tale that would fit in on an old Bad Boy mixtape, modernized with scenes at the sneaker shop Flight Club, in SoHo, and at the Mandarin Oriental, in Columbus Circle. East's dexterous edge caught the attention of Nas, who helped raise East's profile in 2015 with an icy collaboration, "Forbes List." (*Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl.* 212-777-6800. Jan. 16.)

### Horse Meat Disco

The d.j.s James Hillard, Jim Stanton, Filthy Luka, and Severino host one of the sweatiest shows on London's Rinse.FM each Sunday, serving classic disco with sides of Italo, house, and anything else they can squeeze in. The crew accurately regards disco as the root of all club music—the late Chicago pioneer Frankie Knuckles famously called house music "disco's revenge"—and traces its lineage from Herbie Hancock and Cheryl Lynn to the simmering sounds of today on its radio programs and at its notorious parties. They appear on Output's main floor, with Michael Magan and Mike Swells in the club's second room. (74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. [outputclub.com](http://outputclub.com). Jan. 14.)

### PC Worship

In 2015, this experimental project cobbled together by Justin Frye released its "Basement Hysteria" EP: four truly extended tracks of ripping noise and creep-from-behind frequencies that skirt punk without fully taking the plunge. The particularly unhinged solos on the lead single, "My Lens," conjure images of a de-

crepit banjo fingered by Tim Burtonesque appendages. Frye's studio in Bushwick has been described in similarly macabre terms, in *Ad Hoc*: "The reel-to-reel is spooled with broken tape and tied together in a square knot. The drum set in the corner is a Frankenstein, built out of maybe thirty different kits." This week, Frye plays his apocalyptic free-form grunge at Baby's All Right. (146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Jan. 13.)

### Pop. 1280

Named after Jim Thompson's sadistic 1964 crime novel, this excellent cyberpunk act has been skulking around the darker pockets of New York's underground scene for several years, performing sludgy, industrial music to packed houses of leather-clad fans. It began with Chris Bug on vocals and Ivan Lip on guitar, and has remained defiantly directionless since its first seven-inch, "Bedbugs," was released, in 2009. In 2016, Pop. 1280 returned with "Paradise," its third full-length release for the voguish boutique label Sacred Bones Records. The group headlines on Greenpoint's northern tip, with support from A Deer a Horse, Dad, and Irreverent. (Saint Vitus, 1120 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. [saintvitusbar.com](http://saintvitusbar.com). Jan. 11.)

### Soulection Seven-Year Anniversary

DJ Jazzy Jeff headlines the seventh-birthday bash of one of music's most distinctive young collectives. Soulection is primarily a sound: club-music drums meeting the harmonies of rap and R. & B.'s more soulful corners. The scene resembles London's nineteen-nineties rare-groove moment, buoyed by a constellation of d.j.s who play on Soulection's weekly radio show. Jeff is a fitting guest, a titan in his own right as a d.j. and one of the most satisfying to watch on a set of turntables. Fans might remember Jeff Townes as Jazz, Will Smith's scamming sidekick on "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," but the role rarely tapped his first craft; here, he d.j.s alongside the Soulection friends Monte Booker and Sasha Marie. (Brooklyn Steel, 319 Frost St., Brooklyn. 888-929-7849. Jan. 13.)

### Justin Strauss

Strauss signed to Chris Blackwell's prolific Island Records in the mid-seventies at just seventeen, as a member of the pop band Milk 'N' Cookies. Since then, he's jockeyed through three decades of the city's dance halls, from the Mudd Club to the Tunnel and Life, while earning more than two hundred production credits and collaborations with artists like the B-52s, Luther Vandross, and Sergio Mendez—all fair game for the night's set. Strauss performs as Love Tempo with his fellow-d.j. Billy Caldwell; they play alongside JDH and Dave P at the year's first installment of FIXED, a consistent night at Greenpoint's Good Room. (98 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn. 718-349-2373. Jan. 12.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Benny Goodman: "King of Swing"

There have been few more momentous concerts in the history of jazz than Goodman's

1938 debut appearance at Carnegie Hall, where his hit orchestra was joined by guests drawn from the Duke Ellington and Count Basie ensembles. The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and a host of virtuosic clarinetists, including Anat Cohen and Ken Peplowski, will attempt to re-create the fabled festivities. (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St.* 212-721-6500. Jan. 11-13.)

### John Hébert with Ben Monder & Bennie Wallace

The bassist Hébert and the guitarist Monder are welcome and ever-present on the city's jazz scene. The bigger news is that the veteran saxophonist Wallace, a huge-toned tenor stylist fluent in the full range of the sweeping tradition and rarely heard in these parts, rounds out the trio. (*Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St.* [mezzrow.com](http://mezzrow.com). Jan. 10.)

### Vijay Iyer Sextet

There's little surprise that when Iyer, the relentlessly inventive pianist and composer, chose to make use of an expanded sextet for his latest ECM recording, "Far from Over," he called on similarly fertile-minded improvisers, including the saxophonists Steve Lehman and Mark Shim and the trumpeter Graham Haynes. The celebrated drummer Tyshawn Sorey joins Iyer and the horn men for the first three nights of this engagement. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.* 212-581-3080. Jan. 9-13.)

### Onyx Collective

The late Jaco Pastorius once ripped through jazz bass lines on tours with Weather Report, Joni Mitchell, Herbie Hancock, and Blood, Sweat and Tears. His son, Felix, plays bass with this group of New York upstarts, who are making noise outside of traditional jazz avenues, including releasing an album with a skateboard company and hosting stripped-down open sessions at whispered addresses around lower Manhattan. A cast of musicians and guest vocalists rotates around the saxophonist Isaiah Barr and the drummer Austin Williamson, including the singer Nick Hakim and the saxophonist Roy Nathanson, who both accompany the band for this milestone set. Onyx Collective performs as part of the Winter Jazzfest, making its first appearance at the annual two-day concert. (*Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St.* 212-260-4700. Jan. 12.)

### Joshua Redman

The ability to hold a band together, thus insuring a unified ensemble identity, is not to be undervalued. The saxophonist Redman can flit about among a swath of side projects, but he always finds his way back to his trusted quartet, which counts the pianist Aaron Goldberg, the bassist Reuben Rogers, and the drummer Gregory Hutchinson as its loyal members. (*Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.* 212-475-8592. Jan. 9-24.)

### Dr. Lonnie Smith

What's not to love about Dr. Smith, from his omnipresent turban to his concocted title to his shape-shifting ability to get old-school funky and then in-the-moment weird? His groove-intense trio includes the guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg and the drummer Johnathan Blake. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.* 212-576-2232. Jan. 11-14.)



SEE THE BROADWAY SHOW ON EVERYONE'S LIST

# BEST OF THE YEAR



## • THE • BAND'S VISIT

A NEW MUSICAL



THEBANDSVISITMUSICAL.COM

THE BAND'S VISIT MUSIC & LYRICS BY DAVID YAZBEK BOOK BY ITAMAR MOSES  
BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY ERAN KOLIRIN DIRECTED BY DAVID CROMER

Telecharge.com • 212-239-6200 • Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 243 W. 47th St.



# CLASSICAL MUSIC



Joseph Lattanzi and Aaron Blake take the leading roles in Gregory Spears's new opera "Fellow Travelers," a highlight of this year's Prototype Festival.

## No Ordinary Time

*A powerful new opera illuminates gay life in Washington, D.C., in the fifties.*

Gregory Spears's opera "Fellow Travelers," which is featured in this year's Prototype Festival (Jan. 12-14), is a tale from the time of the "lavender scare"—the purging of homosexuals from federal employment in the nineteen-fifties. Around five thousand gay and lesbian people are thought to have lost their jobs; many never recovered from the ruin of their reputations, and an unknown number committed suicide. This shameful period is rightly associated with McCarthyism, but its most lethal instrument came directly from the desk of President Eisenhower: Executive Order 10450, which condemned "sexual perversion" and other amorphous improprieties.

Such a milieu could easily have produced a melodrama of the gay-martyr type, but "Fellow Travelers," which has a libretto by Greg Pierce, is after something different. It is based on the 2007 novel by Thomas Mallon, which follows an affair between two men caught in the web of

fifties Washington: Hawkins Fuller, a dashing, arrogant State Department official; and Timothy Laughlin, a naïve young conservative journalist. Neither character is idealized. Hawk has a ruthless, predatory aspect to his character. "Now I own you," he says as he takes Tim to bed. Tim, for his part, cherishes the fantasy of love more than the reality of it. Hawk gets married, but continues to see Tim on the side. To resolve an increasingly risky situation, he commits an ugly betrayal, reporting Tim's "tendencies" to an interrogator. "I want him to hate me," he says to his secretary, Mary, who compassionately watches the relationship unfold and unravel. Yet Tim is not ruined; he leaves town embittered but undefeated. You sense that he will not die alone.

Spears, a forty-year-old Virginia Beach native who first won wide notice for a deft operatic adaptation of Willa Cather's story "Paul's Case," possesses a singular compositional voice, unlike any that has been heard in opera before. The instinct in this art form is always to heighten the emotions, to raise the psychological stakes. Spears, in contrast, forgoes grand gestures

in favor of transient moods. He employs a chamber orchestra of flute, oboe, clarinet, trombones, and strings, which creates a dusky, autumnal atmosphere. The harmony is largely tonal, but it is anti-Romantic in effect, tending instead toward a decorous neo-Baroque sensibility. Voices and instruments often perform courtly pirouettes against sustained chords and even pulses. The atmosphere is one of hushed disclosure: the music implies more than it says.

What emerges is a potentially ambiguous sound world that conveys human warmth and chill in equal measure. Above all, it is a transparent medium in which singing actors can speak instead of shout. The Cincinnati Opera, which gave the premiere of "Fellow Travelers," in 2016, has issued a superb recording; Joseph Lattanzi, Aaron Blake, and Devon Guthrie, who sing on that release, will reprise their roles at Prototype. Listening again, I am struck by a wrenching orchestral passage in cloudy D-flat major, which introduces the final scene. Hawk is looking at Tim on a park bench, feeling the loss of the life he is not brave enough to lead.

—Alex Ross

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTOINE MAILLARD



OPERA

**Metropolitan Opera**

At the time of its premiere, in 2014, Richard Eyre's production of Mozart's upstairs-downstairs comedy "**Le Nozze di Figaro**," set in the nineteenth-thirties, played into the "Downton Abbey" fever that was sweeping the country. Dressed in soigné period costumes, the stars of the current revival—Ildar Abdrazakov, Nadine Sierra, Mariusz Kwiecien, Ailyn Pérez, and Isabel Leonard—deliver finely etched portraits worthy of the Grantham household, and Pérez's lusciously voiced Countess gives the show its beating heart. The conductor Harry Bicket coaxes supple playing from the Met orchestra. *Jan. 10 at 7:30 and Jan. 13 at 8.* • Peter Gelb's bold plan to move the Met's aesthetic in a more modern direction hit a snag in 2009, when he replaced Franco Zeffirelli's beautiful yet dull staging of "**Tosca**" with Luc Bondy's tawdry yet theatrical one. David McVicar's new staging of Puccini's melodramatic thriller, unveiled on New Year's Eve, feels like a course correction—one that is less risky and more successful. Like Zeffirelli's, it offers a sumptuous re-creation of the opera's Roman settings (gorgeously lit by the designer David Finn), but the slanted stage skews the perspective, creating an effective backdrop for McVicar's detailed telling of a story about sanctimony and sexual blackmail in a nineteenth-century papal state. Sonya Yoncheva (a womanly, richly sung Tosca) and Vittorio Grigolo (a romantic, impetuous Cavaradossi) make smashing role debuts, and Željko Lučić is a coolly calculating Scarpia; Emmanuel Villaume takes care to color and shade the orchestral score, though he sacrifices some of its propulsive intensity in the process. (Jennifer Rowley replaces Yoncheva in the first performance.) *Jan. 12 at 8 and Jan. 15 at 7:30.* • Bartlett Sher's picturesque production of Donizetti's feather-light comedy "**L'Elisir d'Amore**"—built with his usual collaborators, the set designer Michael Yeargan and the six-time Tony Award-winning costume designer Catherine Zuber—returns with a cast of full-bodied lyric voices, including Matthew Polenzani, Ildebrando D'Arcangelo, and Pretty Yende; Domingo Hindoyan. *Jan. 16 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** The velvet-voiced American mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, an accomplished tragedian, cuts loose a little bit in the title role of Lehár's delightful Parisian farce, "**The Merry Widow**." Paul Groves, Thomas Allen, and Taylor Stayton compete for her hand, and for her riches; Ward Stare. (This is the final performance.) *Jan. 11 at 7:30.* • The riveting French tenor Roberto Alagna leads the cast in both halves of opera's most famous double bill, Mascagni's "**Cavalleria Rusticana**" and Leoncavallo's "**Pagliacci**," two pitiless tales of heartbreak crafted in the most ardent verismo style. He's joined onstage by such fine singers as Ekaterina Semenchuk, Aleksandra Kurzak, and George Gagnidze; Nicola Luisotti. *Jan. 13 at 12:30.* (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

**Prototype Festival**

In "**Acquanetta**," a 2005 opera by the composer Michael Gordon and the librettist Deborah Artman, details from the hazy true story of a nineteen-forties B-movie actress spark a haunting rumination on identity and stereotypes; it's the kickoff event of this year's essential festival of new and recent "indie" operas. Daniel Fish directs the world premiere of a new chamber-opera version of the work, with Daniela Candillari conducting Bang on a Can Opera and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street. *Jan. 9-13 at 7:30 and*

*Jan. 14 at 6.* (Gelsey Kirkland Arts Center, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn.) • The mezzo-soprano Blythe Gaisert assumes the role of a convicted killer offered a route to freedom by a moth, portrayed by the renowned performance artist John Kelly, in the world-première production of "**The Echo Drift**," a chamber opera by Mikael Karlsson that was commissioned by Beth Morrison Projects, HERE, and American Opera Projects. Mallory Catlett directs an elaborate multimedia production designed by Elle Kunnos de Voss; Nicholas DeMaison conducts the International Contemporary Ensemble. *Jan. 10 and Jan. 12-13 at 7:30. Through Jan. 20.* (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave.) • The violinist and vocalist Carla Kihlstedt and the percussionist Matthias Bossi, the art-pop aesthetes that make up the industrious duo Rabbit Rabbit, collaborate with their fellow composer and instrumentalist Jeremy Flower in "**Black Inscription**," a song cycle (staged by Kihlstedt and Mark DeChi-azza) about a deep-sea diver's journey of discovery in the inky depths. *Jan. 11-13 at 9:30. Through Jan. 20.* (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave.) • The festival presents the New York premiere of Gregory Spears's acclaimed opera "**Fellow Travelers**," a dark tale (based on the Thomas Mallon novel) of two ambitious gay men trying to survive the "lavender scare" of nineteen-fifties Washington. *Jan. 12-13 at 8 and Jan. 13-14 at 2.* (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, 524 W. 59th St.) (For tickets and full schedule, visit [prototypefestival.org](http://prototypefestival.org).)

**Bronx Opera: "The Abduction from the Seraglio"**

The fifty-one-year-old operation—New York's second-oldest continually running opera company—opens its season with an English translation of Mozart's comedy, set in a Turkish harem; Rod Gomez directs, and Michael Spierman and Eric Kramer share conducting duties. *Jan. 12-13 at 7:30 and Jan. 14-15 at 2:30.* (Lovingier Theatre, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. W., the Bronx. [bronxopera.org](http://bronxopera.org).)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**New York Philharmonic**

Susanna Mälkki, a conductor who has already made a strong impression at both the Phil and the Met (where she conducted the New York premiere of Saariaho's "**L'Amour de Loin**"), returns to David Geffen Hall this week. Her program's new-music selection, the showpiece overture "**Helix**," is, unsurprisingly, by her fellow-Finn Esa-Pekka Salonen; for the beefier standard repertoire, she'll lead Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Baiba Skride) and Debussy's "**La Mer**." *Jan. 11 at 7:30, Jan. 12 at 2, and Jan. 13 at 8.* (212-875-5656.)

**Roomful of Teeth**

This magnetic choral ensemble, which takes elements from world-music and European avant-garde traditions of extreme singing and gives them an exuberantly American twist, arrives at Zankel Hall with its signature composition—Caroline Shaw's Pulitzer Prize-winning "**Partita for 8 Voices**"—in tow. New York-première works by Ambrose Akinmusire ("**A Promise in the Stillness**") and Tigran Hamasyan are also featured. *Jan. 11 at 7:30.* (212-247-7800.)

**Budapest Festival Orchestra**

Iván Fischer is a courageous artist, and the results he gets from his superb personal orchestra are often downright wizardly. In the "Great Performers" style, the repertoire is standard, and

substantial: an orchestral suite of Bach's (No. 2 in B Minor), a piano concerto of Beethoven's (No. 3 in C Minor, with Dénes Várjon), and a symphony of Rachmaninoff's (the surging No. 2 in E Minor). *Jan. 14 at 3.* (David Geffen Hall. 212-721-6500.)

**"Music Before 1800" Series: Juilliard415**

Gotham's flagship early-music presenter, which often hosts outstanding visiting groups, sticks with home-town talent in its next outing, a presentation by Juilliard's orchestral ensemble and a distinguished guest leader, Jonathan Cohen. "Madness and Enchantment" is the theme, with works by Purcell (excerpts from "The Fairy-Queen"), Telemann, and Boccherini ("**La Casa del Diavolo**") filling out the program. *Jan. 14 at 4.* (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266.)

RECITALS

**New York Festival of Song at Juilliard: Music by John Corigliano and William Bolcom**

Steven Biler, NYFOS's co-director and an eminent pianist and coach, leads a group of the conservatory's outstanding young vocal artists in a tribute to two American masters who are turning eighty this year: Corigliano, a longtime Juilliard faculty member, and Bolcom, a staunch colleague. Their songs, marvels of color and craft, will be heard in abundance in this concert, including the world premières of Corigliano's "Rhymes for the Irreverent" and "No Comet Ever Scratched the Sky" and a generous selection of excerpts from such Bolcom cycles as "Cabaret Songs," "I Will Breathe a Mountain," and "Open House." *Jan. 11 at 7:30.* (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. [juilliard.edu](http://juilliard.edu).)

**Music from Yellow Barn**

Musicians from Yellow Barn, a progressive school and festival in the Marlboro vein that also makes its summer home in southern Vermont, come to the intimate Leonard Nimoy Thalia Theatre, at Symphony Space, to present a unique and intriguing pairing of Bach's eloquent compendium "The Musical Offering" with Lei Liang's "Garden Eight," a six-part instrumental cycle inspired by a Ming-dynasty horticultural treatise. *Jan. 11 at 7:30.* (Broadway at 95th St. [symphonyspace.org](http://symphonyspace.org).)

**Bargemusic**

Three powerful artists—the violinist Michelle Kim, the cellist Wendy Sutter, and the pianist William Wolfram—lead off the weekend on Friday evening at the floating chamber-music series, performing favorite piano trios by Beethoven (in D Major, "Ghost") and Tchaikovsky. Concerts of mixed chamber works by Bach, Schumann, Schubert, and Mozart (the two piano quartets, featuring the series' director, the violinist Mark Peskanov) complete the weekend schedule. *Jan. 12 at 8; Jan. 13 at 6 and 8 and Jan. 14 at 2 and 4.* (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. [bargemusic.org](http://bargemusic.org).)

**New York Philharmonic Ensembles**

Nestled among Beethoven's String Quartet No. 1 in F Major (Op. 18, No. 1), Turina's Piano Quartet in A Minor (Op. 67), and Brahms's Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor (Op. 101) in this busman's-holiday concert is a real rarity: the Concert No. 2 for Alto Saxophone, Bassoon, and Harpsichord, by Marguerite Roesgen-Champion, a talented mid-twentieth-century Swiss composer and keyboardist who was highly esteemed in her adoptive city of Paris. *Jan. 14 at 3.* (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)



# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Museum of Modern Art "Stephen Shore"

This immersive and staggeringly charming retrospective is devoted to one of the best American photographers of the past half century. Shore has peers—Joel Meyerowitz, Joel Sternfeld, Richard Misrach, and, especially, William Eggleston—in a generation that, in the nineteen-seventies, stormed to eminence with color film, which art photographers had long disdained. His best-known series, "American Surfaces" and "Uncommon Places," are both from the seventies and were mostly made in rugged Western states. The pictures in these series share a quality of surprise: appearances surely unappreciated if even really noticed by anyone before—in rural Arizona, a phone booth next to a tall cactus, on which a crude sign ("GARAGE") is mounted, and, on a small-city street in Wisconsin, a movie marquee's neon wanly aglow, at twilight. A search for fresh astonishments has kept

Shore peripatetic, on productive sojourns in Mexico, Scotland, Italy, Ukraine, and Israel. He has remained a vestigial Romantic, stopping in space and time to frame views that exert a peculiar tug on him. This framing is resolutely formalist: subjects composed laterally, from edge to edge, and in depth. There's never a "background." The most distant element is as considered as the nearest. But only when looking for it are you conscious of Shore's formal discipline, because it is as fluent as a language learned from birth. His best pictures at once arouse feelings and leave us alone to make what we will of them. He delivers truths, whether hard or easy, with something very like mercy. *Through May 28.*

### Guggenheim Museum "Joseph Albers in Mexico"

From the mid-nineteen-thirties to the late sixties, Albers and his wife, Anni, often travelled to Mexico; this striking show makes a case for the country's impact on his art, as the German modernist faces off with the craftspeople of Chichén

Itzá, Tenayuca, Uxmal, and Teotihuacán. A photograph, taken by Albers on his first visit to the pre-Columbian ball court at Monte Albán, compresses the structure's shadowed stone bleachers into a thrumming zigzag pattern of narrow diagonal stripes. Its formal connection to his 1942 lithograph "To Monte Albán," in which twin rectangles are circumscribed by concentric boxes, is clear. The show includes scores of photographs, many of them combined into meticulous typological collages, never shown in Albers's lifetime, and a judicious selection of drawings and paintings. For every pairing that specifies inspiration—"To Mitla," a 1940 oil-on-Masonite painting in a stepped pattern of blue, red, brown, violet, and olive, echoes a nearby photograph of serpentine stonework—there are half a dozen juxtapositions emphasizing an affinity for geometric repetition. The genius of the show, organized in six geographically themed segments, with an addendum of seven "Homage to the Square" paintings, is to give equal weight to the ruins and to Albers's manifestly enraptured take on them, enabling viewers to participate in a living dialogue between artists separated by centuries. *Through March 28.*

### Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art

"Barbara Hammer: Evidentiary Bodies"

The American artist is best known for her groundbreaking films, which are joyful studies in female subjectivity and formal experimentation. A selection plays on a loop in this concise survey, notably "Dyketactics," from 1974, a now iconic slice-of-life snapshot set to a Moog-synthesized score, and several strikingly erotic Super-8 shorts. Also on view are archival materials, which convey a playful approach to art and activism, as well as early diaristic and psychedelic works on paper. A grid of photographs documents performances that Hammer organized, including "Homage to Sappho" (1978), in which a group of women gathered outside the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and released balloons carrying slips of paper inscribed with lesbian artists' names. In the dreamlike "Pond and Waterfall" (1982), visitors are encouraged to remove a stethoscope from a hook on the wall and listen to their own heartbeat while watching Hammer's aquatic footage—a beautiful moment in a revelatory show. *Through Jan. 28.*

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### "Agnes Martin, Richard Tuttle: Crossing Lines"

Ten stately gray paintings by Martin show extraordinary range, from "Leaves," made in 1966, in which hundreds of close-set graphite lines create an almost audible buzz, to "The Sea," a penumbral square, from 2003, whose narrow white furrows evoke oracle bones. Martin achieved optical transcendence by accumulating small exactitudes until they were too many for the eye to take in. In contrast, Tuttle's site-specific sculptural responses to Martin's works are deceptively slight—each one is a squiggle of wire nailed to the wall above a graphite drawing that riffs on a shadow. Ambiguity has rarely looked as precise. *Through Jan. 13. (Pace, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)*

### "All Good Art Is Political: Käthe Kollwitz and Sue Coe"

This crackling show, titled after a quote from Toni Morrison, displays prints and drawings by Kollwitz, a German social realist who died in 1945, and Coe, an English antiwar, anti-capitalist, and



In the phantasmagoric "Tincture #1" (above), by the young American painter Michael Stamm, a ginseng root daydreams. At the DC Moore gallery, through Feb. 3.

pro-animal-rights illustrator who lives in upstate New York. From opposite ends of the twentieth century, they prove the capacity of art, when both impassioned and adept, to dramatize worldly injustice with fury and flair. Kollwitz is the more appealing, with a style of masterly touch and tender pathos, notably in delicately shaded images of mothers and children indomitably bonded in poverty or facing unspecified threats. Coe makes a burnt offering of her own fine artistic gifts by cultivating an ugliness to befit the targets of her rage, including military and sexual violence and, especially, the horrors of industrial slaughterhouses, which, starting in the late nineteen-eighties, she spent several years researching in person. Both artists have assigned themselves an evergreen social mission: to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. *Through Feb. 10. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)*

### "The Immigrants"

In some seventy pictures, spanning more than a century, the assembled photographers relate edifying, triumphant, and heartbreaking stories of immigration. Recent incidents of xenophobic scapegoating loom large in the dense arrangement, as we reflect on Ernst Haas's poignant "Last Displaced Person Boat," from 1951, which shows a crowded deck full of Ellis Island-bound Europeans displaced by the Second World War, gazing toward shore, or on Dorothea Lange's damning images—suppressed at the time—of the U.S. government's persecution and internment of Japanese-Americans. Though documentary work dominates, Conceptualism crops up, notably in Tseng Kwong Chi's austere and alienated self-portraits in mirrored sunglasses at famous tourist sites. Another standout is a pair of images by the Italian photojournalist Alex Majoli, whose scenes of anguish on Lesbos, where Syrian refugees arrive only to languish in desperate conditions, are as grand as seventeenth-century history paintings but also painfully urgent. *Through Jan. 27. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)*

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Paul Gardère

The Haitian-born, Brooklyn-based painter's final series is titled "Goudou Goudou," the vernacular term for the catastrophic earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010. Gardère, who died in 2011, at the age of sixty-six, depicts the psychic and physical fractures of the island in its aftermath. In canvases dense with symbols of destruction and recovery, vivid figuration—often of regal, matriarchal characters—is offset by passages of cracked-mud relief. In one untitled work, a finely dressed woman rests, eyes closed, against a pickaxe around which a vine of purple flowers is winding, either oblivious to or dreaming about the long-legged bird with a man's face which is looking on. On a narrow panel running along the picture's bottom edge, two yellow backhoes dig a deep pit below a crimson sky—a reminder of the mythic proportions of the natural disaster that divided Haiti's recent history into a before and an after. *Through Jan. 20. (Skoto, 529 W. 20th St. 212-352-8058.)*

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Joseph Geagan

Geagan's colorful paintings and ghoulish assemblages teem with vivid but slippery details evoking late nights and empty liquor bottles. Figures in formal dress abound, most notably "Black Tie

Bozo," a life-size dummy with a rubber horse's head, lounging on the floor holding a 1960 issue of *The Astrological Magazine* in one white-gloved hand. Lithe Tahitian beauties and skeletal streetwalkers strut through pastels and oil paintings past a naked, obese man who's sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, and sometimes bleeding from the nose and mouth. Stuffed dogs with scorched fur wear sunglasses and wigs. There's no doubt that the artist, a thirty-year-old former English major, has a knack for narrative, but his real focus is a mood of urbane decadence. *Through Jan. 14. (Fuentes, 55 Delancey St. 212-577-1201.)*

### Genesis P-Orridge

Thirty small Magic Marker drawings, from 1975, collectively titled "Tree of Life," are bright vari-

ations on a bare-bones theme. Each image was made on a postmarked envelope: a storybook tree, a house, and, on occasion, puffy clouds or a sun with a meteorlike trail. The British artist, now based in New York, is a living legend; he/r remarkable résumé includes collaborating with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, founding the legendary industrial-music groups Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, and assuming a visionary, pan-gender identity through body modifications. Here, P-Orridge presents a window into a day-by-day life rooted in a highly personal iconography. A clover-shaped tree is a cosmic constant throughout, rooted beneath wild or serene skies stamped either "Air Mail" or "Top Secret." *Through Jan. 20. (Invisible Exports, 89 Eldridge St. 212-226-5447.)*

# MOVIES

## NOW PLAYING

### Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool

An unlikely story, but a true one, based on Peter Turner's memoir. In 1979, as a young actor in London, Peter (Jamie Bell) finds himself in the same boarding house as Gloria Grahame (Annette Bening), not knowing who she is, or used to be. Years ago, she won an Oscar, for "The Bad and the Beautiful" (1952), but now she is appearing onstage—not even in the West End—in a Tennessee Williams play. She and Peter dance together, go out for a drink, and start an affair, doing their enraptured best to ignore the difference in their ages; she takes him to California and New York. Paul McGuigan's film tacks back and forth between this brightly period and the more wretched events of 1981, when Grahame, now extremely sick, seeks refuge at her lover's home, in Liverpool, to be cared for by Peter and his parents (Julie Walters and Kenneth Cranham). The movie grows dispiriting as she declines, but the central pairing lends it a touching intensity; Bell, jaunty yet vulnerable, does some of his smartest work, and Bening, wise enough not to attempt an impersonation, conveys both the feline fragility and, despite everything, the exuberance of an extraordinary woman.—*Anthony Lane (In limited release.)*

### Lover for a Day

Philippe Garrel's venerable mode of personal filmmaking exalts intimate life as fragmented melodrama, but his latest film plays more like an unintentional self-parody. Eric Caravaca plays Gilles, a middle-aged philosophy professor in Paris who's living with the twentyish Ariane (Louise Chevillotte), one of his students. Gilles's daughter, Jeanne (Esther Garrel, the director's real-life daughter), endures a hard breakup with her boyfriend and takes refuge in her father's apartment. Jeanne and Ariane begin a close yet fraught friendship; meanwhile, Gilles acknowledges the threat that Ariane's youth poses to their relationship, and her sexual freedom soon becomes a pawn in a game between father and daughter. Garrel's black-and-white images are unusually slack, as are the performances; the script, by the director, Caroline Deras (Garrel's wife and Esther's mother), Arlette Langmann, and

Jean-Claude Carrière, seems assembled from prefabricated pieces and remains undeveloped. The movie is methodically sexual but emotionally remote, and the romantic entanglements are neither self-revealing nor self-deprecating—they're as detached as an equation. In French.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

### Memories of Underdevelopment

This audacious, sensual portrait of an alienated intellectual in Castro's Cuba, circa 1961, is one of the great movies of the sixties. The director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, puts the audience in the head of a would-be writer (Sergio Corrieri, in a marvelous performance) who comes to understand just how conflicted he is about everything—class and sex included. There's a ruthless, universal brand of comedy in his more fatuous deeds and utterances: he views the revolution as his personal revenge against the stupidity of the Cuban bourgeoisie. But the movie is also full of tough-minded mystery. The classic sequence of the writer taking a girl to the Hemingway Museum is rich with ironies about the interplay of art, celebrity, and social conscience. Alea adapted the novel "Inconsolable Memories," by Edmundo Desnoes. Released in 1968. In Spanish.—*Michael Sragow (Film Forum, Jan. 12-18, and streaming.)*

### Molly's Game

The first film directed by Aaron Sorkin, who also wrote the script, is dominated by the imaginary clatter of his computer keyboard; the quality of the screenplay takes a back seat to its quantity, and the direction never brings the story to life. Based on the memoir of its real-life protagonist, the drama follows Molly Bloom (Jessica Chastain), a former Olympic skier and an academic star who puts off law school, seeks adventure, and ends up running high-stakes poker games in Los Angeles and New York—an enterprise that gets her arrested and charged with federal crimes. Molly's voice-over, which runs throughout the film, explains the logic behind her practical decisions while also detailing the skills and the wiles of poker players, yet Sorkin narrows her analytical intelligence to superficial flash. The same thing happens to the relationships on which the movie runs—Molly's connection to the attorney Charlie Jaffey (Idris Elba), who warily decides to represent her, and to her father, Larry (Kevin Costner),



who pops in like a *pater ex machina* to resolve complexities superficially. With Michael Cera, as an intrepid movie star, and Chris O'Dowd, as an Irish gambler with a thing for "Ulysses."—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### My Art

The artist Laurie Simmons wrote and directed this lyrical drama; she also stars, as Ellie Shine, an artist whose work is centered on movies and involves a kind of filmmaking. With her career needing a jolt, Ellie spends the summer house-sitting at a wealthy friend's lavish country home, where she's planning to work on a new project: a series of costume videos in which she portrays the heroines of classic Hollywood movies. But her bubble of rustic isolation is quickly pierced by two gardeners, Frank (Robert Clohessy) and Tom (Josh Safdie), who are actors, and John (John Rothman), a lawyer who's the father of one of her students; she includes them in her project, costuming them, directing them, and performing alongside them in her videos. As these friendships deepen, the romantic possibilities multiply. Simmons doesn't reveal much about Ellie's process or her ideas, but she looks closely at the connections between life and work—the web of relationships, as well as the time, the money, and the sheer ornery determination. The result is a frankly practical look at professionalism and its blurry borders. With Blair Brown, as Ellie's best friend; Parker Posey, as Tom's resentful wife; and Lena Dunham (Simmons's real-life daughter), as a friend of Ellie's who's a more successful artist.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### Phantom Thread

The role taken by Daniel Day-Lewis in Paul Thomas Anderson's strange and sumptuous film—the actor's first screen appearance, he has claimed—is, in every sense, tailor-made. He plays Reynolds Woodcock, a fashion designer of the nineteen-fifties, who, in the London house that he shares with his sister Cyril (Lesley Manville), creates immaculate dresses for a selection of wealthy women. As devout as a priest in his calling, he seems to resent any intrusion upon his professional peace, yet he invites a waitress named Alma (Vicky Krieps) into his life as a model, and, eventually, as far more. The result is a pact as perilous and as claustrophobic as that between the guru and his disciple in Anderson's "The Master" (2012), with the camera closing in remorselessly on stricken or adoring faces, and a strong tincture of sickness in the romantic atmosphere. All three leading players respond with rigor to this Hitchcockian intensity, and Reynolds—fussy, cold, and agonized—is a worthy addition to Day-Lewis's gallery of obsessives. The costumes, every bit as alluring as you would expect, are by Mark Bridges, and Jonny Greenwood contributes a swooning score.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/8/18.) (In limited release.)*

### The Post

The new film from Steven Spielberg, like his "Lincoln" (2012), is a solidly rousing act of historical re-creation. Meryl Streep plays Katharine Graham, the owner of the Washington *Post*, with Tom Hanks as its swaggering editor, Ben Bradlee. Most of the story is set in the early nineteen-seventies, at a vertiginous time for the nation and its capital. The so-called Pentagon Papers, obtained by Daniel Ellsberg (Matthew Rhys), unveil a reluctance, on the part of multiple Administrations, to inform the public about the true state of the Vietnam War. When the *Times* is pre-

vented, by legal injunction, from publishing the Papers, the *Post* gets its chance to step in and continue the job; what will Graham do, given that further revelations will rock the very establishment of which she is such a doyenne? The movie is a little too confident of its own righteous stand (listen to the strenuous John Williams score), but the battle between hesitation and decisiveness is beautifully managed by Streep. With Bob Odenkirk, Tracy Letts, Sarah Paulson, Bradley Whitford, and a lethally smiling Bruce Greenwood, as Robert McNamara, and delicious period costumes, starting with Bradlee's striped shirts, by Ann Roth.—*A.L. (12/18 & 25/17) (In wide release.)*

### Useless

In this promotional film from 2007 commissioned by the fashion designer Ma Ke, the Chinese director Jia Zhangke eludes the genre's constraints to provide a revelatory documentary view of inner

and outer life in contemporary China. Showcasing Ma's handmade haute-couture line is the pretext for a triptych that begins in the vast and oppressive clothing factories of Guangdong. After viewing laborers in their numbing routines, Jia follows Ma at work in her serene studio and records her meditations on the moral aspect of handicrafts. The film concludes with Jia's visit to a coal-mining town in his native Shanxi province, where he speaks with a traditional tailor who has abandoned his needle and thread to work as a miner. Jia's plaintive images suggest the dehumanization that has come with China's industrial revolution and the soul-killing authority on which it depends: a long, poignant shot of laborers squeezing through or climbing over a pointlessly locked gate is a stunning visual metaphor for a society of excessive restrictions in which living normally means breaking the rules. In Mandarin and Shanxi dialect.—*R.B. (MOMA, Jan. 10 and Jan. 16.)*

## DANCE

### American Dance Platform

Curated by Christine Tschida, this geographically varied mini-festival is organized as a series of double bills. The African-American repertory of Philadelphia's venerable Philadanco is paired, somewhat puzzlingly, with the volcanic hula of Hālau O Kekuhi, from Hawaii. Ensemble Español Spanish Theatre and Trinity Irish Dance Company have a home city in common: Chicago. Backhausdance, a Southern California troupe rarely seen in New York, shares a love of props with the Joyce regulars Jessica Lang Dance. And Bodytraffic, coming from Los Angeles with a new piece by Matthew Neenan, has a youthful spirit, which can also be said of the up-and-coming tap-and-swing-dance outfit Caleb Teicher & Company. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 10-14.*)

### "American Realness"

The festival of avant-garde dance and performance is as packed as ever, with about a dozen local and world premières and six remountings of notable recent work. Among the more promising novelties are "The Rehearsal Artist," a quick social-science experiment by the imaginative Michelle Ellsworth; "Figuring," an attempt by the formally rigorous choreographer Moriah Evans to make internal physical processes externally perceptible; "Relational Stalinism—The Musical," a satire of dance in museums, by Michael Portnoy; and "The Way You Look (at Me) Tonight," a playful study of perception by Claire Cunningham and Jess Curtis. The welcome reprises include "Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and Other Works by John Bernd" and Adrienne Truscott's dark comedy "THIS." (*Various locations. americanrealness.com. Jan. 10-16.*)

### "COIL"

After six years of wandering while waiting on renovations, Performance Space 122 returns to its East Village home, for what has been announced as the final installment of its long-running sampler. The dance selections begin with "Visions of Beauty," the latest dogged, minimalist anti-spectacle by Heather Kravas. In "Body of Work," by the Australian artist Atlanta Eke, video of the live performance is projected back onto it, creating a palimpsest. And in "Desert Body

Creep," Angela Goh, another Australia-based choreographer, works in slow motion to expose the horror and the comedy of flesh. (*P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 10-16. Through Feb. 4.*)

### "Pursuit of Happiness" / Nature Theatre of Oklahoma

In its new dance-theatre work, the ensemble explores some of the mythologies of American life, satirizing lust, greed, hypermasculinity, and the cult of violence. The action takes place in an absurdist Western setting, with shades of Quentin Tarantino. The actors hail from the Slovenian contemporary dance company EnKnapGroup, and are capable of staging elaborate stylized fights with panache. The first section is more like straight theatre, while the second veers into the realm of movement and dance. Part of the Public's "Under the Radar" festival. (*N.Y.U. Skirball, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-998-4941. Jan. 12-14.*)

### "Stam-pede"

This kid-friendly staple of the post-holiday cool-down period brings attention to a cross-section of the city's percussive-dance scene, from tappers to Irish step dancers to specialists in the northern Indian dance form kathak (performed in bare feet). This year's edition includes performances by Ann Dragich and Company; Les Femmes, an all-female tap troupe; the Indian classical dancer Barkha Patel; and the tap experimentalists of the Bang Group. (*Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 14.*)

### "Works & Process" / Jodi Melnick

Matchups between star ballerinas and contemporary choreographers tend to produce shallow, forced mixtures. But "New Bodies," a 2016 collaboration between Sara Mearns, of New York City Ballet, and the downtown darling Jodi Melnick, was a rare exception: a series of experiments in which topnotch ballet dancers (including Mearns's City Ballet colleagues Jared Angle and Gretchen Smith) brought firmness and definition to Melnick's delicate, difficult-to-duplicate style. Now the work returns, with the entrancing Taylor Stanley filling in for Smith. Melnick also performs her "One of Sixty-Five Thousand Gestures," a beguiling solo she created with Trisha Brown. (*Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Jan. 14-15.*)

# THE THEATRE



"Paradiso," at the Greene Naftali gallery, in Chelsea, explores myth and the mundane.

## Essential Viewing

*Richard Maxwell stages a new show.*

Last year, the gallerist Carol Greene co-published "Richard Maxwell and New York City Players: The Theater Years," a beautifully photographed and designed book composed largely of stills from twenty years of the director and writer Richard Maxwell's productions, most of which I've seen and all of which I've learned from. A decade ago, I asked the actress Anna Kohler, whose opinion I trust, what theatre artists she was into, and she told me about Maxwell (he's now in his fifties), who was interested in making a new kind of theatre, centered on reducing the actor and the script to their essence. Kohler was then performing in "Ode to the Man Who Kneels," Maxwell's seventh full-length play, which also starred two of my other favorite players, Jim Fletcher and Greg Mehrten. I had never seen anything like that kind of work before—nor have I since. It was like watching an early Fassbinder movie—all those bodies and faces drained of meaning!—mixed with laconic American voices that were observational and internal all at once, like Montgomery Clift in "Red River" meets Fassbinder's "Love Is Colder Than Death."

Subsequently, I found out that Maxwell was the younger brother of the Broadway star Jan Maxwell, and that

he had grown up with a theatre-loving dad in West Fargo, North Dakota. He studied acting at Illinois State University before working with the estimable Steppenwolf Theatre Company, in Chicago; a few years later, in New York, he started his own company, New York City Players, which, in addition to putting on Maxwell's plays, has staged early works by Eugene O'Neill and the young playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury.

Now Maxwell is back, with "Paradiso" (at the Greene Naftali gallery, Jan. 12-Feb. 10), a work that explores his commitment to, and seemingly endless interest in, myth and the mundane. Those two themes have framed Maxwell's best recent work. There was "Isolde," starring Tory Vazquez (Maxwell's wife), as an actress who could no longer remember her lines, and the phenomenal "Good Samaritans," starring a performer named Rosemary Allen, whose work in the piece I will never get over. Like any intelligent director who puts his cast before his egotism, Maxwell knows that an audience wants to see faces—the myths and truths that have gone into making them interesting stars. In his 2015 book, "Theatre for Beginners," Maxwell gives what he calls "brass tacks" advice on how to make theatre. Part of the book's charm is what Maxwell leaves out: an explication of his vision. But who has ever been able to describe talent? Certainly not the talent.

—Hilton Als

### Ballyturk

Enda Walsh wrote and directs this metaphysical comedy, in which two men confined in a room perform frenetic rituals set to eighties pop songs and spin tales about a fictitious Irish village. (*St. Ann's Warehouse*, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. In previews. Opens Jan. 14.)

### Cardinal

Anna Chlumsky and Stephen Park star in Greg Pierce's play, directed by Kate Whoriskey, about a woman trying to reinvigorate her small Rust Belt town who clashes with an interloping entrepreneur. (*Second Stage*, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. In previews.)

### Cute Activist

New Saloon stages Milo Cramer's political fable, in which a circle of part-time activists take on a despotic landlord in a mythical Connecticut hamlet. (*The Bushwick Starr*, 207 Starr St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Jan. 13.)

### The Homecoming Queen

Ngozi Anyanwu's drama, directed by Awoye Timpo, is about a novelist who returns home to Nigeria after many years to look after her dying father. (*Atlantic Stage 2*, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

### In the Body of the World

Eve Ensler ("The Vagina Monologues") wrote and performs this piece about her experience receiving a life-threatening diagnosis while working in the Congo; Diane Paulus directs, for Manhattan Theatre Club. (*City Center Stage I*, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin Jan. 16.)

### John Lithgow: Stories by Heart

The actor performs a one-man storytelling evening, re-creating tales by Ring Lardner and P. G. Wodehouse. Daniel Sullivan directs the Roundabout production. (*American Airlines Theatre*, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. In previews. Opens Jan. 11.)

### Miles for Mary

Lila Neugebauer directs a return engagement of this comedy by the theatre collective the Mad Ones, in which a high-school faculty puts on a telethon in 1988. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Jan. 11.)

### Party Face

In Isobel Mahon's comedy, directed by Amanda Barse, Hayley Mills plays a mother who tries to force the "right" friend on her daughter at a party. (*City Center Stage II*, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin Jan. 11.)

### The Undertaking

The documentary troupe the Civilians presents this piece exploring mortality and the concept of the land of the dead, written and directed by Steve Cosson. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Jan. 11.)

### Until the Flood

Dael Orlandersmith wrote and performs this monologue, directed by Neel Keller, examining the shooting of Michael Brown by Darren



Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri. (*Rattlestick*, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556. In previews.)

### X: Or, Betty Shabazz v. the Nation

The Acting Company stages Marcus Gardley's play, which retells the story of the assassination of Malcolm X using the framework of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar." (*Theatre at St. Clement's*, 423 W. 46th St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin Jan. 14.)

## NOW PLAYING

### The Children

In Lucy Kirkwood's gentle, frightening, and surprising play, Rose, a retired nuclear physicist, arrives at the crooked cottage where her former colleagues Robin (Ron Cook) and Hazel (Deborah Findlay) now live. A Fukushima-like disaster has overwhelmed the plant where they all once worked, irradiating parts of the English countryside. Rose (the astonishing Francesca Annis) has a scheme to put it to rights, recruiting older workers to undertake the dangerous cleanup and spare the younger ones. Directed by James Macdonald, first for London's Royal Court and now for Manhattan Theatre Club, "The Children" is a drama of moral responsibility. Maybe this makes the play sound deadly. In fact, it's an ethical thriller, a passionate and beautifully acted inquiry into the messes we make—of our lives, of a reactor's core, of the downstairs toilet—and into our willingness to tidy them again. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Farinelli and the King

While Claire van Kampen's play is lovely to look at and sometimes to listen to, it's not really a play. Beautifully directed by John Dove, the story concerns Spain's Philippe V (Mark Ryland), doing his apparently audience-captivating whimsy, a "mad" king whose lunacy is calmed, somehow, by a castrato singing star named Farinelli (acted by Sam Crane and sung by Iestyn Davies), who is much admired by the King's consort, Isabella Farnese (Melody Grove). Of course, there are the usual court intrigues that show, directly and indirectly, that Philippe is a kind of political genius, but he is made for finer stuff than ruling. In Act II, the action moves to the country, where Farinelli, the King, and Isabella make a fine little band. The play employs a number of genres at once, but there is no amount of style that can cover up the script's lack of substance. It's a show without purpose. (*Belasco*, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Latin History for Morons

In his latest comic monologue (a Broadway transfer from the Public), John Leguizamo is class clown turned substitute teacher, sprinting from the Aztecs to Sonia Sotomayor in less than two hours—with dance breaks. When his son was in eighth grade, Leguizamo tells us, he was picked on by racist bullies and stumped by a history project for which he had to find a hero. Hoping to fortify his boy with heritage, Leguizamo deep-dived into textbooks, returning with pearls of knowledge: did you know that twenty thousand Hispanics fought in the Civil War? Still, he struggles to find encouraging tales of indigenous forebears, who, like his son, were on the losing side of most battles. Directed by Tony Taccone, the show makes the occasional hackneyed turn—it's unclear why Montezuma is rendered as a flaming homosexual

ual—but quickly rights itself, and Leguizamo lands clear comic punches, especially when sending up his own machismo. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Under the Radar Festival

The Public Theatre's showcase of new work from here and abroad adds some much needed action to the January theatrical abyss. This year's lineup includes the lip-synching drag artist Dickie Beau, sampling Hamlets past in "Re-Member Me"; the feminist stalwarts Split Britches, contemplating doomsday in "Unexploded Ordnances (UXO)"; and Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, channelling the Wild West in "Pursuit of Happiness," a collaboration with the Slovenian dance company EnKnapGroup. Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen revisit the gonzo music journalist Lester Bangs in "How to Be a Rock Critic." Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon adapt Octavia E. Butler's Afrofuturist novel "Parable of the Sower" as an opera. Havana's Teatro el Público melds Cuban revolution-

ary history and Greek tragedy in "Antigonón, un Contingente Épico." And *The New Yorker's* Adam Gopnik tells tales of eighties Manhattan in "The Gates." For the full program, visit publictheater.org. (Various locations. 212-967-7555. Through Jan. 15.)

## ALSO NOTABLE

**The Band's Visit** Ethel Barrymore. • **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Lunt-Fontanne. Through Jan. 14. • **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. • **Cruel Intentions** Le Poisson Rouge. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **Disco Pigs** Irish Repertory. • **Hello, Dolly!** Shubert. • **Hindle Wakes** Clurman. • **In & of Itself** Daryl Roth. • **Mankind** Playwrights Horizons. • **Meteor Shower** Booth. • **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. Through Jan. 14. • **Once on This Island** Circle in the Square. • **The Parisian Woman** Hudson. • **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. • **SpongeBob SquarePants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr.

# ABOVE & BEYOND



### Zlatne Uste Golden Festival

Eastern European and Middle Eastern music, dance, and cuisine are the subjects of this annual festival, held in New York City for more than thirty years. The organizers explore Balkan traditions and customs across two nights and four stages, where attendees can shop for folk arts and sample a wide array of dishes native to the region, which spans roughly from Romania to Greece and from Croatia to Turkey. The main draw is a marathon of performances, including a traditional Egyptian dance troupe, the Yale Women's Slavic chorus, a Balkan brass band, and ROSA, a women's choral group that specializes in non-tempered Serbian singing. Profits from ticket sales will be donated to charitable and educational organizations aiding Balkan communities. (*The Grand Prospect Hall*, 263 Prospect Ave., Brooklyn. goldenfest.org. Jan. 12-13.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### Kaufman Music Center

The actors James Franco and his younger brother Dave began work on "The Disaster Artist" in 2014. The older Franco directed the film, which is based on the true story of Tommy Wiseau, the director and star of his own film, titled "The Room." Wiseau's original movie, from 2003, became a "Rocky Horror"-esque midnight screener around college campuses, infamous for its canned dialogue, confusing

script, and unintentional hilarity. The gobs of optimism required for such a cinematic feat shine through in "The Disaster Artist"; James renders Wiseau with all of his oddness and warmth, emerging with a cult character as quotable as Napoleon Dynamite and Borat, and Dave capably plays Greg Sestero, Wiseau's wide-eyed straight man. The Franco brothers discuss their Golden Globe-nominated film, and the lessons gleaned from its making, at this live talk. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 10 at 7:30.)

### 92nd Street Y

In 2008, *GQ* asked a simple question in its Man of the Year profile of Thom Browne: "His pants are too high, his jackets are too tight. So how did Thom Browne become the most influential menswear designer in America?" Browne's twist on the traditional Brooks Brothers fits of the previous decades turned the power suit into something more agile and casual, with a high hem to expose a pop of sock, slim shoulders that hug a still-growing frame, and a firm, precise silhouette that might attract "the young architect or the young executive," according to Brooks Brothers' chief merchandising officer, Lou Amendola. By turning the nondescript social uniform into a statement piece, Browne helped jolt menswear into style headlines; he discusses his journey and next steps with Fern Mallis, the former executive director of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. (1395 Lexington Ave. 212-415-5500. Jan. 10 at 7:30.)

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Ugly Baby

407 Smith St., Brooklyn (347-689-3075)

According to Thai superstition, you should call a newborn “ugly baby” in order to misdirect thieving ghosts enamored of comely young things. At a new Thai restaurant tucked away on a quiet stretch of Carroll Gardens, the method of misdirection has the opposite effect, reeling in a certain breed of New Yorker for whom the interplay of an underexplored cuisine, a well-regarded chef, and a memorably insouciant name is irresistible. Securing a table at such an establishment is a prize almost as precious as a sweet-smelling babe.

The items chosen for the menu feel thoughtful, like a poetic distillation of the culinary regions of Thailand from which chef Sirichai Sreparplarn, a Bangkok native, took his inspiration. Start in the northeast, which borders on the Mekong River and produces a dish called *kao tod nam klook*, a crispy, sweet-sour-spicy curried rice amplified by delectable bits of pork skin, ginger, and peanuts. Pair it with the *laab ped udon*, a duck salad of Laotian origins tossed with Vietnamese coriander, mint, and dried chilies that land on the tongue with explosive heat.

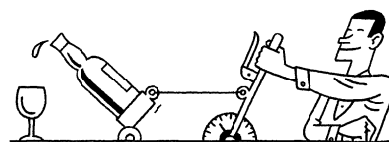
As you note the brilliant red and orange brushstrokes on the wall and wonder if they are meant to mirror the color

of your swollen, chili-smeared lips, take a detour to central Thailand. Think of it as a pit stop at Grandma’s when you order *tom som pla kra pong*, a hearty tamarind-soured broth with red-snapper fillets peering up from under piles of ginger. Then take a deep breath (and a preemptive gulp of water) before heading south, where, despite your better judgment, you will try the *kua kling*, a dry beef curry that is advertised as “brutally spicy”; its potency is akin to subjecting your taste buds to a firing squad of capsaicin-loaded machine guns. Recover with another southern specialty: a fleshy sea bream, generously bathed in turmeric, rubbed with garlic, and fried whole, that is mercifully spared of chilies.

Service wobbles a little under the burden of over-appreciation. On a recent evening, a table of six, half of whom were dripping with sweat from a self-destructive contest to see who could eat the most *kua kling*, waited fifteen minutes for their drinks, only to discover that the harried waiter had forgotten. A few days later, the Thai iced tea had run out by 8. Just as one iced-tea obsessive was feeling sorry for herself—wondering if the absence of tea merited a change of venue—she spotted a TV star, who was told there would be a two-hour wait. The star settled in and began tapping on his phone, and those seated, even without their teas, stayed. (Dishes \$9–\$25.)

—Jiayang Fan

## BAR TAB



### La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels 249 Centre St. (212-343-3660)

Fear not, Duolingo delinquents! This cozy Nolita wine bar’s intimidating mouthful of a *nom* belies its unpretentiousness and approachability. Though La Compagnie, opened by the team behind Experimental Cocktail Club, boasts a head-spinning list of around six hundred bottles, an infectious lightness pervades the elegant setting, where the staff wears brightly patterned tracksuits on Tuesdays and aloha shirts on Fridays, to honor the Hawaiian heritage of the head bartender. “I want the Muscadet drinker to be as comfortable as the Montrachet drinker,” the managing partner Caleb Ganzer said, on a recent Thursday evening, as chic thirtysomethings with nice highlights lounged on plush velvet chairs. It was well past happy hour, which stretches blessedly from the time the bar opens, at five, until seven o’clock, and knocks five dollars off glasses of wine and snacks. Luckily, the food here is excellent. The addictive Cacio e Popcorn is fluffy with Pecorino, and the Cast Iron Leeks arrive melting in brown butter. For a little entertainment, order a round of Mystery Wine—patrons who are able to correctly identify the vintage from the bar’s doorstop menu win a bottle to take home. (Losers still wind up with a very good glass of wine.) At the bar, a patron with a cold sniffled through a warming glass of Syrah and a terrifically funky natural Chardonnay from Australia before Ganzer sent over a nip of a Barolo from 1967. “I’ve always said that the key to finding the fountain of youth is drinking wine that is older than you. You’ll never age,” he said. It would have been hard not to feel at least a little better, with all the booze and attention. But younger? “Well, it’s a very hard claim to test,” he said, with a smile.—Wei Tchou





# THE BEST

PURE COTTON

# NON-IRON

DRESS SHIRT

# BAR NONE.

YOU  
SAVE  
70%

UNBEATABLE  
INTRODUCTORY  
OFFER

**\$24.95**

REG \$89.50

PLUS,  
FREE MONOGRAMMING

REG \$10.95

ADD THIS TIE FOR JUST \$19.95

REG \$72.50

[PAULFREDRICK.COM/BEST](http://PAULFREDRICK.COM/BEST)



800.309.6000

PROMO CODE T7HPNZ

WHITE 100% COTTON PINPOINT / NEAT WRINKLE-FREE WEAR / EASY NON-IRON CARE  
4 COLLAR STYLES / BUTTON OR FRENCH CUFF / REGULAR, BIG & TALL & SLIM FIT

GUARANTEED PERFECT FIT.

FREE EXCHANGES. EASY RETURNS. NEW CUSTOMER OFFER. LIMIT 4 SHIRTS.  
IMPORTED. SHIPPING EXTRA. EXPIRES 2/28/18.

# Paul Fredrick





## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT THE LOST EMPEROR

What made the Emperor Nero tick, Suetonius writes in “Lives of the Caesars,” was “a longing for immortality and undying fame, though it was ill-regulated.” Many Romans were convinced that Nero was mentally unbalanced and that he had burned much of the imperial capital to the ground just to make room for the construction of the Domus Aurea, a gold-leaf-and-marble palace that stretched from the Palatine to the Esquiline Hill. At enormous venues around the city, he is said to have sung, danced, and played the water organ for many hours—but not before ordering the gates locked to insure that the house would remain full until after the final encore. Driven half mad by Nero’s antics, Romans feigned death or shimmied over the walls with ropes to escape.

Chaotic, corrupt, incurious, infantile, grandiose, and obsessed with gaudy real estate, Donald Trump is of a Neronic temperament. He has always craved attention. Now the whole world is his audience. In earlier times, Trump cultivated, among others, the proprietors and editors of the New York tabloids, Fox News, TMZ, and the *National Enquirer*. Now Twitter is his principal outlet, with no mediation necessary.

The President recently celebrated the holidays at Mar-a-Lago, the Domus Aurea of Palm Beach, and nearly every day, before setting out for the

golf course, he thumbed his bilious contempt for . . . such a long list! Science itself did not escape his scorn:

In the East, it could be the COLDEST New Year’s Eve on record. Perhaps we could use a little bit of that good old Global Warming that our Country, but not other countries, was going to pay TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS to protect against. Bundle up!

Future scholars will sift through Trump’s digital proclamations the way we now read the chroniclers of Nero’s Rome—to understand how an unhinged emperor can make a mockery of republican institutions, undo the collective nervous system of a country, and degrade the whole of public life.

Trump joined Twitter in March, 2009. His early work in the medium provided telling glimpses of his many qualities. He was observant. (“I have never seen a thin person drinking Diet

Coke.”) He used facts to curious ends. (“Windmills are the greatest threat in the US to both bald and golden eagles.”) He was concerned with personal appearance. (“Barney Frank looked disgusting—nipples protruding—in his blue shirt before Congress. Very very disrespectful.”) He was fastidious. (“Something very important, and indeed society changing, may come out of the Ebola epidemic that will be a very good thing: NO SHAKING HANDS!”) He was sensitive to comic insult. (“Amazing how the haters & losers keep tweeting the name ‘F\*k-face Von Clownstick’ like they are so original & like no one else is doing it.”) He was post-Freudian. (“It makes me feel so good to hit ‘sleazebags’ back—much better than seeing a psychiatrist (which I never have!).”)

In due course, Trump perfected his unique voice: the cockeyed neologisms and the fractured syntax, the emphatic punctuation, the Don Rickles-era exclamations (“Sad!” “Doesn’t have a clue!” “Dummy!”). Then he started dabbling in conspiracy fantasies: China’s climate “hoax,” President Obama’s Kenyan birth, “deep-state” enemies trying to do him in. Meanwhile, he kept an indulgent eye on the family business (“Everybody is raving about the Trump Home Mattress”) and, via retweeting, sought new friends, including anti-Muslim bigots, a Pizza-Gate-monger, and someone who goes by @WhiteGenocideTM.

During the 2016 Presidential campaign, and then in the first days of the



Administration, some commentators counselled their colleagues to ignore the early-morning salvos about small hands or large crowds. “Stop Being Trump’s Twitter Fool,” Jack Shafer, of Politico, advised, just after the election. Trump’s volleys were merely a shrewd diversion from serious matters. “By this time,” Shafer wrote, “you’d expect that people would have figured out when Donald Trump is yanking their chain and pay him the same mind they do phone calls tagged ‘Out of Area’ by caller ID.” Sean Spicer, the President’s first press secretary, insisted otherwise. Trump, he pointed out, “is the President of the United States,” and so his tweets are “considered official statements by the President of the United States.”

Spicer was right: a pronouncement by the President is a Presidential pronouncement. But Trump’s tweets are most valuable as a record of his inner life: his obsessions, his rages, his guilty conscience. No bile goes unexpecto-rated. Trump, who does not care for government work, is more invested in his reputation as a creative writer, declaring more than once that “somebody said” that he is “the Hemingway of a hundred and forty characters.”

Last week, when Trump returned to Washington from Mar-a-Lago, he set a White House record with a sixteen-tweet day. He behaved less like a President than like a teen-ager locked in his room with an ounce of Purple Skunk, three Happy Meals, and a cell phone. In one tweet, directed at the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong Un, he arguably narrowed the odds of nuclear confrontation—and did so with a reference to an anatomical feature that is a subject of keen and ongoing concern to the President:

Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!

Trump went on to tweet that he would soon announce “the most dishonest & corrupt media awards of the year,” took credit for a year without an American air crash, scolded the “Deep State Justice Dept” for failing to “act” against Hillary Clinton’s former aide Huma Abedin, and quoted the Lou Dobbs show’s praise of the Administration for “a set of accomplishments that nobody can deny.”

Some of Trump’s tweets were more squirrely. Though he lauded Iranian demonstrators for standing up for their “rights,” he continued to offer respect bordering on servility to the likes of Vladimir Putin. One of his signature phrases—“fake news”—has been adopted by autocrats from Bashar al-Assad, of Syria, to Nicolás Maduro, of Venezuela. To the astonishment of our traditional allies, Trump humiliates and weakens a country he pretends to lead.

A new book by Michael Wolff, “Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House,” amplifies, in lurid anecdote and quotation, what we have been learning elsewhere every day for the past year: Trump believed that he would lose the election, but would multiply his fame, his fortune, and his standing in American life. To near-universal shock, however, he won. And the consequences followed. Trump has no comprehension of policy and cares about it less. He surrounds himself with aides who are either wildly incompetent or utterly defeated in their attempts to domesticate the mulish and bizarre object of their attention. There are no lingering illusions about the President’s capacities: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called Trump “a fucking moron” and spared us a denial. Wolff’s book, which leans heavily on interviews with Steve Bannon, makes it plain that pretty much everyone in the President’s circle agrees that he is, in terms of character and intellect, fantastically limited. There is no loyalty or deliberation in the White House, only a savage “Lord of the Flies” sort of chaos. Each day is at once preposterous, poisonous, and dangerous.

And so the West Wing in the era of Trump has come to resemble the dankest realms of Twitter itself: a set of small rooms and cramped hallways in which everyone is racked with paranoia and everyone despises everyone else. Predictably, Trump has reacted to Wolff’s book in the manner of a wounded despot—by declaring that Bannon, once his closest adviser in matters of isolationism and white nationalism, has “lost his mind,” and by declaring war on the written word. With the legal assistance of Charles



*“Hey! I’m reading to you! Don’t even think about falling asleep.”*



Harder, a Beverly Hills lawyer who has represented Harvey Weinstein and Hulk Hogan, he is trying to silence Bannon and block publication of “Fire and Fury.” Bannon, who is rapidly losing his access to power and funding, meekly replied by going on the radio and calling Trump a “great man.” Executives at Henry Holt & Co. ignored a cease-and-desist letter and moved up the date of publication.

Nero had hoped to last long enough on the throne to re-brand the month of April “Neroneus” and the city of Rome “Neropolis.” He did not succeed. When he was thirty, having spent thirteen years in power, he was condemned by the Roman Senate as *hostis publicus*, a public enemy. He was doomed. One of his last utterances seemed to mark the despair of the politician-performance artist: *Qualis artifex pereo!* “What an artist dies in me!”

Scandal envelops the President. Obstruction of justice, money-laundering, untoward contacts with foreign governments—it is unclear where the special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation will land and what might eventually rouse the attention of the U.S. Senate. Clearly, Trump senses the danger. A former campaign manager, Paul Manafort, has been indicted. A former national-security adviser, Michael Flynn, has admitted to lying to the F.B.I. and has become a cooperating witness. The President sees one West Wing satrap and Cabinet official after another finding a distance from him. “Where is my Roy Cohn?” he asked his aides angrily, according to the *Times*, when his Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, defied his wishes and recused himself from the Russia investigation.

In the meantime, there is little doubt about who Donald Trump is, the harm he has done already, and the greater harm he threatens. He is unfit to hold any public office, much less the highest in the land. This is not merely an orthodoxy of the opposition; his panicked courtiers have been leaking word of it from his first weeks in office. The President of the United States has become a leading security threat to the United States.

—David Remnick

## DEPT. OF USAGE NEO-NAZI NO-NO’S



From “The Associated Press Stylebook”: “We do not use obscenities, racial epithets or other offensive slurs in stories unless they are part of direct quotations and there is a compelling reason for them.”

From “The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage”: “The *Times* very rarely publishes obscene words . . . sometimes at an acknowledged cost in the vividness of an article or two.”

From the Daily Stormer style guide: “While racial slurs are allowed/recommended, not every reference to non-white[s] should be a slur. . . . It should not come across as genuine raging vitriol. That is a turnoff to the overwhelming majority of people.” The guide, apparently written by the site’s founder and chief propagandist, Andrew Anglin, lists eighteen racial slurs that are “advisable” and four that are “not allowed,” and reminds writers to “follow the prime directive.” The prime directive, as stated a few paragraphs later: “All enemies should be combined into one enemy, which is the Jews.”

The Daily Stormer is a relatively popular neo-Nazi blog, although it’s impossible to know exactly how popular. (From the style guide: “The site continues to grow month by month, indicating that there is no ceiling on this.” Also from the guide: “We should always claim we are winning, and should celebrate any wins with extreme exaggeration.”) In December, a source leaked the site’s seventeen-page style guide to Ashley Feinberg, a journalist at HuffPost, along with transcripts from an online chat where aspiring propagandists asked a Daily Stormer administrator about blogging opportunities. The administrator responded, “okay basically, it works like this, you can write articles, if we don’t like them you can put them on your own blog or whatever, if we accept them for publication we will pay you \$14.88.” (That number, Feinberg wrote, “is a common shibboleth among white supremacists.

We’re sure they find this extremely clever.”) Then he pasted a link, and wrote, “theres style guide read the site for a couple weeks, get a hang of the style and editorial tone.” When the freelancers in the chat complained about the low fee, Feinberg said recently, the administrator responded, “‘Neo-Nazi stuff is not that lucrative, as you can imagine,’ and ‘We’re not TMZ.’”

The style guide is surprisingly fastidious about formatting. Links must not “stretch into the spacing between words.” Images must be exactly three hundred and twenty pixels wide, to avoid anything “aesthetically problematic.” Each post “should be filled with as much visual stimulation as possible,” in order to “appeal to the ADHD culture”; passages from mainstream sources must be unaltered, so that “we can never be accused of ‘fake news’—or delisted by Facebook as such.”

One section is called, simply, “No Such Thing as Too Much Hyperbole.” “Even when a person can say to themselves ‘this is ridiculous,’ they are still affected by it on an emotional level,” the guide says. “Refer to teenagers who get arrested for racist Twitter posts as ‘eternally noble warriors bravely fighting for divine war to protect the blood heritage of our sacred ancestors’ . . . You and anyone reading can say omg corny lol. But it just doesn’t matter to the primitive part of the brain.”

Since the Daily Stormer was founded, in 2013, some non-Nazis have wondered how seriously to take it. Surely a site named for *Der Stürmer*—a Third Reich tabloid so crude that Joseph Goebbels, in his diary, called it “simple pornography”—couldn’t, in the current century, mean what it appeared to mean. Maybe it was an elaborate joke, or an attempt to test the boundaries of free speech. “The unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not,” the author writes, in a section called “Lulz.” “This is obviously a ploy and I actually do want to gas kikes. But that’s neither here nor there.” For legal reasons, the guide continues, writers shouldn’t openly incite violence; “however, whenever someone does something violent, it should be made light of.” The ultimate goal is to “dehumanize the enemy, to the point where people are ready to laugh at their deaths.” That settles that.

Feinberg, the journalist who brought

the style guide to light, has carved out a beat that might be called public-interest cyber-stalking—searching publicly available data for, as she puts it, “the things conservatives do online when they don’t think anyone’s watching.” She found what appeared to be Anthony Scaramucci’s Amazon wish list (“The Obstacle Is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials Into Triumph”); quoted from a hunting-forum account that seemed to belong to Donald Trump, Jr. (“Lie lie lie deny deny deny . . . it aint a crime if you dont get caught!!!!!!”); and recently pointed out that Sean Spicer, on Instagram, had referred to “A Christmas Carol” as a “book of Christmas Carols.” On Twitter, Feinberg routinely refers to Trump associates as “psychopaths,” “idiots,” and “fucking nimrods.” When it comes to literal Nazis, though, she takes a more muted approach. “There are obviously a million jokes that go through your head when you read something as terrible as this,” she said. “But I figured there’s nothing I can say that’s better than just showing how absurd and insane their thinking is.”

—Andrew Marantz

## PARIS POSTCARD EMPEROR'S NEW CUISINE



Once you’ve made a reservation at Paris’s first nudist restaurant, you find yourself neurotically broadcasting this bit of news to anyone who will listen. While vacationing in France’s capital recently, a visitor from New York City approached the front desk of his hotel and told the thoughtful-looking employee seated there, “Tonight, we will be eating at the naturist restaurant, O’Naturel. In addition to our clothing, we will also be surrendering our phones, so between eight-forty-five and eleven o’clock we will be unreachable.” The desk clerk nodded gravely.

O’Naturel is situated on a residential street in the Twelfth Arrondissement, a stone’s throw from a nursery school. The restaurant’s co-proprietor, smiling and fully dressed, buzzed the visitor and a friend into a tiny, curtained-off lobby. “New York City!”

the co-proprietor said, glancing at his reservation book. “A woman from there is eating with us tonight as well!” The visitor murmured to his friend, “Probably Maureen Dowd.”

The co-proprietor showed the two guests to a small changing room lined with wooden lockers, and handed them each a pair of white terry-cloth slippers. A horizontal wall mirror hung, cruelly, at waist level.

Once undressed, the guests gathered the courage to perform the evening’s chief bit of bravery: entering the dining room. Forward the duo marched. The phrase “surgical strike” does not begin to describe the dispatch with which they moved toward the table that the co-proprietor had picked for them—nor the speed with which they put their napkins on their laps. The room, which seats forty and is largely devoid of decoration, is lit with the rousing brightness of a bank manager’s office and not the caramelly glow of a Monet haystack.

Reading the menu, the two New Yorkers clucked approvingly at the absence of hot soup or bubbly raclette dishes. If there is a gleam of joy on the face of the woman at the center of Manet’s “Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe,” it likely results from the fact that she is not dining at Benihana.

Once the visitor and his friend had ordered, they summoned the nerve to look around at the other customers. They saw two other couples—a French-speaking man and woman in their fifties, and two female Anglophones in their twenties. Dotted around the room were four solo diners: non-creepy-looking men in their thirties or forties, each wearing glasses. Settling in, the visitors reminded each other that the restaurant’s Web site had explained how the black slipcovers on the dining chairs are changed after each seating, and that the law prevents the waiters (the two co-proprietors, who are brothers) from going about their duties in the altogether.

Gradually, the two diners’ shoulders relaxed. The co-proprietor’s ebullience helped, as did a bottle of wine and the not-bad coquilles St. Jacques with salsify. It was heartening to overhear the other two couples, unknown to one another, start to talk *à quatre*—even if

their conversation focussed on how awkward it is to talk to strangers in nudist restaurants.

The visitor now faced two challenges. First: Could he pick up his napkin from the floor without alarming the other diners or projecting a mid-level degree of skeeviness? He found that he could. Then: Could he nonchalantly walk, *sans* napkin, fifteen feet to the rest room? Benjamin Franklin wrote that he liked to take “baths” of air by rising early and sitting before an opened window “without any clothes whatever, half an hour or an hour, according to the season.” A trip to the O’Naturel rest room, the visitor feared, would feel like a Franklin bath on the hoof. But he found the mettle to stand up and walk, evidently inspiring six of the evening’s other nice diners, who ended up making the same trip. Emboldened by his intra-restaurant wandering, the visitor, when he returned



from the rest room, chose to leave his napkin on the table.

When the pair finished dinner, they found themselves alone again in the cloakroom. They avoided looking in the waist-high mirror. After opening their lockers, the visitor watched his friend approach the heavy curtain that separates the space from the dining room and pull it an inch to the right, so that it was closed all the way. The visitor asked, “Are you concerned that the other diners are going to see you getting dressed?”

—Henry Alford



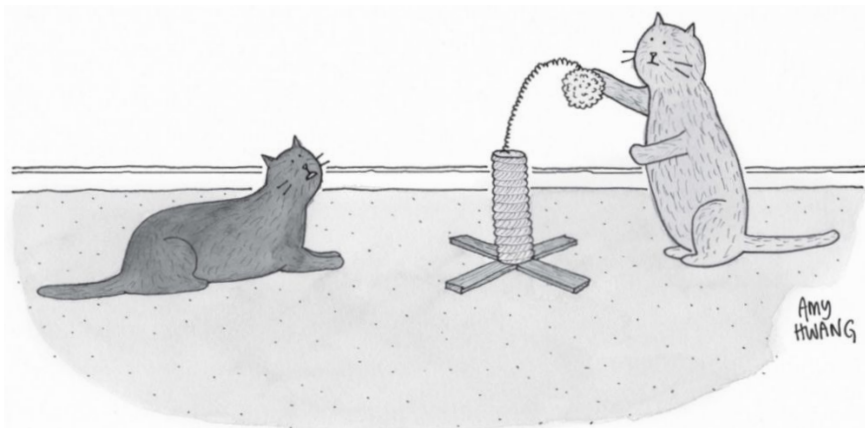
## TIME CAPSULE BITS AND BOBS



Barren Island has been likened to “a scrotum hanging from the bottom of Brooklyn.” In the eighteen-fifties, the city began sending horse carcasses, slaughterhouse offal, and other troublesome refuse there for salvage or disposal, and in 1879 a court ruled that a Brooklyn railroad company could legally turn away passengers who worked in the rendering plants because their clothes smelled so terrible. In the late nineteen-twenties, after automobiles had begun to make horse recycling obsolete, the city used landfill to enlarge the island and merge it with the mainland, then built Floyd Bennett Field, New York’s first municipal airport. In the mid-thirties, Robert Moses evicted the remaining residents to make way for Marine Park. In 1972, Barren Island—whose name apparently comes not from its long association with desolation but from the Dutch word for “bears”—became part of Gateway National Recreation Area. Today, outdoorsy types with a high threshold for disappointment can choose from among fifty-two overnight campsites, twenty of them for R.V.s, in a partially wooded triangle between two of the old runways.

On a recent afternoon, Robin Nagle, a professor of anthropology and environmental studies at N.Y.U., took two dozen students on a field trip to Barren Island. They crossed Flatbush Avenue at the corner of Aviation Road, then walked for a quarter mile through a litter-strewn forest of phragmites and stunted-looking trees. Their destination was Glass Bottle Beach—so named because at low tide much of the sand is covered with bottles, along with vast quantities of other refuse. Visitors usually assume that the refuse has washed up from the body of water still known as Dead Horse Bay, but most of it has actually washed down, from an eroding bank above the sand. “The bank is the outermost edge of a landfill,” Nagle explained. “It keeps receding, and stuff keeps appearing.”

Some of the exposed material, Nagle



*“Take it easy. It’s the weekend.”*

believes, originated in a Brooklyn neighborhood that Moses levelled to make way for one of his road-building projects, more than a decade after Floyd Bennett Field had been supplanted by LaGuardia Airport. “We don’t know which neighborhood,” she said, “but we do know the period, because when we find remnants of newspapers the dates are between early February and mid-March of 1953.” The beach is a window into that era. She went on, “I tell people to imagine that they’re a props master for a film about a working-class Brooklyn family in 1953, and they have to fill their home with goods that would have been part of their everyday lives—shampoo bottles and cooking tools and car parts and flooring and makeup and children’s toys and furniture and electrical outlets. People say the beach is covered with garbage, but it’s actually covered with the material traces of homes that people had to abandon when Moses forced them out.”

Nagle is in her fifties. She’s tall, slender, and athletic, and on the day of the field trip she was wearing a Brooklyn Cyclones baseball cap and sweatshirt. She used her iPad to take a group photo of her students, then sent them out to explore. One young woman said, “I feel like I’m in *National Geographic*. I need my Indiana Jones hat.” (Placing the beach in its exact historical and cultural context can be a challenge. The week before, a different student had observed to Nagle that some people who were alive in the nineteen-fifties might conceivably still be alive today.)

“To me, the most haunting things are the shoes,” Nagle said. “You see wear on the leather, so you know people wore them.” Some of the shoes emerge sole first from the bank; some lie half-buried in sand. There are virtually no sneakers. There are adjustable metal roller skates, the kind that children strapped to their shoes, and there are tangled clusters of nylon stockings, some of them so full of sand that they resemble enormous white sausages. The bottles—almost all of them glass—tinkle like wind chimes when the water knocks them around.

Among Bottle Beach regulars, a philosophical divide exists between the scavengers, who view the refuse as raw material for eBay, and the preservationists, who view it as a potential archeological trove. (Removing items is illegal, since the island is part of the national-park system, but people do it.) Nagle sides with the preservationists but sympathizes with the scavengers: she offered her students plastic bags.

“My favorite find ever was a vinyl squeeze bottle of Stopette deodorant,” she said. “Stopette was one of the first antiperspirants, and it was the primary sponsor of the TV show ‘What’s My Line?’” The bottle was an artifact of the time when plastics were beginning to replace glass in packaging and when Americans, encouraged by advertisers, were beginning to brood about their armpits. “The bottle was missing the cap, but was otherwise perfect,” she said. “I left it where I found it.”

—David Owen

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

## QUIET STORM

*Politics and play in the work of Sanford Biggers.*

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Three years ago, on a Saturday in spring, I wandered into a humid gallery just south of Canal Street. On display was a group exhibition called “Black Eye,” which included works by an impressive roster of established and emerging artists—Kehinde Wiley, Wangechi Mutu, Steve McQueen, Kerry James Marshall, Deana Lawson, David Hammons, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. The show, curated by Nicola Vassell, felt like a confirmation of my growing, and perhaps belated, realization that work by black artists had come to occupy an elevated position of regard in the art

world. A few months before the show, McQueen had won the Academy Award for Best Picture, for “Twelve Years a Slave.” A year later, Wiley’s first career retrospective, “A New Republic,” opened at the Brooklyn Museum to widespread acclaim. In October, 2016, a towering retrospective of Marshall’s work, “Mastery,” was the first genuine hit at the newly opened Met Breuer. In May of last year, an exhibition of seventeen hauntingly quiet portraits by Yiadom-Boakye, at the New Museum, was a surprise sensation; as with the Marshall show, pictures of the works clogged the Insta-

gram feeds of gallerygoers for weeks.

People arrived at “Black Eye” in steady waves, and viewed the art with scholarly quietude. The pieces were uniformly strong, but my favorite, by far, was one of the least assuming: an untitled photograph of modest size, tucked away in a corner, framed in gold. In it, a white woman eyed the camera teasingly, her blond hair drawn up into a high hump that slipped in cascades down her shoulders and back. A red-lipsticked smile cut a spear across her face. With one hand she touched her shoulder; she held the other behind her head. She wore a burgundy T-shirt with “MOREHOUSE,” the name of the all-male historically black college in Atlanta, printed across the front in white block letters. My reaction to the picture—embarrassing for my companion in the hushed space—was a loud, echoing laugh. I stood there looking for a while. The image was very funny, but what, exactly, was the joke?

Two years later, I went to Harlem to talk to Sanford Biggers, the polymathic artist who made the photograph. We met at a bar off Broadway, near the building that houses his spacious basement studio. It was August; outside, people strolled in the early-afternoon sun, carrying bags from Trader Joe’s. Biggers, forty-seven, is tall and broad-chested but walks with a graduate student’s shamle. He wore a T-shirt and jeans—and black nail polish, left over from his recent wedding. His wife, Arana Hankin, works in real-estate development; they met in 2010, at a public conversation between Biggers and the feminist performance artist Lorraine O’Grady, and began dating a few years later. The polish sparkled when he moved his hands, belying his otherwise understated presentation.

As Biggers sipped a beer, I told him how much I liked that photograph—how, for a while, I had used it as the background image on my laptop, and had tried, almost every day, to invent different scenarios for the woman and her incongruous shirt. Perhaps she appropriated it from a black boyfriend; the pose has a vaguely postcoital quality. Or maybe she ordered it online, to satisfy an itch for some small transgressive thrill: once a month or so, she puts it on and preens in front of her bathroom mirror. When I told Biggers these stories, he chuckled, and then reminded me that the woman

*Biggers’s art, layered with references to race and history, is sincere and ironic at once.*



might have a perfectly valid genealogical claim to Morehouse, his own alma mater.

"Man, have you seen pictures of those old H.B.C.U. leaders?" he asked. Biggers speaks in an even baritone, with clear, considered diction; his mouth is often set in the kind of slight upturn that seems on the verge of flowering into an open smile. He had a point: John Hope, Morehouse's first black president, could have passed for white without any trouble at all. (He looked a bit like the former Nebraska senator Chuck Hagel—and a bit like the white men who led Morehouse before him.) Only the one-drop rule and a sense of race loyalty kept Hope on the darker side of what his contemporary W. E. B. Du Bois called the Veil. "She could easily be one of their descendants," Biggers said. Then he shrugged, grinning widely, as if to say that the many possible meanings of the photo were precisely the point. Race, already absurd as a concept, has been pulled in too many directions by the forces of attraction and repulsion that exist between blacks and whites. Mixture makes it mean too many things.

Artists usually court controversy when their work is, or seems to be, stridently polemic, or purposely provocative. Think of Chris Ofili's dung-splattered black Virgin Mary, which Rudolph Giuliani, New York's mayor at the time, decried as anti-Catholic—or its older cousin "Piss Christ," by Andres Serrano, a photograph depicting a crucifix submerged in Serrano's tangerine-colored urine. But there is another potential offender: the artist or art work that doesn't seem to care *enough*, that fails to handle certain sensitive issues with sufficient weight. A recent piece by Biggers called "Laocoön" fits this more slippery category.

"Laocoön" is a huge balloon figure of Fat Albert, Bill Cosby's animated schoolyard hero, lying prone, with his eyeballs rolled halfway into his head. Air is gently pumped into the body, making it contract and expand slightly, as if laboring to breathe. The work's name is a reference to the Greek mythic figure who, in the Aeneid, is killed after trying to smash a hole in the Trojan Horse. It also recalls the ancient sculpture of Laocoön and his sons, writhing as they are attacked by serpents, which was excavated in the sixteenth century and which inspired Michelangelo and others to fur-

ther mine the human figure for its expressive, and tragic, possibilities. Biggers unveiled his sculpture at Miami Beach's Art Basel in December, 2015. Given the timing, it was fair to assume that the piece was in part a reference to the recent deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and other black men killed by police officers—and also, perhaps, a mordant joke about the increasingly intermingled state of entertainment and the news. Then, too, there was the growing awareness of the dozens of sexual assaults allegedly perpetrated by Cosby: an icon was dead, or dying.

"That piece was born out of a lifetime of this dysfunctional relationship between African-Americans and America—not anything that happened within the last four or five years," Biggers told me, declining to identify "Laocoön" as a response to any specific tragedy. His reticence, together with the sheer shock value and the pointed timing of the piece, earned him more consternation than praise. An essay in *ARTnews*, by the writer and curator Taylor Renee Aldridge, chided Biggers, arguing that he had "generally glossed over Brown—whose body, lying in the street, has become one of the default images of Black Lives Matter." Instead, Aldridge complained, Biggers "fell back on the image of Fat Albert, a comedic cartoon character," a move that Aldridge deemed "crass and irresponsible." It was an odd critique, suggesting that a work of art must narrow its focus, become more specific—that it must, in a sense, mean less.

Biggers is a relatively under-sung artist. Of the cohort from the "Black Eye" exhibition, he is among those still awaiting their "moment." His career has proceeded steadily, but somewhat diffusely; he works in a variety of media, and the results, though frequently arresting, are rarely, if ever, loud. In a period when overtly political material may be more respected, and coveted, than ever before, he is disinclined to nudge viewers toward conclusions, whether interpretive or emotional. (He mentioned to me more than once that he disliked writing wall text to accompany his pieces.) His desire not to be pinned down appears to spring from a kind of moral impulse: he wants the audience to do its share of the work. In the case of "Laocoön," what the public discussion seemed to miss, besides

the grim comedy of the piece, was that Biggers's determined silence about his real-world inspirations might help to expand the meaning of his work beyond the moment, and into the future.

Biggers was born in Los Angeles, in 1970, the son of a neurosurgeon father and a mother who worked as a teacher until deciding to raise her three children full time. Biggers's parents were raised in Houston, and attended the same high school; they moved west, in 1963, after deciding that Texas wouldn't be hospitable to a neurological practice headed by a black man. They were a stylish couple, popular among the growing black upper middle class in Los Angeles—they often entertained, or went out to parties at night. And they encouraged their son's artistic ambition, which became apparent early on. Sanford was the youngest child. His brother, Sam, is a retired college chemistry instructor, who now works as a tutor, and his sister, Shaun, is an ob-gyn. He had an older cousin, John Biggers, who was well known in the sixties for creating large-scale works, often murals, that mixed West African iconography with highly intricate, often dizzying geometric patterns.

In high school, Biggers drew and painted and listened to music, his tastes guided, via occasional eavesdropping, by Sam. "He had what the musicians call big ears," Sam told me. "He had ears for all kinds of music. He picked it up like a sponge—even when he was three or four, he'd be riffing on Sly Stone, singing around the house." Sanford now leads and plays keys for a band called Moon Medicin, whose repertoire verges on performance art: often clad in extravagant costumes, the group plays extended funk-soul grooves in front of a huge screen, which blasts out found photographs and video clips to go with the tunes. Sam also introduced his brother to standup comedy, which Biggers has lately come to recognize as an important, if indirect, influence on his art. He had been thinking a lot about Dave Chappelle, he told me. "I'm a big fan of his work, and Chris Rock's—all the way back to Richard Pryor and Dick Gregory, Redd Foxx. I grew up sneaking and listening to my brother's records of all that stuff. It defined a lot of culture for me."

As Biggers deals with ever more

harrowing real-world materials, comedy offers him a way to destabilize the work, complicate it. This past August, he saw Chappelle perform at Radio City Music Hall; afterward, he e-mailed me a capsule review: “Lots of trans jokes, which was sorta weird, but he wove it into a comparison to black civil rights. F’d up.”

The next day, we met in Harlem again, this time near the National Black Theatre, where he had set up a temporary studio in preparation for a solo gallery show, his first in New York, to be held at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, in Chelsea. We went to a loud bistro near 125th Street, and, as a procession of fire trucks barrelled up Lenox Avenue, I asked him about the challenges in getting humor across in visual art.

“Satire works in standup, film, rap, for sure,” he said. “But not as fluidly, really, in visual art.”

“But why do you think that is?” I asked. Do people simply not go to museums expecting to laugh, I wondered? Or is there some inherent formal difficulty in making jokes—which often depend on the stable ground of shared references—through images?

“Maybe the audiences aren’t necessarily coming for that,” Biggers said, looking out the window. “And a lot of times, I think, black artists can be held back—not being able to be abstract, humorous, visceral, abject.”

He was quiet for a moment. “Some of this might be my own historical sense of restriction, but the work has to do so many things when it comes from a person of color,” he said. “And comedy can be misread, and misinterpreted, and become problematic. But that’s what art does: it problematizes things. So I think I’m finding more comfort in that.”

These days, star artists tend to climb an increasingly regular professional ladder: name-brand art school, group shows, gallery courtship, solo début, and a lucrative stream of studio visits by art-world pilgrims. Biggers has made his living through teaching, and has financed his work by winning fellowships in America and abroad. “I’ve gotten really, *really* good at applying for those things,” he said. After Morehouse, he did short stints at the Maryland Institute College of Art and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, in Maine, before earning

a master’s degree in fine arts from the Art Institute of Chicago. Since then, fellowships have taken him to Berlin, Warsaw, Budapest, Vancouver, and all over the States. In 2000, he was one of the World Views Artists in Residence at the World Trade Center, an experience that afforded him “great exposure,” he says; he left the residency in the spring of 2001, after being offered his first two museum shows, at the Matrix Program for Contemporary Art, in Berkeley, and at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. On September 11th, another of the World Views artists, Biggers’s friend Michael Richards, was killed in the Trade Center’s north tower. He had stayed overnight to work on a sculpture in a studio on the ninety-second floor.

A few days after our lunch on Lenox Avenue, Biggers and I met at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he had contributed to a small show called “Talking Pictures,” a series of smartphone photo “conversations” between artists. Biggers had tossed darkly lit captures back and forth with Shawn Peters, a cinematographer and an old friend from Morehouse. We breezed through the iPad slide show; he was anxious to walk me around the Asian wing, his favorite section of the museum. (In a series that he began in 2000, traditional sand-drawn Buddhist and Hindu mandalas are reimagined as hip-hop-inflected dance floors, on which Biggers invites viewers to break-dance. In 2003, he pursued his interest in Zen Buddhism during a residency in Japan; Zen practice has since been a recurring theme in his work.)

We stopped in the wing’s echoing main lobby, where tourists craned their necks in order to snap pictures of huge stone sculptures of emperors on thrones. “I love these,” he said. Such figures had stoked his interest in “power objects”—sculptures that, in some religious cultures, are thought to have special metaphysical significance, with the power to ward off danger for those who made them, or visit it upon others. That interest led him to start collecting small wooden African statues of human figures in various stately poses. He dipped the statues in wax and, in 2015, took them to a clearing outside Los Angeles, where he “resculpted” them by riddling them with bullets. He recorded video of the process for future installations. He didn’t do the shooting

himself—“That didn’t feel exactly right,” he said. He asked his longtime director of photography to pull the trigger. After the shooting, Biggers cast some of the figures in bronze and coated others with ferric nitrate.

In an exhibition of the figures, called “BAM,” he was somewhat less vague than he was with “Laocoön,” which debuted a few months later. The “BAM” sculptures had names like “For Michael” and “For Sandra”—as in Brown and Bland—and they were praised by critics in sombre terms. Beneath the topicality, though, was a bit of art-historical humor. Biggers had become interested in the German critic Carl Einstein and his 1915 book, “Negerplastik,” the grand purpose of which was to introduce Western audiences to African sculpture. (Einstein knew Picasso, who had gone through an African period a few years earlier.) The book is full of black-and-white pictures of such works, but the sculptures have been denuded of the hats, beads, and feathers that originally adorned them. Einstein’s photographic plates put forth an entirely new, and historically bogus, sculptural corpus, one that mars our idea of African art even today. It also created an odd incentive for a class of African artisans and merchants that sprouted up during the twentieth century: they started to make serious-looking, monochromatic tchotchkes that recalled Einstein’s plates, happy to regurgitate the mistake—and to sell the results to tourists.

“It’s sort of hilarious, actually,” Biggers said.

Much of Biggers’s work strives for a balance between formal play and an interest in race and history that manages to be at once sincere and ironic. An older work, “Lotus,” an etching on a circular pane of glass, made in 2007 and included in a small solo show in 2011 at the Brooklyn Museum, looks from afar like a perfectly round white blossom. But the viewer, drawing nearer, finds that the flower’s long petals are actually the hulls of slave ships, full of tightly packed human cargo. The first of Biggers’s pieces to garner serious critical attention was a video installation that was included in “Freestyle,” a group show at the Studio Museum in Harlem, in 2001, curated by Christine Y. Kim and Thelma Golden, the museum’s director and lead curator.



(In the year before the show, Biggers had been a participant in the museum's well-regarded Artist-in-Residence program.) The video was simple and almost sweet: in a split screen, we see two middle-class birthday parties, not unlike the ones Biggers must remember; one family is black and the other is white.

"What I want to do is code-switch," Biggers told me, sitting on a bench in the Asian wing, looking at a rock garden. He often talks with his hands, drawing invisible figures and gently slashing the air. At the mention of code-switching, he made two circles, one with each index finger, then drew his fingers closer together. "To have there be layers of history and politics," he went on, "but also this heady, arty stuff—inside jokes, black humor—that you might have to take a while to research if you want to really *get it*." The result of this mixture is a beguiling tone that stretches across Biggers's eclectic body of work: an almost placid surface giving way, over time, to a dark, ambiguous joke.

"I don't want to just necessarily shock," he said. "If shock happens here and there, fine. If spectacle happens here and there, sure. But it's not spectacle for the sake of spectacle."

He recalled a review for the Brooklyn Museum show that included "Lotus." "The writer wanted more David Hammons and Kara Walker," he said. "Which I thought was odd—the idea that I would just do what they do." He rolled his eyes and shrugged. "They weren't ready to see something subdued, or not be *shocked*."

I asked Eugenie Tsai, the curator of that solo show, what accounted for Biggers's relative obscurity. "People like to pigeonhole artists," she said. "And Sanford's practice is quite nuanced and rich and broad, so you can't just say, 'He does *that*.' I think that has worked against him in terms of creating a kind of 'brand' that's easily recognizable."

The review that Biggers complained about was by Ken Johnson, an art critic for the *Times*. A year later, Johnson was the subject of an open letter, signed by a host of artists and critics, accusing him of bias against artists of color and women, citing several previous reviews. Johnson's references to Hammons and Walker do seem clumsy, as though any piece about a new black artist must compare him with other, better-known black artists.



*"Let me interrupt your expertise with my confidence."*

Still, Johnson ended on a hopeful note. "Mr. Biggers is beginning to deliver on his promises," he wrote. "His best may be yet to come."

Much of Biggers's work is commissioned, and it is often site-specific. These projects tend to be sculptural and audiovisual installations, and are often large in scale: during the World Trade Center residency, he made a huge, leather-clad Afro pick designed to serve as the headboard for a bed with red satin sheets; for a series of public installations in Chicago, he made a billboard featuring a bright-red set of grinning lips, adapted from an earlier sculpture called "Cheshire."

Between such gigs, Biggers threads together series of smaller pieces, like the "BAM" figures. Partly to break up this routine, and to work in a medium less dependent on the generosity of institutional patrons, he recently began painting on quilts. He first had the idea in 2009, after he was commissioned by Hidden City, an arts organization in Philadelphia, to create work to be shown at the Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church. In the nineteenth century, the church served as a stop along the Underground Railroad. In his research on the church, and on the Railroad, Biggers read about the legend—spurious, as it happens—of quilts that functioned as signposts for slaves, carrying coded messages from one fugi-

tive to the next: "Keep moving," "Turn back," "These people are safe." Biggers had moved away from painting, but in the quilts he saw a painterly challenge—he'd add his own codes to these already coded fields, and in this way double down on the communicative possibilities of visual abstraction. He started collecting old quilts, mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and added his marks.

Biggers's latest quilts made up the bulk of the Boesky show. "Sanford was on my radar, particularly after his impressive show at the Brooklyn Museum, but I assumed he was represented," Marianne Boesky told me in an e-mail. He'd just won the Rome Prize—he'd go to Italy soon after the opening—and, earlier in the year, he'd been an honoree at "Art for Life," the annual fund-raiser for Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, the art-education nonprofit run by Russell Simmons's art-minded older brother, Danny. Among the other honorees, fêted at a party in the Hamptons, were the pioneering rapper Chuck D and Stephen G. Hill, the former programming director of BET.

Biggers called his show "Selah," after the ancient Hebrew word that appears as a kind of poetic interjection throughout the Psalms, and which is thought to have been a musical notation designating a rest. In the churches I grew up in, a preacher or a teacher would deliver the crux of the lesson, the part designed to

reach past narrative and deliver a prick to the listener's heart, and then, softly, say "Selah," as if to insist: Think about *that* for a second, before we move on. The word, applied to Biggers's work, might act as an acknowledgment of a stubborn but essential quietness, engineered to demand a pause from the viewer. As images proliferate on Instagram and other social-media feeds, threatening to replace the impulse to visit museums or galleries, Biggers is adamant about the necessity of seeing art in person. For him, a successful piece "sort of stops time," he said. "Things slow down, they get quiet, and there is literally, to me, a sort of aura, or energy, that comes out of the work."

On the evening of the "Selah" opening, black-clad gallery-hoppers in gaudy glasses, dreadlocks, and interesting hats crisscrossed the Chelsea sidewalks. Several shows opened in the neighborhood that night, including Kara Walker's, which had already received several glowing reviews. The exhibition at Boesky was relatively spare, just a dozen or so works across two rooms. There were the quilts, which hung an inch or two away from the blank gallery walls, seeming to float, looking in almost every sense—give or take a neon brushstroke or an angular, clashing new pattern—like exalted versions of ordinary blankets, ready for someone's bed. One was named "Chorus for Paul Mooney," after the great standup comedian and Pryor collaborator whose act hinges on barely controlled racial anguish. Near the quilts, multiple video screens showed the "BAM" figures under fire, splintering as the bullets made contact.

The most prominent piece was a large sculpture, also called "Selah," which takes its shape from one of the "BAM" figures, with an ovoid face and a hollow interior. It is covered in patchwork, the colors of which are darker and more autumnal the closer they get to the floor. Near the top the patches are bright variations on red, white, and blue; the figure's arms reach upward. Like the smaller figure from which the piece is extrapolated, the sculpture has undergone some kind of violence: one side of the face is exploded, and the surface of the interior is coated with glitter. Later, I spoke with Tsai, who was excited about the show. "It just seemed to touch on everything he can do," she said.

The gallery filled slowly at first, but soon it was almost impossible to carry on a conversation over the chatter, or to move without bumping into somebody. Every once in a while, the sound of gunfire—from the "BAM" installation—made people wince. A dense, smartphone-wielding crowd formed around a piece called "Khemetstry," which features fabric patches affixed to a starlike three-dimensional form, hollow in the middle and open like the beak of a Technicolor bird. Something about its geometric complexity made it perfect for social media, Biggers's preference for physical presence notwithstanding. Viewers jockeyed for angles and aimed their cameras.

Biggers arrived wearing all black, with gold jewelry and gold-rimmed shades. He held court for a while, shaking hands, accepting congratulations. His outfit reminded me of a conversation we'd had a few weeks earlier, about artists and self-presentation. I'd asked if he ever felt pressure to build a persona that somehow mirrored the experience of looking at his work. He'd said, sounding rueful, "I've been in so many situations in the last three years, at shows where my work is, and I'll be with friends. People will come up and start talking to my friends, because my friends look—they've got these huge fro-hawks, and Mohawks, and big hair, and rings, and all kinds of stuff. And they're, like, 'Oh, I love your work. You're the artist, right?' Because my friends look like artists. And I always end up being overlooked!" Over the summer, when Biggers was honored in the Hamptons, he was introduced by the curator and professor Isolde Brielmaier. "I affectionately like to refer to Sanford as the quiet storm," she said.

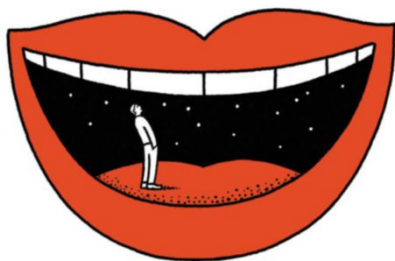
Another piece that attracted a crowd at "Selah" was called "Overstood." Four small black figures are positioned a foot or so away from the wall. Stretching from the figures, up and onto the wall, are long shadows rendered in black sequins, culminating in four faces, which Biggers drew with his fingers, flaking over the sequins and exposing their gold undersides. He found the faces while searching through images on Google, which is something of a pastime for him. The source photograph is of the Black Panther chairman Bobby Seale and a

man named George Murray, who, when the picture was taken, had just been fired from the faculty of San Francisco State University, after joining the Panthers and advocating that black students take up arms against racist violence. It was 1968. Seale and Murray are flanked by Ben Stewart, the president of San Francisco State's Black Student Union, and an unnamed onlooker. They crowd around a microphone at a press conference decrying Murray's firing and urging protests, which eventually spread across the country. Hundreds of students were arrested, and some were seriously injured. The protests led to the establishment of black-studies departments, including one at San Francisco State.

On his way to the show, Biggers got a text message from a friend, Tangie Murray, the executive director of Rush Philanthropic. George Murray is her father. This was news to Biggers. After she sent George a picture of herself standing next to "Overstood," he and his daughter and Biggers texted back and forth about the image and the work. Later, George collected some of his thoughts and memories in an e-mail. "We took this picture after we had a four-person presentation featuring Bobby and Huey," he wrote, referring to Seale and his Panther co-founder, Huey Newton. "That was the last time the four of us were together. . . . then they locked us all up. First Huey, shortly after that lecture, then me, and then Bobby. Before they got me and Bobby, they got Dr. King permanently!"

At the opening, people took turns posing for pictures in front of "Overstood." Seale, Murray, and Stewart sparkled over their heads, in stark, almost eerie contrast to the more withholding fare elsewhere in the gallery. The little figures on the ground were shaped like the "BAM" figure in the center of the gallery: power objects casting Black Power shadows. The promotional copy for the show had provided some context for "Overstood," and noted that the work might "remind us that the pursuit of social justice and equality remains just as relevant today as it was fifty years ago, and in the fifty years prior and prior to that." But Biggers insisted that he chose the faces before knowing their full history. "I just liked the way they were composed," he said. "That came first." ♦





## THE MYSTERIES OF HUMOR

BY JACK HANDEY

Why is it boring when your friend Don tells you about his wife leaving him but you laugh when you find out that she left him for another man named Don?

Why is a funny cowboy dance hysterical but a funny sailor dance confusing?

If a busload of circus clowns is travelling through Mexico, is there any chance they will survive?

When you see someone sinking in quicksand, is it funnier if you know the person?

Did the Vikings have jokes, and, if so, were they surprisingly gentle?

Is pointing and laughing something we do naturally, or do we have to learn it? Likewise, can someone without a sense of humor be taught to have one, or must it be beaten into him?

How long should you laugh at your boss's joke? A half hour or a full hour?

For there to be comedy, must there also be tragedy? For the comedy of someone heckling an actor, must there also be the tragedy of the person being escorted from the theatre?

If your friend is struck by lightning and he seems to be all right, but his hair is smoking, is it O.K. to laugh?

Why does Marta still laugh when I put on my T-shirt backward, even though I've done it hundreds of times?

Are some things never funny, like a man accidentally chopping off his finger with a hatchet, and wrapping up the finger and taking it to the hospital, then discovering that it isn't his finger but one of the Vienna sausages he was having for lunch, and then eating the sausage?

Is there humor on other planets, and

is it so advanced that it makes our fart jokes look crude and primitive?

Why is a man slipping on a banana peel funny, but not as funny as a man choking on a banana peel?

If a man finds a message in a bottle, is it funnier if instead of a message it contains a tiny little banana peel?

Can something be true and funny at the same time, like "Your head looks like a melon"?

Shouldn't a person who tells a joke in a bar and gets no laughs be entitled to a free beer?

If a tree falls in the forest, on top of an old man with a walking stick, does he make a sound?

What is funnier: a dad trying to get his kid's kite up in the air but getting it caught in a tree, or the dad trying to get the kite down with a rake and accidentally tearing it to pieces?

Is there a story that would best illustrate what humor is, and, if so, what would that story be?

Do insects have a sense of humor, and does it involve stinging you?

Will there ever come a time when we won't need laughter, when we'll be sitting on soft pillows, wearing our shimmering metallic robes, drinking our soothing space tea, and perhaps one of us will reach for a piece of cheese housed in an ancient device known as a mousetrap, and the mousetrap will snap on the person's finger, and he'll let out a yowl of pain, and the rest of us won't spit the tea out of our mouths but will just stare blankly?

Will that time ever come? Let us hope so. ♦



### It's Raining Cats and Dogs

Even the most torrential downpour hasn't got a chance against George Booth's irascible cats and dogs. Beautifully made collapsible umbrella, featuring a steel-reinforced black shaft, fibreglass-reinforced ribs, and a 43" canopy.

**\$49.95**

To order, please visit  
**[newyorkerstore.com](http://newyorkerstore.com)**

THE  
NEW YORKER

## FEELING LOW

*The psychology of inequality.*

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



In 2016, the highest-paid employee of the State of California was Jim Mora, the head coach of U.C.L.A.'s football team. (He has since been fired.) That year, Mora pulled in \$3.58 million. Coming in second, with a salary of \$2.93 million, was Cuonzo Martin, at the time the head coach of the men's basketball team at the University of California, Berkeley. Victor Khalil, the chief dentist at the Department of State Hospitals, made six hundred and eighty-six thousand dollars; Anne Neville, the director of the California Research Bureau, earned a hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars; and John Smith, a seasonal clerk at the Franchise Tax Board, earned twelve thousand nine hundred dollars.

I learned all this from a database maintained by the Sacramento *Bee*. The database, which is open to the public, is searchable by name and by department, and contains precise salary information for the more than three hundred thousand people who work for California. Today, most state employees probably know about the database. But that wasn't the case when it was first created, in 2008. This made possible an experiment.

The experiment, conducted by four economists, was designed to test rival theories of inequity. According to one theory, the so-called rational-updating model, people assess their salaries in terms of opportunities. If they discover that they are being paid less than their co-workers, they

will "update" their projections about future earnings and conclude that their prospects of a raise are good. Conversely, people who learn that they earn more than their co-workers will be discouraged by that news. They'll update their expectations in the opposite direction.

According to a rival theory, people respond to inequity not rationally but emotionally. If they discover that they're being paid less than their colleagues, they won't see this as a signal to expect a raise but as evidence that they are underappreciated. (The researchers refer to this as the "relative income" model.) By this theory, people who learn that their salaries are at the low end will be pissed. Those who discover that they're at the high end will be gratified.

The economists conducting the study sent an e-mail to thousands of employees at three University of California schools—Santa Cruz, San Diego, and Los Angeles—alerting them to the existence of the *Bee's* database. This nudge produced a spike in visits to the Web site as workers, in effect, peeked at one another's paychecks.

A few days later, the researchers sent a follow-up e-mail, this one with questions. "How satisfied are you with your job?" it asked. "How satisfied are you with your wage/salary on this job?" They also sent the survey to workers who hadn't been nudged toward the database. Then they compared the results. What they found didn't conform to either theory, exactly.

As the relative-income model predicted, those who'd learned that they were earning less than their peers were ticked off. Compared with the control group, they reported being less satisfied with their jobs and more interested in finding new ones. But the relative-income model broke down when it came to those at the top. Workers who discovered that they were doing better than their colleagues evinced no pleasure. They were merely indifferent. As the economists put it in a paper that they eventually wrote about the study, access to the database had a "negative effect on workers paid below the median for their unit and occupation" but "no effect on workers paid above median."

The message the economists took from their research was that employers "have a strong incentive" to keep salaries secret.

*What's most damaging about being poor, Keith Payne argues, is feeling poor.*



Assuming that California workers are representative of the broader population, the experiment also suggests a larger, more disturbing conclusion. In a society where economic gains are concentrated at the top—a society, in other words, like our own—there are no real winners and a multitude of losers.

Keith Payne, a psychologist, remembers the exact moment when he learned he was poor. He was in fourth grade, standing in line in the cafeteria of his elementary school, in western Kentucky. Payne didn't pay for meals—his family's income was low enough that he qualified for free school lunch—and normally the cashier just waved him through. But on this particular day there was someone new at the register, and she asked Payne for a dollar twenty-five, which he didn't have. He was mortified. Suddenly, he realized that he was different from the other kids, who were walking around with cash in their pockets.

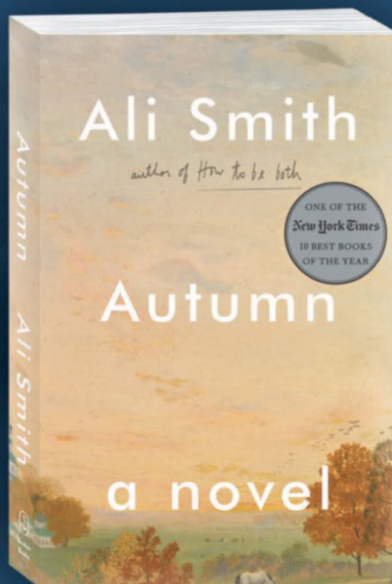
"That moment changed everything for me," Payne writes, in *The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die*. "Although in strictly economic terms nothing had happened—Payne's family had just as much (or as little) money as it had the day before—that afternoon in the cafeteria he became aware of which rung on the ladder he occupied. He grew embarrassed about his clothes, his way of talking, even his hair, which was cut at home with a bowl. 'Always a shy kid, I became almost completely silent at school,' he recalls.

Payne is now a professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has come to believe that what's really damaging about being poor, at least in a country like the United States—where, as he notes, even most people living below the poverty line possess TVs, microwaves, and cell phones—is the subjective experience of *feeling* poor. This feeling is not limited to those in the bottom quintile; in a world where people measure themselves against their neighbors, it's possible to earn good money and still feel deprived. "Unlike the rigid columns of numbers that make up a bank ledger, status is always a moving target, because it is defined by ongoing comparisons to others," Payne writes.

Feeling poor, meanwhile, has consequences that go well beyond feeling. People

# Fascinating Reads

## New in Paperback



ONE OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES*  
10 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Man Booker Prize Finalist

**"Beautiful, subtle...."**

Brimming with humanity and bending,  
despite everything, toward hope."

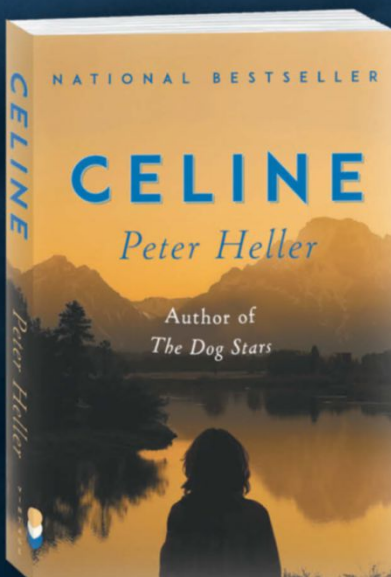
—*The New York Review of Books*

A *New York Magazine* and  
NPR Best Book of the Year

**"Remind[s] us of  
her brilliance**

as a stylist, social commentator  
and observer."

—*The Washington Post*

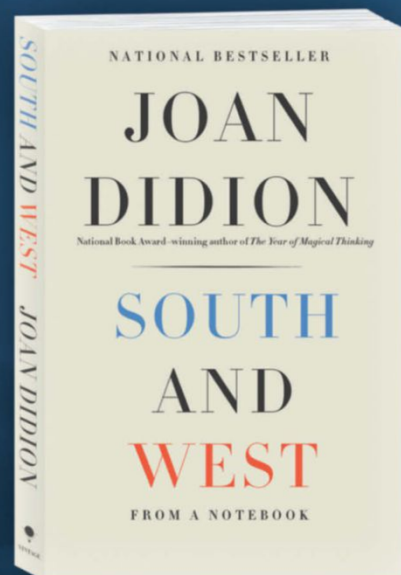


An *Esquire* Best Book of the Year

*Entertainment Weekly's*  
The Must List: Top 10 Things  
We Love This Week —

**"Gorgeously wrought...**

equal parts character study and mystery."

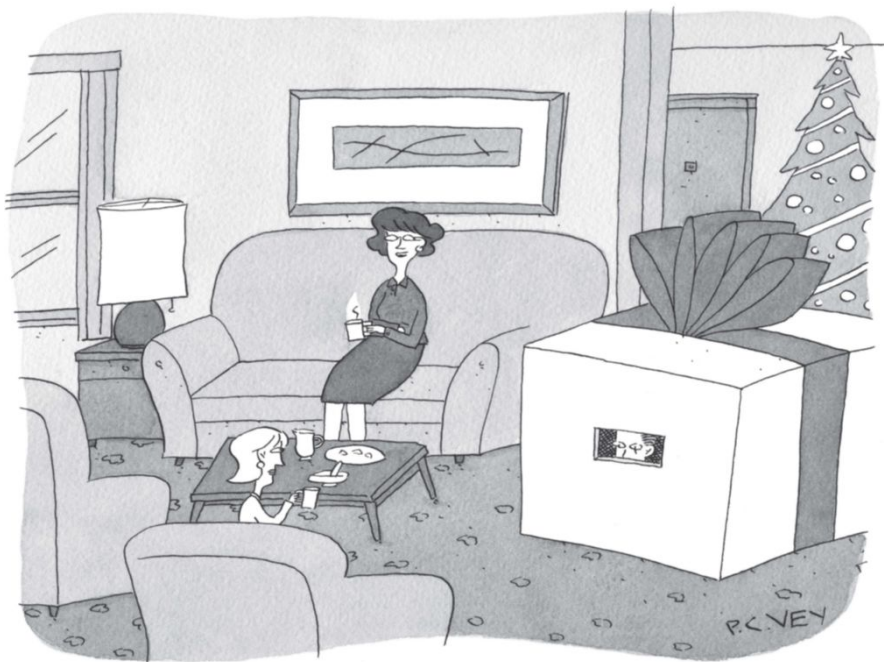


ALSO AVAILABLE IN EBOOK

VINTAGE

Read excerpts at [VintageAnchor.com](http://VintageAnchor.com)

ANCHOR



*"Every year he regifts himself to me."*

who see themselves as poor make different decisions, and, generally, worse ones. Consider gambling. Spending two bucks on a Powerball ticket, which has roughly a one-in-three-hundred-million chance of paying out, is never a good bet. It's especially ill-advised for those struggling to make ends meet. Yet low-income Americans buy a disproportionate share of lottery tickets, so much so that the whole enterprise is sometimes referred to as a "tax on the poor."

One explanation for this is that poor people engage in riskier behavior, which is why they are poor in the first place. By Payne's account, this way of thinking gets things backward. He cites a study on gambling performed by Canadian psychologists. After asking participants a series of probing questions about their finances, the researchers asked them to rank themselves along something called the Normative Discretionary Income Index. In fact, the scale was fictitious and the scores were manipulated. It didn't matter what their finances actually looked like: some of the participants were led to believe that they had more discretionary income than their peers and some were led to believe the opposite. Finally, participants were given twenty dollars and the choice to either pocket it or gamble it on a computer

card game. Those who believed they ranked low on the scale were much more likely to risk the money on the card game. Or, as Payne puts it, "feeling poor made people more willing to roll the dice."

In another study, this one conducted by Payne and some colleagues, participants were divided into two groups and asked to make a series of bets. For each bet, they were offered a low-risk/low-reward option (say, a hundred-per-cent chance of winning fifteen cents) and a high-risk/high-reward option (a ten-per-cent chance of winning a dollar-fifty). Before the exercise began, the two groups were told different stories (once again, fictitious) about how previous participants had fared. The first group was informed that the spread in winnings between the most and the least successful players was only a few cents, the second that the gap was a lot wider. Those in the second group went on to place much chancier bets than those in the first. The experiment, Payne contends, "provided the first evidence that inequality *itself* can cause risky behavior."

People's attitude toward race, too, he argues, is linked to the experience of deprivation. Here Payne cites work done by psychologists at N.Y.U., who offered subjects ten dollars with which to play an

online game. Some of the subjects were told that, had they been more fortunate, they would have received a hundred dollars. The subjects, all white, were then shown pairs of faces and asked which looked "most black." All the images were composites that had been manipulated in various ways. Subjects in the "unfortunate" group, on average, chose images that were darker than those the control group picked. "Feeling disadvantaged magnified their perception of racial differences," Payne writes.

"The Broken Ladder" is full of studies like this. Some are more convincing than others, and, not infrequently, Payne's inferences seem to run ahead of the data. But the wealth of evidence that he amasses is compelling. People who are made to feel deprived see themselves as less competent. They are more susceptible to conspiracy theories. And they are more likely to have medical problems. A study of British civil servants showed that where people ranked themselves in terms of status was a better predictor of their health than their education level or their actual income was.

All of which leads Payne to worry about where we're headed. In terms of per-capita income, the U.S. ranks near the top among nations. But, thanks to the growing gap between the one per cent and everyone else, the subjective effect is of widespread impoverishment. "Inequality so mimics poverty in our minds that the United States of America . . . has a lot of features that better resemble a developing nation than a superpower," he writes.

Rachel Sherman is a professor of sociology at the New School, and, like Payne, she studies inequality. But Sherman's focus is much narrower. "Although images of the wealthy proliferate in the media, we know very little about what it is like to *be* wealthy in the current historical moment," she writes in the introduction to "Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence."

Sherman's first discovery about the wealthy is that they don't want to talk to her. Subjects who agree to be interviewed suddenly stop responding to her e-mails. One woman begs off, saying she's "swamped" with her children; Sherman subsequently learns that the kids are at camp. After a lot of legwork, she manages to sit down with fifty members of



the *haut monde* in and around Manhattan. Most have family incomes of more than five hundred thousand dollars a year, and about half have incomes of more than a million dollars a year or assets of more than eight million dollars, or both. (At least, this is what they tell Sherman; after a while, she comes to believe that they are underreporting their earnings.) Her subjects are so concerned about confidentiality that Sherman omits any details that might make them identifiable to those who have visited their brownstones or their summer places.

"I poked into bathrooms with soaking tubs or steam showers" is as far as she goes. "I conducted interviews in open kitchens, often outfitted with white Carrara marble or handmade tiles."

A second finding Sherman makes, which perhaps follows from the first, is that the privileged prefer not to think of themselves that way. One woman, who has an apartment overlooking the Hudson, a second home in the Hamptons, and a household income of at least two million dollars a year, tells Sherman that she considers herself middle class. "I feel like, no matter what you have, somebody has about a hundred times that," she explains. Another woman with a similar household income, mostly earned by her corporate-lawyer husband, describes her family's situation as "fine."

"I mean, there are all the bankers that are heads and heels, you know, way above us," she says. A third woman, with an even higher household income—two and a half million dollars a year—objects to Sherman's use of the word "affluent."

"'Affluent' is relative," the woman observes. Some friends of hers have recently flown off on vacation on a private plane. "That's affluence," she says.

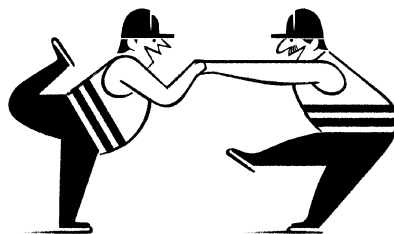
This sort of talk dovetails neatly with Payne's work. If affluence is in the eye of the beholder, then even the super-rich, when they compare their situation with that of the ultra-rich, can feel sorry for themselves. The woman who takes exception to the word "affluent" makes a point of placing herself at the "very, very bottom" of the one per cent. "The disparity between the bottom of the 1 per cent and the top of the 1 percent is huge," she observes.

Sherman construes things differently. Her subjects, she believes, are reluctant to categorize themselves as affluent be-

cause of what the label implies. "These New Yorkers are trying to see themselves as 'good people,'" she writes. "Good people work hard. They live prudently, within their means. . . . They don't brag or show off." At another point, she observes that she was "surprised" at how often her subjects expressed conflicted emotions about spending. "Over time, I came to see that these were often moral conflicts about *having* privilege in general."

Whatever its source—envy or ethics—the discomfort that Sherman documents matches the results of the University of California study. Inequity is, apparently, asymmetrical. For all the distress it causes those on the bottom, it brings relatively little joy to those at the top.

As any parent knows, children watch carefully when goodies are divvied up. A few years ago, a team of psychologists set out to study how kids too young to wield the word "unfair" would respond to unfairness. They recruited a bunch of preschoolers and grouped them in pairs. The children were offered some blocks to play with and then, after a while, were asked to put them away. As a reward for tidying up, the kids were given stickers. No matter how much each child had contributed to the cleanup effort, one received four stickers and the other two. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children shouldn't be expected



to grasp the idea of counting before the age of four. But even three-year-olds seemed to understand when they'd been screwed. Most of the two-sticker recipients looked enviously at the holdings of their partners. Some said they wanted more. A number of the four-sticker recipients also seemed dismayed by the distribution, or perhaps by their partners' protests, and handed over some of their winnings. "We can . . . be confident that these actions were guided by

an understanding of equality, because in all cases they offered one and only one sticker, which made the outcomes equal," the researchers reported. The results, they concluded, show that "the emotional response to unfairness emerges very early."

If this emotional response is experienced by toddlers, it suggests that it may be hardwired—a product of evolution rather than of culture. Scientists at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, outside Atlanta, work with brown capuchin monkeys, which are native to South America. The scientists trained the monkeys to exchange a token for a slice of cucumber. Then they paired the monkeys up, and offered one a better reward—a grape. The monkeys that continued to get cucumbers, which earlier they'd munched on cheerfully, were incensed. Some stopped handing over their tokens. Others refused to take the cucumbers or, in a few cases, threw the slices back at the researchers. Like humans, capuchin monkeys, the researchers wrote, "seem to measure reward in relative terms."

Preschoolers, brown capuchin monkeys, California state workers, college students recruited for psychological experiments—everyone, it seems, resents inequity. This is true even though what counts as being disadvantaged varies from place to place and from year to year. As Payne points out, Thomas Jefferson, living at Monticello without hot water or overhead lighting, would, by the standards of contemporary America, be considered "poorer than the poor." No doubt inequity, which, by many accounts, is a precondition for civilization, has been a driving force behind the kinds of innovations that have made indoor plumbing and electricity, not to mention refrigeration, central heating, and Wi-Fi, come, in the intervening centuries, to seem necessities in the U.S.

Still, there are choices to be made. The tax bill recently approved by Congress directs, in ways both big and small, even more gains to the country's plutocrats. Supporters insist that the measure will generate so much prosperity that the poor and the middle class will also end up benefitting. But even if this proves true—and all evidence suggests that it will not—the measure doesn't address the real problem. It's not greater wealth but greater equity that will make us all feel richer. ♦

## NO REFUGE

*For some immigrants, deportation from the U.S. is a death sentence.*

BY SARAH STILLMAN

On June 9, 2009, just after 2 A.M., Laura S. left the restaurant where she waitressed, in Pharr, Texas, and drove off in her white Chevy. She was in an unusually hopeful mood. Her twenty-third birthday was nine days away, and she and her nineteen-year-old cousin, Elizabeth, had been discussing party plans at the restaurant. They'd decided to have coolers of beer, a professional d.j., and dancing after Laura put her three sons to bed. Now they were heading home, and giving two of Laura's friends a ride, with a quick detour for hamburgers. Elizabeth said that, as they neared the highway, a cop flashed his lights at them. The officer, Nazario Solis III, claimed that Laura had been driving between lanes and asked to see her license and proof of insurance.

Laura had neither. She'd lived in the United States undocumented her whole adult life.

"Do you have your residence card?" Solis asked.

"No," Laura said, glancing anxiously at her cousin and her friends. Solis questioned them, too. Only Elizabeth had a visa, which she fished out of her purse. Solis directed the others to get out of the car. "I'm calling Border Patrol," he said—an unusual move, at the time, for a small-town cop in South Texas.

Laura panicked. At five feet two inches and barely a hundred pounds, she looked younger than her age. She often wore tube tops and short shorts, and styled her hair in a girlish bob. Her affect was "attached to childhood," her older brother told me; she collected porcelain dolls, and loved Japanese anime and Saturday-morning cartoons. Laura's friends saw her trembling. Like her, they had kids who were U.S. citizens and steady jobs they didn't want to lose, but they knew that Laura's fear was distinct. She had an ex-husband

across the border, in Reynosa, Mexico, who had promised to kill her if she returned.

"I can't be sent back to Mexico," Laura told Solis, beginning to cry. "I have a protection order against my ex—please, just let me call my mom and she'll bring you the paperwork."

Laura's two-year-old had an operation scheduled for later that week, to remove an abscess in his neck, and Laura also told Solis about that. "I need to be here," she begged, in Spanish. In English, Elizabeth detailed the threats from Laura's ex, Sergio. "You can't do this," Elizabeth said. "He'll kill her."

"Sorry," Solis replied, shrugging. "I already called." (Solis could not be reached for comment. He was later sent to prison for unrelated convictions, including bribery, extortion, and drug conspiracy.)

Laura had started dating Sergio when she was eighteen, and he soon became physically abusive. After a particularly horrific night the previous spring, when Sergio assaulted her, Laura had finally called the police, and cooperated with them to secure his arrest. He was later deported. In the year since then, Laura had tried to create a normal childhood for her sons. She shared a small trailer with Elizabeth and the boys near the Sharyland Plantation, a gated community of houses with lima-bean-shaped swimming pools and Roman-pillared porches which advertised its "delicate scent of hibiscus and bougainvillea flowers." Sometimes she'd dress the boys in cowboy outfits, and use the neighbors' sheep and horses as their personal petting zoo. At night, she'd sneak into the citrus groves and pick oranges for breakfast, humming her favorite song, "Single Mom": "A single mother who does not worry, who will always fight to be a mom. Tell him she can be a mother without him." Still, Sergio haunted her.

In Mexico, he'd reportedly joined a local drug cartel. He often texted Laura death threats.

Laura and her friends waited by the roadside until a U.S. Border Patrol agent named Ramiro Garza arrived and ordered the three of them into his vehicle. Laura pleaded with Garza as he drove them to a nearby processing center, where Laura's friends saw her, under pressure, sign paperwork for a "voluntary return." Three hours later—after holding off until dawn "for safety reasons," Garza later explained, "since there were females involved"—he drove them to the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge, which crosses the Rio Grande and leads to Reynosa, a city so violent that the U.S. State Department forbids its employees there from venturing out after midnight.

As the sun rose, Laura stepped onto the bridge and into a much larger story, one that has launched a major legal battle over the U.S. government's duty to protect prospective deportees who plead for their lives. The lawsuit, and others like it, has implications for the treatment of hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have found refuge in the United States, and for whom deportation can be tantamount to death. Some, like Laura, are survivors of domestic violence seeking safety in the U.S. Others, like Elizabeth, are Dreamers, undocumented youths who were granted relief from deportation under President Obama, only to have their status imperilled by his successor. Still others are asylum seekers from Central America, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and elsewhere, who have fled gangs, climate crises, and armed conflicts, and then been misinformed or turned away by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers, some of whom have been emboldened under President Trump.

In the final moments before Laura





MAGNUM

*Laura's mother holds up a blouse that her daughter left behind in Texas, after a traffic stop led to her return to Mexico.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAROLYN DRAKE

THE NEW YORKER, JANUARY 15, 2018

33

crossed the bridge, she turned to Agent Garza. “When I am found dead,” she told him, “it will be on your conscience.”

When Donald Trump announced his bid for the Presidency, he made anxieties about whiteness under siege a signature part of his platform. On the campaign trail, he promised to “deport all criminal aliens and save American lives.” After his Inauguration, the Department of Homeland Security created an office for the victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, called VOICE—Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement. The office is compiling an online database to track “illegal alien perpetrators of crime.” (Data show that immigrants actually commit crimes at lower rates than U.S. citizens.) There is, however, no White House initiative to track a more sprawling set of legal violations involving immigrants—violations for which the U.S. government is largely responsible.

In the past decade, a growing number of immigrants fearing for their safety have come to the U.S., only to be sent back to their home countries—with the help of border agents, immigration judges, politicians, and U.S. voters—to violent deaths. Even as border apprehensions have dropped, the number of migrants coming to the U.S. because their lives are in danger has soared. According to the United Nations, since 2008 there has been a five-fold increase in asylum seekers just from Central America’s Northern Triangle—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—where organized gangs are dominant. In 2014, according to the U.N., Honduras had the world’s highest murder rate; El Salvador and Guatemala were close behind.

Politicians often invoke the prospect of death by deportation in debates about the fate of these immigrants and others with precarious status, like the Dreamers. In February, 2016, in a speech criticizing the lack of legal representation for Central American children seeking refuge, Harry Reid, at that time the Senate Minority Leader, warned Congress, “Deportation means death for some of these people.” That summer, Senator Edward J. Markey, of Massachusetts, told the press, “We should not

be sending families back to situations where they can be killed.” He added, “That’s just un-American.”

These conversations have been largely theoretical, devoid of names and faces. No U.S. government body monitors the fate of deportees, and immigrant-aid groups typically lack the resources to document what happens to those who have been sent back. Fear of retribution keeps most grieving fami-



lies from speaking publicly. In early 2016, as the director of the Global Migration Project, at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, I set out, with a dozen graduate students, to create a record of people who had been deported to their deaths or to other harms—a sort of shadow database of the one that the Trump Administration later compiled to track the crimes of “alien offenders.” We contacted more than two hundred local legal-aid organizations, domestic-violence shelters, and immigrants’-rights groups nationwide, as well as migrant shelters, humanitarian operations, law offices, and mortuaries across Central America. We spoke to families of the deceased. And we gathered the stories of immigrants who had endured other harms—including kidnapping, extortion, and sexual assault—as a result of deportations under Obama and Trump.

As the database grew to include more than sixty cases, patterns emerged. Often, immigrants or their families had warned U.S. officials that they were in danger if sent back. Ana Lopez, the mother of a twenty-year-old gay asylum seeker named Nelson Avila-Lopez, wrote a letter to the U.S. government during Christmas week in 2011, two months after Immigration and Customs Enforcement accidentally deported him to Honduras. Nelson had fled the country at seventeen, after receiving gang threats. He’d entered the U.S. unauthorized and been ordered removed, but an

immigration judge then granted him an emergency stay of his deportation so that he could reopen his case for asylum. An ICE agent told his family’s legal team that Nelson was deported because “someone screwed up,” and ICE alleges that the proper office had not been notified of the judge’s stay.

“His life is in danger,” Ana Lopez wrote, begging U.S. authorities to reverse her son’s deportation. Her efforts proved fruitless. Two months later, Nelson died in a prison fire, along with more than three hundred and fifty other inmates. His lawyer told me that Nelson had been detained by the Honduran government without charges, in an anti-gang initiative. Survivors of the fire alleged that it was set intentionally, perhaps as an act of gang retaliation, and that the guards had done little to help the men as they screamed and burned to death in their cells.

We discovered, too, how minor mistakes—a traffic violation or a workplace dispute—can turn lethal for unauthorized immigrants. At eighteen, Juan Carlos Coronilla-Guerrero was deported from Texas to Mexico. He later returned and settled in Buda, Texas, with his wife. He worked as a carpenter and raised three kids. In January, 2017, someone in his neighborhood reported him for a domestic dispute; police found him in possession of a quarter of a gram of marijuana.

In March, Coronilla went to the Travis County courthouse for what, before Trump’s election, would likely have been a quick misdemeanor hearing. Travis was a “sanctuary jurisdiction,” meaning that the sheriff there declined to honor most federal detention requests for undocumented individuals without a warrant or an allegation of a serious crime. But Trump, within days of his Inauguration, had ordered a crackdown on sanctuary jurisdictions, and ICE agents in Travis County had suddenly appeared in the courthouse. After Coronilla left his proceeding, his lawyer noticed two men who, he recalled, were “dressed like hunters.” The men followed Coronilla into an elevator, then identified themselves as ICE agents and arrested him for reentry after deportation, a felony.

Coronilla’s wife begged a federal judge to spare her husband. Gangs had overrun his home town in Mexico, and



deportees were prime targets for crime, since they were presumed to have money. Coronilla was deported in June. Three months later, gunmen woke him from the bed where he slept with his young son. According to the Austin *American-Statesman*, he tried to soothe the boy, saying, "Don't worry, my love." His body was found about forty miles away, filled with bullets. When I spoke to Coronilla's wife shortly after his death, she told me that she'd returned to Mexico to claim his body. She now fears for her own life. "He was a good man," she said. "Now I have to prepare for his funeral."

In the years following the Second World War, the United Nations established a principle of international law known as non-refoulement, or non-return, which forbids the removal of asylum seekers to countries where they are likely to be tortured or killed. The principle was enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, formalizing the concept of the "refugee" and insuring safe harbor for people who could show "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." No one with a credible fear of persecution could be expelled "in any manner whatsoever to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom."

For the U.S., the effort to protect refugees was also an act of atonement. In 1939, the government had rejected a boat carrying more than nine hundred Jewish escapees from Nazi Germany. At least two hundred of them were later killed in the Holocaust. As the refugee crisis worsened, countless more were refused entry. President Franklin Roosevelt had warned the public that Jews posed a national-security threat, and argued for tighter restrictions on their numbers. "In some of the other countries that refugees out of Germany have gone to, especially Jewish refugees, they found a number of definitely proven spies," he said at a press conference. Among those denied entry was Anne Frank, whose father applied for refugee status for his family in 1941, unsuccessfully. "What is done cannot be undone," Anne wrote in her diary, "but one can prevent it happening again." She later died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

In 1980, Congress incorporated the idea of non-refoulement into the Refugee Act. The act established protocols for vetting and resettling refugees and assured asylum seekers that they would not be treated as criminals, even if they arrived unauthorized in the U.S. The act, which had bipartisan support, was also meant to bolster relationships with allies and to provide a humanitarian model of resettlement for the rest of the world.

Today, the first screening of asylum seekers at the border often falls to U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers, who attempt to separate out candidates for asylum and other forms of protection. Many agents treat the task with great care. In the Rio Grande Valley, in Texas, several told me that they view the work of identifying individuals who may have fled serious harm as one of the most rewarding parts of their job.

A field manual for C.B.P. agents lists a series of questions that agents must ask an unauthorized immigrant before subjecting him or her to immediate deportation. "Do you have any fear or concern about being returned to your home country or being removed from the United States?" one reads. "Would you be harmed if you were returned?" another asks. C.B.P. agents are not authorized to evaluate the validity of the fear expressed. Instead, anyone answering yes to these questions must be referred to an asylum officer

from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and given a chance to explain his or her fear. "The inspector should err on the side of caution," the field manual reads, and "apply the criteria generously."

Nevertheless, my team and I heard stories from more than a dozen women who say that they were never asked the required questions, or were ignored, mocked, or even sexually propositioned by U.S. agents after expressing their fears—and then deported to harm. In Queens, we met Rosaleda, who had worked as a police officer in Comayagua, Honduras, until her investigation of a cousin's murder revealed a high-ranking colleague's involvement in the crime, which Rosaleda reported to the department. Menacing phone calls began, followed by a drive-by shooting while she worked the overnight shift. "This is a warning," read a note bearing her name that was left at the scene. "Leave things alone or we will kill you and next time we won't miss." Rosaleda asked a supervisor to transfer her; he said he'd consider it only in exchange for sex. In a second attempt on her life, while she was on patrol, two of her colleagues were killed. Rosaleda decided to risk the journey north. Her situation is surprisingly common, in some ways. In a recent study conducted by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, ten per cent of the women interviewed, who had fled



*"Time traveller for dinner again?"*

El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, or Mexico, indicated that “the police or other authorities were the direct source of their harm.”

When Rosaleda arrived in Texas, she was apprehended and deported without seeing a judge or a lawyer. She hadn’t shared details of her escape from Honduras, fearing that it would further endanger her. She attempted to cross the border again, and was kidnapped by a cartel and held for ransom. Eventually, she made it to New York, where she found pro-bono legal help. But, because of her earlier—and, her attorney argues, unlawful—deportation, she is now ineligible for asylum. (She was granted a “withholding of removal,” which has allowed her to remain in the U.S. but offers no path to permanent legal status.)

Allegations abound of Customs and Border Protection officers dismissing asylum seekers more brazenly. According to a 2014 American Civil Liberties Union report based on conversations with nearly a hundred people who were removed without seeing an immigration judge, “Fifty-five percent said they were not asked about fear of persecution or torture,” while “forty percent who were asked and said they were afraid were ordered deported without seeing an asylum officer.” For years, the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has documented Customs and Border Protection’s noncompliance with asylum-seeker protections, including, in more than fifty per cent of cases, officers at ports of entry neglecting “to read the required information.” More recently, after Trump’s election, civil-liberties groups began documenting an apparent increase in rejections in some places on the border. According to a recent lawsuit, C.B.P. officers have told prospective asylum seekers, “The United States is not giving asylum anymore,” and “Trump says we don’t have to let you in.”

On the night Laura was sent back across the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge, her mother, Maria, put her grandkids to sleep and lay down on Laura’s bed. Lately, she’d been helping Laura with childcare. After her daughter got back from her waitressing shift, she would often get into bed next to her mom and tell stories from

her day before falling asleep. When Maria noticed, around sunrise, that her daughter hadn’t returned, she began to worry.

Maria had raised Laura and her brother as a single mother while working at a Black & Decker plant in Reynosa, on the assembly line. She’d also done a stint at a laundromat, where Laura kept her company. Laura grew into a mischievous preteen. Once, she riled her brother by shaving off half his mustache while he was sleeping. At eighteen, Laura started seeing Sergio, who lived on her grandmother’s block. Sergio had a buzz cut, a square jaw, and an awkward sense of humor. He and Laura talked on the phone for hours, until Maria complained, “My phone bill—it’s a whole year’s salary!” Sergio had Laura’s name tattooed on his arm. After a year, Laura, who had a son from a previous relationship, gave birth to their first child. When Sergio later moved to Texas to work in construction with his father, Laura joined him. In 2007, the couple had another boy. Laura found work as a waitress and sold homemade candied apples door-to-door,

while also taking care of the children. They were a handful, and, Maria recalled, “her partner was like a fourth child.”

Maria told me that Sergio had been abused as a child and had struggled with addiction. “He came from a tough psychological background,” Laura’s brother said. One time, Maria told me, Sergio dragged Laura across the floor by her hair. Another day, in March, 2008, when Laura said she was going to leave Sergio, he grabbed a knife and threatened to commit suicide. As Laura protested, he shoved her to the floor and kicked her in the ribs. He beat her so badly that she called the police and prepared to file charges against him. A judge signed an emergency protection order forbidding Sergio from going within two hundred yards of Laura’s home, but the order seemed only to enrage Sergio. After multiple threats against Laura, he was arrested, charged with assault, and deported to Mexico.

In the years since Laura and Sergio had left Reynosa, the town had become a cartel battleground. In 2008, at least five thousand Mexicans died in the drug

## SEASON TO SEASON

I have been fooled before, and just because  
This summer seems so long, it might not be  
My last. Winter could come again, and pause  
The sky like a taped tactical descent  
Of pocket paratroopers. Things to see  
Could happen yet, and life prove not quite spent  
But still abundant, still the main event.

The trick, I’m learning, is to stay in doubt,  
Season to season, of what time might bring,  
And patiently await how things turn out.  
Eventually time tells you everything.  
If it takes time to do so, no surprise  
In that. You fold your arms, you scan the skies,  
And tell yourself that life has made you wise,

If only by the way it ebbs away.  
But still it takes an age, and after all,  
Though nearly gone, life didn’t end today,  
And you might be here when the first leaves fall  
Or even when the snow begins again,  
If life that cast you, when this all began,  
As a small boy, still needs a dying man.

—Clive James



war, more fatalities than the United States suffered during the Iraq War. That year, a drug kingpin was captured in a shoot-out near Laura's childhood home, and the military seized five hundred and forty rifles, a hundred and sixty-five grenades, and fourteen sticks of TNT. A turf war began, to determine his replacement. After Sergio returned to Reynosa, he reportedly started working as a cartel grunt. Maria told me that he continued to threaten Laura, saying that if she ever returned to Mexico he'd set her on fire, and texting, "I'm going to smoke you."

On that Tuesday morning in June when Laura didn't come home from her waitressing shift, Maria considered the dark possibilities right away. Then the phone rang. It was Laura, from Reynosa. "I did everything I could," she said, crying. "I even told the police, 'Arrest me, and I'll show you the documents,'" referring to the emergency protection order.

Laura called Elizabeth, too, and the cousins made a plan to meet in Reynosa. Elizabeth, trying to lighten the mood, asked whether the border agent who deported Laura was cute. Laura said that he was, and Elizabeth asked if she had tried to flirt. Laura replied, "I told him, 'You're sending me straight to the slaughterhouse.'"

For years, most undocumented immigrants facing deportation in the U.S. were given a chance to go before a judge—to show evidence, call witnesses, and make a case for why they should be allowed to stay. In 1996, Congress revoked that right for tens of thousands of immigrants, expanding forms of "summary removal," which can take place without a hearing or judicial input. By 2013, more than eighty per cent of deportations were nonjudicial, with the result that life-or-death decisions now routinely rest in the hands of immigration authorities at the border.

Even when asylum seekers get the opportunity to see a judge, it can be difficult to prove that their fears merit legal relief. Asylum seekers aren't entitled to lawyers, and children as young as three have been told to represent themselves in immigration court. According to Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, at Syracuse University, asylum seekers who find legal representation are

five times more likely to win their cases. Geography is a strong determining factor in their fates. When the Government Accountability Office studied the outcomes of asylum cases in courts nationwide, it found significant geographical disparities in the responses to nearly identical situations. Between 2007 and 2014, some sixty per cent of asylum applicants won their cases in New York City, while in the courts of Omaha and Atlanta less than five per cent did.

Perhaps the most formidable challenge for asylum seekers is that the Second World War-era categories of protection aren't well suited to immigrants fleeing modern gang violence. Courts resist recognizing the asylum claims of people who have been targeted by MS-13, for instance, because the motive for violence rarely fits the criteria. For victims of domestic violence, the legal protections, including the Violence Against Women Act, are slightly more favorable. If Laura had gone before a judge, she could have had multiple options for potential relief, including a U visa, for crime victims. Still, the legal scholar Blaine Bookey writes, "Whether a woman fleeing domestic violence will receive protection in the United States seems to depend not on the consistent application of objective principles, but rather on the view of her individual judge, often untethered to any legal principles at all."

Not long ago, I met a young mother who asked to be identified by her middle name, Elena. In Honduras, where she grew up, her teenage brother was murdered by MS-13 for being gay, another brother was killed for refusing to join the gang, and her sister was shot for ignoring a gang leader's sexual advances after he'd raped and impregnated her. A different gang member began pursuing Elena, and fired shots at her house after she turned him down. She reported the crime to police, and then learned that he was planning further retaliation against her.

In 2012, Elena crossed the U.S. border near Eagle Pass, Texas, and told a Border Patrol agent that she feared for her life. He logged her possessions: a black sweater, a hairband, gray shoelaces, and a key chain with photographs of her two children,

whom she'd left behind in Honduras. He asked, "Would you be harmed if you are returned to your home country?" He wrote down a single word: "No."

In detention, Elena fought back against this supposed denial, and won a hearing with an asylum officer, who corrected the record. Here she encountered a new obstacle. After she related her experiences, the officer asked her whether she was persecuted on account of her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group—the refugee criteria created by the United Nations to reflect the political threats of 1951. Elena answered no on all counts, and the officer determined that she did not qualify to apply for asylum.

Elena appealed, requesting a hearing with a judge. Asking to go before an immigration judge often means a long stint in detention, and detention can mean poor food, minimal medical care, and scant access to legal counsel. In the past, federal policy has encouraged releasing asylum seekers while they await court hearings, sparing taxpayers the cost of detention. But in the last year of Obama's Presidency, and then under Trump, the percentage of asylum seekers who were granted parole plummeted. Government data obtained in a civil-rights lawsuit showed that, in one New York facility,

fifty per cent of parole requests were granted in the months immediately before Trump's Inauguration. In the months after, twelve per cent were.

After three months in detention, Elena was granted a rare hearing before an immigration judge. The hearing took place virtually, with the judge ap-

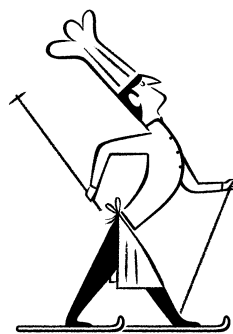
pearing on a video monitor. He asked Elena one question.

"Did you move to any other city in Honduras before coming to the United States?" he inquired.

"No," she said.

"Well, the government of the United States doesn't afford you protection for this type of reason. I affirm the asylum officer's decision. Nothing further." Elena was deported two weeks later.

Back in her home town, Elena was assaulted at gunpoint by the man she'd



fled. He tortured her, holding a lighter to her skin. Other gang members cracked her thirteen-year-old son's skull. She fled, with her kids, to a tobacco-farming town in western Honduras, where the man who'd been pursuing her found her again. Once more, she escaped to the U.S. This time, authorities agreed that Elena's fear—and the threat to her kids' lives—was credible. But, like Rosaleda, she is barred from receiving asylum because of her prior deportation.

Many immigrants, after being deported, never get a second chance to prove their claims. Constantino Morales was a cop in Guerrero, Mexico, until he tried to break up a drug cartel and became a target of violence. He escaped to the U.S. and worked at a Cheesecake Factory in Des Moines, Iowa, and then became a popular laborers'-rights advocate. As with Laura, a minor traffic stop led to his removal, which he initially fought. At a community meeting with Tom Latham, at that time a Republican congressman, Morales said, "If I am sent back, I will face more violence, and I could lose my life." Morales had applied for asylum a month earlier. He was denied. At the time, the U.S. State Department called Guerrero "the most violent state in Mexico." Seven months after Morales's deportation, he was shot and killed.

In October, Attorney General Jeff Sessions decried the "rampant abuse and fraud" in the asylum system and said that "the system is being gamed." The Trump Administration has called on Congress to crack down, which federal immigration judges may be doing already. For the past several years, asylum grant rates have declined. In 2017, judges rejected some sixty per cent of asylum seekers, the highest denial rate in more than a decade.

Protections have also evaporated for many refugees seeking resettlement in the U.S. Trump has portrayed refugees from countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Somalia not as candidates for humanitarian assistance but as national-security threats. In his first days in office, he banned many of them from traveling to the U.S. The ban is being contested in ongoing litigation. Several asylum and refugee officers told me they worry that the ban, and the inflamed discourse about refugees more

generally, misrepresents their highly comprehensive vetting process, and undermines core American values.

"We have a great mission characterized by extreme caution and care," Michael Knowles, a U.S. asylum officer for the past twenty-five years, told me, speaking as the president of Council 119, a union representing refugee and asylum officers and other staff of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Ours is a dual mission—to identify people who aren't refugees and who, worst case, might wish us harm, but also to identify and protect refugees." At a meeting in March, 2017, with John Kelly, the Secretary of Homeland Security at the time, Knowles warned that asylum and refugee officers are "deeply concerned" about the future of the program. Knowles told me what he wished he could have said to Kelly: "You've already unshackled Border Patrol. Please, don't put the shackles on us."

**I**n the hours after Laura's deportation, Elizabeth drove across the border to meet her. "Ay," Laura joked, after Elizabeth arrived at her grandmother's house, in Reynosa. "What's going to happen to my birthday party?" Maria and the kids came soon afterward, and they set up an inflatable pool in the back yard so that the boys could play while the adults discussed what to do.

Sergio soon learned of Laura's return. He began driving by the house, shouting obscenities. A few days after her arrival in Mexico, Laura went to the pharmacy with Elizabeth and her youngest child. As she pulled the car out of the driveway, another vehicle T-boned her, blocking her exit. Sergio leaped out of the car and dragged Laura from her seat through the window, shouting, "You bitch!" He bit off a chunk of her ear and tried to strangle her, as their child cried in the back seat. Elizabeth grabbed a fallen tree branch and hit Sergio on the head. He stumbled, muttering, "You better not get involved."

"I'm calling the cops," Elizabeth told him, flipping open her phone. The gesture was a ruse—her U.S. cell phone didn't work in Mexico, and, anyway, the local police were known to collaborate with the cartels. But it worked. Sergio staggered back to his car and drove off.

The incident gave the cousins new

urgency. Elizabeth emptied a coffee can and wrote "Help bring Laura back!" on it. She took it to friends and family members, asking for money to pay a coyote to smuggle Laura into the U.S. Laura's trailer in Texas was only a twenty-minute drive from Reynosa, but it would take hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars, and a risky crossing, to get her there.

The next day, Laura left the house in her mother's Ford Contour to buy food for the kids. By evening, she had not returned. "We called the Red Cross, we called the hospitals, we called the police," Elizabeth said. The following morning, Maria turned on the local news, and a grisly image flashed across the screen. It was an incinerated vehicle, with a charred human skeleton in the front seat. The car was a Ford Contour.

**S**ergio seems like the kind of immigrant few Americans would object to deporting. In speeches, Trump has often warned the country about "bad hombres," emphasizing the spectre of violent men to justify his deportation policies. Obama, whose Administration deported more immigrants than any other, also divided undocumented immigrants into neat categories: the long-timers versus the newcomers, those keen to "get right with the law" versus those trying to skate beneath it. "We're going to keep focussing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security," he promised, in 2014. "Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids."

But even some immigrants who have committed felonies or other crimes have stories that are more complicated than they first appear. At a law office in San Francisco, I met the surviving family members of a woman named Yadira. She'd come to California from La Lima, Honduras, in the early two-thousands, to escape an abusive boyfriend. In 2010, she was deported on a drug-possession charge, despite articulating her fear of return. After she was back in La Lima, her brother, who was confined to a wheelchair, was murdered by the Mara 18 gang. (He had left a competing gang more than a decade earlier, after being shot and paralyzed.) Together with her grandparents, Yadira's fourteen-year-old daughter discovered his body. Yadira



began speaking out publicly against the gang, and became a target. Afraid for her life, she went north, hoping to get back to San Francisco.

At the U.S. border, she told officials about her brother's murder but was detained nevertheless. "They're going to deport me," she told her father, in a call from detention, saying that she had begged for protection. (The C.B.P. stated that Yadirá "did not claim fear of persecution.") She stepped off the tarmac in Honduras wearing her favorite "California" sweatpants, hoping to go unnoticed. Her father, a trucker for Chiquita bananas, drove her home. A few days later, her youngest daughter found her body in front of the house, riddled with bullets.

Under Trump, ICE arrests of undocumented immigrants—including those accused, but not convicted, of minor crimes—have gone up by nearly forty per cent. Trump describes these round-ups to the electorate as a public-safety measure, but many law-enforcement leaders argue that they can have the opposite effect, lowering the rate at which crimes are reported. In February, a group of sixty law-enforcement officials warned, in a letter to Congress, that Trump's policies "could harm community trust and make it harder for state and local law enforcement agencies to do our jobs." In March, Los Angeles's police chief noted that reports of sexual assault among the city's Latino population had declined twenty-five per cent in the first three months of 2017, Trump's first months in office. Domestic-violence reports dropped ten per cent. (The decline was not found among other ethnic groups.) In April, Houston's police chief noted that the number of Hispanics reporting rape was down more than forty per cent.

My team and I filed public-record requests in the twenty U.S. cities with the highest populations of undocumented immigrants, in order to determine the extent of this change. We obtained sexual-assault and domestic-violence reports from heavily Hispanic neighborhoods, and contacted more than a hundred police departments, district attorneys, legal-services providers, and domestic-violence shelters.

The results were striking. In Arlington, Virginia, domestic-assault reports in one Hispanic neighborhood dropped more than eighty-five per cent in the



*Laura's incinerated body was found in her home town in Mexico.*

first eight months after Trump's Inauguration, compared with the same period the previous year. Reports of rape and sexual assault fell seventy-five per cent. Meanwhile, in Chicago, domestic-violence and sexual-assault reports from Hispanic victims dropped seven per cent. In Denver, the city attorney, Kristin Bronson, told us of more than a dozen Latina women who had dropped their domestic-abuse cases since Trump took office, citing fear of deportation. She estimates that the number of women who have avoided pursuing legal action against an abuser is far higher.

Many local law-enforcement officers are also concerned about state-based legislation, including bills requiring local cops to act as subsidiaries of ICE. A Texas law called SB4, known as the "show me your papers" law, threatens to jail or fine

sheriffs who don't cooperate with immigration holds. The law, which was supposed to go into effect in September but is in litigation, would make routine the process by which Laura was turned over to Border Patrol. Last July, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, a group of police chiefs and sheriffs representing dozens of large cities, joined with two other groups condemning SB4, warning the court that the law "will dangerously impact local communities by eliminating law enforcement discretion of how to effectively serve public safety needs."

On June 17, 2009, a week after Laura's return to Reynosa, a coroner confirmed that her DNA had been found in the Ford Contour, and the police delivered her remains to Maria. The next day was Laura's twenty-third birthday,

and Elizabeth kept her promise to throw a party. She and Maria got balloons, prepared a cake, and hired a mariachi band. The birthday also served as a burial. At the gravesite, Laura's family called her Texas friends on video chat. Laura's eldest son brought his mother a gift, a figurine of his favorite cartoon character, and placed it in the coffin.

That week, Sergio was arrested by the Mexican police and confessed to Laura's murder. He'd strangled her, according to the local press, then doused her in gasoline and set her on fire. Maria and Elizabeth testified at his trial. He was sentenced to forty years in prison.

Grief, for Maria, was soon subsumed by the challenge of caring for Laura's sons. A teacher called her to complain that one of the boys had told his class that his dad had killed his mom. "He cannot do that!" the teacher said. Maria told her, "He's a child, and he's in pain." One day, Laura's middle child Googled his mother and discovered disturbing details about her murder. He threw a fit, smashing furniture and crying, "I don't want to be here without my mom!" At home, the youngest boy asked his grandmother, "Can you make her again, so that I can see her?"

I went to Texas to meet Maria, and she welcomed me into her darkened apartment wearing black. She had the same deep-set eyes and velvety brows as her daughter, whose photograph hung above an overstuffed couch. "What I'm most proud of is what she left me—my grandsons," Maria said, as she made coffee, gesturing toward the boys' grade-school portraits in the living room. She added, "There's a reason they're alive."

She showed me a cigar box on a shelf by the front door, the boys' Mom Box. "If they find something girly outside, they bring it home and put it in the box," Maria said. We looked through the contents: pink ribbons, a Disney Birthday Princess pin, a Mr. Potato Head ring, a Peter Pan figurine, and assorted trinkets that reminded the boys of Laura. Underneath was a copy of Laura's emergency protection order, carefully folded.

When Maria realized that the boys would soon be home from school, she told me that there was one last thing she wanted to show me. "You know how usually, when you box up someone's clothes, and then you take them out,

they smell bad?" she asked. "Well, my daughter's clothes, they don't smell that way. They're still fresh." She went into the bedroom and returned with an armful of clothing. At her urging, I pressed my face into one of Laura's red satin blouses. A gentle scent lingered—unobtrusive, vaguely floral, verging on nothingness. I found it strange, after so



many hours spent searching for Laura, to find her here.

Maria told me that shortly after Laura's death she began encountering problems raising the boys. She wasn't their legal guardian, and doctors wouldn't allow her to make decisions about their medical care. Signing off on school activities and therapy dates was complicated. So, one day in 2013, she packed up the boys and took them to the law offices of Jennifer Harbury, a civil-rights attorney.

Harbury told me that, in the meeting, the boys "were a wreck." She explained, "The older one was rocking back and forth, and the middle child looked scared—crying and hyper and desperate—and the little one was very upset." The whole family, Harbury said, showed "every sign of post-traumatic stress you can think of."

Maria told Harbury that she needed help getting custody of her grandsons, and then recounted the circumstances of Laura's death. "When a woman is afraid," Maria asked, "why can't you give her the opportunity to show her documents, to show her evidence?"

Harbury was stunned. Her team could help Maria get custody of the kids, she said. But, as the pair discussed the case, another idea emerged: filing a lawsuit against agents of the Border Patrol.

Harbury, who is sixty-six, has made a career of challenging alleged abuses of immigrants, including refoulements. She grew up in Connecticut and California, in a family that had fled Nazi persecution in Holland during

the Second World War. After graduating from Harvard Law School, in 1978, she moved to the Rio Grande Valley to defend farmworkers' rights. In the early eighties, she noticed an alarming trend: thousands of Salvadorans and indigenous Guatemalans were crossing the Rio Grande, fleeing civil wars. Most were denied asylum and forced to return—often, she said, "to face torture chambers and death squads," some of which were funded in part by the U.S. government.

In 1990, Harbury went to Guatemala to conduct research on indigenous women rebels fighting in the country's civil war. Atop a volcano, she met a young Mayan rebel commander, Efraín Bámaca Velásquez, who went by the war name Everardo. They fell in love and travelled back to rural Texas, where they married and, in the tradition of leftist guerrilla fighters, exchanged silver spoons. A few months later, with Harbury's support, Bámaca returned home to fight the Guatemalan Army. Then he disappeared.

At first, the Army claimed that Bámaca had been killed in combat. But Harbury grew suspicious when she reviewed the autopsy report. "Everardo was a walking war museum," she said, explaining that he was covered in scars—and yet the report noted none of them. Later, a rebel fighter who had been captured by the Army escaped, and claimed to have seen Bámaca alive, being tortured on a Guatemalan military base.

Harbury began a series of hunger strikes, sleeping on the pavement in front of Guatemala's Presidential palace for thirty-two days, demanding answers. She attracted the attention of U.S. news shows and celebrities like Bianca Jagger and Charlie Rose. "If you kill him, I'm going to die on your doorstep with convulsions in front of every camera in the world," Harbury said, addressing the Guatemalan government. "You're going to be seen." CBS reported that the C.I.A. knew that Bámaca had been captured alive and tortured, and Harbury moved her hunger strike to the gates of the White House. On the twelfth day of her fast, the congressman Robert G. Torricelli revealed that a Guatemalan Army colonel being paid by the C.I.A.



had been involved in Bámaca's torture, as well as in the earlier killing of a U.S. citizen, in 1990. President Clinton's Administration ordered internal investigations into the United States' role in the murders and their coverups.

Along the way, Harbury became something of a celebrity herself. The writer Chris Kraus centered part of her cult hit "I Love Dick" on her, describing Harbury's pre-fasting aesthetic as "Hillary Clinton on a budget"—"a well-proportioned face with good WASP bones, blonde tousled bubble-cut, a cheap tweed coat, clear gaze"—and noting that, mid-fast, people looked at Harbury as "a strange animal." Ted Turner bought the film rights to her life story, and a *Times* reporter suggested Madonna for the role, writing, "It would take a certain controlled irreverence and mad gusto to get Jennifer Harbury on the screen."

In 1995, Bill Clinton suspended covert C.I.A. funding to the Guatemalan Army after the agency admitted to making mistakes in Bámaca's case. To Harbury, this was far from sufficient. By then, she'd learned that her husband had been killed by men on the C.I.A.'s payroll. The next year, she sued officials from the State Department, the C.I.A., and other government bodies for denying her access to information that might have helped prevent her husband's killing.

The case was filed as a "Bivens" claim, so called because of the case of *Bivens v. Six Unknown Named Agents*, which, in 1971, established that citizens could sue federal officials if their rights had been violated. Harbury's claim was simple: if the government hadn't lied about her husband's whereabouts, she could have petitioned for his rescue. Her case eventually went to the Supreme Court, where, in an unusual move, Harbury argued it herself. The Court acknowledged "appreciating Harbury's anguish" but ruled against her.

In Maria's story, Harbury saw a grief similar to her own, and a chance to hold the government accountable for another family's anguish. "The U.S. government should not be free to submit people to torture and murder," she said. "They did it in my husband's

case, and they did it in Laura's case."

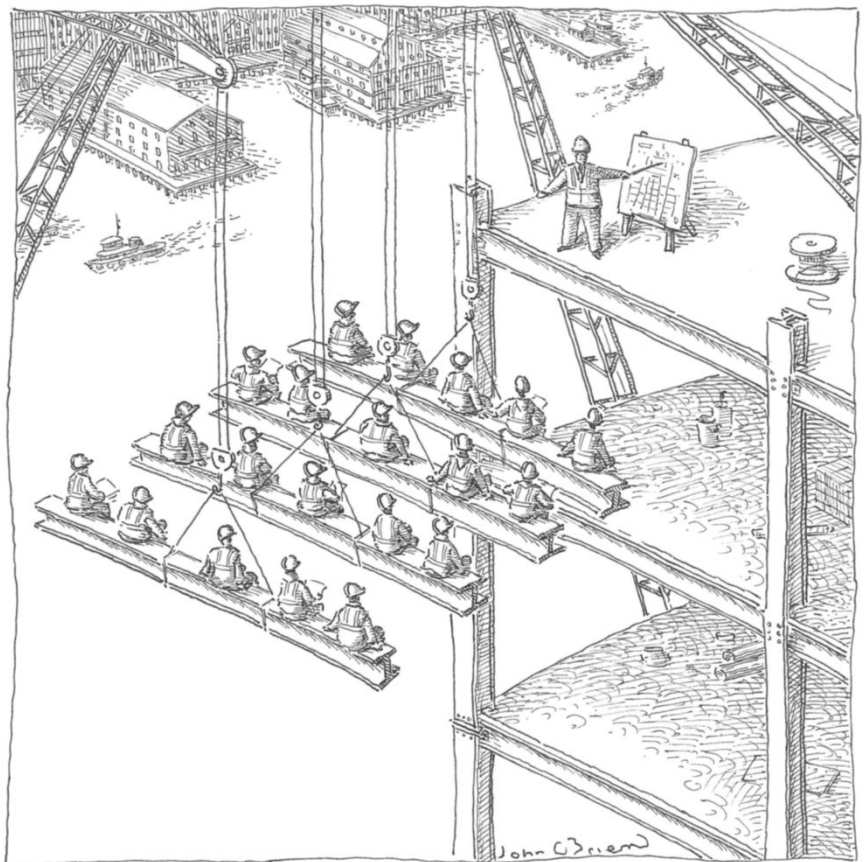
Maria worried about antagonizing the authorities, but she was desperate for ways to draw meaning from her daughter's death. Recently, she had given Laura's porcelain-doll collection to a center for abused girls. "In the case of my child," she said, "there are many lessons that could be useful for other women." Maria decided to press ahead with a lawsuit.

They had to work quickly, because the statute of limitations in Laura's case had nearly expired. Harbury partnered with the Texas Civil Rights Project, a nonprofit that often pursues civil-rights cases on behalf of immigrants, and she was soon joined by one of the group's attorneys, Efrén Olivares. On June 5, 2013, they filed *Maria S. v. John Doe*, on behalf of Laura's three sons. U.S. immigration agents, they alleged, had arrested Laura, then "violated her procedural due process rights" and "refused to consider her clear eligibility for relief from removal." Laura had the right to a full and fair hearing before a qualified immigration judge, and the right to counsel at her own expense, as afforded by the Fifth Amendment. In-

stead, the complaint claimed, agents had sent Laura back to "extreme danger, resulting in her battery and death." Their decisions, the complaint said, "shock the conscience."

**H**olding U.S. Customs and Border Protection legally accountable is difficult but not impossible. The day before *Maria S. v. John Doe* was filed, the A.C.L.U. brought a class-action case against officers from Border Patrol and ICE in Southern California, alleging the widespread use of coercion, threats, and deception to get immigrants to sign their own expulsion orders, including a form called the I-826. In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security and other defendants agreed to a settlement. A long list of reforms resulted, including a stipulation that prospective deportees could use a phone to call a family member, a legal-service provider, or a Mexican consulate before removal. The reforms, however, applied only to Southern California.

Other suits are pending. Last July, a nonprofit called *Al Otro Lado* sued officials at the Department of Homeland





*"You want anything from the food Zamboni?"*

Security and at Customs and Border Protection, alleging that asylum seekers are being "systematically turned away at ports of entry." Last year, the city of Chicago sued Trump's Justice Department over a plan to withhold federal public-safety funds from sanctuary cities.

Harbury has become involved in still more cases. After Trump's election, she began interviewing recent deportees in Reynosa about their experiences with U.S. immigration authorities, and gathered accounts of asylum seekers who'd been kidnapped or otherwise harmed after being turned away. She compiled her findings in a sworn legal declaration, and shared it with a national network of civil-rights attorneys. In September, she filed a suit against officers from ICE and other government entities on behalf of a group of "young civilians who were forced to flee their homelands due to the ongoing violence."

These asylum seekers had come from places as diverse as Ghana, Guatemala, and Sierra Leone, but faced the same "danger of severe persecution" if deported. Although they had committed no crimes, the suit alleged, they had been "wrongfully denied parole and subjected to prolonged and arbitrary detention in prison-like conditions."

The case of *Maria S. v. John Doe*, filed on behalf of Laura's kids, ended up on the docket of Judge Andrew Hanen, of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, in Brownsville. His rulings on immigration are infamous. In 2015, he accused the Obama Administration's Department of Homeland Security of "criminal conspiracy" after the agency chose not to arrest and deport an undocumented mother who had paid a smuggler to bring her child to the States. Hanen said that the decision set a "dangerous and unconscionable" precedent.

Government lawyers argued for the dismissal of Maria's suit, saying that U.S. Border Patrol agents enjoy wide immunity from civil lawsuits. It seemed likely that Hanen would side with the government, but, in 2015, in one of his first decisions in the case, he took a surprising position. He refused to dismiss the suit, writing, "Even aliens who have entered the United States unlawfully are assured the protections of the Fifth Amendment due process clause." The case, he said, could move to discovery, which would have to focus on a single issue: whether, and how, Laura's deportation had been coerced.

At a pretrial hearing of *Maria S. v. John Doe*, Hanen clarified this critical question. Laura, he noted, had signed an I-826 form in the hours before her removal, checking the box giving up her right to seek asylum, which reads, "I admit that I am in the United States illegally, and I believe I do not face harm if I return to my country." Why? If Laura really feared for her life, had she signed under duress? Or did she check the box voluntarily?

Harbury tracked down one of the friends who had been in the car that night. She was frightened but agreed to testify. While seated at the processing station, the woman recalled, Laura wept and begged the border officer—Ramiro Garza—not to send her back. The officer, she said, had a gun and an "annoyed" expression. He put the paperwork in front of Laura, and ordered her to sign. "This is an injustice!" Laura objected, according to the friend. Garza, she said, "mocked" Laura, and pressed again. The pair went back and forth until Laura caved. (Garza denied this version of events, and said that he would never force anyone to sign the form.) Laura's friend said that her own decision to sign was influenced by the prospect of the long detention that often accompanies fighting deportation. "I didn't want to be locked in," she said, "because I have children."

In July, 2017, Hanen finally handed down his ruling. "This case presents one of the most lamentable set of circumstances that this Court has ever been called upon to address," Hanen wrote. It left the court with "a profound



sense of sadness about the disastrous chain of events that ended in the defendant's murder." But he said that he couldn't overcome the problem that "the only person who can truly reveal Laura S.'s motivation" in checking the box—Laura herself—"was killed." As a result, coercion was hard to prove. Perhaps she was coerced, Hanen said, or perhaps she signed the I-826 so that she wouldn't be in detention during her son's surgery, or for some other unknown or unknowable reason.

"Despite their best efforts," Hanen ruled, "Plaintiffs have failed to clear the evidentiary hurdle created by the death of Laura S." The case was dismissed.

Harbury felt heartsick, but she'd always known that the case might have to wind its way through higher appeals courts. Last August, Harbury and the other lawyers filed with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, arguing that the case should be heard by a jury. They noted that the lawsuit's outcome "directly affects ongoing life and death situations" for other immigrants. Harbury is hopeful that, if success eludes them in the initial appeals, the case will eventually reach the Supreme Court. And if no justice emerges there? Harbury and her team will turn to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. There, they can draw on treaties meant to protect immigrants like those the United States failed in the Second World War.

For Laura's family, the stakes of the case are profound. But they also have other, more immediate worries. Not long after Laura's murder, Elizabeth's purse was stolen from her car. Her visa—her only proof of legal status—was inside. Then, in 2015, she learned about Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which was intended for people who had come to the U.S. as children and, in many cases, grown up here, who wanted to work legally, get an education, and stay in the place they considered home. Elizabeth decided to apply. She had to prove that she'd come to the U.S. before the age of sixteen, posed no threat to national security, and met a list of other criteria.

Not long after submitting her materials, she was notified that she had won legal relief, and officially become a Dreamer.

Politically, Obama's DACA policies have been hugely popular. Recent polls show that more than three out of four Americans support allowing Dreamers to remain in the U.S., and two-thirds of Republicans back a pathway to citizenship for them. But, last September, Elizabeth got frightening news: Trump had ordered an end to the program, and had given Congress six months to extend its protections. Elizabeth had to submit a renewal request before an October deadline, but she couldn't afford the legal fees. Her immigration attorney, she told me, refused to return her paperwork without a substantial payment.

In December, Elizabeth's DACA status expired. If a legislative solution isn't reached by early March, nearly seven hundred thousand people in the U.S. will be stripped of their legal status and their protection from deportation. Earlier this month, three former Homeland Security Secretaries, including Michael Chertoff, who served under George W. Bush, wrote a letter to Congress underscoring the importance of a DACA fix. "We write not only in strong support of this legislation, but to stress that it should be enacted speedily, in order to meet the significant administrative requirements of implementation, as well as the need to provide certainty for employers and these young people," the letter read.

Some Dreamers fear for their lives if sent back. Elizabeth testified against Sergio at his murder trial, and she told me that he has called her relatives in Reynosa from prison to make death threats against her. When she lost her legal status, she also lost her work permit, and therefore her job. Some days, anxiety overtakes her. "I'm still trying my best," she recently texted me, "which is what matters."

Still, when I asked Elizabeth what she would tell President Trump if they ever met, she immediately thought of Laura's boys. "Please be conscious of what happens when a woman gets deported," she said. "It's not only what

could happen to her—it's the family she leaves behind, in America. Please think of those kids."

At home last summer, Laura's boys celebrated what would have been their mother's thirty-first birthday. Maria decorated a vanilla cake with fresh carnations and hung streamers from the ceiling in Laura's favorite colors: purple, pink, and light blue. She gathered the family in the living room—the three boys and Elizabeth, as well as aunts and uncles and cousins—and handed out pens. Each person wrote a message to Laura on a piece of notebook paper, which they tied to pink balloons and launched into the sky.

"Hi, *mami*," Laura's youngest wrote, in Spanish. "I miss you." He said that he hoped to have four careers—as "a basketball player, a Nascar driver, an engineer, and a YouTuber"—so that he could send his earnings to his mom in Heaven, after buying himself a "fancy refrigerator."

The oldest boy told me of his plans to persuade the rapper Drake to adopt him. He loved Drake's music, and his style, and his Instagram feed, and he knew Drake would love his, too. "Hey, Mom," he wrote. "I need you to take care of me."

Laura's middle child kept his note secret, but he showed me a poster board he'd made for his mother, with colorful pompoms and photographs glued above a poem he'd written: "Wave after wave/Crushes onto my legs/I remember Mom's every word/To help me stand on my own two feet."

At the kitchen table, the boys played with an iPhone. "Siri, what is ten to the thousandth?" the youngest asked. "Siri, who am I?"

"Who is my mommy?"

"Who is Donald Trump?"

"How old is Donald Trump?"

The oldest chimed in, "Siri, can I call my mom?"

Maria sometimes envies the boys' approach to death. She told me that twice Laura's eldest son had stood at the bus stop after school, craning his neck, waiting. "What is it?" she asked.

"When is Mom coming?" he replied.

"Mom's not coming," she told her grandson. "Remember where we left her?" she asked gently, pulling him close. "We left her on the other side of the border." ♦

## HARD TESTS

*A historically black university in the age of Trump.*

BY JELANI COBB

One morning last February, not long after Donald Trump had been inaugurated as President, but long before many people had reconciled themselves to that fact, students at Howard University awoke to find a bold message written on a walkway of the campus's central plaza, known as the Yard. Spray-painted in blue block letters, it read "Welcome to the Trump Plantation, Overseer: Wayne A.I. Frederick." The message was aimed at the heart, the character, and the conscience of Howard's president, a reserved, deliberative oncologist and surgeon whom the board of trustees had unanimously elected to the position in 2014. Frederick is pure Howard: he earned his undergraduate and medical degrees and a master's in business administration there. At forty-six, he has held a number of titles, but "overseer"—a derisive term for black proxies of white authority—was hardly one he was seeking.

There was an additional layer of shade visible to those familiar with the school's history. When Howard—one of the largest of the hundred and two historically black colleges and universities, or H.B.C.U.s, in the United States—was founded, in 1867, it was supported by the Freedman's Bureau, the federal agency charged with helping emancipated black people navigate the world that awaited them after the Civil War. The author of the spray-painted message was clearly suggesting that the school—and, specifically, Frederick—no longer represented a disruption of the nation's racial hierarchy but was a bulwark of it.

The message was a response to a series of events that began on February 9th, when Betsy DeVos, the Trump Administration's newly appointed Secretary of Education, made Howard, which is in Washington, D.C., the site

of her first official campus visit. Trump was already unpopular with African-Americans, on account of his company's discriminatory real-estate practices and his racist pronouncements, but the bigoted rhetoric of his campaign had made him more so. (When Talladega College, a historically black school founded by two former slaves in Alabama, announced that its band would march in Trump's inaugural parade, alumni started a petition in protest and inundated the college's Web page with complaints.)

Trump's nomination of DeVos, a billionaire businesswoman whom Chuck Schumer, the Senate Minority Leader, called the "least qualified nominee in a historically unqualified Cabinet," was seen as another affront. Frederick told me, "She was confirmed at noon, and at two o'clock I had a call saying she wants to have a conversation." A provision of Howard's governance automatically makes the Secretary of Education an ex-officio member of the board of trustees, but many on campus felt that DeVos was using Howard as a convenient backdrop for a show of broad-mindedness. Why else would she make the visit such an immediate priority? As a former Howard administrator told me, "It's not like she was there to announce a multimillion-dollar grant."

Then, on February 27th, Frederick and sixty-eight other presidents of black institutions went to the White House to meet with various officials, in the hope of laying the groundwork to secure additional funding from the federal government. Howard, in a unique arrangement, receives forty per cent of its operating budget—two hundred and twenty-one million dollars in 2016—from a congressional appropriation. This makes its administrators accountable not only to its donors, its alumni,

and its students—as all college administrations are—but to the national political leadership. At a meeting that day, DeVos further angered many educators by referring to H.B.C.U.s as pioneers of "school choice"—a perspective akin to viewing Jim Crow as an empowering opportunity for black people to drink from race-specific water fountains. As John Silvanus Wilson, then the president of Morehouse College, in Atlanta, wrote after the meeting, "H.B.C.U.s were not created because the four million newly freed blacks were unhappy with the choices they had. They were created because they had no choices at all."

Omarosa Manigault, a graduate of two black universities—Central State, in Ohio, and Howard—was then the director of communications for the White House Office of Public Liaison. She had reportedly pushed Trump to schedule a meeting with the presidents in the Oval Office, and pushed them to attend it. Frederick told me, "I was probably the last person to enter the room. I knew there would be a photo op." In one of the photographs from the meeting, Kellyanne Conway, the counsellor to the President, knelt on a sofa in what seemed inappropriate informality. But many African-Americans were more offended by another photograph, which featured Trump smiling broadly, with the African-American leaders standing around him. It seemed like a tableau from plantation days, and served as a succinct summary of the fraught transition from Barack Obama, the first black President—and Howard's 2016 commencement speaker—to Trump, who had smeared Obama by trafficking in birtherism and who now embraced the support of white nationalists. Frederick stayed near the door, out of the camera's view. Nonetheless, his presence became an

*Wayne Frederick, the president of Howard University since 2014, might best be described as a pragmatic optimist.*





incendiary element in the post-election mood at Howard. The message appeared the next morning.

Juan Demetrixx, a political-science major and a leader of a student activist group called H.U. Resist, told me that he didn't know who had written it, but added, "We agree with the sentiment." Another student told the *Hilltop*, the campus newspaper, "Frederick doesn't care about us, only money." Other local media reported that additional messages had appeared, such as "Wayne Frederick doesn't care about black people" (a spin on the accusation that Kanye West levelled at George W. Bush after Hurricane Katrina) and "Make Howard black again." Mark Mason, an alum who is a chief financial officer at Citigroup and a vice-co-chair of the university's board of trustees, was protective of Frederick, telling me that the graffiti "was inappropriately personalized and should not have happened." He added, "Howard has always been a place where people have been able to offer a difference of views, and Wayne continues that aspect of our legacy, but there's a respectful way to do that."

I enrolled at Howard in 1987, a year before Frederick, though I didn't know him there. I met him briefly a year ago, but our first substantial conversation took place last spring, at his office, in a corner suite on the fourth floor of the main administration building. The room looked very different from the last time I had been in it, in my sophomore year,

when students occupied the building during a protest. Frederick's office is composed and serene, much like his demeanor. That day, he wore a blue suit, a crisp white shirt, and a pin commemorating Howard's recent hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary. He is trim and somewhat formal, and speaks softly, with a trace of the accent of his native Trinidad. (Frederick's father, a policeman, died when he was two; he was raised by his mother, a nurse, and his stepfather, a prison officer.) He lives in suburban Montgomery County, Maryland, with his wife, Simone, a fellow-Trinidadian, whom he met at Carnival and who previously worked in health-care information technology. They have two children.

Frederick might best be described as a pragmatic optimist. James Comey, the former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is spending the year as a fellow at Howard, and he told me that he found Frederick to be both kind and tough. Effective leaders, Comey said, "are nice people who listen well, but they're not going to get run over." The day the message appeared, Frederick asked that it not be removed: "I said, 'Let the rest of the campus see it.' There's a freedom of expression that we're going to uphold." (Graduate students cleaned it up the next day.) But he was clearly shaken by the incident, particularly when a white classmate of his twelve-year-old son mocked him, saying that Frederick was "running Trump's plantation" and would soon be fired. He told me, "I'll

be honest with you. That probably was one of the lowest points not just in my being president but in my life."

Part of Frederick's frustration stems from the fact that, although he is more conservative in his actions and in his manner than most students and faculty members, both groups had previously regarded him favorably. A number of people told me how impressed they had been by the speech he gave at the 2016 convocation ceremony. The night before, the university marshal, who traditionally leads the parade of faculty, e-mailed Frederick to say that, in light of the anti-racist and anti-police-brutality demonstrations being staged across the country, she would not stand when the national anthem was played. She offered to step down as marshal, or to resign, but Frederick said no. At the ceremony, others followed her example, and, during his remarks, Frederick paused to ask those who had sat during the anthem to stand and be recognized. He told them, "While I intend to stand when the national anthem is played, I also will respect and celebrate your interests in protesting." For many college presidents, this would be a straightforward embrace of free speech, but, for one whose campus is so susceptible to the fluctuations of national politics, it was an audacious position to take.

Then circumstances changed. In April, members of the faculty senate passed a vote of no confidence in Frederick's leadership, for, according to the chair at the time, "ineffective fund-raising" and a failure to incorporate faculty perspectives in decision-making. No one who voted against him would speak to me on the record, and no further actions were taken. Some faculty members disputed the validity of the vote on procedural grounds. Also last year, six women filed suit against Howard, alleging that the university had been slow to respond to reports of sexual assault, and that, in at least one instance, this had allowed a perpetrator to commit additional offenses. The university filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, which has not yet been ruled on. In the meantime, Howard announced a new set of policies to clarify the handling of sexual-assault complaints, following an internal review.



*"Oh, no. We're still us."*

In addition, despite the federal funding, Howard has faced particular financial challenges. It is responsible for the administration of the undergraduate college and seven graduate and professional schools, with a combined enrollment of ten thousand students, more than half of whom come from low-income families. It also runs Howard Hospital, a six-story, four-hundred-bed facility built in the nineteen-seventies. In March, the *Washington Post* reported that the hospital was suffering a financial and organizational crisis that threatened the well-being of the broader institution. (It is currently ranked sixth out of seven major hospitals in the District of Columbia, and it operated at a nineteen-million-dollar loss in 2015.)

"There's a reason the other two universities in D.C."—Georgetown and George Washington—"don't fully own their hospitals," Frederick told me. "It's a business with a very small margin, and an industry unto itself." The issue is further complicated by the hospital's history: not only does it provide critical care for low-income, predominantly African-American residents of the city, but it was founded, as the Freedmen's Hospital, in 1862, to care for black soldiers wounded in the Civil War. Although Howard did not take over the hospital until 1967, the school has used it for teaching since 1868, and it represents a central part of the school's mission. More than a hundred positions have been eliminated, and the university says that there has been a surplus in the annual budget for two consecutive years. Even so, it is exploring options to sell the hospital or to share its ownership.

Frederick hopes to one day return to surgical practice full time, and he still occasionally operates at the hospital. I visited him there in early July, when he had volunteered to be on call. He had also invited a recent graduate named Shakira Jarvis, who was considering applying to the medical school, to accompany him on his rounds. At the hospital, a different side of Frederick's personality emerged: he was at ease and even, at times, jovial. He first checked in on a patient he'd operated on two days earlier, for a perforated ulcer. Then he looked in on a

twenty-five-year-old man with familial adenomatous polyposis, a disorder that begins in adolescence and is characterized by the growth of tumors in the large intestine. Those with the condition are at a high risk of developing colon cancer. The recommended treatment, Frederick said later, is the removal of the intestine, at around age sixteen. This patient, who lived in one of the poorest areas of the city, had received only sporadic treatment, and a cancerous growth had gone unnoticed. Frederick was there to discuss end-of-life care with him.

When Frederick came out of the patient's room, he talked to Jarvis about how medicine cannot be separated from the social context in which it is practiced. His long-term plan is to send not only medical students but also social-work students and nutrition majors to chronically underserved communities in the District, in an effort to step in where the health-care system has failed. It's easy to see how the demands of Howard's social mission might outstrip its resources.

The issue confronting Howard and the other H.B.C.U.s is not whether they still have a role in a society where the formal segregation of higher education no longer exists; that is something commonly asked about black colleges, not by them. In the years immediately following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, in 1954, many worried that the colleges would be unable to compete against prestigious, better resourced, mostly white schools in order to attract talented black students. Yet the schools' core mission, their cultural traditions, and, increasingly, their capacity to provide a sense of community for a significant subset of black students who grew up in largely white environments gave them durability in the new landscape. If part of the terrible yield of racism has been the reduction of human complexity to flat caricature, then Howard's objective—pedagogically, socially, demographically—has been the opposite. As Jacob Hardman, a senior finance major, who grew up in a predominantly white community, told me, "Howard was

the first opportunity I had to not just be the one exceptional black person."

The resilience of the H.B.C.U.s is even more striking given the fate of women's colleges in the United States, which have declined in number by eighty per cent in the past fifty years. (There are currently just forty-four.) A study in the nineteen-nineties found that three-quarters of African-Americans with doc-

toral degrees and four-fifths of black federal judges hold at least one degree from a historically black institution. The question that looms over the H.B.C.U.s is not "why" but "how."

The "big four" among H.B.C.U.s includes Morehouse and Spelman, both in Atlanta, and Hampton, in Virginia, but Howard,

situated in the nation's capital, holds a central status. A study from the Equality of Opportunity Project ranks it in the top eight per cent of elite schools in terms of impact on the social mobility of students. Its list of alumni includes luminaries in politics (Thurgood Marshall, Doug Wilder, Andrew Young, David Dinkins, Kamala Harris); arts and letters (Zora Neale Hurston, Lucille Clifton, Donnie Hathaway, Ossie Davis, Amiri Baraka, Roberta Flack, Jessye Norman, Toni Morrison, Tanenehisi Coates); business and science (Walter Lincoln Hawkins, Bill Bell, Kelly Miller); and academia (E. Franklin Frazier, Thomas Sowell, Marjorie Lee Browne). In my time there, such people were held up not simply as case studies in achievement but as a kind of categorical validation of the ideal of black institutions. They were data points of possibility to counter the roster of pessimisms arrayed against black America and, tragically, even subscribed to at times by members of our own communities.

Faculty and alumni refer to Howard as "the mecca," in part because it has historically attracted students from throughout the African diaspora. It is held in particularly high regard in Frederick's native Trinidad. Eric Williams, who became the nation's first Prime Minister after independence, in 1962, taught in the social-science department. Stokely Carmichael, who was a student activist at Howard before becoming a leader of the





Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and, later, the Black Power movement, was also Trinidadian. Shaka Hislop, a former English Premier League soccer player, was a star of Howard's team in the late nineteen-eighties, and had been a schoolmate of Frederick's in Trinidad. "I left to attend Howard on a soccer scholarship," Hislop told me. "I fell in love with the place and encouraged him to come." He went so far as to cover the twenty-five-dollar application fee, in a bid to insure that Frederick applied.

Frederick's decision was complicated by the fact that he has sickle-cell anemia, a condition that causes fatigue and painful blockages of the blood flow. Cold weather can worsen the symptoms, and Frederick worried about winters in Washington, D.C. But the appeal of Howard's history prevailed. He arrived on campus a sixteen-year-old freshman weighing less than a hundred pounds. Frederick and Hislop were a study in contrasts: the tall, popular athlete and the diminutive introvert so dedicated to his studies that he earned his undergraduate and medical degrees in just six years. In 2014, Hislop completed an executive master's in business administration; his degree bears the signature of the friend he all but coerced into applying.

Most of the H.B.C.U.s are in the South, where they were the product of an ethic of social uplift adopted after the Civil War, when resistance to the education of blacks was almost as fierce as it had been during slavery. W. E. B. Du Bois, in his history of Reconstruction, published in 1935, quotes a Louisianan to the effect that white Southerners were "more hostile to the establishment of [black] schools than they are to [blacks] owning lands." Theories about what social roles best befitted the four million black people in the United States in 1865—a sixth of the population—varied, and so did the mission of the schools. Many focussed on agricultural and technical education, such as Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, and North Carolina A. & T. University. Others, such as Morehouse, Spelman, and Howard, aimed to build a broadly educated segment of black America that would open the doors of opportunity for the remainder of the race. And, for decades to come, admission to white-dominated universities re-

mained so segregated, at least in the de-facto sense, that without the H.B.C.U.s higher education would have been an impossible aspiration for formerly enslaved people and their descendants.

Howard was first envisioned during a series of dinner conversations among political brokers in downtown D.C. The organizer was Oliver Otis Howard, who, as a general in the Union Army, had fought at Gettysburg. In May, 1865, Howard was appointed the commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau. In his memoirs, published in 1907, he wrote that he had experimented with organizing primary schools for black children in the South, but that the white teachers he hired were too indoctrinated with racism to be effective educators. The dinner group came up with the idea of establishing a college to train black teachers, but General C. H. Howard, Oliver's brother, suggested that educators alone could not safeguard the civil rights of such a vulnerable population. Lawyers were also needed, so a law school should be established, too. Over the course of a month, a plan to create a full university came together.

Oliver Howard's experience in the war had given him a higher regard for African-Americans than that held by many of his contemporaries, including President Andrew Johnson, who generally resisted the Freedman's Bureau initiatives. By the standards of the era, Howard's proposal was wildly idealistic, even if, today, it appears notably tentative. "A brief experience showed us that the Negro people were capable of education, with no limit that men could set to their capacity," he wrote. "What white men could learn, or had learned, they, or some of them, could learn."

In the spring of 1867, Howard authorized a transfer of funds from the bureau to cover the cost of building the main campus, on a hundred and fifty acres of farmland that he and others—the new trustees—had purchased. Charles Boynton, a clergyman who also served as the chaplain for the U.S. House of Representatives, was selected as the first president. Although John Mercer Langston, the great-uncle of Langston Hughes, had served as interim president from 1873 to 1875, it was not until 1926 that the university appointed its first black president, Mordecai Wyatt

Johnson, a thirty-six-year-old theologian. Johnson, whose parents had both been enslaved, was so light-skinned that he could be mistaken for white. He presided over Howard's first great expansion and modernized the law school, with a focus on civil-rights law, hiring Charles Hamilton Houston, the first African-American to make the *Harvard Law Review*, to run it. Houston became a mentor to Thurgood Marshall, and together they initiated much of the key litigation to integrate American schools in the nineteen-fifties.

Howard also attracted an overtly political student body. A famous photograph from 1934 shows a line of students, wearing nooses around their necks, standing across the street from the Daughters of the American Revolution Memorial Hall, where a national conference on crime was being held. The students demanded that the Attorney General, Homer S. Cummings, take action to halt the dozens of lynchings that were still occurring across the nation. The following year, members of the House Appropriations Committee called on Johnson to answer questions about radicalism on campus. He said that he would sooner send the students and faculty "back to the cornfield" than prescribe what they could read or how they could think. Johnson's audacity made him a legendary figure in Howard's history—the main administration building is named for him—but many at Howard saw his statements and his actions as irresponsible, and even reckless.

In "Invisible Man," published in 1952, Ralph Ellison, who was a student at Tuskegee Institute in the nineteen-thirties, described the tense dynamic between black colleges and their leadership. The first section of the novel is set at an unnamed Southern school, where the protagonist, a student, runs afoul of the president, Dr. Bledsoe, who is as dictatorial toward blacks as he is deferential to whites. When white benefactors, whose noblesse oblige blinds them to their own racism, gather for dinner, Bledsoe discreetly excuses himself rather than offend their sensibilities by dining with them.

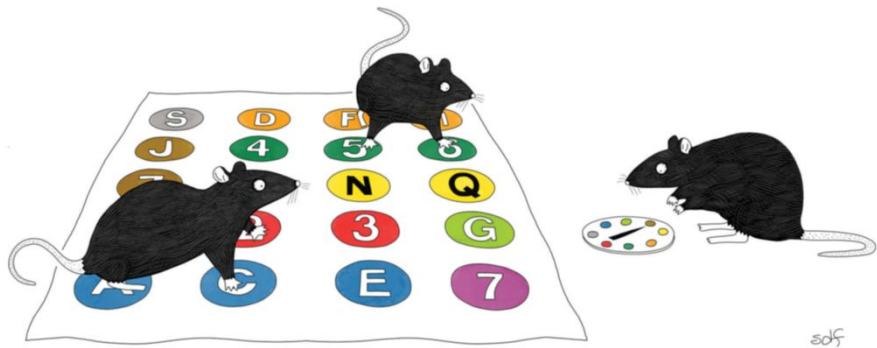
Bledsoe was based, in part, on Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee, but he represents a broader character type in H.B.C.U. history. In

1963, Albert Manley, the president of Spelman, fired Howard Zinn, then the chair of the history department, for encouraging his students—Alice Walker and Marian Wright Edelman among them—to participate in the burgeoning civil-rights movement. Manley worried that student activism would upset the white good will upon which the school depended.

In Ellison's time, Tuskegee was dedicated to the proposition that personal dignity and character were the antidotes to racism. Du Bois, one of Washington's most ardent ideological opponents, criticized him for practicing the "old attitude of adjustment and submission." Howard was always intended to be a more forward-thinking institution, though the delicate political positioning of the school made that a complicated undertaking, particularly for its administration.

Over and over again at Howard, the conflict between conciliation with the white world and a more assertive form of politics animated campus activism. In 1968, when students shut down the school and demanded a greater prominence in the curriculum for African-American studies, they posted a sign reading "Black University" on the front of the administration building.

In 1987, when I arrived at Howard, from Jamaica, Queens, to become the first college student in my family, James Cheek had been the president for eighteen years, following a successful stint in that role at Shaw University, in North Carolina. (Mark Mason, the Howard trustee, was also from Jamaica, and was my freshman roommate.) During my sophomore year, in a display of the kind of racial pragmatism that so incensed Ellison, Cheek recruited the Republican political operative Lee Atwater to the board. Atwater, a specialist in employing racially coded rhetoric to discredit and defeat Democratic opponents, had run George H. W. Bush's 1988 Presidential campaign, and used the notorious Willie Horton ad to portray Michael Dukakis as "soft on crime." For Cheek, the virtue of Atwater's political access outweighed his actions. For the students, the move heightened a fear, bequeathed to us by the protesters in 1968, that Howard was not a black university but merely a university with black people.



At the annual Charter Day ceremony in 1989, at which Bill Cosby was given an honorary degree, a group of protesters led by April Silver, who now runs an arts agency, and Ras Baraka, the son of Amiri Baraka and now the mayor of Newark, confronted Cheek about the Atwater appointment. Cheek dismissed their concerns, and, a few days later, more than two thousand students occupied the administration building, shutting down the university. Atwater resigned from the board four days later. Cheek was widely criticized for his decision to deploy the D.C. police in an attempt to remove the students from the building, and stepped down soon afterward.

But Frederick, who did not participate in the protests, regards Cheek in far less stark terms than I do, in part because Cheek presided over the largest modern expansion of Howard's campus—including the construction of the new hospital building—and of its student population. Where some saw in Cheek a figure willing to sacrifice self-respect in pursuit of revenue, others saw a brilliant tactician navigating a minefield of white antipathy. Frederick is not unaware that the same debate colors the way his own presidency is seen.

The intertwined sense of the weight of Howard's history and its current implications has typically inspired a kind of racial omertà—a reticence to openly speak ill of one's own in a society that is always ready to use your shortcomings against you. This made the circumstances surrounding Frederick's selection as president all the more noteworthy. In June of 2013, Renee Higginbotham-Brooks, the vice-chair of the board of trustees, published an

open letter warning that, under the leadership of Sidney Ribeau, a communications scholar who became president in 2008, Howard was on the verge of financial collapse. It had also undergone a worrisome decline in prestige: its credit rating had fallen, and its standing in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings had dropped for several years running. Some of Ribeau's supporters disputed the claims, but he announced his retirement later that year, which led to the appointment of Frederick, a physician with a master's degree in business.

I visited Frederick again on campus late last summer. He'd arrived at the office at seven, and I sat in on several meetings he had scheduled with his "cabinet" of executive officers and new faculty members. One of them was Justin Hansford, an attorney and a Howard alum, whose parents and maternal grandparents also graduated from the university. I had first met him in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, when he helped bring a human-rights complaint to the United Nations against the United States, in response to the events surrounding the death of Michael Brown. He was coming to Howard to lead a civil-rights institute at the law school. "Social justice is in the DNA of this institution," Frederick said, and he hoped that Hansford would help revitalize the tradition. Given all the recent criticism that Frederick has been too conciliatory, the remark seemed somewhat pointed. Hansford, though, felt that Frederick was sincere. "There's a huge gap between the way the students view him and the way the faculty views him," he later told me. Students, in his estimation, are far more critical. Yet Frederick's relationship with

the faculty is not without problems, as the vote of no confidence, valid or not, made plain.

Frederick thinks that his difficulties are partly due to a bias that some African-Americans have against West Indian blacks. "I'm the first non-American-born president of the university," he said. "There's an undercurrent of 'Does he really relate to black people?'" I was struck by his forthrightness, even though I wasn't sure I believed it, given Howard's history as a crossroads of the African diaspora. But later, when I asked a retired senior administrator about Frederick's decision to attend the White House meeting, she said, "It may be that, as someone from outside this country, he doesn't know the various cultural markers, doesn't have an absolute understanding of racism the way we do." That "we" she conscripted me into was as loathsome a designation as the "they" that has so often been the lens through which black people are viewed. (Her argument also failed to explain why so many black American college presidents attended the meeting.) Clarence Lusane, who chairs the political-science department, echoed Frederick's impression: "There's an idea that there is a West Indian faction and a black American one, and that Frederick favors the former." The idea had no real basis, Lusane said, and no one I spoke to could identify any

specific instance of favoritism, but the perception nonetheless complicates Frederick's reputation on campus.

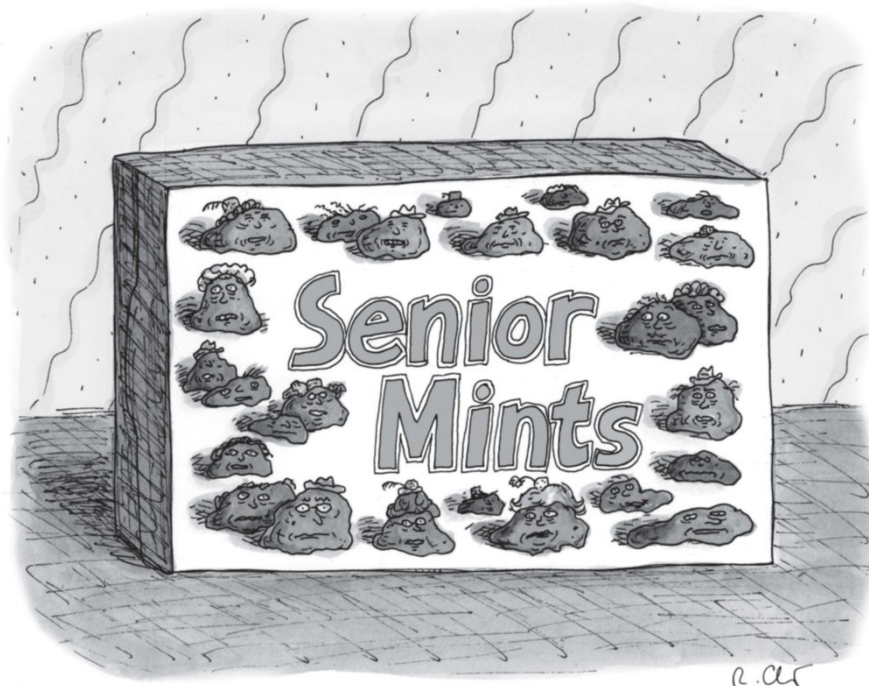
Frederick knows that alumni will judge him largely on the university's financial footing at the end of his tenure. Harvard, with an endowment of thirty-six billion dollars, has a policy that students whose families earn less than sixty-five thousand dollars a year are awarded free tuition, fees, and housing. Stanford, which has an endowment of more than twenty-two billion, has a similar policy, for families earning less than a hundred and twenty-five thousand. Howard, which competes against these institutions for students, cannot come anywhere close to such largesse. In 2015, the financier John Paulson gave Harvard a gift of four hundred million dollars. Howard is the only H.B.C.U. with an endowment larger than Paulson's gift—around six hundred million dollars. The largest gift to the university during Frederick's tenure so far is a four-million-dollar donation from the media executive Cathy Hughes and her son, Alfred Liggins III. Frederick also secured ten million dollars in pledges for need-based scholarships last year.

I also sat in on a meeting in the admissions office, where the staff was celebrating the record number of commitments the school had received from accepted applicants for the 2017-18 year.

That presented new challenges, though, in terms of housing and classrooms; most of all, the administrators were concerned with the number of academically high-achieving applicants from low-income families. "We've got an incoming class with an average G.P.A. of 3.54 and 1210 SAT scores," Frederick told me later. "But, when they run the analyses, probably sixty per cent of those kids can't afford to be here." This meant that those students would struggle with finding financial aid and paying it off. It was the main difficulty confronting all the H.B.C.U.s: a crisis not of purpose but of means.

Last year, the Howard administration sent out a fund-raising e-mail requesting donations for a "Senior Year Fund" for students who had managed to pay tuition for three years but could not cover their senior year. I understood the problem intimately—that circumstance had forced me to drop out of Howard, in the fall of 1990. I owed three thousand dollars in back fees, and therefore couldn't register for the upcoming year. I stayed in Washington, working in bookstores, attending lectures, and writing bad short fiction. Three years later, when Carmen James, the bursar, and Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, a history professor, discovered that I had not graduated, the registrar's office allowed me to reënroll and to pay off the outstanding fees in monthly hundred-dollar increments. Everything that followed—graduate school, a doctorate, a career in academia—was thanks to that intervention, a step that the school took in keeping with its sense of mission. But this is precisely the kind of thing that makes it possible for a university to receive a substantial budgetary appropriation and still find itself chronically strapped for funding. Howard's outstanding tuition fees currently amount to eighteen million dollars.

The H.B.C.U. system has become a sort of longitudinal study of how the racial wealth gap plays out in higher education. Still, Frederick notes, "Howard produces more black people who go on to complete Ph.D.s in STEM fields than any other college or university in the country. Nine of the top ten producers of black people with undergraduate degrees in physics are all historically black colleges." He added, "One of the things I feel is a real challenge is





communicating what we accomplish not in comparison with each other but with all colleges and universities in the country.”

He has some ideas to that end. In an effort to become a crucial player in the diversification of industries where African-Americans are underrepresented, the university launched Howard West, which grew out of a program that brought in Google engineers to serve as computer-science faculty. Through Howard West, twenty-five students were selected by faculty to take a twelve-week course on coding at Google’s San Francisco campus this past summer. The company funded the program, which was initiated by Bonita Stewart, a Google vice-president and a Howard alum. There are plans to expand it to a full academic year.

Another idea has reconnected Frederick with Ben Carson, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Frederick originally applied to medical school because he wanted to work on a cure for sickle-cell anemia, which afflicts a hundred thousand people in the United States. Once he began his studies, he decided that he wanted to be a surgeon, though he wasn’t sure that he had the physical stamina the job requires. In 1993, Frederick cold-called Carson, then a celebrated neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University and the author of several best-selling books, to ask his advice. Carson invited him to Baltimore, took him to lunch, and persuaded him to pursue surgery.

Frederick does not share Carson’s political views, but he is still grateful for the advice that Carson gave him twenty-four years ago. He recently called him again, to talk about how HUD’s loan programs might help with a potential new plan to finance the hospital. But, Frederick joked, “that doesn’t mean I’m going to say he needs to be on my board of trustees.”

James Comey declined offers from many universities in favor of Howard’s. He was looking to engage in the conversation about law enforcement and race, he said, and “I thought maybe the hardest, most stimulating, and for me most beneficial place to have that would be at the mecca.” Some on campus interpret his presence as a sly

gesture on Frederick’s part. Having been criticized for attending the White House gathering, he hired the man whose firing triggered an ongoing, potentially existential threat to Trump’s Presidency. But Frederick denies any political motivation: he met Comey last year, before the White House meeting, when he gave a black-history talk at F.B.I. headquarters, and the fellowship offer came out of discussions they had afterward.

In any event, Comey’s hiring sparked a campus backlash. Students from H.U. Resist released a statement saying that Comey “represents an institution diametrically opposed to the interests of Black people domestically and abroad.” Frederick met with the students, who later told me that they objected to Comey’s use of the term “Ferguson effect,”

to describe an alleged uptick in violent crime that followed the national protests against police brutality, because police officers felt powerless to do their jobs effectively. They also criticized the reported monitoring of members of Black Lives Matter during Comey’s tenure, and lodged wide-ranging, historical complaints against the F.B.I. for its treatment of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, and its role in the deportation, in 1927, of the black-nationalist leader Marcus Garvey.

Convocation typically draws a respectable but far from capacity crowd, yet on the morning of last September’s ceremony, where Comey was due to deliver the convocation address, students and faculty packed the auditorium. Shortly after he began to speak, students started chanting protest slogans and singing “We Shall Not Be Moved.” The clamor suggested that at least some students believed that Howard had once more chosen political accommodation over principle. But an apparently larger group began shouting that Comey should be allowed to finish. He continued, saying that “Howard has always been different, which is why I wanted to be part of it. It was designed that way and it has remained that way. A safe space, especially for those who face the oppression and the challenge of being black in

America.” He ended his comments to sustained applause. When I asked him later about the event, he laughed and said, “I’ve never given a speech where people were shouting ‘Comey is not my homie.’” Then he added, “Howard is dealing with this, like a lot of universities: How do you both embrace energy and protest and dissent and maintain an open environment where people can have hard conversations?”

Frederick was no less sanguine. “Institutions like the F.B.I. and the White House have a tortured history among minorities,” he said. “But we didn’t blame Barack Obama for every ill of the White House’s history. It’s the same with Comey.” Frederick had brought him to campus not despite the strained relationship between minority communities and law enforcement

but because of it. “The dialogue is important because minorities are being killed by law enforcement, and I thought it important for my students to be asking him about that directly.”

The protest and counterprotest reminded me yet again of the apparent paradox at the heart of H.B.C.U.s, where pragmatists are in the business of producing new generations of fierce idealists. Ralph Ellison’s Bledsoe delighted in the idea that he might alchemize power from deference. Booker T. Washington denounced racial equality to powerful segregationists, but he also secretly funded efforts to defend black civil rights. Howard’s militancy has been underwritten by its compromises.

One afternoon, when I spoke to Frederick by phone, he told me about a student who had harshly criticized his decision to attend the White House meeting, but later came to his office seeking financial assistance to pay for his final year. To Frederick’s mind, the connection between his trip to the White House and his ability to aid the student was obvious. To his critics, such connections either are opaque or come at a cost that betrays the school’s founding mission. “People think we’re doing God’s work, on God’s time, with God’s money,” Frederick said. “The problem is, we don’t have access to the latter two.” ♦





*David Gates*

After the children had left home and his wife had made her escape to Italy, Garver kept most of the house closed off, even when summer came and he no longer had to save on heat. Better the blank doors than the empty rooms—not to get sentimental at this late date. He still went to his studio every day, although the work was no good anymore, and “anymore” was putting it kindly. His married daughter, Emma, the only one of the kids who kept in touch, had flown up for his birthday and told him that this was no way to live. Look at the garden: sumacs ten feet high. He should sell this stupid farm and move back down to the city, she said. Or *someplace* where he could see people. Sixty-three wasn’t too old to make a fresh start.

“Ah, but is every morning not a fresh start?” Garver said.

“You need a better attitude,” she said. His children might not have turned out to be prodigies, but by Jesus he’d given them an ear for irony.

Anyway, he *did* see people. He’d even had a thing with one of the artsy transplants, a printmaker whom he’d met at her opening in a converted barn—*after* his wife had left, be it noted. She’d confessed to her husband, thank God, before it had become necessary to say something about her work: electric-green pastures with black-and-white cows. The scandal had cost him invitations to lawn parties and potlucks—Republicans couldn’t have been more self-righteous. But now and then he still smoked weed with another graybeard, who had once worked for Gary Hart and had hooked Garver up with the local growers. And during baseball season he’d drop by the sports bar, where he could banter with the salt-of-the-earthers. Garver had grown up in western Pennsylvania, so he knew how to talk *that* talk.

No, the problem was money. The once-a-week drive down to Pratt had raised hell with his back, he couldn’t collect full Social Security for three more years, and he was afraid to show his dealer—if she was still his dealer—his recent pieces: found objects on painted canvases. Rauschenberg had done the same shit, better, sixty years

ago. *Garver* had done the same shit, better, twenty years ago. So he’d just finish a new one and stack it against the wall with the others. Maybe they’d be taken for intentional kitsch someday—he’d be the Jeff Koons of 2099. But he liked smelling the good old oil paint and turpentine—no acrylics for this boy—and sometimes he’d still make a mark that satisfied him. And he worked while listening to late Miles Davis, which sounded like Miró, and which used to be his lucky music. Fuck Rauschenberg: what he wanted, really, was to paint like Miró. That was the difference between him and Miró.

Garver had built the studio himself, when the kids were little, a few hundred yards past the house on what must have been an old logging road: toilet, sink, shower stall, single bed—like a cabin at the church camp he’d gone to when he was twelve. All he’d ever needed. When things started falling to shit with his wife, he’d bought a mini-fridge and stapled up insulation. So why not move in here and rent out the big house, maybe to some writer type from the city? If he could get, say, fifteen hundred, that would cover the mortgage, which still had years to run, and enough over to live on.

A young couple answered his ad in *The New York Review of Books*, and when they got out of their rental car, on the Saturday afternoon before the Fourth of July—him in jeans and black T-shirt, with shaved head; her in yellow sundress, dark bangs, those retro cat’s-eye glasses—he thought, You’ll do. She released their little girl from her car seat and lifted her out. The girl’s pudgy legs dangled, then kicked.

Ben was a composer with a grant from the N.E.A., and Lois had an M.F.A. in nonfiction from Columbia; the little girl had just turned five. They praised “the trees” and “the quiet”—no news to Garver—before getting onto the school thing. Private schools, they believed, were elitist; so, good lefties though they were, they’d chosen to put their daughter among redneck kids instead of black kids. Or that was how Garver read it: he and his wife had had the same coded discussion years ago. His two older children had managed to get into SUNY

Plattsburgh, and William had actually graduated, in what was called “marketing”; Emma had got pregnant during her sophomore year, and was now a stay-at-home mother in Denton, Texas. The youngest, Marianne, had finally straightened out enough to hold a job at an animal shelter near Burlington.

Garver had his own dish put up for the Internet—it was about time, anyway—and, at the end of July, Ben and Lois moved their stuff up from their one-bedroom in Bushwick. Everything they owned fitted into a U-Haul van; Garver didn’t even have to put his furniture in the barn. The little girl got Marianne’s old room, whose flowered wallpaper had cleaned up O.K. with a sponge; Lois made William’s room her study; and Ben set up his keyboard and computers in Emma’s room, which had a view of the hills to the east, in Vermont. Garver hung a mosquito net over the double bed in the master bedroom for them. The bugs wouldn’t leave Lois alone, and Ben didn’t seem handy enough for country life: they’d bought a used Honda and, when the battery died, he didn’t know what jumper cables were.

Ben worked every day on what he said was a quintet for strings and sampler, commissioned by the Aspen Music Festival, while Lois took the little girl to the lake. When school started, she said, she’d get back to revising her thesis, on the films of Ida Lupino. Ben had hunted down Garver’s old Web site, and some evenings after dinner he’d walk over to the studio to look at what he called “the pictures”; Garver approved of the word, though he couldn’t tell if Ben was clear-sighted or inarticulate. They’d listen to jazz, drink Garver’s Knob Creek, and have some man-talk in the guise of artist-talk.

It wasn’t until the evening of Labor Day that Garver learned the other reason for the family’s little pastorate: Lois had thought that a change of scene, and getting away from certain friends, might help Ben cut back on smoking weed. “Not totally,” he told Garver. “Just, you know, not go crazy with it.”

“I hear *that*,” Garver said. “Shit’s



strong these days." Lately, he'd taken to having just one hit, then drinking whiskey to dull his paranoia.

"You wouldn't have any, would you?" Ben said. "I mean, I know that's a weird thing to ask, you know, your landlord."

"I might," Garver said. "Actually, I might join you in just a smidge."

The next morning, Garver walked down to the mailbox and found a postcard addressed to Lois and Ben: a green hillside, topped by a castle, sloping down to the Rhine. Lois was hanging a sheet on the line he'd strung up for her, from a hook on one of the porch posts to a hook screwed into the maple tree. "*Guten Tag*," he called. "*You're up bright and early.*"

"First day of school. And I thought I'd do laundry before Ben settled in to work. Hearing the washer makes him crazy."

"You'll make some man a good wife," he said. "Here—this came."

"Oh, cool. My sister and her partner are in Germany for a month. We're hoping to get there next summer—Ben wants to go to Bayreuth."

"Wagner Central, right? They still tattoo your seat number on your wrist?"

"You're being *e-vil*," she sang. "He's thinking about an opera eventually."

"Ah, to be young and ambitious. I help you with those?" He bent down to the laundry basket, saw a pair of her black lace underpants, and took a pillowcase. "God, first day of school. They grow up fast." This was the way to talk.

"Poor Claire. She had a meltdown about her new sneakers. We went over to those outlet places"—she pointed her chin in what she seemed to think was the direction of Manchester—"and now she's having buyer's remorse. Sorry—this isn't interesting to you."

"I hope *you're* not," he said. "Having renter's remorse." He hung up a T-shirt with the David Levine caricature of Stravinsky.

"Well, it's been a godsend for Ben. So far." She hung up a pair of little leggings. "Can I talk to you about something? You want a cup of coffee?"

"Will we bother him?"

"No, voices are O.K. It's just, like, anything rhythmic."

He followed her up the porch steps, watching her bare heels lift up off her flip-flops. "Go ahead and sit," she said. "You take milk?"

"But no sugar. Thanks. Didn't get service like this under the old management."

She poured his coffee and sat down across from him at the kitchen table. "Here's the thing, O.K.? It's not like I want to be Ben's mommy, but when he came back from your place last night he couldn't even put a sentence together."

"Really? He *seemed* O.K."

"I'm not stupid," she said. "Look, he can do whatever. Obviously. It's just—"

"I'm afraid I was the culprit," Garver said. "If you'd rather—"

"I don't know. I mean I'm not a puritan or anything. It's just when it gets out of hand. Which it has sometimes. I don't want to see him go there again. He's been working really well."

"Got it," he said. "Listen, it's probably not the best thing for me, either."

"Some people I guess it's fine," she said. "You know, Ben looks up to you. His father was kind of a monster."

"He looks up to me, then he is in deep shit. No, seriously, I'm glad you said something." He took a sip of coffee. Too hot. "So how's *your* work coming?"

"I was going to get started this morning."

"Then I should get out of your hair." He got up from the table. "Can I take this? I'll bring your cup back."

"It's yours, actually."

"Huh, come to think of it," he said. "So are we good?"

"We don't have to talk about this anymore," she said.

Ben stopped visiting the studio, but in early October he and Lois invited Garver to dinner, to celebrate Ben's finishing his piece. The leaves were blazing and falling as he walked to the house; they'd already filled the ruts his truck had made. He presented Lois with a bottle of Mumm's, and Ben pointed to a bottle of Knob Creek on the blanket chest they'd moved down from the bedroom to

use as a coffee table. While they cooked, he sat with their little girl, who was watching a Disney movie; the princess in this one had a bow and arrow and didn't want to get married. Lois came in and sat between them on the sofa. "Sorry about—" She pointed a thumb at the screen. "She's got a new bestie who's all into this. I guess it's—you know, modeling not such bad stuff. I'm just afraid she's going native."

"I don't think we're supposed to say that anymore," Ben said. "Looks like you could use a refill."

"God, the more things change," Garver said. "My youngest wore out the tape of 'The Little Mermaid.'"

"We *used* to take Claire to the Young People's Concerts," Lois said.

"Yeah." Ben poured more whiskey over Garver's ice. "Spared that at least."

"He's such a snob," Lois said. "I swear, though, half the kids in her class are earning-lay isabled-day."

"What's that?" the little girl said.

"Just boys, sweetie," her mother said. She turned to Garver. "Did you have trouble navigating this? I mean, you were like us."

"What can I tell you," Garver said. "There's advantages and disadvantages. Well, shit, *that* was fucking profound."

"I'm trying to *watch* this," the little girl said.

"Claire," her mother said.

"No, she's right," Garver said. "I was being loud."

"Not to mention," Ben said.

"We should eat," Lois said. "I'll bring you a plate, sweetie."

At the dining-room table, Garver raised his glass of champagne. "Hey, official congratulations. So when's the blessed event?"

Garver thought he saw Lois give Ben the stink-eye; Ben cocked his head. "Oh," he said. "Right. They're looking at July. I'm flying out next week to talk about stuff."

"That's great," Garver said. "Shit, I haven't been on a plane since they started making you take your shoes off. Another age of the world."

What was he doing in this room with these young people? His wife used to sit in that chair. He used to sit where this young man was. And

## WAR AND PEACE

I made a big wish on the evening star,  
Venus, or was it Mars,  
but it was a low-flying plane  
headed east.

I saw the little foxes on the hillside  
with their pointy red ears;  
up close, a fallen branch of autumn.

When the guide clapped his hands,  
the brilliant apples on the tree got frightened  
and flew away.

The marriage I called Gibraltar  
went down like a ship  
scraping the rocky strait.

I thought the war would bring peace.  
The road signs all said  
This Way to the Future, so we ran out  
with flag and shovel, elated, planting—

—Chana Bloch  
(1940-2017)

there'd been the aesthetic problem of two kids on one side and one on the other.

A couple of years ago, Garver had found an old household dump out in the woods. He'd unearthed a plastic bas-relief Porky Pig face, the rollers of a washing machine, the carcass of a Bakelite radio, and a doll's head with evenly spaced hair-holes, and brought them to his studio, thinking, *Maybe someday. It had taken all this time for him to realize that he was sick of looking at them. Well, if you hate them, why not use them? Like that insidious hymn from his childhood: If you love Him, why not serve Him?*

As the sun was setting, he gave up and started the woodstove—for what would be the first of many times before May—and finally took off his red plaid jacket; the denim shirt would be enough. He was listening to “The Jack Johnson Sessions” on his laptop and sketching out possible arrangements on bristol board—it would be a big canvas, and a bitch to

transport, not that he'd ever be called upon to transport it—when Ben called his cell. “You receiving? Or you still working?”

“Nah, I'm about done. Jesus, there's a confession.”

“Cool. I thought I'd stop by for a second. I'm flying out in the morning.”

“We used to sing that one, too,” Garver said. “Yeah, just give me a minute to put shit away.”

He turned off the music, put his sketches on his worktable, face down, then pawed through the canvases stacked against the wall. He pulled half a dozen that bothered him less than the others—he hoped he hadn't already trotted them out—and lined them up facing the room. Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?

Ben came in wearing a black wool topcoat and a knit cap on his shaved head. “*Man*, it's chilly,” he said. “I just checked the weather. Supposed to be a frost tonight. I have to get up at five so Lois can drive me to the airport.”

“Got a scraper for your windshield?” Garver said. “Better grab mine out of

the truck. You picked a good time to get out of Dodge.”

“Yeah, but to Colorado?” Ben took off his coat and sat in the Morris chair next to the stove. “These new? I like that one on the left.”

“Newish. Newish-ish.” Garver took down the bottle of Knob Creek and two jelly glasses. “You want a taste?”

“Hit me,” Ben said. “So how cold does it get up here? Whoa, whoa, when.”

“Well, last winter wasn't the worst.” Garver took the desk chair, supposedly ergonomic, and set his glass on the table between them. He'd nailed it together out of boards from the barn. “You're probably going to want snow tires.”

“O.K., I'm not going to think about it,” Ben said. “Cheers.”

“First today,” Garver said. “Yeah. *That* burns. Congratulations again, by the way. I'd like to hear that piece sometime.”

“Actually.” Ben reached into his coat pocket and handed Garver a thumb drive. “This is still rough. And it's not real strings.”

“Shit, thanks.” Garver got up and went to his laptop. “Just plug this in, right?”

“Oh, no, I didn't mean for you to—keep it for sometime when you're, maybe when you're working or something. I think it's—I don't know, I'm not going to say.” He took a sip and nodded at the canvases. “That one on the left, with the red business? That just *moves*. Like, internally. I don't really know how to talk about pictures.”

“Hey, I don't know how to talk about music.” Garver put the thumb drive in his shirt pocket and snapped the snap.

Ben put his glass down. “Listen, what I could *really* use.”

“Great minds,” Garver said. “Your lady would kill me, though.”

“Oh. She give you the talk?”

“She was nice about it.”

“She would be. So I guess I'm cut off.”

“Paging Dr. Freud,” Garver said. “Ah, shit. I don't want to be the devil, but one hit probably wouldn't hurt you.”

“Yeah, I don't know,” Ben said. “Pot's a weird thing.”

“Everything's a weird thing,” Garver said. “Properly looked at.” He

opened the mini-fridge and took out the Ball jar, set it on the table, packed the wooden pipe, and turned the stem to Ben. "With an old man's blessings."

Ben took a hit, coughed it out, took another, and passed the pipe to Garver, then closed his eyes and released the smoke. "Oh, *fuck* yeah. It just gets so noisy by the end of the day."

Garver sat back down in the desk chair. When he saw Ben's eyes open again, he relit the pipe and took a hit himself. Yeah, better keep it to one. He set the pipe down, and Ben picked it up. Garver let out the smoke and said, "A word to the wise."

"It's cool." Ben held this one in for what seemed to Garver like a long time, then took one more and passed the pipe across the table.

Garver held up a hand.

"Taking a wait-and-see position," Ben said. "Fuck that, no offense. You mind if I?"

"Boys will be boys," Garver said. "Hell, I might as well do one more, too. Music?"

"Yeah, but not—you wouldn't have,

like, Ellington? Or whatever. Just not anything too squonky. I mean, I don't mean to dictate."

Garver took a second hit, went to his laptop, and scrolled through iTunes. That first hit was coming on already, so it was Katie bar the door. "I got just the thing," he said, and clicked on "The Payback." Somehow it had got dark outside.

"Is this *Ellington*?" Ben said.

"No, no, no," Garver said. "James Brown."

"Right, right, right," Ben said. "He is Ellington. No, actually he's fucking Terry Riley. I fucking *love* this piece." He started bobbing his head in time with it, then stopped. "You know," he said, "I'm the real deal."

He wasn't making much of a case for himself.

The song seemed to be going on for a long time. After a while, Garver looked at the track listing: seven minutes and thirty-nine seconds. Whew: so that explained it. Ben had another hit; Garver drained his whiskey and poured himself more. He was afraid that Ben could read his thoughts, but

was there really anything wrong in his thoughts? Well, *that*.

"More of this?" Garver said when the song finally stopped.

"More of everything," Ben said. "You know, that picture? What I was thinking—the red thing? If it was farther up? And to the center more? Am I being too pushy? I *am*."

"No, no. *Something's* wrong with it."

"Yeah, O.K., so you're humoring me. Sorry. Fuck, I'm the only person in the world who gets belligerent on fucking pot. I think I need to take a walk." He stood up, then sat back down. "I'm fucked."

"Not to add to your troubles," Garver said, "but is Lois going to be wondering where you are?"

"Yeah, shit, I better go." He got to his feet again, put out a hand to steady himself against the woodstove, and jerked it back just in time. "I can keep this together. Experiences to the contrary—wait, what'd I say? Appearances to the contrary."

It was still dark when Garver was awakened by a splintering of headlights through the trees; he heard the car going down the driveway and listened it into silence. When he heard it coming back, he was sitting in the Morris chair, drinking his third cup of coffee and reading the *Times* online. In this respect, at least, he'd changed his life; he'd be on fucking Facebook if he didn't watch himself. Advil had nuked his headache, the studio was still warm from the night before, and apparently he'd done himself the kindness of bringing in more wood. All a body needed for a good workday except good work. He looked out the window and saw the Honda pull up behind his truck. Lois got out, leaving the little girl in the car seat, and he went to the door.

"Our young man get off O.K.?"

"I don't even know what to say to you," she said. "That you would help him fuck up. *Again*."

"Yeah, I hope he wasn't the worse for wear this morning. One thing kind of led to another."

"No, you *wanted* him to fuck up. I see what you're doing. Claire and I are going to my sister's today. As soon as he's back, we'll be moving out of here."



*"And now I will attempt the same feat but without insurance."*



"Hey, Lois. Seriously."

"I liked you," she said. "And he thought you were his friend."

"I hate to say it, but he's going to find other friends. You can't just, you know, go someplace else."

"What, are you going to sue us? I'm not letting him end up like you."

"Ouch," he said. "Yeah, what can I say, life is long. Well. Shit. I like both of you, whatever that's worth." He lifted his chin toward the Honda. "You better go to her."

The little girl was thrashing in her seat; Garver couldn't make out what she was yelling. Lois opened the car door and knelt next to her in the frosty leaves, smoothed the hair off her forehead, said whatever a real parent would say to a weeping, unreachable child.

The day before they came back to move their stuff out, Garver drove to Albany and got on a plane to Texas. His daughter had been after him to visit since his birthday, and if there were ever a time. At this point, what was another thousand dollars? He'd been making minimum payments for years. When he passed through the gate at Dallas-Fort Worth carrying his suitcase—the only one, he'd noticed, that didn't have those wheels—he spotted Emma in the crowd, wearing an oversized T-shirt that bulged out below her breasts, though her thighs were skinny in her leggings. She took a picture with her cell phone, then moved in to hug him. He felt that belly touch him. "So good to see you," he said. "Hey, I know you're not supposed to ask, but—"

She looked down at herself. "Well, what in the world? Not *again*?"

"You didn't tell me this. I'm happy for you."

"Are you now," she said. "I seem to remember."

"Yeah, O.K. Not my finest moment."

"You weren't exactly thrilled when Kayla was born, either."

"O.K., well, that was about the time your mother and I—"

She held up a hand. "Let's not. Look, it's good to see you, too. So we're, like, half an hour, forty-five? You're not going to need that jacket. It's eighty-five degrees out there."

It was the first time he'd been a passenger with her, as far as he could recall, since he'd taught her to drive, on country roads near their house. In the freeway traffic, she stuck to her lane as tractor-trailers passed on both sides, and her eyes kept darting from rearview mirror to left-side mirror to right-side mirror and back to the road. Out his window, all he saw was box stores and office buildings and apartment complexes.

"I know, right?" she said. "Pretty flat. You get used to it."

"Tell me something," he said. "Was I a monster?"

"To be honest? You kind of were. I guess not as much to me. I hear from William on Facebook. Marianne not so much. Mom, of course."

"Ah. Are you all 'friends'?"

"You're still kind of a dick," she said.

"So I'm told," he said. "Jesus, I don't want to be."

"But you're going to be nice with Jason and the kids, right?"

"I had planned on it," he said. "Watch this guy."

"I see him." She put on her turn signal, checked the mirrors, and edged into the exit lane. "We've almost made it home alive."

The house was on a street called Skylark Drive, a brick rambler with a two-car garage, a chemical-green lawn and a tall oak tree in front. "This is right nice," he said.

"We like it," she said. "Let's give you the tour and get you settled. I have to pick up the kids at five."

She punched numbers on a keypad and opened the door. It was cool in the house. He set his suitcase down in the foyer: the living room had a fake-zebra rug and a black leather sectional, whose longer side faced a white brick fireplace. On the far wall—it had to be there, right?—the fucking Picasso Don Quixote.

"What can I tell you?" she said. "Jason's had it since college."

"Well. At least it's not—" He couldn't come up with what it wasn't.

"You might as well bring that in here. We're putting you in Noah's room."

"Oh Christ, no. I'm perfectly fine with the couch."

"He wanted to give it to you. He

found your Web site and everything. I think he's secretly hoping you'll look at the drawings he's been doing."

"Don't tell me he's inherited the family curse."

"Yeah, I'm not gonna touch *that*," she said. "It's this one—that's a bathroom next door."

The boy's room had bare walls, a twin bed with a Dallas Cowboys quilt, a dresser, and a giant computer on the desk. It looked as austere as Garver's studio.

"Oh, crap," she said. "He took everything down. I guess he's a little shy."

"Silence, exile, and cunning," Garver said. "He's obviously got the gift."

"Do you want to rest up?" she said. "Or we can sit out back. There's iced tea. Or I think there's some vodka somebody left. We don't really drink."

"Iced tea'll do me for now." He'd had two mini-bottles of Jack Daniel's on the plane. But he should have thought to bring something in his suitcase.

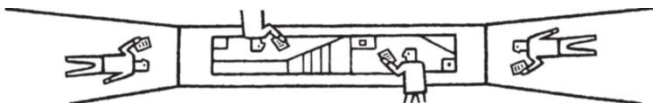
When she went to pick up the kids—from soccer? from choir practice, God help us?—she left him on the deck in the back yard, shaded by more tall oaks. So this was Texas. It was the middle of October and he was sitting outside, sweating through his shirt. Denton, she'd told him, was a university town; they'd even banned fracking. The subtext being? She couldn't possibly picture *him* living in such a place. Dying in such a place. She knew him as little as he knew her.

He finished his iced tea, went inside to shower. In the boy's room—his grandson's room—he opened his suitcase, took out his denim shirt with the fake-pearl snaps, and felt something in the pocket. A thumb drive? He must have tossed the shirt in the wash without checking. Probably ruined what was on there. He had no inclination to find out. He went into the kitchen and opened cabinets until he found a bottle of Absolut Citron, only a quarter of it gone. By the time the family got home—his family, if you thought about it—he ought to be where he needed to be. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

David Gates on unsympathetic characters.

# THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

## FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

*The ideological acrobatics of Trump's favorite morning show.*

BY ANDREW MARANTZ

President Trump woke up on November 3rd, turned on the television, and started tweeting shortly before 7 A.M. “Everybody is asking why the Justice Department (and FBI) isn’t looking into all of the dishonesty going on with Crooked Hillary & the Dems,” he typed. “People are angry.” By “everybody” and “people,” he seemed to mean, as he often does, the three anchors of the top-rated cable morning show, “Fox & Friends,” who happened to be discussing that very topic live on air, deploying their trademark brand of folksy, disingenuous outrage.

Soon afterward, one of the co-hosts said, “And now the President is tweeting about this.”

“I think he’s tweeting right now!” another said. The thin fourth wall between Trump and his TV had been broken once again.

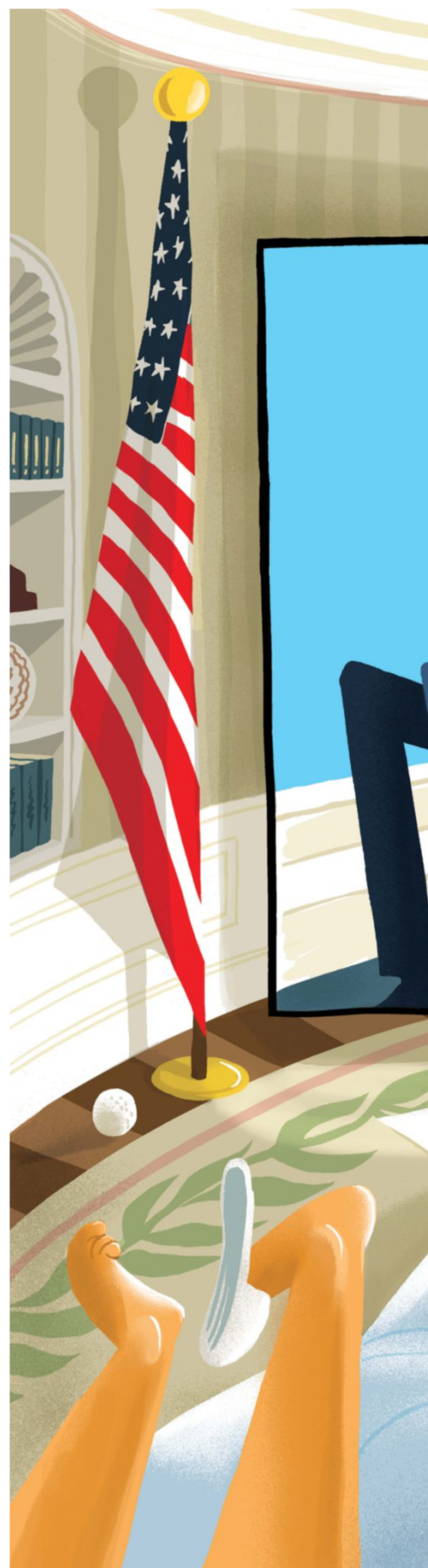
In the Fox News studio, the fresh tweets were displayed in bold type on a thirty-foot-wide screen, Trump’s larger-than-life Twitter avatar peering, Rushmore-like, into the middle distance. (Presumably, the real Trump, in the Presidential bedroom, peered back, an elderly youth gazing into a shallow pool.) A co-host read the tweets aloud, and then, completing the feedback loop, said, “This has been the question that people have had about Hillary Clinton and her campaign.” By “people,” she seemed to mean, as the anchors of “Fox & Friends” often do, Donald Trump.

“Fox & Friends” ended at nine. Moments later, Trump arrived on the South Lawn of the White House, answered a few questions from reporters, and left for a ten-day trip to Asia. A few days into the trip, en route from China to Vietnam, he walked to the rear of Air Force One, where the press corps was sitting,

to deliver some off-the-cuff remarks. “I know they like to say—people that don’t know me—they like to say I watch television,” he said. “People with fake sources—you know, fake reporters, fake sources. But I don’t get to watch much television, primarily because of documents. I’m reading documents a lot.”

This was weird, even by Trump’s standards. For one thing, “reading documents a lot” is high on the list of activities it’s nearly impossible to imagine Trump doing, along with foraging, Pilates, and introspection. For another, no one on the plane had said anything about television. It later became clear that the impetus for Trump’s outburst was an e-mail he’d just received from the *Times*—a list of fifty-one fact-checking questions for an article about him. Of these, he felt compelled to respond, indirectly, to just one, about his “prodigious television watching habits.” When the piece came out, it reported that Trump begins his day by watching TV in bed, where he “tweets while propped on his pillow.” (Trump, on Twitter: “Wrong!”)

Trump has been candid about his TV dependency for years. In a 1997 interview with Howard Stern, he described escaping from his own wedding reception—his second, when he married Marla Maples—as quickly as possible to look at coverage of the wedding. “I ran back and turned on the television,” he said. (A diagnostic test called the Television Addiction Scale asks subjects to agree or disagree with several statements, including “When I am unable to watch television, I miss it so much that you could call it ‘withdrawal.’”) During his trip to Asia, he tweeted, “I was forced to watch @CNN, which I have not done in months, and again realized how bad,



ABOVE: LEWIS SCOTT

*A chart of Trump's 2017 tweets, plotted by*





time of day, reveals an unmistakably dense band between 6 A.M. and 9 A.M., when “Fox & Friends” is on the air.

ILLUSTRATION BY BENDIK KALTENBORN



and FAKE, it is. Loser!" Of course, apart from rare circumstances (jury duty, North Korea, "Get Out"), no one, much less the President of the United States, is ever "forced" to watch TV. One imagines Trump writhing in pain, using his tie as a blindfold, while his staff scrambles to find him more documents to read.

On a recent morning, a chyron on "Fox & Friends" read "STUDY: 90% RECENT TRUMP COVERAGE IS NEGATIVE." The study—by the Media Research Center, a right-wing nonprofit whose declared "sole mission is to expose and neutralize the propaganda arm of the Left: the national news media"—came up several times during the broadcast, as did an F.B.I. agent's anti-Trump text messages, a pair of offensive socks that Colin Kaepernick had worn once in 2016, and the fact that it was very cold outside. Morning TV relies on constant repetition, the assumption being that most viewers, unlike the President, will be too busy to watch for long. (A chart of Trump's 2017 tweets, created by a University of Chicago graduate student and plotted by time of day, reveals an unmistakably dense band between 6 A.M. and 9 A.M., when "Fox & Friends" is on the air.)

"Wow, more than 90% of Fake News Media coverage of me is negative," Trump tweeted. He ended the tweet by naming his source, as well as his favorite exception: "@foxandfriends."

Every morning begins with an artificial L.E.D. sunrise, all teal and goldenrod, like an orange-juice carton come to life. The camera starts on the bottom floor of Fox News' lavish main studio, then glides upward—past a translucent staircase, past thirty-foot windows overlooking a still dark Sixth Avenue, past innumerable video screens—until it locates the three co-hosts, perched on their signature white "curvy couch."

"C'mon in!" Steve Doocy said recently, beckoning viewers with one arm. Doocy, who has hosted "Fox & Friends" since its inception, in 1998, is the show's jovial, distant dad, greeting all comers with a bemused rictus. His name sounds like a gentle pejorative that would describe him perfectly. In addition to being unflappable, he is tall and blond. These appear to be his only job qualifications.

"It's a Monday morning," Ainsley Earhardt said, adjusting her fuchsia jump-

suit and sucking the lipstick from her teeth. "Let's pretend today is Friday." Earhardt, from South Carolina, is a conservative Christian who is liberal in her use of "y'all's and "God bless you's"; on a recent show, Geraldo Rivera referred to her as a "Palmetto queen," and she smiled demurely at the compliment.

Brian Kilmeade—squat, distractible, tightly wound—tore at a pen cap. "You feel like every day is Friday," he grumbled at Earhardt, with a taut smile. In addition to repetition, the morning-show formula calls for heaps of fatuous banter. Kilmeade, a mini Sean Hannity in both appearance and affect, performs this duty truculently; he might endure a debate about whether the new Taylor Swift is better than the old Taylor Swift, but you can tell he'd rather be debating whether Robert Mueller should be waterboarded or put before a firing squad. Perhaps Kilmeade resents spontaneous small talk because it has led him into trouble. Once, while riffing about a Scandinavian scientific study, he shared his opinion that "the Swedes have pure genes," unlike Americans, who "keep marrying other species and other ethnics." He later apologized.

Network morning shows, such as "Today" and "Good Morning America," are bland products that try to avoid confusing, provoking, or offending any part of the audience. For this reason, especially nowadays, they tend to speed past political stories, or avoid them altogether, and instead fill time with the sort of banal chitchat that strangers might make at the post office. When a host refers to a topic that "everyone is talking about this morning," it's usually a cute viral video, an upcoming holiday, or a snowstorm. (It's no coincidence that one of "Today" 's biggest stars is its weatherman.) On cable, where the audiences are smaller and more ideologically segmented, morning hosts are free to be more opinionated; on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," for example, Trump is compared to an autocrat, a thug, or worse. "Fox & Friends" mashes these two genres together, resulting in some whiplash-inducing segues. A few minutes of misty-eyed Christmas nostalgia leads immediately—"meanwhile, switching gears"—to a conspiracy theory about Benghazi. A weather report gives way to a warning about the dangers of chain migration, with little adjustment in tone.

As the banter died down, Doocy, who rarely encounters a sentence he can't mangle, faced the camera and addressed the folks at home. "We're delighted to have—that you would join us today, because we've got a great story to—tell you with—uh, tell you all about," he said. "But, first, our top political story."

It was the day before Alabama's special Senate election, and the polls were close. However, Earhardt noted buoyantly, "Republican candidate Roy Moore has President Trump on his side." Trump had just recorded a robocall for the Moore campaign. The control room cued it up: "We will win and we will make America great again."

The morning of the election, a "Fox & Friends" field correspondent, Peter Hegseth, interviewed locals at Spot of Tea, a restaurant in Mobile. He began, "We're talking to the people on the ground, as opposed to caring what the pundits in New York City and Washington, D.C., are saying." Turning to a person on the ground named Diane, he said, "So, ultimately, a vote for Roy Moore is a vote for President Trump?"

"Correct," Diane said.

Hegseth ended the segment and then directed viewers back to his colleagues, the pundits in New York City.

Moore lost. The following morning, both "Fox & Friends" and its No. 1 fan were busy rewriting the immediate past. "The President had said that Roy Moore couldn't win, and, as it turns out, he was right," Doocy said.

"The President just tweeted about it," Earhardt said. The camera panned to Trump's words, on the giant tweet-screen: "I was right! Roy worked hard but the deck was stacked against him!"

Earhardt, speaking "as a female," summed up her view: "I think this is a referendum on Harvey Weinstein, not on President Trump." She delivered the line twice more, with slight variations, at the top of each hour. Earhardt is clearly the brainiest of the three co-hosts, if only because she can get through a broadcast without any notable malapropisms or endorsements of eugenics. Still, inevitably, she plays the role of the down-to-earth Southern gal, asking only the softest of softball questions. (Earhardt, to Ivanka Trump, in July of 2016: "Were you a tractor girl, or were you, like me, the pink Barbie Jeep?" Ivanka: "I was that combination.")

Halfway through the show, with Sixth Avenue brightening behind them, the co-hosts introduced Corey Lewandowski and David Bossie, two former Trump-campaign employees who are now freelance Trump lickspittles. “The President has done the right thing,” Lewandowski said. He was referring to the special election, but he could have been referring to just about anything. At one point, using some mind-bending rhetorical dark magic, he managed to imply that the real loser in Alabama was neither Trump nor Moore but Hillary Clinton. I have now watched the clip a few dozen times, and I still can’t quite figure out how he did it.

Doocy, wrapping up the interview, said, “I’m sure both of you would say the—your new book called ‘Let Trump Be Trump’ would be the perfect stuffing—uh, stock-in stuff for this holiday season.”

“Or you could put it in a box,” Earhardt said.

Professing shock at Fox News’ sophistry is hardly a hot take. But shilling for Trump, who has no discernible ethos beyond self-regard, is something new, requiring Baryshnikovian levels of ideological flexibility. Obama was easy—the “Fox & Friends” co-hosts simply denounced everything about him, from his terrorist fist-jabs to his choice of paper clips. The Bush Administration was mendacious, but at least it was predictable—the co-hosts had to work hard to build a connection between 9/11 and Iraq, but they didn’t have to worry that they’d wake up one morning to find that the Administration was now blaming the attack on Sudan. These days, hosting “Fox & Friends” is like cheerleading for a player who misses an open shot on goal, then doubles back to score on his own goalie, then storms off in a fit of petulance, complaining that the ref is a loser.

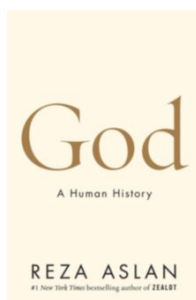
During one of several critiques of the non-Fox media and its purported anti-Trump bias, Earhardt said, “Just make it equal. Make it equal. Even if you have people on that give their opinions, try to make it fair and balanced.”

“It should be just ‘Here’s what happened today,’” Doocy said.

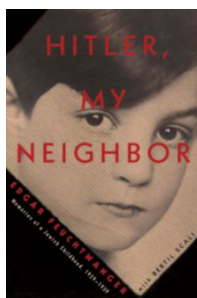
Earhardt let out an ebullient, cynical chuckle. “Those days are long gone, Steve,” she said.

“Those were the days of Walter Cronkite,” Doocy said, with a grin and a shrug. “Oh, well.” ♦

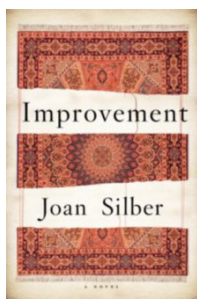
## BRIEFLY NOTED



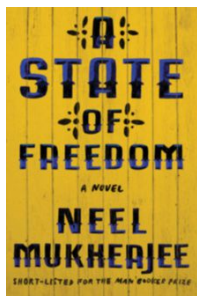
**God**, by Reza Aslan (Random House). Aslan’s first publication since his short-lived television series “Believer” is a brief survey of human conceptions of God, from the man-beast divinities found in prehistoric cave paintings to the one God of Islam. Drawing on evolutionary theory, Aslan argues that people have an “unconscious urge” to project their image onto God, since “we are the lens through which we understand the universe.” This urge has often led away from the idea of an embodied God to one in which God is a creative force underlying existence. Aslan is a believer in the latter. “I am, in my essential reality, God made manifest,” he writes. This conclusion has been reached before by many worthy thinkers; here, however, it arrives abruptly, in a book that merely skims subjects demanding weighty treatment.



**Hitler, My Neighbor**, by Edgar Feuchtwanger with Bertil Scali, translated from the French by Adriana Hunter (Other Press). In this disquieting coming-of-age story, narrated in the voice of the author’s childhood self, Feuchtwanger unfolds the surreal tale of the decade he spent living across the street from Hitler’s Munich apartment, from 1929 to 1939. Born to proudly German secular Jews, he had barely grasped that he was Jewish before he heard that Jews were evil and not really German. He can’t wrap his mind around the contradictions, but neither can many adults. Illuminating how it was possible for so many to be so confused is the book’s great achievement; young Edgar, seeing his famous neighbor frequently around town, can hardly believe that he truly means what he says on the radio.



**Improvement**, by Joan Silber (Counterpoint). This novel follows the far-reaching consequences stemming from two decisions. Reyna, a white single mother in gentrified Harlem, refuses to abet her boyfriend’s interstate cigarette-smuggling operation. And, decades earlier, her evasive, bohemian aunt returns to New York after eight years in Turkey. Those affected, some tragically, by these choices include a young home health aide, an adulterous trucker, and a volatile trio of German antiquities dealers. The book’s interwoven structure—literalized by a motif of Turkish rugs, bought and sold throughout the narrative—is overly schematic, especially as concerns race relations. But both the plot and the prose maintain an absorbing momentum. “People thought love was everything,” Silber writes, “but it could do so much and no more.”



**A State of Freedom**, by Neel Mukherjee (Norton). In this experimental novel, food communicates “affections and feelings . . . and often need, too.” For an urbane expat leading “a divided life” between London and Mumbai, the enormous, luxurious variety of cuisines lumped together as “Indian” provides inspiration. Others, however, struggle with the daily absence of food. One village girl is told by her starving mother that “God gave us stomachs to punish us.” Years later, well fed and working as a housemaid, she feels “a knot deep inside her” begin “its long, slow untwisting.” The characters are connected less by the slender narrative thread than by their acute awareness of inequity: “They didn’t mind; it didn’t occur to them that something such as minding existed.”

## BURIED WORDS

*Han Kang and the complexity of translation.*

BY JIAYANG FAN



How literal must a literary translation be? Nabokov, who was fluent in three languages and wrote in two of them, believed that “the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.” Borges, on the other hand, maintained that a translator should seek not to copy a text but to transform and enrich it. “Translation is a more advanced stage of civilization,” Borges insisted—or, depending on the translation you come across, “a more advanced stage of writing.” (He wrote the line in French, one of several languages he knew.)

In 2016, “The Vegetarian” became the first Korean-language novel to win the Man Booker International Prize, which

was awarded to both its author, Han Kang, and its translator, Deborah Smith. In the English-speaking world, Smith, at the time a twenty-eight-year-old Ph.D. student who had begun learning Korean just six years earlier, was praised widely for her work. In the Korean media, however, the sense of national pride that attended Han’s win—not to mention the twenty-fold spike in printed copies of the book, which was a fairly modest success upon its initial publication, in 2007—was soon overshadowed by charges of mistranslation. Though Han had read and approved the translation, Huffington Post Korea asserted that it was completely “off the mark.” Smith defended herself at the Seoul International Book Fair, saying, “I

would only permit myself an infidelity for the sake of a greater fidelity.”

The controversy reached many American readers in September of last year, when the *Los Angeles Times* published a piece by Charse Yun, a Korean-American who has taught courses in translation in Seoul. (The article extended an argument that Yun had first made, in July, in the online magazine *Korea Exposé*.) “Smith amplifies Han’s spare, quiet style and embellishes it with adverbs, superlatives and other emphatic word choices that are nowhere in the original,” Yun writes. “This doesn’t just happen once or twice, but on virtually every other page.” It’s as though Raymond Carver had been made to sound like Charles Dickens, he adds. This isn’t, in Yun’s view, a matter merely of accuracy but also of cultural legibility. Korea has a rich and varied literary tradition—and a recent history that is intimately entangled with that of the West, particularly the U.S. But few works of Korean literature have had any success in the English-speaking world, and the country, despite its frequent presence in American headlines, does not register in the popular imagination the way that its larger neighbors China and Japan do. Han Kang seemed to fill that void—or begin to, at least. But if her success depended on mistranslation, how much had really got through?

“The Vegetarian” (Hogarth) is fable-like in structure. It centers on the vivid self-destruction of a single human body. That body belongs to a housewife named Yeong-hye, who is described by her husband, Mr. Cheong, as “completely unremarkable in every way.” For Mr. Cheong, who has “always inclined to the middle course in life,” this is part of her appeal. “The passive personality of this woman in whom I could detect neither freshness nor charm, or anything especially refined, suited me down to the ground,” he says. But there is one thing Mr. Cheong does find remarkable about her: she hates wearing bras—she says they squeeze her breasts. She refuses to wear them, even in public, even in front of her husband’s friends, even though, he says, she doesn’t have the sort of “shapely breasts which might suit the ‘no-bra look.’” He considers this shameful.

One morning, Mr. Cheong finds his wife discarding the meat in their refrigerator. She has become a vegetarian, she

*Korean critics have lamented the supposed overreach of Han’s English translator.*



tells him, because she “had a dream.” Before, he could think of his wife “as a stranger . . . someone who puts food on the table and keeps the house in good order.” Now he feels embarrassed and betrayed. Eventually, he is aroused by her insolence, and he begins to force himself on her. Overpowered, Yeong-hye goes limp. Her muted non-reaction evokes, for him, images from Korea’s past as an occupied nation: it is “as though she were a ‘comfort woman’ dragged in against her will, and I was the Japanese soldier demanding her services.”

Yeong-hye’s decision not to eat meat is received as an appalling rebuke by her entire family, especially her father, a Vietnam War veteran whose violent tendencies suggest the traumas of the battlefield. (More than three hundred thousand Koreans served alongside American soldiers in that conflict.) During a family meal, orchestrated as an intervention of sorts, he attempts to shove a piece of sweet-and-sour pork down his daughter’s throat. In response, Yeong-hye slits her wrist as the entire family watches in horror. Finally, she is institutionalized.

Near the end of the book, Yeong-hye’s more conventional-seeming sister, In-hye, visits her in the hospital. Three years have passed since the family dinner, and In-hye has begun to realize that her role as the “hard-working, self-sacrificing eldest daughter had been a sign not of maturity but of cowardice. It had been a survival tactic.” At the hospital, Yeong-hye has withered to sixty-six pounds. Refusing to speak or to accept food in any form, she has spent much of her time attempting to imitate a tree: doing handstands and basking in the sun. Han Kang has said that the character of Yeong-hye was inspired by a line from Yi Sang, a modernist poet of the early twentieth century who was heavily censored under Japanese rule, and whose work evokes the violence and agitation of imperialism. Yi described catatonic withdrawal as a symptom of oppression. “I believe that humans should be plants,” he wrote.

If Yi was consumed with the collective trauma of colonialism, Han focusses on suffering of a more intimate and personal nature. But her writing, too, is rooted in Korea’s history. This, according to Charse Yun, is what risks getting lost in translation. One of the reasons that “many Western readers find so much contem-

porary Korean fiction to be unpalatable,” he writes, is the passivity of its narrators. Smith, however, emphasizes “conflict and tension,” making Han’s work more engaging for Western readers than a faithful rendition would be. When Yeong-hye ignores a question from her husband, for instance, he says that it is “as if she hadn’t heard me,” in Yun’s literal translation of the passage. In Smith’s version, her husband asserts that she is “perfectly oblivious to my repeated interrogation.”

Yet what makes Yeong-hye an affecting character isn’t a matter of any heightened aggression or more overt struggle. “The Vegetarian” reads as a parable about quiet resistance and its consequences; it’s also a ruminative probing of Korean culture, in which questions of agency and conformity have particular resonance. These are the questions at the heart of Han’s work.

Han Kang was born in 1970 in Kwangju, a provincial city near the tip of the Korean Peninsula with a population, at the time, of around six hundred thousand. Her father, Han Seung-won, is a noted novelist and the recipient of numerous literary awards. (In the past decade, Han has won many of the same prizes.) Both of Han’s brothers are writers, too. Her father was a teacher as well as a writer, and the family moved frequently for his work. As a child, Han attended five different elementary schools, and she sought constancy in books.

The family left Kwangju, for Seoul, in 1980, when Han was ten, shortly after Chun Doo-hwan, a general nicknamed the Butcher, seized power in a coup and declared martial law. Peaceful student demonstrations in Kwangju were met with violence: soldiers shot, bayoneted, and beat protesters and bystanders. A civilian militia, made up of students and workers, took weapons from local police stations and forced the Army into a temporary retreat in the city’s suburbs. The event, which has been compared to China’s Tiananmen Square massacre, lasted nine days; at least two hundred, if not two thousand, people died (the government estimate is about tenfold fewer than unofficial tallies). Though Han’s family did not suffer personal losses in the massacre, the name of her birth city became, for her, a metonym for “all that has been mutilated beyond repair.”

“Human Acts,” Han’s most recent novel, also translated by Smith, tells the story of the massacre. It begins with a fifteen-year-old boy, Dong-ho, waiting for a rainstorm and for the return of the military, which has filled his city with dead bodies and separated him from his best friend. Dong-ho goes out to look for his friend but is recruited by demonstrators to catalogue corpses housed in a local government building. (The morgue is full.) There the boy encounters death’s methodical attack upon the flesh—the way open wounds are the first to rot and how toes “swelled up like thick tubers of ginger” into the most grisly shade of black.

Strains of South Korea’s national anthem periodically filter into the building; it is sung during the funeral rites being held outside. When Dong-ho asks why the mourners sing the anthem—“As though it wasn’t the nation itself that had murdered them”—the others react with surprise. “But the generals are rebels, they seized power unlawfully,” one responds. “The ordinary soldiers were following the orders of their superiors. How can you call them a nation?” Dong-ho realizes that the question he really wants to ask is much larger, and more abstract, or perhaps it is a bundle of questions, about the persistence of cruelty and the meaning of freedom. His epiphany echoes In-hye’s realization, in “The Vegetarian,” that her survival has not been a triumph but its opposite, because it has come at the cost of her dignity.

In the fourth chapter, after the military has retaken Kwangju, Dong-ho, hands raised in surrender, is shot and killed by soldiers. Each of the novel’s chapters focusses on a person affected by his short life: the high-school student who grows up to be an editor tasked with censoring the facts of the massacre; the undergraduate turned political prisoner who ultimately commits suicide; the factory girl who becomes a labor activist; Dong-ho’s mother, who remains haunted, every day, by her son’s death. The book experiments extensively with second-person narration, and Han plays with that “you” throughout it, inscribing the reader and implicating us in the wreckage.

The book’s most striking chapter is “The Boy’s Friend, 1980,” which centers on Jeong-dae, a classmate of Dong-ho’s who was fatally shot when the two boys went out to watch the crowds. Dong-ho crouched in the shadow of a building,

watching his friend's feet twitch as rescue attempts led to the murder of others, and, finally, as soldiers dragged off the dead. The story of Jeong-dae is narrated by his soul, tethered to his corpse as it drains of blood at the base of a growing mountain of bodies, like a wilted balloon caught in the branches of a tree. As Dong-ho teaches us the language of dead bodies, Jeong-dae elucidates the struggles of a soul as it comprehends its body's death. Souls that touch one another but can't quite connect are described as "sad flames licking up against a smooth wall of glass only to wordlessly slide away, outdone by whatever barrier was there."

Unlike Dong-ho, who tries to resist his memories, burying them in shame, Jeong-dae seeks refuge in his past as a way of avoiding the sight of his mangled corpse. In Han's books, those who distance themselves from their histories are fated to live lives worth barely more than death. The characters who embrace their own horrors at least have the hope of freedom. Unspooling the story of such memories is painful, but there is also relief in the diagnosis of the injury.

In an essay about translating "Human Acts," published in the online magazine *Asymptote*, Deborah Smith describes reading Han's work and being "arrested by razor-sharp images which arise from the text without being directly described there." She quotes a couple of her "very occasional interpolations," including the striking phrase "sad flames licking up against a smooth wall of glass." Charse Yun, in his essay about "The Vegetarian," declares his admiration for Smith's work but argues that it is a "new creation." Smith insists that the phrases she added are images "so powerfully evoked by the Korean that I sometimes find myself searching the original text in vain, convinced that they were in there somewhere, as vividly explicit as they are in my head."

This isn't what's normally meant by translation. One might compare it to the collaborative work of a writer and an editor; Han has said that the process, for her and Smith, involves considerable back-and-forth, "like having a chat endlessly." The latitude of Robert Lowell's poetic "imitations" comes to mind. (Yun cites Ezra Pound's "Cathay.") And yet what Smith describes is the effect that any writer might hope to coax from her reader: a feeling so visceral that it's as if

she had absorbed the text into her own experience. It also seems deeply in tune with Han's purpose as a writer. In 2015, Han wrote about a translation workshop that she attended in England, during which Smith and others labored to turn one of her stories from Korean into English. In an essay about the experience, Han describes a dream she had while she was there. "Someone was lying in a white bed, and I was quietly watching them," she writes. (The essay was also translated by Smith.) Though the sleeping figure's face was covered by a white sheet, she could hear what the person was saying. "I have to get up now . . . no, that's too flat." Then "I really will have to get up now . . . no, that's too bland." And: "I have to leave this bed . . . no, that's awkward." A good translation, Han's subconscious seems to suggest, is a living, breathing thing, which must be understood on its own terms, discovered from beneath the great white sheet. Han recalls, "In the session that morning, everyone enjoyed hearing about my dream. (I have come to realise that it is possible for someone's nightmare to make many people happy.)"

"Human Acts" ends with a chapter titled "The Writer, 2013," which is about Han. (The book was published in South Korea the following year.) In it, we learn that Dong-ho is a real person, whose life overlapped with Han's in indelible ways. In an interview in 2016, Han said that writing about Jeong-dae and Dong-ho was so excruciating that she often produced as few as three or four lines in a day. To write about the Kwangju massacre, she explains in the book, she had planned to pore over historical documents, but she found herself unable to continue, "because of the dreams." In one, she was met with news of a mass execution that she had no power to stop. In another, she was given a time machine, and promptly tried to transport herself to May 18, 1980. Perhaps it is the hope of any writer to have a subconscious so tightly tethered to her work, but Han's dreams—where characters surface, as if "through the heart of a guttering flame," as she puts it in the interview, which was also translated by Smith—are sweat-soaked affairs, self-directed interrogations in which she is victim and villain at once. The horrors may differ for Han and Yeong-hye, but they are hewed from the same dark place,

where memories of brutality persist, and take on phantasmagoric lives of their own.

In October, Han wrote an Op-Ed for the *Times* about watching, from Seoul, as North Korea and the United States engaged in a potentially devastating diplomatic disaster. "Now and then, foreigners report that South Koreans have a mysterious attitude toward North Korea," she writes. "Even as the rest of the world watches the North in fear, South Koreans appear unusually calm." But that is merely the surface, Han insists: "The tension and terror that have accumulated for decades have burrowed deep inside us and show themselves in brief flashes." For Han, the project of writing is, like translation, a kind of unearthing: she must exhume these buried feelings, and return a sense of agency both to her fictional characters and to those whose lives inspire them.

In "The White Book," a new work translated by Smith and published in the U.K. in November, Han reflects on her mother's pain at losing an infant daughter and meditates on the act of mourning. The color white serves as a symbol of death, grief, birth, and artistic creation; Han leaves several pages in the book blank. (One thinks of her nightmare about translation, in which a white sheet cloaks phrases she is trying to get right.) She wanted her writing to "transform, into something like white ointment applied to a swelling, like gauze laid over a wound," she explains. Most of all, she needed to write about the pain of her sister's death, because "hiding would be impossible."

In March, the President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye—whose father, the military strongman Park Chung-hee, was President during the Vietnam War, and was assassinated months before the 1980 coup—was ousted for influence-peddling. The scandal convulsed the country. In Han's *Times* Op-Ed, she recalls a series of demonstrations that she took part in last winter, before the younger Park left office. It was one of the largest citizens' rallies in Korean history. Protesters blew out candles to symbolize descending darkness. "We only wanted to change society through the quiet and peaceful tool of candlelight," Han writes. It is a gesture that could have been borrowed from Han's imagination, or from her dreams. A flame is an ephemeral and fragile thing that can serve at once to memorialize the dead and light the way for the living. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

# RESOLUTIONS

*What if self-improvement is making us worse?*

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ



Happy New Year, you! Now that the champagne has gone flat and the Christmas tree is off to be mulched, it's time to turn your thoughts to the months ahead. 2017 was a pustule of a year, politically and personally; the general anxiety around the degradation of American democracy made it hard to get much done. That's O.K., though, because you've made new resolutions for 2018, and the first one is not to make resolutions. Instead, you're going to "set goals," in the terminology of the productivity guru Tim Ferriss—preferably ones that are measurable and have timelines, so you can keep track of your success. Apps like Lifetick or Joe's Goals will help by keep-

ing you organized and allowing you to share your progress on social media; a little gloating does wonders for self-motivation (unless, of course, one of your goals is to spend less time on social media). Once your goals are in place, it might be smart to design a methodology that will encourage you to accomplish them. Charles Duhigg, the author of "The Power of Habit," recommends a three-step self-conditioning process. You want to get to the gym more? Pick a cue (sneakers by the door); choose a reward that will motivate you to act on it (a piece of chocolate); execute. Bravo! You are now Pavlov *and* his dog.

But soon enough February will come,

mid-winter doldrums will set in, and you'll start to slide. Not to worry. Jane McGonigal's "SuperBetter" tells you how to gamify your way back from the edge with the help of video-game-inspired techniques like finding "allies" and collecting motivational "power-ups"; and Angela Duckworth's "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance" reminds you that persistence makes all the difference when the going gets rough. Duckworth doesn't think you need talent in order to become, as another of Duhigg's books puts it, "Smarter Better Faster," and neither do any of these other experts. According to their systems, anyone can learn to be more efficient, more focussed, more effective in the pursuit of happiness and, that most hallowed of modern traits, productivity. And if you can't, well, that's on you.

Self-help advice tends to reflect the beliefs and priorities of the era that spawns it. A decade ago, the reigning champion of the genre was "The Secret," published in 2006 by an Australian, Rhonda Byrne. Like Norman Vincent Peale before her, Byrne combined a literal interpretation of select verses from the Christian Bible—notably Matthew 21:22, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, ye shall receive"—with the acquisitive gospel of positive thinking. If you sent a wish out into the universe with enough faith, she told her readers, it could come to pass. Want to find a husband? Clean out a closet for the man of your dreams and imagine him hanging up his ties. Want to get rid of your glasses? Picture yourself acing your next vision exam and kiss those progressive lenses goodbye. In retrospect, "The Secret," which sold more than twenty million copies worldwide, seems a testament to the predatory optimism that characterized the years leading up to the financial crisis. People dreamed big, and, in a day of easy money, found that their dreams could come true. Then the global economy crashed, and we were shaken violently awake—at least for a time.

In our current era of non-stop technological innovation, fuzzy wishful thinking has yielded to the hard doctrine of personal optimization. Self-help gurus need not be charlatans peddling snake oil. Many are psychologists with impressive academic pedigrees and a commitment to scientific methodologies, or tech entrepreneurs with enviable records of

*Self-help advice reflects the beliefs and priorities of the era that spawned it.*



## What a Beautiful World...

More than 100 spacious, natural acres for a retirement community where stewardship of the environment is prized by all.

**KENDAL®**  
*at Oberlin*

Together, transforming the experience of aging.™



1-800-548-9469  
[kao.kendal.org/environment](http://kao.kendal.org/environment)

## Ohana Family Camp in Vermont

Swim  
Sail  
Kayak  
Canoe



Archery  
Tennis  
Hiking  
Biking

[Ohanacamp.org](http://Ohanacamp.org) • (802) 333-3460

## MORE THAN JUST WEIGHT LOSS



At **Structure House** we can help you achieve your weight loss goals and improve your overall quality of life. Start your journey to wellness at our retreat in beautiful Durham, North Carolina. Call or visit us today for more information.

[STRUCTUREHOUSE.COM](http://STRUCTUREHOUSE.COM) | 919.493.4205



Carter Goodrich, May 25, 2015

## New Yorker Cover Prints

Find your favorite cover  
on virtually any topic at  
[newyorkerstore.com](http://newyorkerstore.com)

THE  
NEW YORKER

success in life and business. What they're selling is metrics. It's no longer enough to imagine our way to a better state of body or mind. We must now chart our progress, count our steps, log our sleep rhythms, tweak our diets, record our negative thoughts—then analyze the data, recalibrate, and repeat.

Carl Cederström and André Spicer, business-school professors in a field called “organization studies,” set out to do all that and more in their recent book, “Desperately Seeking Self-Improvement” (OR Books), a comically committed exploration of current life-hacking wisdom in areas ranging from athletic and intellectual prowess to spirituality, creativity, wealth, and pleasure. Cederström, an enthusiastic Swede, and Spicer, a melancholy New Zealander, want to understand the lengths to which people will go to transform themselves into superior beings, and to examine the methods that they use. In their previous book, “The Wellness Syndrome,” the authors followed health nuts who were determined to meditate and exercise their way to enlightenment. This time, in the spirit of George Plimpton’s brand of participatory journalism, they’ve become their own test cases, embarking on a yearlong program in which they target a new area of the self to improve each month. They bulk up at Cross Fit, go on the Master Cleanse liquid diet, try mindfulness and yoga, consult therapists and career coaches, sample prostate vibrators, attempt standup comedy, and attend a masculinity-boosting workshop that involves screaming and weeping naked in the woods. Even their book’s format—entries of the diary that each keeps to record and reflect on his endeavors—is relevant to their mission, considering that daily journaling is recommended in Tim Ferriss’s “Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers.”

Many of the tasks that Cederström and Spicer assign themselves have a double-dare quality whose cost-benefit value seems questionable, like memorizing the first thousand digits of pi during Brain Month in order to improve mental acuity. But others inspire the same niggling whisper of self-doubt as Instagram posts of green juice: *Should I be doing that, too?* I confess to feeling a pang

of jealousy when Cederström produces a complete book manuscript in a euphoric amphetamine rush induced by study drugs during Productivity Month—and a surge of Schadenfreude when it’s rejected by his baffled publisher.

“In a consumerist society, we are not meant to buy one pair of jeans and then be satisfied,” Cederström and Spicer write, and the same, they think, is true of self-improvement. We are being sold on the need to upgrade all parts of ourselves, all at once, including parts that we did not previously know needed upgrading. (This may explain Yoni eggs, stone vaginal inserts that purport to strengthen women’s pelvic-floor muscles and take away “negative energy.” Gwyneth Paltrow’s Web site, Goop, offers them in both jade and rose quartz.) There is a great deal of money to be made by those who diagnose and treat our fears of inadequacy; Cederström and Spicer estimate that the self-improvement industry takes in ten billion dollars a year. (They report that they each spent more than ten thousand dollars, not to mention thousands of hours, on their own quests.) The good life may have sufficed for Plato and Aristotle, but it is no longer enough. “We are under pressure to show that we know how to lead the perfect life,” Cederström and Spicer write.

Where success can be measured with increasing accuracy, so, too, can failure. On the other side of self-improvement, Cederström and Spicer have discovered, is a sense not simply of inadequacy but of fraudulence. In December, with the end of their project approaching, Spicer reflects that he has spent the year focusing on himself to the exclusion of everything, and everyone, else in his life. His wife is due to give birth to their second child in a few days; their relationship is not at its best. And yet, he writes, “I could not think of another year I spent more of my time doing things that were *not* me at all.” He doesn’t feel like a better version of himself. He doesn’t even feel like himself. He has been like a man possessed: “If it wasn’t me, who was it then?”

The desire to achieve and to demonstrate perfection is not simply stressful; it can also be fatal, according to the British journalist Will Storr. His forthcoming book, “Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It’s Doing

to Us" (Overlook), opens, alarmingly, with a chapter on suicide. Storr is disturbed by the prevalence of suicide in the United States and Britain, and blames the horror and shame of failing to meet the sky-high expectations we set for ourselves. He cites surveys that show that adolescent girls are increasingly unhappy with their bodies, and that a growing number of men are suffering from muscle dysmorphia; he interviews psychologists and professors who describe an epidemic of crippling anxiety among university students yoked to the phenomenon of "perfectionist presentation"—the tendency, especially on social media, to make life look like a string of enviable triumphs. Storr confesses that he, too, is dogged by self-loathing and suicidal thoughts. "We're living in an age of perfectionism, and perfection is the idea that kills," he writes. "People are suffering and dying under the torture of the fantasy self they're failing to become."

Storr's explanation for how we got into this predicament has three strands. First, there is nature. "Because of the way our brains function, our sense of 'me' naturally runs in narrative mode," he writes; studies show that we are hard-wired to see life as a story in which we star. At the same time, he says, we are tribal creatures, evolved during our hunter-gatherer years to value cooperation and, at the same time, to respect hierarchy and covet status—"to get along and get ahead."

Next comes culture—a trajectory that wends its way from the ancient Greeks, with their idea that humans are rational creatures who must strive in order to fulfill their highest potential, to Christianity, with its doctrine of a sinful self that requires salvation, to Freud, who's "just a self-hating, sex-afraid, secular reinvention" of the same, and, finally, to the perilous American pursuit of happiness. Storr has conflicted feelings about the American view that the self is fundamentally good, and thus worthy of comfort and satisfaction. On the one hand, it's a nice change from Christian guilt. On the other, it has "infected" the rest of the world with aspirational narcissism. Storr has harsh words for positive psychology, and for the self-esteem movement. He reserves special scorn for the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, which pioneered the Human Potential Move-


ment back in the nineteen-sixties and has recently gained popularity with the Silicon Valley crowd.

Finally, there's the economy. Survival in the hypercompetitive, globalized economy, where workers have fewer protections and are more disposable than ever, requires that we try to become faster, smarter, and more creative. (To this list of marketable qualities I'd add one with a softer edge: niceness, which the gig economy and its five-star rating system have made indispensable to everyone from cabdrivers to plumbers.) Anything less than our best won't cut it.

After a while, Storr says, this rational response to economic pressures became instinctive habit: "Neoliberalism beams at us from many corners of our culture and we absorb it back into ourselves like radiation." Like reality television before it, social media frames human relationships as a constant competition for popularity and approval. Donald Trump, with his greed-is-good hucksterism and his obsessive talk of "winners" and "losers," is in the White House. ("Selfie" was published in England last year; Storr is adding a chapter about the President for the American edition.) Meanwhile, parents continue to feed their children the loving, well-intentioned lie that there are "no limits" and they can "be anything," which leaves the kids blaming themselves, rather than the market's brutality, when they inevitably come up short.

All told, this is a bleak picture. If the ideal of the optimized self isn't simply a fad, or even a preference, but an economic necessity, how can any of us choose to live otherwise? Storr insists that there is a way. "This isn't a message of hopelessness," he writes. "On the contrary, what it actually leads us towards is a better way of finding happiness. Once you realize that it's all just an act of coercion, that it's your culture trying to turn you into someone you can't really be, you can begin to free yourself from your demands."

This sounds suspiciously like self-help-speak, Storr acknowledges. He is quick to say that he isn't encouraging anything quite as clichéd as self-acceptance. At the same time, he reports that he has, in fact, come to accept himself. "Since I learned that low agreeableness and high neuroticism are relatively stable facets of my personality, rather than signs of some shameful psychological impurity, I've




**WALDHAUS SILS**  
A family affair since 1908  
\*\*\*\*\*

**A place to realize  
your winter dreams,  
be they active  
or serene**


Winter 2017/18 | December 10 - April 15  
Summer 2018 | June 14 - October 22

Hotel Waldhaus, CH-7514 Sils-Maria  
Tel +41 81 838 51 00 | [www.waldhaus-sils.ch](http://www.waldhaus-sils.ch)

Advertisement



Overcoming trauma and borderline personality disorder is no joke. **But it is possible.**

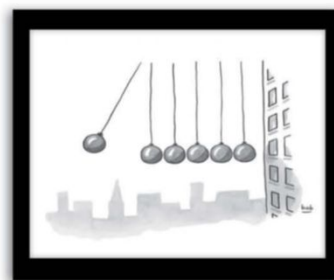
 **McLean HOSPITAL**  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE

844.551.6655  
[McLeanHospital.org](http://McLeanHospital.org)



**THE CASHMERE WATCHCAP**  
4 layers of 6ply cashmere at your ears.  
Warm and Soft like nothing else.  
SCARVES, HATS, SOCKS, MITTENS, ETC.  
HAND-BUILT 26 COLORS, USA. **575.776.8287**  
109 East Palace Ave, Santa Fe, NM  
[www.golightlycashmere.com](http://www.golightlycashmere.com)

## New Yorker Cartoon Prints



Bob Eckstein, October 5, 2009

Order online at  
[newyorkerstore.com](http://newyorkerstore.com)

stopped berating myself so frequently,” he writes. Instead, he now apologizes to those whom his disagreeableness and his neuroticism have offended. This seems like good, common sense, but Storr has another, more radical suggestion to make. Since it is our environment that is causing us to feel inferior, it is our environment that we must change: “The things we’re doing with our lives, the people we’re sharing it with, the goals we have. We should find projects to pursue which are not only meaningful to us, but over which we have efficacy.” Storr means to be helpful, but changing every aspect of the world we inhabit is a daunting prospect. No wonder people try to change themselves instead.

Sarah Knight has advice of a more specific kind to offer. Her latest book, “You Do You: How to Be Who You Are and Use What You’ve Got to Get What You Want” (Little, Brown), is the third she has published in two years, after “The Life-Changing Magic of Not Giving a F\*ck: How to Stop Spending Time You Don’t Have with People You Don’t Like Doing Things You Don’t Want to Do” and “Get Your Sh\*t Together: How to Stop Worrying About What You Should Do So You Can Finish What You Need to Do and Start Doing What You Want to Do.” Knight’s books belong to what Storr sniffily calls the “this is me, being real, deal with it” school of self-help guides, which tend to share a skepticism toward the usual self-improvement bromides and a taste for cheerful profanity. Other recent titles include “The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck,” by Mark Manson, and “F\*ck Feelings,” by Michael I. Bennett, a practicing psychiatrist, and Sarah Bennett, his daughter.

Knight, who favors the shouty, supercaffeinated tone of a spin-class instructor, calls herself a “bestselling anti-guru.” She is particularly proud of the best-selling part, and it’s easy to see why her approach appeals. The phrase THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU takes up two full pages of her first chapter. She agrees with Storr that what is wrong is society, or, rather, the “random, stupid obligations set forth by society—whether to be nice or thin or to act submissive or sane.” Sanity seems not to be an entirely random or stupid social obligation, but never mind. Knight’s point is to encour-

age her readers to embrace themselves as they are, warts and all, and to help them do so she proposes strategies like “mental redecorating” (recasting one’s weaknesses as strengths), embracing pessimism (to be pragmatic and set realistic expectations), being selfish (advocating for one’s needs), dwelling on the thought of death (to maximize happiness while alive), and “breaking free from the Cult of Nice.” Knight is happy to demonstrate the latter. “You have to stop giving a fuck about what other people think,” she tells us.

Much of the advice in “You Do You” is geared toward helping readers confront the workplace dissatisfactions of the daily grind. Generally, the idea is to be more assertive. “If a boss doesn’t like the way I operate, she can fire me,” Knight writes. “If a client thinks my unconventional ways aren’t for him, he doesn’t have to hire me.” This is curiously cavalier. Where Storr is concerned with the precarity of modern-day work, Knight is preoccupied with the tedium endured by the office-bound class: pointless morning meetings, irritating group projects. She gives her readers permission not to care too much about always doing their best on the job, because, as she reveals, she knows what it is to be a perfectionist. As an adolescent, she suffered from eating disorders. After graduating from Harvard, she made a career as a book editor at a big publishing house. She was successful, but stressed. Knight describes



experiencing panic attacks that required medical attention; to stay calm at work, she kept a kitty-litter box full of sand under her desk so that she could plunge her toes into a simulated beach. In 2016, when she was thirty-six, she left her job and her home in Brooklyn and moved with her husband to the Dominican Republic.

“The difference between me and a lot of condescending bozos out there is that I don’t give a Fig Newton whether

anyone chooses to do it the same, differently, or wearing a gold lamé unitard,” Knight writes. In other words, she is not advocating that all of us quit our day jobs and “step off the motherfucking ledge,” as she did. Still, it comes as something of a shock to realize that the person who has been advising us to push against the lean-in mores of contemporary office culture leaned so far out that she escaped altogether. Many readers will undoubtedly find this inspiring. Others may feel betrayed. What about those who can’t afford to take the risk of stepping away from their lives, as much as they may want to? While they are stuck in their cubicles, mentally redecorating and meditating on death, Knight is sipping piña coladas and writing her next best-selling “No F\*cks Given” guide.

Those for whom the imperative to “do you” feels like an unaffordable luxury may take some solace from Svend Brinkmann’s book “Stand Firm: Resisting the Self-Improvement Craze” (Polity), first published in his native Denmark, in 2014, and now available in an English translation by Tam McTurk. Before “Stand Firm” came out, the author’s note tells us, Brinkmann lived “the relatively sedate life of a professor of psychology at Aalborg University.” Then the book became a best-selling sensation. Brinkmann now lives the life of a successful European public intellectual, appearing on TV and radio and traveling the world to lecture “on the big questions of modern life.”

The big question that Brinkmann addresses in “Stand Firm” is speed. The pace of life is accelerating, he says. We succumb to fleeting trends in food, fashion, and health. Technology has eroded the boundary between work and private life; we are expected to be constantly on call, to do more, “do it better and do it for longer, with scant regard for the content or the meaning of what we are doing.” Like Storr, Brinkmann condemns self-improvement as both a symptom and a tool of a relentless economy. But where Storr sees a health crisis, Brinkmann sees a spiritual one. His rhetoric is that of a prophet counselling against false idols. “In our secular world, we no longer see eternal paradise as a carrot at the end of the stick of life, but try to cram as much as possible into our



relatively short time on the planet instead," he writes. "If you stand still while everyone else is moving forwards, you fall behind. Doing so these days is tantamount to going backwards."

Yet, as Brinkmann's title makes clear, standing still is precisely what he proposes that we do. Enough of our mania to be the best and the most, he says. It's time to content ourselves with being average. With pride, he tells us that, when he and his colleagues at Aalborg University were asked to propose institutional development goals, he suggested "that we should strive to become a mediocre institute." ("I thought it was a realistic goal worth pursuing for a small university," he explains. His colleagues did not agree.) And enough of self-acceptance, too—in fact, enough of the self! "Being yourself has no intrinsic value whatsoever," Brinkmann tells us. Maybe the Norwegian nationalist Anders Breivik felt that he was being "true to himself" when he went on his murderous rampage; maybe Mother Teresa did not. What difference does it make? If you must engage in soul-searching or self-analysis, Brinkmann advises limiting it to once a year, preferably during summer vacation.

After Knight's can-do cheerleading, this is like having a glass of ice water poured over your head. It's harsh, but bracing. In cheeky deference to the self-help genre, Brinkmann has structured "Stand Firm" as a seven-step guide of the type that he abhors. Chapter titles include "Focus on the negative in your life," "Put on your No hat," and "Suppress your feelings." The goal is to accept, with calm resolve, the fact that we are mortal, and irreparably flawed. He is big on the Stoics, with their focus on the transience of worldly things. (So, for that matter, is Tim Ferriss.) And he finds wisdom in other, more surprising sources. "I might not be an expert in Jewish culture (my main source of knowledge is Woody Allen's films)," he writes, in a section in praise of "kvetching," "but I get the impression that a general acceptance of griping about things both big and small is actually a cultural conduit that fosters collective happiness and satisfaction." I can assure Brinkmann that the concepts of collective happiness and satisfaction are all but alien to the Jewish people, but if kvetching works for him he is welcome to it.



*"And I got this one for calling the President 'sir,' sarcastically."*

The important thing, in any case, is the word "collective." Brinkmann doesn't care so much how we feel about ourselves. He cares how we act toward others. His book is concerned with morality, which tends to get short shrift in the self-improvement literature. He likes old-fashioned concepts: integrity, self-control, character, dignity, loyalty, rootedness, obligation, tradition. Above all, he exhorts us to do our duty. By this, I think he means that we are supposed to carry on with life's unpleasant demands even when we don't feel particularly well served by them, not run off to the Dominican Republic.

All of this gives "Stand Firm" a somewhat conservative cast. Even the phrase "stand firm" may sound pretty foggyish. Brinkmann can come off like a parent telling his tetchy teen-ager to tough it out, and sometimes, like the teen-ager, you want to talk back. Much of his advice is contradictory. How are we supposed to both suppress our feelings and emphasize the negative? And doesn't "dwelling on the past," the corrective that Brinkmann advises, lead to the kind of maudlin nostalgia for the good old days that got us Brexit and Trump? "I would contend that, in a culture where everything else is accelerating, some form of conservatism may actually be the truly progressive approach," Brinkmann writes. He acknowledges that this is paradoxical.

His advice, like all advice, is imperfect, and limited. He, too, is only human. That's part of his charm.

The biggest paradox of "Stand Firm," as Brinkmann is well aware, is that it calls for an individual solution to a collective problem. There's good reason to fear being left behind by an accelerating society, especially a society, like ours, that is not kind to those who don't, or can't, keep up. Brinkmann at least has the Danish welfare state to fall back on. Still, you don't need to agree with everything he says to recognize that there is value in reading his book. Mainly, you come away with the comforting sense that there are other people out there struggling with the same pressures and frustrations, who experience similar dissatisfactions and worry about their own inadequacies. That feeling—solidarity—is another Brinkmann value. We may be blundering forward, but we are not blundering alone.

And Brinkmann does offer some advice that seems immediately worth taking. Go for a walk in the woods, he says, and think about the vastness of the cosmos. Go to a museum and look at art, secure in the knowledge that it will not improve you in any measurable way. Things don't need to be of concrete use in order to have value. Put away your self-help guides, and read a novel instead. Don't mind if I do. ♦

## COURTING DISASTER

*"The Insult" and "Paddington 2."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

The most important person in "The Insult," you could say, is not in the movie. We see his flickering image, and we listen to the clarion call of his words, but the man himself is dead long before the plot gets under way. Bachir Gemayel, the leader of a powerful Christian militia in the Lebanese civil war, was backed by the Reagan Administration, elected

sprang, as quarrels tend to do, from next to nothing. Yasser, a foreman on a local construction crew, fixed a new drainpipe to Tony's balcony, as regulations required. Tony, for whatever reason, smashed the pipe. Yasser called him a "fucking prick." (The fecundity of the oath, in Arabic, may be richer than the subtitles can express.) Tony demanded an apology, and

less scene in which one of them helps the other to start his car. The problem is not just their own intransigence but the eagerness of others, in positions of authority, to exploit the minor ruckus and crank it up into a national dispute. Plenty of movies unfold from petty sins: the theft of a five-shilling postal order in Terence Rattigan's "The Winslow Boy," which was filmed in 1948 and 1999, or the prank against a principal that kicks off "Scent of a Woman" (1992). But a residue of pettiness clung to those tales, with their self-contained world of school rules, whereas the outrage in "The Insult" is uncontrollable. As somebody says, "We live in the Middle East. The word 'offense' was born here."

If you think that the rule of law will encourage Tony and Yasser to settle their differences, think again. Their first legal encounter is a lowly affair, with both men representing themselves, and a judge dismissing them with exasperation. Next, however, we shift to a higher court, where Tony's case is handled by Wajdi Wehbe (Camille Salameh), a peppy little bristler who revels in his own pugnacity as the defender of the Christian standpoint. Not content with eroding Yasser's claims of provocation, by summoning a witness whom he once beat up in a refugee camp, Wajdi even manages to foment a clash inside the courtroom, squaring up to a young Palestinian on the public benches, who promptly lambasts him as a "Zionist dog," whereupon the security staff muscles in and the three judges stand there as numb as dummies in the background. Outside, the media flock and the unrest spreads. What began with a piece of guttering results in riots on the streets.

As a study of inflammation in the body politic, "The Insult" is engaged and astute. In comparison with "West Beirut," though, it seems oddly programmatic in its moral layout, designed to prove that, in Wajdi's phrase, "no one has a monopoly on suffering." Some viewers will emerge from the cinema feeling more schooled than stirred. In court, we are referred back not only to Black September, in 1970, when the Palestine Liberation Organization was driven from Jordan into Lebanon, but also, by way of balance, to an atrocity wrought by Palestinian fighters, five years later, upon a Christian village. No one could deny the



*Adel Karam and Kamel El Basha face off in Ziad Doueiri's political drama.*

as President of Lebanon, and assassinated before he could take office, in 1982. The film is set in the present day, but it is Gemayel's memory that is invoked at the start, to approving roars, at a political rally. One of those applauding is a mechanic named Tony Hanna (Adel Karam), and at his garage, some time later, Gemayel can be heard in the background, on TV, declaiming against "the Palestinian refugee, wandering the world, ruining everything in his path."

In earshot, at this precise moment, would you believe—and the movie is a hymn to coincidence, asking us to believe a great deal—is a Palestinian refugee. He is Yasser Salameh (Kamel El Basha), and he and Tony have already raised each other's hackles. The quarrel

Yasser, belatedly, has come to deliver it. His diplomatic mission does not go well. Gemayel's hostility clouds the air; Tony fouls it further by saying, "I wish Ariel Sharon had wiped you all out." Yasser responds with a fist to Tony's midriff, cracking two of his ribs. Battle is joined.

"The Insult" is directed by Ziad Doueiri, who made a terrific debut, nearly twenty years ago, with "West Beirut." That, too, explored the chasm between religious cultures, but it did so with the aid of teen-agers—two Muslim boys and a Christian girl, who bonded in their intent to have a good time. No such common cause exists for the adults in the new film. Tony is forty-six, and Yasser over sixty, and they are at loggerheads throughout, unless you count the word-



gravity of these accounts, but are they not in danger of smothering, rather than bolstering, the individual narratives at the movie's heart? And do such deep-rooted grievances not deserve better than the tacky score, largely electronic, that nags away on the soundtrack?

In other ways, however, Doueiri's film compels attention. He was formerly a cameraman for Quentin Tarantino, on "Pulp Fiction" (1994) and "Jackie Brown" (1997), and the cinematographer on "The Insult," Tommaso Fiorilli, keeps poking his lens into people's business, ducking and dodging like someone unable to stay away from a fight, and displaying a nimbleness that the script, by Doueiri and Joelle Touma, can scarcely match. Then, there is Kamel El Basha, whose performance won him the award for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival, and rightly so. He has quite the history, having been incarcerated by the Israelis as a youthful activist, and later serving as artistic director of the Palestinian National Theatre, in Jerusalem. Now, as Yasser, he holds sway over this flawed film and lends it weight. As you inspect the landscape of his lean and bony face, with its telltale twitch in the cheek, you sense that you are looking at a lifetime of emotion—compacted, reflected upon, and not always suppressed. No wonder Yasser is ready to burst. All it takes is a broken pipe.

The courtroom scene in "Paddington 2" is pretty much identical to those in "The Insult," save for a couple of discrepancies. One, the setting is London rather than Beirut. And, two, the defendant is not an angry Palestinian

construction worker but a small and extremely courteous Peruvian bear. His name is Paddington, and his creed is "If you're kind and polite, the world will be right." Tell that to Yasser.

Do we really need a sequel to "Paddington," which came out in 2015? Yes, partly because it boasted a surprising deftness and charm, but mainly because it took in more than a quarter of a billion dollars worldwide. As before, the director is Paul King, who is wise enough not to tinker with the founding principle: wherever there is trouble, Paddington will put his paw in it. He still lodges with Mr. and Mrs. Brown (Hugh Bonneville and Sally Hawkins), who first welcomed him, as a stranded soul, into their home, but his object of desire is now a dusty pop-up book, which he wants to buy as a gift for his aunt Lucy, back in Peru. Alas, when the book is stolen, Paddington is arrested and, stoutly though he proclaims his innocence, sentenced to ten years in jail.

As in the original, the modern story is stacked with antique contraptions, like a printing press and a pair of competing steam trains. Calls are made from old red phone boxes. As for Paddington's fellow-inmates, their spirits are raised by marmalade sandwiches, animal magnetism, and cake. The obvious risk is that the movie, sated with such benevolence, will doze off into the winsome or the cute. King's response is to keep things increasingly busy, with flashbacks, animated interludes, and fantastical flourishes, like the dream-jungle that sprouts through the floor of Paddington's cell. He is enmeshed in a series of cogs, as Chaplin was in "Mod-

ern Times" (1936), and the homage that King pays to Wes Anderson, not least to the jailbreak in "The Grand Budapest Hotel" (2014), is positively slavish. Most fruitful of all is the husbandry of the gags, some of which are planted early in the film and must wait for more than an hour before they bloom. I had all but forgotten Mr. Brown's yoga sessions, a key component of his midlife crisis, until they proved invaluable during the climactic chase, in which he is obliged to do the splits.

As for the cast, "Actors are some of the most evil, devious people on the planet. They lie for a living." So says Mrs. Bird (Julie Walters), the Browns' housekeeper, and, in reply to her cheerful slander, a host of British performers descends upon "Paddington 2." None is more devious than Hugh Grant. He plays Phoenix Buchanan, a superannuated thespian and a wizard of disguise. The walls of his house are festooned with pictures of his younger and prettier self—Grant, of course, in his doe-eyed days. Phoenix, like Paddington, longs to possess the pop-up book, which hints at hidden treasure, but the most dastardly crime is that Grant somehow filches the entire movie, in the course of which he gets to dress as a candle-carrying nun, a knight in armor, and, to his eternal mortification, a giant spaniel. He even bestrides the end credits with a song-and-dance number, resplendent in pink satin bell-bottoms. By this stage, I must confess, I no longer cared about the bear. ♦

#### NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2018 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCIII, NO. 44, January 15, 2018. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 12 & 19, July 9 & 16, August 6 & 13, November 26 & December 3, and December 24 & 31) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Chris Mitchell, chief business officer; Risa Aronson, vice-president, revenue; James Guilfoyle, executive director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman emeritus; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president & chief executive officer; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, chief revenue and marketing officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail [subscriptions@newyorker.com](mailto:subscriptions@newyorker.com). Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Risa Aronson at (212) 286-4068. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com). Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail [covers@cartoonbank.com](mailto:covers@cartoonbank.com). For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com). To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit [www.condenast.com](http://www.condenast.com). Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.





## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Panckeri, must be received by Sunday, January 14th. The finalists in the January 1st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 29th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



### THE FINALISTS



*"It's for my back. You have two more questions."*  
Dan Dratch, Los Angeles, Calif.

*"Do you seek alignment?"*  
Adam Faroni, Oakland, Calif.

*"Before I settled here, I bounced around a lot."*  
Art Bobrove, Palo Alto, Calif.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Sure, I've got a few minutes to kill."*  
Brian Sintay, Sacramento, Calif.

# How Great Insurance Is Made

*“With a pull of the crank  
And a turn of the gears  
Savings and service for 75 years  
With many ways to save  
Friendly agents, night and day  
The right coverage is just the start  
To how great insurance is made.”*

**GEICO®**

Auto • Home • Renters • Cycle • Boat



geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO | Local Office

Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states or all GEICO companies. Motorcycle and ATV coverages are underwritten by GEICO Indemnity Company. Homeowners, renters and condo coverages are written through non-affiliated insurance companies and are secured through the GEICO Insurance Agency, Inc. Boat and PWC coverages are underwritten by GEICO Marine Insurance Company. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, D.C. 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. GEICO Gecko image © 1999-2017. © 2017 GEICO





Retirement is years away but you can feel better now.

Knowing you've planned for retirement can bring less stress, more sleep, and true focus to what matters now. TD Ameritrade's Financial Consultants are here for you, whether it's getting help with a plan, rolling over your old 401(k), or opening an IRA. Feeling better about your future starts today.

Get up to \$600 when you roll over an old 401(k) today.



Visit [tdameritrade.com/planning](https://tdameritrade.com/planning) to learn more.

A rollover is not your only alternative when dealing with old retirement plans. Please visit [tdameritrade.com/rollover](https://tdameritrade.com/rollover) for more information on rollover alternatives. See [tdameritrade.com/600offer](https://tdameritrade.com/600offer) for offer details and restrictions/conditions. This is not an offer or solicitation in any jurisdiction where we are not authorized to do business. TD Ameritrade, Inc., member FINRA/SIPC. © 2017 TD Ameritrade.